Australians at War Film Archive

Stanley Keetly (Stan) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Right. Thanks Dan. Can I get you to describe to me where you were born and where you grew up?**

Right. I was born in Nottingham, in England, in a street called St Christopher's Street, Nottingham. I was the last

01:00 of 8 children, two of whom died as babies; there were 6 of us then. Then when I was 3 year old I moved from St Christopher's Street, which is within an area of Nottingham called Snenton Dale, which is the poorer part of Nottingham. And when I was 3 for some reason we moved up to a higher and better area of Nottingham called Snenton Hill, into a very big house – big

01:30 2-storey house with about 5 bedrooms, I think we had. And it was on 4 blocks of land going from one street to another. I don't know how that happened. We were there then. My father died when I was about 6. And then after a couple of years my mother remarried. Married a builder. Was an Englishman, but working in Australia.

02:00 And then he, after they were married, he came back to Australia and set up a house. And my mother brought 4 of us – my older 2 sisters stayed in England. One lived in London and got married there, and the other stayed with the house and ran it as a boarding house. My stepfather then had 2 sons, so we were a family of 8 altogether.

02:30 The Depression had struck pretty heavily by then. Nobody had permanent work; you just got what you could when you could. My stepfather and his two sons were out of work. My 2 sisters went as live-in child-minders. My brother got a job in a grocery

03:00 shop. And I started delivering and selling newspapers, which was fortunate because I was keeping the family going. I think my brother was getting about 10 shillings a week and I was getting 15 shillings a week.

Where were you living at the time?

Living in Kew at this stage, sorry. Living in Kew. We started with living in a street Park Hill Road, which is alongside the cemetery in Kew. And then we

03:30 moved to North Kew because we couldn't pay the rent. And then we moved to a third house in Kew in Princes Street because we were having trouble paying the rent there. No electricity because we couldn't afford it. We used to have to do the homework by candlelight at night. We were doing that until I was—I went through Kew State School,

04:00 right through there to eighth grade, and got what we knew then as Merit Certificate. Today it would be Form 2, I think. But in those days everybody seemed to leave school at around about 14. I was 13 - 14 less 2 months when I left school, and I had to wait 'til I was 14 before I could get a job. I got a job in a factory that used to make cases for watches. And

04:30 I was on a machine polishing watchstrap buckles. I had to do a thousand a day. That was a great job. But anyway, I had it in my mind that I wanted to get away from the city. So I watched the papers very closely. One day there was an advertisement in the paper. In the those days, incidentally, we had the Sun, Age and Argus daily newspapers

05:00 and the Herald at nighttime. So when I was just about 15 I come across someone in Gippsland wanting a lad on the farm. So I wrote, and he wrote back and sent me the fare up. And I went up and stayed with him then for the next 3-3½ years. He was a man by the name

05:30 of Bill Morrison, an elderly gentleman. We were milking cows by hand; around about 60 cows by hand. And then he got a bit old for the job and his nephew took over the whole thing. So I worked for his nephew then, Alan Morrison. And I was with him. And then he got married and he didn't really need

anybody working for him. He had his brother working

06:00 for him as well. His brother Frank, who had a dairy farm near Dandenong, he wanted someone, so I transferred from one Morrison household to the other. And then the war broke out soon after, or within 12 months of me going there. And in the meantime I'd bought a motorbike.

How old were you when the war broke out?

19. I was born in '20. So September

06:30 '39 I said, "I'm off." So I took off and I went to the place where they were going to do the recruiting and they said they weren't ready yet, to come back in a few weeks. So in the meantime I managed to get a job at the Town Hall Hotel in Swanston Street Melbourne as Assistant Chef. The work for an assistant chef in those days was, when you started at 7 in the morning, you

07:00 peeled a bag of potatoes and then spent the rest of the day washing dishes. That was assistant chef work. So… And then I kept getting in touch with the Army authorities and they finally said, "Right, you can come in now." And I went in. It was October by this time, October '39. And I went in and I said, "I want to be a dispatch rider because I've got a motorbike." And they said, "We want infantrymen."

07:30 And this went backwards and forwards and backwards and forwards for quite a while. So they finally gave in and said, "Go to the signals depot in Royal Park and join up there." So I joined up there. And I've got a very low number VX-1523. And when I got there I said, "Right, I want to be a dispatch rider. I've got me motorbike as well." They said, "Well get rid of your motorbike in the first place because we supply the motorbikes anyway."

08:00 So I did that and I got in okay. And they said, "How old are you?" And I said, "Twenty," when actually I was 19. They said, "Well, because you're under 21 you've got to get a form signed by a parent or guardian." And at that time I was living with my brother in Kew. He was married and I was living with he and his wife. I went straight back home and said to

08:30 my brother, "From this moment on you're my guardian. Sign this." Oh – I missed out something there. My mother, in 1938, decided that she would take a 2-year return trip to England and see how everything was going there with the house and the daughter and all that. Anyway, the war broke out and she couldn't get back. So, okay, I joined the Army. My brother signed the paper as my guardian and I joined the Army – accepted into

09:00 the signals. And we were trained for a little while at the showgrounds and then we went to Ingleburn in New South Wales and continued our training there. We all were, in the signals, split up into different sections; and each section had a role to play. I was with F-Section, attached to artillery. We were supposed to be a section of about 12 - wireless operators,

09:30 line layers, and dispatch riders. Then on the way— The Army decided we would do exercises with our artillery regiment—2nd 2nd artillery regiment. So we had to go by road from New South Wales to Victoria to meet up with our regiment. And there's a couple of photos there

10:00 about that. And then we did the exercise and went back to Ingleburn. The time came for us to embark, to go overseas. And we were given great lessons on how to behave in the Middle East – Egypt and Palestine. So we knew where we were going. So we got

10:30 on the Queen Mary; 2000 troops on the Queen Mary, with a lot of other ships, with the Navy escorts, and started off. And after a few days we changed course. And everybody wondered why we changed course; and we headed for South Africa. And we realised then, by the news, that things weren't going very well in France. And we called into Cape Town for a couple of days

11:00 then headed off to England. We were right on the tail of Dunkirk then. All the troops had just scrambled back into England from France. They welcomed us with open arms because they had nothing. If Hitler had bothered to follow them across he could have taken England without any trouble at all. Now we were there for 6 months—I was—and I came back in the Advance Guard to the Middle East. But in the meantime we went through the Battle of Britain, which was

11:30 an amazing experience, and all the bombing that was taking place. One experience that I had— we were traveling all over England and part of Wales right up to the Scottish border, camped in the south of England on the Salisbury Plains. We did thousands of miles in that 6 months that we were there. One experience that I had, we had to take a special dispatch to

12:00 one of the big industrial cities in England (I had the name in mind but it's gone—Coventry). And I wanted to stay the night because it was a fair trip up and back. They said, "No. Get going and come back tonight." So I raced up, delivered the dispatch, came back, and that night Coventry was wiped out

12:30 by the Germans.

That's right, there was a big bombing raid there.

So I was a bit lucky, yes.

Now Stan, I want to ask you more questions about your personal experiences, in the sense of some of the stories you're telling me now. Would it be possible if we could go back to them a little bit later? Could you tell me which theatres you served in, just briefly?

Right through?

Yeah, the war.

I was in England and then we went to Palestine. Went through Egypt,

13:00 Palestine to Syria where we were the—

So let me trace this correctly. You went from Australia to South Africa to England by ship. And then from England you came back through Gibraltar—

—Via South Africa—

Oh, via South Africa.

Going we called in at Cape Town. Coming back we called in at Durban for a couple of days; had a spell there. And then to the Middle East through Egypt and Palestine.

13:30 And then we were taken up to Syria to relieve the British troops up there as whatever-you-call-it. And things weren't very good there because the French had been put out of there at that time. And the people weren't terribly happy about having troops there at all. Every now and then

14:00 someone would take a pot shot. We had a long run from Tripoli to Aleppo, and we daren't go by motorbikes because there was too many of those big trees along the way with snipers in them. So we used jeeps: one driver and one rifleman in a jeep.

I see.

So that was the Syrian campaign. And then we came back from Syria and did some training in

14:30 Palestine. A place called Julis camp, alongside a big orange orchard which the Army bought so we could —because we used to sneak in and get oranges anyway. So they bought the orange orchard and opened it up and let us help ourselves. Beautiful, big Jaffa oranges. We trained there and then we went up the Middle East, right up North Africa,

15:00 Benghazi. And then Rommel and his mob came through and chased us back to Tobruk. We were in Tobruk for 8 months, which is scary. Probably the hardest part of the war, actually, that 8 months. And then we were finally relieved by ship. The Royal Navy, with destroyers, used to come in at nighttime to deliver

15:30 our needs. Everything was brought in by destroyer: water, food, everything; ammunition. And we were relieved then and we got out on the destroyers one night. Then we went back to Palestine for more training. And from

16:00 there we went back to North Africa. We didn't get quite as far this time: Alamein. We went to Alamein and set up a big line right across there with all the other Allied troops. And I remember the night very well that they opened up.

16:30 There was something like 120 big artillery guns, almost wheel-to-wheel right across, and all opened up simultaneously this night. Did quite a lot of damage to the enemy, but there were still some of them there. And the next day—in the meantime we were backwards and forwards with dispatches on our motorbikes madly—

Are you talking about Montgomery's major offensive at Alamein?

Yes. The first victory of the Allies,

17:00 and from then on they never lost another battle. But before that we'd never won a battle. But after that we never lost one. So that was the beginning of the end, actually, for the German forces. After that we left—the Australians came out of that after about a week chasing Germans back up, and then they came back and left it to the others to mop up. We came back

17:30 to Palestine again and then we heard of the strike on Pearl Harbour. So they gathered us all up, brought us back to Australia and gave us about 10 days leave, and then up to Atherton tablelands for jungle training. And then off to Milne Bay as a base. And then we did the landings at Lae first and then Finschhafen up the New Guinea coast. We finished up on

18:00 Labuan island on Borneo.

Were you there at Milne Bay when the Japanese attack came through, when the Japanese attacked Milne Bay?

Well, they were attacking all the time.

The amphibious assault.

Oh, the amphibious? Oh yes.

You were there?

Oh yeah. The infantry went first and then we followed them because we were, at the time, were about the only

18:30 means of communication: the Signals. We couldn't put landlines down for a long time because they'd get blown up pretty quick, and the Japanese were always sniping around the place. So we had to go backwards and forwards – a lot on foot too because there were no roads when we first went on. And you just had to rely on radio, mainly, in those days. And then actually we, as dispatch

19:00 riders, became linesmen because you couldn't ride a motorbike there – we didn't have vehicles for a while. And then we went up the coast from Lae and then did the landing at Finschhafen. And then we drove up the coast from Finschhafen right up, pretty high up New Guinea. And then onto Borneo where we were on Labuan Island,

19:30 just off the coast of Borneo when the war ended.

What did you do after the war?

After the war?

What happened after Labuan when the war ended?

Oh, after that we were discharged. When we came back to Australia we were discharged and then asked what we'd like to do – what we wanted to do. I said, "I want to go back to farming." And they tried to talk me out of that, but I was determined to go back

20:00 to farming. So they put my name down for a Soldier's Settlement Block. And they said, "It will be quite a while before that happens because we've got to get it all set up." I said, "That's alright. In the meantime I'll get a job." I got a job at a place in Kew called the Model Dairy. It was a very big dairy in Cotham Road, Kew. And I decided I'd spend 6 months there because I wanted to see the other end

20:30 of milk, what happened with milk. I know where it came from—from the cow—but didn't know. Now I had 2 months bottle-washing, 2 months pasteurising, and 2 months driving tankers to South Gippsland and picking up the milk. And then in the meantime I got in touch with the people I used to work for in Gippsland and asked them did anyone in that area need someone. They said, "Yes, there's a fellow by the name of Charlie Treasure wants

21:00 someone up there. He'd be only too happy to have you." So I dropped everything and went onto this farm. I was there for 12 months altogether, middle of '46. We were milking by hand then. And he wanted me to start share-farming

21:30 with him. So I said, "Yes, I'd like that." And then he said, "I'll build you a house on the property, and if you're going to get married you can live in the house." I said, "Okay." In the meantime word came through that I'd been allotted a block of land which I'd applied for in the Western District because in the meantime I had met, when I was working at the Model Dairy, a lady by the name of Joan. We went out together a few times and decided that we'd get married. And then I went back

22:00 up to Gippsland, back on the farm, and then word came through that we'd been allotted a block of land not far out of—between Camperdown and Toorang, where all the soldiers' settlements was. And that was great because her family lived in Camperdown and we got to see a lot of them. She wasn't keen on the land, but because it was near her family she put up with it. I was on that farm for 12 years. We had 4 daughters.

22:30 And the eldest one was getting to the age where she needed secondary education. So we decided to—also at that stage the cost of production had gone up tremendously but the prices we were getting had hardly moved at all. So it was really a case of double-up or get out. So I got in touch with the guy next door and he agreed to buy me out and he doubled-up and I got out. He had a family

23:00 of sons that could take over. So we came to Melbourne then.

What did you get involved in when you came to Melbourne?

Sales. About the only thing I could think of was sales. So I joined a firm selling office equipment, and then they went out of business. Then I bought a milk

23:30 bar in Mentone, near the Post Office. And I ran that for 6 years. After 4 years I decided that I'd had enough, I wanted to get out – took me 2 years to sell it. And then I joined the AMP Society; was with them for 3 years. Then I got a job as Sales Manager at a company near Dingley

24:00 that were making plastic bags. I was there for—I didn't retire from there until I was over 70. It was a great job; I loved that. Did quite well. And in the meantime the children were getting married. First one got married when I was working for AMP. The next one—the two were married within 6 weeks. The bank manager

24:30 wasn't very happy, but we managed.

So you had to raise a large family?

Yeah. And after we came to Melbourne we had two more, so we finished up with 6.

Okay. Six. That's very good; thanks Stan for giving me those explanations on your introduction. I would like to go back now towards your pre-war life – where we started from initially in the conversation. Now you said that your mother

25:00 **remarried, I understand?**

Yes.

Your father. Now, what could you tell me about your father?

My father – I didn't know much of him at all. We only saw him in the evenings when he came back from work. We had meals and then we were chooffed off to bed and we didn't see any more of him. So I suppose we saw him for, at the very most, one hour a day at nighttime and we never knew much about him, what he was doing. I found out later that he

25:30 was working for his brother who had a factory to do with cotton, to do with the lace industry because Nottingham is renowned, or was renowned, for its lace production. And he had what was known as a cotton waste factory. And my father was the manager of the factory for him. He got double pneumonia when I was about 5.

26:00 And I just, just vaguely remember—it's funny how you remember things—I remember two guys carrying a big container of oxygen upstairs to the bedroom, and the next day the doctor coming down shaking his head and saying, "Sorry, he's gone."

And you can remember that at the age of 5?

I can remember that. I can remember that. I can also remember where I was born: St Christopher's Street in Nottingham. I can see the

26:30 street and the houses. The houses fronted onto the footpath, and every second house had a lane alongside it for coal deliveries mainly.

Did your father ever serve in the First World War?

No. He was a Special Constable during the First World War. I saw a—I don't know what became of it—I saw a medal, or just a badge, to say that he had served as a Special Constable during the First World War.

27:00 **What did that involve, Special Constable?**

Something about keeping the peace around the place while the troops were away, I think.

Was there any particular reason why he didn't actually enlist?

There would have been. There was something wrong with him that he couldn't join the Army, so they made him a Special Constable. I think that's what they did in those days. He must have been pretty sick because they'd take on just about anybody.

That's true. Did you have any uncles?

27:30 I had an uncle that my father worked for, his brother. His name was Matthew. My father's name was Horace and his brother was Matthew.

Did he serve in the First World War?

He didn't, no. He didn't. I think he was allowed to stay with his industry for some reason.

Oh, he had a protected industry then?

Protected industry he was in. Something to do with cotton. Probably, I think, I got a faint suspicion that I heard he was

28:00 helping or making up uniforms, cotton material uniforms.

Did you have any family members who served in the First World War?

No.

None?

No.

Okay. What about your mother? Now, what can you tell me about your mother's background?

My mother? Her name was Florence. She must have got married very young because she didn't seem that old when we came to Australia and she'd already had

28:30 8 children. I think she was married pretty young. She ruled the family; she was the boss. The father was just the breadwinner; and that's all he did; didn't do anything else. My mother did all the housework and looked after the children. She had a very heavy wedding ring on her wedding finger, and we all finished up with

29:00 welts across our face from that. She was a hard woman. You either did as you were told, or else.

Was she loving?

No. Not at all. No. No. Probably the things that she said, like: "Little pigs should be seen and not heard." We were not allowed to speak while there was adults around. Never.

29:30 Which is a bit different today. I often wish we had because I was a very, very shy person. Very shy. Didn't know how to greet people or talk to people. And even when I joined the Army, because I'd been in the country and only had dealings with 2 or 3 different people then, just doing as I was told—

So your mother never did any sort of work on a

30:00 **part-time basis?**

Oh no. Only the house.

Just a housewife?

She was a housewife, yes.

What background did your parents have as far as religion was concerned?

Church of England, High Church of England. We used to go to church every Sunday. I was a boy soprano at that time, even as young as I was, singing in the local choir – loved singing. Even when we came out to Australia I joined any choir that was around. Actually I

30:30 became a Catholic when I was married and sang in Catholic choirs for the next 35 years. Loved singing.

Both your parents were from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds of course?

Yes.

Were they religious?

Religious?

Yes, in the sense were they practicing?

Yes, on a Sunday. Only on a Sunday.

What about as far as

31:00 **following up on that on daily life? Was your mother, for instance, fairly religiously-minded?**

No, not really. I think it was all forgotten during the week and then come Sunday it all comes back again. So from what I can remember, anyway, because I was only 9 when we left England. I can remember going to church every Sunday; but apart from that we were never told to say prayers at bedtime or anything like that. We were just chooffed off to bed.

What

31:30 **about your step-father? Did he have any war service?**

No. I don't know why. I think he would have been the right age—oh no, he might've been a bit young. I'm not sure about that. And his 2 sons would have been too young to serve in the First [World] War and too old to serve in the Second [World] War. No, as far as I know he didn't have any war service. He was a builder, though he might have got out of it that way.

Was your relationship with him close?

32:00 No, not very good. That's one of the reasons I wanted to leave home and go into the country and go to farming.

I see.

No, I wasn't very happy with him at all. He didn't treat us very well. We were a nuisance as far as he was concerned.

What about your relationship with your siblings?

Siblings?

Yes. How many again? How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had one brother and four sisters.

How did you get along with them?

Very well,

32:30 except the eldest one, May. I don't know how old she was when we left England, but she was a snob and used to go out with a guy that actually owned a motorcar. That was something in those days; and it was a Renault. She went to London as a model and we didn't hear from her after that. My next sister Kay, she was very kind.

33:00 She lost her husband through lung disease.

Tuberculosis was it?

TB, that's right, yes. Her husband had TB and he died of that. She had 2 sons. When my mother died and the house was sold up, she came to Australia on my brother's instigation because after the war he married

33:30 a lady from Tasmania. They were living in Launceston and he made application for my sister to join him in Launceston and promised her living quarters. What you had to do in those days was promise living and a job. And he was a caterer, so it was easy for him to give her a job. And she and her 2 sons built

34:00 a house on their own with mud bricks. So got on well with her. The next one, my brother and sister were twins, that's the next 2; got on well with them. My sister moved out of house to take on a live-in job as my other sister did. So

34:30 then my next sister, the sister that was next to me, she was only 2 years older than me. And she reared me. She was Meg, she was my second mother, and we got on extremely well. She died—

How did your experiences in the Depression affect you relationships with your friends, your family?

35:00 **You had a pretty hard time, I understand?**

I accepted it. I was the sort of person that accepted whatever came along because everybody else was in the same boat and you couldn't do much about it anyway, so you did what you could when you could.

Now your mother's second husband was on sustenance because he couldn't find work.

That's right. They used to go to the Town Hall, he and his

35:30 2 sons, once a week and either get a job or get some sustenance from them. It might be a coupon for food; it might be a small amount of money; or it might be a couple of days' work – whatever they could get. They were only earning enough to keep them in, probably, clothes and tobacco and stuff like that.

And where were you living at this stage?

Kew.

In Kew.

Yes.

Tell us about Kew. What was it like at the time of the Depression when you were

36:00 **living there?**

I would say there was more poor people than rich people, although some parts of Kew were very rich at that time; like Robert Menzies was living in Kew at that stage too. But that was Studley Park Road and we were further away from that. It was a nice suburb, very clean. A nice suburb to live in. We were living across the road from what was known in those days as the Kew Asylum –

36:30 got a different name now: Home for Intellectual Disabled, or something like that. I thought it was a very good suburb to live in. There was a boy living next door to me, and he and I used to get on our bikes on a weekend, on a Sunday, and ride up to Doncaster, up to some golf links and find golfballs and

37:00 sell them, or caddy if we could and then ride home again. Used to enjoy that. That was very enjoyable. A good break because all the other 6 days I was selling and delivering papers.

So you were also supporting the family in a big way. Did whatever you could?

Oh yes. I was the main breadwinner as it were, yes.

How did your family cope with the distribution of

37:30 **food, for instance?**

My mother did very well. Whenever she got some money she went down the street and bartered with the butcher and the grocer—the butcher mainly—trying to get the best she could for as little as she could. She did very well; she was a good shopper. And very seldom had any treats out of the ordinary. We knew what we were going to have everyday of the week because it was always the same. Mondays

38:00 we'd use up the roast from the weekend, and Tuesdays we'd have—so we'd have tripe and onions one day, and fish and parsley sauce another day, and so on. We knew exactly what we were going to have every night for a meal.

So you generally ate well?

We ate plenty, yeah; we had plenty to eat. It mightn't have been the same food that the rich people ate, but we had plenty, always plenty.

38:30 **Dripping? Was that a big thing?**

Oh, dripping. Every night coming home from school or from selling papers, the first thing I did was have a slice of bread and dripping. Beautiful, yeah.

You wouldn't do that now though, would you?

No, I don't think so. No

Very fattening.

You'd probably have different dripping though. This dripping used to be something special, usually, out of a lamb roast or something like that. It was a brownish

39:00 colour and had plenty of flavour in it. These days the dripping is just pure white and you couldn't use it for that.

So the dripping was essentially the fat that came—

—came out of the meat, with the meat juices in it. And it used to set. And mother would put it in the pot on the table and we'd just help ourselves to it. Yeah it was great. That was one of our staple diets.

39:30 But I used to get up every morning at 6 o'clock and go straight to the paper shop. Do a delivery round. Always used to finish up close to home, my round, and have breakfast and go back to the shop and get a bundle of papers and sell them at the Kew Post Office. That's where I came to be a, I wouldn't say an avid reader, but a good reader. And I used to love reading the newspapers. Went right

40:00 through all the front and back pages, the news and the sports, in the Sun Age and the Argus (in those days). And always liked reading.

Sorry to cut it there. We'll stop now and just change tapes.

Right.

Tape 2

00:40 **Just a few more questions I want to ask on pre-war before we move towards your war experiences. With your step-father, was he also a Church of England background?**

As far as I know he was no religion at all, although he and my mother

01:00 were married. I remember the day he and my mother married. All the family were there of course. It was at a church, but I've never known him to go to church. Soon after they were married he came back to Australia and made arrangements for us to come over. But no one in the family after that went to church except me. And I used to go to any church that was the closest

01:30 one, and try different churches around the place, and try and find one that I liked. But it wasn't until I was married that I was a regular church-goer.

What was his name, your step-father's?

Step-father's name was William Henry Brakes. B-r-a-k-e-s.

And he was an Australian?

He was English.

English?

But he'd been out here building. And then I don't know how he heard, he must have—was it he knew my mother beforehand

02:00 or what, but he went back and they got married. But he did a lot of building in Australia but when the Depression came nobody wanted any building done so he didn't have any work, he and his two sons. His idea was that one of his sons was—he was a bricklayer himself, builder and bricklayer—and one of his sons was a bricklayer's apprentice or assistant, and the other

02:30 son was a painter. And he sent me up at one stage to be an apprentice to a carpenter in Kew, but that only worked for about a month and that was it. But his idea was to have 3 sons: a bricklayer's labourer, a painter and a carpenter so that between us all we could build houses. But it just didn't go because of the Depression.

03:00 **And you said that you used to read a lot. When did you actually finish school? How old were you?**

13.

You were 13 when you finished school? So about roughly about year 8 or something like that by today's standards?

Yes. I got two. I got my Merit Certificate. That was as far as you went in those days unless your parents had a bit of money they could send you to secondary education.

And how old were you when you came from England to Australia?

03:30 9.

You were 9.

Yeah. I was about 3 months off 10.

Did you find that you adapted okay to Australian lifestyle very quickly?

After the first couple of weeks at the primary school, yes. Because the first couple of weeks was hell because I was talking a little bit funny as far as the other kids were concerned, and they used to make a circle around me and taunt me to say this and say that.

Which primary school was this?

04:00 Kew.

In Kew.

Kew primary. And within 7 to 10 days I was speaking exactly the same as they were.

You learn quickly…

Oh yes, yes.

With your affinity with reading newspapers, that obviously would have put you in touch with what was happening around the world.

Oh yes.

So you knew about the Spanish civil war, I'd assume?

The which?

The Spanish civil war.

04:30 No, I didn't know anything about that.

Oh, you didn't know.

No, no.

What did you know about other wars?

Only the First World War because we did a bit of that at school. But apart from that, I didn't know anything about any wars, really, because there weren't many wars during that time.

The Boer War, did you know anything?

Oh no. Only what I've read since in books actually.

Did you know

05:00 **any World War I veterans? Did you come across them?**

Only came across one. He was a bootmaker in Kew and he was a German..

Out of all veterans, a German.

Yeah. He fought for the German Army during the First World War.

And he would talk about this to you?

He would talk about that. And my friend, a boy about my age, he was

05:30 working for him and he didn't like him because all the time he kept singing songs how he hated the ANZACs or something. But, no, I think that was about the only person I came across that I knew had fought in the First World War.

Right.

Yeah. I didn't actually go looking for them, but I was quite satisfied with the life I was leading and just made the most of it then and not worried about what had happened

06:00 before, and perhaps wondering what was going to happen after that. But just doing what I could at the time.

So what about your understanding of Anzac; what did it mean to you? This is before the war, of course.

Oh, before the war?

Before you actually enlisted.

I would say that anybody mentioning Anzac I would get a puzzled

06:30 face and say, "What's that?" Never heard anything about that at all. No. At school, we learned about Anzac at school.

What would they teach you at school about Anzac for instance?

About the landing at Anzac Cove, and how hard it was, and how many troops were there. We learned that poem called 'To the Fallen' that finished up

07:00 "We will remember them." We learned that poem; that was from the Anzac Days. Simpson and his donkey, we learned about that. Various little stories like that. But they didn't dwell on it very much; we didn't learn a hell of a lot.

So when the Anzac Day parade was on, how did you see it?

I don't remember doing anything about it to be honest with you.

So it really didn't faze you?

No.

07:30 No.

Did you feel Australian? Or did you feel more English, even though you had come here?

Felt very English when we first came out here but after a while, like doing school—having been educated in Australia from 10, 11, 12, 13, (4 years), I felt Australian during that time and after that. Never felt

08:00 English though. I told people I was born in England, but I never felt English. Never felt close to the crown at all.

So what did Empire mean to you?

The Empire? I knew we were part of the Empire, and I knew one or two places that were also part of the Empire (like New Zealand and that), but it didn't mean much to me at all. Anything that didn't have a

08:30 bearing on my life or the family's life didn't mean much to me at those days, although even though I read the newspapers about what was going on, but mainly in Australia.

As far as politics was concerned, were you supportive of what the Empire stood for?

I don't think I gave any thought to the Empire whatsoever to be honest

09:00 with you. No, I don't remember thinking of the Empire, as such. I knew there was an Empire and one or two countries attached to it, but it didn't figure in my thoughts very much.

What did you understand about communism – before the war, that is?

Before the war? It was a sort of a dirty war both before, during and after the war: communism.

09:30 Something that was left to the politicians to do something about. I was a bit too young, I think, to do anything about it and learn too much about. I just knew that communism was there. But from an early age I did realise that communism itself, if it was properly applied to any country, would be the most wonderful thing in the world because it meant.

10:00 what it says: communism. Everybody has exactly the same as everybody else; everything is equally divided amongst everyone. Now, that's pure communism but it never worked because there's always the blokes up top that wanted more than the blokes down the bottom. No, I was very disappointed after reading about years and years of communism here and communism there. It just wasn't working.

10:30 **Did you ever come across communists in Australia?**

I joined a mob by the name of… It was an anti-communist group run by Bob Santamaria.

Oh, Bob Santamaria, of course.

As a matter of fact, he used to come up to the farm, Bob Santamaria.

11:00 He was my idol in those days.

Why's that?

I thought he was doing a wonderful job because he was fighting communism a lot on his own. He had quite a few followers but he was the main voice against communism in Australia at that time. And I belonged to a group by the name of National Catholic Rural Movement, and he was

11:30 running that. We'd follow him anywhere. He was great. A Wonderful speaker.

Did you know about Billy Hughes as well?

Billy Hughes, he was the Prime Minister, yes. Billy Hughes. A very good Prime Minister, Billy Hughes.

So he was liked by people in your area?

He was very much liked. He was real Australia—he was a real Aussie, real Aussie, Billy. Very adamant in his statements,

12:00 and very well liked by the people. Very popular.

What did Bob Santamaria say about the potential for war with Germany or Japan or Italy? Did he ever say anything about that in his public speeches?

No, he didn't mention war. No. No, he didn't mention that, because this was after the war. But what was happening there was the communists were starting to run all the trade unions, and that was what Bob was

12:30 all about, anti-communism in the trade unions.

When war broke out, what did you understand was happening when Germany had invaded Poland and then subsequently Menzies' famous speech. Where were you that day?

Who's famous speech?

Sir Robert Menzies', talking—

Oh, Robert Menzies'. I was on the farm those days.

13:00 We had wirelesses, radios. I heard his speech; and he appealed to people to go join the Army and all that. And I went along with him. I thought he was a wonderful man.

You always liked Menzies?

Always liked Menzies. Yeah, always did. Anybody that spoke well attracted me, even though I had been brought up with people not speaking that well. But anybody that spoke well

13:30 really attracted me like honey to a bee.

What significance did war have for you?

Significance?

At least at this stage with the German problem in Europe?

I could see that they were doing the wrong thing, I was reading the papers. All Hitler wanted to do was to get more territory, and I didn't like that

14:00 idea at all. I didn't think anybody should grab anybody's territory, particularly with war.

Did you know much about Hitler before the war?

No.

From the newspapers you used to read?

Oh, he would seem fairly harmless at first. He seemed to be doing a good job in Germany for a while,

and then he got to the stage where—because they used to call him The Little Corporal, and also he was a

14:30 painter and decorator, or something at some stage—but

Who called him The Little Corporal?

The newspapers. He was a Corporal at one stage in the Army when he was young.

Newspapers here would call him The Little Corporal?

Oh yeah. Yeah. He seemed to be doing a reasonably reasonable job in Germany, and then he started getting rid of the Jews and at the same time taking over other countries. We realised then that he was a

15:00 nasty man.

Did Bob Santamaria have any sympathy with the Germans before the war?

I didn't have anything to do with Bob Santamaria at that stage. It was after I left the farm that all this was taking place. (Oh, sorry, no). No, I didn't know Bob Santamaria during that time, before the war. It was only after the war that I got to know Bob Santamaria and the movement. He was a great mate of Dr Mannix.

15:30 He was a hard man, but he used to get his way.

You didn't see any—you realise, obviously, that the war went bad with Dunkirk and the evacuation of France being taken over. You joined up practically immediately, was it, when hostilities were declared?

Yes. I got a note the other day from a friend of mine who was also

16:00 was with us right through. As a matter of fact he's the Secretary of our unit, ex-unit. We get together a couple of times a [year]—I'm on the committee. He wrote me a note the other day and he said, "I was doing some history on you the other day," and he said, "The war broke out in September and you joined in October. What kept you?" No, as soon as war broke out I left the farm and rode me motorbike to Melbourne.

16:30 **At Victoria Barracks was it?**

Yes, Victoria Barracks, they were doing the recruiting, that's right. And when I said I wanted to join the Signals they sent me out to Royal Park. That was the Signals depot out there.

Why Signals?

I wanted to be a dispatch rider.

Because you liked motorbikes? You just wanted to—

I had a motorbike, and I wanted to take it in with me but they wouldn't let me. They had their own motorbikes.

17:00 You have to ride an Army-issue.

Was it better, the Army-issue?

They were very strong bikes, like the BSAs [motorcycle]. They were an English bike. Very solid. Never liked the American bikes; they were too heavy. Like the Harley Davidson, not like today of course. And Indian was another American bike – very heavy and unwieldy. We did a,

17:30 when we were on the Atherton tablelands, we did a course with an American crew who had these American motorbikes. And we were riding around up there on these and, oh, they were too heavy and awkward to handle, whereas the smaller and lighter bikes like the BSA Triumphs and those; the British bikes they were very suitable

18:00 for us.

Did you join up with your mates?

No, I didn't have any mates at that time – just come straight from the farm. It wasn't until I joined the Army that I got— There was another fellow who rode in with me the same day as I went in. He had the same idea: he wanted to be a dispatch rider and take his motorbike in with him. But they wouldn't let us. We were very friendly for quite a while after that. And then I sort of

18:30 joined up with other people along the way. But wherever we went, everybody had one particular friend that he was always—we were always in pairs. Didn't matter what we did, we were in pairs.

This is even in the campaigns when you went to the front lines?

Yes. Always in pairs. Of course we knew all the other people around us. They were all friendly; all friends. But one particular mate, my particular mate was a guy by the name of Joe

19:00 Goldsmith. He was very Australian.

Where was he from?

The other side of town somewhere – Pascoe Vale. Joe. He drank himself to death about 3 years ago.

He was a working-class boy?

He was a plasterer. Undaunted: he would say anything to anybody.

19:30 **Pretty straight.**

He led me a merry dance overseas. We used to ride motorbikes together, and he taught me how to stand up on the saddle of the motorbike and ride no hands standing up on the saddle.

He sounds like an expert.

Oh, I hate the thought of it now. I shudder. And yet, whenever we had a reunion of our unit he used to say, "Gee you got me into a lot of trouble." He said to me! But I used to

20:00 follow him; whatever he did I wanted to do.

Was he older than you?

He was. About 3 or 4 years older. I was the youngest in the group, the youngest in our lot, yeah. I was the youngest and the biggest.

So your first posting was to, via the Queen Mary, was England.

Yes.

Can you tell us about the voyage?

20:30 **Was anything interesting about the voyage? The weather? The people you met, for instance? And your expectations.**

Yeah. Well, when we first went on the Queen Mary there was 2000 of us. And there was practically a riot because a lot of the guys reckoned there were too many, although they'd pulled out a lot of the furniture in the Queen Mary. They'd stripped a lot of it out and made room.

21:00 And I thought it was quite comfortable actually. And this Joe Goldsmith that I was with, the first thing he did when he went on board he said, went up to someone in charge and said, "I want to be a waiter on the tables." He said, "You'll need waiters to feed this mob, and I want to be one." They said, "Alright, you can be a waiter," because he was always thinking ahead, this bloke. So we got better food than anybody else because we could pick out the food we

21:30 wanted, and any leftover we had that. So we used to serve the food up. And whatever he did I did, of course. When we got to Cape Town on the Queen Mary we went ashore and bought a lot of jars of jam and marmalade and stuff like that, and we used to spread them around a bit. And the boys liked that. We got a lot of—we weren't too bad on the Queen Mary. I think we ate well, actually, because

22:00 they had good cooks on a ship like that; and just made the most of what he had.

How big was this convoy? Was it a convoy?

A big convoy. Well, there was 10,000 troops.

In the entire convoy?

Yeah, because it was half a division. It was half of the 6th Division. We were formed as the 6th Division. The first half went to Palestine,

22:30 and we were to join them soon after; and we went to England instead.

To do more training, I understand?

No, it wasn't to do more training. It was to help the English because they were in trouble.

Oh, right. So you were stationed in England—

—To help—

—to maybe thwart an invasion as well?

Oh yeah. They welcomed us with open arms because they had nothing. They knew that they were gone as soon as France fell and there was only

23:00 the Channel between the might of the German Army and England. Lucky for them, Hitler decided he'd leave England till later and go to Russia. And that was his downfall. Otherwise Germany would've won the war without any trouble whatsoever – got England. And once they'd got England that was it. They

were training with broomsticks when we got there, members of the Army. And

23:30 they lost a lot of men, of course; lot of equipment. We took a lot of equipment with us. But the convoy itself would have consisted of about 6 troop ships, because ours was the biggest with 2000; 6 or 7 troops ships, there would be another 3 or 4 supply ships. And the Navy had one battleship, 2 cruisers and about 4 destroyers

24:00 going round us all the time.

Were there any submarine scares?

Yes. There was one boat was sunk from our convoy – one of the supply ships actually. And you could feel the thump. It might've been miles away but you could feel the thump on the ship. Whenever there was a scare of submarines the

24:30 Queen Mary used to take off because she could do 30 knots, whereas the others could only do about 20. Take off and leave the convoy and then wait for them to catch up later on. So we felt pretty safe because of that.

At the time that other ship was sunk, the supply ship, did you

25:00 **actually witness that?**

No, we saw some floating stuff afterwards. It was during the night. The next morning we could see because we'd gone past it. In the background we could see bits and pieces floating around.

You didn't hear the explosion?

Oh, we felt it. Felt the thud through the boat.

When you say "thud" what are you referring to exactly?

It's like someone—it's hard to describe it. It's

25:30 like when you hear an explosion down the road, you can sort of feel a bit of vibration, because the sound waves travel in water a long way, and they just sort of hit the boat like another thud on the boat. And also the Navy were dropping depth charges. We heard that they'd got the submarine but we never saw

26:00 anything of it. There was a lot of rumours floating about (or as they call the, "furfies").

Furfies?

Furfies. That's a rumour.

Why "furfy." Why would they say that?

It was an Army term and it originally came from the First World War because they used to cart water in tanks on wheels. And those tanks on wheels were called furfies. And

26:30 of course water was something everybody was always needing. And they were told that the furfy was coming, but it was only a furfy – it wasn't coming at all. So, in the Second World War, if word went around that something was happening they'd say, "Is that real, or is it a furfy?" A furfy was something that never happened. Of course, during the war,

27:00 it's understandable that the guys think what they would like to happen and they say, "Wouldn't it be nice if such-and-such happened." And the next guy would say, "Yeah, I think it will." And it would go down the line, "Something's going to happen, " "Something's going to happen," but it was all dreaming. Dreamtime.

What were you expecting when you got to England?

We didn't know what to expect actually. We were a bit worried

27:30 because we knew—we were getting news bulletins all the way—that the Germans were driving the British out of France. And we knew, when we got there we knew that France had gone, and that we were going to help them – as much as we could. Considering

28:00 what Armies the British had originally, we were only a very small force. We were only 10,000 men. But it was 10,000 trained troops with all their equipment. And that was a big boost to the British people. There were a few New Zealanders there when we got there, too, so they'd been pushed over there. It was a Empire thing, really. It was a big boost to the British people.

So you said that they welcomed you with open arms.

28:30 **Can you give me some examples of how they did that?**

Wherever we went—you could be riding your motorbikes along, or riding along a convoy backwards and forwards—and the local people would say, "Good on ya Aussie." Or walking along the street in uniform they'd come up and shake you by the hand and say, "Welcome," or something like that. As a matter of

fact, one woman came up to

29:00 me one day and she said, “Aloha.” And I said, “What?” She said, “Aloha.” I said, “What are you talking about?” She said, “You’re from New Zealand aren’t you?” I said, “No, I’m Australian.” “Oh,” she said, “I thought you were a New Zealander.” But anyway, they welcomed any troops from overseas at that time.

Now, you did see some of the dogfights in the Battle of Britain?

Well we saw a few planes come down – some German, some British.

29:30 But as far as the dogfights was concerned, they were like thirty- or forty-thousand feet up in the air. And you could see vapour trails, not all day long, a lot of the day you could see these vapour trails going round and round, and hear, eventually, the machine guns. Just wondering who was hitting who. But the Hurricanes and Spitfires did a wonderful job. And the German planes were

30:00 much improved to the British planes. But once the second Spitfire mach 2, that was the superior plane of all, and they finally drove the Germans off. But the Germans thought it was only a matter of pounding England and then coming over when they liked and taking over. But they found that wasn’t quite right.

Did you see bombing raids?

Bombing? Oh yes.

30:30 Oh often.

What were the worst examples that you witnessed?

Whole rows of houses bombed and just destroyed completely – down to the ground. It was terrible. In the finish, the Germans were sending over a hundred bombers at a time and just doing strip-bombing with huge bombs, 2000 pound bombs. They’d destroy everything

31:00 in sight for a while.

Where were you stationed in England?

We were stationed in the south of England at first, and then we went up the coast to a place called Colchester. I think it was in Sussex [actually Essex]. And that was in the town of Colchester. We set up a headquarters there. We were doing our runs from there wherever we needed

31:30 to go. And we used to have time off, go to the pictures. We never seemed to go into restaurants for meals because we were quite happy with the meals we were getting at where we were camped. We were camped in houses.

What about your association with women at the time?

I got to know one girl, I don’t know how I got to know her.

32:00 Her name was Rosemary Howard, actually. And she took me home; had a meal there. She had a sister who had just lost her husband in the Navy – his ship was sunk. I only went to her place once. I think I took her to the pictures a couple of times. And then we wrote to each other for quite a while;

32:30 even when I was in the Middle East we wrote to each other. A couple there; but it just sort of disappeared, petered out. There was another, there was a girl that I used to write to all the time I was away from Australia. Her name was Lesley Brown: 27 Bayview Crescent, Blackrock.

33:00 How I came to meet her was we were riding a convoy from New South Wales to Victoria to do some work with our artillery that we were supposed to be attached to. Driving along and there was a car going past us and a girl was waving some knitting out of the window. And as she

33:30 passed, she handed me a piece of paper with her name and address on it. So I wrote to her and she sent me what she was knitting. It was a pair of socks, I think it was. And we corresponded all through the war then, after that. And when I came home I met up with her; lovely girl. She worked at the Melbourne University Press; very

34:00 bright girl.

What was her name?

Her name? Lesley Brown. Her father was a builder, and she had a brother and a sister. Went to her place, had one meal. And it was soon after that that I went back into farming and I had met this girl that I was going to be married, and I got engaged. So that petered out too. But it was great

34:30 to have someone to write to and get letters from, and an occasional parcel.

Did you say she got engaged?

I got engaged.

You got engaged, sorry.

The lady I met at Model Dairy in Kew when I was working there after the war.

So what about when you were in England? You didn't come across any other women that you—

Didn't bother very much.

35:00 We were pretty busy over there. Didn't have that much time off.

How long did you stay in England?

In England?

Yes.

6 months. And I was in the advance party to come away from England and go to the Middle East. The others stayed another month; that was November. We left in November and the others came over in December to join us in Palestine. That's where I had my 21st birthday.

35:30 **I see, right. So you had to go all the way round South Africa again and then go back to Palestine and then to Egypt?**

Yeah.

How was that voyage?

That was a good voyage. We were on the Mauritania. It was a 4-funnel vessel. It was only about half the size of the Queen Mary but it was alright. By the time we got to Palestine we'd been on the sea

36:00 for a longer period than a lot of sailors on the ship, by the time we went over and came back again. A lot of the sailors were just new, young fellows on their first voyage. I never liked being on the sea, never. I still don't like being on the sea.

Why's that?

I don't know. The thought of deep water worries me.

Did you ever come across very stormy weather

36:30 **or rough seas?**

Oh, we had some terrible seas, oh yes. Especially around the Cape of Good Hope. They can be very rough there.

When you say "rough" are we talking about very big waves?

Oh yes, oh yes. Higher than the ship. That's a worry, that's a worry; when you see a huge wave rolling towards you, and then it sort of rolls over and the ship goes down right inside it and up the other.

37:00 And if you're having a meal, too, you've got to be very careful: all the stuff on the table rolls off – you've got to grab it. So it was an experience, though. Although it did worry me at the time, a bit, I wasn't what you'd call fearful because there was so many others. We were all together. If you're on your own

37:30 you'd die of fright. But because everybody was there you had to put on a brave front anyway and you just passed it off as just another day.

Did you get seasick?

No, never been seasick in me life, and yet quite a few of the other guys that were with me, as soon as they get on a boat, every time they got on a boat, even before it left port they'd be seasick. I think it was in the mind.

So

38:00 **it was essentially uneventful as far as enemy activity was concerned? No subs or ships or anything else?**

Oh, well, up to a point it was, yes. There was always, when we were close to land, there was aeroplanes going over, either ours or enemy. We knew there were submarines somewhere not that far away all the time because German submarines were always looking for supply ships. They sunk hundreds of supply ships during the war;

38:30 heading towards England, mainly. And no, we didn't come across—we were lucky, I suppose, in our convoys.

So you went to Palestine first. Which port did you disembark at?

Suez. We went up the Suez Canal, embarked at Suez, and then camped there for a little while.

39:00 We were camped in a training camp called Julis for a while. We trained there for a while and then we

went up to Syria.

Now, the campaign in Syria had been finished by then. They finished the campaign in 5 weeks.

Yeah, that had been done by the British troops. We took over as garrison troops from them. We were camped in a high school in

39:30 Tripoli. And then we were riding our motorbikes—we used to ride up to the mountains. I think we must have had a headquarters up in the mountains somewhere because I remember going twice. I had special dispatches to deliver up in the mountains. There was snow; it was so cold. The Army authorities were a bit silly at the time because we had to

40:00 wear .303 rifles strapped to our back. And they weighed 10 pound each. Until one of our guys had an accident and just about—hurt his back, broke his back I think— because he fell on the rifle. So they took the rifles from us and gave us .45 revolvers, sidearms. Until we had to go to Aleppo from Tripoli

40:30 on the long trip and then we took the jeeps and a rifleman.

Right, well we're out of tape for the second one. Great.

Tape 3

00:35 **You did your training at Palestine initially, you said.**

In a camp called Julis.

How long were you actually at Palestine for?

We were only there for about a month before we went to Syria.

A month. Did you actually get a chance to interact with the local population?

No, not really. We were

01:00 doing a lot of convoys, a lot of moving around in convoy. And we used to speak—I got to know a few words of Arabic, and the little boys used to come along selling boiled eggs and loaves of bread. "Eggs a cooka bread," they said, "Eggs a cooka bread." And whenever we stopped

01:30 these little boys used to come up to us and say, "You come see my sister? You come see my sister? She is very good. Very sweet, very clean, very hygiene." That was all the English they knew, but we never went to see their sisters.

Had this got anything to do with paying them?

Paying them?

Paying them for a service?

No – oh, what with women?

Yeah.

02:00 Oh, with prostitutes? There were plenty of prostitutes about. Most of the towns in the Middle East have got their brothels, and they're quite open about it. But disease is so rife that a lot of us wouldn't even turn—not one of the guys. They might get inveigled into going with one of the young girls, and they'd

02:30 see a beautiful young girl walking along and start talking to her, and ask about sex and she'd say, "Oh, no. I'm a virgin." One of my mates did this one day and he came across one of these virgins. And he said he finally talked her into going to bed with him and he finished up with VD in the hospital anyway, so… They used to pay for that. There was a brothel in

03:00 Tripoli when we were there. It was right—

That's Libya, is it, or Lebanon?

No, no. This is Syria.

Syria. Tripoli?

Tripoli in Syria. That was our base. We were camped in a secondary school house, a big school. There was a brothel there. It was actually run by

03:30 the medical profession. They knew every girl there and they kept them very clean. But I was always afraid; never ever. There were 2 things that I wouldn't do, that was go into a brothel; or get married during the war. Even as young as I was when I joined up I vowed that I would not even think about

getting married regardless of who I met during the war because it wouldn’t be fair if I didn’t come back and left a wife and perhaps a family. Some of them did get

04:00 married during the war, when we came home on leave or something like that. Or even before we left for overseas some of them rushed in and got married. But I didn’t think it was fair on the women.

You didn’t have anyone to leave, did you, when you did leave, or did you?

Well, my sister—my mother was in England until she died.

04:30 I had a sister living in Melbourne; we were corresponding. We were very close together. I had what they called an allotment to her, the (UNCLEAR)s take it out of your pay each fortnight or month, whatever it was, and allotted it to her. But when I came back I found that she’d been putting her allotment into a bank account for me. So when I cam back there was a bank account with a few pounds in it.

05:00 I had allotted it to my mother in the first place. When I first joined I allotted her so much a week.

Actually, sorry, I meant specifically in regards to girlfriends. You didn’t have anyone when you left here?

No. No. Didn’t have a girlfriend. No. Didn’t have a girlfriend until after the war. Never had one. I was frightened of them. I was scared of women. I think it was because my mother was so dominant

05:30 that I thought that if I even touched a girl I’d get a slap over the ear or something like that. I had that in mind until after the war.

When did your mother die?

When?

What year?

What year?

Was it after the war?

No, it was during the war. I was 21. When I was in Syria I was 21 year old, so it must have been 1941.

06:00 1941. I was in Syria. And I got a cable. In those days, being in Signals meant that you got news a lot faster than anyone else, because it went straight to you. And everything had to be coded and decoded. And I got a telegram addressed to me saying, “Sorry to inform you,” number whatever it was “68,”

06:30 say. So I had to look up the code words for 68 was “mother died.” They wouldn’t put it in there complete: “Sorry to tell you your mother died,” because the Germans were always listening in to these things and they might’ve taken it that something was afoot and that was the code word, the code for that. Everything had to be in code. “Sorry to tell you 68.” Then if it came to a member of the forces that wasn’t

07:00 in Signals we used to have to decipher it and send it on to the person concerned. So we had to be radio operators, linesmen, dispatch riders, do everything. That was the job of the dispatch rider, was a jack-of-all-trades in the Army.

Did you have any encounters with the enemy in Palestine in any way?

07:30 In Palestine, no. There was no enemy in Palestine.

No air activity?

Very little. Very little. Just an odd plane come over, that’s all, to see what we were doing, but not really. We were away from the theatre of war. The theatre of war at that stage, of course, was around England and Germany, France.

08:00 At each others’ throats a lot then. And while we were in Palestine the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour. We heard that come over the radio and knew that that was the end of Palestine for us. And we were soon packed off back to Australia after that.

So you stayed at Palestine for a few weeks.

That was a staging camp. See, whenever you did a campaign

08:30 like we did Syria and back to Palestine; Tobruk, back to Palestine; Alamein back to Palestine; that was a staging camp all set up for the Australian troops. That’s where we learned to make Lady Blameys.

Lady Blameys. What’s that?

That’s a cut-off beer bottle, because we didn’t have

09:00 glasses. Whenever we were in the staging camp when there was plenty of beer, bottles of beer. So we used to get a piece of string, dip it in kerosene, tie it around the top of the straight part of the bottle, set

fire to it and dunk it in a bucket of water, and that would break it off; and just level the edges a bit. And that was our Lady Blamey. Why they were called Lady Blamey I don't know.

Does it have anything to do with

09:30 **the Australian General Blamey?**

Oh yeah, that was his wife, yeah. She was Lady Blamey.

He wasn't very much liked was he, Blamey?

No, he wasn't, he wasn't. He was a pig of a man.

Why's that?

It was his manner. We never thought he was a good General, and we found out after the war that he was a very bad General. He made some terrible decisions. And he had a lot of men killed that shouldn't have been killed,

10:00 bleeding up after the war about the way he went about things: the orders he gave which shouldn't have been, and even some of his commanders around him used to not argue with him but question him whether that was the right, and he always insisted that he was right and they had to do what he said. Some bad decisions. I can't explain exactly what they were now,

10:30 but I have read since the war that he made some very bad decisions, especially in New Guinea.

You were in those campaigns, weren't you, in New Guinea?

Yeah. We didn't do the Kokoda Trail. That was the 6th. Had we still been 6th Division, as we joined up as, we would have done the Kokoda Trail. If we'd have been the 7th Division, a bit later on, we would have done Greece and Crete.

11:00 If we'd have been the 8th Division we would have been taken at Singapore. But being the 9th Division we only did Tobruk.

So the 6th, the 7th, and the 9th. Which one was the most well-known? Was it the 9th?

The most well-known now is the 9th.

What about then, like during the war, at home? Which Division had the most respect at home?

Actually, when you were in Australia you would never know

11:30 which division was where and what they'd done and how they were going. You weren't allowed to hear anything about that at all; because if the enemy knew exactly who was where, then they could direct their troops to there. It was Intelligence that wouldn't allow anybody to. Like when we were writing home we weren't allowed to say where we were, or who we were, or who we were with, or anything, where we'd been.

12:00 **What was life like in Syria? You were there for how long?**

We were there for a few months, actually; probably 6 months, I think, in Syria. It wasn't bad, although the locals weren't very well-disposed towards us.

Why is that?

Because they didn't want any troops

12:30 in their country. They'd put up with the French for many years. The British drove the French out, so they didn't like the British staying there. Then we took over from the British, and we shouldn't have been there either. So every now and then there'd be a shot fired in anger at some of our blokes somewhere. So we had to be very careful there. I know at one stage there was a—

13:00 I think there was a child crossing the road, and one of our convoys was going through. And the child got hit by one of our vehicles and killed. And, oh, there was hundreds of locals came around and they wanted to lynch everybody. Anyway, we finally managed to calm them down; but they never really accepted our troops. I don't know what happened when we left. I don't know whether anybody took over from us.

13:30 I never heard of anybody taking—we just left them as they were because things were… I think the French wouldn't be worried about that at that stage because they were busy fighting their own battles in France.

Did any Australians die as a result of being killed by Syrians?

Oh yes. There were one or two. I don't know how many, bet there were a few.

14:00 Yes. From snipers.

Syrian snipers. This is after the Vichy French had been defeated?

Oh yeah. After the French had been there. After the British had been there. I think there was one or two British killed too. There is always someone that hates people more than someone else and they do something about it.

Was it a tense occupation for your…?

In a way it was, although it didn't

14:30 worry us particularly. We were just on the lookout all the time.

Different to Palestine.

Oh yeah. Like, we wouldn't go out at nighttime or anything like that – in the streets at nighttime. Even driving along the roads we used to keep a very close eye on trees and buildings and that.

Why trees and buildings?

That's where snipers are.

In Syria?

Yeah. "The Cypresses of Lebanon."

15:00 Some beautiful cypress trees there.

What did you appreciate about Syria?

It's a beautiful country if you're out to look at the scenery. Absolutely beautiful: there's so many hills and mountains and snow. It is really a beautiful country. And beautiful trees growing.

15:30 The whole countryside looks pretty healthy.

Now you said before that you were doing some sort of runs towards the mountains, the Syrian mountains. The Australia ski troop?

I did. I wouldn't say it was a ski troop. It was some sort of headquarters up there. I don't know what it was, but I know twice I had to ride my motorbike up there, and

16:00 came off my bike a couple of times in the snow—which doesn't hurt—but it's very hard to handle a motorbike in the snow. That's why I remember it. Twice I had to go up the mountains in the snow and deliver some special dispatches. But it was only a couple of times there, but I've got no idea now—it would have been written on the dispatch—but I don't know who it was that I had to go and deliver to up there.

Were you aware at that time that there was an

16:30 **Australian ski unit formed?**

I wouldn't say it was a ski unit; I didn't know that is was a ski unit – it could have been.

They formed a company of about 300.

Oh did they?

Yeah.

Well that's where I went then. No, I didn't know at the time. I was just given the dispatch, told where to go and deliver it, and come back again.

It's quite interesting isn't it?

Yeah.

After Syria where were you stationed?

17:00 Well, we went back to Julis camp in Palestine after Syria and did a bit more training. And then we went up to North Africa, up to Benghazi. We got as far as Benghazi.

Where did you start in the first actions towards Benghazi? This was against the Italians?

There was no actions there at all; we were just stationed up there. I

17:30 don't know what the intention was; we didn't know what the Generals intended to do with us from time to time. I know we went up to North Africa to Benghazi.

So you went to Benghazi once it had been overrun by the Allies?

Yeah. That's when we were driven back to Tobruk. One of our friends was taken prisoner there—Benghazi—he didn't get back quick enough, didn't get on his motorbike quick enough.

He was a signaller,

18:00 **a dispatch rider?**

Yeah. He came back after the war and he was okay. I think he finished up in Germany, as a POW [prisoner of war] in Germany, or wherever they had them. But that was as far as we got up at that time. That was our first taste of war, I suppose actually, after England.

18:30 I don't know whether it was expected or not, or whether they were pushed up there to try and stop them. But oh, they came in huge numbers of tanks – Rommel's mob. And we went back to Tobruk and formed the perimeter and stopped them.

So were you involved in any battles

19:00 **after Benghazi, initially?**

Myself?

Yeah. Like in support, or whatever?

We were supporting; when you're a dispatch rider you've just gotta keep delivering dispatches all the time – to whoever needed them too. There was about half a dozen of us had formed what they called "Rear Division Headquarters" in Tobruk—we were right on the coast,

19:30 right on the sea. And it our job was to deliver special dispatches – not just the ordinary dispatches going out day by day by day. They were done from the forward headquarters; they had regular runs. Any special ones, we had to take them to the, perhaps to the battalions or regiments or Indians, New Zealanders;

20:00 wherever. But I had a regular run twice a day between where we were camped and Tobruk port, on a back road.

I see. You said you were involved in some actions on the way towards Benghazi. When I say "involved" I'm saying that you were participating

20:30 **in the operation as a dispatch rider. What did you see on the way toward Benghazi? I know lots of Italians surrendered. Could you tell us anything about that?**

The Italians. When we first started going up toward Benghazi there was hundreds and hundreds of Italians used to see us there. There might be only, say, 3 or 4 of us on motorbikes just driving up and we'd see this army of Italians with their arms up, "Commandant, Commandant," or whatever.

21:00 We'd just say, [pointing behind him] "Keep going down that way." Further down the road somewhere they put up some barbed wire and called that a POW camp, and there was hundreds and hundreds of Italians. They didn't want to fight. As soon as they could get away from the Germans they surrendered. An old Italian—

Why do you say that?

21:30 Why? They didn't like they Germans. They didn't want to fight; never. An old Italian told me, after the war, that Italians never, ever wanted to fight. Never. Didn't matter what their superiors said. Not a fighting race; whereas the Germans are a fighting race. Totally different people altogether. And the only way the Germans could get them to do any fighting was to form a corp

22:00 or whatever it was, of them and then the Germans come behind and tell them to go forward. They used to hate that. They never liked the Germans anyway.

Yes.

Even though Hitler and Mussolini were friends, that's as far as it got.

Did you see anything else while you were on your forward advance towards Benghazi?

22:30 Various equipment left by the Italians – and when we came back to Tobruk, especially. There had been an Italian camp there – sort of dug into the side of a hill. And my mate Joe and I decided we'd investigate. And we found cases of Italian

23:00 hand grenades, and cases of Italian vino. So we drank a couple of bottles of vino each and then started throwing hand grenades. Silly, I know. I remember one hand grenade, the nitro didn't go off. And I looked at it and I picked up a big rock and I said, "You so-and-so," and I dropped the rock on it and it exploded. Now, if it

23:30 had've been German or a British hand grenade it would have blown my feet off; but being an Italian one I was a bit lucky. Stupid thing to do. You do those things on the spur of the moment. That was when we first got back to Tobruk. We were just looking around, riding our motorbikes around the perimeter and all around the place and getting ready for an attack by Rommel's mob.

Now, when Rommel attacked

24:00 **Benghazi, were you ever strafed by planes? What did you have to watch out for? Artillery? Snipers? Planes?**

First of all artillery, but they relied on tanks – almost solely on tanks, really.

The Germans?

Yeah. They didn't have much in the way of artillery because they had the big guns on the tanks. They didn't really need artillery. They were pretty lumbersome to move around, and the tanks could move around

24:30 quite freely and quickly and easily. So they relied on that. So they had a few hundred tanks with the big guns on them. They had a big—I don't know what size the gun was, it was probably about a 2-pounder or something like that, and machine guns as well. And they thought they could claim the earth with those. They found the Aussies were a bit tough. Every now and then Rommel used to send a small number of

25:00 tanks to go through the gaps and try and force gaps through the perimeter. And the infantry would let them through. And behind the infantry were anti-tank crews and they used to blow the tanks up as they came in. So they tried that a few times and gave up; they were losing too many tanks.

You said that you

25:30 **had to watch out for artillery fire.**

Not very much.

Was this like stray artillery?

Stray?

Yeah. How close would you get to the frontline being a dispatch rider?

Oh, I suppose the closest would be at Alamein I suppose. We were probably within half a mile of the frontline there. There was our troops, no man's land, then the Germans. And we were back

26:00 with the guns, the heavy artillery guns that opened up. But that's the closest we got because we—

There was a battle in progress…?

We were Divisional Headquarters, you see. And Divisional Headquarters always the furthest back. And then you get the brigades, you got Brigade Headquarters. Each brigade has 3 battalions, each of a thousand men. That's the infantry. And then

26:30 you've got the anti-tank, anti-aircraft, anti-tank and the regimental guns – artillery. I saw one – I was with a dispatch. One time I had to take a dispatch to an anti-tank regiment. And while I was there some dive-bombers came over. And one came down to drop a bomb

27:00 on where I was, where we were, I was talking to other guys, and they fired 3 shots with their Bofors anti-aircraft gun. The first one missed and the third one was wasted because the second one hit him right on the nose and it blew him to pieces. That was one of the happiest moments of my Army career.

What were you attacked by? What plane?

What plane?

Yeah.

It was a Stuka, dive-bomber.

27:30 They each carried one bomb and a couple of machine guns. And they'd come down machine-gunning and get close to the ground and then go up and drop the bomb as they went up. They were very accurate mainly, too. They used to come over several of times a day, and with my 2 runs a day into Tobruk port there was always Stukas above. And

28:00 one particular day I just happened to look up, and one of them was peeling off the group that was going over. And I happened to be passing some old Italian trucks, there was a wadi with some old Italian transport in it that had been abandoned for years. And this pilot must have spotted that and thought it was some of our transport. So he peeled off and machine-gunned and bombed this one. I was

28:30 probably a little bit too close because it blew me off the motorbike but didn't hurt me. But just sort of picked the bike up and went on my way. I always had to deliver to a guy, an Australian, by the name Staff Captain Edward Wills. We used to call him Teddy Wills. He was a great bloke. He was quite a young fellow for a Staff Captain, and always good for a yarn

29:00 when I got there. Quite often when I got there, his sort of dugout he was operating from, was a mess because they were always dropping bombs around the port to try and stop the port from working because that was our lifeline. And that was the aim of all the Stuka bombers. And he was always in a

mess, and occasionally had a bit of blood running down his face or his arms or something.

29:30 But he was a wonderful bloke, terrific.

Were a lot of ships sunk in Tobruk?

There was quite a few. Even when we got there there was a few ships sunk in the harbour. I suppose it was a pretty big harbour; there'd be half a dozen ships with part of them sticking up out of the water. It wasn't easy to get in and out. The Navy did a wonderful job during that time, the 8 months that we were there,

30:00 to keep us supplied with everything – even motorbikes. At one stage we ran out of motorbikes and the government commandeered some in Australia and sent a shipload over. And we were told to go to a certain place and pick out a bike for ourselves. So we did that and got going again.

You must have worked also,

30:30 **through your liaison with the other Australian battalions, 2nd 23rd Battalion?**

Yeah. 23rd, 32nd, 48th. There were 9 battalions altogether; 9000 infantry; 3 brigades.

Do you remember a man by the name of Captain or Major Ratray?

Ratray? Yeah. That name

31:00 rings a bell, Ratray. He was with one of the battalions I think.

That's right. 2nd 23rd.

23rd. Yeah, Ratray. I probably delivered a dispatch to him because when we went there it was always to an officer that had to accept the dispatch because they were so important.

What was it like to be—how many k's behind the line would you be in Tobruk?

How many what?

What was the distance you'd

31:30 **be away from the frontline when you were camped?**

In Tobruk? It was a matter of... Oh, most of the troops were within 5miles of us, I suppose, or less. But it depends on where we were. I think the New Zealanders were out on that [points to the right] flank, the Indians and New Zealanders [points straight ahead], and then our blokes were sort of coming around that way [draws a half-circle in front]. I suppose within 5 miles you could reach anybody.

32:00 You had to know exactly where they were because sometimes we had to do night deliveries. Went out with my mate Joe one night. We took a jeep because it was pretty dark. We were chortling along and I said to Joe, he was driving at the time, I said, "We've just passed a sign. Did you notice what it was?" He said, "No."

32:30 So I said, "Well, you better back back and have a look." So he backed back and it was a German minefield that we'd just entered. Why we didn't get blown up I don't know. We managed to veer around it and (UNCLEAR) I suppose. But nighttime it was very—you had to be very careful at nighttime.

What dangers could you experience from German soldiers at nighttime?

33:00 They didn't seem to do a lot of infiltrating. Our blokes did a lot of infiltrating.

At night?

Yes. Particularly in Tobruk. A couple of times they brought back German officers. They actually went for Rommel a couple of times, knowing exactly where he should be and which tent he was in, and where he was. They missed him both times

33:30 and brought back other officers. But they wanted me to join that mob but I said, "No thanks, I'll stick to the motorbikes." And they wanted me to become a sniper too because a fellow by the name of Les Parry and myself were the top shots in our unit. And they wanted us to become snipers. But I'd read somewhere, somehow, that the

34:00 first people that get shot in the Army were snipers. So I decided—I said, "No thanks, I'll stick with the motorbikes." And when we were in England we had a Lieutenant by the name of Payne. Quite a young fellow for a Lieutenant too. We were training under him in Australia in Sydney, New South Wales. And he was posted somewhere else

34:30 and he wanted me to go with him as a Corporal. And I said, "No. I'll stick to the boys on the bikes." So I stuck with them for the rest of the war then. I wasn't ambitious.

You just enjoyed your job?

Oh, I enjoyed the job and the people I was with. And I thought getting away from that I didn't know what I'd be in for.

35:00 So. the devil you know.

What are some of the memories you have from the period in North Africa? So you were involved in the counter-offensive in El Alamein as well?

35:30 El Alamein?

Yeah.

We didn't do a lot. After the initial bombardment we all went forward a little way. It would only be a matter of a week, I suppose, after the bombardment that they followed that up and went to a certain distance. And then we came out and left the rest of the fighting to

36:00 the rest of the Empire troops, and left them mopping up; which they did. And cleaned the whole thing up. And we came out and went back to Julis camp in Palestine and we were told we had to come back to Australia to go to New Guinea.

In your experience in North Africa what did you think of the Germans?

36:30 **Good soldiers?**

Good soldiers. Good soldiers. They were very good. I think only once I came across one that was a POW. They were very good. They told us how good we were, and we knew how good they were. And any of our guys that were taken prisoner were treated very well by them, particularly

37:00 compared with other forces – especially the Japanese. But no, they were good soldiers. They were fighting for what they thought was right, and so were we. Good clean fighters and well-respected. Pretty well educated people. Always did the right thing – right what they should do.

37:30 They were good.

What about the Italians?

The Italians just didn't want to fight. Didn't want to fight. There was nothing nasty about them at all. All they wanted was peace. Always. Peace has its price.

So you liked them?

I got on well with the Italians, oh yes.

38:00 I didn't mix much with them, but the ones that I saw and spoke to… As a matter of fact we stopped at this particular POW camp in North Africa at one stage and one fellow came forward and started talking perfect English. And I said, "Gee, your English is good." He said, "I am a doctor." He was just another POW that was caught up in the melee. But they were naturally nice

38:30 people, the Italians were. There was a lot of them sent back to Australia to work on farms. And a majority of them stayed here and liked the country and the people they worked with and the job they had. And they were good workers.

What about other troops you came across? Did you meet Indian troops?

Indian troops, yes. I had an occasion one time to go

39:00 to take a special dispatch to the Indians. When I got close to where I thought they were I left my bike and started walking. And I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was an Indian feeling—used to feel up [touches his right shoulder with his left hand], we had Australia metal badges on. I didn't know he was there, I can tell you that. They were good troops, the Indians –

39:30 especially to us. If I'd have been a German and he'd have done that I would have got a knife, just a knife. That's all they did. They were very good troops. Wonderful soldiers, the Indians.

Why's that?

I think they were born fighters, these Indians. They were of a particular tribe, and big, strong fellows. Very proud

40:00 of their achievements. What were they? They weren't Sikhs?

Punjabis?

No, they weren't Punjabis. I've forgotten what they were now. But specially trained. Very well trained, especially at nighttime.

Tape 4

00:39 **Yes. So you were talking about the Indian troops. These troops were of what nationality?**

Nationality was Indian.

Ethnic group? They were Ghurkhas was it?

Yeah, they were Ghurkha troops, yes. Not afraid of anything or anybody. They were quite happy

01:00 to go behind the German lines and either take a prisoner or destroy a few – without any noise at all. Wonderful people to have on your side. They were on one flank and the New Zealanders were next to them. A couple of times that I had special dispatches for the New Zealanders they used to welcome us with open arms: “Aussie! You beauty! Come in!” and give you a drink before you could do anything. Yeah, wonderful people there to

01:30 liaise with.

This is in Tobruk is it?

This is in Tobruk, yes. They were on the perimeter with the Indian troops.

The New Zealanders?

Yeah.

What were the other troops that were there? There were British?

There wasn’t any British, mainly Australians. That’s all. A few New Zealanders. It wasn’t even a full division of New Zealanders or Indians, just

02:00 a small amount. So it was a nationality job. Nearly all Australians in Tobruk.

What were the British like there? Northumbrian Fusiliers?

No, we didn’t have any British in Tobruk, any British.

02:30 They’d gone back before we came up to North Africa. No British.

There were no British there?

No. There was a smattering of British top brass giving orders. I didn’t come across any British troops there at all. The only reason I knew that was on one of my visits late in Tobruk, to Staff Captain Wills in Tobruk port,

03:00 he told me he’d got a dispatch from the British Headquarters that there was a pretty small British contingent that was in Tobruk telling him that there was certain medals available for him to allot to troops that he considered were worthy. There were two MID’s [Mentioned In Dispatches] and two MM’s [Military Medal] that he had to allot.

03:30 And he said, “I’ve recommended you for one of the MM’s.” But our commanding officer, he was a Colonel, he wouldn’t have anything to do with it. As a matter of fact he paraded us and told us that if he caught anybody looking for a medal they’d be out. So I never got it.

What’s a

04:00 **MID?**

Mentioned In Dispatches. The other’s the Military Medal. Anyway… Didn’t worry me.

If a soldier got mentioned in a dispatch, what’s generally the significance of that?

It’s something you’ve done out of the ordinary, above-and-beyond the call of duty in a small way.

04:30 That’s the lightest medal you can get from the Army. There’s Mentioned In Dispatches—

It’s an actual medal?

It’s a medal, oh yes, MID. It’s a medal, it’s the smallest medal you can get. And you get a ribbon to go with it. But Military Medal is a bit higher than that. That’s for something outstanding: outstanding bravery or outstanding performing duties over-and-above.

05:00 But we didn’t consider we were doing anything over-and-above what we were supposed to do, just doing our job; even though we were under fire a lot of the time. We got through it. I think the worst experience I had in Tobruk was I was going along McAdam Road, a sealed road. There’s a sealed road and a back road. We used to go on the back road 2 or 3 times a day.

05:30 But the sealed road you wouldn’t go on very often. And I was going along this sealed road to deliver some dispatches one day and I noticed an aircraft coming towards me fairly low and spots of dust flying

up off the sides of the road. He'd been firing at me and missed me, and he just flew very low over my head. And I thought, "Gee, that was lucky." But those little spurts of dust were his machine-gun bullets. I sort of

06:00 swerved a bit when I saw them coming. I've just been lucky, that's all.

What's life like in Tobruk generally: daily life?

Daily life was fairly humdrum. We didn't have very good food. We didn't have much water because all the water was brought in by ship, and we were only allowed so much per day with our

06:30 water flasks. Our washing was done in the sea. We used to swim in the sea to keep ourselves clean. We were lucky because the infantry further inland couldn't get to the sea; they just had to go without because we didn't have a shower of course. Food was scarce. We had a food dump. Every unit, when we got back to Tobruk, was asked to provide whatever

07:00 food they had, and it was all put in a heap. Oh, it was a mountain of food with a barbed-wire enclosure in Tobruk. And that was sent out bit-by-bit to the various troops. That's where my mate Joe went out one day and crawled under the wire and got a couple of tins. We used to do that occasionally: crawl under the wire and get a couple of tins of food; not knowing, of course, what—

07:30 because none of the tins had labels on them. And when he came out there was a dive-bomber came down and shot him in the foot. So he had to go out to hospital. So he was away from the unit for a while. As a matter of fact he didn't catch up until we were in New Guinea then. He came back to the unit when we were in New Guinea. That was Joe. I had another

08:00 mate then called John from New South Wales, a wonderful surfer and rugby player, big rugby player – 2nd row forward. And when we were on the Atherton Tablelands, when we came back to Australia, every unit had a football team and we played like a league ladder. And he said

08:30 to me, "I want you to play rugby." And I said, "I don't know how to play rugby." He said, "Oh come one, I'll show you." Anyway there was a rugby match going, and he put me in. And he said, "Now, you bend down like that and push your way forward, try and get the ball." And he said, "If somebody else gets the ball chase him." I didn't take to it at all. I didn't like it. So I took up Australian Rules that I was more used to – had played a bit at school.

09:00 So we had an Australian Rules team and a rugby team. We didn't win much because we didn't have a lot to choose from. Our unit was taken from every state in Australia, whereas the battalions, the infantry, each battalion had a thousand men. Young, strong,

09:30 healthy – a thousand men to choose from. They had wonderful teams. A lot of them had played league football in Australia. So they were very good.

After the North Africa campaign you went back to Palestine and then a ship back to Australia was it?

That was after Alamein, yes.

Which division were you attached

10:00 **to at that time? The 9th?**

Yeah, we were 9th. From the time we got to Palestine the first time, until the end of the war, we were 9th division.

And where did you stop on the way to Australia from the Suez area?

Where did we stop…? That's a good question.

10:30 I'll be honest: I don't know.

Did you stop in Ceylon?

Ceylon? No, we didn't stop in Ceylon. We stopped at some islands where we couldn't get off; it was only for refueling. And then we were probably only there for one day and then took off again. Can't think of the name of it now, but it was just a very small island that was used by the Empire troops

11:00 for the Navy to refuel.

Where was the first port in Australia that you landed in?

I think we came to Melbourne.

11:30 Or was it Sydney? No, we went to Sydney, that's right because we were going to do some sort of get all our gear together and get new stuff and re-equipped. The Melbourne people came to Melbourne for a couple of weeks' leave; and the Sydney people stayed in Sydney; and all the other parts just went to their various states for a couple of weeks'

12:00 leave. And we came together again in Sydney after that. We came back to Melbourne and then up to Sydney. Went to Queensland by troop train. That was a long trip because we were last on the list as far as—

That's the Atherton Tablelands?

Yeah. That

12:30 took a few days.

And you did jungle warfare training there?

Yes. That's where we did that, yes. Jungle training.

How long did that go for?

Oh, we must have been up there for a few months I think. Probably about 3 months, I think, from memory. It was pretty intensive. It was summertime. We had to learn how to do long route marches in the heat;

13:00 take salt tablets. That was very important, taking salt tablets every day.

And you remained in your same role as a dispatch rider?

Yes, same role. I had a brother up there at the time. He'd joined up just after me, and he joined a hospital unit. One of the things we couldn't keep up with on the Atherton Tablelands was socks. We used to sweat them out – they used to rot

13:30 very quickly. We were always running out of socks. So I used to get on my motorbike and go to the 2nd 2nd AGH, General Hospital, and say to my brother and say, "I want some socks." So he used to gather a few pair of socks and I'd take them back and hand them around. That was pretty intensive training up there. We did a lot of work up there. Lost a lot of sweat up there. But every now and then we'd have a

14:00 few hours to spare and a group of us would get on our motorbikes and ride down to Cairns, from the Tablelands down to Cairns through Atherton and those places. And what I can remember best about that was paw paw and ice cream. Have a feed, a bit of a run around Cairns and back up again. You couldn't be away long,

14:30 but it was just long enough to do something different.

From there you went to New Guinea?

We went to a staging camp in New Guinea and did a bit of training there. Got back on boats

15:00 and did the Lae landings and then the Finschhafen landings.

You were at Milne Bay first?

Yes. Then we walked up the coast. There was no roads (as far as I could remember) up there, up along the coast anyway. There were a few roads inland, but most of the tracks that we used during the New Guinea

15:30 campaign were those that were made by the pioneer companies. They used to cut trees down and put logs across crossings and muddy patches and all that. Used to rain a lot in New Guinea. When it rains there it really rains.

What was the Battle of Milne Bay like in your experience?

Battle of Milne Bay, I wasn't in the Battle of Milne Bay.

16:00 **You weren't? When did you come? After the battle?**

After Milne Bay. That's where we first went when we went to… That had been over before we got there, and that was our staging camp and there was training before we went on, to prepare us for the Lae and Finschhafen. Whoever thought that up did a wonderful job because we sort of made a pincer movement.

16:30 There were troops actually in Lae. I think they were the 6th and 7th division were heading (UNCLEAR). The 6th did the Kokoda Track, and then the 7th came over and they did the Lae campaign. And they were over on our left. We were on the coast and they were on our left in Lae. And they were driving up inland and we were driving up along the coast. But then with the Lae

17:00 landing that cut off a lot of Japanese troops, and they got cleaned up. And then did the same thing with Finschhafen and cut off a lot more Japanese troops.

When you say "cut off" what do you mean exactly?

Well, we went in Finschhafen around them and the other troops came in towards them. We were sort of pushing away from the coast, and the other troops were coming from inland towards the coast. They got trapped.

Was that a pretty bloody campaign?

17:30 It was a fairly tough campaign.

A lot of Australians were killed, weren't they?

Oh yes, especially in the landings. I think the Japanese were more-or-less ready for them because although the Navy did a good job there, they pounded and pounded along the coast before the landings. So the Japanese were more-or-less warned. There were a lot of

18:00 snipers there in trees. Once they started firing down, they would kill a few troops before you got the idea about firing up. And the troops would just fire up and get rid of them. There was always someone to take their place; that was the trouble, further along the track. But the Japanese were a

18:30 people we'd never come across anything like it because they were so dedicated.

So they were different to the Germans?

Oh yes. Totally different, oh yes, yes.

As far as infantrymen are concerned, for instance, and tactics?

Well, life didn't mean anything to them. Human life meant nothing to the Japanese, nothing. If they lost their life in battle that was the most glorious thing they could do. They'd come at the troops in hordes.

19:00 They'd all get mowed down, but they were happy to do that. They weren't stupid, it was just their belief. And although we were outnumbered all the way probably 10 to 1 all the time, but because they just kept coming towards the infantry in big groups they lost a lot of men. We lost a lot of men, but they lost 10 times more I think. To die for the Emperor…

19:30 But to get taken prisoner was the worst thing that could happen. If any prisoners were taken, they didn't want to go home; they were in disgrace.

What about sending and receiving dispatches through the jungle? What sort of problems with that did you encounter?

We did most

20:00 of that by telephone, wireless; lines – we put out a lot of lines, but they kept getting blown up or cut. So the dispatch riders then became linesmen and we used to have to keep repairing lines and putting phones on lines to get through to various headquarters.

Was that constant?

Very,

20:30 yes. Three of us went out one time behind the Japanese lines, they'd cut our line, and we were there for three days. We repaired the line and put a phone on it until the Japanese were rounded up a bit. I think we lived on guavas; there was a guava tree nearby. And then we went back to our unit. But that's the sort of work that we had to do because you couldn't ride motorbikes and there was no roads

21:00 for cars until we got to Labuan Island. We could drive jeeps on that. We were told when we went to Labuan Island that the Japanese had all been rounded up. But we'd only been there for about a week or 10 days and a group of Japanese marched down the road to the port wanting to take over some American boats that were there. The Americans had landed and looked after the port,

21:30 they were in charge of the port. And they got wiped out. But the idea was to go to the port, get a boat and go home.

So they were trying to fight their way out?

Yeah, all ready to go.

Labuan was where they had the thing called the pocket, isn't it?

The pocket? I didn't hear about that.

Was it Labuan or Moratai? I can't remember.

I haven't heard about the pocket, no.

Were those Oboe operations?

Oboe?

Yes. Oboe 1, oboe 2. Was that in Labuan?

Yeah,

22:00 that was infantry stuff. I wasn't involved in that.

So you were involved in Lae, Finschhafen, Labuan. Labuan was the next one?

That was the last one. That was part of Borneo.

What was that like compared with the New Guinea ones?

Well, Labuan Island there was practically no fighting at all. They got cleaned up very

22:30 quickly. When we landed on Labuan Island the infantry cleaned up. They thought they'd cleaned up the Japanese but there was a pocket left for some reason or other, and they're the ones that marched down to the port and got wiped out down there.

So they were fighting their way down towards the harbour?

Yeah. They just marched down the main road. As a matter of fact I saw them in the distance. I came across a guy, Doug Campbell, at the

23:00 bowling club recently. And I happened to mention that I was on Labuan Island. He said, "I was on Labuan Island," and he said, "I was at the port there when the Japanese came through." And I said, "And I watched them going past." He said, "Were you there?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I was at the port at the time when the Americans cleaned up the last of the Japs." So it's funny how you meet people.

23:30 Yes…

What were the contrasting experiences between the desert and the jungle?

Oh, totally different. So opposite that you wouldn't believe it. You were going from hot sandy, windy desert. When you stopped to have lunch sometimes it was usually bully beef biscuits and sand that you were eating.

24:00 All the time it was dry and dusty. In the jungle when it wasn't raining it was sweaty; it was very damp and we used to sweat like crazy there. Had to drink a lot to survive there. Mosquitoes. I got malaria. Lot of guys got—there was two types of malaria, one was recurring, one was non-recurring. I was lucky, I got the non-recurring one.

24:30 I got a fair bit of experience in hospitals then. I used to have a bit of time to go and help them in the hospitals – do various things. They were pretty short-staffed. My job was to take blood samples and put them under the microscope to see what type of malaria they had and then report it to the doctor. But I was lucky that I was pretty well in those days.

25:00 A lot of—I suppose at least 50 percent of our blokes got diarrhoea—dysentery. I didn't. I missed out on that altogether. So I was very lucky.

Diarrhoea and dysentery?

Mmm. I didn't get it at all. Very lucky. I've never had diarrhoea or dysentery in my life, oh, except a few years ago I got Crone's Disease. That's what I'm stuck with now, Crone's Disease.

What's that.

25:30 It's a disease of the bowel. Can be fatal, but I take a little cortisone each morning and that keeps it away.

Did you have any experiences that were, with the enemy, with the Japanese for instance like snipers or ambushes or anything like that,

26:00 **being a dispatch rider? What's the difference being a dispatch rider actually in the jungle?**

You're behind the action, really, wherever you go. You're behind the action. You see a lot but you're not that involved in it because you haven't got a machine-gun, you haven't got a rifle. You've got a sidearms and usually a means of getting about, but not in the jungle, you had to walk. So we were behind the action all the time

26:30 there; just came across various things afterwards. Like, there were groups of Japanese that lived underground, and the infantry were given flame-throwers to cook them out. That wasn't very pretty.

You've seen it?

Oh I saw the results. Just burnt-up Japanese. Burnt bodies. Black bodies.

27:00 **Did you have much respect for the Japanese?**

No, because they didn't have respect. We found very quickly that they had no respect for human life whatsoever. They wouldn't take prisoners. Even if you wanted to be a prisoner they wouldn't take you, not in the jungle anyway. They did in Singapore.

Not in the jungle? Really?

No. They didn't want to take prisoners there. They just wanted to kill or be killed, that's all.

27:30 **So the Australians were also doing the same thing? They weren't taking prisoners either.**

Well, we took a lot of prisoners.

From New Guinea?

New Guinea, yep. We were on, I remember, even when we got to Labuan Island there were prisoners coming in there. And there was one who was a Japanese Colonel. We even built a special compound for him,

28:00 to lock him up in. He was only there 2 nights and we opened the door the second morning and he'd committed hari-kiri because I'd made the mistake of leaving his sword with him. But it would be a dishonour to go back having been a prisoner of war. But at that stage we were taking prisoners because that was towards the end of the war and we knew that the war was almost over,

28:30 and there were just pockets of Japanese had to be rounded up. They didn't want to, but they had to surrender. They were told to.

Have you ever witnessed Japanese being killed?

Not being killed. Afterwards.

So as a signaller, you wouldn't have—would you come across people being killed?

29:00 I didn't shoot at anybody or be shot at.

You never shot at anyone?

No.

Did you like the idea of having guns?

Would I have?

Yeah. Did you feel comfortable having a gun?

I think if I had to I would have, with the right equipment. But we were equipped to ride motorbikes and deliver dispatches. The infantry were equipped for firing on people, with rifles and machine-guns.

29:30 Everybody has a different role to play in the Army.

What do you think the difference is, in your view, between infantry and signals in terms of mentality and behaviour and personality?

Right. No difference, I think. The thinking might be different, but as far as personalities

30:00 and abilities go, there'd be no difference.

Why is the thinking different?

Because in one case you're facing the enemy yourself, so you've got to be thinking all the time, trying to think what he's thinking and try and outthink the enemy in case there's a charge or a movement of troops

30:30 against you. You've got to try and outwit him. That's mainly to the officers and the leaders, but the men have to be alert more-or-less just the same. Whereas we are concentrating on our own jobs, what we have to do, where we have to go. Like, we had to do a map-reading course. And

31:00 after the map-reading course I had to teach the officers map-reading. You've got to know exactly what to do; when you see a map you've got to know what you're looking at, where you've got to go. Follow orders and deliver, as it were. In the infantry you don't travel much, you're stuck in one

31:30 position more-or-less, without travelling very little. We also taught the officers how to ride motorbikes. That was good fun. That was in England, actually, we did that. That was good fun.

I trust that you didn't suffer from any war neurosis of any sort?

No, I didn't.

No, you didn't.

I saw a lot of it in the hospitals though, particularly in Tobruk. We used to go into Tobruk and help them out in the

32:00 hospital when we had spare time, and also give blood. A group of us used to give blood regularly in the hospital in Tobruk, and go round the guys just talking to them. Oh, you'd see them shaking like this [shakes]. I remember one guy who was quite funny. He said, "Wh-when I get b-back to Australia I-I-I'm going to be a barman and I-I-I'll shake up cocktails."

32:30 He had a sense of humour with it, but mostly they didn't. It was terrible to see them, actually – just wrecked bodies that would never ever get better really.

When you say "wrecked bodies" is that shrapnel wounds or…?

They were human wrecks. They were mentally and physically human wrecks. It's bad to see, yes. Nerves are just gone.

33:00 Some of them never ever got back.

When you went there how many people were like that?

That's hard to say because we were going backwards and forward for about 8 months. At least once a month we'd go in there and there'd be different people because they'd stay there for a while and then they get taken away and back.

And when you go into a ward are we talking like hundreds of people here, or…?

The hospital in Tobruk

33:30 there was probably about 50 or 60 patients in that hospital in Tobruk.

And what do you think caused these people to become mentally wrecked; I mean are we talking about shell shock?

Shellshock, oh yes. All shellshock, yes. Nerves, bad nerves.

What about their experiences on the frontline as well?

Oh yes, well that's what causes it. They get neurosis over that sort of thing and they get bombed and shelled and shot at. The nerves just go.

34:00 I don't know—a majority of the troops went though it without that happening to them, but how that happened I don't know. Whether they were tougher or better trained or thought differently, I don't know.

Did people want to transfer out of their units to come into, like, Signals, units like that?

There was people getting transferred all the time, but very, very few;

34:30 just an odd one. They might have had a friend or relative in another unit that they'd asked to be transferred to. Most transfers wouldn't take place. Most of them were refused because if you started moving them around too much then one unit would be depleted and one would be overstocked sort of thing. But there were transfers, yes;

35:00 transfers all the time. We even had one or two that wanted to go into the Navy or the Air Force because they knew someone or had a relative in them, or for a change.

Now, General Blamey's name comes into prominence in the South East Asia campaign.

Yes. Very much so.

Alright now, a lot of soldiers were fairly upset about Australian lives being wasted, apparently.

Oh yeah. In New Guinea they were.

Now, can

35:30 **you give me some examples in New Guinea where a lot of people—**

No, because I wasn't there when Blamey was there. Ours was a totally different war to the original ones like the 6th and 7th division, when the 6th went up the Kokoda Trail and the 7th joined them then. That's when Blamey started to make wrong decisions. Then we came in a bit later and did the landings up the coast. So we personally didn't have very much. But his

36:00 name was mud right through—his name was mud all through the war because most of the soldiers decided that— They knew too much about him and there were stories going about what he did before the war. Like, he ran brothels before the war and that was his game before the war.

Really?

Yes.

This is proven?

36:30 **Or is it word of mouth?**

It's word of mouth; I've read it. But Little Lonsdale Street was the street of brothels before the war and he controlled that. So he didn't have a very good name right from the start.

He’s a very controversial figure.

Oh, very. Very. Yes.

So he never stood up for the Aussies?

Not really, no.

Against General MacArthur, for instance?

Oh no, he let MacArthur have

37:00 his own way. But even against some of the advice from his higher commanders.

What did the Australian troops think of Americans when they came across them?

Oh they got on well. When we first came back from the Middle East we had a get-together at the Melbourne Showgrounds with the American troops. They

37:30 put on a party for us. We had a great day. Because before we came back—on the way back—there was all talk of how they were going to attack the Americans that were in Australia because they’d been out with their wives and their girlfriends and all that sort of thing.

This is the 9th division?

Yeah. What they weren’t going to do with those Americans. So the heads of the Americans

38:00 and Australians got together and decided to put on a big party at the Melbourne Showgrounds and get together and get drinking together. There was a few brawls, but not a lot.

They got along.

Yeah. We didn’t have a great respect for the Americans early in the war as fighters because they had too much. They were getting paid about twice as much as we were and they had a lot of luxuries. Wherever they went they took refrigerators.

38:30 And their rations were so much superior to ours. Of course, our blokes were a bit annoyed about all this sort of thing. As the war progressed and the Americans became more and more involved then we realised what an asset they were and our opinions changed.

So what about the 9th division soldiers; how did they find out about Americans sleeping

39:00 **with their wives and so on and so on?**

I think they got a few letters from home, from people other than their wives and girlfriends, telling them what they were up to. I know they did that because my sister was one of them.

What do you mean she was one of them?

She used to write to her husband, he was in the Army at the same time too, she used to write and say what all the local girls were doing

39:30 with the Americans. So it wasn’t a rumour, it was a fact.

And I suppose the new recruits coming from Australia would also—?

They had stories too.

So there ended up being a very displeased 9th Division? I heard there was a lot of big brawls in Melbourne, in the Flinders Street area?

Oh yeah, big brawls.

Have you seen many of them?

Oh yeah. I wasn’t involved but I’ve seen them brawling.

40:00 I kept away from that sort of thing. I wasn’t a brawler. I wasn’t a fighter. The only time I ever fought was on the Queen Mary: we had boxing contests on the Queen Mary. Anything to create a bit of diversion and give us some exercise. We had all sorts of things and one was a boxing contest that we ran throughout the voyage of the Queen Mary. And

40:30 some of us became quite adept at looking after ourselves. It was good training too. That’s it?

That’s it. We can stop there. Great.

Tape 5

00:35 **Thank you Stan. Stan, I wanted to ask you initially about—I want to track back for a bit—and ask you about the training, the initial training, you underwent after you enlisted. If you could tell me where you were sent to.**

We started off at the Melbourne Showgrounds and

01:00 then I went to Royal Park to the Signals depot there. And we were trained in radio, line work, and map reading.

What's line work?

Putting telegraph lines up

01:30 for the telephone – like a telephone line sort of thing. We relied on those a lot because it was fairly safe – it was going from A to B; whereas the radio could be picked up by anybody. So between the lines and the dispatches they were pretty safe, although the lines weren't always safe.

02:00 **So can you just explain to me, technically speaking, what were during World War II the main forms of communication?**

Well, that was it. We had radio, telephone lines—radio was mostly morse code—telephone lines and dispatch riders.

Now, the telephone lines were above ground in those days? All above ground?

Yes, yes.

02:30 You laid them as you went, and then rolled them up when you wanted to move somewhere; because we were always on the move. That was the linesman's job.

Did you literally just run them along the ground?

Yeah, that's all. Sometimes hooked them on trees in the jungle; but in the desert, of course, you'd just run them along the ground.

Couldn't they be damaged easily?

They could. We were always repairing them. In the desert the German

03:00 aircraft were coming over and dropping bombs all the time, and they got disturbed a lot. That's where dispatch riders were most versatile, I suppose you'd say, because we were pretty-well certain to get there once we left. But it wasn't always so with the telephone. And radio silence was often put on because of interference.

03:30 **So, if we can go back to your training, would you like to sort of elaborate on the sort of things you learned during this time?**

Learned morse code. That was one thing we had to be proficient to a certain—we didn't have to be as proficient as radio operators because we were sort of a fill-in. But as dispatch riders we had to reach something like 15 words per minute whereas radio operators were about 30-35

04:00 words a minute. How to do a line, connect up a line, with a phone at each end. We also learned flag and messages by flashlight, morse code again. We learned those, all the means of communication, but

04:30 we never used the flashlight ones as far as I know – we didn't anyway. We did a lot of flag work when we were on ships going from one place to another. But apart from that I can't remember using them on land.

How did the flag system work? Did you have different shaped flags, or coloured flags, or…?

No, we always had the same type of flag. I can't remember the colour but they were just

05:00 one colour flag. And you used to have the alphabet on flags – there were different positions that you'd have the flag in, and one or two flags, right through the alphabet. But we never used them on land anyway.

Did you ever use them on a ship?

On a ship? No, I didn't. I watched them being used; I knew how to use them, and watched them being used by both the sailors and the soldiers. The sailors used them a lot to

05:30 communicate between ships, because we were a fairly close-knit convoy; and they used flashlights too, from ship to ship.

So what else did you learn during that time?

We had to learn all about rifles – the normal Army .303 rifles, how to look after it. Machine-guns,

06:00 we did a little bit of machine-gun work: pulling them to pieces and putting them together. A lot of the

time was spent in route-marching. Toughen us up, exercising, get up early, six o'clock of a morning, do our exercises and have breakfast, and then go for a route-march and come back and do some drilling. Had to learn how to drill-point march properly in threes, 3 abreast. I can remember got

06:30 a great thrill one time when we were up in Sydney near Liverpool, we were camped there for a while. And we were marching to a band of bagpipes. That was fantastic. Wonderful.

So initially you were in Broadmeadows, you say?

No, in the Showgrounds.

Showgrounds, yes. How long were you there for?

Oh we were only there for…

07:00 The whole Army was put there for a while, say it might've been a week, 10 days and then we were sorted out into our various units.

What did you do during that week, 10 days?

We were marching around and drilling and learning normal soldier work.

Discipline?

Yes, we had to all be brought into discipline.

How did you adapt to that?

Oh, no problem. No problem at all. I'd always done work that

07:30 I was told to do, or work that needed to be done. And yeah, I took quite well to that because I'd been farming, getting up at 6 o'clock or half-past 5 every morning.

Used to early starts.

Early starts and hard work. It didn't worry me at all.

Did they feed you well?

Oh yes. Always fed well. Always plenty to eat.

That's good. So did you become quite fit?

Very fit, put on weight. I grew

08:00 in the Army. When I joined the Army I think I was 19 – I was a bit below 6 feet and I was about 10 stone 10. And after 12 months in the Army I was fully 6 feet and 13 stone. No fat.

Just muscle?

I was so fit,

08:30 yeah.

So you were a week to 10 days in the Showgrounds, and then you got allocated to…?

We were allocated to different camps, like the artillery went to one place, and we Signals went to the Signals Depot and did the rest of our training there. It was all set up for that sort of thing.

Where was that located?

That was at Royal

09:00 Park. I don't know whether they've still got a depot there, but they've always had a Signals Depot at Royal Park. And the infantry were sent somewhere else to do all their training because they would have a lot more route-marching than we did because they had to get pretty fit on the legs, more than we did.

So you were saying, I remember you mentioned to Sergei [interviewer] before, that you chose to be in Signals or be in that area.

Yes.

Why is that? Do you want to elaborate

09:30 **on why you chose that?**

Because I'd bought a motorbike when I was 18. And I was working at a farm near Dandenong at that stage, and I was travelling at weekends between the farm—every Sunday I went to my brother's house in Kew for Sunday dinner, which he always cooked. He was a great cook.

That's quite a long way, Dandenong to Kew.

Not bad on a motorbike

10:00 in 1939. Not a lot of traffic on the road.

Not much traffic.

No.

That'd be a dirt road, wouldn't it, in those days?

There was a highway. I went along the highway.

There was a bitumen highway?

Oh yes. But Dandenong in those days, I think it consisted of about 3 pubs and 4 shops and that was about it. And a petrol station. Petrol at 2 shillings a gallon – that's 20 cents a gallon.

I wish it was that now.

Yeah.

10:30 **Okay, so this is just pre-war.**

That was pre-war, yeah.

So you got a lot of miles up on your bike?

Yes, although when I drove into camp to join up they told me to get rid of the bike; was the first thing I had to do. So I took it back to where I'd got it from. I was paying it off, I think it was a pound a week. Because I was getting 2 pound in wages, which was pretty good in those days. And when they said that we were going to join up and get paid 5 shillings a day,

11:00 that was good money.

Was it?

Well, 5 shillings a day and your keep and your clothing and everything. So you didn't have to buy anything.

So, did choosing Signals, was that also about not having to carry arms and fight the enemy directly?

No. That thought didn't cross my mind. I wanted to be a dispatch rider. I'd read a bit about dispatch riders and you'd see

11:30 films occasionally. It just appealed to me that I'd like to ride around delivering dispatches to various places. It didn't cross my mind as to whether it was safer or easier or anything like that. I just wanted to do that.

In deciding to enlist, was there any hesitation in enlisting? Or was that something you just thought you wanted?

No, I just said to this fellow I was working for,

12:00 his name was Frank Morrison, "I'm going to join up." And as soon as the war broke out, was declared, I said, "Well, I'm going to join up." He said, "Okay, that's up to you. I won't talk you out of it." So I left there and went straight into town and tried to join up straight away, but they weren't ready. They were setting up.

How did your family react to your joining up?

Well, I only had my brother, and I had a sister

12:30 living in Kew, and my brother was living in Kew, a different part of Kew. They didn't shed a tear or anything; they accepted that quite well. In fact, when I went in and they said that I couldn't sign up because I was underage, you had to be 21, I was 19 – I told them I was 20.

13:00 But they said, "You've got to get this signed by a parent or guardian." So I rode me motorbike to my brother's place and said, "You're my guardian from here on and sign this." And he did. There was no hesitation about anybody at all. My sister's husband joined up soon after that. And we both got through the war quite well. The three of us: my brother and myself and my brother-in-law got through it alright.

13:30 **Speaking of getting through the war, did you have any close mates or relatives that didn't get through?**

Yes. We had one that was POW in North Africa when the German Army came through. He was a bit slow getting on his bike with the rest of us heading for Tobruk. So he got caught. There was one or two got

14:00 killed amongst the signals. Whenever there was an air raid we used to dive into —we didn't have air raid shelters—bomb holes and things like that. One or two got killed that way.

Were they good mates, or…?

No. None of my very close mates got killed. My closest mate in

14:30 Tobruk, Joe, he got a bullet through the foot from a Stuka dive-bomber one day. But he rejoined—

Oooo. How did he deal with that? Very painful.

He was taken straight to hospital. We had a hospital in Tobruk where some of us used to do some duties there whenever we had the chance, and give blood. And he was taken there and they operated on his foot.

15:00 He was a bit lucky: there was only a small bone broken. And that eventually healed and he rejoined us when we went to New Guinea later on a few months later – oh probably 12 months, at least, later.

Speaking of injuries and wounds, during the war what wound did you fear most, getting wounded?

I

15:30 don’t remember fearing any wounds in any particular part of my body. I think I was of the impression that if it came it came and that was it. I think we all had the idea that if the bomb or the bullet had your name on it that was it. But there was so many of us got through without our names on them. So there we go.

It was just a fate, a fateful thing.

Oh yes, yes.

16:00 We were fairly protected because we were behind the lines most of the time. We were doing very important work, but not the firing at or being fired on.

Let’s say in the Middle East, what would have been your scariest episode?

I think taking it over a period of time, the

16:30 8 months we spent in Tobruk were probably the most terrifying. We were worried, a bit scared I suppose, day after day because we knew that we were more-or-less sitting ducks. Although we were living more-or-less underground. We’d go into a wadi, that’s a dig in the side, and that’s where we were sleeping and working from. We had radios and lines from there,

17:00 and motorbikes. That was always a worry because the Stuka dive-bombers used to come over every day, 3 or 4 times a day, and it was just.. They were heading mainly for—in fact they were always heading for—the port of Tobruk because that was our lifeline. And they wanted to destroy that. If they could wipe out the

17:30 port of Tobruk, or sink enough ships so that it couldn’t be used, then we would’ve had to do something about it. But the Australian Navy and the Royal Navy, they were fantastic because they used to send the small boats, the destroyers, stacked with provisions, food, water and everything we needed there was brought in by destroyer at nighttime

18:00 from Alexandria. They used to sneak up the coast and head into Tobruk and unload and out again while it was still dark. But the bombers used to come over 3, 4, 5 times a day trying to close the port down – which they never did. But there was probably half a dozen ships sunk in the harbour. You could see part of them sticking out.

So when

18:30 **you were back in training, do recall the first time you put your uniform on? Do you remember that?**

When we first joined up?

Hmmm.

Yes, that would have been the Showgrounds, and they had the quartermaster’s store there. And we just lined up and—they had more than one quartermaster’s store there—and just lined up. And everybody got the same type of uniform

19:00 at the start. And they just looked at you and said, “Oh yes, you’ll be so-and-so,” and handed you trousers, shirt, jacket, socks, boots. And that was it. And as you needed more you had to go to the quartermaster’s store, from time to time, to get what you needed. But that was the first time.

How did you feel in a uniform?

Well, I felt like a soldier.

19:30 I think we were probably proud, I think, when we put the uniform on. And we all put on a good face. I

suppose we were all wondering what was ahead of us but we'd be joking and singing, making up songs and different words to what the songs were

20:00 about originally, some of them not so very pretty.

Do you recall any songs?

We worked out one song with divisional signals, yeah. 6th division. "We're the 6th division," how did it go?

20:30 "marching all day long while the mug militia spends time in the pub," or something like that. "And we do all the fighting and do all the killing while the mug militias are in the pub swilling." That sort of thing.

The militia?

The militia were the civilian Army.

What was your opinion of the militia?

We didn't think much of them because

21:00 they were not volunteers. We were all volunteers, the first… I don't know how long the volunteers lasted. I know we made up 6th and 7th division, and I think 8th division were all volunteers. Might have gone right through to the 9th division too. And then they had to start forcible recruiting. And we weren't very keen on those because

21:30 we called them "Chocolate Soldiers." They were in pretty uniforms and they had red and blue uniforms; we just had this drab khaki. And if they did volunteer they were put in positions of authority. But that was necessary because we hadn't done that job before and they had; so it was only natural that they should be the leaders and the teachers

22:00 of what to do.

So did they teach you things?

Oh yes. They became our drill instructors and brought us into line. Made an Army out of our ragtag.

This is at Royal Park?

Yes, well first of all at the Showgrounds. We learned a bit at the Showgrounds and then more at Royal Park. Went to Royal Park so that we could be issued with our necessary equipment. Like the Signals had to be

22:30 taught and given radios, motorbikes, and line-laying equipment, and all that sort of thing and taught how to do that. Whereas at the Showgrounds it was just Army: everybody was just in the Army.

In together, yes. What did you think of the militia as far as soldiers once they were in the midst of action, were concerned?

We didn't differentiate then. It was only when we

23:00 first joined up because they had pretty uniforms and we didn't. It was just an Australian thing, I think, trying to bring someone down and trying to boost yourselves up, that sort of thing.

So, how did you find learning training at Royal Park? Did you find it difficult or…?

No no. That wasn't any trouble. They went

23:30 from—because they knew that we knew nothing, and they were very good, very patient with us and taught us what to do and how to do it. They gave us little booklets on various things, and showing us as well as telling us. And I thought it was a good way to do it. It was like going to school and learning something right from the bottom, gradually going up until you become proficient at that sort of thing. But we didn't have to be

24:00 quite as proficient, as dispatch riders, as the other people who were going to be radio operators and line-layers because they had to be absolutely perfect – everything had to be exact with that: pretty fast on the wireless on the morse code and that sort of thing. So we were lucky there.

How long were you in Royal Park for, training at Royal Park?

We were only there

24:30 about a couple of months, I'd say, and then we were sent up to Ingleburn in New South Wales. That's where the real stuff started as far as Signals go. We had to reproduce what we were taught at Royal Park. That was only more-or-less a staging

25:00 area at Royal Park as an army had to be formed. We, as Signals, were sent to Ingleburn to become a whole divisional signal unit. And each group had to learn what they had to do and who they were

attached to and what that meant to do.

How

25:30 **many men were in your group?**

Well, my original group was only about a dozen. We were in what was called “F-Section” attached to the 2nd 2nd field regiment, that’s artillery. We were to be a signals section with the artillery. But then when we left Australia they went one way and we went another. So we had to part

26:00 company and to start all over again. Then when we got to England we were reassembled again and had to join up in a different manner.

And you say that Joe was your mate, your best mate.

Yes, he was. From the start.

Was he there from the start as well?

He was in England with us, yes.

And did you meet him at Royal Park?

I met him at Royal Park, yes.

So he was a bit

26:30 **older than you, is that right?**

He was about three or four years older, yes. I was the youngest of the group.

So did you normally work in teams, teams of two, or…?

Right through the war everybody had one mate. We worked with everybody else but there was always two stuck together. And when we were out somewhere, say we were gone a few days, a day or two leave, and we wanted to go a local town,

27:00 we might’ve wanted to see a show or get on the grog, or something, you’d stick together. And then each pair would sort of go where they wanted to – we weren’t all in one group all the time. But it was great because if you wanted to do something or go somewhere you had someone to talk to about it.

So sort of supported each other.

Oh yes. Great support. Everybody supported

27:30 everybody else at the same time but you had your very close friends.

Did you confide in your friends about feeling homesick or missing the company of women, or…?

Oh yeah, we talked about that all the time because the talk about women was foremost in everybody’s mind, I think.

28:00 But you couldn’t do anything about it anyway, so it was just talk: how you’d like women to be there but they can’t be there, so you just put up with it.

Were many of the men in your company married?

Yes, a few of them were married, yes. As a matter of fact when we came back to Australia there was a few of them had babies that they’d never seen.

28:30 They’d got married either before we left Australia or on leave. A lot of them rushed into marriage when they joined up. But I wouldn’t do that. I vowed I’d never get married while the war was on; didn’t like the idea of leaving your wife, or perhaps family, if I didn’t come back. Although I was only 19 when I joined up, that was one of my pet discussions of myself. Oh yes, there was a lot of discussions

29:00 about females because naturally we missed female company. But we knew there was nothing we could do about it, so we just put up with it. We knew that everybody was in the same boat though. I mean, there was no one man said, “I’m lonelier than you,” or anything like that. You knew everybody was feeling the same.

And in some ways it might have been even harder for the men who did have wives.

I’m sure it would be. They would miss them more

29:30 than us. I didn’t even have a girlfriend when I joined up. I’d never been out with a girl when I joined up. Only been on the dairy farms. The only female company I had were the cows.

Oh well. Nice cows.

Oh yeah, cows are beautiful. Somebody asked me about cows one time: “And what did you think of cows?” I said, “I loved cows.” They said, “What do you mean you loved them?” I said, “Well, they looked after us and

30:00 we looked after them.” And that’s the way I looked on any animals. I had some sheep on the farm too, and they were there, we looked after them.

So you were an animal lover.

Oh yeah. Dogs – always had dogs on the farm too.

Did you come across much wildlife, animals and stuff, when you were overseas?

No. That’s the funny part about it. In the jungle I don’t remember seeing any type of native animal.

30:30 **No?**

I know there was some there because the New Guinea natives, they had villages which, we never went close to them actually. We were warned to keep away from the villages because—they were very friendly natives and they’d do anything for you—but the Army said, “Don’t. You are not to go anywhere near the villages because that would spoil the relationship.” So we didn’t. So

31:00 we didn’t see any of their—they didn’t want us to cohabit with them. Just wanted them to be left alone and do what they were doing and not be interfered with in any way whatsoever. So we didn’t see any of their—I saw an odd garden, growing sweet potatoes and stuff like that. Coconut trees were everywhere. And if we wanted a coconut we’d ask one of the natives to climb up a tree and get one. And then we were

31:30 issued with spikes that strap onto your ankle. And they were handy for climbing up coconut trees. They were actually for climbing up poles for fixing wires. But we used them for the coconuts. That was part of our diet in New Guinea was green coconuts. Everybody had a machés, machete they call them now, we called them machés. Just knocked the top off and

32:00 drink the contents. That was great. That was very good for you.

Did you eat the coconut flesh too?

No. Well, these were green coconuts that we used have more of. A ripe coconut, yes, we used to drink the juice and then eat the flesh.

Okay. So I’m interested to know, once you did your signals training, so then you went

32:30 **up to NSW you were saying.**

Yes, Ingleburn.

Ingleburn. How long were you there?

We would have been there for about 3 months, I think. We did a lot of route-marching and signals training. And then we got on—

So that was a sort of an advanced stage of training.

Oh yes. You did a little bit more. Everywhere you went you did a bit more.

Who was actually training you?

The

33:00 officers in charge. We had a Colonel in charge of us all. And we had the A, B, C, D, E, F sections (there were 5 sections). Probably in the 5 sections there probably would have been at least a hundred men, I’d say. About a hundred men altogether because some sections were bigger than others. Like A-section was the headquarters section; that was the big one. We were about 12-15 strong and

33:30 there was a lines section and a telegraph section and that. The Colonel in charge would decide what we were going to learn and how long we’d be there. And he’d give each section the work to do. And then each section had their own Lieutenant. We had a Lieutenant. The big section had a Captain and a Lieutenant.

34:00 We had a Lieutenant and a Sergeant; they were in charge. They were told what we were to learn and we did it that way. We had huts there. Each section had a hut or two to sleep in. A mess hut to eat in.

Was it comfortable?

Oh yes. In those days there was no such things as inner-spring mattresses and stuff like that. So whatever we’d been sleeping

34:30 on previously I think, and especially me on a farm, you were just glad to get to bed. You could sleep on the floor you were that tired at the end of the day. So we had what were called “palliasses” filled with straw in the Army. It was fairly comfortable. You’d just make hip hole and you’re right for the night.

So who was your mates at this time?

Joe Goldsmith was

35:00 at that stage. He used to disappear at nighttime and come back in the morning as full as a boot. He became an alcoholic and it killed him in the finish – about 3 years ago. One story about him. He came back one morning pretty stoned and he was standing in front of his mirror

35:30 shaving. He always used a cutthroat razor. And he's swaying about, and he says, "Keep still you bastard or I'll cut your throat." I remember that sort of stood out in my memory. But he was a funny man like that. He was always coming up with some sort of quip. Always very, very quick. When we were about to leave Ingleburn the officers lined us up and said,

36:00 "Now we've got to pack up because we're going away, going on a boat. We've got to pack up all our gear." And he said, "I want a couple of rough carpenters." And as soon as he said that Joe stepped forward and he said, "Yes sir." He said, "Goldsmith, are you a rough carpenter?" He said, "None rougher sir!" That was the sort of mind he had. He always had an answer for something. So he and I—of course if he said he'd do something he always included me, I knew that. So he and I packed all the stores and we got an extra

36:30 3 days leave before we went overseas. So…

So he sounded like a good mate to have.

Oh, he was a good bloke. He'd been around. He was married – he hadn't been married long, I think he married after the war broke out, actually. And he knew—of course he'd been round working. He was a plasterer; he'd done a lot of work plastering. He would have been 23, I suppose, at that stage.

37:00 Been plastering since he was about 18 and he'd got around and he'd learned a few tricks of the trade.

So he was a bit of a mentor figure for you, do you think?

Oh yes, very much so. I'd follow him to hell. Oh yes. If he said, "We'll jump in that river," I'd jump in without a thought.

What sort of things did he teach you? What sort of life-lessons did he teach you do you think?

Well, he quickened my

37:30 mind up. You know, somebody was talking or if I was talking to someone, I'd think of things much quicker after knowing him for a while because I had to think quick to try and keep up with him. And I learned that. A lot of things about life that he'd been through previously opened my eyes quite a lot because I'd only been on the farm.

He was a city boy, yeah?

He was a city boy, yeah; he was a plasterer from—

38:00 I forget where he was now—the other side of town anyway. And he'd learned quite a lot. So I learned a fair bit from him. And I was a fairly avid reader. I used to read a lot too. I think I got more education in the Army than I got at the Kew state school. That's where I learned a lot about life and lots of other things, yeah. How to live: what you

38:30 could do, what you couldn't do, and what you could get away with.

What about women? Did he teach you about women?

No. I don't think we ever talked about women much. He had his wife, and he was quite happy with that. I was afraid of girls, scared of girls. I wouldn't touch a girl because I knew she'd hit me because my mother always hit me. I wasn't game to take the chance. No, I avoided all that.

39:00 **Did you come across any women in the Army, and AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service]?**

Nurses in the hospital. In Tobruk we had a few nurses, but they were evacuated before we were and all the male nurses took over. Didn't have anything to do with them apart from going there and like rolling

39:30 up bandages up for them, taking blood tests. Used to delight in sticking a needle into the guys' finger and get a blood sample on a glass; did that in New Guinea too. I used to love doing things medically. Really, I should have been a medical orderly or something, a nurse or something like that because all my life I've been interested in that sort of thing. My son was a nurse.

40:00 He was a psych nurse for a start. He had 5 sisters and he became the nurse.

Good on him.

His sisters, 3 of his sisters, were teachers; no nurses. He was the nurse, psych nurse. And then Royal Melbourne and then up in Sydney, the big hospital there.

We might just pause there, Stan, while we change a tape.

Tape 6

00:34 **Thank you Stan. We'll continue on. Just talking about women in the services. What was your opinion of women in the services?**

I couldn't see why they couldn't do the same job as men, apart from the front line. I didn't like the idea of them going to the front line. I think it was too dangerous for them. The sort of things like driving vehicles,

01:00 well behind the frontlines. They'd get shot at and bombed at and all that sort of thing, but they always made good drivers from what I saw. Not that I saw many women drivers in the Army until later.

What, overseas?

No, I don't think I saw any women drivers—oh there were a few in Tobruk, because Tobruk became too volatile.

Too dangerous.

Yeah.

01:30 No, it didn't worry me. I knew that women could do a job just as well as men. I'm not one of those people that say that there's mens' jobs and womens' jobs and that a woman should stay at home and look after the kids while the man goes out; although that's what happened with us. My wife never worked. She eventually had 6 children to look after and she was quite busy looking after the house and the children, (UNCLEAR)-ing them and that. She made all

02:00 their clothes and looked after the house and I went out and brought in nearly enough money to survive on.

And with the nurses you met, you were saying; did you get a chance to sort of talk to them much?

No, not very much because the only reason we went to the hospital, apart from having something wrong with us—

02:30 we didn't go to the hospital if we had scratches and bruises and grazes because what are called RAPs: Regimental Aid Post. Used to go to do something like give blood. Regularly we rode our motorbikes in to the hospital and gave blood; that was always needed badly. And rolling up bandages and taking blood samples. It was only in passing that we'd speak to them and say what a good job they were doing

03:00 and all that. And they were too busy to stop and talk anyway. So I didn't have much to do with women right through the war, actually.

Not even on leave, times when you had time off?

No.

Didn't go to any bars or clubs or nightclubs?

No, I think I spent most of the time sight-seeing when I could. When we were in Egypt I went to see the pyramids and went round Cairo and various places in Egypt. You

03:30 read about them and you'd like to see them. And so that's what I did. There was only a few of us that would do that. The rest of them would go to clubs and prostitutes and bars.

Did Joe go to many bars?

Joe? Yeah. Well, when we went on leave we parted, he went his way and I went mine. He was at the bar all the time. That was his destination

04:00 wherever we went.

Did he sort of start drinking during the war, do you think, or was he always a drinker?

Me?

Did Joe.

Oh, Joe. He was always a drinker. He always liked his beer apparently. Yes, he told me that he always had a couple of beers after work. So that's where he started drinking.

Do you think the war contributed to his, you know, like maybe, over-drinking?

I don't think he would have been any different because when he got out of the Army

04:30 he got even worse.

Did he?

Yes. He had 4 or 5 children. Left his wife. Went to live as a hermit somewhere up the country and just drank and drank, never ate, just drank. He used to come to the annual reunions and I'd meet up with him there and he'd always have more than his share of the beer, of course, and tell me how I got him into trouble all through the war.

Why do you think he drank so much,

05:00 **Stan? Do you think—**

Well, there's people there today that drink too much.

It just became an illness for him.

Oh yeah. He became alcoholic completely, oh yes, absolutely. He couldn't help himself.

You don't think the war may have contributed to that?

I don't think so. I think he would have been alcoholic anyway.

Do you?

Oh yes. He was a bit weak that way. That was his—of course we all smoked in the Army—but the grog was about his only weakness as far as I could see.

His outlet.

I took him

05:30 up to Nottingham for 3 days leave when we got it, we had a house up there, and we had a big party there. The first thing we did when we got to Nottingham was do a round of the pubs. I was chasing Joe around all the pubs. I think we called into about 6 different pubs in an afternoon.

A crawl.

It was a pub crawl, yeah.

So it sounded like he was a bit of a wild young man.

I think he was,

06:00 yes. Not knowing him before the war, but from what he talked about, and his manner and expression, and the way of life, led me to believe that he would have been a wild young man, yes.

Had he had a fairly tough home life do you think?

I don't think so. He was a very, very proficient plasterer, very much in demand as a plasterer and could get a job whenever he wanted one.

06:30 But according to him he used to work for a while and then have a holiday and go on the grog. He did exactly the same thing after the war.

Now, okay. After Ingleburn where did you go from there?

We got on the boat.

Okay, so you got on the boat to—

Queen Mary.

Queen Mary, yes.

Went to England

07:00 via Cape Town, and got to England in I think it was May, 1940.

And I believe you reunited with your mother in England at that time?

Yes, because in 1938 my mother decided to take a 2-year return trip to England because we had the big house over there and she wanted to make sure everything was okay. Her daughter was running it as a boarding house and she wanted to make sure that

07:30 my sister was okay and the house was running alright. She had a bit of money so she took this 2-year return trip. And that was'38 and of course '39 war broke out and she couldn't get back. So she was still there in 1940 when we went over there. I was probably the luckiest guy in the Army at that stage because no one else in the Army had a mother in England. And I was able to visit her with our 3 day leave, and took

08:00 Joe up. And we had a big party the last night we were there. Came back and then we were in the south of England, camped, we were doing all our training down in the south. And my mother came down there and went to a house, a boarding house, and lodged there for 2 or 3 weeks while we were near the camp. And Joe and I rode our motorbikes every night and went and had dinner with her.

08:30 And that was wonderful.

Was it good to see her again?

Oh, it was wonderful. It was great.

You got on well with her then?

I did then. When I was little she was always pretty antagonistic. Hard lady. I think she was brought up that way; that's the way she thought children should be brought up. And when I went to Nottingham and caught up with her

09:00 she thought it was great, her little boy had grown up and he had a uniform on. We were walking up the street one day and one of her neighbours was up the street and she said, "Hello Alice, this is Stanley." "Not little Stanley!" she said. And of course I thought, "Cor, that's me." She said, "Yes, little Stanley."

Because she knew you when you were a little whippet?

Oh yes, she was our next-door neighbour. We saw a lot of each other.

09:30 **So your mum was sort of quite proud of you?**

Oh, she was very. Very proud, yes. I had another mother in Sydney too. When we came back to Australia we went on leave, went to Melbourne on leave, and then we came back to do some more training in NSW, Ingleburn. And

10:00 came Christmas 1943, I think, yeah, must have been '43. There was a lot of us from other states with nowhere to go because it was Christmas. And the Army let us out for a few days, between Christmas and New Year. And there was an appeal on the radio,

10:30 this was I think it was Christmas Eve, for the people of Sydney to take in troops from interstate. We went into Sydney on the train from Ingleburn and got off at Central Station. And two little boys came up to us in scout or cub uniform and said

11:00 to us, "Would you like to come home for Christmas dinner?" Must have been Christmas day, Christmas morning we must have gone down. Their name was Foster. There was the two boys and two girls in the family and Mrs Foster. They were all younger than us. Mrs Foster adopted me. That was great.

In Sydney.

11:30 Yeah.

Did you keep up with them after the war?

After the war? For a while but not for long. Once I got married I sort of let that go. One of the daughters wanted to marry me but I wasn't—she was quite a bit younger than me. As a matter of fact when we first went there—Ohh! No, it was before. Before we left Australia it was. It was the Christmas before we left Australia.

12:00 That's right.

When you were training in Ingleburn?

Yes.

So you'd go to Sydney on leave.

One girl was 12, I think, or 13 – just a little school girl she was. When we came back it was over 3 years later, because she'd blossomed out, and she was out every night with the Americans. She was only about 15, 16.

12:30 And she was the one that wanted to marry me. But she was too—

A bit young.

I was 24, or something, at the time she was 16. Lovely girl though, beautiful girl; they both were. The older one was a nice girl too but she didn't want anything to do with men. Anyway, this lady, Mrs Foster, I used to go shopping with her into town and if she came across any of her friends she'd introduce me

13:00 as her eldest son.

Oh that's nice.

Yeah. That was very good. That was Sydney. But oh, they were very good to us up there. And then we

went overseas, came back and I went to see them a few times after we came back, before we went up to New Guinea or up to the Tablelands, and they were very good to me.

13:30 **They were your Sydney adopted family.**

Yes, that's right. I was adopted.

It sounds like there was a lot of support for servicemen during the war.

There was. I'll tell you where we found a lot of support too when we overseas. We went to Scotland to embark to come back to the Middle East and the people of Scotland they were absolutely fantastic – couldn't do enough. And on the

14:00 trams, any transport, we were free. And if we wanted a lift anywhere we'd only got to put a finger up and a car pulls up and takes us. If we wanted a meal "Come to our place."

So the locals in the UK were very friendly?

We found the Scottish people in particular. They were extremely kind to us.

What were you doing up in Scotland?

We were preparing to embark for the Middle East.

14:30 That was after our stint in England was over. The Battle of Britain had finished and Britain had rearmed – got all her armoury back to where it should have been in the first place. And so they decided we'd better go to the Middle East where we were supposed to be in the first place.

So how long were you actually in the UK that time?

6 months.

And that was pretty much what? Training preparation

15:00 **or you were working?**

We were working. We were part of—we were Army. The artillery were manning guns, there was some Australian Air Force there. We were riding all over—oh, we did thousands of miles on the motorbikes delivering dispatches. Everybody was afraid of what they called

15:30 the "Fifth Column." That was the Germans infiltrating in amongst the population.

Oooo.

Oh yes.

Spies.

Yes. There were some dropped by parachute and some sneaked across the Channel. You couldn't trust any other means of transport than road transport. And they were frightened to send any urgent messages

16:00 across the airwaves at all, phone or radio.

So that's why they used you guys on the bikes.

That was the main means of communication over there. Oh, we did thousands of kilometres in the 6 months.

What about morse code?

That's worldwide, and you might as well do it in plain language because everybody reads morse code.

What about,

16:30 **I'm just trying to think. We interviewed a woman who was in, I think she was in the WAAAF [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force], who used that cipher system. Did you learn that cipher?**

No. We didn't learn cipher; that was Intelligence. The people who were put into Intelligence, they had to do all the ciphering and deciphering. They had a different

17:00 cipher code from time to time, probably every 2 or 3 months, but the Germans picked it up almost straight away how to decipher their code. So they had to keep changing codes. And it wasn't long each time before the Germans picked it up. They were doing the same with the German stuff too. They kept changing their codes and our blokes kept breaking them. As a matter of fact, I read more about that after the war than I knew during

17:30 the war, because we didn't know much about that because it wasn't our cup of tea.

So quite literally what you were carrying were messages on paper, bits on paper, basically; just

hand-written or typewriters?

Sometimes they'd be in code, dependent on how important it was. But mostly it was written or

18:00 typed.

And you'd have it in a sort of locked bag or like a secure vessel on the bike?

Yeah, we had a canvas bag slung over our shoulder.

So pretty much just like a postie?

Yes.

So did you have any form of security as you were travelling?

No, I don't think it was necessary, actually, because unless somebody held us up at gunpoint then there was no way we would stop. You don't

18:30 stop for anything under those circumstances.

So you never got held up at gunpoint?

No.

And so they didn't arm you then?

Oh yes. At that stage we had .38 automatics.

Right.

We started off with .45 revolvers, and finished up with .38 automatics in England.

And that's a handgun?

Yes, sidearm.

Sounds a bit like the Wild West.

19:00 Yes, very much so, except we were riding motorbikes instead of horses. That's the only difference.

And there's this interesting mythology about bike riders too, isn't there. Like the "bikies," that's what they're called now, which are kind of slightly irreverent, outlawy men and women who ride bikes.

Talking about that, when I was in Alice Springs I was camped in a place called MacDonald Range

19:30 Holiday Park. And I was in a hut, and the hut next to me had a lady living there for only about a week, and she was a school teacher aged 55.

Wow.

She was very proud because she'd just got her first tattoo.

Good on her.

Her husband had died 5 years before that from an aneurism.

So she was getting out there.

Yeah.

So was there an element of

20:00 **sort of a rebellious streak in dispatch riders? Like is there an interesting subculture formed amongst you all?**

We thought we were a bit superior to the rest of the people because they didn't have a motorbike. They couldn't get around like we could. We could come and go as we liked, more-or-less, although I will admit that one time we were camped at Julis camp which wasn't that far away from

20:30 Tel Aviv. Some of us had had a few drinks one night and I said, "Why don't we grab a jeep and go into town?" So they said, "Alright." So about 4 of us got onto the jeep and I drove it into town in Tel Aviv. The other went off somewhere and I stayed with the jeep. I was just standing there on the footpath with the jeep and the Military Police came up, they were local

21:00 Military Police, and they said, "Have you got a leave pass?" And I said, "No, I haven't as a matter of fact." They said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Oh, I'm waiting for the driver of this to take me back to camp." Anyway, I spent the night in jail that time. Went up before the beak the next morning.

Because you'd pinched it?

Yeah.

You were talking about how during the war you spent some time

21:30 **in hospitals working in hospitals. What were the commonest wounds that were inflicted on most soldiers?**

Oh dear. I don't know whether you could put a commonest one. There was a bit of everything. They'd have parts of their body shot away. Bullets that had to be operated on to get out; and their legs and feet and parts of their body; shrapnel wounds, bullet wounds

22:00 and bomb splinters, you know. So just a bit of everything. So if you weren't killed you'd go into hospital. But I reckon some of them were pretty close to being killed, by the look of them. But most of them got through.

Pretty bad injuries.

They were sent to Cairo or Alexandria, the big hospitals there, until they recovered enough to be sent home.

And who were actually looking after them as far as

22:30 **medical staff goes? Was it just Australian or…?**

Yes, they were all Australians, yes. Some male nurses and female nurses.

And doctors.

Oh, there were doctors there, yes. For sure.

Did you get to know any of the doctors for instance?

No. I didn't get to know any of the medical personnel personally. We didn't know them well-enough to get that

23:00 well involved because they were sort of changing all the time because they were working 24 hours a day. And every time I went there, there would be a different set of people on the go. So no, we never got close to them.

But they worked very hard, those doctors?

Oh they worked hard, oh yes.

So you had a lot of admiration for them?

I have. Yeah. I've always had a lot of admiration for the medical profession. I haven't held them up in

23:30 high esteem enough to sort of kneel before them, or nod before, whenever I meet them. I like to call them by their Christian names and go to them and find out what's wrong with me. And if they say, "You need such-and-such," then I'd say, "Okay." I'll always put myself in the hands of the medical profession. I've had 2 hip replacements, a shoulder replacement, a knee replacement, a couple of other

24:00 small operations. Always known that I'm in the hands of good medical people and I get through it.

Did you personally have need for a doctor during the war, apart from the malaria you mentioned?

No. Only the first week I joined up when we were in camp at the Showgrounds. I got the flu. They put me straight into hospital. I was there for a couple of days and out again.

And then you had malaria in New Guinea.

Had malaria in New Guinea,

24:30 yes. We used to take Atebrin, that's a yellow tablet that then makes your skin go all yellow. But that helped us to keep malaria away. But I had the one that didn't repeat. There was an MT and a BT, and I had the BT: Benign Tertian. The other one was Malignant Tertian. Malignant Tertian repeats and comes back afterwards.

25:00 And some of the guys had it for years and years afterwards, coming back all the time. But mine didn't. I was lucky that way. But I was pretty well there, apart from a high fever. I used to spend most of my time helping the nurses and doing the—

Did you have malaria bad enough to go to hospital?

Oh yes. Once your temperature goes up to a certain height you've got to go into hospital. And they look after you and give you

25:30 whatever treatment there is at the time to do it. And I think I was in bed about one or two nights and walking around after that and wanting something to do because I was the sort of bloke that when I'm

sitting down reading or talking to someone, in the back of my mind there's always the thought that I could be doing something else.

You like to be active.

Always been active, yes.

With the

26:00 **patient-soldiers that you saw in the hospitals in Tobruk, did you talk to them at all?**

Oh yes, we used to talk with them. We used to go and visit them and talk, just go from bed to bed saying, "How you going? Look after yourself. You'll be right," sort of thing just to try and bolster them up a little bit. And just go round as many beds as you've got time for and then take off again.

And what were their spirits like generally?

26:30 Their spirits?

Yeah.

They varied, varied a lot. Everybody's different, and some can take pain and some can't. And with the ones that can't take pain they were worse off, of course; they wanted to get out of it as soon as they could, get back home. But the tougher ones say, "I'll be right. I'll get over this and come back." It was always a lot like that.

27:00 **And the medical staff there must have been very positive and encouraging?**

Oh very encouraging, yes. They were very good. Extremely good. That was what we called a forward hospital, wasn't that far behind the front lines, and they were chosen specially for that position.

Was there—I know counselling in those days wasn't

27:30 **really regarded as something that was done, but do you think that in some ways they may have counselled those people anyway? Just by their talking positively that's sort of almost a form of counselling, do you think?**

Yes, I think it would have helped – I hope so anyway. Even getting them to talk about what happened, and how they felt, and all that, that little bit made them

28:00 feel better. And knowing that someone was interested in them also would make them feel better, yes.

So some of them would talk about how they got injured?

Oh yes. You'd get them talking, yes. Well, you were a soldier you see. They'll talk to a soldier, whereas if a civilian walked in, or say a woman that wasn't in the Army, they wouldn't talk about that.

It's interesting. So soldiers would talk to other soldiers about

28:30 **the awful things—**

Well, they know they'll understand—

—but not to civilians.

That's right, yes.

Did you find that was the case when you left the war, or when the war was over?

We were all medically examined when the war was over, and some of the guys didn't want to talk about what they'd been through, or what injuries they had, or wounds they had. All they wanted to do was get out of the Army. With the result that when

29:00 they became sick or disabled later on, through that sort of thing, they were not accepted as war-caused. When I left the Army they said, "Have you got anything that you want to tell us about?" I said, "Yes, I've got varicose veins," which I didn't have when I joined up, because when I joined up they wouldn't sign you up if you had varicose veins because you had to walk a long way. But I knew I was going to have varicose veins because my mother had varicose veins, and a doctor

29:30 told me, when I was a little boy, not to play too much sport because I was going to get varicose veins because my mother had varicose veins. And then when I was 19 and joined the Army I didn't have them. When I came out of the Army I did. So they put down as "varicose veins war-caused." And that put me on a pension. I think it was about 5 shillings a week or something.

But I suppose every cent helps, I suppose—

That was an admission that

30:00 that was war-caused, and that that started the ball rolling. But a lot of people they were in terrible, dire circumstances later on—through the war—and it was not recognised. And in those days, if you wanted

your payments to be increased you had to go in front of 2 doctors, and I think they were left over from the First World War, and they'd just look you over and try your heart and your lungs and

30:30 shake their head, "I'm sorry, we can't do anything for you." But in those days they had hundreds of thousands of people to look after. They didn't have the money that they really needed. But these days they've got enough money. They'll accept a lot of things now as war-caused that they wouldn't accept straight after the war.

So have you been able to have support ever since then?

31:00 Oh yes, oh yes. I've found it wonderful. Actually, I had to go to one of the guys that works for the RSL [Returned and Services League], an advocate, and tell him that I thought that particularly my hips—I had very bad hips—after everything had arthritis. And I said that after all the walking we did during the war, it should be classed as war-caused. And he agreed. So he wrote out a big documentary and sent it in to the

31:30 powers that be and they gave me a bit more pension. They accepted that, and then when I had a very bad shoulder through arthritis, and had to have that replaced, they accepted that; and accepted my knee. So each time gave me a little bit more pension. Over the years they've gradually accepted a lot more. And instead of going to see the doctor, to get their version, before they do anything

32:00 they send you out a form to fill in called a Self-Assessment form. And if you fill that in accurately and honestly they know exactly how you feel and what you're doing. And I sent one of those in and they bumped my money up straight away.

That's good.

Self-Assessment: makes it easier for them and easy for the people concerned.

So, do you think generally

32:30 **there's been enough government support—do you think that World War II veterans have been given enough support from the government?**

Over the last 10-15 years, yes. Before that, no. It wasn't their own fault—well, it was the government's fault, but it wasn't DVA's [Department of Veterans Affairs] fault because they only had a certain amount of money

33:00 to go around and they just had to be careful with it. But since so many thousands have died, whether they've got the same amount of money I don't know, but they've been able to help people much easier and much more and much quicker than they did before.

Now, one question I was curious

33:30 **to ask you was: what was the sort of content of most dispatches that you delivered? Was it just a hugely, widely varied content, or…?**

Movement of troops was the big thing. That was the most secret one of course. We didn't want the Germans to know. And the volume of troops, the number of troops, and certain types of troops in various areas;

34:00 how many there were, what they were doing, and where they were moving to and from. So troop movements were probably the most urgent and the most secret because we didn't want the enemy to know what we were doing.

And when you were given a dispatch to deliver, were you told what was in the dispatch?

No. We'd have no idea. It would just have an address on it—not an address;

34:30 the name of the person to give it to and the name of his regiment or company, whatever. And that was it. That's all. We didn't have the faintest—we never ever learned what was in them. Nobody ever told me.

But you assume that they were generally about troop movements?

Oh yeah, found out afterwards. They'd open it in front of you and say, "Oh yes, thanks for that." And I'd say, "Is there any reply?" Sometimes there was; sometimes there wasn't.

35:00 So you'd go on your way.

And mostly you'd be delivering to "brass," officers in command?

Oh yes. Officers always. A certain officer had to take it. And if it had his name on it no one else was allowed to have it.

Did you ever deliver to top brass? Did you ever meet, you know…?

I suppose, particularly in England,

35:30 you'd come across Colonels and Majors, an odd General because we used to call on big headquarters.

And we used to get dispatches to them and from them.

Australian Majors in general?

Oh no, mainly British because once we left our camp we were concerned with the British Army.

But you were still working for the Australian Army?

Oh yes, still Australia.

Would it be like the Australian Army

36:00 **sending messages to the British Army?**

Sending them and receiving, yes. It might even be a reply to a message that the British had sent to the Australians, and I had to take the reply to a certain high-ranking officer.

So in England, when you were doing this sort of work, how was your work structured? Did you have like shifts? Did you work shift-work?

No.

36:30 From the day we joined we were available 24 hours a day.

So you were on call.

Oh yes, on call all the time.

Like a courier.

Yep. And where we were camped in Tobruk, we only handled urgent dispatches. Where we were, that was Rear Division.

And how often would that mean you'd be working then? How many hours a day would you average?

Oh, that would be hard because there might be one through the night then you might go

37:00 for a week without one through the night. You might have one every hour through the day, or you might go for a full day with only a couple of short runs.

So how did you get any sleep?

When you could.

So sleep patterns were a bit thrown all over the place?

Well we got in the habit, and I'm still in the habit, that if I'm tired I'll sit down and put my head down and go to sleep for 10 minutes. Still do that. Not 9 or 11, but 10 minutes.

Catnap.

37:30 Used to do it on the farm after lunch everyday.

So it sounded like you were quite well-prepared for that job.

I reckon from farming to Army, life was perfect because in the Army we used to get up at 6 o'clock and then do some exercises like we used to on the farm, half past 5 or 6 o'clock depending on the time of year. And it sort of just followed as far as I was concerned. No trouble. A lot of the guys were growling because they normally don't get up until 8 o'clock,

38:00 half past 8 or something, have a quick cup of coffee, something for breakfast and then go to work. But think I was prepared for it.

Okay, I think we might just stop there. Do you want to have a tea break?

Tape 7

00:43 **Stan, I'm interested to ask you about the general morale amongst the men that you served with and how you kept each others' spirits up.**

I think it was more than an individual thing, although

01:00 individuals did come into it inasmuch as you'd get one that was always moaning about something. We had one, a fellow by the name of Evans, and his nickname was Whinger Evans – never ever stopped whingeing. Curly Evans, he had blonde, curly hair, or Whinger Evans. And we used to just rib him about that.

01:30 I don’t think anybody was to the point of sadness in the Army, you know? We put up with a lot but because everybody else was putting up with it we’d go along with it. There was no jealousy in the Army because everybody was on an even keel. It was communism at its best; everybody was even. Of course we had officers

02:00 and NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] above us, but they were treated the same as us as far as we were talking to each other goes. We knew they were getting about the same rations as we were, and the same treatment, and perhaps a bit more pay. But no, I don’t think there was any real alarmists or sadness in the Army. You just made the most of what you got, I think.

02:30 **So generally mateship was very important, obviously, in the Army?**

It was very important. I think one of the things that kept us strong was the fact that we were all volunteers. Later in the war they used to push men into the Army, but we were all volunteers. I think that made a difference. We wanted to go to war sort of thing.

What about with the absence of women?

03:00 **Were you aware of any cases of homosexuality in the Army?**

No. We struck one who we thought was gay. That was on the Queen Mary going to England. I didn’t have anything to do with him but I know that some of them were pointing to him and saying, “Oh, he’s gay,” or whatever they called them in those days – poofter or something.

03:30 I know he jumped up one breakfast time, and he was crying, and he said, “I’m sick of this. I can’t stand this any longer,” and he walked out of the room. He got sent home. Whether he was, I don’t know; but the way things happened I think he might’ve been. And that was the only case, in the 6 years I was in the Army, that I struck. Not saying that there wasn’t any, but that was the only case I struck.

Why do you think he was sent home?

04:00 Didn’t fit in. He never would have fitted in. Wherever he went, the others would be against him.

Was he sort of outwardly effeminate or…?

He had a slightly higher voice, a slightly effeminate voice; and his actions were slightly effeminate. But apart from that I don’t know what else he did.

So he was pretty much just given a hard time?

He was, yes. Oh yes.

04:30 **Did you think that discrimination was pretty unfair or…?**

No. Everybody hated gays in those days. It wasn’t masculine. It was more feminine than masculine and it wasn’t to be put up with.

So it was really seen as a threat to their own masculinity in a way, do you think?

I don’t think it wasn’t a threat, it was just something to be pushed

05:00 off and done away with, discarded. I think, if it had’ve been allowed, I think it would have upset the way of life of the Army.

In what way?

It would’ve taken peoples’ minds off their jobs: what they were doing, and who they were with, and where they were going, and what they were going to do. I think it would have been a big distraction.

What about—

05:30 **have you heard of the term “LMF,” Lack of Moral Fibre? Some men were put on a charge of Lack of Moral Fibre, which basically meant that they weren’t coping with war.**

We never used that term. We had a term “Snarler,” Services No Longer Required. One of our guys it was, he claims

06:00 he was, this was in Tobruk, cleaning his rifle and it went off and shot him in the foot. So he was discharged Services No Longer Required. He got a dishonourable discharge, in other words. But that was the only case that I’d heard of. Everybody else was quite happy with what they were doing, quite willing to do it and keep on doing it.

And how were men like that viewed? Basically viewed as cowards?

06:30 I don’t know whether we did regard them as cowards at the time; they were probably regarded as having something go wrong with them mentally and they couldn’t take it any longer. Probably felt sorry for them and glad to see them go – for their own sake, really.

And I guess was it also that thought of if there’s

07:00 **one of us in the group that's not coping it's not a good atmosphere, you know?**

No. That's right. It does spoil the whole group of course. It happened in the infantry at times too where some guys had to be taken care of, I believe, with the other guys. And it did split them up a bit, and it did interfere with the way they were

07:30 trying to work. But that type of person, who does that, there's plenty of them in civilian life that commit suicide – same type of person, can't take life anymore, and that's it.

I'd like to ask you Stan now, just as far as our chronology goes, you talked about you traveled back to Australia from the Middle East;

08:00 **you had a certain amount of leave. You came back to Australia for what purpose?**

Retraining. Jungle training.

Oh, that's right.

We knew we were going to be sent up to New Guinea in the jungle, so we had to do jungle training. We'd about 3 weeks leave because we'd been away for 2 years and 10 months, almost 3 years. And one of those photos there [points] must have been taken after I came back because I had a

08:30 ribbon on, we'd got a medal, or something, from the Middle East. I don't remember having one in the Middle East; I think it was when we came back. That points to the fact that it was taken when we came back. So yes, we had about 3 weeks leave and then had to report back and go by train up to the Atherton Tablelands for jungle training.

How did you spend that 3 weeks leave?

Oh, it was wonderful, doing what we wanted when we wanted. I stayed with my

09:00 sister in Kew. We used to go to the pictures, go for joyrides with anybody that had a car, go walking, go into the city shopping. It was really great. And it was a long time as far as getting away from the Army was concerned. Any other time it was only overnight. The most leave we'd had before that, I think, was 3 days when we were in England.

09:30 They said, "You could have 3 days London leave." And I said to the commanding officer, "Sir, my mother lives in Nottingham. Can I go there, or I have to spend my leave in London?" He said, "No, you go up to Nottingham. Blimey, by all means, yes. See your mother." So Joe and I went up to Nottingham, a couple of days.

So it must have been great

10:00 **just to get back to Melbourne and, you know, experience civilian life for a little while.**

Back into the family life again

Was your mum back in Australia by then?

No, no. She never came back to Australia. She was killed soon after I left England. She was knocked down by a motorcycle and she died about 3 months later. I was in Syria and, being in the signals, I got the

10:30 memo quicker than I would've if I'd been in the front line because it was a telegram sent to me: "Sorry to inform you – number, it was 86 or something." So I had to look up the code book for number 86 – it was "your mother died." So that's how I found that out. But and then I thought I was so lucky, having been with her when I was in England. And I was the only member of the family that saw her after she left Australia.

11:00 **It must have been quite a shock.**

Well, no, I knew that she'd been knocked down and she was pretty ill. She was in hospital for quite a while. Then she was discharged, but she wasn't well, so… I wasn't terribly surprised. But no idea how old she was. I never knew how old my mother was. If anyone asked she would say, "I'm as old as my tongue and a bit older than my teeth." That's all that she'd say. But she was probably in her 60's

11:30 by that time. I was the youngest, and I was 20 when she died.

Was she still with your step-father?

No, no. She'd pushed him off. All he was interested in was money. As a matter of fact, he chased her to England and demanded money from her and she wouldn't give him any. So that was the end of that.

So how did your mother's death

12:00 **impact on you do you think?**

Not a lot because I was more-or-less expecting it. I wasn't surprised because she had been so ill beforehand. And I hadn't seen her previous to that for a couple of years because I was in the country

and she was in the city, although she and my step-father came up – drove up to see me on the farm one time. But

12:30 apart from that I didn't see her for a couple of years. And then I saw her in England. All I thought at the time was that I was lucky to have seen her while I was in England. Funny how the things happen. Fate, yeah. Strange.

So in some ways you were grateful that you at least spent some positive time.

I was very grateful that I'd spent some time with her, yes. It was sort of,

13:00 it just struck me as though it was some way of saying goodbye. So it didn't have a terrific effect on me. It did have an effect on me at the time, but I got over that pretty quickly. I'm extremely adaptable, I can go from one thing to another without thinking about the past.

Just speaking of questions

13:30 **of fate and that sort of thing, were you an overly or particularly superstitious person?**

Never superstitious, never. Don't believe in superstition. I believe in facts.

Did you have any lucky charms?

No, never. No lucky charms, lucky numbers or lucky birthdays or anything.

Did you know any soldiers who did?

Not that

14:00 I know of. No, I don't think so; unless they kept it pretty secret because there was no outward sign that I knew of.

Because I think some servicemen would carry little items—souvenir items—that would bring them luck.

I know some of them who were very religious used carry religious things, like scapulas and things like that, on them in

14:30 the hope that it keeps them from harm, or something like that. But no, I never thought that way.

Or wear a cross, or something.

Yes.

So when you came back to Melbourne, did you socialise much with the opposite sex?

No. Not until I got a job with the Model Dairy in Kew. And my future wife was working there at the time

15:00 with her girlfriend who the 2 of them grew up in the Camperdown western district, went to school together. Then the war broke out and Jo, my wife's girlfriend, said, "Joan, would you like to come to Melbourne?" And she said, "I'd like that. Alright, I'll go with you." So they went to Melbourne and got a job. They were working at the Model Dairy, I came along after the war started working at the Model Dairy and we met there. So we went out together a few times

15:30 then. And before I went back into the country, dairy farming again, became engaged and then about 12 months later I got allotted the block of land and we got married.

What was the Model Dairy?

It was a place where—what I was doing there, I decided to spend six months there. I spent 2 months on the bottle-washing machine,

16:00 because I wanted to know what happened at the other end of dairying. 2 months on the bottle-washing machine; 2 months in pasteurising; and 2 months on the tanker that used to go to South Gippsland, pick milk from the dairy farmers, bring it back, pasteurise it, bottle it and deliver it. That's what a dairy was in those days. And there was also a cream, and what did they do…?

16:30 a type of cream,

Pasteurise?

No, it wasn't pasteurise. There's a huge trough and they used to bring it to a certain heat and let it die down, and all the cream would come on top. And they'd collect that and bottle that,

Clotted?

No, it wasn't clotted either—and tip the skim milk down the drain. So every Sunday I used to go up there when I was a kid,

17:00 take a great big billy and get a billy full of skim milk. And that was great for the family for a couple of

days. What did they call the cream…? I'll think about it. He's retired I think [referring to Sergei off camera]. Scalded cream.

Scalded? Ahh.

Beautiful it was.

17:30 **So, I'm just thinking—where are we? I'd like to ask you about your journey to New Guinea. Now, you got on a boat to go to New Guinea, or a ship, I should say.**

It was an American boat called an LST [Landing Ship Troop] [Liberty]. The Americans made something like a thousand

18:00 of these LST's for transporting troops. And each of them was made in about 2 weeks; had hundreds of people welding and welding and welding and the great big sheets of steel. And they put these troop transports out. Oh, they built hundreds of them. We were on one of those with an American crew. Went from Australia. I think we went from…

Was it a Liberty Ship?

Yes, it was

18:30 something like that, yeah. I think we might've gone from Cairns. Anyway, it was from northern Australia somewhere. And over to New Guinea. We had a staging camp there and then we got on other American ships which were LST's, Landing Craft Troops. They had a big drop-down front on them, and they

19:00 used to take a few hundred troops at a time. There the ones that we did the landings at Lae and Finschhafen with.

What was the journey like?

It was very basic. I don't know what sort of beds we had but we had some sort. It was only a few days. The Americans used to wake us of a morning and say, "Come to chow."

19:30 They were a bit rougher than that, what they said I can't repeat on this, to wake us up in the morning.

Go on…

"Let go of your cocks and grab your socks and come to chow." That was the way we…

A bit rude…

Yes. That was an awakening for us. So we did that and we did as we were told, we let go and grabbed and we went.

20:00 Just a few days, actually. But the food was good. They had good food, and plenty of it. And they treated us well. We didn't do any exercises or training or anything on the ship because there was not much room.

How did you spend the time?

Just lolling around, just waiting to get there and hoping it won't be long.

Play cards?

Yes, I had a

20:30 set of miniature cards actually, they were about that square, a full deck of playing cards that I carried with me right throughout the war—except in England—right through the Middle East and New Guinea. There was 4 of us used to play 500 with those, even in Tobruk. You know, you'd be underground and you'd be putting these little cards around, dealing out and playing

21:00 all day and every day, apart from the fact that we had to get up and deliver dispatches every now and then. But they were great. They were wonderful. And in the Queen Mary going to England we used to play cards quite a bit because there wasn't a hell of a lot to do. That's where I learned to play bridge; we used to play bridge. People were pretty well astounded when I told them that we played bridge in the Army. They didn't

21:30 relate the two things together: the Army and bridge. Bridge was always regarded, I think, as an old woman's game. No, we enjoyed playing bridge on the Queen Mary.

And on the trip to New Guinea you didn't see any action like submarines or Japanese planes?

No, we stood back for a day or so while the Navy bombarded the shore, and the shells

22:00 were whistling over us, but there was nothing coming back as far as we could see. And then the infantry went in and we went in after them.

Where was your first port of call?

Where did we go? Finschhafen. That was the landing at Finschhafen, yes. That's a German word, actually.

22:30 The first people to land up there were German.

And what was your sort of first impressions of New Guinea as far as the landscape went?

Oh, we were told a fair bit about it before we went. When we were doing our training on the Atherton Tablelands we were shown maps and photos, and got a fair idea what it would look like. And they just said, "Multiply all those trees you see there by

23:00 about 10 and that's what the jungle's like." So we were more-or-less prepared for it.

As far as time off goes, when you were in New Guinea, did you have much time off or any time off?

None.

23:30 We were on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – like the supermarkets…

So were there any recreational duties that you took part in?

Not in New Guinea, no.

How long were you actually in New Guinea?

I think it was about 12 months, I think, from the time we landed till the time that we came out. I'm not certain about that

24:00 but I think it was about 12 months. That's '44-'45 around that area because we were there at the end of the war.

Where were your sleeping quarters?

On the ground.

So there were no huts?

No. We had rubber sheets that we put on the ground to sleep on.

24:30 But there was no huts – no buildings at all.

So you were pretty much mobile units.

Very mobile in New Guinea. We were on the move all the time. We just kept going northwards.

Did you see much enemy action?

I saw the result. Heard a lot and saw the results of some. Heaps of dead Japanese and

25:00 caves with black Japanese in them, having been burned.

At this stage of the war were you in contact with home much during your time in New Guinea?

Not at all in New Guinea, no. Didn't seem to be any mail backwards or forwards at all.

Really?

No, because

25:30 we were there to do a job and I don't think there was any boats—oh there was planes coming and going, I suppose there could have been mail, but I didn't get any mail. Most of us didn't get mail during that time.

Did that discourage you a bit, the fact that you couldn't have contact with home?

No. We were there to do a job and we did it. That was the thing in the front of our minds.

26:00 That was there, that we had a job to do.

So how long were in New Guinea for? Oh: as you say, about 12 months.

About 12 months, I think.

And you never went home on leave during that time?

Oh no. Didn't go anywhere during that time. No leave at all, no. no, we were just concentrating on getting the war over because at that time the Americans were doing pretty well in the seas,

26:30 and starting to clean up the Japanese ships and aircraft. And we could see that the worm was turning, and we kept pushing on and pushing on. It gave us all the more reason to just keep going.

Who was commanding you at this point?

27:00 I don't remember our—it would have been a Colonel but I don't remember which one it was at that stage because I never had anything to do with headquarters themselves. We just did what needed to be

27:30 done. It was a totally different war, really, to what we'd done in the Middle East. Totally different.

In what way?

Well, we were in contact with everybody in the desert, everybody to do with our own unit and other peoples' units and everything right from the top to the bottom. But in New Guinea we couldn't go round delivering dispatches

28:00 because you couldn't have a vehicle – nothing to drive or ride. So we did mainly line work in New Guinea and just kept up the communications as much as we could that way.

So you didn't have motorbikes?

Oh no, not in New Guinea – there were no roads, lot of mud. You'd get bogged anyway.

So it sounds like it was probably physically a lot more demanding.

28:30 It was demanding physically, yes, but at that stage we were so well trained and so fit that we didn't mind. We could do it. Now, I think the Australian Army was much better trained than any other Army in the world, really, apart from the Indian Ghurkhas; they were the best. No, I think we were better trained than anyone, and I think that's where the spirit of Anzac, and the Australian Army,

29:00 and 9th division, all that sort of thing, comes down to the physical fitness of the people and the way we were trained.

So you say that you didn't have as much to do with headquarters in New Guinea; who actually initiated and gave you orders then?

It was passed down from Colonel to Major, Major to

29:30 Captain, Captain to Lieutenant, Lieutenant to Sergeant, Sergeant to Corporal, and then to us.

Down the chain.

We were fairly close. I suppose it wasn't a big distance between us and the bigger bosses, but we didn't need to be up there.

So you were running line, what, from the frontline back to—or forward to…?

We were mainly repairing lines as

30:00 we went along. The people in front of us were laying lines and we were repairing them because they got chopped up and cut and all that sort of thing.

Did the Japanese sort of intentionally cut lines?

Oh yes, whenever they could, yes – sneak out at night and cut a line and dash back in again.

Just a general question I have for you: what was your impressions of

30:30 **the other Australian services?**

When we first joined up we were very contemptuous of the Air Force. We used to call them Blue Orchids. But that was because they had a pretty, blue uniform I think. We were jealous of everybody in those days. We were the service. In the armed services you've got

31:00 3 tiers of service. The Navy is top; the Army is second; and the Air Force is third. That's the way things go in the forces. We looked contemptuously down on the Air Force and looked up to the Navy. We knew our place.

Really?

But when things started to happen during the war itself, when we were in action,

31:30 we were very glad of the—we knew we could see and read what they were doing, the various services – the Air Force, and particularly in Britain with the Battle of Britain we knew what they did there. So we looked up to them. And the Navy, we got to know what the Navy was doing because we were in convoy between Australia to England and back to the Middle East. And they did a magnificent job; really did.

32:00 So we complimented both services on what they'd done or what they were doing whenever we got the chance.

Why do you think the Navy was on top of the tree?

It’s always been the senior service, always. Why? I think it came from England because the Navy was the one that saved England from any

32:30 wars in the past, or did a big job in saving them. You see, they’re an island, and without the Navy they couldn’t do much. They would’ve been invaded time after time after time. They relied on their Navy, so that became the senior service. And in those days, many years ago, they didn’t have much of an Air Force—if any—and gradually the Air Force came into being; but the Navy was still the senior service.

33:00 **Did you ever think of joining the Navy?**

No. I didn’t like the sea.

How come?

I was frightened of it. Once I left dry land I was unhappy. Only that there were so many of us there and everybody doing the same thing; I wouldn’t have liked it at all, but I put up with it.

Yes, how did you cope with your journeys

33:30 **to and from Australia?**

Good. I coped well. I was never seasick. I was always fit and well and did plenty of exercise and had good meals and that. No, I coped well.

Even though you didn’t really like being there—or didn’t like the sea?

Didn’t like the thought of the sea being under me. If I’d have stepped off the boat I would have liked to have stepped off on dry land.

34:00 **I’ll just have a quick look at my notes, Stan. … I just wanted to ask you, while you were in New Guinea, what did you know of the war situation elsewhere?**

We got

34:30 news from time to time – not always regular, but every now and then we’d get a news bulletin to say what was happening. We knew that the war was going fairly well for us while we were in New Guinea. And sort of buoyed our spirits up and we just kept going. Yeah, we had quite good news right through – you know, what the Americans were doing,

35:00 particularly when they won that big sea battle up north there. That was the beginning of the end for the Japanese, really – on the sea. And then our guys had pushed the Japs back in New Guinea and that was the beginning of the end on the land.

So morale lifted?

Well, we had good morale in New Guinea,

35:30 yes.

Did you notice the physical beauty of the islands?

No. To us it wasn’t physically beautiful. Where we were was very flat – along the coast where we were going up. Very

36:00 long grass. You could probably see a mountain or two in the distance, but the terrain as far as we were concerned was unimpressive.

And you didn’t like the look of the beaches or the jungle?

Very few beaches, as such. There were rocky outcrops right to the beach. Fairly flat and not terribly interesting.

How much time did you spend in New—I think I’ve asked you that three times now.

36:30 **I should stop asking you that.**

I think it was about 12 months.

It was 12 months, yep. Might cut there.

Tape 8

00:34 **So, could you tell me Stan where you went after New Guinea.**

New Guinea, Borneo and then home.

And what did you do in Borneo?

Well, that was Labuan Island. Actually, the idea of the Army going on there was to clean up what was left of the Japanese

01:00 Army that had been there. Which they thought they did, and they declared the place safe. And the idea was to bring Australian ex-prisoners of war over there and we build quarters for them, sort of a semi-hospital quarters with nurses and doctors for them, and special food—dietary food. And they came along

01:30 and they started feeding them up, and then we left. We were able to leave to come home to be discharged then.

Now, was the war still going on when you went to Labuan?

Just after we got to Labuan the big story came out that the war had finished. And Hirohito—I think he was the Japanese Emperor at

02:00 that stage—he advised all the leaders of the troops that the war was over and they were to surrender everything they had. Well, some did and some didn't. That's where our troops had to be careful that some of the outlying posts with groups of Japanese had not heard of the surrender and some of them kept fighting a bit longer. We had one group on Labuan Island that

02:30 nobody knew about. They got caught up with anyway, so that was okay.

Can you tell me, do you recall the day that you heard that the war had been declared over?

Yes, we were on Labuan Island. We were expecting it because we knew that we were winning on all fronts and it was only a matter of time. And when it came we said, "Oh, thank God that's over," something like that. That was it. No

03:00 big rejoicing or anything. No three cheers or champagne. Actually, we had a cup of tea. It was the day before we left Labuan; we were all packed up ready to go. And we were having a cup of tea, standing around talking – wide open spaces – and 2 big American Liberator planes went over flying very low. And there was a sort of a vapour coming out of them. And we didn't take much notice and

03:30 drinking our tea. And I looked down and there was a sort of a film, like an oily film, on the top of my tea. And I said, "Aww, what's this stuff?" Said, "Oh, I don't know." So we drank our tea and then we found out later that those planes were spraying DDT [dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane] right over Labuan to kill off all the mosquitoes so that when the prisoners of war came in there wouldn't be any malaria. And that's what we were drinking – that's a poison.

Couldn't have been that good

04:00 **for you.**

No, but it didn't harm us; we were that tough by that time I don't think anything would have harmed us.

So, there must have been a great sense of relief, I suppose?

It was a relief that it was all over; and looking forward to get back to civilian life. It was a bit of a worry because we'd been away for so long—out of civilian life for 6 years—we didn't know exactly what we'd find. I suppose a lot of

04:30 them didn't know what they were going to do. I know one fellow, a friend of mine at bowls, he decided when he was discharged—they asked you what you wanted to do as you were discharged. He said, "I want to become a dentist," so they sent him to university and he became a dentist. But you could choose anything that you wanted to be. But because I'd been dairy farming I said, "I want to go back to dairy farming," and they said, "Oh, you mightn't get a block if you put in for a block." I said, "I'll take my chance." So they tried

05:00 to talk me out of it, but I was determined that I wanted to go back into dairying.

Now, just going back to Labuan for a moment. So you were sent there to build accommodation for ex-prisoners of war?

That was part of it, but also for communications because it had been a fairly big Japanese base at one stage. And the infantry went in

05:30 to clear up the Japanese, and then we followed them in and hoping that they'd cleaned them up, they almost cleaned them all up. That was the idea.

"Almost": was there still some lurking around?

There was one group. They marched down the main road. The idea was to take over a boat and get back to Japan. But the American Army were there in charge of the port and they just got rid of

06:00 them. Then we were able to clean the place up and start the building, getting ready for the POW's. That was a fairly big base there, though we had to be careful there because they were just skin and bone. They started bringing them in just as we were leaving.

Where were they from? Which camps?

From Singapore,

06:30 Malaysia.

Changi and...?

Yeah, those places. They had to be very careful what they fed them with too; very gradual buildup. A lot of them tried to eat a lot of food at the same time and it made them sicker than they were. But they finally got through alright.

What did they look like, the POW's?

Skeletons. Walking skeletons.

Did you talk to any of them?

No.

07:00 No. I wouldn't say we weren't allowed, but we didn't get the opportunity. They were taken straight to the place that was set up for them. They were bringing them bit by bit, not a whole lot at once. Then the day after they started bringing them in we took off.

Was there medical staff there?

Oh yes. Oh yes. Doctors and nurses

07:30 and dieticians.

It must have been a shock to see them was it?

Oh, it was terrible. It made you think that you were lucky that you got through the way you did, I think. I saw a lot of things like that. And whenever you saw something bad you'd think, "Thank God it's not me." "There but for the grace of God go I," as they say.

08:00 **What was your opinion of the use of the atomic bomb to end the war?**

We thought it was—because it denoted the end of the war, we knew it would denote the end of the war when it happened, we were quite for it. I mean it was something—you see, the trouble with the Japanese there were so

08:30 many of them. And they could keep pouring thousands and thousands of Japanese into any one part of the world that they wanted to, if they were allowed. And something very drastic had to be done to bring them around to the thinking of they're going to lose because they never ever believed that they would lose the war. They would sacrifice every Japanese person, and there's many millions of them,

09:00 to satisfy their need to win the war. So something had to be done, very drastic; and that was it. And we were quite pleased that that happened.

Even though civilians were killed?

There was a terrific loss of life, but it had to be brought home to the whole Japanese nation that

09:30 war is not something that the rest of the world would put up with. And it's been a good lesson for them, I think.

So once peace was declared, how long before you went back to Australia?

It was only a matter of days, a few days actually. Peace was

10:00 Declared, the Japanese laid down their arms, the prisoners started coming out of the prison camps. Probably, I'd say, within 2 weeks we'd be on our way, yeah. Everything was starting to settle down. Still small pockets of Japanese in amongst

10:30 various countries up north, but none of them worried us.

And how did you travel back?

Came on the ship. I don't remember the name of the ship. I'm not sure where we went from. We got on the ship anyway, and traveled back to Australia. I think we landed in Sydney, then we were transported to

11:00 Melbourne. And when we got to Melbourne there was a big party waiting for us on the Melbourne Cricket Ground. We didn't know what we were going to find there either.

A big party, like a parade?

I'm sorry, no. That's the wrong place. That was when we came back to Australia from the Middle East so that we could fraternise with the Americans who we had been detesting because we'd heard

11:30 from several sources that they were fraternising with our wives and girlfriends, you see. So we wanted to come back home and destroy the Americans. But the American and Australian governments had a different idea, so they got us all together, got drinking together, and we became mates. There were a few fights.

So what was it like coming back?

It was a bit strange because the place felt a bit different to what we'd left.

12:00 I think wartime has an effect on people that you won't get in peacetime. All the women were pressed into some sort of service, that could work. I know the girl that I married, when she first came to Melbourne she was asked to do a job fitting seats, or saddles, as we called them, to motorbikes. That was her job.

12:30 And then she and her friend left that and went to this dairy. But women were asked to help the war out by doing something or other. It was a woman's world and we were told that if we wanted a job, and we went to a factory or anywhere where anybody was employed – if they were employing a woman they were to take us on and put the woman off. That was law.

13:00 So I went to the Model Dairy and said, "I want a job," and they said, "Okay." But they had room for me anyway because my brother-in-law was working there and he told me that they did need someone.

Where was that located?

Kew.

And did you go and live with your sister?

I went to live with my sister, yes, for that period of time – for 6 months.

Was she married at that stage?

Yes, she was married, she had a few children. She was married before the war. She had about 4 or

13:30 5 children, I think.

Did her husband go to the war too?

Yes. He went soon after me, and he got out just before me because he was home when I got there after the war.

And what was your homecoming like? Did you have a get-together with your family and friends.

Oh yes. I didn't have any friends there because I'd been in the country all the time, but

14:00 we did know various people who had been neighbours of ours. But it was mainly just the family sort of get together and have a drink and have a meal together and then go back to civilian life and get a job and go from there.

So it doesn't sound like you were a big drinker; like you didn't go and get—

Never had more than 2 glasses of beer.

You never got, sort of,

14:30 **smashed?**

I got into trouble a lot because I'd go into a hotel with a group of people might have two beers and that was it. And they used to push and push and try and make me have more. But I'd never have more than two beers.

You knew your limits?

Well, I didn't like the thought of getting drunk. Once I had two beers I felt full, that was it. I was the same with food, once I'd had enough food…

15:00 So, never was a big drinker, no.

So, you talk about Melbourne being different when you got back and the fact that women had been quite active. Had women changed, do you think? Had women's attitudes changed?

I don't think so, because they were quite happy to,

15:30 again, to get married and settle down and have families. They would probably work until they got married. In those days, most women who got married were just intent on being housewives and mothers. My wife never worked after she was married. Oh, when you finally have 6 children there's not much time to go out and work anyway;

16:00 you got plenty of work to do in the house.

When you got back did you think about the war much Stan?

No, not very much at all because I went back to farming and just concentrated on that. The only time I thought about it was probably Anzac Day, and even then I didn't go to Anzac parades. We have

16:30 a reunion the day before Anzac Day every year, which I didn't attend for many years until it came to Melbourne. So never thought about it much at all. My second-eldest daughter has always been at me to write up my memos on the war. I did a little bit, but not very much. She was at the stage of giving me a tape recorder and some tapes to do it with.

17:00 I told the guy on the phone the other day that she wanted me to do that and he said, "Oh, you won't have to now; we'll do it for you."

That's right. Did you talk about the war with fellow veterans?

Yeah, when we had our

17:30 annual reunions each year we did. We talked a bit about what happened about the war, but not that much. I think it was something most of us wanted to forget about and get on with our normal lives – get our lives back to normal as soon as possible and carry on like that. I suppose it's always in the back of the mind but you push it back and keep it back there.

18:00 **Did you ever dream about the war?**

No.

No?

No, I never dreamt about the war at all. I don't know why; it probably didn't have that much effect on me. But no, I didn't.

Did you know any men who did dream about it?

Not that I heard of, no. Nobody admitted to having dreamt about it. I think the only ones that probably would are the ones that were deeply affected during the war and to stay in

18:30 hospital with war wounds and nervous breakdowns and things like that. They would probably, I would think. But the ones that came out reasonably healthy, I don't think they did.

Okay, I'll just have a quick look at my notes.

19:00 **So, how do you think your wartime experience affected you personally Stan?**

I think it made me grow up. I had a great education during the war, it was a real education for me. Without that I would have been probably

19:30 not able to talk to people properly and know my proper place in civilian life. It brought me out. I became an adult, I'd say, because of the wartime experience and the mixing up with other people, mixing 6 years with the real men of the world.

20:00 **So it was a real education for you?**

It was an education for me, yes. Yes, I learnt more during the war than I learnt at school.

How do you think war has been portrayed in popular culture, like films and television?

Well, it's the figment of a lot of imagination in it. So I suppose there's a small percentage of it would be the real thing. But

20:30 once people start writing books and making films I think they let their imagination run riot and think what could have happened or might've happened and put that in. And people say, "Oh, that's exactly what happened, was it?" I don't take much notice of war films.

You haven't seen any that have struck you as being authentic?

No, no – particularly the Americans – they're too over the top,

21:00 yes.

And what do you think about war now and the more recent wars we've had?

I would like not to see any more wars. War is a dreadful thing where nobody wins. Nobody's a winner. Everybody loses in the war.

21:30 Not only monetary, but population-wise. And if the world could live without wars it would be a wonderful place. And I don't know why there is so much bickering and hatred and accusations from country to country throughout the world these days. Why they just can't get on with each other… I think of Australia as the ideal

22:00 place to live, perhaps England could be alright, where we could be at war interstate, state-by-state, because we could start up like some of the Balkan states do. We live together extremely well, I think, because we're Australians. They can't seem to be able to do that overseas. There's always someone bickering about "We want to be free of them; and they should be away from us," and all this sort of thing. It's just in people's minds I think.

22:30 It's a shame, because that's the sort of thing that starts wars – and people get killed. It's not right.

What did you think, for instance, of the Korean War and the Vietnam Wars?

Didn't take much notice of those to be honest with you. As far as I was concerned they were very small wars, nothing like a worldwide war. I don't think Australia should have been called into either of those wars, personally; but they were,

23:00 and they went. Some got killed. Some will be maimed for the rest of their life—and it's a shame.

Why don't you think they should have gone?

I think it's too far away from us, nothing to do with us. I think they should have worked it out amongst themselves.

Do you think the Americans should've been involved?

Well, they thought they had something to be proved, so they

23:30 decided that they'd have to be involved in it. But as it turned out they couldn't prove anything anyhow. So they shouldn't have been involved, no. But it's all mainly a matter of communism and stuff like that. They wanted to stop communism from spreading around the world. It's sort of petered out on it's own anyway—communism—throughout the world. So I don't think there was any need for that sort of

24:00 thing. It's the thinking of leaders, it's got nothing to do with the populations. The leaders think this and that and then bring the population into that and talk them into doing something about it.

Well, I think I'm almost through with questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add as far as anything you haven't told us, for the record,

24:30 **about your experiences during the war?**

I think you've covered it fairly well Sue [interviewer]; going from before the war, through the war, and after the war. I think you've done a really good job on that. I think we've covered about as much as I can recollect, you know. It was good to have the war over and get back to civilian life again. Nice to have my own farm

25:00 and rear a family.

Did you talk to your wife much about your experiences?

She asked me a few things about it, but I wasn't talkative about that very much, no. She always said that I never talked much about it. I said, "Well, it's the sort of thing the majority of the ex-servicemen wouldn't want to talk about." You talk about your

25:30 pleasant experiences and try and forget the rest, but it's sitting there – any bad experiences.

Those memories are still there?

The memories are still there, of course, yes. They'll always be there. You blot them out by carrying on with normal life and doing things that you have to do.

Do you think your strongest memories are memories from the war, some of your strongest memories?

Yes,

26:00 oh yes. Made a very great—you see, I was 19 when I joined up; a very impressive age, between 19 and 25. As far as a young person is concerned, that's a lifetime. And you either learn—you have to learn, you must learn during that period, whether you learn the right things or the wrong things, it's up to you, and that's what stays with you the rest of

26:30 your life. But I had some very good experiences during that time. And as I say, I grew up, got to know how to treat people and talk to people, mix with people. Otherwise, I don't know where I'd finish up.

So you don't regret having done it?

No. Not at all. Never did. No. Even when we were under fire

27:00 anywhere in the world, never regretted being there. I knew I should be there, and there I was and had to put up with it. But then again it all goes back to the fact that there was thousands of us in the same position – helping each other, talking to each other and urging each other on. It was a wonderful

experience, really.

So it was that camaraderie?

That was wonderful, yes. We had so much in common.

27:30 So it was a good experience.

What would be one of the best memories you have of the war, the most positive?

I think the time in England because I suppose it was like going home, I think. I saw so much of England;

28:00 part of Wales, bit of Scotland, travelled a tremendous amount, then saw my mother and sister. I enjoyed our 6 months in England even though the Battle of Britain was raging around us. But we had a job to do. It wasn't all one thing or the other, it was a bit of everything. Yes, I would say that would be a highlight of my wartime experience.

28:30 **And reuniting with your mother, do you think?**

Oh yes.

That was a big part?

That was great, yes.

Do you feel like you made peace with her then?

Oh yes. Yes, we became close then, which was good because if we hadn't I probably would have regretted it afterwards. But

29:00 I wanted to see her, and she wanted to see me, and we were great. It was terrific. Because there was only my sister, that was left behind in England, and my mother and I were the only ones of the family that were there at the time. So it was really good and I have appreciated that ever since.

29:30 So you got good and bad memories, but I think most of my memories are not bad ones, not really bad ones, really. We went through some hard times, testing times, and tough times, but the fact that most of us got through it in reasonably good health, I think that was a bonus. Lucky.

Have you

30:00 **been back to the places you served, since the war?**

Been back to England.

Yeah?

In 1991 my wife and I went over there and my youngest daughter was over there at the time on about 6 months' holiday with her husband and a couple of children. And my daughter came with us to Nottingham and I showed them where I

30:30 used to live. We toured around. But, that was the only place we had a chance to go back to because we were touring France, Germany and Holland as well, and a fair bit of England. We stayed with my daughter in England, as a stepping off place, and went through the Continent and came back. But we had time to go and have a look in England where I used to live which was an eye-opener

31:00 for them. It wasn't the same because when we lived in England we had the big house there on 4 blocks of land. Well, in the meantime 3 of the blocks of land had been built on, and that was just another house in the street really. But it was there, still standing.

When you went back in 1991, did it remind you of the time you were there during the war?

Yes, oh yes.

Did it bring memories

31:30 **back?**

I remember we went by tram from the railway station, on the tram about 10 minutes' ride. I knew exactly where to get off and where to go from there and how to go down the street and find the house. No, it was still in my memory. If we hadn't have gone back through the war I probably wouldn't have remembered exactly where to go because I was only 9 when we left.

Because when your mother went back there during the war she stayed at

32:00 **the original house that you were born in?**

No. I was born in another house. I was born in St Christopher's Street, Snenton Dale, and we moved up to Brooklyn's Road, Snenton Hill when I was about 3. And that's where we went to see the house when I was between 3 and 9, when we left England. And that's where my mother went back to because my

sister was running it as a boarding house. She

32:30 had up to 4 boarders at a time. But when we went back during the war she only had 2, so she could put Joe and I up and my mother was staying there. But she still had 2 boarders. So it was good to get back there. I often think just what an amazing thing it was that I was able to go back and see my mother at that

33:00 stage.

So, in a way the war did you a service?

It did, yes. I was very lucky right through the war, actually. I thank my lucky stars ever since that I got through it okay. And the DVA have been looking after me very well over the last few years. As a matter of fact, I got a free train ride to Alice Springs recently

33:30 through the DVA.

Great.

Yeah. Great Southern Railways have got my name down to go on them anytime, anywhere they go, free-of-charge, First-Class – Gold Class.

Wow. Fantastic.

Thanks to the DVA. It is, yeah.

You'll have to start travelling around a bit then.

And also, thanks to the—see, with these reunions we have we swap things that we know we've done or been advised to do and been

34:00 given, and through that I managed to get in touch with DVA about transport. And I've got a railway ticket that will take me anywhere in Victoria, First-Class, free-of-charge at anytime, with my photo on it. Yeah, that's great. I suppose quite a few ex-servicemen have got that. But I only found that out early this year.

That's fantastic—save a bit of money too.

34:30 Oh yes.

Good support.

I think they're supporting us extremely well at the moment. They are, yes. Very happy with them.

Alright, is there anything else you'd like to add there Stan?

Oh, I don't think so.

No?

No, I don't think so. I think we've just about covered everything. Nothing I can think of anyway.

Well, thanks very much for letting us talk to you.

That's okay

35:00 Sue. It's a pleasure. Thanks for coming.

Thank you.

Putting your time in.

No worries.