

Australians at War Film Archive

Arthur Fields (Stanley) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/398>

Tape 1

00:31 **So Arthur, tell us about your early life, where were you born?**

Well I was born at, oh actually, Oakleigh. Not Oakleigh, no, no, no wrong now Arthur, see my memory goes

01:00 once I start talking... Footscray. And we lived out on the road going out to Geelong. My father had a machine to clean the road up, you know, do all the...

And what do you remember about living in Footscray as a child?

01:30 I went to school there at High Street, I was a bit of a tiger. There's one story there, they used to drive the sheep up across to the abattoirs or whatever. And I got in amongst the sheep

02:00 and all hell broke loose, because they couldn't find me and a joker seen me amongst the sheep so he grabbed a hold of me and he took me to the abattoirs of course, over where they would go, and then he brought me back home and said to my mother, "This is what you're looking for." I had a ride

02:30 in his truck.

How old were you then?

I would be about three, and then we moved from there into High Street, oh not High Street, that was the school. I can't remember the name of the school there. And that's about all there.

03:00 But the old fox night I got in a row, put a one of the (UNCLEAR) down one of the boys' back, so I got in a hiding for that.

And how long were you in Footscray for?

Footscray? Oh about two years. And then we moved out to, oh I've, what's the name of the place now.

03:30 **What'd you say? Out at HP Mackay was where my father was working, and he was in that street and we had a,**

04:00 **oh they had a war service home. And that, they all went broke, and we went up to the bush to live, lost everything. And we went up to a place called Barkstead.**

This was during the Depression was it?

Yes, during the Depression, this is

04:30 in that. But I was a terror. I used to go and catch snakes, and this is before we went to Barkstead. And the women would be walking down the street and past our place and I would kill the snake and pull it on a bit of string and pull it in the grass and, the women.

05:00 Things like that are what I done.

What a charming boy.

Yeah, that's all in the history there.

And how long were you there, in the bush?

Oh now that was, must have been about three, two to three years.

What was the family doing there while you were up in the bush?

Gold mining.

05:30 Found a mine and found some gold, it was down about sixty feet. So that was the normal there, so in 1919 we come back to Melbourne, had to, Dad

06:00 went back to work in HP McKay's. I went to school in there.

Was this back in Footscray?

No not Footscray, um, that long since I was there. I gee... I know it was well as anything. Cultherwood Street was the name of the street

06:30 I can't think of it.

That doesn't matter, it'll come out, we will come back to it.

It's all in the paperwork.

That's all right. So what age are you now roughly when you come back to Melbourne?

When we come back to Melbourne, oh went to school at

07:00 I've got to think, of my mother. My mother went to a women's hospital sick and I went to one aunty, to another aunty while she was sick in the hospital all the time. So I could be with one for a couple of months and then she would come home and then she would have to go back to hospital again and I would go

07:30 to another aunty's. I moved around there.

What was wrong with your mother?

Oh women's complaints as far as I know. Because she was in the women's hospital.

And were you a teenager then?

Then? No I was only twelve or about, no I was

08:00 I must have been four or five years old when I was in Melbourne.

So this is after you've come back from Ballarat when you were in Melbourne?

Yeah.

So you were only in Ballarat for a year or two then?

And then after, while I was in Ballarat I was thirteen then

08:30 at Christmas time I went in a job in a big shop and I had to sing out there for, oh raj or a bong I used to hear sung out.

What does that mean?

I don't know, but that was part of the thing, I was dressed up

09:00 and that and Father Christmas was...

Were you dressed as an elf?

Yeah.

And you had to sing Oh Raj of Bong?

Yeah. And then because I was there I got a job then. I was thirteen or fourteen, and I got a job delivering.

09:30 You would order from the shop and I would deliver it. Around Ballarat for a while, and then I, there was a break up in the family then. And then I came down and I was living with Aunty June in Oakleigh and I was working at, oh different places in the city.

And how old are you now?

Eighty-two.

10:00 **Now how old you when you were in the city?**

Fourteen.

Ok good, so you're fourteen, this is about 1935, 36 isn't it? It's around that time?

Yep.

And what, are you enjoying work at this stage?

Oh yes. I worked

10:30 around in the city delivering things from a chemist shop. And I had another job later on, Mongord, making things out of that.

Sorry, delivering chemist shop supplies?

Yeah

11:00 and down at the Melbourne footy ground. England and Australia were playing cricket and I had, I sent for me down there to sell seats. You know balloons and things like that, I walked around and sold a lot of that sort of thing, watched the

11:30 cricket of course.

Was Bradman [famous Australian cricketer] batting?

Yeah it was his era. Seen him and all that.

Was this 36 we're talking about?

Yeah.

Is that bodyline, is that the bodyline era?

Yeah it was, that's right.

So you would have seen Douglas Jardine [English cricket captain] and all those?

Yeah.

Hal Larwood [bowler]?

Yeah.

What would you do for entertainment after work as a

12:00 **teenager then?**

Nothing. I, after work, I used to go home. Back down to the aunty, I was living there at the time. So I used to just go home and go to bed.

Didn't go to the pictures or to any dances?

Oh yes, later on and that. Used to go to the Oakleigh RSL [Returned and Services League] for dancing.

12:30 **And so as you become an older teenager, are you becoming aware of the build up of war in Europe?**

Yeah, and I joined up the, at Oakleigh. The army and I was there for two

13:00 years, three years.

In the militia?

In the militia.

So how old were you when you joined the militia?

Thirteen, oh no I must have been fifteen sixteen years of age when I joined up.

So you had three years in the militia?

Yep.

And what sort of training was that?

That training was good

13:30 training at the Oakleigh football ground. We used to train, and across the road from there if it was wet, the big hall there. We used to go up to Seymour and that, and then there was the fires, the bushfire.

'39 fires?

'39 fires. Yes.

14:00 **Were the militia involved in fighting those?**

Yeah.

So when did you join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], when did you transfer across?

I went across in 1940 and that. I went to an ad for the air force but they knocked me back. And I had

bad teeth because, and I had to go to, I went to the doctor and told him I wanted my teeth out. So

14:30 I made an appointment and went home, and went home and told my Mum and she went mad at me. Anyhow they came on the Friday morning and I had an anaesthetic and took all my teeth out, they were rotten. And then a week later I

15:00 went up to the doctor and told him I wanted to join the army and he said, "No, too soon," because I had no teeth. So I waited another two or three days and I went into Melbourne Town Hall and signed up there. And went out to Caulfield Race Course and stopped the

15:30 night there and then up to Pucka [Puckapunyal].

And how old were you at that stage?

I was at this stage, ah,

Would you be about nineteen?

No eighteen.

Did you have to lie about your age then to join the AIF at eighteen?

No. Because I had experience with them.

16:00 So they put me in the army like the, oh I should know that one. I was in the unit, I was in the 2/5th Field Ambulance, right through.

16:30 **And where did you train with the 2/5th?**

Puckapunyal.

And was it good training?

Good training yes. And then we got sent home on leave for a week, and then we come back to Pucka and then we went down to, to go overseas.

So that was your final leave that week?

That was our final week.

17:00 **Final leave.**

Yep.

And so did you embark from Port Melbourne?

Yes, embarked from Port Melbourne. And we got down to, got half way down and we stopped there, and then we went out and we met the rest of the convoy in the late afternoon.

17:30 And the other two ships came down from Sydney, and we went to Western Australia to refuel and over to Bombay.

And did you get to stop in Bombay?

Yes, when we got to Bombay the first thing we done was to, found out who won the cup.

Which cup is that?

Melbourne. Melbourne Cup.

18:00 And it was Old Royally that won it. And was put on a train and we went a hundred mile up to an English camp. And we was there for three weeks. Then we came back and we went up to Suez Canal, and then we got off there

18:30 to go down to, they put us in carriages, or on a train. And it was all full of cow manure and that. So the boys, the whole lot of us, when they started to move we were mooing like cows. And we got into a row over that.

Did you get on a charge or?

Yeah I did.

19:00 **So here we are, are we on our way to Palestine now?**

Yeah, down to Palestine.

And where were you in Palestine?

Oh about, oh what was the name? Oh I'd say from here to Dandenong.

So what's that about ten kilometres or something?

Yeah out from the main town.

19:30 And we were there for Christmas, and then I was sent over to Egypt. The whole lot of us, when I went over there I was promoted, well before... I should have said that before that. And I was lance corporal. That was on our way to Western Australia.

20:00 So I went over there, and I got into trouble, thought I got into trouble I should say. There was a canteen there and there was a motorbike outside, one of the RPs [Regimental Policemen]. And so two of us got on the bike and took it for a bit of a spin, and left the bike down the road.

20:30 And the next morning the parade was there and we were all, the two of us were like this. And they found, we thought we were gone for the motorbike but it wasn't that at all, it was another joker got into trouble.

For something else?

Yeah for something else.

Lucky.

I couldn't tell you what it was now, but anyway I got out of that one.

21:00 And then from there we went on to Tobruk.

Did you go straight to Tobruk? You weren't involved in Bardia or any of the other?

No, no, went straight up to Tobruk. And, but that was against the Italians. With that we moved around a bit there, scrounging

21:30 and all that. I was in B Company because I was a corporal, anyway we picked up some little hand grenades. They wouldn't hurt you, or we thought. So we picked them up and threw them at A Company. So,

You threw hand grenades at each other?

Yeah.

Jeez.

To the ground, you know. So I got into a

22:00 row there.

How did you manage to hang onto the stripe with that all going on?

Well that went, I was corporal fifteen times.

They didn't learn did they?

No, that's over the full time.

So you did Tobruk the first time, how long were you there for roughly?

22:30 Roughly, two months, three months. And then from there, oh while we was there, very important this one. We were out on this scrounge, three of us. And we were walking up this (UNCLEAR) and we could hear voices. So I said to the other two,

23:00 "Look each side and I'll put my head around and see what's going on." So here's these Italians sitting there and they are writing a letter. So I called the others in and said it's safe. And they put their hands up and carried on and we had a look around and here's a big wall there

23:30 and it was full of money. So we put our hands through and took some of it and took them back to camp and gave them the money, oh kept a bit of it in our pocket.

Could you spend that money though? You couldn't spend that money could you?

Oh well that's what they told us. And I said, "That's Italian

24:00 money, that's no good." So what did we do? We burnt it lighting our cigarettes with it and boiling our billy and everything like that. So that was all right. Then we started got shifted back to Egypt.

So this is after Tobruk's been taken the first time?

Yeah.

24:30 And one of the boys had some money in his pocket, and he's walking down the street. And these money lenders and all that are down there and he sold it all. And of course I,

Could have made a fortune.

Could have made a fortune but that was it. And from there we got on a ship to go to Greece. And

25:00 we got half way, well not half way, we were out and then these ships coming towards us, they're signalling of course. And it was the fleet, they were just coming back from a battle. And they turned us around and we had to go back there where we came from.

25:30 And that's where went to Tobruk the second time. I went up by ship, some of them went up by train, or part you know.

And was this as the Germans were marching back across the desert?

Yeah, the Germans had taken over virtually. That was the start of the Tobruk siege, the siege of Tobruk.

26:00 So that was it.

How long were you in Tobruk for, a few months?

Yeah a few months, but fortunately with me. Oh before this happened we were out on a scrounge and so forth and the Germans were coming over with their bombs and so forth, so we

26:30 hopped into a hole and Titch Patty, he was over there and next thing he was up running towards us. I told him to get down I yelled at him get back in there. But the reply was when he got to us there was a snake in there, a little snake about that long. So that was that. Went crock at him for running across of course.

27:00 That was all right. We were on our back from delivering some wounded and the Germans came over, bombing and they dropped a few bombs around us, so we were out of the ambulance. And there was some whole trucks that had been bombed before

27:30 so we got in under them. But when we came out of course covered in grease and oil so we had to clean ourselves up before we could get into the... So we cleaned ourselves up and got back. That was one little part. And it wasn't long after that, I was

28:00 living in a little cave and so I come up and I'd been bitten.

By?

A little, I forget what you call them now. I was bitten by these ticks in here.

Ouch.

28:30 And so went to hospital and then they sent me to an English hospital in, on there. From there I went to, I was only... From the English hospital I went to the Australian hospital and from there, because

29:00 I was bitten by ticks, I shouldn't be here by this stage.

You should be dead?

Yeah. And they thought they would take blood out of this arm and put it in this arm and vice versa. Well that went on for about three or four weeks.

Why would they do that?

Because the blood was infected.

Oh so you were getting a transfusion

29:30 **in this arm and they were pulling it out in that arm?**

Yeah. And so they were very good, and I had very high temperature and if I remember rightly, it's in the book somewhere. It was in the 5/6 and that.

30:00 But there was a sister with me all day, all night, you know change over. And then finally I got right and they sent me to another hospital. And that was all right, I was there for a little while, three or four weeks. And then I broke out again. So I had to go back to hospital again.

30:30 And that was the end of that. I broke everything there, and I rejoined the unit. And that was getting toward the end of the Tobruk siege.

So did you go back to Tobruk?

No I didn't go back, I picked up the unit and went up to

31:00 Hamah. Yeah Hamah, that's up, that was the first stop I stopped at. Up near the Turkish border.

In Syria?

Yeah Syria. And I was looking after the deluded and so forth.

- 31:30 In the, and that... There was a French soldier was picked up in the desert, he was dead. We had to do a post mortem on him. That's what I was in that part. And we, the doctor went through and said what it was and so forth. And I had to
- 32:00 clean up after him. He said, "Righto Arthur you can finish it." So I had to put him in the box and so forth. That was there, from there, that was a lot of the work I done there. From there we got shifted up further into Syria.
- 32:30 We was only three mile from the border, and a big town. So there was a school there. And we took over the school and that, part of it. And we looked after all of the kids and that. We had Christmas in there. But then they
- 33:00 found me another job, I had to go to a brothel.
- Were you the brothel picket?**
- And I had to look after that from five o'clock to ten o'clock, yeah nine or ten. And they'd come in,
- 33:30 and they'd pick up a girl and she would bring him to me. And I would put down, only put their army number and not their name. And then she would bring him back to me and he would have to wash himself out and so forth and usual thing. So there was two of these places. So I'd work in one one week and the other the next week.
- 34:00 Now in that stint there, there was one soldier that came in and he got VD [Venereal Disease], so the question was, "Where did you get it? Who was it? Name this girl." So she was put out of work. Anyhow he named this girl
- 34:30 so she was put, wasn't allowed to work. And she was tested and everything and she was clear of the bug. And he was, then we'd questioned him more and that and we found that he'd gone out on the street and picked up a girl and
- 35:00 that's where he had got from. And he was sent to, out to, oh gosh it's gone. Egypt. And he lost all of his money, his pay, and they cleaned him up and sent him home.
- 35:30 **Was that standard procedure if you got VD?**
- Yeah. Standard procedure.
- You got sent home?**
- Got sent home to Australia. And so that was the end of that part of the story. And then from there I used to work from, that one this week and that one next week. There were two of them, used to change shifts.
- 36:00 And the girls were good girls. Like you know in that respect. They would, you'd meet them at the theatre, the picture theatre and things like that. One of the boys married one of them. And then we, I was coming home back to camp and they
- 36:30 were packing up. So we got to move, and we picked up there we went and robbed, picked up a few bottles of grog from a little shop.
- So you robbed a shop?**
- Yeah. And then we're
- 37:00 car right down through the desert and out to pick up a ship and we went to Bombay, and we were changed from Bombay onto a little ship, The Tacklewa[?], always remember it. And from there we went to Colombo and refuelled, and then
- 37:30 out to, out from I can't think of the name of it there. Anyhow when we got there the Japs had already got there, so we never landed there. We just turned around and we went back to Colombo, and then we refuelled and come around
- 38:00 past the South Africa coast. And up into South Australia. And there was a few of us camped there. That was my, I had a boil come up on my face.
- 38:30 And I spent it in hospital, that was my birthday. And so that was all right, back to camp
- 38:45 End of tape

Tape 2

- 00:30 Right, I come out of hospital and went back to the unit and that was about three weeks later we packed

up and came back to Melbourne on leave. And when we got off at Flinders Street station. One of the boys, his wife came up to him with a little baby.

01:00 **How long had you been away?**

One two three, must have been four or five years. And that caused a lot of trouble and we told him to go home to his mother, not go home to her. So that was that, he was really upset,

01:30 and of course with all of the others we didn't know what was going to go on when they went home. Didn't worry me. So we went home on leave for a week. And then we went up to a place, Jewels, out from Brisbane.

02:00 Done some more there, played football there and I broke my ankle.

You were in the wars, being in the war weren't you?

Yeah. And then I, they sent me to a hospital at, one of the towns, can't think of the name of them now. Anyhow

02:30 there was a girl, she was, her father worked on the council. He was the head joker for the council and I went to the dance, by this time I was ready to go back to the unit. And he took us all around his daughter and that gave me a look at the town. And I

03:00 corresponded with her for quite a few years. And, I was shifted out of course. Went back to the unit and by this time we moved up to Townsville, and so three of us hopped on the train out to, oh what's the big town there, out there?

03:30 This is where it goes wrong for me a bit. Can't think of the name of the big town now.

Near Townsville?

Out from there.

Charters Towers?

Charters Towers I think that was it.

What were you heading up there for?

Oh just to have a sticky [a stickybeak - a look], nosing around. The three of us, and as

04:00 we had to look around the town and that and we decided to go and have a few beers. As soon as we stepped into the pub the army police grabbed us, and said what are we doing there? There's a train going back to Townsville because the unit is moving out. And when we got down there, they were gone.

04:30 So we were put on another ship, the Unsung. And went to Milne Bay, and we just got off the ship when the Japanese came in and sunk the boat. And it's still there today, it just sunk down in the mud. And it was used as the wharf over the years. So hence

05:00 I went from corporal to lance corporal and down again. So that's where I spent there.

So you were in Milne Bay, were you there prior, during or after the battle?

No, during the battle. The Japanese and that. And I'll always remember that one in this respect. They marched down,

05:30 the Japanese marched down for the airstrip, and we had no aeroplanes there at that time. And they formed up right across the airstrip the Australians. We was in the background of course being medical. And they came down blowing their bugles and so on, carrying on, starting to come across there.

06:00 And orders went out that no one was to fire a shot until it was given, the order was given. And one joker at the end, or three parts across there, one joker let go. Of course all hell broke loose and the Japanese nicked off then, they got pushed right out. And

06:30 so that was the Battle of Milne bay. And then that was while I was there. Of course being a naughty boy as I always was, I had to, with the other boys, the three of us. I had to give them drill, up and down the road.

Is this because you missed the train?

07:00 Yeah and all that business. And up past us was American camp, and they used to have to come through our lines to go down to the wharf and all that. They had ice-cream and all that stuff and we had bully beef and hard stuff. But anyhow, this joker he was going past and he was picking at us. And it was the wrong time

07:30 because a sergeant major was watching us, to make sure that I was doing the job properly, you know marching them up and down. And anyhow because the American joker started picking at us, he notified the, well this time, I'd done mine was just about to leave that. But our sergeant

08:00 major notified the Yanks what he had done, so he had the full army gear, and I had to march him up and down. Just stand there, right turn left turn you know. For a week.

All day?

All day. And so that was that. That was Milne Bay.

08:30 But in Milne Bay while I was there, middle of the night the plane was taking off from there, and one of the troops, they was waiting for, to go onto a plane

09:00 this one. Come over and went right through the one that was stationed. Didn't take off the ground. And so there was some hell to pay there.

Did you see the airfield with the exploded plane and so forth?

Yeah we had to go over and pick up the wounded and all that part of it.

09:30 Another occasion, oh it was Christmas time, we were there, and my mother sent over in a box, posted, a bottle of wine. And that was all right, so we were drinking that and a plane come over

10:00 and there's a big hill behind us, and he never made it. He crashed into the mountain, so we had to go up and fix that up. That's another thing. Then we, well of course we were in the, what they call, I can't think.

10:30 We got shifted then from there up to, oh yes that's right. We used to have a lot of games, like you know running, between different units and so forth. While we were in Moresby, and I was one of the,

11:00 we had some good runners and I was one of them so we never got beat.

Good.

In that respect. And then we were shifted, put into an aeroplane into an aeroplane and we're going over to. We didn't know exactly where we was going. Anyway when we got on the plane

11:30 where we were supposed to land we never landed. They kept on going to a place called Shaggy Ridge. Have you ever heard of that? So we set up camp and all of that. And then while we were, one night I got called up to headquarters and they said the Japanese are going to make a

12:00 raid there, and I had to get all the wounded from the hospital and all that and take them over to, over the river, over to the other side. And get all that ready, and the engineers came and put bombs all around the place,

12:30 and when we had taken out all the wounded, what we was treating down. We got word to say it's all over. The air force went over and done the job, what they were supposed to do. So we set up, half way up Shaggy Ridge, well not...

13:00 Shaggy Ridge was like that, and down here was the Faria River and that. And that's where we made a hospital and we, well the doctors done all of their new work on the wounded and so forth. And then I was sent up,

13:30 from there, up the coast be about twenty mile. And they... We set up camp there, hospital there. I only lasted three days and I got called back out because things had changed. And so Shaggy Ridge back to there.

14:00 And so I had to go up over the ridge which is like that. So that's all right, so we settled down there. And then I was, I had to take in, this is what's upset me for years. I had to take a crew, some troops through.

14:30 And that's the longest track. And we had to cut our way in on one side and on our way back, cut our way out to get the stretchers through. So that was all right, we cut it down and we came across a Japanese had been killed on the side of the road. But someone's taken his ear off.

15:00 **For a souvenir?**

For a souvenir. And so anyhow we got through, and we picked up all the wounded and some walking wounded and ones on stretchers. There was two English officers come to see that and they had both been wounded.

15:30 We're getting along the road and one of the English officers died on me. And so I had to make a decision of what I would do with him. So I put him on the side of the road because it was getting late in the afternoon and to have him along was, so I put him on the side of the road and

16:00 could pick him up the next day. And the other English soldier he was going crook, so we got him down the road further and we left the other one behind. Because we had to cut our way back. On the other side to get the stretchers through. We cut it here, and now we had to cut through the other side to get the stretchers.

- 16:30 Well by this time it was getting late and we had three rivers to cross over. So that's what we did, and got back and we reported that we left one behind. So the next morning all the other wounded, because it was late night when we got back. I had the job then to...
- 17:00 the Faria River it was open. We didn't have to go over the ridge. The river, so took a couple of the wounded back to hospital. So that was that virtually. But the whole point of it is, later on after I got discharged I'm reading the papers
- 17:30 and I start getting worried, was he really dead? Because I've always followed the medical and that here in Melbourne. And I start to think we knew things were coming out, but was he really dead?
- 18:00 And that used to upset me, and I still worry about it at times you know. And so that was that part of it. And from there, oh should I say about, the Japanese, yeah we done that one. After that
- 18:30 we, now from there we, right down from the ridge through on this side. We were called and we come back to the Tablelands after that. So
- 19:00 then we start doing water and that for landing. Used to come down, down to the sea and have a play around there and go out and swim out to the barges or whatever and that. Anyhow we came back to camp and we were playing football
- 19:30 and I, kicking a goal, kicked the goal and I twisted my knee out of nothing you know. So next morning on the Sunday morning I had three choices, to go on a group march, be a good Catholic
- 20:00 or go and see the doctor. So I said, "Oh that's easy I'll have a bludge here." So it was a new doctor and I went and saw him and told him what happened, sore knee. And up on the table and that and what happened? He twisted my leg and that having a look and he locked my leg up my back.
- 20:30 I couldn't get it down. For the next, from there I went to hospital.

With your leg still up your back?

Now I went to a hospital, in a big town out from the

Were you still in New Guinea at that stage or were you back in Australia?

No we were back in Australia. And

- 21:00 anyway I was in this orthopaedic hospital and I was all ready, I was on this stretcher ready to go into theatre and a big nob came up from Sydney, he was an orthopaedic doctor. Colonel. And I,
- 21:30 he's doing the ward and I'm on the stretcher ready to go to theatre. And the sister said to him, "This is a good case for you." And he had a look and he said, "Put him back to bed." And he said, "Soldier don't let anyone put a knife in your leg." So I went back and they used to pull my leg there until they got it
- 22:00 straight. And then once they got it straight I had to climb ladders and you name it and that. So that was it, when I was able to walk properly and so forth they sent me to Melbourne for discharge.

And when was that?

That was in 19...

- 22:30 about 1950 I think it was. Just after the boys all went to, oh I can't tell you an actual time now it would be in the book anyhow. And anyhow they were going to discharge me, I could get around all right, hobble and that.
- 23:00 So they sent me down to, before I was discharged I went down. Oh before that I had leave and I came down to home and had a fortnight's leave and I was put on a train to go back to my unit and I got to Brisbane and they put me in a
- 23:30 camp, and oh it'd be two or three o'clock in the morning, a joker came running up the thing, "Corporal Fields, Corporal Fields." Singing out my name, and, "Yeah what do you want?" He said, "You're moving out straight away you've got to get down to the station." So they put me on, in a truck and down the station I go, and what happens?
- 24:00 I get in the train, the same carriage, the same seat back to Melbourne.

The same seat you came up on?

What? Yeah, the same train I came up on so I was back on the same train back. And out to, oh what's the name of the place. Out from the zoo, and anyhow, the doctors down here

- 24:30 they're going to discharge me, and the question was, "Is there any reason you can't be discharged A1?" And I said, "Yes there's me knee playing up," and so forth. And he said, "You know soldier we can keep you in the army for another two to three weeks?" And I said, "What's two to three weeks after four or five years?"

25:00 and oh yeah, so I had to go and see a specialist, he wouldn't come down to me. And I was immediately unfit for service so I was discharged. From that point onwards I was working, on the rail.

25:30 I was working, I got a job on the railway changing light globes.

In the carriages?

No on the, while I was going across in the yards. So I gave that away. Back on the general things and you know one job

26:00 to another. And then the VP [Victory in the Pacific] day, that's when war finished England that was a big day. I went into town and everyone was going mad. And I got to the Melbourne

26:30 Town Hall and there's a conga train of people jogging around you know. Down to Elizabeth Street and around and back and up the hill. Anyhow that was good. And I got my arms around this girl and we jogged around. Anyhow when we got sick of that we went over the bridge,

27:00 what's-a-name bridge and went to the gardens and sat down and talked. And then it was time to go home, I put her on the train. She lived in Spotswood, I lived in Oakleigh. And I was a good boy, I put her on the train, and later on I took her. Oh she had a bit of trouble where she was living and I said,

27:30 "You want to give that away, come over here to Oakleigh." And I got her a, oh a few houses up from the milk bar. She went up and lived with Quirks, people by the name of Quirks. And got her a job in Oakleigh and from that point onwards, I had a row with my mother and so forth. She

28:00 wanted something done and changing the shop. And I went up to Linda's and telling her about it and she said, "The best bloody thing that can happen is you and I can get married." So that was all right, we went up to the church in Oakleigh and were married. So that

28:30 was done, that was going to go to the beach, but we couldn't get a train. So we finished up going up to Fern Tree Gully for our honeymoon a week up there. And that's the story of me getting married.

Well that's good.

29:00 From there I had a chance of going up to Cabbage Tree Creek, they had a sawmill there, Springvale. And they moved that up to Cabbage Tree Creek, and I had the option of going up there as the engine driver because I knew I could look after

29:30 the engines all right. So we went up there. Carol, the one that was here, she was born down in Murrumbidgee, that's where we lived before we went to Cabbage Tree. And then we was up there until 1960, and then we decided to come because the kids were getting older

30:00 Carol was born down at Murrumbidgee but the two boys were born up at Albury. So we decided to come back to Melbourne for the kids' education. And then that was all right. We come down and bought the house three doors down. And we lived there for a few years,

30:30 and this one came on the market and Linda wanted this house because the other's only a weatherboard, so we bought this house. And lived here ever since. So 1960 it was.

Did you get good treatment from the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] for your knee and so forth?

Yes, yes. Still do.

31:00 (UNCLEAR) hospital with my knee, later on. Come down from Cabbage Tree and went out to, forgotten the name of the hospital out there.

Did you find it hard settling in after the war, coming back into civvie street [civilian life]?

No not really. Because I had so much on before the war, didn't worry me at all.

31:30 **There was no problem with getting used to living again in a house with normal people?**

No that didn't worry me at all. In that respect I, when we came back from Cabbage Tree and we lived here I

32:00 got a job with the Gas & Fuel. Looking after the engines, pumping gas out. Then they ended up shipping me over to Box Hill and then from there down to Werona. And from there we went to Clayton, but then they

32:30 put the charge of St. Kilda right through to Sale. And at that time they were putting the new main in.

Did you join an RSL when you came back?

Yes, down here at Noble Park, when we shifted from Cabbage Tree the first thing I did was to join the Noble Park RSL.

- 33:00 **And what about the 2/5th Ambulance Association when did that start?**
Well soon after, straight after the war. The boys were very close knit.
Still get to see them?
Yeah and they, we have a reunion on the 25th of
- 33:30 October, November, next one. What's the next one?
December?
September October, on the 25th of October. We always celebrate that day.
What was important about that day?
That was the date we sailed around Melbourne. And we kept that up all then, there's not many of us left now.
- 34:00 **That would have been sixty-three years ago now wouldn't it?**
Yeah.
Crikey.
So when you look at it that way.
And what do you do on these days, do you talk much about the war or is it more about post-war now?
Post-war. Yeah. There's not many of us left. I suppose last year there was only about ten of us
- 34:30 there, but a lot of women. The war widows, they come, and we go to the hotel. Oh what's the name of the place? Oh Hotel just up from the end
- 35:00 of Swanson Street. And that's the place that they take tours out and we use that as a place to go to. They're very good to us. And so that's all of that story virtually. For the last three years I've been president of the unit.
- 35:30 **And is that a very proud position for you?**
Yes, very. And so that's how I got that picture over there. That one there, from the Anzac Day this year.
Have you been going to the Anzac Day since the war finished?
Oh yes. The kids wanted to go this year, they wanted to go and see the shrine and so forth.
- 36:00 So we took them in. And then we went down to Collins Street, to meet the boys and so forth. Marched, so that photo there is this year leading the march.
Have you noticed a big rebirth of interest in
- 36:30 **Anzac Day in the last few years?**
Yes, this year was very big. Yeah about twenty-three thousand people came to the dawn service.
Very moving isn't it?
Yes very moving. It's worth going in, the kids wanted to go in so done the right thing and take them in.
Do any of them march with you?
No. We don't have that. There is only a few of us left now for that.
- 37:00 So that's all, that photo there was me leading the march this year. Hobbling along.
How is the knee? Did it ever come back to pretty much as good as new or never?
Never. It's always given me trouble. And I can't turn. Over the years
- 37:30 there's been some funny things in this respect. I came out of the TAB [Totalizator Agency Board] here at Noble Park, walked across the road and as I'm stepping up on the gutter a joker has walked passed there right in front of me. And I stepped up and down I started to go and I grabbed him, grabbed his trousers
- 38:00 and pulled his trousers down a bit and he was going to give me the whack. And he could see the sweat pouring off me and all that. So people come up and they helped me up on my feet and all that again. So I said, "I'll be right," so I'm hobbling around to the doctors and seven times I fell over from Noble Park

38:30 town, you may as well say until I got to the doctors, seven times, out there.

Ouch.

Out to hospital again. Changed now, so I was in there for a while. Oh that's been going on all my life you see. The knee. Another time I was,

39:00 well I went into town and well I wanted to go across the road to the, Veteran Affairs. And Linda she said to me, she came in with me and she said, "I'll be in Myers

39:30 or David Jones." So I was longer over the other place, and then I said, "Oh she wont be in Myers, she'll be in David Jones," so I get into David Jones and looking around. And here she is over there, right over there. And I done the thing what I should never do, I turned around too quick. From around... she got out of the lift and I looked around,

40:00 I said, "There she is over there." And I turned too quick that way instead of walking around quietly. And arse over head I go, legs out there again, people rushing everywhere. They wanted me to get an ambulance and so forth, I said, "No I'll be right, just leave me." And Linda she's sitting there, she's laughing her head off. And I said, "No, I'll

40:30 be right just leave me." And get me up on my feet, and I got on my feet, I pulled a rack of dresses down of course. I waited a few, oh about three to five minutes. Then I walked around the isle, walked in a straight line and good as gold.

On that note we've got another tape to change.

41:00 **End of tape**

Tape 3

00:30 **Go back to the early days again and have a chat about your father, you said that your father worked on the roads?**

Yeah that was when I was a little kid. And, did I tell you about going over with the sheep.

Was your father in World War I?

Yep.

01:00 **What did he do there?**

He was just an ordinary soldier.

Where was he?

He was in, around, now where was he? I know he was in France, yeah mainly in France. He was in France.

01:30 **Was he able to talk to you about the war at all?**

No the only thing he told me was up until eighteen he lived in Ballarat, the family. And down the road, (UNCLEAR) there's a tree there with his name on it, still there. That's about all he ever mentioned about...

02:00 **Apart from the famous sheep incident what are your strongest memories from childhood?**

Well school, High Street State School.

Tell us about that.

Well yes that's all right. I'm in the school,

02:30 there, state school. And the kid behind me whacked my back, and I must have had something because it started bleeding. So that was it and I was taken to a Chinese doctor and he did something, stopped the bleeding and so forth.

03:00 So that was that part of it. When we lived in, I can't think of the name of the street now, but there was a lolly shop next door, and then us and a couple of houses and a bakery shop around the corner. And us as kids, we used to hop on the back of the bakehouse

03:30 and that for a ride.

On the back of the baker's truck?

Yeah.

Pinch any bread rolls?

No, just the ride on there. In that era Christmas time came up and there was a spare room in the house

04:00 and we used to go in there and play. And this particular year this room was shut, we weren't allowed in there. It was just a few days before Christmas, so my sister and I we went around the side and jemmy opened the window and climbed in. And I hopped on this little toy truck and pedalled away yelling out,

04:30 "I've got a truck, I've got a truck." And my mother heard all of the commotion and she came in and she was laughing her head off at me riding yelling this out. This was a story she told me and that was it. I never got Father Christmas, I'd already got.

Christmas came a bit early in your house.

05:00 Was that, came, what's-a-name. Oh wait up. All the, gone again.

05:30 With crackers, fire cracker night. And we were all out in the street throwing crackers and so forth. And as a good boy in those days I put a cracker down a boys back, and he got burnt. And I got a hiding for that.

I'll bet you did.

And so,

Tell us a little bit about your circumstances around your move to Ballarat.

06:00 Well that was after them they lost their house. We was out at Barkstead and we moved to Ballarat. So I went to the Ballarat School of Mines and when, oh back in Sunshine where I was at school there, there was a teacher there I used to

06:30 hate him, sort of you know. And all of my learning was all there, couldn't be bothered doing and all that, I was always getting the straps and all that. But when I went to the Ballarat School of Mine instead of getting ten and twenty out of a hundred. I started there at the Ballarat School of Mine I was up in the nineties.

07:00 How did that happen? What was the difference?

Well the difference was the teacher. One the way they portrayed it and so forth. He used to talk too much in different and I didn't agree with him too much. And I was only right down low. Ballarat School of Mine soon straightened that out, I was getting nineties out of.

07:30 When you were in Ballarat dad had a gold mine?

Yeah that was when we were out from Ballarat yeah. Sixty feet down.

Did you ever get to go down the mine?

Oh yeah.

Tell us what it was like there?

Black.

Black, I figured that much. What sort of lamps did they use?

Just ordinary lamps.

08:00 You know and that. The funniest part on that. It was getting near the end of that and we were going to live in Ballarat, and we were out scrounging. Coming back from another place in the bush there, we used to go out

08:30 there, and the water was coming down. It was there, water, but someone's laid a trench down where the water used to wash down and look for gold in that. And so I'm, we're coming back from there and I'm walking through

09:00 and I find some gold on the surface. Little nugget. And yelled out to my father and grandfather, what I got. And so they came over and that became, they worked that for a while got a bit of gold, only surface. And that was when we moved to Ballarat.

09:30 Out of that was my father and grandfather went back home. But another person, they went and dug a little bit deeper than what my grandfather and father did and that became the Barkstead Goldmining and that lasted right through the fifties

10:00 and all of that.

So your dad and your granddad just missed out on it?

Missed out on it, they got all of the surface stuff, but it was deeper.

Did they make much money out of it though? Could you live off what they were making?

Oh yes.

Was it really good money they made?

Just normal.

And down in the mine were they digging through quartz, was it what kind of gold?

Yeah. The whole problem was, instead of going straight

10:30 down, they got to far out underneath you know. They'd get so far down and move over there you know. In other words the hole was from here to that and it was a bit unsafe at times. When you'd go down.

Did you have any cave-ins?

No not

11:00 in that respect.

Well that's good.

I've been back since but it's been a rubbish tip. Filled in with the local rubbish tip.

Were there a lot of people with little mines like that around Ballarat?

Around Ballarat yeah. But on the other side of Ballarat to what we were. See we were half way

11:30 between Ballarat and Dolther. And that was the way it was you know in those days. There was only fourteen, sixteen of us went to school down there.

Did you like the country life?

Oh yeah.

What sort of things would you get up to with kids in the country?

I better not start on that.

Go on.

12:00 What did I get to? Snakes. Go and get a snake and put a bit of string around it and put it in the grass and go behind the hedge or the shrub. And the women would start yapping away down the street pulled the snake across the road and they would go crook and scream out.

12:30 And so I got a few hidings from that. And when we were in Barkstead I picked up, I got a snake and put it in the teacher's cupboard.

A live snake?

Yeah.

What sort of snake?

Oh just a normal black snake you know.

You put a live black snake in the teacher's cupboard?

13:00 **what happened then?**

What happened? About twenty smacks. Put your hand out. Oh things like that, that was nothing unusual.

Did anyone ever get bitten by these?

No. Never. Another thing I used to do, because when we lived at Sunshine the railway, the Ballarat train used to run past our place. And I used to go out

13:30 and yell out "Paper, paper," and the people would throw out the local paper, all depends on which way the train was going you know if it was Ballarat paper or the Melbourne paper. Take that home. Go over the golf course on the other side of the creek and pick up golf balls and things like that.

Hopefully ones that are lost and not ones that are just.

14:00 Oh no.

So that's how you made some pocket money as a kid with golf balls and?

Things like that. Another time we, there... I had a little bike and I don't know if you know the place but the Maribyrnong River, and there's a train that runs though there and out to Sydney and there's a big,

- 14:30 across the river and that we used to go out there swimming. Ride our push bikes down, because you've got to go down a steep hill. So all the kids they used to get off their bikes and walk down the steep hill, but no not Arthur. This particular day I hung back, hung back, and the kids were further down,
- 15:00 my sister and so forth. So I hopped on my bike and started riding down the hill here I come, here I come. And got down near the water, the last part of it, hit a big stone and over into the creek. The river, Maribyrnong River. And my bike was all buggered up,
- 15:30 so I carried that home, got a hiding. As usual.
- So growing up in the twenties and thirties, what sort of memories of the Depression do you have, how that affected other people and the way of life?**
- Really a lot, the Depression
- 16:00 because my Dad and mother they lost their house. And it was a war service home, and they foreclosed on all the houses and that. So we went to Barkstead and when we came back, we went to live opposite the
- 16:30 railway line that came to Ballarat, and that's when I was walking along the train track and that and playing around. And I fall over and cut my leg on the track, I've still got the scar now. That's one of the things.
- 17:00 We used to go down, they had a creek there, a swimming hole. They used to have races and so forth. Across the creek.
- What about how the Depression affected the fathers and the families and that?**
- More the families and that. Didn't affect us, like us kids. We was well fed and that.
- 17:30 Used to get rabbits.
- Did you go rabbiting?**
- Yep.
- How would you get them, with a trap or ferret?**
- Trap, yeah. What else was there? Oh yeah that's another thing I done with the snakes. I come home and my mother gave me a bag
- 18:00 of beans and said to me will you take it up to Mrs, oh I can't remember her name now. So as a good boy I got it in there, put the dead snake in the bag. So I got up there and I said to Mrs, I can't remember her name now.
- 18:30 Anyhow, "My Mum sent some beans up for you," and she puts her hands in and get a hold of the snake and looked at it. And where'd she finish, down on the floor screaming her head off. So...
- I think before we go any further we've got to talk about your snake catching techniques because you must have caught hundreds. How did you not get bitten,**
- 19:00 **how did you catch them?**
- Well just with a stick, just give them a good whack behind the ear. Bang.
- And it was just black snakes? Or were there any tigers or brown?**
- Oh mainly black and that. They were quite easy to catch.
- Did you ever miss and have one turn around and try to bite you?**
- No, no. See which way they are, and they're going
- 19:30 and get on this side bang. No worries at all.
- Did your mum go off at you for killing snakes and...?**
- Oh she, yeah. I got more hidings than feeds I think.
- So lets roll on a few years, when you were in the final years of school, how old were you when you left school?**
- 20:00 Oh when I left school I was thirteen, yeah thirteen I was when I left school.
- And did you leave school to get a job?**
- Yes, well actually that bit there, I, it was Christmas time and it was a big shop like Myers, can't think of the name now.

- 20:30 And they wanted kids, they had Father Christmas and all of that and I was dressed up, and I used to have to call out The Raj of the Bong. And of course I couldn't say it properly and the people used to laugh and say, I had the crowd all around me. So that
- 21:00 gave me a job and I left school. And I went down, got this job at a place with all stationery, and people would ring up or firms would ring up and they'd want some stationary or whatever and I would hop on my bike and deliver it.
- 21:30 **And how much pay were you making as a thirteen year old there?**
- Oh just enough to give Mum some money. Twenty shillings I suppose.
- And you'd give it all to your mum?**
- Yep, oh not all of it, I kept a piece in my pocket.
- And what would you spend on at that age? Would you buy lollies [sweets] or?**
- Mainly lollies.
- 22:00 and that. And I used to go at Ballarat, I used to go around the lake where the lovers were down in the grass there, go there the next morning, you always pick up two or three dollars around. It wasn't dollars in those days, coins, where they used to...
- 22:30 that was a good catch.
- Good lord, you are a scallywag. So are your teenage years are passing by, are you following the progress in Europe of Hitler and his passage through other countries and his taking over other countries here and there?**
- No, I'm Australian so I don't worry about them.
- 23:00 **So what led you to join the militia then at the age of about fifteen?**
- Oh just because of other boys and that, mates. That was part of it.
- And what were you doing in the militia at that age? Would it be camps every few months or how would it work?**
- We used to do training on the Oakleigh Football Ground.
- 23:30 And across the road there was a big building, if it was raining we would go in there. So that was every Wednesday that used to be.
- And what would training consist of?**
- Oh just normal walking and so forth and doing what you were told.
- You wouldn't have been very good at that would you?**
- 24:00 **Doing what you were told?**
- No I had, and then we would go up to Seymour and have exercises up there and.
- Were you using rifles and so forth at fifteen?**
- Yeah.
- With live ammunition?**
- Yeah. And used to go for route marches from there from Seymour, right down towards Melbourne,
- 24:30 right around. Three day marches. And the cook would do our cooking, a civilian, so I had the job of working with them at times. And we were coming right around heading back to Seymour that way, and
- 25:00 we camped the night. And the cook there he had bottles of wine, so that was my first taste of wine.
- Was it a white or a red?**
- Red.
- Very nice, rough old red was it?**
- Yeah rough old thing. While we were there a fire broke out in the bush
- 25:30 and we had to go out and fight that. Things like that, that was all part of it.
- Did you think at any stage that the army might be a career for you?**
- Yes I did. Yeah. If it hadn't have been for the war I would have been definitely joined up in that.

And did you have any inkling as the years were rolling on that there might be a war?

26:00 Well no not then. But once the war started, when the war started I was living at home with my grandmother and that. And then I got called when war broke out, it was late at night

26:30 and I was put on stand-to duty.

What did that involve?

Well what it would have involved if we really got called out, we all got notified. And out there on the Frankston Dandy Road there was a big telephone place there, army stuff. And I thought

27:00 we might to have to go out there. But the Dandenong boys went out there. Got called in, so I missed out on that. That was when we, which was close on Christmas.

Was this 1939?

Yeah.

What was the, did everybody from the militia rush to join the AIF when war broke out, or many of you?

Well that's the funny thing,

27:30 yes and no is the answer for that. '39, Christmas time, you had the boys we went to, just after Christmas it was. We went training, and this is like February,

28:00 before this, first year. We went to do our training and there's only half a dozen of us there. "Where's so and so? Where's so and so?" "Oh he's joined the navy, he's done this." So that started us as going to join up myself. And there's another little instance there.

28:30 Why did the others all go? Oh no, that's another story. The, it was up at Seymour in the camp and this is just when it first started and

29:00 the colonel of there, we were all lined up and he said he's been picked to go to the Middle East, and I would like the company, the whole lot of us to go with him. And he said he had to set up the Egypt and so forth and he asked those in

29:30 favour to step forth. And he got the shock of his life when he said that, not one bugger stepped forward.

You were still militia at this stage?

So he blew himself out and he stamped off. And the sergeant major said,

30:00 "Well if anybody wants to go come down to the orderly office," and he went. So there was later on, two or three or four went over to the Middle East to set up the troops going over. And that was one of the disappointing parts of it.

And when you decided it was time to leave

30:30 **the militia you initially decided you wanted to join the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] didn't you?**

Yeah

Why was that?

Oh, I don't know I just wanted to try it.

And why wouldn't they have you? What was the teeth thing?

Because I had bad teeth.

But you don't fly with your teeth.

Well no just that, and I think they way, the questions they asked and so forth like that. And just not suitable.

31:00 And I didn't want to join the navy.

Why was that?

I don't like water.

So then it was the army, and why infantry?

Oh well that's what I was trained for and all that, in the militia. Simple as that.

31:30 **And what did your mum and dad think about you switching from militia to AIF?**

They didn't have a choice.

Were they in favour of it?

Oh at that time, my mother and father had broken up and so that's why I, it was one of those things and I was my own self.

32:00 **So tell us then you are about eighteen or nineteen at this stage weren't you?**

Yeah.

And you're off to train with the AIF, is this at Puckapunyal?

Yeah.

What sort of training, medical training did they give you there?

Oh the usual, how to treat people and things like that. A lot of that.

Describe that sort of training for us, what did it involve?

32:30 Oh it involved how to manage and that. What not to do, and take pressure.

Did you have to learn how to carry stretchers?

Oh yes.

What's, is there a technique with that?

Oh yeah.

Tell us about that.

You would have to make sure that, the whole point is

33:00 we did use stretchers, not in the sense that we had back at camp we would have stretchers and things like that and the wounded on them. But ninety per cent of the stretchers we had were home made stretchers in the bush.

And how did you learn, how did they teach you for those stretchers?

How to pick them up, where

33:30 and how to put a patient on a stretcher and things like that.

How do you do that?

Well you put the stretcher down and it all depends on what their wounds are and that. But you would have to grab by the feet and the shoulders and bring them over and lay them on the stretcher. Or

34:00 lift them up and put a stretcher underneath them. All depends on what the wounds are like.

And did you want to be an ambo [ambulance officer] or were you assigned to it?

No I was assigned, yeah. Had no choice.

Were you happy with that assignment though?

Oh yeah I was lucky. Because, that story part of it. Joining up at Melbourne Town Hall, I

34:30 got there and I still had no teeth and they put me to one side and I had to wait until midnight when they asked all of the questions and all that. And they put me in the, they said, "All right then we'll send you to Puckapunyal." I didn't

35:00 know where I was going. And I slept, instead of going home from Caulfield to Oakleigh I had to stop the night there, and they put us on a truck and up to Seymour.

So you didn't get a chance to go home at all from there, you had to go straight?

Yeah and then after I settled down there. It was only a week I went home for a day or a couple

35:30 of days. Oh that's another thing, I've got no teeth and lucky there was a dentist within the unit and he made my teeth, and I've still got them up in there.

That was my next question. I was going to say when did your teeth catch up with you?

So he made me a set of teeth, and I had them for years and years.

How

36:00 **did it feel, can you remember how it felt to put them in for the first time?**

No I can't remember any of that. Really.

What were you eating in those few weeks that you had no teeth?

Well that I couldn't tell you but you can bet your life I had a good feed.

Once you got your teeth?

No before then even that I was able to gum a few things and that. I was a good eater.

36:30 **I'll bet you were. No use doing all of that scrounging if you're not going eat it.**

Mainly scrounging stuff, and did I say when I was in Tobruk I...? I don't think I did tell you. We were going on the scrounge and there was an Italian there with a lot of fruit, tinned fruit and all that stuff. Tinned stuff. And four of us

37:00 one night, we go over and get under there and we come back with tins of fruit and so forth. And we started to come home, go back to camp. And we start having an argument, the four of us. Between us, two of them wanted to go that way and the other two want to go

37:30 this way. And I said, "Well you please yourself I'm going this way, who's coming with me?" So two of us we started off that way and the other two started off that way. And so next morning we're packing up the ship and so we're going back to

38:00 Alexandria and the other two hadn't turned up. And we packed their gear and all that, put it on the truck. And we're just about to move out when they turned up, and I was the corporal in charge of it, what do I do? Do I go

38:30 and tell them what's happened or give them a bit more time? So I left it as long as I could. So I'm just about to tell the sergeant major what's happened and they turn up. All the others are on the trucks ready to move, so they turned up. I got them in the truck with us.

39:00 "What happened?" And all that. And, "What's the smell on you?" Oh gee they stank. And anyhow they on a cross road there was a building and they went in there and stopped the night in there, but there was two dead Italians in there

39:30 in between them.

They just didn't see them in the dark?

They couldn't see them in the dark and that, they had no lights. So they walked back from there and just made it in time. So I've got them on there but I've already told the sergeant major that they was missing.

40:00 And next thing, "Oh here they come now, they must have gone for a walk." The two of them had gone for a walk somewhere, so they accepted that and nobody got hurt.

Very lucky. On that note Arthur.

40:20 **End of tape**

Tape 4

00:30 **I would like to start, if it's ok with you when you started off in the AIF. I just wanted to work out whether you had to get your parents permission to get into the AIF or..?**

No. No.

So you were old enough or...?

Thirteen, oh I wasn't quite thirteen.

Not the militia, I meant the actual.

Thirteen, I had my thirteenth birthday up at Puckapunyal.

01:00 **Ok. Well then I might talk about your leaving Australia or heading off, did you get, you got some leave before you headed overseas?**

Yes. A week.

And how did you spend that week, in relaxing at home or up to no good?

Oh I just carried on as usual. By that time I, no

01:30 I behaved myself. Yes it was nothing unusual for me to go to Dad's up at Oakleigh, or I mean going

home from the pictures run along bagging all the things up on the roof. You know the ants and all that.

02:00 You know bang bang. And there was a policeman who's a friend of my father, and this is out at Oakleigh, he said, "Right if you want to do that, go right around." So I had to run around and go over the hill and come back on the other side of the railway line.

02:30 And he said you've got so much time to do it. So I had to run all the way around, and then he said, oh before that he said, "I'll be there waiting for you to get back." So I got back and righto now home, bang. Bloody old foot in the

03:00 backside. So that's all right, he next day, next night should be my father said "You been naughty again," so I got a clip under the ear too from him. He said, "You don't do those things."

Were you parents the sort that lived with the fact that they had a naughty little boy or were they

03:30 **constantly trying to reprimand?**

No, no. I was just a naughty little boy I think.

I wanted to ask to, Oakleigh is now the home of many golf courses?

Yeah.

Were they built around, were they there then or were they built later?

Later.

Ok. So what sort of terrain was Oakleigh, was it houses or market gardens?

Market Gardens. Now where

04:00 Heatherton Hospital, you know down bottom, my grandfather was, he turned the first sod of that there. And helped to make that hospital.

Was he part of the council or?

No, no, no.

Was he just walking past?

He, they had cows there, where the golf

04:30 course is, they used to raise cows and stuff in there. They used to live, where was it? Opposite the street where the golf course is, there's a street there coming down, they lived on the corner of that street. I can't think of the name of it now.

You said you went to the Oakleigh RSL for dances?

Yeah.

05:00 **Did you run into many ex-serviceman from World War I?**

No.

They weren't around?

No.

Did you know anybody that had served in the First World War before you went overseas?

Only my father.

And he didn't tell you much about it?

Oh he told a bit, but nothing to really. You know.

What did he tell you?

Very little, nothing

05:30 really. Because he was wounded and he was in hospital in England. No he never spoke about it.

So when you got your posting and you got your final leave, did he have a word to you about what you might encounter overseas?

No, no. They were separated and he was living up in Ballarat.

06:00 And I went up, this is on my final leave. I went up to Ballarat and seen him. No, no. He was living in a hotel in Richmond and I went in there and seen him. He was an alcoholic, but

- 06:30 sent down not a book, a... can't think of what it was now. It'll come back again. Something, a keepsake anyhow.
- Ok, but you got to see him before you left though?**
- Yeah.
- 07:00 **And was he sad to see you go?**
- No, no.
- Was he worried for you?**
- No I don't think so, no. He was a ladies man. That was, he was a good dancer and that. He used to like the ladies to dance with you know. He used to, my sister and I used to go out and see him at
- 07:30 different times. And that's about all as far as that goes, you know.
- How about your mum then, she must have been a bit worried to see her only son go?**
- No, no. I think she did go crook at me, you know, "What do you want to go there for?"
- 08:00 I know I got into trouble when I got the doctor and dentist to come down and take my teeth out. She really blew the house down on that. It was too late but, they were here and that was it. But she knew that she couldn't do anything about it. It was all ordered and that.
- 08:30 **You left on the Mauritania and I've read that despite the fact that it was meant to be a secret departure, people just came for miles to wave you off?**
- That's right yeah.
- Did your mum and your sister come along?**
- No.
- Did they know that they had a chance to wave goodbye?**
- I don't know, no I didn't see them.
- It would be a bit hard to see them.**
- No, no. It was supposed to be a secret and we're
- 09:00 coming down the highway and there was still people, even before we got to Melbourne, people out on the road waving goodbye you know. And the wharf was full of people. We got on the Mauritania, was surprised how many people turned out you know,
- 09:30 to see us.
- And did you have any girls that you were a bit soft on at the time, that were there to wish you goodbye?**
- No, I had one girl I think, I used to go dancing with. I still see her now and again. No I was a very quiet boy in that respect. Although I was a
- 10:00 devil I wasn't interested in girls virtually only the dancing part of it.
- You didn't have one of those scenes where she's crying because she's going to miss you but you don't really care that much?**
- Didn't have any of that. And when I got onto the Mauritania I was right opposite the room of the dancing.
- 10:30 Right opposite, and a little room on my own. And so I got picked at on that, how did you get such a good...?
- How did you get such a good room?**
- Just allocated that was all.
- You didn't change your name or anything?**
- No, no.
- Put yourself up to lieutenant?**
- No.
- 11:00 **With this dancing, what sort of?**
- Old time dancing.

But they all had different names didn't they?

Oh yeah, You had all the different steps and all that names and all that.

So what music did you prefer the most, what big bands or?

Bands, oh normal dance music. You know. No, I don't know what sort of band it was.

11:30 **Was Glenn Miller [American band leader] around doing his thing?**

No. They was up in the corner and just normal music in those days, nothing spectacular.

Was there any music of any kind on the Mauritania when you sailed over? Did anybody have a wireless or a gramophone?

12:00 No, but the Mauritania itself had music. Right across from there, the dancing and playing up.

What did... they had a band or did they have recorded music?

I think it was only, they didn't have a band because that was closed off you know.

12:30 But they used to, we used to go in there and do things you know in the ballroom. Muck around in the ballroom.

How would you describe mucking around in the ballroom on the Mauritania?

13:00 Oh grab a boy, you'll be the girl.

Oh dancing you mean?

Yeah.

I thought maybe you were up to no good.

No, no no. Things like that. And they had a music, they would put it on, but no band. I don't know how they worked it. And we used to go in there. But not only that, lectures and things like that.

13:30 **What sort of lectures did you attend?**

Oh well telling you, training, you know. Dos and nots and all that. What you...

Give me an idea of what some of the dos were?

Oh well, how to put a patient on a stretcher and do all that stuff again. And what we were trained to do, we had to keep on going and that was all done in there.

Did some of the soldiers have to be the patients

14:00 **so you could practice on them?**

Yeah oh yeah. Someone would be patients and that.

Was that a bit hard to resist having a bit of fun there?

No, no. We were good boys there.

You didn't threaten anyone with an injury?

No. On our way across we got out in the heads and we picked up the Mauritania and the,

14:30 oh another big ship. Was going through the straits past that, and that's where they made me a corporal.

I'm curious about that, especially since you went up and down fifteen times. How did it come about, what had you displayed that had given them the idea that you could be promoted?

Just because my, I had

15:00 more experience than the others from my militia days. And I thought that would be why.

Were you pretty popular with your mates?

Oh yeah. Very. I only had one fight in all the years of that. He was half full and I

15:30 was in my cabin. And this was up in, where was this? Out from the, I don't know if I told you about that place. I can't think of the name of it now, it'll come. Anyhow

16:00 old Jim was laying on the bed and had a few beers and I went in and woke him up, and one of the other boys said leave him alone and carried on like that. And he throws a punch at me, so I went bang and whacked him. And the boys never said a word over that. White haired boy and no-one

16:30 else would hit him, but I did. Things like that, that was.

They made you lance corporal and your mates, were they impressed or did they give you a bit of drubbing?

Oh both. But I was a corporal, but I up, must have been in seven or eight times.

17:00 Down at least ten, seven or eight times or more down to a lance corporal, demoted. Then go back into action again, and I'd get my medals back again you know.

I wonder how the pay clerk kept up with you?

Bit of a worry.

How much of an increase was becoming a lance corporal from a private?

Only a couple of dollars, it wasn't much.

17:30 Paid shillings and pound those days. You might get, I should have brought my, I think it's up there. An old paper.

So the trip to India was it without incident or were you worried that you might run into some enemy ships?

No, no. When we got to Bombay, the only thing we had on our

18:00 minds was what won the Melbourne Cup.

Now did you all have a private bet?

No, oh yeah between ourselves.

Like a sweep?

A sweep yeah, in that. And the boys as soon as we got off the ship and all that was yelling out, "Who won the Melbourne Cup?" And so forth and then they put us on the train and went up to Deolali.

18:30 That was a British camp. And there's birds there, and you go up to have your meal and that, take you plate up and that. And you have to be careful, you're like this with your plate there and your food there. And your hand there, the birds will come and 'tch.'

What kind of birds were they?

Oh I can't think of their names now.

19:00 But they were big birds and they would come 'tck' and clean your plate.

I'm going to ask you about India in a moment, but I must ask, you said earlier on that Old Royally won the Melbourne Cup that year?

Yep.

Who did you have in the sweep?

Yep.

Oh you had him?

No I didn't have him. No no, I'll never, I don't think I ever won anything. I still don't.

19:30 I always pick the wrong ones.

So how did you feel about arriving in India, did you think it was just radically different from what you knew in Australia?

Oh yeah. Big difference. And when we came back, to go to the Middle East, we had a, we come down on the train

20:00 and we had a day's leave, oh you had to be back at the camp where we were waiting for the ship. A certain time. So we just had a glance around the wharf virtually and Bombay itself and then the ship came in and we were put

20:30 on it and that was it.

What did you make of the locals there in India?

Oh poor. Yeah in fact, hut city to us, the way they lived and what they. Because we were in, not only the bad part, when I say bad part

21:00 I mean where they had no food no, not like, when you go in further. Other parts of it where they're all well fed and the big places where you go in like fed and things like that. Well we had two days in

21:30 Bombay waiting.

Did you get to go and visit of any of the sites there?

Nothing there, there's no interest around the wharf and that.

Did anybody decide to go for a bit of a wander and end up AWOL there? Sorry AWL [Absent Without Leave].

No we only lost one boy or one man there. And he had to

22:00 go to hospital, sent back home.

Was he injured or did he just get sick?

He was just sick, something had upset him. It was only two weeks, all told in India. Two to three weeks.

And was it hard work there, or more of a holiday?

22:30 Holiday, that. And they, what do you call? Like Dandenong, shops, not shops the..? You had all the, you go into this

23:00 shed and you can buy anything.

Like Dimmeys [department store]?

Dimmeys yeah. And I did buy something; it's around the house somewhere.

Was it presents for home or was it for yourself?

No presents, couple of little presents. Mainly beads. Don't know where they are. Have you seen them? No, you haven't knocked them off?

And then the ship up to

23:30 **Palestine?**

Yep up the Suez Canal.

I'm always curious what it must have looked like the Suez, it's an incredible structure and..?

As we were coming through there, before we got into the Suez we had a plane came over and the

24:00 ship that was looking after us, they fired a couple of shots and got him down.

Did you see them get him out of the sky?

Yeah just seen it go down.

And what did the lads on..?

Oh, good, carried on. Mob watching. And then we got up to, oh what was the name where we got off?

24:30 Can't think of the name of it now. Anyhow we got off and they put us in these cattle trucks.

You mentioned earlier that unfortunately they were used cattle trucks?

Yeah dirty ones. And we were all going, "Moo, moo." And carrying on, got into a row over that.

Now if you're a lance corporal and all of the other lads started acting up?

I would go with them. In that respect.

25:00 **So what would your sergeant say to you in a situation like that?**

Oh just go crook, and you'll never learn and things like that. And shut them up you are supposed to look after them.

Poor old sergeants, they're a bit like your parents, I suppose?

Yeah that's right, but we never had any fall out like that. He always wanted you to,

25:30 I told you about pinching a motorbike. Didn't I?

Yeah you mentioned that you nicked a motorbike, just before we get there, where did you disembark in Palestine? Where did they send you to straight away when you went through the Suez?

After the Suez we went down to a place called Gulali. That's, now

26:00 what's the you've got the main part of the town and that. And then up where we were it's not, not Jews, Palestinians you know?

The other guys?

Yeah, but they

26:30 mixed. And later on when I came out of hospital there, that's when they, the Jews started coming into Palestine by the shipload.

From Europe?

From Europe yeah.

That must have been a bit interesting?

27:00 Oh yes, although we was too busy. I came out of the hospital and I went to a place way down the beach and I seen the ships coming in. And then I picked up the unit and went right up the coast right up to, oh what's the name of that town?

27:30 Oh we had there and then we had to. Two places we went to, I told you before but I can't remember now.

It might have been, I'm judging from your notes, it might have been Gaza and Tel Aviv?

Gaza and there and then we went up to the border.

So does it feel like you are getting quite close to the action at this point, or does it still feel like war is something far away from you?

No, no

28:00 I don't worry about it now. Haven't worried, you know.

But when you got to Gaza and Tel Aviv did you sense that it was getting close and you could tell a war was on?

No, no.

Still feeling like a holiday?

Yeah, it was a holiday. And then we, we got a bit of leave and you go down to around where Jesus was supposed to be

28:30 and was born and you have a look at that. But the whole trouble was you have an escort, they take you around. And this one will tell you this story and this joker will tell you his story.

You were saying that you were still having a bit of a holiday but then we discovered that you had a nickname at that point?

29:00 Mine? Couldn't tell you about many of them.

Give me an idea of one of them then. Racy? Gracie?

Yeah I was trying to think of it, Gracie Fields.

Did you get a lot of wolf whistles as a result?

29:30 Yeah.

Did they ask you to sing?

No they would want to. Although I sang in the choir.

Actually you were saying how all the guides in Bethlehem I take it or Jerusalem were giving you their different stories? Now you're a bit of a natural con and a bit of a scrounger, how did you find the locals in

30:00 **Palestine, you probably met your match there did you?**

Yeah they would come around, it didn't matter where you were, not in Tobruk and that. But you'd come out of there and you could go back to Egypt and that. They would come out of nowhere and they would have oranges or fruit,

30:30 but you wonder where they come from. Always had a basket of, they would come out in the desert.

How did your boys get on with the local Arab boys there in the desert, was it a sort of fair trading or was it a who could nick the most off each other?

No, fair trading I think there. See the truck would, you would be on a truck or

31:00 something and get along. And they've got fruit or whatever and you buy it off them and that was it you know. Oh that's another thing I didn't say did I? We was in,

31:30 when I come back. Yeah when we come back from Tobruk the first time I was sent down to the rubbish tip. And it was all the Arabs they was scrounging for food in the rubbish tip. And it was all our rubbish and that. And there

32:00 was English soldiers there too, but I couldn't take it. I was there a week, but I would allow them to pick up a bit of good stuff you know what had been thrown out, but the English, no not to do that. So I would sneak it out to them you know, over there. A truckload

32:30 would come in and they would all race to the truck, you know, want to go through it. I put a blind eye to it and let them go, so I didn't last too long on that job. Sent back to the unit.

Bit too compassionate for that picket?

Yeah.

Just before Christmas when you're knocking around in Jerusalem, do you have any idea how soon you are coming up for action, have they given you any warning?

33:00 No. None what so ever.

So you might as well have been just having the time of your lives?

We were. And I went down to, I don't know how I got there. Down to the river from Jerusalem, where the, was supposed to, the water, I went down there and they

33:30 in fact I, it's part of the Bible you know. And I went down there and seen that.

Do you want me to guess? Was it the River Jordan?

No it was like a big lake.

The Galilee, the Sea of Galilee?

It could be yeah.

You're testing my Sunday school knowledge here.

Yeah, something like that.

34:00 It's water and you get into it and you can swim and you can't drown in it.

The Dead Sea?

The Dead Sea that's it. Yep.

Now who are your mates at this point, who are you knocking around with?

Oh quite a few. No girls. Oh...

Although there was some decent brothels operating in Jerusalem as far as I'm aware.

Yeah that was up

34:30 near Syria.

But who are your good mates, have you got a couple that you do everything with?

Oh, well they're all gone. The ones that are there now, they are all A Company. As far as I can remember. I know there's one more, I can't remember. I think we were the only two left of

35:00 B Company.

And at Christmas time in Palestine, which of the fellows in B Company that are your good mates?

Oh when we was in Palestine we all formed up together and the

35:30 officers fed us and that.

On Christmas Day?

On Christmas Day. And that. The Wharf brother they were my mates, there is only one of them left. Now what was the others? They're all gone. Things like that.

36:00 **And on Christmas Day what did the officers give you for Christmas tucker?**

Proper Christmas dinner and everything like that. They waited on us. Cooks would cook the meal and they would come around and give it to you.

Were you polite to the officers that day or would you give them a bit of stick?

No, no. We were very quiet, I was too young and

36:30 didn't know nothing about it, sort of.

And it sounds like at this stage you are having a good time, are you missing your mum and your sister?

No. No. I used to write home, but just a little note you know, everything's ok and that. Sent photo's home.

37:00 Otherwise I was a loner in one sense and that. There's I met up, when I come out of hospital there, there was one lad he wasn't in our unit. But I met him at the two-up

37:30 school, and he said what about we go to the concert. And this is in Jerusalem. Or just out of Jerusalem. And because I was never into that sort of thing you know, I went with him and that's when I became a very good boy who used to like

38:00 what's-a-name music.

So you hadn't been interested in music until then?

That's right.

Can you recall what sort of music they played that you liked so much?

Oh all the good stuff. Like you name it they played it. Off hand I can't.

Because you liked dancing already.

Yeah and I like going to the opera.

38:30 **How lovely.**

So that was my first opera that I ever went to.

Can you recall, was it just soldiers putting on a concert or were they touring from somewhere?

Oh no it was the Jews and...

It was a local concert.

It was local yeah.

Ok we've got to change tapes.

38:57 **End of tape**

Tape 5

00:31 The second time we went by, I went by ship, some of them went by trucks.

You went by ship to Tobruk?

The second time.

Now were the seaways getting a bit dangerous at that point?

Oh yes very much so.

So was that a bit dangerous for you going on that ship?

Yes.

Did you see anything in the water?

No, no

01:00 We was on the lookout but we were quite safe you know. The others, the ones that went by truck they just made it. They were the last ones to get into Tobruk for the siege. But we went by boat and we was lucky because nothing happened.

01:30 **And was it not long after this that you began this deadly game of grenade toss to toss?**

Yeah that was the first time we went in.

When you got to Tobruk the first time and you were having a look around, who lobbed the grenade the first time at A Company?

No A Company did, but I couldn't tell you who it was.

And how far away from the grenade were you when it went off?

Oh about from here to the wall.

02:00 And that, dodged it and away it goes. They were only little hand grenades.

They can still blow a leg off can't they?

Yeah. Did I tell you that time about getting all the money.

Yes you did, but I'll ask again about the money and I want to ask about the motorbike as well. But with the grenade throwing, was there an officer in cooee [within hearing] of what you were doing?

Yes afterwards.

02:30 When it was all going off and a couple of them got wounded and they, not seriously but, one of the officers come down and stopped us.

They must have torn strips off you, those of you that didn't already have strips torn off you?

Oh yeah, they'd go crook and things like that. Go back to work.

03:00 **Not to be a kind of a parent here but did it not occur to anybody that you might have killed somebody?**

No, no. Didn't think about that.

Did you throw any yourself?

No I didn't I was a good boy there. But they was, they got there before we did, you know. And that's when they started and we had

03:30 to go out in the desert and there was a lot of Italian wine. Barrels of it. So we rolled them back into the camp, we was in a dug hole and that, with a tent over the top of us. And

04:00 we rolled it and dropped it in there. So we had plenty to drink, too much. And I was, my crew, I was sent out with an axe and that, all the barrels we could find, the sergeant major was with us.

04:30 And all the barrels we could find we had to put an axe through it and let it all run out into the desert. And here we are crying. Virtually, you know.

Did you get any punishment?

That was our punishment, to go out and get rid of it all.

That must have hurt?

It did. But we still had some left in our tent or...

That they didn't find. So there's already been a fair bit of action happening in Tobruk

05:00 **and I guess that first battle has occurred and the Italians surrendering?**

Yeah.

So I'm curious though in all these shenanigans that you managed to get up to, were you actually doing any work as an ambulance officer, or has there been none requested of you yet?

There hasn't been any requested of it. You know. Mainly.

So you really are the epitome of idle hands getting up to the Devil's work?

Yeah definitely.

05:30 There's another little thing. We, there was three of us was out on the scrounge and a plane comes over to drop some bombs on us or near us or so forth.

An Italian or a German?

A German, this is the German one. So

06:00 myself and Reg Harry we got into a little hole and looked over there, there's, what's his name? Oh Titch Patty and he's in a little hole there. And about from here to the far wall between us, and he up

06:30 and running over to us. And I yell out to him, "Get back in there you silly bastard," and so forth and he

yells out, "No, there's a snake in there." And I, so anyhow by this time they've dropped a couple of bombs down.

How close did they land to where you were?

Oh, too far away to

07:00 hurt us, you know. It would be from here to a couple of doors down.

And would this be the first time you've seen some fairly nasty activity?

Yeah.

Did it give you pause for thought about what you were doing over there?

No. But that's, oh that's another story. Anyhow Titch when I yelled out to him and all that to get out of it. We went back and went

07:30 crook at him. Oh he yelled out, "There's a snake in here," and that's what made him jump up, there was a little snake about that long. So we laughed about that you know.

Did you kill it for him?

Pardon?

Did you get rid of it for him?

Oh definitely, showed him how to kill it.

Well with you being the big snake Svengali.

Yeah, now after that,

08:00 what happened the..? Did I tell you about getting covered in oil?

Yeah but I wanted to ask you about, you say when you are going out on a scrounge, do you tell your sergeant you are going out for a while or do you just nick off?

No, just nick off. You wouldn't go that far you know. Just scrounging around, right around. You knew the safety parts and

08:30 not allowed in that area, so you'd be looking for trouble if you did certain areas.

So what's going on in the area where you are? Is it just the Australians in the camp or are you anywhere near the Italian POWs [Prisoners of War]?

Yes, the first time.

Did you go over and visit them?

No. We kept to ourselves. And they were about from here

09:00 to the shop down the corner, Corrigan Road.

And could you hear them of a night?

No it'd be very quiet of a night time. You know as far as noise and things like that. It was very close to the beach and we used to go down to the beach and have a swim.

Was it like an Australian beach or was it not as good as that?

Oh very much like an Australian beach, you know the waves coming in.

Soft sand

09:30 **or pebbles?**

Soft sand in parts.

And what about any medical work, were you ever called upon to go and assist any of the POWs?

No, the POWs no.

Were you doing any field dressing?

Field dressing, yes. You know, like when we was up Shaggy Ridge area we were sent up to another town further up.

10:00 And we set up camp there and we got, Shaggy Ridge over there we were coming in the back way. And we were there for two days and we were sent back home. Everything was safe. Did I say about the raid? The terrible raid?

The German raid?

Not the German.

10:30 That was up at Shaggy Ridge.

Well let's just stick with what's going on at Tobruk at the moment. Have you set up a regimental aid post, or a field hospital at all?

Yeah, yeah, oh yeah.

And do you have to regular work in there and keep your training going, in between going out?

No I would be going out and things like that.

11:00 And making places for, set up a camp for where you go to the toilet, make a toilet and things like that. Done a lot of that. Things like that.

And while you were in Tobruk the first time was there any action that you were a part of?

11:30 No not really. No, nothing really it was just only the... We set off. When we first went there, there was a big gun facing Tobruk, down there. And myself

12:00 included we turned it around out the beach, not the beach, out there in the bush. Of course there is nothing there, only a few little things. And we fired. So I got in a row over that. You should have more sense and so forth. So I was demoted for that.

Busted back to private then or just to lance corporal?

12:30 Down to lance corporal. One step lower. Lost a bit of money in my pay book.

Well you certainly paid for your fun.

Oh yeah.

After the first round of battles in Tobruk they sent a lot of Australians over to Greece, were you a part of that?

No, we was on our way to Greece but we got sent back.

So you got orders to go?

Yeah.

And?

We come out of Tobruk

13:00 and we had to change all of our gear, a lot of our gear. And put it away.

Sorry what sort of gear did you have to put away?

Oh medical stuff, you know and that. Because we could get that, had that over there.

And who do you hand that back to when they tell you to do that?

Oh another company who is taking our place.

13:30 Mainly little things and that like tents, things that we don't want over there because that's all on the ship we come off. But we were on our way, and it was a wonderful sight at sea, the British naval ships,

14:00 they are all coming towards us, and then the next thing they are all flashing lights and that. And the, we got shoved back.

Were you up on deck and could see that?

Oh yes, yes.

Did you have any idea what was going on?

No only that these ships were all in formation

14:30 and then they are all coming towards us, and then the signal comes to our ship to turn around and go back. And which we did.

And was there panic stations on deck?

No, no panic stations but there was the question of why? What's going on? And so Greece, Tobruk, the Germans were coming down into

15:00 Tobruk and so we had to go back into Tobruk. So we went to our old camp and picked up the gear what

was left behind, all of our stuff for that type of fighting. And I went to Tobruk by ship, but a lot of the others went by train.

Right this is the second time when you got back there?

Yes.

So was there any danger in disembarking from the ship after the trip

15:30 **to Greece, the aborted ship to Greece? Was it dangerous getting off that ship back to Egypt?**

No trouble at all because we had the English ships with us. And then we picked up, all what we had put in we picked that up. And the others all went by train out to Tobruk.

16:00 And I was one of the... that went up by ship. So the unit was the last to go into Tobruk, and the ones that went up by truck and that.

Now the Germans would be fairly hot on your heels I imagine?

Oh yes they were. That's what... and the unit

16:30 was the last ones to go into to Tobruk before the Germans got around the other side.

Could you visually sight them?

No no.

Couldn't see them?

See I was on the ship and I was, the others got into Tobruk and I got into Tobruk at night time, in the dark.

17:00 **Now what sort of soldier were you under those conditions? Did you have your wits about you?**

Oh yes.

I'm assuming you weren't armed as part of the Red Cross?

No we weren't armed at all.

Did you wish that you were armed?

No it didn't worry me, I didn't think of it.

So you were comfortable that you would be looked after by the others?

Yeah, you knew what was going on. That was the main thing. And what you had to do,

17:30 and all that business. Go down to the sea and have a swim and things like that. And then you get told to go out somewhere and pick up some wounded and bring them in.

I wanted to know when was the first time you had to go out and pick up wounded?

18:00 **Was it then on that second trip back to Tobruk?**

Yeah on the second trip.

So it's fair to say that's when the war really started to kick in?

Yeah. The first time was games, you know. You was your own boss and you could do what you like and that. As I said all the Italians put their arms up. There's two armies,

18:30 you had the Italians run by king of there, and the other is by, oh what was his name? There was two armies actually fighting in the first there. So

19:00 a lot of them, all the ones that was the King's Army, they all come out to Australia. Up at the, put in the fields for all the fruit you know.

All the immigrants after the war?

No this is during the war.

Sorry.

And the other army of course was the

19:30 crook ones, they was put in, up in a camp in New South Wales, separated out there.

The difference between the conscripts and the volunteer. I wanted to ask you what it was like going on that first experience to collect the wounded under what would probably be heavy gunfire?

- 20:00 No wasn't any gunfire in that respect. We used to be able to go out and get them in, and oh I think it was. In there, Tobruk I didn't come under any gun fire. I would go out and we would bring them in but.
- 20:30 **Oh ok, so were you ordered to wait until the action was over?**
- Yeah, virtually yeah.
- And what was that like the first time you went out and collected the wounded?**
- A bit hairy because you're worrying about what was going on. But that's where your training came into in and you put what you learnt on what's around you and that.
- 21:00 **Did you think your training had been good enough?**
- Oh yes. Very good training.
- And did you go out on foot or in a truck?**
- Sometimes in a truck or in an ambulance or sometimes just our on foot and bring them in. it all depends on where it is and that.
- So you could give me a blow by blow description of going out to get the wounded and what you had to do immediately and how you brought them back again?**
- 21:30 Yes, you would go in, and you were very alert of what's around you and that. And you would also know where the soldiers are, the fighting soldiers, you know where they are. And they would tell you where it is, or they would bring one back or two, whatever. Back to you as you were coming in.
- 22:00 Their mates would bring them in. Certain point and we'd pick them up and take them in to the hospital.
- And what was that like picking up wounded soldiers, were they crying in pain?**
- Not really. They mainly asleep virtually. The serious ones, well you'd say, "The poor bugger,
- 22:30 he's not going to last," and you'd get him back as quick as you can. To the hospital.
- Could you tell fairly soon into the piece the difference between a man who was going to make it, and a man who wasn't depending upon their wounds?**
- Yes definitely, you'd say, well, "That poor bugger." Like the English soldier. He had no hope.
- So did you field dress them at the front line or did you**
- 23:00 **bring them back straight away? Did you have to choose between?**
- Yes, oh yes, sometimes. All depends, if they're badly wounded you try to get them in as quick as possible. The others are just minor injuries get them to walk in.
- So was that the first time you experienced say the sight of a dead person or?**
- 23:30 No I'd seen quite a few before.
- Oh ok but in the war or before the war?**
- No, in the war and that and you leave them there. Or get them out and bury them, things like that. And then they get picked up later. Put a barrier and mark it
- 24:00 and then when it's all finished they get picked up and put in the cemetery.
- I imagine the Middle East would be hard to dig graves, the ground would be quite tough.**
- Yes it was there.
- So what about carrying these poor soldiers back to receive medical care? The ones that weren't unconscious?**
- Oh yeah, yeah. They wouldn't be unconscious, you could talk to them, if they're unconscious they wont speak.
- 24:30 So it was as simple as saying to yourself, "Oh this bugger's not going to make it," or, "This one will."
- And did you develop a way of keeping the men's spirits up? Were you good at jollying them along? They're going to be ok?**
- 25:00 Oh yes, "Everything is ok," that's what you always say.
- What would you do, would you make little jokes with them?**
- Oh yes make jokes with them and that. Or talk to them about where they come from you know. Where they lived, are you married? You know you'd find out all of those things. "Who's your girlfriend," you'd

say to them, "Have you got a girlfriend?"

- 25:30 All depends, get them as quick as possible down into the hospital. And then they in Tobruk there was a big hospital, and then the ships used to come in of a night time in the dark and there'd be food and all that stuff and they'd bring it in. And the ones that were being shipped back to Alexandria and that, the bigger hospital
- 26:00 they would start on one part of the ship and unload that first and get the other half of the ship where they wanted, fill that up, they're coming in so you've got to virtually in a circle, and then you've got to sneak off in the dark. Everything had to be done in the dark. They'd
- 26:30 come in in the dark, twelve o'clock or two o'clock in the morning. And they had to be out within an hour, unloaded and out. We didn't lose any ships, what I know of. But that's one of those things that, you'd start, you'd go in there and then back and around that way, you know.
- 27:00 **So you took part in evacuating the men?**
- Yeah.
- Now I'm sure you had to learn a professional way of, I guess it's called detaching, moving on. But in the early days when you were doing your work did you find yourself, I'm just wondering in the early days whether you,**
- 27:30 **if there were any soldiers that were special to you that were say perhaps some of the first guys that you carried back?**
- No, you'd carry them back and get them back and you'd forget all about them.
- There was no one that you kept enquiring about to see if he'd made it or?**
- No, only myself.
- 28:00 **Well how about the other guys you were working with, how did you keep each other going? Did you, you know shout a few jokes across?**
- Oh yeah, we did that. But you had to be careful, you had to be careful that you didn't yell out too much because everything was quiet between each other. You know you'd pass something over to them quietly, and that's when you're out. When you're down the beach it's a different thing.
- 28:30 **And how long did the siege of Tobruk last, how long were there working?**
- Oh now, that's, I came out in, second time I was in hospital for a fortnight three weeks in Tobruk and then sent down to an English hospital and
- 29:00 then across to the Australian hospital. Virtually when they found out, an Australian doctor, Lamarack, Dr Lamarack in our unit he was the one that diagnosed all my trouble.
- Was this with the tick bites and all that?**
- Yeah this was the tick bites. And he diagnosed everything and
- 29:30 passed it all on. And that's when, because my temperature was going up and up all the time. Lucky he worked it out and put the message through.
- Were they pretty, they can be fatal ticks can't they?**
- Yeah they can be.
- Before you get there I just wanted to ask you, about you getting covered in oil. It must have been about this time that you went to El Adem corner?**
- We... coming back.
- 30:00 We delivered some patients. And when the bombers come over and started dropping bombs, and we got out of the ambulance and got behind in these old trucks what had been bombed before, and got down under them
- 30:30 but when we went for a dive under them, not realising that it was all oil underneath and we were all covered in oil. So before we could get back into the ambulance we had to de-louse ourselves and wash all that off us, you know, get it all off.
- Were you carrying anyone at the time?**
- No we were coming back.
- 31:00 We had been to the hospital and we were coming back to our base.
- And was that plane bombing you specifically or were you just part of the terrain it was having**

a go at? Was it watching your truck move?

Because you must remember in Tobruk we had no planes.

The Australians? No.

31:30 **Germans had too many though.**

Yeah they had all the planes and they would come over and drop a bomb here and there and like that.

No I just wondered because it's a bit rich, you know you would have had a red cross on your ambulance?

Oh yes but they took no notice of that, the Germans.

Did you in your travels ever come into contact with any of the Germans?

No.

32:00 **Ok, now what about their propaganda machine, I'm sure you would have picked that up from time to time?**

Oh at different times. Lord Haw Haw [German propaganda broadcaster], he used to broadcast every night and tell us, "You've only got another day to go," or silly things like that. We're going to do this to you.

Where would you go to listen to him?

32:30 **Where was the wireless for that?**

That would be all over the, right through Tobruk the Germans would have it in part there. Like a big loud speaker. We used to look forward to it and laugh at a lot of it.

Did you ever, I realise it was funny and you all probably had a good laugh together, but underneath that did you worry that

33:00 **maybe he knew more than you did and you were in deep...?**

Yeah, oh I suppose we did in one sense. But, because we used to say you won't beat us you know sort of thing. Because we was lucky to be able to see what's coming

33:30 you know, and where to go.

And during your time in Tobruk, did any of your mates cop it, you know get wounded in the field?

No, not that I know of. I was the only one that got crook.

The tick bites?

Yeah.

How did you, was that even an itchy thing or was it a sickening or?

Sickening.

34:00 **Were you vomiting a lot?**

No just pain mainly, and that.

In your joints?

Yeah mainly in the leg here.

What did you think it was in the beginning, what did you think you had?

Didn't know. Had nothing, all I knew was that all around the old fellow was all sore and that. And these little things were.

34:30 **Were you worried that if you went to see the doctor that they might think it was venereal disease or something?**

No I was just worried about is that the, what it was. And they put me in the hospital and then that night I think it was two days or one day in the hospital. One or two days and they sent me to an English hospital

35:00 in Alexandria. And from there I went to an Australian there and that was when doctor, he worked it all out and sent the message what it was.

Can you recall talking to him?

No, no.

Ok and the nurses that looked after you, were you able to talk to them and..?

Oh yes yes.

35:30 **And I believe after reading about them that they were just incredibly professional.**

Yeah they were. I would like to have met them after you know. The one that looked after me or the two of them you know.

So did you never work with nurses or any of the VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachments] over there?

We were distant from them. Other boys, A Company, not B Company,

36:00 A Company mainly. They were the headquarter company.

So they were the orderlies?

They were the orderlies with the nurses.

And I think at some stage after that they were evacuated anyway.

They wasn't in Tobruk, or some of them was in Tobruk and they all got evacuated in the end. And when we had nurses, we had

36:30 nurses up with us, what was the name of that place? Before we went up to, at the school. We took over a school.

Oh yes you took over a school. Look before you went there, I wrote down where you went before you, it was Aleppo where you went.

37:00 **But before you went there I guess it was not long after you recovered you were in a morgue, and that was where you did that post mortem. I'm a bit curious and I guess it's a bit morbid, bit I'm a bit curious to learn what that was like, having to do a post mortem and why they did...**

Well the officer who done it, he done all that part of it. I only had to clean up afterwards. And,

37:30 **So you weren't there while they did everything?**

Oh yes I was there and watched everything.

What was that, tell me what they did? Like where did they start cutting and?

Oh just right through. Just start from there, see and that. Where he, if he had a wound and all that we'd strip him right out and then do a post mortem on him, on what he actually died of.

So he was a French soldier?

French soldier.

Vichy or?

No,

38:00 he would be a French. He... not Vichy French.

An Ally?

Oh yes he was on our side.

And did he not have a wound on him that?

No, oh no. Grog.

So did you see the liver?

Yep, pulled it all out.

38:30 **What did it look like?**

Oh you know what it usually does. What you get from the butcher. And pretty much, I was just standing back for all that one. Cut him right down the middle and opened him all up and checked what it was, and what's he's been eating and drinking or whatever.

Could you tell what he had been eating?

Yeah they could tell what he'd been eating.

What had he been eating?

Oh I can't remember now.

39:00 But all that and then, put my hands together. And all that because I was only looking along and then he put it all back together again and he said, "It's all yours, and you've got to clean everything up."

You must have very strong intestinal fortitude.

39:30 And that was no trouble to me at all, because I had seen so much.

Did you give him a name, this French guy a sort of a nickname?

No. Just gone you know it was just another thing. And in fact when I came out of the army and that, only for my knees and that I was going to go for a medical

40:00 and all of that, but I just couldn't. Put that one aside.

Tape 6

00:31 **Syria, at a place called Aleppo you took over an Italian hospital?**

Yeah that's right.

Can you tell me what the Italian hospital was like?

Well it was divided into two things, the hospital where you looked after, and the school which was right next door to it was there. So Christmas time

01:00 we gave all the kids a party. And the hospital was run by Cortis like the unit. And as I said before I had to go to the two brothels each week. Go to Madam Lola one week, this week and the other one the next week. So

01:30 wasn't getting to, with the girls.

Oh right. Just wanted, I do want to talk about the brothel story, but I wanted to ask you about the hospital first. Was it a well equipped hospital?

Yes.

So the Italian medical equipment was as good as?

Ours, yes, as far as I was concerned, because I wasn't in there.

And with the school, is this Syrian kids in the school?

Yes.

Tell us about the Christmas

02:00 **party you gave for them, that must have been a real thrill for them?**

It was for the kids. We gave them a Christmas gift.

What sort of gifts?

Oh whatever we like. I think headquarters, we had to put some money in and they bought everything and gave them to the kids.

Would it be little toys or food?

A bit of everything.

02:30 There should be a photo up there of it.

We'll have a look at that later on. And this was your second Christmas away wasn't it?

Yeah.

Were you starting to feel a bit lonely or a bit homesick?

No, definitely not.

Happy as a pig in proverbial?

Yeah, and I played a lot of football.

What sort of position did you play?

Oh what was it? Mainly goal kicking.

03:00 You know kicking goals in that section.

So full forward?

Yeah.

Basing yourself on the old Jack Collins from Footscray days?

Yeah. Bang, bag.

Where were you staying in Aleppo, in tents?

No in a hospital, not a hospital but in a building across the road from the hospital. And

03:30 we were, or I was. And the others, there was another section for the other lot.

So was it a building like a block of flats?

Yeah like a flat. And two storey and I was on the bottom row, and I was only like a kinch there so I slept on that. Made it up, sleep on there.

04:00 **Better than a tent?**

Was better than a tent yeah.

Now with this Italian hospital around and the fact that the Italians had been there recently, was there much scrounging to be done in Aleppo?

No.

None at all?

Didn't look for it.

Not even for a professional scrounger like yourself?

No, mainly I was getting a good boy by that time and I would go to the pictures

04:30 and things like that of a day time. Play football.

So there wasn't much going on really in Aleppo?

No not much.

Not many wounded coming in?

No. Only on, so that. Aleppo was very quiet place. In fact one of the boys he married

05:00 one of the girls there.

Let's talk about the girls. There were two brothels?

Yeah.

Did the madams approach the army to say, "Look we need a picket on each one," or did the army approach the brothels and say, "Here's a man for you, and here's a man for you?"

No, it was very specially run, because it's a French country.

05:30 And so you had the, our doctors, Australian doctors would go in and test all of the girls. One week, or it might be two or three weeks and the French doctor would come in and see that everything was all right there. Very well run thing.

And they were all French girls were they?

No a mixture.

06:00 **And what was the price?**

Oh that I couldn't tell you because I don't know. They paid to the girls but I had nothing with that I only had to give out the condoms and so forth and put their number down. See it was

06:30 your number, we say in the... They'd come in and they'd only give a number on the vehicle on what they're working so you've got a... each vehicle has got a number

07:00 and you would just give that number and that would be written down.

Were you paid any extra for that duty or was that a guard duty?

Just part of guard duty. No extra.

Any bonuses or perks?

Oh there could have been if I wanted, but I wasn't interested in it. We used to laugh, they used to pick at me and I know some of the other boys took advantage.

Now these boys you are with in the western

07:30 **desert, are you still with the 6th Division at this stage?**

No, 7th Div [Division].

7th Div in Syria wasn't it?

Yeah.

Was there much difference in the Divisions? Was the 7th Div different kinds of guys to the 6th?

No not really. When we got to the Middle East and that we were 6th Div. And then a change came and the

08:00 ones that were over in England they came and became 7th Div to make up the numbers and so forth. So we had 7th Div, oh part of 6th Div because everything was in fours, and then they changed it to threes, so you had three of everything.

08:30 So the one that we were in became the third division, you know, they come into our category. That later, or the ones going to, where they all got caught? Gee I'm terrible with names.

09:00 **That's all right, are we talking Middle East?**

No. In Asia.

Java?

No there were some in Java but the others all got caught in...

Singapore?

Singapore. And that was 8th Division, so you've got the 6th Division, the 7th Division and the 8th Division. That's how it was. Was broken up.

09:30 But you know it's a... but we being 7th Div, we was made 7th Division. And there was not very much difference in the structure. We had the same numbers and all that.

Because I just asked that question because I heard

10:00 **that a lot of ne'er do wells were drafted or coerced to go into the 6th Division initially. A lot of guys who were in trouble were encouraged to join the army or go and serve for a while. I was wondering what kind of fellows they were.**

Don't know, I didn't come in contact with them much.

Ok.

Because they all went to, they were in what's-a-name.

10:30 The 6th Divvy and they went to Greece and got caught, most of them. Some of them escaped, that 6th Division was virtually non-existent.

And continuing the brothel story,

11:00 **was that a tough job? Did you have to turn away a lot of drunk fellows that caused a bit of trouble?**

No. They wasn't allowed in if they were drunk and things like that. Wouldn't serve them.

Would the girls make you something to eat while you were there?

No. Straight in straight out sort of. And the girls would come and pick up the, you would pick up who

11:30 you wanted and then the girl would come over to me and put down the particulars. She would go away and do the job and then she would bring him back and I would fill in the paperwork. And then she would go back and have another customer.

Were the brothels run by the army then?

Yes.

Did the army make any money out of them?

I don't think so, it was just a matter of

- 12:00 the girls making the money and we looked after them made sure everything was clean and that. And after we finished at ten o'clock the sergeants and all the top dogs would come in. We were sent home and it was taken over by one of the officers.
- 12:30 **What about the fellow you said that married one of the girls?**
- Yeah.
- How did that happen over there?**
- Well he met this girl at the pictures, sitting alongside of her. And he started with her and he proposed to her and they lived up
- 13:00 the top of Victoria. His father had a, what was it? A farm, and he took over that later on.
- Did he marry her over there or did he bring her back here and marry her?**
- I don't know.
- 13:30 But I've got an idea he married her over here, he brought her out. But then thinking of it I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't, if he went back over there and married her and brought her out to Australia. I couldn't say definitely on that.
- This is Christmas 1941 we're talking isn't it?**
- Yeah.
- So around just before that the Japanese had bombed Pearl**
- 14:00 **Harbor and had started to invade Malaya and Thailand. Did you guys hear about that news straight away?**
- Yes. That's when we were packed up and raced straight over here.
- Did you think, were you afraid Australia might be invaded before you got back, did you think that might happen?**
- No, didn't know what was going on. All we knew was pack up get over as quick as you can through the desert. Non-stop virtually.
- 14:30 And hop on the Tacklewar at Bombay as I said before. We come right around into Adelaide and took the train home from there.
- Were any of the other blokes worried about Australia, about their wives or mothers, daughters?**
- Oh that I couldn't say. Although we were close there, they didn't
- 15:00 say much about their wives or things like that.
- And were you on your way to Java before you came to Australia?**
- Yes.
- How close did you get?**
- Well there was three in the convoy, and one ship went in and they all got captured,
- 15:30 and the other ship was waiting to go in, waiting with us. And when they got caught we got signals get out quick. And we went out to Colombo refilled and came around to Adelaide.
- Very lucky there were no Japanese warships around at the time.**
- Yeah that's right.
- I'm just trying to imagine those poor blokes who go in on a ship and then as soon as they...**
- 16:00 Got caught. Yeah, it was very...
- How did that make you lot feel?**
- Well to tell you the truth we were out from it all, we were out waiting to come in with the others who had got there before us. And we was, like every time we would always be last.
- 16:30 So that's all we knew that they had been captured and to high tail it straight back to Colombo. Refuel and come up into Adelaide.
- Was it a thrill to get to Adelaide?**
- Yes we enjoyed it very much. Coming through the Bight, we had a scare, a submarine was

17:00 knocked out by a ship, two of them. One at the front and one at the back.

Which ships were they, can you remember?

No I couldn't remember now, probably written down somewhere. Probably in the book. That's about all there. I told you when we got to

17:30 Adelaide and we had a bit more training there and we settled down and then we went home for leave. And one of the boy's wife comes with a baby.

That must have been shocking?

Shocking. It was.

Did you see them when they met on the station?

Yeah. And he went mad.

What did he do?

18:00 Oh just running around and bashing her and told her, "It's not my baby. You're not my wife." So we grabbed him and took him to one side and told him to go home to his mother.

And what did she..? Did she just leave?

Yeah he left.

But did she just leave, did she just go?

Well she was carrying on and one of the A Company boys grabbed a hold of her, someone

18:30 that knew her and knew where she lived, he took her home. But the other boys, the whole lot of them, didn't worry me. But a lot of them was upset, the married ones, and they didn't know what they were going to get when they got there, the married ones. And they were all this getting upset.

19:00 **I bet it made them think.**

Yeah. But..

Bit of a sad homecoming.

Yeah very sad. And it didn't worry me. But I had to comfort some of them. And of course they lived all over Melbourne and that. And I lived at Oakleigh. Went out to Oakleigh and everything was all right at home, I knew it would be. Because being a single joker, not married.

19:30 **This fellow whose wife had come out with the baby, when the unit reformed was he a changed man?**

Oh very much so.

What was he like?

Well he wouldn't have anything to do with women. And things like that. He was in A Company, I didn't see much of him after that you know, other than when we all got together.

20:00 **You always think of leave as a happy time, but I'm sure there must have been many times when leave was a terrible thing.**

Yeah that's right it was, at times you wanted to get back to your unit quicker.

How did you feel when you were at Oakleigh, did you have itchy feet, did you want to get going?

Yes I did. Because I was one of the leaders to go up

20:30 to Tenterfield, so I went up to Tenterfield and then I went back on leave. When the others had and that.

So you didn't take full advantage of your leave initially?

No.

You were that itchy to get going?

Yeah. See where we were going.

And while you were in Adelaide were you sick at all?

Yeah I had an abscess on...

That's right a boil on your neck didn't you?

21:00 Yeah.

You copped a lot of injuries and infections and things?

Yeah that's, right I did.

And while you were up at Queensland, up at Tenterfield, did you go somewhere else?

Yes we went to oh what was the name of the place. A hospital there.

I think I wrote it down before, Killaroy?

21:30 Yeah, Killaroy, yeah.

And that's where you had..?

Yeah I done my knee, no my foot. Kicking a football.

Kicking a football, you did your ankle?

Yeah.

Football was not a kind friend?

No.

And was that where you had, you mentioned before, I don't know if it was a romance but you met the councillor's daughter, was that right? Killaroy?

Yeah that right.

22:00 With her because I had my broken foot, that's why I had to go down there. She was working in the post office and I wanted to send a letter home and we got talking. And she said, "There's a dance tonight would you like to come?" And I said,

22:30 "Well I've got a crook leg." She said, "Oh that's nothing, would you like to come?" And I got to know her and kept corresponding all those three or four years.

Pretty brave of her to ask a man to a dance?

Yeah. But her father was top notch on council and he took the both of us around you know, and showed us all around the area. Which was very good.

What did she do?

She worked in the post office, her and her mate.

23:00 And her father took me all around on these tours you know.

When you are back in Australia and you are on leave is it really noticeable that there are fewer man then normal around?

No, didn't take any notice.

Ok when you came back was the country in any way a different place? Was Australia, was there things you thought, oh I forgot about that or you thought, oh that's different?

No. No.

23:30 I was too concerned about getting back to the unit and things like that. And keeping to myself.

Where did you rejoin the unit then?

From there up to Kilcoy.

You joined them up there?

Yes.

And were you in training there?

Yes in training there. Used to go down and catch fish in the river and that.

24:00 **Was that part of training or?**

The good part of training I would say.

What were you catching?

Oh just ordinary little fish you know. And we had leave down into Brisbane.

Is that when you went walkabout?

Yeah walkabout. I had an aunty up there at the time. And went and seen her and had a general look

around.

24:30 But I was never AWL.

I thought you said before you were, I though Charters Towers?

Oh Charters Towers that's a different that's further on.

So you're in Brisbane on a bit of leave. Did you come back to Townsville then to join the unit or back to Killaroy?

No back to Killaroy. And then we moved up to Townsville, and that's when I went AWL up there.

Lets talk about that. Why did you go AWL if you were so desperate to get back to your unit?

25:00 Well I got back to the unit and we went from Kilcoy by and that with the unit, the whole unit. Not by train, no we were on a train to Townsville and where the train went straight ahead and the other one went out to there we was right

25:30 in that corner. Like the train going to Brisbane and another one going out there. So that's the one we hopped on.

So you knew what you were doing?

We knew what we were doing, going to have a look at Charters Towers. But we didn't think that they was going to ship us so quick.

Why Charters Towers, what attracted you to that place?

Well we had heard of it. And

26:00 the other two they wanted to go out there and have a look around.

There were some army brothels in Charters Town wasn't there?

Yeah.

Was that part of the attraction?

Well we just thought, oh Charters Town, we'll just go out there and have a beer and see what's going on out there, we had heard a lot about it.

What had you heard about it?

Oh just how good country it was and all that. A bit of gold around that area.

26:30 But we didn't get a chance to, as soon as we got there to go into the pub. We walked around the town and by the time we had a look around and walked into the pub to have a beer that's when the MPs [Military Police] grabbed us. Put us on the train sent down back. We missed the boat.

When you were on the train into Charters Towers are you making up, are you saying "Look if we get caught we

27:00 **are going to tell them this?" Are you making up stories to tell them?**

No, no.

What did you say when they got you?

Well they just said, "What are you so and so doing in here? Where did you come from?" And things like that. "Your unit is going, get on this train straight away." They put us on a train straight away and when we got there the boat is gone.

27:30 To Milne Bay and so we got the next boat over.

And were you in a lot of trouble for missing the boat?

Oh yes, for missing and all that.

So who did you have to report to them when you got back if your unit was gone?

Oh when we got there, the sergeant major.

And what did he say to you?

Oh boy. Wanted to know where we were, how we got there and so forth. And then we had to do drill.

28:00 And marching up and down the three of us. Down the road, and that's where the Yankee started picking at us.

What was he saying to you?

Oh laughing and carrying on, just the normal you know. And the sergeant major caught him, and he told the Yankee men what was going on. He was going down to get the mail every day.

28:30 So we finished our duties. But I didn't because they made me take him to march him up and down, twice as hard as what we done with our boys.

And were you, was this another occasion where you were dropped down from corporal to lance corporal or private?

Yes.

29:00 **When you're coming up on a charge like that, and the sergeant major or the lieutenant or the captain is going corporal, private, corporal, corporal, do they say, "Fields what are you bloody playing at? You could have been sergeant by now?" Would they say that kind of thing to you?**

No not really, just you'll never learn and things like that. And you'd get all those things you know.

And was it important to have rank, did you worry about that?

No I didn't worry about it

29:30 it just was there. As I say I was a corporal seven times.

You must have been good at it by the end. Like if you've been married seven times must be good at marriage.

Yeah.

So you're on a boat, the Unsung. How many days behind your unit are you?

Oh well what would it be? Three four, it would be about five weeks. Three to five.

30:00 **And the Unsung. I've heard about the Unsung before, and I've heard it wasn't a particularly good boat?**

No it wasn't but it was a small boat. And we came into Milne Bay, we just go off the ship, I suppose we would be from here to a couple of doors down from the wharf and that's when the Japs came in and the sunk it.

30:30 Down into the mud.

Did you see the Jap come in or did you just hear the ship explode?

Well we had got off the ship and just got, say three or four houses down, and bang the Unsung just sat down in the mud. And it's still there today. And it's only sat down in the mud and they were able to work the nibbits you

31:00 know. And all the stuff that was coming off, that was down in there that all got pushed over. And was able to use a lot of equipment.

That's good.

And the submarine nicked off. And then we went up and then, oh it would be

31:30 we went in then, and that's when the Japanese came down. Up on the airstrip.

So when you landed at Milne Bay is the battle already on?

No.

There's no Japanese there at that stage?

No they landed

32:00 like Milne Bay's here, and it's a big bay all around that way really. They landed up the other end and we landed this side. And they came down that way. So when they got down to Milne Bay itself, just beforehand, they're blowing trumpets and marching down the road. Then they sort of disappeared for a while

32:30 and that's when our troops lined the airstrip. And because we had no aeroplanes there. They start with their bugles and that and marching across the airstrip and our boys were in line waiting for them and the word went out that no one was to fire a bullet or anything.

33:00 And we had to be very quiet, us at the back. And that's when they... one joker let fire, not quite half way across they were and bang bang. And they turned and raced away and.

So the Japanese weren't aware that you were lined up there?

No.

When you landed, what were your duties?

33:30 **what were you assigned to do?**

Me? I was a bit of everything. And I used to go out in the bush further inland and have a look what was up there and that. The three of us, and just check on that.

Were you looking for Japanese?

Yes, things like that on the river. Follow

34:00 the river because they could come back around.

Were you setting up aid stations or AGHs [Australian General Hospital] or anything?

Yeah. All like that, we had out there and down there. And then some of our boys went over to Goodenough Island but I didn't I was kept over with our own unit.

34:30 **How long was it before you started to see casualties?**

Oh that would be, oh the ones that went. We had no casualties in Milne Bay as far as we were concerned. When they went over to Goodenough Island we had casualties coming in from there. One of our boys, he was coming back on the boat and the Jap plane come over

35:00 and threw a few bullets at him and he got wounded, but he threw himself on top of our wounded and he got it in the back. He survived.

Good.

And he got the, not the OBE [Order of the British Empire], forget now. He got a high ranking anyhow for that.

35:30 **I'm intrigued that you were there during the Battle of Milne Bay but your unit didn't treat any casualties, where did they go?**

Well we had, when we say we never treated them, I wasn't in that section at the time. One part of our unit was down there, another one over here and they were the ones treating all the casualties if any. And,

So what would you blokes be doing

36:00 **at that time?**

Well that's what I was saying, went bush. See what's around the place.

And did you have any, did you come across any Jap casualties at this time?

No.

None at all?

None at all.

And we're talking now about the end of '42 aren't we?

Yeah.

The end of '42, did you have Christmas there?

Milne Bay. No,

36:30 at Christmas time we was in Moresby.

So from Milne Bay you went down to Moresby?

We went to the Tablelands, we were there for three weeks or a month and then we packed up and went back to Port Moresby.

Right, in the Tablelands were you training again?

Oh yeah everywhere we went we was training.

Was it always the same training?

No not necessarily.

37:00 That's where I went and done a cooking course.

Tell us about that.

Yeah I done that and I got eighty or ninety odd points for that.

Great.

But I was always been able to cook, before the war and that.

What would you have to be cooking in the cooking course, what sort of meals?

Oh just normal army meals and that.

37:30 **Opening a tin of Bully Beef?**

Tins of Bully Beef.

Heating up a tin of that?

Yeah anything you like to make. You know, nice cakes and that. With the food, make it nice, you know, and don't give them the same meal day after day and that.

How did you end up in a cooking course, what led you to do that or were you assigned to do that?

38:00 Oh well I had experience before the war, I worked in a bakery shop.

But did you think, hang on they're going to transfer me to a cookhouse, did you think they would?

Yeah. But I did, they did and I done a bit of cooking for the powers that be of the unit, and all that. And the sergeants' mess and all that.

38:30 **Did you enjoy being a cook?**

Yeah I enjoyed it.

Because you hear that the cooks are all (UNLCEAR) did you get a lot of that?

No because I was able to change the menu. What you had today you wouldn't have tomorrow.

So the joke about the cook being the only one in the army that killed anybody wasn't true in your case?

No.

That's good. So

39:00 **all right you've done your training, your cooking course and you are back to Moresby?**

Yeah.

So you were in Moresby for Christmas then?

Yeah.

And how was that, your third Christmas away, you're still not getting homesick?

No.

Very lucky man. What about other fellows who had been with you all that time, were they starting to think, "Oh I've had enough of this?"

Oh probably some of them would be. But in my case we had a lot of trading there and we

39:30 one of the boys used to go down to the water and catch fish. That wasn't far, it's like going down to the shop on the corner.

A couple of hundred yards or something?

Yeah a couple of hundred yards. Oh that when we was there,

40:00 during the night we got called out, the, now I can't think of the name of the company. They were all lined up to go into action by aeroplane. And the aeroplane came up there and he couldn't make it, and he went into the boys

40:30 all waiting. And that was about three o'clock in the morning. And we got called out there and had to go over and pick them up.

What sort of injuries did you have there?

Oh everything, everything. Nearly wiped out the company.

And how did you bring those men out, did you have ambulances or stretcher bearers?

Stretcher bearers mostly there. And we got called out for that

41:00 and we was getting ready, it was getting close to Christmas and another aeroplane come over our camp and that. And he never made it up over the hill, and he went into the hill and so we had to race up and get the bodies out of that.

Any survivors?

41:30 No survivors. Just straight into the hill it went.

We better stop there, end of the tape.

41:34 **End of tape**

Tape 7

00:31 Christmas time, getting near Christmas time and we were waiting for parcels coming from home. And I had a bottle of wine sent over from Mum and the other boys, so we had a whale of a time. At that time,

01:00 we was doing a lot of trading and got over that and had a lot of racing.

Did you have like a sports carnival day?

Yeah yeah. This is what I was just going to say. And we had one of the officers, he came from New Zealand really, and he was a long distance runner. And I was half way

01:30 and then we had another couple who was very good runners. And even the hundred yards or so forth. And was, the 2nd5th Field Ambulance would compete in the games with the other units and the air force and all that. The big, there... So

02:00 our... was our second runner up, I can't think of his name now. Anyhow he started off, he was a long distance runner, anyway he's off and he's miles ahead of anybody else he hands the baton over to me, and I increase

02:30 the run again. And that was a hundred yards, oh fifty yards oh more than that. And then I had the baton over, a hundred yards to go to win. Double the whole lot, and of course the boys all had a bet on it.

How much did you make?

Couldn't say. But I never got any of it. The boys would have a bookie

03:00 and that but I wasn't interested.

Would you get a sports day every year, was it an annual thing?

No.

Just a one off?

One off thing.

That would have been a great distraction for you though?

Oh yes. And we had, in quarter company we had a couple of Abos in our unit and they were good boxers.

03:30 And we used to go and watch them box and they nearly always won.

What were they like as men? Did you know them at all?

Oh they were good as gold, no worries.

Did they ever get any stick from anybody about being Aboriginals?

No, no, no, they were just one of us.

What about the local people in Moresby and New Guinea there? The New Guinea people did you have much to do with them at all?

Yes we had

04:00 them as carriers at different times and it was very good.

Did you ever learn any pidgin?

No. So they would, we used them as carriers at times and that.

04:30 **Back to sports day, did you get a medal? Did they give you a medal or anything?**

No, no. No medals, oh as far as the unit went it was clap clap clap, you know you got nothing for it. I suppose, what would you say, it was for the unit. You were running for the unit and they got all of the, whatever they wanted.

05:00 **And when you were in Moresby did you have any inkling of where you might be going next?**

Yes, by our training,

What sort of training?

Marches and walking you know. You go away for two or three hours. By that time the trail, Moresby that was over, or near the end of it.

05:30 So we was training there, running, you'd know what you were in for you were going up in the hills and coming back out again.

And what was it like compared to, you had been in the desert, did you prefer the desert to the jungle or?

Definitely, yeah.

Why?

Why? Because you could see what you were doing and where you were going. See Shaggy Ridge, that's where we

06:00 finished up going to, it's like that.

I've seen pictures of Shaggy Ridge, it's incredible.

Yeah. And I was sent out from there, and was there two days and we got called back. And then they sent us up over Shaggy Ridge and we had to climb up all through there.

How was that, did that take you a long time?

Took us all day. It was an all day walk.

06:30 And we went through the other headquarters and all that up in the top and we went down a little bit, and up the ridge and that's when we started off again. That's when I went out to get the wounded and.

Tell us about that, that experience.

Well it was, we had

07:00 two English officer to pick up. And on our way in we had to cut our way in to get the stretchers back out on one side, and this way going back out. And along the track was a Japanese, and I don't know if I said it before. And he's lost an ear.

07:30 **Had he been dead a long time do you think?**

No not that long.

So there was still Japanese in the area when you were there?

Oh yeah you had to keep watch and because they was coming through where they'd been held up and they were sneaking through of a night time or late in the day or whatever. And we was always on the lookout for them. And so

08:00 that joker had cut the ear off, because we had a new razor issued that day, brand new one. Razor blade. And you could see where he had cut the ear off, and then later on back in Australia here he is, met up with him, and he was showing what he done, around here, to the Japanese. And we all went crook on him

08:30 and told him we was there after he had. Because it was only just done.

So at the time when you saw the dead Japanese fellow with the ear missing, did you know who had done it?

No.

When did you find out, was that back in Australia?

Back in Australia here I was on the ship coming back and here he is going around showing the boys, "Look what I've got," sort of business. You know.

When you saw the guy with his ear cut off did you think that's disgusting?

09:00 Yeah definitely, I did. And I went crook at him. There was nearly a fight between the two of us.

I'm not surprised. That's a terrible thing to do. Was there many fellows doing things like that?

No, not many. That's the only one I know of. So and he was brazen about it you know. That was coming back to Australia,

09:30 (UNCLEAR) when we get of at Moresby.

So lets continue the story then, you've cut your way through and you come across this dead Japanese fellow with his ear missing and you go and pick up these wounded officers. What happened next?

We carried on right through and we got through all right.

10:00 And next morning we had all the wounded and all of that, and the Faria River was open for us to walk instead of going over the ridge. So we walked along the Faria there. And I had all the wounded.

How many wounded were there?

Oh there must have been twenty thirty of them.

And that's including the two English officers?

Yeah.

So were they all able to walk?

Not all of them.

10:30 We had stretcher cases. But we had the fuzzy wuzzies to carry them out, down the Faria River. And I was the leader for them you know. And I got them down to the station at the bottom of Shaggy Ridge, where there was a hospital and the operation theatre and so they just got handed

11:00 over there.

Do you mind if we talk a little bit about the English officer you had to leave on the?

Oh yes that one.

What injury did he have?

He had an injury here, on that part on the shoulder. He'd been shot. And so we carried him, he was walking, but finished up as a what's-a-name there,

11:30 and he just died on us. And because I had to make up, to get him back or to get the others all back I had to decide if he was really dead an leave him there, or do we carry him in. And we had so far to, I

12:00 suppose it would have been from here to Caulfield.

So what about twenty, fifteen miles or something?

Yeah. So I made the decision he was dead and left him on the side of the road.

What do you do to decide a persons dead? What tests?

Well just go over him and make sure there are no heartbeats and things like that.

12:30 Normal things, so I made the decision and then because we was cutting our way back out again. Boys were taking it in turns. And I took no notice of it, and when I got back to the camp that night and I told the powers that be what happened

13:00 and next day they would have to go out and pick him up and bring him in, another crew. But, so there was always then, later on in life, it wasn't straight away after the war and that, because I've done a lot of medical stuff and then

13:30 a horrible burden to go around. And then I started to read things, was he really dead? What worried me.

What would make you think that he wasn't dead if you had done the tests?

It was just one of the things because when you are getting books from different people at university and things like that, and the way the structure over the years is getting bigger and better and better.

14:00 So you get to the stage, now was he really dead? With the new things are coming out.

It must be pretty hard to blame yourself though. I mean, you can't beat yourself with a stick that hasn't been invented yet, twenty years in the future.

That's right,

14:30 but I didn't look at it that way, and it worried me. And they sent me to a shrink at South Yarra.

Is this after the war?

Yeah, oh yeah, this is three or four years after the war. So they could understand the nightmares I was having, so I'm still on tablets for them.

15:00 **Wow.**

So I still get back in there, but I take a tablet and I go to the doctor, Fernando, he's the doctor I've got to go to. And last week, and still the same.

You still have the nightmares?

No not so much, I do have them now and again.

Are you able to tell us what the nightmares are about?

15:30 What you are thinking. Mainly when you read something in the paper of, new ideas coming out in the medical part of it, and how it had advanced over the years. And little things, only little wee things that you,

Strange isn't it how your job in the war was to

16:00 **help people, and you did all you could for this fellow,**

Yeah.

And that's the thing that haunts you.

Yeah.

It's not fair war, is it?

No, but that is the way it is. So, then after the war, when I came back to Melbourne, I done different courses for

16:30 medical research over at, oh dear forgot again. It'll come back. Oh big hospital.

Austin?

No the one up the road, the army one.

Heidelberg River?

Yeah over there. Well I did a lot of tests for them. Arthritis tests

17:00 and that. I would have to go over there today and they would give me some stuff and I wasn't allowed to put it down or go to the toilet after, I wasn't allowed to put it down the sewer. I had to take it over in a bucket and things like that. A taxi would pick me up and take me over and you would give that to them.

17:30 And things like that went on for nine months I suppose. Things like that I've done. Monash University, gone down there.

Why do you think you are motivated to do that?

I don't know, just little things you read in the paper and it says they are looking for people to do these tests for them.

Do you think it goes back to that

18:00 **chap in the jungle?**

Yeah I think so yeah.

Is this your way of giving something back?

Yeah I think so yeah. It would be.

Life's a funny thing isn't it?

Yeah. I went to Monash and I had to go with a dog, they had a dog. And so,

18:30 there was no dog there, you start there and you've got to sit there and watch the screen and so forth and press that button. And that was, you do that and that's all recorded down there. You've got to be quick you know, answering the questions. And then they bring a dog in, and you start again. And so it would have to be

19:00 what the, would the dog how it would affect you if anything. And you pressed there and go through it all again.

That's a bizarre one.

They're things I've done over the years.

Did you have nightmares about this chap straight away?

No.

After the war?

19:30 After the war, yeah. After the, when I start reading, and going through different courses like you know. And the way it, how it changed over the years.

Did you go to, what I'm trying to say is were the DVA willing or able

20:00 **to give you help at that time?**

Yeah.

Were they understanding about that?

Yeah.

What did they do for you?

Oh medicine and so forth like that. And I had to go to a doctor in, oh near the what's-a-name station, train goes down through

20:30 Sandringham.

Brighton?

No.

Black Rock?

The train goes down and around, but up in, big shopping centre and so forth.

Southland?

No, no no. Our train comes there and out through

21:00 this station. Sandringham's train, whatever goes through there.

South Yarra?

South Yarra's the one I'm looking for. A doctor in there I had to go and see. He wrote paperwork out and everything and that's how I come to get the pension

21:30 for that. And then, then I was sent up to Fernando in Dandenong.

So this was about 1950 or something would it have been or later than that?

Later than that.

In the 60's?

60's yeah. Because we came back from Cabbage Tree then.

Did they give you good treatment in those days, were they understanding?

Oh yes. Because in those days

22:00 a lot of it was done down at near the barracks. And they, very good you know. Go in there and go through all the rigmarole again.

Was your wife able to understand?

Oh yes, yes. She was a great help really.

22:30 Did I tell you about me falling over with my knees? Yeah. With her, and things like that.

It really helps when you are troubled like that to have a good partner by your side.

Oh yes. She was marvellous really. Yeah so we had fun and so forth.

Were you able to talk to her freely and openly about how you felt about this stuff?

Oh yes definitely. I was able to talk and she would talk back.

23:00 **Well that's good.**

There's no trouble there. Just one of those things, she got cancer and that was the end. She had it for five years before she died.

That's a shame. Let me just check my notes for a second. I wonder if we could talk a bit more

about Shaggy Ridge?

23:30 Shaggy Ridge.

24:00 **What was it like? Or what are your memories of the conditions?**

Conditions were terrible, in respect to what you're doing and that. Everything's in your own hands, you know.

What do you mean by that?

Well you've got to climb up the ridge, and it was like that.

24:30 And you're looking around, especially when you go over the top of the ridge. And you know the Japs are coming through. And so you all the time have that in your mind, where are they you know.

Could you hear them?

No.

Could you hear any guns?

No, because

25:00 they were sneaking, trying to sneak through the lines. And so you, we would go out that way, and they're coming across this way, and you didn't know which track they were going to be on and things like that. And they seem to sneak through, you know you don't hear them in the bush or things like that. Funny sort of a thing.

25:30 **As you are an ambulance fellow, are you carrying a rifle?**

No.

Have you got a big red cross on your arm?

No.

So how are they going to tell that you are not an infantryman?

Well that's right.

So that must be so frightening?

No never took any notice of it.

Really because if I'm walking along without a gun and I look like someone who would, didn't worry you that they would have a pot shot?

Never thought of it. All we're thinking about is ourselves and where we've got to go and what we've got to do.

26:00 **What about if you take a break for a minute and you're sitting down and you hear a tweak, a twig snaps, are you instantly..?**

Oh yes, many a time. You're looking. You're always on the alert.

What kind of stress would that put on you? Because you're constantly on?

Yeah you don't think of those things you know. You're always thinking of what you've got to do.

26:30 **Moving again to post war, would you, was there any things that made you, like if you heard a car backfire?**

Oh yes. Very nervous in that respect, even today.

So if you hear a noise like a gun?

Yeah, yeah. Or say Bang, where's that gun come from you know.

What do you feel, where are you taken in your mind when that happens?

27:00 Oh just up here. And there, and you oh what's that? You know.

Is your mind back in New Guinea or back in the desert?

No, just around you. Like where the other night a gun went off, and the first thing I did was go to my window, "What? Where's that coming from?"

What about say at Anzac Day marches and so forth, or

27:30 **at army reunions where they fire a salute, does that?**

No that don't worry us now.

Because you know it's coming?

Yeah. Like this year the kids all wanted to go in, so we went in to the, and then took them up to the shrine and so forth. And then we walked

28:00 down to Elizabeth Street, Elizabeth Street and Collin Street corner, that where we march from. And they walked along with the crowd you know. So we got back up to the shrine. And then went out to Rats of Tobruk Hall and spent the afternoon there.

Where's that hall?

Out in Albert Park.

28:30 Very nice little hall and that.

And what did you have there in the afternoon? A couple of quiet beers?

Few beers and food and so forth.

Do you consider yourself to be someone, even taken into account the memories and the nightmares you have had of that chap, do you consider yourself to be someone who came out of the

29:00 **war pretty unscathed?**

Yeah. Virtually. I've got two, oh this leg was all right but this one, I came out of the army with it. Now did I tell you how that knee went up my back? We talked about that?

What about mentally unscathed? Was there many men you know that came out upstairs a lot worse?

Oh yes a

29:30 couple of them. They have passed on now. Three or four of them. They, it got the better of them afterwards.

They were ambos too?

Yeah, they'd mainly drink. You know it broke up their marriage and things like that. Being an alcoholic.

Does it strike you as strange looking back that the army takes young men, teaches them how to kill, teaches them

30:00 **to live a life where you don't think about anybody else, does that to them for six years and then says go home and sit on the couch with your wife. Does that strike you as strange?**

No, never. Never think of anything like that. The only thing that, I've been mixed up in welfare work since

30:30 I came back from the bush, that was in 1960. And I'm more or less looking after the widows, the widows now. Legacy. And down the RSL, because I'm the, I instigated the monuments down there.

31:00 Now what were we saying?

War widows, legacy.

Oh yes war widows I've got all that I look after them. And then the RSL, things like that I still do it. They ring up if something's wrong,

31:30 and ring up and Veterans' Affairs will get it all sorted out for them. Like get the, take the bath out of their room, new bathroom. They can't get in and out of their bath. Put a shower in and things like that. It's all done by Veterans Affairs, but you've got to put it in action.

32:00 **And do you enjoy that work?**

Oh yeah. And all that. Take them on holidays. Like last week we went up to Warburton. Busload up there, took them up there. Busload of widows, I'm the only man on the bus. Apart from the driver.

That's not a bad job.

Then I get picked at again by the fickle women. And you

32:30 go to the RSL when you come back and some of the boys will say, "Oh, here's Arthur with his harem."

Half your luck. I just saw something that you mentioned early on today that I just want to touch on before I hand back to Stella [interviewer]. In your last time in Port Moresby, did you get confirmed?

Yes.

Tell us about that.

33:00 Oh well I was always, when I was a kid and that, I was sent, when I was playing with the snakes and so forth. And I gave her a bag of beans with the snake in it and she nearly died of fright I suppose but as punishment I had to go to church.

33:30 And sing in the choir, so I had to go and learn to sing, lessons, and all that. So while we lived in Sunshine that's when I had to do it all. And so that's all it was.

But what made you get confirmed all of a sudden?

Yeah well I don't know. In Moresby I'd never been

34:00 confirmed, I sang in the choir and so forth like that so I don't know why but I decided to go to church and be confirmed. And I haven't been since, apart from our wedding day.

I wonder what motivated, do you have any idea what motivated you?

I have no idea. Just one of those things you decide to do.

Did you have to go to church for a few

34:30 **weeks?**

No, no.

Just walked in and said,

Yeah.

I want to...

Yeah. Went and told them, and then I had to go back a couple of days later, on the Sunday and it was all done. And then when the, when we got married, Linda we was sitting in the car together

35:00 and I had a row with Mum and I said to Linda the best bloody thing we can do is get married and she agreed so, she wanted to go into town to a wedding in there. To a registry office and I said, "No, we'll go to church." So she agreed so we went up to Oakleigh Church. Church of England, on the corner

35:30 of the highway and what's-a-name road. And so we went in to have that. There was only the three of us.

Who was the third one?

Peggy her sister. So that was that. And we went home back to Mums place, after she asked me to come back you know. And later across the road,

36:00 what do you call them? Oh you know, along side of you, so that was all right and we went back home and my mother put on a bit of turn and an uncle

36:30 and he got up to say a few words. And congratulations, this is during supper time you know. And he said, oh he put some remarks, rough remarks they were. And he said, "I don't think she knows what she's doing," and all this business. And I said to her, "Let's get out of here quick." So we just left,

37:00 hopped on a taxi over to, oh what's the name of that place? Anyhow and we went up to Fern Tree Gully.

Very nice.

And we had a week there for the honeymoon and how we got there. Linda she got her

37:30 over our way because she was the other side of Melbourne. A shop in Robina, and her mother and father owned the shop you know. She rang up Ferntree Gully, and had a room there, it was a guest house, but it was out, tiny little thing. And it was the middle of winter. So that's what happened.

Good.

So we got

38:00 married there and that's what happened.

Now before I hand you over to Stella just one more question about the end of the war, when you left Port Moresby and you're heading back to Townsville, this is before you've done you knee, were you by this stage thinking I think I've had enough of this now?

No.

You're still keen for it?

- Yeah. Was keen for it,
- 38:30 was looking forward to the next thing because we went up in the Tablelands again, more training.
- Where did you think you would be going this time?**
- Because the war's changed we would be going over to, oh near, oh wouldn't know exactly, I know it was outside of Australia. Oh that's right they all went to
- 39:00 where the big island are,
- Borneo? Philippines?**
- Philippines, no down further. In between there, where the main fight was.
- Rabaul? New Britain?**
- Yeah in that area they all went.
- 39:30 **Well the tapes just about to finish but before we do, what was your confirmation name?**
- I think Arthur Stanley.
- You didn't have to pick a name?**
- No.
- 39:41 End of tape

Tape 8

- 00:31 **Would you mind if I went back to Aleppo and asked you a few questions about that?**
- Yeah.
- You were in a school, you took over a school for a hospital. Was it a school or an orphanage?**
- A school. And we turned the other half of the school to a hospital and they all ended up in the other side.
- What happened to all the little kiddies?**
- Oh they went to school ,
- 01:00 and it was a big school in this respect. But some of them were orphans and others went home and things like that.
- And did the soldiers do special things for them, like Christmas special things, played Father Christmas?**
- Yeah. And all that yeah.
- Can you tell me about that?**
- Only that we all put some money in and bought them presents and that.
- 01:30 There's a photo up there. That's all we done there, you know made them happy.
- Now I know you didn't have any children yourself at that point, but did that sort of activity make you feel a bit homesick?**
- No. No I wasn't a home boy.
- Did anything make you homesick?**
- No, never got homesick, no no. I was always looking to further things.
- What do you think you would have done**
- 02:00 **if the war hadn't broken out?**
- Oh I would have done something. I was working in a pastry cook place. I got the sack from there because I went up to Seymour with the army and so forth.
- A bit past the point wasn't it, I'm just wondering did you have any other ambitions when you were little?**

- 02:30 No, always thought of myself because I was shifting from one aunty to another and that, and that was my life. Changing schools and that.
- Interesting, can we talk about that a little bit more? I know it's not the most pleasant subject, you parents separating. And from what I know it's not that uncommon from families surviving the Depression.**
- 03:00 **So did you have any bitter feeling towards your dad from leaving your mum?**
- No not really, he was an alcoholic and when he first left there, up at Ballarat, he had girlfriends because he used to like dancing and he was a good dancer.
- 03:30 He had a lot of friends, but then he came down to Melbourne and there was more drink there. And we used to go out and see him now and again.
- So what qualities did you inherit from him?**
- Nothing, in what way qualities?
- Oh good ones or bad ones?**
- I always said he was a good one.
- Because you said yourself you weren't a ladies man, you were more into having fun with your mates. So,**
- 04:00 **but you're a dancer?**
- I used to like dancing yes.
- I guess I'm asking because I'm wondering what you got from him that made you such a good soldier or such a survivor?**
- I don't know, I wouldn't be able to answer that. I just took everything as it came. It's always been my motto.
- And it's also interesting that they didn't make you a cook straight away but then the army didn't seem to make people who could cook, so.**
- That's right.
- 04:30 Oh no, I've done a fair bit of cooking at different times you know.
- I'm wondering if you ever felt that you might have done better in another section of the army. Did you ever wish that you had been in the infantry?**
- No, no I was quite happy where I was and looked forward to it. Got all my mates there, to join up another unit, I didn't have any idea of that you know.
- 05:00 New training, new regiment.
- And they put you in the Field Ambulance fairly early on in the piece? Did they teach you to shoot?**
- Yeah.
- Were you a good shot?**
- Yeah because I learnt that in the militia beforehand. For a while. I done, in the cookhouse, I done that there.
- And did you ever fire a rifle**
- 05:30 **during the war?**
- No. we wasn't allowed to carry a rifle.
- I wondered sometimes, especially with the isolated spots on the ridge whether you had ever come into contact with the enemy at any stage?**
- No.
- Apart from the poor old Jap that had his ears cut off did you ever face up to them at all? Did you ever confront the Japanese at all?**
- 06:00 No, only the joker that was on the ship coming back from Moresby and he's going around showing the ear. And you know, having a, and when he come up to us and he started bragging about it there, that's when we went berserk on him.
- Was it yourself and another couple of guys that had a go at him?**
- Yeah.

06:30 Yeah definitely.

Did you, to put a finer point on it, beat him?

Wanted to but we didn't. We wanted to, we dobbed him in and wanted to get a hold of it and they, he wanted to, he's bragging about it you know. And

07:00 a couple of us wanted to take it off him and throw it in the water. But we were stopped from doing it you know. His mates, it was different, he got the infantry mates involved. So it was them against us and so we had nothing to do with him after that.

Did you hear while you were in New Guinea about the atrocities that the

07:30 **Japanese were perpetrating against the Australians?**

Yes, we wasn't involved in that. We were still down in Milne Bay and our soldiers went through there. But some of our unit then went to Goodenough Island and up the coast, and came into where the fighting was again. Stopped the Japanese, they all got captured.

08:00 **But you heard about how bad things were for the Australians?**

Yeah.

So when you were so upset about this Japanese man who had his ears cut off, did you have any thoughts that they might deserve that treatment? I'm asking why were you so..?

That's my nature, simple as that I would say.

You just knew that wasn't, the desecration?

You're not supposed to do that you know.

So it doesn't sound like you were a particularly

08:30 **religious fellow, but what was your religion while you were fighting?**

Still Church of England.

And what was your view of how Christianity operated during the war? Did you have a sort of a philosophy?

No. Just very quiet in that respect and that.

09:00 But not really a church person, I haven't been to church except for funerals and things like that.

But you seem to have a quite a solid sense of social justice?

That's right yeah.

And did you ever have to treat Japanese POWs in the Field Ambulance?

No.

Ok. What about at Milne Bay, there must have been

09:30 **casualties either side there?**

Yeah, but because we were broken up into three or four sections and I was way up there out of all that. And our troops were different, everything was down there, you may as well say at Dandenong,

10:00 and I was out at, way down the river there. So I missed all that. Just waiting to go somewhere.

Well let's talk about a lighter subject. Your mum managed to send you a bottle of wine for Christmas?

Yeah.

Did she have to hide that to send it to you?

Yeah she had it wrapped up in

10:30 a roll like paper and that, so it wouldn't get broken and all of that. Well just put lollies on it.

Lollies on the bottle of wine?

I think it was lollies or chocolates or something like that. In the, the decoration of it. And it come though all right.

And did she hide it in anything? Or did she just send it?

Oh it was wrapped up well and hidden.

11:00 **Because I wouldn't mind betting that the postal service kind of made the most of things like that.**

Yeah, and they, the main thing was being liquor and like that it was just as likely to get pinched. But it came through all right. Cost her a few bob to post it though.

I'll bet. Plus probably the rations to get her hands on it.

Yeah.

So when you received it, how many could you share

11:30 **that with if any?**

Oh, one two three, about four of us.

You must have been the chap of the day?

Yeah, we were. We used to make our own.

Oh do tell, I've heard a few stories about stills operating in the war. How did you get your's going and where were you?

At Milne Bay mainly. And we used to, we got some wine

12:00 and that, and from one thing or another and somebody else would make something. And all these fancy drinks we would make.

What did you use to make it?

Oh whatever we could get our hands on.

Such as?

Oh you start off with one liquor, one lot of liquor and you join up with something

12:30 else, and use fruit. Things like that, and put it down to ferment and start drinking it. Some of the boys were very good at making it.

Did you ever see anyone get sick from it? Or get blind?

No never got sick from it, we got blind.

Not in the figurative sense I think.

13:00 **What about the Yanks in Milne Bay, I believe they probably would have sold their arms and their legs to get their hands on some liquor?**

Yeah. But we weren't too happy with them. The aeroplanes used to come in and drop their meals down, and they had everything. They had ice-cream and all that stuff, twice as much and better than us, whatever we

13:30 had. And there was a bit of a jealous thing.

But I forgot to ask was, you a smoker during the war?

Was I a smoker? I used to eat them.

Eat them?

Very, big smoker. That's something I should have said earlier. I finished up in Heidelberg from smoking.

14:00 And the doctor said to me, "If you don't stop smoking you'll be dead in twelve months." And I was living at Cabbage Tree then, working. And Linda used to go down to the local shop and get me a tin of tobacco and papers, and bring it home and it would be on the table from morning tea. And I would get up from here

14:30 go to the front door, roll a cigarette and before I got there lit it. I was a very heavy smoker. And he said, "If you don't stop smoking you'll be dead in twelve months," so I just threw it all. Oh they put the money, the money went up threepence. So bringing up a family

15:00 and that I decided that I couldn't afford to pay for tobacco and so forth and afford to bring up the kids and that. So I threw I up on the mantle piece and Linda didn't say a word, but I got out of it. And she said, "Oh you'll come back on it." I went on the beer a bit more after that but so

15:30 that was it. Never smoked since. That was 1953.

Well good for you because my question was did you trade much with the Yanks in Milne Bay?

No, no.

You didn't think to or?

No we wasn't allowed to. Kept away from it.

Well I've never known you in the story of Arthur Fields to do something just because you weren't allowed to.

No, I didn't socialise with them at all.

16:00 The only time I was with them was the one soldier that was picking at us and our sergeant major notified the Yanks that was there and he was sent over and I had to give him drill all week. And so that was, I said why should I have to do it? But I had to

16:30 do it. And he had to go up and down and I had to go with him. Make sure, give him it. The Yanks were mean.

When you were in New Guinea and you had to cope with the heat and the rain and the bugs and everything, did you ever find time to find it a beautiful part of the world?

17:00 **Did you just think it was a stinking dump?**

No, not that bad. How would I put it? It's a pretty place in parts, very hard place. The natives were very good, they, and their food was good, you know what they had planted.

17:30 **Did you have occasion to talk with the locals at all?**

Oh yes. They done all the hard work for us.

All the stretcher bearing?

Yeah.

So did you pick up much of the language?

No, too hard.

How did you communicate with them then?

Oh just blah blah blah, you know. Things like that.

So you spoke in English and they just had to learn it?

Yeah. They soon learnt it yeah.

18:00 **And what about giving orders? I'm aware that a corporal or a lance corporal doesn't have to do too much order giving, but at times you have to tell your men what's what. How did that sit with you? Did that come naturally to you?**

Yeah naturally. Because as long as you're fair and that and you know what you're saying you had no trouble. And things like that. If you go out of

18:30 line yourself well you lost your friendship of your mates and that you know. They get upset. And they know how far you can go, and the same as you knew how far. You never dobbed one another in.

Did any of your friends do anything while you were in the army that disappointed you?

19:00 Oh no I don't think so. Only the, no we saved them from being court martialled. No I think everything was well, these were the ones that were left behind with the different units, not our unit.

19:30 We were very close, there was no, I don't know what you're doing and all that. So they made me, in the last two years they made me head of the unit.

Well then, you obviously never did anything to disappoint them then?

No. Definitely not.

What about your senior ranking officers?

No we had no trouble there with them.

20:00 No, no trouble at all. If they wanted something done they would come to me and tell you what to do or where to go.

Did you ever have occasion to talk your mates out of something they were going to do? Did you ever think maybe they were going too far at some stage?

Yes, a couple of times I would say I went crook at them but I didn't dob them in.

Ok well give me an example because that's as much of being a good mate as anything isn't it?

Yeah.

20:30 **What did they, did they want to go AWL or?**

I've done that too.

But did they want to do that at a point where they really would have been deserting or?

No none of that. Although we went off to town and was out there we paid the penalty for that.

So what, give me an example of something that you talked your mates out of doing?

No,

21:00 I can't remember ever doing anything like that. They've already done it and that so you know about it, you're quiet about it. That's the same when we got all the money and that. Unfortunately we, we had all the beer, not the beer the wine.

21:30 And we rolled it into our tent and we were drinking that all the time and we got caught with that and we had to go out there with an axe and chop it all and let it run down in the sand. Crying.

Yes I would have been there crying too I imagine. Now also in New Guinea, did any of your mates or any of the patients you were working with

22:00 **get to the point where they had just had enough, they just couldn't do it any more and they wanted to get out one way or another?**

No, no. They were all good in that respect, and the doctors. We could go in to the big tent that they had and watch them do their surgery on the wounded.

So you attended a lot of operations?

Yes.

What, did you ever see an amputation for example?

Yes. Seen that.

What was that like?

Oh

22:30 just you know. You look at it and see what they are doing of course you can't go right up close to them, so you can only see them go into different parts of the body and stitching them up.

Now I know you've got a pretty cast iron fortitude so you can stomach all of that. And you also said that you had an interest later on in possibly doing something in the medical profession, what was your fascination

23:00 **with it? What was your fascination with the human anatomy?**

I think it was just our training, that's about all.

Did you ever have to perform emergency procedures above and beyond what a Field Ambulance officer should be doing?

No just normal. There would be two or three of us to make a decision, always went out in three. And between the three of us we would do what we had

23:30 to do and talk about it.

What's the hardest thing you've had to do in the Field Ambulance and I'm not talking about the English officer here, that was obviously very hard.

That was hard yes. That was the hardest decision to make.

Well second to that what was another decision you had to make amongst the three of you? Would you have to stop up a man's artery or cardiac arrest?

No, no. Didn't have to do any of that, that was already done by the

24:00 units there, you know, say there's a doctor in their part. We're only picking them up. If we were picking one up in the desert laying there well then we would put a bandage on him and so forth to stop the bleeding, but most of the

24:30 time that's all done. And you go out and put them in the ambulance or carry them back.

Now up on Shaggy Ridge where it wasn't really possible to have ambulances it was too steep,

No couldn't have ambulances there.

Did you ever, and I'm not trying to be funny here, but did you ever drop any of your cases out of the stretchers?

No. Because our stretchers was

25:00 home made and we couldn't get the normal.

We might head home. When you were, you had a sort of unusual conclusion to your service because of your knee injury. When you were coming back again what were you looking forward to most?

Well the,

25:30 Oh that's over at, I forgotten the place name, the hospital. I was in there with malaria, I forgot to say all of that.

Where did you get malaria for the first time?

That was after I came out of the army.

After you came out of the army?

Yeah.

26:00 **That's a bit stiff isn't it?**

Yeah and I had to go to Caulfield Hospital and that was it. I was in there for just a fortnight, three weeks something like that. I had Linda then and we went down to a beach on an outing.

26:30 I was allowed to go out then, that was the end of it.

What was it like getting malaria? Were you..?

Just malaria, just like your head and that. A lot of headaches and sweaty.

Was it sort of like a vice grip on your heart, did you..?

No,

27:00 just a whole part of you, and sweating so much.

And when you were coming back what were you looking forward to?

Oh a good job and that when I got out of the army. And they wanted to discharge me a hundred per cent fit

27:30 and I said to them, "I've still got troubles with my knee and that," and they said, "Well soldier, this will keep you in the army for another two to three weeks," and I said, "What's that got to bloody well do with it after three years or four years of army service?" And they said, "Oh well we can see your point," so they sent me to a doctor

28:00 up Collins Street and he put the report in and I got my discharge and I was home three weeks, about three weeks with my Mum, at the most, and I had malaria again. So that was the time I went to.

That's rough. Look I wanted to ask you about celebrating in the streets of Melbourne, was that the end of

28:30 **the war or was that VP [Victory in the Pacific] day, the day?**

No in Europe.

So what did you do on VP day when it was the end of the war in the Pacific?

Well we started off, VE [Victory in Europe] day that's when we went mad in the city and had a what's-a-name train going around and the lot.

29:00 And that's when I met Linda. Then also, so that was that. Then we when the war finished the big thing was on in Melbourne and Linda and I went into the town And they had big marquees and everything over in the gardens and all that. It was a good

29:30 day, you know crowds and crowds of people. Oh that's something funny too. We were at Flinders Street station waiting to go across the road and this woman in front of us and she started to fall into the crowd so I grabbed and lifted her up. So I went to grab her on the hip, but a bit too high.

30:00 You never seen a girl get back so quick.

She thought you had different intentions?

Yeah, and sorry you know. She had a boyfriend with her but you know that was all right, got a dirty look.

Was he going to take a piece of you?

Yes. But he seen he couldn't, and so we

30:30 got her, she got up on her feet very quick and that, that was good.

So what were your thoughts about the end of the war? And I'm sure that's an obvious question, but did you feel strange having been discharged?

No, no.

Did you wonder what all of your mates were doing back in the unit?

Oh yes. And all that, when they came back from Java and

31:00 the places they went to, they had a big reunion, up near the big market there in one of the buildings there. And of course I went there, we had a good turn out.

So you didn't feel like you had missed out?

No, not then. And we was living in Bleak Avenue Oakleigh then. And there

31:30 off our back door there was a big yard of our property and then there was a vacant block behind and the bus. The bus come along, I've got a habit of going. The bus come along and he toots his horn and Linda goes out, "What does he want? What's going on?"

32:00 And he sings out to her, "Does this bugger belong to you?" And she had to come around and get me out, and I brought a big bunch of flowers home for her, poppies.

Bit of ammo [ammunition]?

Yeah poppies off the table. (UNCLEAR) I wasn't full [drunk].

32:30 **What did you think about them dropping the bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima?**

Well that was the cause of the end of the war, so that was, America did that.

Did you think it would have still been going on and on and on if they hadn't?

I think it would have been.

And I know that you're not a man to, well you don't seem to have any hatred for the Japanese.

33:00 **Were you surprised? Or was it shocking or did you just think it was the best thing to happen at the time?**

It was the best thing to happen at the time you know.

So what did you make of your experiences as a soldier then? Granted you were in the Red Cross so it was a bit different to the others, but did you think it was necessary that Australia went to war?

Yes, yes. If it hadn't have been we would have been overrun here.

33:30 Definitely.

When you got back did your mother tell you that she was worried that the Japanese were going to invade?

No, no. She never mentioned it.

Did she ever ask you about your experiences overseas?

Not much. No.

What did you talk about?

Oh just general things doing you know. I got working and so forth like that. She was upset

34:00 because she had the shop and she wanted me to put, because I learnt cooking and things like that she wanted me to put in some ovens and I wouldn't do it. Because I didn't want to cook again.

Was that what the argument was about?

Yes, one of them. And that time then was when I decided to get married and all that.

34:30 Then we got married and Uncle Herb, he started to make up a speech and so forth and he said to Linda virtually, she don't know what's she's doing and letting herself in for and that.

Oh well you seem to have proved him wrong.

Yeah I said, she said to me, "Let's get out of here," and I couldn't get out of there quick enough. Peggy was with us.

What about your sister, how had she endured the war, what had

35:00 **she been doing?**

Oh that I wouldn't know too much. She was working in Oakleigh at the dry cleaners.

Did you see much of her when you got back?

No. Oh she had a boyfriend and they got married, that was, I was in the Middle East.

35:30 **That was a sign for me. So how had Melbourne changed when you got back or how had Australia changed?**

I didn't think it changed at all at that stage. It was later on that it changed, more so in the last three or four years.

You didn't think that it was different with all the women who had been out at work all of those years? Or you didn't

36:00 **notice that there was more machines and gadgets in operation than before?**

No I thought after the war, well the war made a big difference to the working force here and that. And what you'd done, you know what happened. Because Linda was working in the munitions factory.

36:30 **How long did she stay working for after you got married?**

Oh after we got married, oh she always wanted to work and she worked at different places, and she was re-enforcement placing, plastics. And they, that was a place in Oakleigh. And then she

37:00 went over, they shifted to another factory near Chadstone and from there they went up to, oh what's that, up near Westall, and worked there for most of her working life, and she was

37:30 a forelady of about seventy-one women.

Ok can I just interrupt there, when you got back had you saved very much money?

No.

Did you have anything to start with when you got home?

Oh yeah I had a little bit. But no big amount. Deferred pay.

38:00 **Had you signed most of your pay over to your mum?**

Yeah I did, yeah.

No, no no that was a sign for me not you, that was a two minute sign. So you didn't have much to start with so how did you get going again, how did you get yourself set up again afterwards?

Oh well money was put away for me like all soldiers and I had that. And I had a good job at the time and

38:30 we lived on that. Good as gold.

Just one final question, did you miss your army life enough to want to go back if you had had then chance?

No. No didn't think of it.

Interesting, because while you were in the army you didn't miss home.

No never missed home.

And then when you got home you never missed the army?

No.

I think you're a very...

I had myself

39:00 and then I had Linda and so I looked after all the time and that was the idea, and the kids as they got older. And that's about it you know. There's all of these kids here to look after now, there's another one to go up on there now. Grandchildren are those, they've all got children now.

39:30 **You're a great grandad?**

Great grandad.

Well you're a great interview as well.