

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Walter Varley (Wally) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/408>

### Tape 1

00:54 **Were you born in Newport, Walter?**

Yes, how did you know?

01:00 **Yes from the researcher, do you want to tell us about your childhood in Newport?**

Yes, I certainly can. I was born in a butcher's shop in Newport. My family were butchers. All the Varleys were butchers and Joe Varley, my father bought a building down there in the Depression days and its still there. If you go over the bridge from Footscray,

01:30 over the overpass to Williamstown you'll see the building - Varley's building 1921 when it was first bought. I was born upstairs. In those days there were no hospitals and I was weighed on the scales in the butcher shop at eight pounds. But I don't remember a great deal about Newport,

02:00 we weren't there for very long. After Newport we moved to Camberwell. I've got a brother I was in the army with. Harry and myself served together and I've got a sister she was in the army. We had a great time in Camberwell, and then we went into a pub in Bridge Road, Richmond. My father bought the Town Hall Hotel opposite the Richmond Town Hall.

02:30 It's now a trendy café. You probably know the name of it - I can't think of the name of it, but its an interesting place. He was the first one to get rid of the Carlton beer and put the Richmond Tiger on, and that's where I started school in the depression days, over at the Richmond Central. At the Richmond Central school a lot of the kids were bare footed nearly

03:00 and we were the same and we had to take our shoes. We never wore shoes, just old shoes and things, old boots to conform with all the other kids. But they were incredible days. I was a paperboy then in Richmond.

**Why was there this issue about the shoes you wore? Can you tell us a bit about that?**

Oh well we didn't wear boots and socks and things. We wore shoes a bit but there was no

03:30 dress up. They were all raggy. I was a paper boy and I enjoyed it all. I used to ride on the back of the cable trams then up and down Bridge Road, Richmond as a kid. We would hop on the back for a ride. But the Depression days were you know, it was a good education for me to be able to do that. I leaned to swim at the Richmond pool with the Donnetts.

04:00 They were professional boxers and wrestlers and both my brother and myself learned wrestling and boxing over there and Saturday nights we used to box and wrestle at the Richmond Town Hall. Girls were not allowed in. Little girls were not allowed in the town hall but Mum used to dress Pat my sister up in a Jackie Coogan cap and put her hair up and she'd come in and sit in the town hall and see it all.

04:30 But I can remember even the police in those days they had the big Lancia cars with the radios in the back. They were big open cars. They would come into the pub at all sorts of hours and knock on the door and expect to get a few drinks and things. They were the days when Jimmy Scullin was the prime minister of the Labour Party - big days those depression days. My father used to hang out the corner window

05:00 up at corner of Lindhurst Street at the hotel and he would argue the point with them - the Communists. Mum would pull him in, you know come in out of there. That was a bit about Richmond.

**What an amazing childhood and what an amazing era to be growing up - the Depression in early urban Melbourne?**

We used to make paper footballs with newspaper with string on them tied up. I was a paperboy and I sold papers in the street

- 05:30 and I would go out and have a go and I wanted to do it with all the other kids. Horse and drays used to go up and down Bridge Road, Richmond. We would clean up all the manure and everything off the horse drays. The horse drays then delivered all the beer and everything you know from different places. Adams Case were up the road. It was a factory, and as a kid I used to go there early to get the... Dad would send me up there to get the packing
- 06:00 cases for the kitchens.
- So growing up in a pub during that time you would have come across a lot of people from the local community and you would have heard a lot about how people were struggling in the Depression. Can you talk a bit about that?**
- I remember one day a truck pulled up in front of our place and he had about, oh full of cauliflowers, and he couldn't sell his cauliflowers. So my father bought the whole lot, a penny each they were
- 06:30 and he gave them to all the poor people. Mum used to make sausage rolls, mince pies and patties and everything every week, and fish and he would send trays and trays of it over to the school for the poor kids. But you know, it was a great education to be able to mix with all those different types of people.
- 07:00 **I guess coming from Camberwell too?**
- Well then we went on to Camberwell after that. We enjoyed it there.
- So how long did you spend in Richmond do you remember?**
- Probably about three years. I think then Jackie Titus, one of the great Richmond footballers - I was a Richmond barracker then.
- 07:30 He bought the pub. But the Richmond Tiger, the beer, I can remember the label when came out you know. It was a big challenge. I think Dad took a half page in The Argus then in those days advertising the Richmond Tiger. But it was fun, the whole thing was fun. I could talk for hours about that, but lets get on to some other part of my life.
- 08:00 **Well no, it's fine to hear those stories of that time. Yeah, we've got plenty of time to listen to those. It's interesting and it's an important part of your life too.**
- Oh we went to up to St. Stephens's Church next to St. Ignatius, up on the hill. And there was a story going around about Spring Heel Jack. Everybody was frightened to get into their houses at night. There was a fellow
- 08:30 around the trees up at St. Ignatius that was suppose to have springs on his shoes and feet and he would jump on to people. It was very well known around Richmond in those days about Spring Heel Jack but it eventually faded out.
- Was he ever caught, did he ever exist?**
- Well people said they had seen him but I think it was a bit of a joke really about Spring Heel Jack. But
- 09:00 that was some of the main things. We had a nice dining room there in the hotel and we had jobs to do as kids - folding the serviettes. And I can always remember on Sunday we would have a little bottle each. There was the kitchen, the big dining room and then through the dining room into the kitchen with a big open fire, and at the head of the table sat Joe Varley my father.
- 09:30 The three of us sitting all around with Mum and we would all get a tiny bottle about that big of Guinness stout each. A little demy demi, demi one, a little small one. We would have that on Sunday. That was the speciality, the bottle of Guinness stout.
- Where did you father come from?**
- Oh, he was born in Carlton
- 10:00 and Mum came from Stawell. She was a country girl but she was the one... she had a lot of brains, a good organiser and negotiator in the pub with the people. In those days in hotels during the Depression days and nearly up to the war, the drip trays... When you pull a beer it runs into the copper dish - the overflow runs
- 10:30 from the tap into the tray. And now what people used to do...a lot of the old pensioners used to come in with a billy can and buy three penneth of slops. It was fresh beer but it was in the tray and it was quite legal. Now about the war time they had to put Condies crystals in the trays to colour it and its illegal to sell it. They used to call it slops.
- 11:00 **Do you recall many people coming to buy the slops?**
- Old Mrs Heaney used to come in, she was a little old lady of about 60. She would come in about once a week. Old Mrs Varley would come in a say "Can I get a little billy can of slops?"
- Sounds like your parents really went out of their way to help people out in the Depression and to understand what people where going through?**

Oh yes, they were very interested to help a lot of people.

- 11:30 Any people who were poor. They would help them with clothes. Mum used to knit and buy a lot of clothes and send them over to the school and things like that - and particular all the food and everything. But there was a lot of tragedies in those days, people unemployed and on sustenance and everything. The Boulevard at Kew - they were built by all the unemployed... all the sustenance people.
- 12:00 They worked there for practically no money at all, digging and making roads and things. It's interesting - down at the end of Bridge Road towards the Hawthorn Bridge where the housing commission is on the corner there... you would know about it, but just before you get to the bridge down Bridge Road that was the Richmond racecourse. There was a racecourse there and opposite that on the corner
- 12:30 the cable tram sheds were there. The big rollers and wheels of the cables, those trams were running along on cables, and when you came to the corner of Church Street where the trams cross, the Gripman would have to let go his grip to go across otherwise you'd catch the cable on the other tram. The cable tram had a little inside carriage and there was an outside carriage,
- 13:00 and it was a penny then... oh no it was a penny for kids from the Hawthorn Bridge into the city, and about threepence for an adult on the tram. They were running quite regular up and down there. The steam rollers used to run up and down rolling the roads and putting on the tar. All those roads in those days in Bridge Road were made out of red gum blocks covered in tar each side of the tram lines.
- 13:30 McDonald's, the steamroll people would be up and down there all the time repairing the road, and (UNCLEAR) McDonald I went to school with later on. We're great mates and we often talk about it. The McDonald family.

**I'm curious to know why your parents settled in Newport?**

Well Dad had a lot of shops and so did his brothers, quite a few of them had shops around

- 14:00 in Carlton, mainly in Carlton. And he decided...he was a fairly good business man, a pretty cluey man and he picked...he could see the situation down at Newport and he could see that block there and he said I'm going to open a butcher shop. That's what made him take the move. There were four shops. I think
- 14:30 there was Adam's Cakes next door. Cleggs had a big grocery business, no a men's wear clothing business... And King's. It was a two storey building a very nice building in those days.

**It's a trendy place now and it was quite industrial back then?**

Oh yes and the railway workshops were over the road and we used to have...Mum used arrange for the Williamstown band to come down on a Saturday morning and play out

- 15:00 in front of the shops. She was a bit of a promoter my mother, and she'd give prizes out to different customers for their kids and things. They'd be there and there was always a bit of fun on Saturday mornings out the front of Varley's butcher shop.

**You've had a very interesting childhood, very diverse, different things that have happened to you.**

- 15:30 **I'd like to spend a little bit more time on the Depression years and Richmond. When you said you went bare foot to school was that so.....**

Oh we played in the streets after school completely bare footed but we'd put on a pair of shoes with no socks or something. We had to be the same as all the other kids.

**So that was about fitting in?**

Oh fitting in.

- 16:00 We loved it you know, it was good. We learned a lot and we mixed a lot and they used to come and play with us in Richmond and run around and wag school and all this sort of thing. But after Richmond we moved on to other things.

**Where there many people that you knew who were evicted from their homes during the Depression?**

- 16:30 Well I wouldn't have known about it. I was a bit young to know, but there were families on the unemployment and everything. On the dole they called it...being on Sustenance it was. Yes, a great amount of people, but they all seemed to get the football on Saturday.

**So in the pub in Richmond did you have many family members around?**

No only Mum and Dad.

- 17:00 They ran the hotel and I think there was little Freddy the yardman he was there. He'd be down the cellar half the time changing the barrels over. In those days the beer used to be lowed down by ropes into the cellar off the footpath. The horse and dray from the Richmond brewery would come, they would

open the louvres in the footpath and lower the beer down. That's the way that they used to received the beer.

- 17:30 At St. Stephens Church where we attended it was interesting because Mum insisted that we all go to Sunday School, and that was Sunday School in the morning and then we would go back in the afternoon for another round of things.

**So you had brothers and sisters?**

Yes I had one brother and a sister.

- 18:00 Harry is fifteen months younger than me, and the sister is another fifteen months younger. There is fifteen months between the three of us - and he was a pretty wild little fellow too.

**So you were the eldest. Did you have extra responsibilities?**

No not really, we were on the same level, always plenty of fights and arguments and things.

- 18:30 Before we actually got up into Canterbury, we went into Bowen Street, Camberwell which is up on the top of the hill from Toorak Road before Ashburton. We had a house there. I can remember one day we were little buggers. We were playing up and we got the hose out, Harry and I, and played firemen with a bell and hosed the house out next door at meal time through the kitchen window.

- 19:00 We used to go and take her eggs and bring them home and Mum would have to send them back and things like that. That was in Bowen Street.

**Were your parents very disciplinarian?**

Yes. Oh yes Mum was very strict, absolutely. After Bowen's we went to another church then. I can't think of the name. It was on the corner of Bowen Street and Toorak Road.

- 19:30 It was incredible, at a later date we went to Sunday school there. Post war my brother became a dentist and he had a big two-storey house over the road from Bowen Street. He had his dental practice a hundred yards away from where we were.

**So going from Richmond during the Depression to Camberwell is quite a change. Was it very different?**

- 20:00 Yes it was. That was from Bowen Street and then we moved to Canterbury Road in Canterbury. Dad was a bit of a good thinker...and Mum. I think we paid seventeen hundred pounds for that house. It was on the corner of Monomeith Avenue and Canterbury Road. We had a tennis court and it was very good, a lot of comfort.

- 20:30 We were getting to the teenage stage then, getting up a little bit. We had lots of parties and lots of fun and we were strictly sent to church again down to St. Marks on the corner of Canterbury Road. It was a big sandstone place and we played a lot of basketball down there with the youth group. But Canterbury Road was a bit of a wild place too.

- 21:00 The things we used to play, the games in the streets and things. We used to play drop the penny which was a piece of cotton with a penny on the end of it with a little hole in it. We'd go down to East Camberwell shopping centre and we would be up a tree and we would lower the penny down behind someone and drop it and then pull it up. A friend of mine, Peter Thomas who lived up near Wentworth Avenue,

- 21:30 on Sunday morning we used to like to play the penny drop with little old elderly ladies who was going to church. They would stop and look around for their money and say, "Oh I've dropped my plate money." I remember one day I nailed a purse on the edge of the road, a lady's purse and that caused a bit of commotion getting out of the car and stopping

- 22:00 to look at the purse. The things we did. We even dug under the drive of the house next door to make a cubby house, which was ridiculous because there were cars going over it and there was only concrete over the top. We used to hang on the back of cars going along on our pushbikes. We'd be hanging onto the back of the car to get a free pull.

- 22:30 There was a bus service with little buses which used to run from Canterbury to the Hawthorn Bridge at Richmond. It used to carry about ten or twelve people and we would ride that. Sometimes we would have a ride on that, school kids you know. There would be that many hanging out the back it was unbelievable.

- 23:00 And down there we also had the big memorial hall. It has a big dome on the top of it at Canterbury on Canterbury Road. That's where Bob Menzies used to open his Liberal Party on election night and that was always a big night. UAP, the United Australia Party they called it then before it became the Liberal Party.

- 23:30 Joe Varley, being a Liberal man was always down there, and he would have a few beers and interject and he'd have a few words to say about things. And the church next door, the Presbyterian church, it

had a beautiful big dome on it, and we used to get on the top of that at night and make a bit of noise on it, playing up, tapping the roof and that sort of thing, but they were wild boys, the Varley boys.

24:00 **Joe Varley was your dad so he was a bit of a political man, liked his politics did he?**

Oh yes absolutely, he was a bit political.

**So you mentioned earlier about being in the pub and he'd be yelling out the window?**

Oh yes he would have a few beers and he'd be out there arguing the point, with the Commos on the corner, and Mum would be worried about it and pull him in you know.

24:30 I remember Richmond, another story. I think Richmond were premiers one year and Joe being a character, he got in touch with the circus - he wanted a donkey to take to Richmond Town Hall. He had the Richmond jumper on and he got a donkey and they had to put socks on it to keep it clean. He hired someone with a shovel and pan to clean up the droppings. Unbelievable the things my father used to do. He rode a bike off the high tower at Richmond

25:00 swimming pool for a dare. Rode the old bike off and straight into the pool.

**Did he come from a poor family?**

Yes he was self employed, self educated and never was highly educated .

25:30 He never used a pen. He used an indelible pencil - you have never heard of them have you? They are illegal of course and he would sign all his cheques with an indelible pencil. He would go into the bank... "You can't do that Mr Varley," and he'd say, "Yes I can" - because you can't rub out an indelible pencil. He never used a pen always the indelible pencil when he paid accounts and everything.

26:00 He was only a little short fellow Joe. He was much shorter than my brother or I. My mother was tall but Joe was a tiny little bloke. He got on well with everybody. He was liked by everyone and liked a few beers and a few whiskies, and a bit of fun in the pub. They used to have the parlours in the hotels then where the little old ladies used to come in

26:30 and have a little brandy or a gin and tonic. They would sit in the little parlours to have a drink. And the dining room was always busy. A lot of business people used to come in for lunch... some of the business people, solicitors and from the factories there. It was a popular eating spot.

**And did your mum cook in the kitchen for the pub?**

Oh yes. We had Maggie she was the offside and the cook.

27:00 There were about two or three in the kitchen. They had big open fires then, no modern things. They would always get a three course old fashioned meal, a roast, and the starched serviettes. There were a few boarders there - about five or six bedrooms upstairs in the hotel, different people.

27:30 We had a lot of old artists used to come in there - can't remember their names. Some of the well known ones used to come in and drink. Our doctor from Richmond, Frank Lynn, he was a colonel in the First World War. He would come in with all his medals and dressed before Anzac Day, and before the march early he'd come in and have a couple of whiskies.

28:00 And I have had a couple of rides in the big Lancia police cars . I've been out in them just for a drive up the street when we were kids.

**So you had the police coming in?**

Oh yes, the police would come in early in the morning or at night. Plain clothes police they were. Of course the police then used to have the big shiny black hats, the ones out on the beat - have you ever seen them? Big hats like that with a little brim on then.

28:30 The Richmond police station was over the road and next door to the Richmond police station was the Richmond cinema theatre. I think it was one of the first theatres in Victoria to put on a talking film, a movie film. I'm not sure, but I'm sure we saw 'All Quiet on the Western Front' at the theatre. That was a bit of a speciality to be able to go to the pictures in those days.

29:00 Alexanders were the big drapers, menswear, up on the corner of Church Street and Bridge Road Richmond. Mum used to buy nearly all our clothes up there, and we had the cake shops and the penny cake shops and this and that and everything. But after Camberwell I went to the state school

29:30 at Canterbury for a while. Then I was fortunate. Mum and Dad... we went to a private school then, the three of us. I went to Scotch with my brother, and my sister went to MLC [Methodists Ladies College] over at Kew. We had a bit of fun then too. We used to run in the morning to get to the train at East Camberwell.

30:00 To catch it to get there...we had the dog box on the trains then. Have you heard of a dog box? A little now narrow carriage...a train with little carriages. They'd seat about seven people. Well we'd get down there and quite often we couldn't get on the train because we had to stand back for the adults. We were

taught to do that from school and home.

- 30:30 We would let the adults step in first. So we used to ride the trains from East Camberwell to Glenferrie, then jump the tram up to school. There was a gang of us and we would meet the girls at the Glenferrie Station after school.

**Was it very different going to Scotch? Different kinds of kids from different backgrounds?**

During the war..., well when I was at Scotch, I was in the fourth form when I first started there. Old Rubber Guts was my teacher the first year, Mr. Tomlinson. In the class next door where my brother was, was Mr. Nance. One of the boys there, a new boy, he would always have to stand up in school and Mr. Nance

- 31:00 would say "I want you stand up and give me your name." They'd go around the room, "Jones, Barley, Smith, Roberts, Watt." He said, "Excuse me I want you to give me your name." "Watt sir." It was Randall Watt, and we could always call him Wattie and I see a fair bit of him now. We used to have a bit of a smoke behind the hedge then.

- 31:30 In those early days that was the place for smoking behind the hedge. For any misbehaviours you would either have to go to the principal for the cane or the captain of the school. I was caught out for something I don't know what it was, and I preferred to take the captain. Mr Gilroy, he was a New Zealand rugby player, a big strong fellow. "Oh I'll take Harvey Nicholson." The captain and the prefects would be sitting around the table

- 32:00 and he'd talk to me and say "So you've been smoking and this and that, well right, okay." So I had a bit of cardboard well packed into my pants before I went in. It was a cane about that long. And the first thing he said was "Lets have a look inside your pants" and he pulled the cardboard out and I think I got about six cane cuts.

- 32:30 I made a lot of mates. It's unbelievable. When we joined the army in my unit, the first unit, there was ten fellows from Scotch College that I sat with in those two forms. The Hannah's...bushies they were, big bush fellows. Gordon Hannah, and we had John Harriett from Holbrook. They had big properties, they were boarders, And these fellows we called scabbies -

- 33:00 the boarders, and the day boys we called dagoes. The scabbies never had much to eat and my mother used to send extra food. They'd take our food off us. They were big fellows. Bob, Douglas, and the Macquarie brothers, Alan and Sid Macquarie. There was a lot of them. We didn't realise when we left school and went into the Armoured Division, we all sort of

- 33:30 walked into that same unit. A lot of them went down to see Colonel Pope down on St. Kilda Road and they wanted to be 'tankies'. They wanted to join the Armoured Division and he wrote a note and they went. So fellows I went to school with are still mates of mine and we went right through the war. We had floods at Scotch at one period.

- 34:00 Glenferrie Road, the dip in Glenferrie Road near the Kooyong tennis courts and the blind institute was completely covered in water and trams couldn't get through. The water came right up and we had a boat shed on the river and the water came right up nearly up to the school. We had a boat out there and you could row nearly on the ovals. But a lot of them joined the cadets, a lot of our fellows. A lot of them did very well during the war, high commissions and things.

- 34:30 I joined the scouts which was interesting.

**So when was that, when did you join the scouts?**

'41 oh no wait a minute, in the scouts? About '35,'36,'37, something like that..

- 35:00 We did camps and things like that. Some went army, some went cadets and some went scouts. So my brother and myself we went into the scouts and joined that.

**So were you very conscious of the approaching war at that time in '37?**

About the war and what was happening? What it was leading up to, oh yes. The trouble in Germany and the problems there. A lot of them said we want to go and get away and of course in those days you could alter your birth certificates.

- 35:30 You can't join... you have got to be nineteen. I didn't join the army until I was nineteen. As soon as I turned nineteen I joined. There was a bloke younger than me and he played around with his birth certificate and changed the dates and everything and a lot of them did that to get in.

**So what did your father think about you joining up?**

Oh he

- 36:00 was quite happy about it. He wanted to get in but he was too old. My mother, during the war years... they all did things. She worked down in Chapel Street in one of the big preserving companies helping peeling fruit, tinned fruit for the soldiers. A lot of people did those jobs.

- 36:30 Then we had the comforts fund parcels when we were away.  
**So you went from the scouts...you were in the scouts to start with?**
- 37:00 **Just another thing I will let you know about. The Richmond brewery, as I mentioned,**
- 37:30 **they would deliver their beer in horse drawn vehicles and the beer was delivered in cases in wooden boxes and in those cement bags you've got now. There were a dozen bottles in a cement bag stitched up. They would go around the suburbs in a horse drawn vehicle and they would deliver it for ten and six a dozen. That's ten shillings and six pence, its nothing. And you would get a penny back on the bottle.**
- 38:00 **Canterbury Road, in the hotel... When we were in Bridge Road Richmond just before we moved to Camberwell. Joe Varley bought a car, I've got a photo of it. A big Chrysler Imperial 80, a big open car with dickey seats in it. A magnificent car, and he couldn't drive it.**
- 38:30 **So he had someone driving him around in it and they used to have dustcoat then, driver's dust coats. Khaki coats with a belt on it. . He would put his coat on and be in this big Chrysler car. We took it to Canterbury when we were on the corner and he couldn't handle it, no way at all. I was getting up to the stage of getting my licence**
- 39:00 **and we used to get it out at night and we used to have a go in this car. I can remember one night I took it down Monomeith Avenue with about eight fellows in the back of it, down to Canterbury and we could hardly stop it when we got to the end. We nearly went across Canterbury Road. But that car - the things we did in that car. I remember we had it at a boat race just after school when I think Scotch**
- 39:30 **won the Head of the River, and I took a mob in the car down to St Kilda. It was all of us and we put a placard on the front of it and the car boiled at Fitzroy Street. So we went into a little Greek café and we got a bucket of water and filled it up. The things we did. Coming down one night in Chapel Street after being at a dance somewhere... in the car, there was a lever on the floor where you could open the exhaust pipe**
- 40:00 **up and it would give a big noise. There were two exhaust pipes and the cut off. I was coming down Chapel Street with it wide open, the exhaust pipe, and for some reason one of the boys said the police are behind you, so I shut it down to just a little flipper.**
- 40:30 **He pulled us up and he said, "There's something wrong with your exhaust pipe. You've got a hole in it. You had better get that repaired." That was a great car. It's unbelievable the things that we did. We took the car on a holiday. About four of five us camping, and coming back in the fog we hit a cow in the fog and we didn't know what it was. I said, "What are we going to do?" And I rang Joe Varley. Just previously to ringing Joe, one of my mates brought a car up and we tried to lift the car up to tow it but there was no way they could lift it up it was too heavy. It was just a heavy car this one.**

## Tape 2

- 00:46 **So tell us about your father?**
- Well he was a little fellow. He wasn't very tall. He wore and nineteen-inch collar. A very strong man. You would often see him put two shillings
- 01:00 in his mouth and bend it with his teeth. He had all his teeth. He got on well with everybody old Joe. He liked a few drinks and he would enjoy it. I've seen him actually... he could wrestle. He would wrestle with people. He could handle it. He had no trouble with his arms or anything but he was...
- 01:30 He liked people, he liked the pub life and he liked people, like when he was in the butcher shop. I remember in the butcher shop if he put a boy on or an apprentice on, the first thing he would say was, "If you want to work for me there's the knife and there's the piece of steak, a big piece of rump. I want you to cut me a slice of steak," and if he couldn't cut that slice of steak nice and even, like a bit of cheese, he
- 02:00 didn't want to know him. He was very, very fussy about those things.
- What was your relationship with him like?**
- Average. He was good all right. He used to clean our shoes. He was a very, very fussy man about our shoes. Even the kids at Scotch. He would come passed...Peter Thomas would come past and he would come in the morning and get their shoes property cleaned and polished.
- 02:30 I'm the same now, I just must keep my shoes nice and clean. Yes, he was very fussy about those things. Oh we used to get on all right. He used to enjoy a bit of booze and a bit of fun. He was good but Mum was the boss I think. She made a lot of the decisions.

- 03:00 She had a good brain too Mum did about business. She was so good. She took us to everything , the Royal Show and all those things. We got our bags and looked after us, our clothes and kept us nice and clean and everything. We weren't scrappy. We had to be properly turned out you know, we had to be correctly dressed in everything
- 03:30 which I think has paid off over the years, and I like to be reasonably turned out if I can.
- So why did you want to join the army?**
- Well I mean naturally the war was on and the Japs were in the war, October '41, the 15th October 1941. I had just turned 19 and I got the call up. The call up was coming to go into the militia
- 04:00 and I said no way so I immediately went straight into Royal Park and joined up. VX64806 that was my number and that's when I met all my pals and it was a complete change of life. Men in their forties and older men and young fellows and roughies, business men, everybody all on the same level straight away.
- 04:30 I can remember the first day I joined at Royal Park as clear as a bell. We got all our...the big old sergeant major...he was a First World War fellow, as rough as guts. He had us running around and doing this. Our kit bags were marked with our numbers and he looked around and he said, "Your name is Varley and that's your number." He wrote it down and he came around and got about six of us and that night we were put on guard
- 05:00 at Royal Park. We had had our issued of gear, clothes, and in the issue we had thick grey flannel singlets. I had never worn anything like that in my life and it was a hell of a cold night. This night on the guard I said, "I'm going to get into the grey flannel singlet." It lasted an hour. I had the prickly heat all over the body and I had to get it off and get back into a cotton singlet. That's how they cop you, and
- 05:30 I was hoping to get home that night and have a bit of fun. But I was gone you see. After being in Puckapunyal for about three or four days I wanted to be a tank man. I wanted to join the Armoured Division. I put my name down. There was a big line up of everybody and some wanted to go into this and that, and I was
- 06:00 fortunately that I was picked out. They said I could go into the Armoured Division and I was happy. We were sent up by truck to Puckapunyal. All our young fellows went straight up to Pukka, those that wanted to get into Armoured Division. As I mentioned, a lot who had a bit of a whisper about things went down to St. Kilda Road to see Colonel Pope who was at the divisional headquarters.
- 06:30 He gave them a note to get into the Armoured Division and so up they went. Well, I ran into all these blokes from school, I couldn't believe it. Gordon Hannah was a great big bushy fellow from up on the Upper Murray. The Macquarie brothers, John Herriot. We all knew each other and we had other fellows,
- 07:00 forty and forty five with us and we were young boys. We all got on together, everybody, and not many could drive as young fellows but I was a very good driver at that stage and I taught a lot of them how to drive. I just omitted one thing there. Before I joined the army after leaving school, I went to... my brother went on and I left school a bit earlier than he did. I went to Melbourne Tech
- 07:30 and did engineering, drawing and refrigeration for twelve months and then I went to Patterson Lang and Bruce in Flinders Lane and I was working in Flinders Lane in the clothing business. I was there for about eight or nine months and then I left and joined a fashion house. A chap by the name of Max Mollard and he was a very hard man, very, very strict.
- 08:00 Everybody was yes sir and no sir and they wouldn't call you by your first name. It was Varley this or Varley that and everything. He would run around and he was a little bit of a stand over merchant. I stayed there right up until I turned 19, just nearly 19, before I joined the army. When I got my licence at 18... I remember the day I got my licence
- 08:30 he sent me out on the road for a fortnight up into New South Wales as a traveller with a caravan on the back full of stock. I was away for a fortnight and I would leave in the morning about 6 o'clock. A big Pontiac car and first stop would be Wodonga.
- 09:00 You would have to go to the police station to get a permit to go over the border into New South Wales from Victoria. I think it cost a shilling or something to go in. Then the first night at Wagga, then Gunnedah, right up the top. Forbes the whole lot. And that was a good business experience and I did get a lot of good knowledge working with Mollard. So then after working
- 09:30 on the road travelling for a while, I decided, well now I have turned 19, I'm going to leave and go to the war. So I went into his office one day and told him I'm leaving. He looked at me and said, "I beg your pardon." I said, "I'm leaving I've had enough." I got my marching orders and I went out and I got a reference and that's when I started
- 10:00 army life. When I came back from the war I went back for about three or four months, back to Mollard. I had a holiday for three weeks and then I went back to work for him for a few months. Then I made the decision, I've had enough. I will have a go on my own. So I started with a couple of hundred pound in the fashion business.



10:30 Everything was on quotas then, coupons and all sorts of things. You were struggling to get materials and things. It became quite successful, the whole business. I have really been self employed you know all my life.

**Can I ask you why you wanted to join the Tank Division?**

11:00 Oh being a driver and being mechanical minded and working on the car and everything I just thought it would be marvellous to be in a tank crew. So we all got in. When we joined were rookies and we knew nothing. We were sent up to Puckapunyal and we went to the Armoured Training Regiment as raw recruits and learned a bit about driving, wireless,

11:30 gunnery. But the main division, the main headquarters of the 1st Australian Division was formed in St. Kilda Road, 441 St. Kilda Road Melbourne. It was a big mansion. The 6th Division had it before we did and they went overseas and the Armoured Division walked in and took over. So that was the headquarters, the administration that planned of the whole

12:00 division. After that was planned and formed, in October that's when I went into the army at Puckapunyal and we did our basic training down at the Army Training Regiment. Then the Armoured Division decided that they would have to have a fighting squadron, a divisional headquarters fighting squadron as a protective squadron

12:30 to look after the divisional headquarters, the general and all his senior officers. So Major Ives who was an English gentleman...we call him a gentleman...he came out from England. They recruited him in and they wanted him in Armour.

13:00 He joined the army at 16 at Warrington UK and he went right through the war from a school boy, and he was very knowledgeable about vehicles and everything as far as armour was concerned. He was the perfect soldier and he was appointed by General Northcote from St. Kilda Road to hand pick his own squadron

13:30 for the fighting squadron. So Major Ives marched in and he went down to the Armoured Training Centre and he interviewed a lot of us. Not only my mates from school but all sorts of fellows, bushies the whole lot, and he went along and asked you what your name was and questioned you and he hand picked the squadron.

14:00 The fellows I was with were all hand picked fellows. Then we moved out of the Armoured Training Regiment about a mile away in the big Puckapunyal army Camp to where they set up this area for the Divisional Headquarters Squadron. Major Ives was our first CO [Commanding Officer] and Captain Dennis was the 2IC [Second In Command], all us rookie boys. They presented us with Bren gun carriers and D and M,

14:30 driving and maintenance courses. And he was a very hard foot slogger. He was a great soldier for dress and every thing. Major Ives a very correct man, incredible. If you wanted a hair cut...there was no such thing as a hair cut. You would say I'm going to get a hair cut and he'd say, "Soldier, it's hairs cut, plural," and the beret had to be

15:00 exactly straight across the...an inch above the left eye. Kit inspections to be laid out and he would come and have a look once a week, packed blankets everything. He was an incredible soldier Cec Ives. Oh, on Sunday mornings there was a church parade. At Puckapunyal we had three other regiments there, the 8th Armoured Regiment, 8th, 9th and 10th lined up at Pucker

15:30 on the big main road and every one had fifty two tanks. There was a church parade and every unit had to parade for church on Sunday morning. Any fellows in the squadron, if you didn't want to go to church you went on to duties, kitchen duties or fatigues. And I think we won the top prize for marching and everything.

16:00 You know it was incredible. It made our fellows professional soldiers by the way he trained us all. But he was a wonderful man. We all loved old Cec. He was hard but fair. We were the first unit in the Australian Army to learn a pistol guard. A normal soldier carries his rifle on his shoulder for a guard. You see them at the Shrine with their rifle on their shoulder while they march >

16:30 He taught us to do it with a pistol, with a .45 Smith and Weston pistol. We would all line up and we would all have our pistols and break them and the guard would be inspected with the pistols. I have a photograph of the pistol guard. Things like that.

**So when you said that he hand picked his men what qualities do you think you had?**

17:00 Oh he just talked to us and asked us a few questions and things and different things. He picked the goodies and the baddies, the roughies everybody. It was always yes sir, no sir all the time. He was very strict. He just picked out... it worked out that the guys that joined in '41 that Cec Ives picked, we went right through the war together and what's left of us are still together.

17:30 Our mates, you know it was just something, we just love one another. It's incredible. I can remember after the war... when we were discharged after the war, I was in Flinders Lane. I had my own warehouse at 289 opposite Patterson Lang, a big warehouse there. A few of the guys used to drop in

from time to time,

- 18:00 have a yarn and things. A few of the bushies would be knocking about and they'd come in. And two mates in particular, Alan Macquarie and Bill Perdie... Bill Perdie's father was an estate agent in Melbourne, E.M. Perdie, and Allan Macquarie started a little business. And I heard a whisper on the grape vine from somebody that one of our fellows, Alf was his name.
- 18:30 I won't say any more. He was... he had no education much but he was a good tough hard working Digger. He would do anything. He would hop in and go for it. He was married with a couple of young kids and he got into a lot of trouble after the war. We had hire purchase then, people wanted a fridge
- 19:00 they wanted this and that, and that was the start of things. So he got locked up in badly in the hire purchase thing and I got the story he was going to commit suicide. I called these fellows together. It was a small meeting and we sat and talked it over and I said we have got to do something for Alf. So I said what I'm going to do is I'm going to write to the squadron and let them know a little bit about what's happening - no names no pack drill. One of our members is in a lot of trouble
- 19:30 about this with his family and no money. I said I make a suggestion to you. You can send a donation and if any of you want to know or want it back... or you make it a gift take your pick. I think two fellows out of the whole squadron wanted it back but the rest said it's all in, the money.
- 20:00 And I said I'm not going to tell you who it is, it's not fair. So we raised enough money to pay a deposit on a house for him. And he is not with us now, but that was something to me to help a mate. Things like that.

20:30 **So those bonds were formed out of your experiences during the war?**

The bonds were unbelievable. My best mate, my very best mate, little Ted Leeman. A little bushie, uneducated, one of the greatest bushmen you could ever meet. He was over in South Australian, York Peninsular. He just worked there as a fisherman Ted.

- 21:00 He was the greatest. He was a wonderful bushman. He could take you through the bush, no compasses. He knew exactly where he was. He could look around and tell you where a kangaroo had sat and he knew where the wind was blowing from and everything. He was fantastic bloke. Little Ted was in the same tank crew as I was in Borneo. There was Dick Bennison and Ted and myself.
- 21:30 Dick was a big bloke tall like me. He was the senior officer in the tank. But different fellows you know. We wealthy fellows. We had a lot of squatters from the bush and that. Plenty of money but they all dropped down into the same line, no difference. On big stations, big properties in Western Australia. We would go on leave together. We'd all go together and have great times
- 22:00 and get into the booze at six o'clock at night in the Hotel Australia in the bottom bar. The fellow with the broom would sweep the floor at about six cleaning it up. There was army, navy and air force all down in the basement bar there. He'd scream out, "Time gentlemen please," two or three times, so we would all get another bottle of beer each and put it in our great coat pockets and drink them there. We wouldn't go out.
- 22:30 Things like that you know. We used to walk over the road to an Italian restaurant in the Centre Way, opposite Hotel Australia which goes right through to Flinders's Lane. Navarettes, an Italian place. We used to go down there at night for a feed.

**So with your training I'm curious to know when you first got in a tank and learn about it?**

- 23:00 We did a lot of schools and things. I just wanted to be a tank driver. I was a driver, a car driver. I just didn't want to be a foot slogger. I wanted to get in a tank. You'd see a bit of action with a tank. So we started off in little Bren gun carriers, little carriers that we could drive. They were track vehicles you know but they were open and they were the first things we learned to drive in, the Bren carriers. And then we got the first Australian
- 23:30 tank. We developed a tank. We couldn't get enough tanks from America so we developed the Sentinel tank. The Australian tank was built up in New South Wales at the railway work shops. It was an incredible tank. It had three Cadillac engines in it but it was on a trident and we had a lot of trouble getting them synchronized and that tank was the first tank in the world where the top turret
- 24:00 of the tank was all cast in one piece and the hole was too. We had experimented with one at Rokeby when we went into that camp, but eventually we were able to get enough of our own Grant tanks that they closed the set up down. It wasn't a viable proposition and they were too expensive to make and we were getting enough tanks
- 24:30 sent out for the division from America.

**So the Sentinel... so that was designed here in Australia?**

Oh yes. It was a magnificent tank. I've got a photo there taken up at Puckapunyal. That was an incredible tank but we couldn't get the motors all running at the same speed.

- 25:00 We had a lot of trouble. It had a twenty five pounder gun in it and the last one they were going to put a different system in. They were going to put a seventeen pounder in but time was running out so we had to get on with the production of the tanks and production of other vehicles for the services. So we were able to pick up these tanks and the whole division had enough tanks then
- 25:30 to set up the whole of the Armoured Division. There were six regiments in the Armoured Division. The 8th, Victoria; 9th from South Australian; and the 6th, New South Wales. There was 8, 9 and 10 they were from Victoria, and 5, 6 and, 7 were up in New South Wales. Each regiment had fifty two tanks. It was a big
- 26:00 business the whole thing was.

**So were you testing the Sentinel?**

Oh yes, I did a little bit of testing in those. We brought one up from Broadmeadows because General Northcote who was the GOC [General Officer Commanding] was up there then. He wanted to have a look at the tank a bit further and wanted us to have run with it and give opinions and things on it. We had a demonstration on it at our camp at Rokeby. It was only there for a couple of days and that's the last we saw of it.,

- 26:30 We didn't see anything further after that.

**What was the next... what other kinds of tanks were you trained to operate?**

Oh other tanks? We had the first Staghound that came to Australia. That was an American armoured car, the big one which came in towards the end of the war. That was a four wheel, big wheels

- 27:00 with a turret on the top spinning around the top with a 37mm gun in the turret. It was the first vehicle to come to Australia which was fully automatic. Fluid fly wheel they called it then and it changed the gears as it went through like the automatic cars do. That was the start of it, an American vehicle and it would do up to 70 mph, that vehicle. It was a reconnaissance vehicle. We had them.

**27:30 What about the Matilda?**

Oh the Matilda tank. Well this is getting on towards the end of the war. Before we went overseas we were a special equipment squadron that went up to Southport with all these new tanks that we were given.

- 28:00 We had the Matilda tanks. We had a flame thrower Matilda, which was...we had a lot of problems with it to get it running. It carried about 80 gallons of thickened gelatrol petrol, the Matilda Frog tank. There were three in the crew: Teddy Leeman the driver; I was in the turret... I was the gunner; and Dick Bennison. You could hardly get into the tank for equipment....

- 28:30 for the tanks, the fuel tanks. The gelatrol was thickened like treacle. There were three great big pumps. They used to pump the pressure up on the fuel up into the top gun for the gun to fire. And we had a lot of problems with the hoses bursting. We experimented until we got them ready to go. In the end we changed a lot of couplings and that was successful and we got them going. We had another special tank the, Dozer tank.

- 29:00 It was another Matilda. It had dozer blades like you see on the street today. They were on the front for cutting tracks and roads in the jungle. And we had a bridge-layer tank that could lift a bridge up and open it up and out. We had a General Grant tank which was another American tank. That was the tank we had originally right through the war. The Grants all the regiments had.

- 29:30 The General Grant... We put a big dozer blade on the front, hydraulic. That was right at the end and they were never used. So we had a lot of special equipment tanks.

**Do you recall what sort of equipment you had in the tanks, can you describe to me the different types of equipment and the functions were?**

In the Grant tank, the first ones were Matildas the Mark 3. Not the Grant I'm sorry...yes the Grant, the Matildas the Mark 3.

- 30:00 There was a 75mm gun that was down in the front away from the turret. There was a loader behind him loading the gun, and the driver down there. Up on the top there were three others. There was the crew commander, the gunner, a wireless operator.

- 30:30 So there were quite a few in the tank, all operating with head sets and phones and everything. There was an intercom in the tank and we had a three way radio system. We had the intercom set. We had the B set for between the regiment, and we had the other set that would take you further, back to headquarters. The Grant was a big tank, it was a good tank. The first ones we got

- 31:00 when we were at Rokeby, they had the Pratt and Whitney radial engines like in the aircraft. It made a terrible noise in the back of them. You had to stand with a fire extinguisher when you started them up in case there was any trouble. They were the only ones we could get. We didn't have them for very long and then we switched over to the diesel engines after that which were the main body of the Armoured Division.

- 31:30 In the Matilda tank, the flame thrower tank, that was very tight inside with all the pumps and things. The fuel in that tank pumped under pressure up to the gun, and up in the nozzle of the flame gun there was a spark plug and a little pointed
- 32:00 valve there and you would pull a valve to pull the needle valve back to let the flame come out. Well not to let the flame, to let fuel out and it would go to about 80 to 100 yards then you would push a button to ignite it. So you could have a cold shot. Put the cold goo into a target, as much as you want and you just give a flick, and put a little bit in with a hot shot.
- 32:30 A flame would go in and ignite it. So they were very successful up in Borneo and up in Labuan and Tarakan. The Frog tanks were very well used. The gun tanks in Borneo.... The Matildas that had the blades on them, we dropped the blades because
- 33:00 they were unsatisfactory in the sand and we were having trouble with them. So we just turned them into ordinary straight gun tanks. They were mostly two pounders.

**So what was your role in the tank. What did you do?**

Ah I was a gunner. In the different vehicles that I have been in over the period I was a gunner, a turret gunner. I was a flame thrower gunner in Borneo.

- 33:30 We were all a tight knit group of fellows, all together. You know on leaguers at night, forming leaguers. especially the Armoured Division when we went to Western Australia on the big field exercises over there. We would go for miles and miles. The area was so big, the tanks and everything.
- 34:00 The Don R's would ride the bikes up and down the convoys at night and put them into a leaguer, the tanks on the outside of the ring, and the soft vehicles would come into the middle at night to be refuelled and food and every thing would be brought in by the Army Service Corps. They would come and the petrol trucks would be in there. The whole division was fed on the move and even they had a bakehouse. The would cook bread and everything.
- 34:30 The divisional headquarters were responsible for the planning of all these leaguers at night after field exercises.

**How long was the training in WA [Western Australia]?**

The training? At Puckapunyal, about six weeks basic training

- 35:00 but then we came back to reality then with Cec Ives. Then we had the real training with him, with Cec. He was an incredible man. Then we moved on to other things, to other vehicles. Once we left Puckapunyal we went down to Wilson's Promontory to do exercises down there
- 35:30 with the Commandoes. We had little Bren gun carriers then. We were all new rookies then and that went on for three weeks.

**What were those exercises, can you describe them?**

I didn't go to the Prom. I went down to St. Kilda Road. I thought it was going to be good down there. For a bit of a joke I said I would go down there and do a few jobs. I thought I would get plenty of leave.

- 36:00 Six of us went down. We were a bit afraid. We thought we might be put in as batmen or something... officers boys and that. We thought we would take a chance, and we had a great time. We were driving vehicles, staff cars and getting leave every night and every thing. That was with John Northcote, General Northcote and the top echelon fellows and everything. That was an incredible place St. Kilda Road down there.

**36:30 What does an officer's boy do?**

They make them batmen and all sorts of things. You look after them you know. And runners and this. Take messages. But we were mostly all driving staff cars and things. No guards or anything. We were only there for a week or ten days or something. But it was leave every nigh and out to parties

- 37:00 and dancing and one thing or another. All the other blokes when we came back said how was it, and we told them and they wished they had all put in for it when we went back to camp. After the Prom, after we did the three weeks training, the squadron, the Japs came into the war about that period - the 7th December - and the whole Armoured Division was on a final movement order

- 37:30 to go to the Middle East to get equipment and tanks over there and set it up. That was kyboshed... the move, and we were kept in Australian and crucified for years in the dessert of Western Australia. We had a lot of moves.

**What do you mean crucified?**

We trained all the time and we wanted to go and see some action.

- 38:00 The first move was from ...when we came back from Puckapunyal and when we came back from the

Promontory, we went to a new camp straight away. We finished at Pukka, gone, the squadron. Then we went to Rokeby which is just out of Seymour.

38:30 That was the headquarters of the first Armoured Division. The big headquarters at St Kilda Road, they moved all the senior officers up there. That was the divisional headquarters. It was a big homestead that they bought or they required it and they took it and that was theirs. General Northcote, Major Dennis, Captain Wilson - they were our squadron fellows while we were there

39:00 but we were a separate group. The officers and all the senior men lived in the homestead up there and we were the protective squadron, the fighting squadron. That's where we set up our squadron tanks. We moved with the headquarters pretty well right through to look after them.

39:30 That was ...and a lot of leave them of course. It wasn't too far into Seymour and too far down to Tallarook. They were just pubs. Not far down there, and there was a little Mechanical Institute Hall down there, the dance hall. There would be hundred and hundreds of soldiers down there on a Saturday night and about twelve girls. It was unbelievable down there.

40:00 **Did you have a girlfriend during that time?**

No not really. I just knew a lot of girls when I was on leave. But at Rugby we got a lot of special equipment. We got a motor bike troop, seven bikes. Scout cars. Big radio vehicles for the Divisional Headquarters and all sorts of things and then we had to look after and move them. The motor bikes were responsible to go out and find areas,

40:30 reconnaissance work everywhere. Then we would all pick up and we would move the division, the headquarters of General Northcote. We would move off into another area. We just kept moving. It was move all the time.

**Why was that?**

For field exercises.

41:00 The move from... When we left Rokeby we had the biggest trans continental move in the history of Australia war. The whole division moved. Some from New South Wales moved down to Gunnedah, Narrabri, and another one, I just can't think of it at the moment. We moved on this by road and rail. Flat tops and everything and we went up to New South Wales to do these big exercises in the field which was living out under trees and all that sort of thing.

## Tape 3

00:32 **So Wally you were going to talk more about Puckapunyal and what you guys got up to, be it mischief or...?**

Yes. With Cec Ives, once we broke off at night we were on our own. He never gave us any problem chasing us around. After the parade fell out, I don't know what it was, about four 'clock or something, we would all get an allocation of beer. We had a few teetotalers and we had a few older blokes who liked a bit of booze.

01:00 The orderly sergeant would come out with a ticket roll and he would allocate us two tickets each and they were sixpence each. So everybody bought tickets. You would be always shuffling up to your mate you know. We used to take the tickets down to the great big canteen. We had infantry, engineers - not only armoured... there was others. I was a big camp.

01:30 There would be hundreds and hundreds down in the canteen. Around the bar like a U shape there were boxes. There would have been fifteen or twenty boxes, and when you throw your ticket on the counter to get a pot of beer, you put it in the box. So I came up with an idea. I got a coat hanger and straighten it out and I hooked it up at the bottom and

02:00 chewed up the chewing gum and stick it on the end of it nice and firm, and when the barman might have been away for a bit I would plunge into the box, and I would always get a few beer tickets. That became a pretty popular thing to get your booze down there.

**Were you only given two tickets?**

Only two tickets.

**What was your record, do you remember?**

I can't remember but it was plenty. We had Gracie Fields up there too at the theatre next door. We had a few concerts.

02:30 Down at the main gate, the Provos were camped down there, that was their area and the main Brigade, the 2nd Armoured Brigade Headquarters was there. Brigadier John Claribow was a wonderful man. He

was a dentist pre war, and after Puckapunyal or during Puckapunyal... we used to get leave, weekend leave or sometimes at night after work... The petrol up there that was issued to us was

03:00 all coloured with a dye for the simple reason you couldn't use it in a private car. They would know if you had any. A few blokes used to get an odd gallon or two out of a tank or a Bren gun carrier. And we had one officer there and about the only officer we never got on well with. He was

03:30 Lieutenant Humphries, Nugget Humphries. He was an Englishman and he was a cruel man old Nugget. He used to give us a bad time. We were not allowed to drink from sort of lunchtime until we broke off for our water bags in the heat. One of our blokes big bushie Hannah caught him behind a tank having a drink of water and a few words were said. He was a D and M instructor and he always had a saying:

04:00 every man with a spanner in his hand.

#### **What's a D and M?**

D and M is a driver and maintenance course. And then we had the old Reid's buses, the old rattle trap buses at the gates of Puckapunyal camp which were just about dragging their backsides to get along. I think it was threepence each or something to get on that bus

04:30 to go to Moody's pub at Seymour. It was suppose to hold about forty blokes but there was always about a hundred in it. Then it was a struggle to get back once we got into town to get back at night, back into camp. We had leave passes up to 23:59 - that a minute to twelve, to get in. Then the fellows that wanted to go down to Melbourne for leave,

05:00 we could always jump the rattlers at Seymour when they were pulling in from Sydney and other places. We would get in through the windows. But coming home at night on Sunday night - everybody coming back to the Seymour area, you had to have a leave pass to get on that train or a platform ticket or something. So nearly all of us had platform tickets to see our mates off to get into the train. The provos were very strict, they were old Second World War blokes and right on to us young fellows. There

05:30 would be hundreds of us blokes there. "Have you got a ticket?" "A platform ticket." "Right, all aboard." We would pile up in the train to go back. At Tallarook, we would pull the chain at Tallarook, or the train would normally stop for us, there was no station for it to stop at officially. We would all get out at Tallarook and walk down to Rokeby. The things we got up to, it was unbelievable.

06:00 **Did anyone ever miss that last truck or train?**

Oh yes I think that would have happened, yes. They would be in serious trouble because they had no way to get back then because there was no other means of transport. They would be AWOL [absent without leave].

#### **And what sort of punishment would be metered out for AWOL?**

Oh AWOL, you would get a fine or confined to barracks for two or three days or something like that. You might get fined ten shillings or something. Most of our fellows, we got back without any problem.

06:30 At Rokeby, over the road from the homestead where Divisional Headquarters were with General Northcote, Landscape was a magnificent property owned by Essington Lewis from Broken Hill BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary], and a lot of the officers used to get the invitations over there at night for dinners and things. There were two beautiful girls there, the daughters.

07:00 We used to see them out riding. The officers used to be always able to work something out over there. That was another great place. And the pub at Tallarook was a water hole. It was only a tiny little pub at Tallarook. It was unbelievable that place...Tallarook, Rokeby. We made home brew at Rokeby.

#### **And you were saying, there would be all these...the tank men and the infantry, you would all be out socialising together?**

Oh yes around town and that on leave and everything.

07:30 Oh you wouldn't be together. You'd meet in pubs and you would all be mates. Chaps that had been overseas. The air force, the whole lot, we'd all be great mates. The Mitre Tavern Hotel up in Collins Street. A little one in Banks Place, a lovely old hotel. Mrs. Allen owned that pub. She was a dear old elderly lady. About four of us got to know her. Myself

08:00 and a couple of other fellows, the Macquarie's. She would always look after us. "You boys come in any time you like for a nice meal." But a lot of the squatter blokes and some of the senior fellows used to drink at Scots. That was a hotel up in Collins Street. It was a big pub and we'd go up there and get a bit of booze too. We all had our own little watering holes. We knew where to go.

08:30 We used to go down to the Trocadero and the different dance halls and things like that. They were some of the thing that we did. In Western Australia when we were over there in the desert, there was no water much, it was all bore water. We were drinking this water. On the sides of the road there were these big fire hose things hanging down. The farmers used to fill their tanks up.

09:00 We were getting stuck into this water. It was beautiful and you had to have something. I used to drink

nearly two gallons of water by 9 o'clock in the morning out of my waterbag. You couldn't handle it, the heat was in the hundreds. There were stubble paddocks and Red Robbie wouldn't let the tanks go under trees. He wanted us out in the open to toughen us, and we all got a bit of a problem. We got excruciating pains every time we went behind a tree to pass water. It was the mica in the water.

09:30 We called it the fish hooks. We all got it, nearly everybody, a terrible thing but eventually we grew out of it after a while. We made some magnificent bush huts. They were all thatched together and they were completely fly proof and water proof. We used them for messes and things like that.

10:00 Of course the other thing we had over there... Tom Blamey, General Blamey was in the Middle East. He was with the 6th Division originally. His wife was in charge of the Red Cross - Lady Blamey in Australia. She was in the Middle East and she saw these thousands of bottles in the desert, like pyramids. She said "What are they for?" "Oh they're rubbish." She said, "Now wait a minute, we will sort this out."

10:30 So she had the engineers... and she said, "What we're going to do is cut the necks off the bottles. Put a hot ring around them, a steel ring around the neck of the bottle. Mark the neck just for a second and plunge it into water. The top will blow off or break off. So there was the whole bottle except the neck. Now they would grind them up and they were drinking their beer out of Lady Blameys which was nearly a bottle of beer. We adopted the thing in Western Australia.

11:00 We did the same thing, there was always a bit of a ration on at the canteen at night. We had a fair bit of beer there and we'd drink a few of those Lady Blameys at night. A couple before mess and at night we'd sit around and sing a bit of harmony with Cocoa Tom, the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] man. He wasn't AIF [Australian Imperial Force], he was just attached to us as the cocoa man. He would give you a cup of cocoa or a cup of coffee at night.

11:30 Old Chisholm would sit there and harmonise with a bit of old jazz and things. We'd drink our Lady Blameys and then we would wander off to bed.

#### **I wonder if Lady Blamey knew that her name was used for that?**

Have you ever heard the name? That's what they called them, the Lady Blamey. They went right through the war and everywhere. Up in the islands, up in Balikpapan, when the war was over we set up a camp there.

12:00 They wanted a volunteer to run the canteen and I thought that will suit me. So I took the canteen on, just a small hut. We had a ration of beer each week, and I would go down the rough old bumpy road to the canteen and pick up a few wooden crates with straw in them for the beer. My father gave me a crown seal before I went to the war.

12:30 He always used one. It's a little opener and it's like a disk thing and you could open a bottle of beer with a crown seal. You don't damage the top and you can fill it up with water or whatever you like. You then put the seal on top and hit it with a hammer. It would close it together. So I was fortunate that I happened to have that crown seal on me. When we got back, on numerous occasions I would have quite a few empty bottles, I would clean them up a bit and crown seal them and

13:00 take them back to the canteen. "God it's a rough trip today, the road is bad. I've got eight or ten bottles here broken" and they would replace them no charge. Even in the days of Richmond in the early days... and it happens today I believe...if you break a bottle and the bottle is completely sealed the hotel or the brewery will replace it back to the brewery.

13:30 That was another one of little tricks.

#### **Wally, we were talking about Puckapunyal to WA. Was WA the next move...you're basically saying you would move from one place to another as an exercise. So was it Puckapunyal, then on to WA?**

From Puckapunyal we went to Wilson's Promontory with the commandos. After that we went back from

14:00 Puckapunyal and we went straight up to the big continental exercise up the top to Narrabri and Boggabri and Cessnock up in the top, and we had major exercises for thousands of miles. No camps, just in the fields. Some of them were on twenty to thirty mile fronts, the tanks. Going through exercises and fighting against one another, the different regiments.

14:30 That went on for quite a while. We used to get a bit of leave and at that stage I volunteered for a short time to go into the motor police squadron. So we would get a bit of leave there and we would go in to pick up the papers and things like that for headquarters. Of course we had the Armoured Divvy provos right on to us and there was always a big race at night to find us.

15:00 I remember one night I had about four fellas on the back of my bike going back to camp along the dirt tracks in the mud and everything with the provos chasing us.

#### **Were there ever any accidents?**

Oh yes, we had a few accidents. I had a crash up there at Narrabri. I hit a cow, my leg got caught between the bumper bar and the tank and I was in hospital for a few days

15:30 then back into action again. But Narrabri was one of the biggest exercises in Australian war history.

**Can you just describe what that exercise entailed?**

Oh night exercises, night marches and things. The tank crews were sleeping with their tanks. We had a primus stove. You had your own rations and everything. You would get an order to move in the middle of the night into another area.

16:00 You would have to map read it and find the place. And you were competing against one another as if it was a battle. It was a lot of training. We had the scout cars, we had the motor bikes, and we had the big leaguers at night when we were on the move. It was interesting.

**How would that culminate? How would an exercise come to an end?**

The units would be all told after you moved to the last one. That's the end and now we are going to do something else.

16:30 At the end of that major experience up there. The next move was the biggest move ever, from up top at Narrabri and up that end there. We were moved to Western Australia from there. We had a bit of leave on the way. A lot went by train but all the tanks came down by rail right through Melbourne,

17:00 through Victoria. It was about a ten day exercise and we changed where the gauges changed at Port Pirie and then across to Kalgoorlie, and all our tanks were loaded on to flat tops and we slept with our tanks. Well not actually with them. We had cattle trucks,

17:30 bloody cattle trucks with old dried palliasses with straw. It was that old it was like dust with just rails around it. There were sliding doors as we went along. I think it was four or five days across the Nullarbor. We used to get... the people on the Nullarbor used to receive all their rations by train - the little settlements.

18:00 That was terrible shocking experience that was. I can always remember the first marvellous stop was at Kalgoorlie. The squadron was absolutely dying for a beer. Mrs Allen at the Railway Hotel, an elderly lovely lady. She said, "You boys need a drink," and we were all given permission to go forward to the pub off the train.

18:30 It wasn't overnight. I think we had about four hours there. We went in, loaded up potato bags with bottle beer and dragged it and had a few. And Mrs Allen said to a couple, "Take a bit of food with you, go to the kitchen and find something" I found a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in the fridge cooked and we picked up a bit of tucker. And poor old Bluey Lang from Rainbow, he was really

19:00 pretty illiterate Old Blue. He was nearly blind and I don't know how he got into the army. His mate might have put his name in for him. But he was with us. He was a roustabout old Bluey. He'd do any job we wanted him to do. Old Blue was a stumbler. If you kicked a football at him and he couldn't see it nearly. And Blue was on the flat top. You were not allowed once you got on that train to go back at any stage. You can't leave the train with out permission.

19:30 Well Blue fell off the train, off the flat top, and one of our officers charged him with leaving the train without permission. Old Blue...it was a bit of a joke. He didn't get into too much trouble.

**But the time... you had obviously been doing all these important exercises, did you sense you were prepared for the eventuality of war?**

20:00 Oh yes, yes we were getting a lot of preparation and we had a lot of experience then about maintenance and guns and working together as tanks troops...fighting against one another. We were ready for a go.

**And you said earlier you were to go to the Middle East but things changed?**

You see when we came back from

20:30 Puckapunyal down to Wilson's Promontory and then we went to rugby. Then we went to place called Axedale just for exercises near Bendigo - the squadron. And from there that's when we went from Axedale

21:00 to... straight up to the top, up to New South Wales. We never went back to Rokeby. The other movement was from ... Of course when we were in the West we did a lot of movement there in Western Australia up and down the sand dunes.

21:30 I mentioned about the water and the fish hooks. It went for ... we did thousands of miles there training. Some of the fronts there were up to fifty miles. Some of the regiments you know fighting one another in battle like that. We had a fellow there who was a shearer and he used to give us a hair cut occasionally. I remember

22:00 he ran the clippers right through my head one day. It was threepence to get a hair cut. The west was a terrible place. Unbelievable, you know the boredom. We use to have a great canteen and we had a great cook and we used to send a truck up to Dongara just out of Geraldton and we would buy a few hundred crayfish. Dongara crays, threepence each.



- 22:30 Our senior cook was Don Benny who worked for Nicholas, the Aspro people as his private cook. We happened to have him as our cook. He used to subsidise our squadron funds, the money that we had accumulated and he would send a truck down to Perth or somewhere and get a great load of good green vegetables and things like that. So we ate reasonably well in the messes with the subsidised food, apart from the army muck we used to get...
- 23:00 and a beer ration occasionally.
- How were the relations with the locals there?**
- Oh no a lot of it was all tinned stuff , bully beef, mechanised eggs – that was the powdered egg.
- How did they taste?**
- Oh it was all right. Gold fish - that was herrings in tomato sauce. They're a luxury now but we used to live on those.
- 23:30 It was unbelievable some of the food. Bully beef in the tins and M & V - meat and vegetables. We could always make a good stew, the tank crews. They would get together with their primuses and cook it all up together. So we ate reasonably well.
- So as we were saying this is '41, '42?**
- Oh no a bit later '43 after moving around a lot.
- And what are you hearing about the war. What is the mood amongst the men, yourself?**
- 24:00 During the war? Oh the frustration was unbelievable. We were a highly trained group the whole division. We wanted to get away. The reason they put us in Western Australia from New South Wales when we came down after the big exercises,
- 24:30 was the threat of the Japanese and in case there were any landings on the coast. That's why they placed us over there, to look after the coast line, and that's where we were stuck. We were frustrated.
- So you were there as home defence?**
- Yes, a home defence unit, but we had a few good moves. We used to get a bit of leave occasionally down
- 25:00 in Point Walter, the water school near Perth. We'd get leave and we would go down to Scarborough. It was good to get that bit of leave. From there we moved on up to Northam. That was another interesting place.
- 25:30 It was another camp that we went to and we got different vehicles then. We had scout cars and armoured cars. A big variety of vehicles for exercises.
- You were saying before that there was that sense of frustration. So there was not a feeling that the coast defence was legitimate?**
- I think it was a waste of time, it was frustrating, we were sitting
- 26:00 waiting to do something.
- And you were coming into contact with men who had seen action in the Middle East?**
- Not in Western Australian, only when we were on leave occasionally, very seldom. We were never in contact with them – only when we came home for sick leave or short leave or something like that. I came back a couple of time to pick up a few armoured cars and bring them back to the squadron. I would meet a few blokes then when I had a bit of extended leave.
- 26:30 **I can imagine talking to those guys who had been overseas, that would add to your...?**
- Oh yes it was hard because they had experienced war. They were men then they weren't boys. They had been to the Middle East, Syria, Tobruk, and those sort of places. We would meet those fellows in pubs when you were on leave or you would come into town. In Perth we had a lot of New Zealanders there.
- 27:00 There was a well known hotel in Perth and Aussie's weren't allowed in. The yanks had it. The Negroes were there. And I remember the provos, the Australian provos and the New Zealand provos. One particular thing there. We had a street blockage and there was a big punch up. A big one. The Aussies and the New Zealanders with the Yanks. We got into them in a big way.
- 27:30 **How did that start?**
- Oh you know they were arrogant and we couldn't get into this pub. I can't think of the name, it was a well known hotel in Perth. Oh, she wanted the money you see from the Americans. But we were out of bounds, no you out, go somewhere else for a bit of booze.
- 28:00 **So you said you came to blows?**
- Oh big blows. It happened in Brisbane too I believe. A bit of that when on during the war.

**So your general impression of them was not favourable?**

No.

**And the Kiwis?**

They were all right, they were our mates. We got on well with them just sort of moving through from Perth to different stagings and things.

28:30 We had the red light area there too. That was in Perth for the servicemen, the locals and everyone. But it was getting to Perth...it was a wonderful place. I think one of mates married a girl from there, Alan Macquarie married a lass from Perth. They were very friendly people.

29:00 **You worked hard and you played pretty hard?**

We played hard yes.

**Can I just go back a little bit. We're in WA now. You told us earlier of your desire to get into the Armoured Division. I don't think we've really discussed your reasons for enlisting per se. Obvious you knew the war was on. Was it a sense of duty before it was a decision of infantry or tank.**

29:30 **What motivated you to join?**

You are talking about the beginning? I think the main thing that brought me in was that a lot of our blokes were being killed overseas... the airman in England. I said you've got to have a go and get in. I said well I'm going to go in, I'm not hanging about here. I was called up in the militia.

30:00 I had to join, I wanted to join. Apart from the tanks I still wanted to be in it. The AIF... and the militia. They called them... there was a lot of trouble, a little bit, but not much between the militia and the AIF. Even with us fellows I was AIF. But the big fellows that came back from the Middle East they were the top hardened soldiers a lot of them. Before the war a lot of them were wild, out of work and everything, and they went away overseas.

30:30 I just wanted to be in and we all toughened up a bit once we got in. The AIF, the 2nd AIF had a grey...on their colour patches on their arm, the border of the patch was grey and that indicated that you were 2nd AIF. The Militia had a colour patch without a grey border

31:00 around the edges of it. That's how you picked up the difference.

**Yeah we have heard from other people about that difference and there was you know some attitude towards the people who where militia and the 2nd AIF. Was there tensions in a way between two armies?**

Oh we used to pick on them a bit, a little bit, unfortunately, because they eventually did a terrific job up in New Guinea... the young blokes who were sent up there.

31:30 One of my best mates - they were in the butchery business - young Frank and his brother Sid. Sid was too old and he had to stay behind to run the butcher shop. And I said to Frank, my brother and myself, we're going to join the AIF and go into the Armoured Division, will you come in? And he said, "Oh no I don't want to go so he got called up and went into the Militia

32:00 and he got hell knocked out of him in New Guinea. So it was just the luck of the draw you see. He was knocked around very badly. He's not with us. He finished up a TPI, totally and permanently incapacitated. There was a bit of feud but it settled a bit towards the end of the war when they were coming back from overseas, the militia people.

32:30 You know they had seen a bit of action and a bit of service and everything.

**Now Wally I don't think we have really discussed your brother. Was he a tankie as well? So you joined up together?**

Harry, yes he was a tankie the same as me. We practically joined up together. I went in in October and he came in January. He wasn't quite old enough. He was just not long out of school much.

33:00 He was a pretty smart guy too. He did very well after the war when he came back. He said I'm going to do something decent. In those days we had a rehab scheme going where ex-servicemen could take on a university course and all things, and a book allowance. We got a ten pound allowance to buy tools of trade. A plumber could get all his tools.

33:30 I was in the textiles business. I'll have a suitcase. I'll be a commercial traveller. Harry said... he did his leaving. He didn't do his matric [matriculation certificate]. He gave that one away the final one. He decided to go back to Taylor's with all the young kids. A few of them were there twenty, thirty, forty to do that last year again.

34:00 He battled on with all these young kids around him and he finished his matric and he said, "Now what

do you think I should do? I've discussed it with a lot of different people. If I become a doctor I will be on call twenty four hours a day, no. An optician, that sounds all right. Nine to five.

34:30 I'll think I will do dentistry." So he became a dentist in a very successful business in Camberwell. A big one just over from Bowen Street where I was when I was a kid. He retired and went to Mornington. His son, young Peter Varley, he

35:00 wanted to be a dentist too. So he was in London for twenty-six years and he's back here in Melbourne now. He's been back here for six months.

**So going back to those early days with Harry, all those movements from Puckapunyal up through New South Wales and West Australia, was he involved? Were you guys together for a lot of that time?**

35:30 In those movements?

**Were you involved together?**

Oh we were all together we were together all the time Harry and I. Everybody... we never moved away from one another much.

**Were you good mates?**

Oh yes we were great mates yes, very close. Everybody... being a brother didn't matter. We were all brothers. He was the same as the fellow next door, the whole lot of us.

36:00 **What was his role in the tanks?**

Yes he was the same as me. He was in tank crews and everything and did all the courses. We came out together and discharged together.

**Obviously after a period of time you were an expert. Were you training as well? Were you actually teaching others?**

Oh yes we were training all the time.

**Were you training others?**

Oh yes up to a point, yes. We had little classes,

36:30 gunnery classes with new recruits. We would take lessons in gunner and one thing and another. We did all those courses. A lot of them in Western Australia. You know to develop our training in Morse code and all that sort of thing.

**So although you were a gunner you were also...?**

I was a gunner operator, I've been mainly a gunner all my life during my war years, sitting up in front you know

37:00 behind the gun.

**So in a typical training exercise what would you actually be doing?**

We had a lot of field exercises training for targets and things like that. Puckapunyal was a big moving target. It's still there on the train line running along out on the range. They would have mock ups like that screen of yours on wheels for firing on, you know the Grant tanks.

37:30 And rifle training. We did everything. We did the whole gamut of it all.

**And did you find that that was something that you really had to work at or did you find that you had a natural skill?**

Oh well I think you had to work at everything we had to do...get a bit up to date in the experience with it.

**And how was it with three of you in the tank.**

38:00 **When you were doing the training was there a chance to converse?**

Oh we had to talk a bit, particularly with the flame thrower the Frog tank. That was the worst thank to be in because it was three quarters full up in the top nearly with the gelatrol and things like that. The crew commander Dick Bennison behind me, he was six feet odd. His knees were right up my back if you know what I mean.

38:30 There were two up in that turret, and little Ted down the bottom had a little bit more room. It was very noisy with the pumps and the heat and everything. The Matilda tank with the diesel engines in them, they were very uncomfortable to be in for hours, to be locked down. Sweat boxes they were, shocking.

**You were talking about the Matilda and the Frog.**

The Matilda was the tank,

39:00 but we called the flamethrower tank the Frog.

**Why was that?**

I don't know where that came from. Someone must have invented it from the squadron.

**Like a frogs tongue coming out. So was that an adapted Matilda?**

Oh all those Matilda tanks were all completely adapted. We had some Matilda tanks that were straight gun tanks.

39:30 We had three in the turret. A wireless operator, a crew commander, and a gunner. But in a Frog tank there were only two of us. The crew commander was the wireless operator and I was the gunner. The crew commander would be laying off on targets, picking them off where he wanted them, where he wanted the gun into the fox holes

40:00 There was a lot of them up in Borneo. Mostly in a fox hole you would pump in about ten gallons. You could fire nearly up to a hundred yards of cold shot thickened gelatrol into a fox hole, and then a short burst of a hot shot. The crew commander handled all that and you would be traversing the gun all around looking for targets. In Borneo we had telephones on the back of the

40:30 tank so the infantry who were behind could pick up a phone for a designated target. They might want us to go on and they would give us instructions on what they wanted done. But the tanks themselves, the group of tanks were told by the battalion commander on another link, another radio link back behind us somewhere on another point.

41:00 **So there were other modes of communication?**

Yes there was communication amongst the whole lot. Particularly this new development which they got started up there with the radios on the back for the infantry... to let the infantry come and let you know what was happening and what they wanted done. If they were in a bit of trouble somewhere we could move into that area to protect them, or cover them, or evacuate them out.

## Tape 4

00:31 **Now Wally, we are going to talk in sequence about what happened in WA. Apparently the 1st Armoured Division was disbanded in '43 if I'm not mistaken. Can you tell us about that?**

Yes in '43. After all the time wasted but not wasted in Western Australia, things had settled down a little bit. The Japs were under control and we weren't worried about the invasion of Australia.

01:00 So the government decided in their wisdom, we won't need them. The Middle East is reasonably under control so we'll disband them and put them into different areas where they are needed in smaller groups. So the whole thing was disbanded and we formed from 1st Armoured Headquarters Squadron and changed our colour patch and we became the 2/1st Armoured Brigade, Recce Squadron, where we got special equipment things.

01:30 We had a certain number of tanks and armoured cars and scout cars. We still trained in the west but on a faster sort of movement without the tanks, with these armoured vehicles, wheeled vehicles up and down the rabbit proof fences and places like that right up and down and nearly up to Geraldton and right down to Albany down there.

02:00 I think the last exercise at Albany was a bit of a break for the squadron to pull up barbed wire. Captain Glasgow, the Middle East 2IC said we would go down there for a couple of weeks pulling out barb wired in Albany. There wasn't too many men there, they were all at the war.

**What was that experience like, down at Albany pulling up the barbed wire:**

I was away picking up Staghounds in Melbourne to bring back.

02:30 But the fellows had a great time. They played with the locals. They played football and different things like that, and socialised a bit. There were dances every night and they put on all things in Albany. I was back there a few years ago, about four of us. We took a trip to go back and see it all. We hired a car when we got there and we went to Geraldton and Perth and stayed with the regiment over there at Karrakatta.

03:00 We had a change of clothes and got in the car again and went down to Albany. I was in at the library in Albany at the town hall and I said, "We're some of the original recce squadron boys who had the Staghounds and everything who were over here, do you mind putting a notice on your notice board saying the Recce boys are back in case anybody would like to see them....particularly the young ladies" But that was the story of Albany. And then after Albany....

03:30 **Did anyone respond to the notice you put up?**

No we never put it up, it was a laugh. It was just the thing that we thought we'd put it up there. It was an incredible place Albany was, from all reports from everybody. It was a good break after what we had been through. Our main officers, Major John Holden, we called him Honest John the workmen's friend.

04:00 That was his nickname. And Gordon Glasgow, he came from a wonderful family of military people. His great grandfather was knighted and they were all top men from the Middle East. They were highly trained me. There was Duncan and his other brother. He looked after us all and he was a fair man.

04:30 The last one was Fred Maloly. He was Horizontal Fred. He used to sleep all the time. Horizontal Fred. He used to lie down. At Southport just briefly, we played water polo. We were on the Nerang River and he was an incredible swimmer. We had a lot of good swimmers in the squadron .

05:00 He would push one on the top of the head and drive him down. That was up at Nerang.

**So you had Glasgow who was your 2IC?**

We had Gordon Glasgow. He finished up as our CO. But the first major one was Cec Ives, then we had Holden and then we had Fred Maloly. They were all Middle East fellows.

05:30 They brought a lot of officers back from the Middle East that were in Cavalry Regiments to train the Armoured Divisions. The different regiments in the divisions. They were spread across the different armoured units and they were all great fair men and they knew exactly what was going on.

**What experiences did they bring back?**

06:00 Oh I think crew controls, crewing in tanks, manoeuvres, night marching. You name it, everything. They gave us serious training. It was very good.

**When you say manoeuvres what... can you explain that?**

Out on field, exercises because they covered all those big manoeuvres over in the Middle East. You know setting up leaguers and setting up movements at night and movements in the day.

**And were there changes?**

06:30 **Were these techniques different to what you had known up until then?**

Oh a few little things that we learned from them about relations with motorbikes and armoured cars and artillery and different things like that.

**Can you describe how those different units inter related. You're talking about to motorbikes and tanks. How did they support each other?**

07:00 Well they were controlled from the brigade headquarters. Before a big field exercise takes place in the dessert or some where, they sit around. The CO's from all the units, they have a meeting, a get together and have a conference and plan. The Recce Squadron will do this. They will be here, from point to point so and so. Or the Armoured Regiment or the artillery will do something else. Particularly the ASC at night.

07:30 That was the Army Service Corps which looked after all the food. They would bring in all their vehicles at a certain time at night. They would bring all their trucks in and they would go around like a football ground and they would pick up their petrol, water, supplies, what ever they wanted, and then they would go back to their unit

08:00 They were controlled by the Don Rs [despatch riders] of the squadron to lead them in. That was all planned exactly where we would be at a place and time, everything.

**So working down the chain of command where would you get your orders from?**

Oh we would get our orders from our CO. He would pass them on and he would call in his troop commanders, the different officers and sergeants and they would detail what we would be doing, and of course we would be reading with our maps and things like that.

08:30 It would all come down. Headquarters, the main brigade headquarters, the units... the heads of the units, the senior officers and then related down to the soldiers.

**And you were saying you were placed with the Reconnaissance Squadron so what part did you play in that?**

Oh the reconnaissance would be

09:00 ready to move at any place at any time. If there was a problem you would be ordered into a particular section to protect a unit that was in trouble, just reconnaissance, Recce, moving about. But we were under command all the time with what we were doing.

**So we have talked about the senior men there, Maloly, Glasgow and Holden.**

09:30 **You also mentioned when the unit moved to Albany, you actually went to Melbourne to pick up... to escort the Staghouads?**

We were short of a few Staghouads. We went up to full strength. We were still short and I went over and brought back three on the flat tops.

**So it was just you that went over?**

No, two of us went over, another guy and myself. We loaded them and brought them back.

10:00 We brought them back to Northern and we did a lot of field exercises there. We looked for an airman at one stage. It crashed out of Brisbane somewhere. It was RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]. Glasgow took us right out into the field there out in the scrub. We were there for a couple of weeks looking. We had no luck with him.

**So that wasn't on a training exercise, that was for real?**

10:30 That was a field training exercise, a big one. We covered over two and half thousand miles in that exercise. And I can remember very well over those paddocks, they were Staghouads, mainly Staghouads. A whole squadron of Staghouads. They were the big ones I was telling you about with automatic drive. Alan Macquarie was up in the turret with Dick Bennison and myself, I was the gunner.

11:00 They had dry creek beds that would just ride up and down like a bit of a row in a paddock. We were going over sixty/seventy miles an hour and we took off. The Staghound took completely off the four wheels. She went fifty, sixty yards through the air. Alan Macquarie was in the turret and we were all down and locked in. He whacked his head on the turret and wasn't feeling too good.

11:30 When we landed, the back wheels...you wouldn't believe it. The axle on it was about ten or twelve... the big housing...the big one. The wheels were splayed right off and it had to go to the workshop. We had a major workshop in the brigade in all the divisions where they could do engine changes. They could do everything.

12:00 Allan Macquarie and I were sent down there for a little bit of break, and we were there for about three weeks until we could get a housing. So eventually we got the thing together and Allan and I said, "We're only about fifty or sixty miles from Perth, not too far. We'll slip down one night in a Staghound."

**Tell us more?**

So we cleaned ourselves up and put our ASC

12:30 suits on. I drove and he sat up the top in the turret as the crew commander so it was official looking and everything. In Perth there was a reparatory club, it was a marvellous club with a lot of the young ladies there who used to invite the officers to the reparatory club for drinks and that. You know if you were on leave you could come in and enjoy yourself. Alan Macquarie happened to know one of the ladies there.

13:00 He took her out a couple of times. On the way to Perth you would often see staff cars running up and down from Northam - that was north of where the workshops were. He said he knew a girl in one of the cars. We drove down to the Embassy.

13:30 We arrived there about eight o'clock, right through Hay Street, the two of us in this Staghound. The Embassy is like a big ball room. We pulled up at the front door in the Staghound, opened it up and stepped out. There was a million people looking at us and we went in and had a night - no provos, nothing. We got back into the Staghound and we drove back.

14:00 I'd still be in boob.

**Boob?**

Gaol. We drove back that night at about 12 o'clock, back to the workshops. If we'd gone on it would have been about another twenty or thirty mile to take back to the big camp in Northam. We slept there...we had the clearance before we left...when we left the workshops to go back to camp. So we said we're not going down to the camp, we're going down to Perth. When we got back... we slept on the road that night in a paddock

14:30 and we left in the morning about four o'clock. We drew into the lines in the morning very early and very quietly, put it in and reported back to our CO Gordon Glasgow. We had the Staghound in working order and everything. He told me many years after the war that he knew where we were. I told me that he knew we had gone down to Perth that night.

15:00 **And he let you off. So he must have had a very high opinion of you guys not to cause a fuss?**

Yes nothing was said at that stage.

**Was there a fair bit of that going on? Was there a bit of leeway?**

Some nights you could get a little vehicle to go into town or something, or take a couple of extra blokes on the back of a motor bike or whatever.

15:30 **But driving the Staghound into Perth, I could imagine that would turn a few heads?**

It was unbelievable to do a thing like that - to take it right through Hay Street, the main street of Perth. It wasn't a little job.

**You guys were either very brave or very stupid?**

Very stupid I think. And the other wonderful story - At Narrabri in New South Wales

16:00 Mr. and Mrs. Iceston, or the family of Icestons were a family of solicitors. They were a lovely family and they were the main ones in the town... well known, and they took to a few of our fellows. We would come on Sunday nights for meals and they would give us a nice meal and a little bit of wine and things. Like if they were coming home, Mum might invite some fellows in Melbourne here.

16:30 And we used to go there quite regularly...into the Iceston's home for dinner. A few weeks later it came back... and we had planned, Ernie Bounds another mate of mine, to go to another place where we had met some nice people for dinner on a property. We took a thirty hundred weight truck and we went out, the two of us. It wasn't far out of town. We were sitting down having a wonderful meal and someone walks up to the door.

17:00 It was two of our officers and they knew the girls there and they walked in and they saw Bounds and myself and they sat down at the table with us all together, with the meal and nothing was said. Gordon Glasgow was one of them and another one I believe. Nothing was said. Gordon said, "Its about time we all went back to camp."

17:30 They had walked out. It wasn't far and they got dropped. They didn't have any wheels. And Bounds' said, "Oh I've got a vehicle out there sir, we'll take you back." So they both got in the back - these two officers, and we drove back to camp. He paraded us in the morning and he was all right about it. It was all finished. That was a really good story.

**Obviously you guy were very well though of and it sounds like the relationship**

18:00 **between officers and men was terrific?**

And the other thing. At the wireless school we went to... I think it was down at Guildford in Perth. A big wireless school. There was a mixed army, air force - everybody went to this big wireless school. We had to build the latrines. We had to dig them and they were

18:30 big hot boxes. They were about ten feet long, and they had to have one for the women personnel, and they put canvas around it, right around for when they wanted to go at night. I remember the night quite well. One of our signals fellows, one of our instructor signals fellows said, "Oh we might have a bit of fun tonight," and they wired a wire

19:00 down into the ladies toilets inside there, and waited until they came and lifted the box and sat down on the seats. They were all sort of comfortable there and he got his microphone out and said, "You're under observation by the soldiers" - and there was panic. That was a great story about the hot boxes.

19:30 **You guys certainly got up to a few tricks. Now we are sort of going back and forth across the country. I think we left off in terms of sequence at Northam. You moved up to Northam and this is still with the 1st Brigade Recce Squadron. I believe there were other changes afoot. There was another disbandment there is that right?**

There was another change. The final change was in

20:00 '44 I think, about September '44. The Recce Squadron, the 2/1st Armoured Brigade Recce Squadron was disbanded again. Then we moved across then because we were getting ready for this Japanese business. They sent us over to Queensland

20:30 and we came the 2/1st Australian Army Armoured Brigade - the Special Equipment Squadron. That's when we went over to join the 4th Armoured Brigade, a big organization, a very big one that one was. It was at Nerang River not far from Surfers. We had the 2/1st Armoured Regiment, another unit.

21:00 We had the 2/9th Armoured Regiment - they were one of the big ones we had in Victoria. And the 2/4th Armoured Regiment - they had moved on. We formed up then for the moves and planning for the big operation which we had a very limited time - for Borneo. That was our last final movement and we changed our uniforms and berets from khaki to jungle green.

21:30 We had black berets and new colour patches, and then the work started on all this new special equipment, which was all completely new to us.

**Right you now had a sense that you were going to be in action?**

Yes we were practically told that something was happening.

**Did you know that in WA?**

22:00 Well we were sent over there in preparation.

**Was it preparation for anything, New Guinea?**

No they didn't tell us anything, not at that stage. Nothing was told other than just a movement. So there was a major rush to get on these tanks and all this new equipment. They were converted - not completely, but

22:30 they were converted in workshops. The flame throwers to new facilities, planning and tanks, jettison tanks that would take about eight gallons of goo on the outside. They were all planned ready and we had a lot of trouble with the frog tanks, the flames. We had hoses bursting. Lieutenant Bells was a very clever man.

23:00 Captain Harris was an engineer and we remodified a lot of things. There was a tremendous lot of modification and we got them ready.

**Why were the modifications necessary?**

Oh well they weren't satisfactory at testing. Hoses bursting. Pumps not right. They were just made and sent up. They were roughly tested in Melbourne, but we found they weren't suitable. The hoses had sort of rubber joints. We put ball joints on them and things like that

23:30 where they'd come up and turn at ninety degrees to go into the gun. That was a major thing, and the other tanks...the other Grant tanks were fitted with the dozer blades on the front that were operated on the inside to elevate the blade on the front like they dozer blade they used for grading roads. We took them away and they were working reasonably well. And then we had the Grant tanks, the big Grants that we had originally.

24:00 They were fitted....we had a troop of those, three of those. They were fitted with dozer blades but they were hydraulic in the tank. And the bridge layer tank, that was an English tank with no top on it, no turret no nothing. Just a bridge, like a scissor bridge which the driver could lift up, open out to go over a bomb crater or something like that. All that type of equipment was a made

24:30 rush to get it ready before the final movement came. We got notice then, thirty six hours to be prepared...to be down in Brisbane for embarkation.

**What was the mood like at that time. You had spent these years on his hardware and finally..?**

Well we had major problems.

25:00 Basically some of the troops we left behind. They followed on...a couple followed on at a later date. But we finished up in Brisbane down at the wharf down there and we sailed on the 4th May 1945, on the [SS] Sea Cat across to Morotai.

**So when you boarded there in Brisbane, were you told where you were going?**

Well they were spread a bit.

25:30 The vehicles went on different vehicles. It was a big convoy, a major convoy. The Sea Cat was one of these American Liberty ships. There wasn't one piece of timber on the ship, not even a match box size. It was all steel welded together. I believe they used to put them together in a couple of months or so. There were over two thousand on this ship of our fellows, sleeping on deck and down in the holds in the heat. The latrines were

26:00 outside hanging over, swivel boxes over the side of the ship. The food was iron rations. The only good bloke on the ship was the padre. He had that much tobacco for us, loose pipe tobaccos. He gave us plenty of that. No booze but you would always hang around the American's sergeants' mess or officers' mess cook's window

26:30 to take any scraps that came out the porthole.

**And people like Dick Benison, they were on board... your brother?**

We were all on it. There were salt water showers. They were scattered about. They got a bit of selection. But you were lying in four and five tiers, and there would no air. You couldn't come up on top to open up or to have a light or a smoke or anything. It was a complete black out with the convoys.

27:00 Naval ships were running up and down the convoys... but the showers were terrible.

**And how were the men dealing with it. They knew they would be finally seeing action..?**

Oh yes we knew it would eventually. I can't remember the number of days but we eventually arrived at Morotai. That was a battle area during the war.

27:30 Japs were there but they were out on the perimeter. That became our staging camp for the Squadron with the 2/9th Armoured Regiment. We had all their tanks and other units. We were staged there in preparation for the two big operations in Borneo. But we had a lot of work to do when we got to Morotai to bring the tanks up to scratch. We had to water proof the back of the tanks



28:00 because when we landed in Borneo we were under water up to a point. Water proofing...the ark mess they put down when they put a garage floor down. That was shaped and bent and put all over the louvres. Canvas tarps were put over the top of that. It was sealed and glued and everything around it all. Then a snorkel about four inches would run up, straight up into the air above the turret to completely water proof the tank from water.

28:30 So that was one of our major jobs.

**Did you have to do that at Morotai?**

We did that at Morotai and the same with the Grant tanks, the gun tanks. I don't know how far they had to go.

29:00 It depended on what sort of beaches we were going in on you see. Eventually then the warning came up for Borneo. It was called Oboe 2 which is Balikpapan and Oboe 6. Oboe 6 was the top end, Tarakan and Labuan. But our squadron, when we arrived at Morotai

29:30 they cut the squadron in half, exactly half the squadron did the landing with Ray Bells up in Labuan and Tarakan in supporting the 9th Division - those AIF blokes from the Middle East.

30:00 That was to support them on the landings up in North Borneo. The other half that was left behind, not long after, I can't give you dates. They were under the command of Maloly and Captain Glasgow. Just prior to the Ray Bell was give the command for the top end. He did all the work on the Frogs and everything

30:30 in Lismore. He was a very brilliant man. He did that operation to Labuan. But the Oboe 2, the other half that followed later on, we sailed with the 7th Division - that was another Middle East Division, an Infantry Division. Our Squadron supported them

31:00 with lots of other units and things on the landings at Balikpapan. That's how it went. The operation at Balikpapan was one of the biggest armadas of the Second World War. It was the last operating. There was an incredible number of shells fired off.

31:30 delousing mines that the Japs had set up in the foreshore. There was oil coming from the oil wells ... a Shell Oil Refinery it was at Balikpapan right back to the early 1940s. The Australians were there very early in small numbers there. But the Japs took

32:00 that in '42 I think. They took control... they took over Borneo because they wanted the oil for Japan. On that landing at Balikpapan we were towed on a little landing craft tank. The three of us, three tanks in our troop.

32:30 It was an open thing with a tarp on the top and we were towed right across from Morotai. There was a lot of that going on. There were landing craft ships [LCS] and landing craft tanks [LCT]. It was a major big convoy. It was incredible. The bombers used to come across from Morotai for days and days before to blow it up... to work on the coast line there. They had guns built in.

33:00 Vasey Highway after General Vasey, you couldn't find that on the landing. It was covered with bomb craters and trees and everything.

**So can you remember taking off from Morotai?**

33:30 Getting back to the first crowd up there., Ray Bell's unit took the Frames and Frogs up there. They were their mates from the 2/9th Armoured Regiment. They did some good work up there, some incredible work, particularly at Labuan. Ray Bells and Max Gilbert were in the main operations and the biggest one was called a pocket.

34:00 They were supporting the infantry battalions, the footslogger boys. There was a couple of places they couldn't get into so they sent the Frogs in and they had trouble. They had to come out again and a day or two later apparently - this was called a pocket - they sent two Frog tanks in. Bells and Gilbert, they sent their tanks in

34:30 with the infantry, and other gun tanks, straight gun tanks from the 2/9th Armoured Regiment. They followed the infantry down the side of the road with mines and every thing. The Frog tanks did a lot of damage there.

35:00 The Frogs were flaming up everything. There were Japanese casualties and all sorts of trouble there. Then the Frogs withdrew and then the gun tanks went through with the Infantry. It didn't last too long but they got highly recommended. The Recce Squadron with their

35:30 flame throwers. That was from Brigadier Macarthur-Onslow for the result. The infantry were very happy and being tankies we all worked together on the island. There were so many battalions there. Another day you would have a different group and it was all programmed. The radio links the whole thing for the operation. They were told on the radio what to do.

36:00 They were told to target here and target there, to flame them and things like that. I believe there were

about thirty...ninety odd Japanese killed and the Frogs were responsible for about thirty. So that was getting a little bit towards the end of the operation at Labuan in North Borneo. They went to Brunei. Very short. Nothing done. Clean job.

- 36:30 straight in and out. We had a bridge-layer up there and I think it was used on a couple of occasions. We found that some of the craters were too big and it couldn't bridge them.

**Were the landings at Labuan and Brunei done at the same time?**

No different times.

- 37:00 I can't think of the number but Brunei was another Oboe. Oboe 6 was the big one at Labuan. We camped there for a while until the war was over basically. We did a lot of reconnaissance work and different things.

**Were those operations all done simultaneously?**

No, that was practically finished before...ours was July 1.

- 37:30 I'm not sure of the exact date. I'll look at after... the date for that one. The other one was a completely different story, the Balikpapan one. I have just mentioned what happened to my mates up there, reports coming back to me, talk and things about what happened and how that operation took place.

- 38:00 Particularly the Labuan one. But there was a lot of other work up there but that was a pretty major one apparently, the Labuan one.

**And that was before you left Morotai?**

Yes that was all clean up pretty well.

**And that must have given you guys some confidence?**

Oh we got messages through all the time, how they were going and things. We kept in touch with one another, the different units and things. I think at some stage after the war

- 38:30 just before the Balikpapan one, some of our officers were up there. They flew them up to have a talk and see what had been happening and things. How they were operating. How the tanks were working.

**So you're hearing this news...you're at Morotai and you were told you were off to Balikpapan. That must have been quite a moment?**

Well we knew we were going to go yes. As I say, that was the last operation of the war

- 39:00 in Borneo and up the top at Sandakan. That's where the POWs [prisoner of war] were. There were terrible things there, the atrocities that took place. The landing was a very difficult one. It was very steep the landing. But when we came in we were on Red Beach. I've got a plan that I can show you after. There's a map there. We landed on Red Beach.

- 39:30 It was at 0900 in the morning and about twenty three minutes after the infantry came in. It was all programmed right out at Morotai to the exact minute of every vessel, LSTs, engineers, strikes from the air, everything

- 40:00 was spot on, even the night flares at night. When we landed there they would go every fifteen or twenty minutes to light the place up. There were snipers coming in to cover the infantry and the tanks and everything. But when we got in, the Yanks who were towing us,

- 40:30 they got a bit nervous and they pulled in a bit short. I said, "Come on, we want to be a bit closer," and we had to drop off. We were right under and we were in serious trouble. But we got our tanks in but there wasn't much to spare. They were all water proofed but if we got a bit more water they wouldn't have been able to get us out. Once we got ashore we had little detonators under the canvas louvers and we just blew the detonators and blew the canvas off the top. Then we converted

- 41:00 straight away the gun tanks and the flamethrower tanks... they all converted straight away into action tanks. I think it was the second day at Balikpapan - he walks on, Macarthur-Onslow. He always does it. It might have been the second day he arrived there with his cherry wood pipe, dressed up like a speck you know, polished spit and polish with his guards and every thing. He came right past my tank.

**What did you make of the man?**

Oh I saw him there. I had no respect for him much. He was an arrogant man. He even took over the Menzies Hotel for his headquarters up the top of Collins Street. He demanded this and he demanded that.

00:36 **So we are going to go back over the arrival from Morotai**

01:00 **to Balikpapan.**

Yes we talked about the trip across and the landing.

**Well let's talk about the landing and the operation and how it was planned.**

01:30 **Tell us what you can recall.**

I'm trying to recall...it was a long time ago...1945 and what took place at the landing Balikpapan on July the 1st 1945 at 0900 hours in the morning. The first wave in....

02:00 It was a major operation and one of the biggest landings. I think it was probably the biggest in the Second World War - the number of vessels, landing craft, navy, air force bombing over the top, everything. I was in the convoy from Morotai. I was towed to Balikpapan behind a little American

02:30 craft. There were three tanks in tow, three Frog tanks of our troop. Dick Bennison's tank that I was in and the other two. The previous night you could see in the distance miles and miles away the glow of the fires. The oil wells were burning.

03:00 The oil wells collapsed just like a pancake. They went right down to nothing with the heat of the oil from the bombings from the previous three weeks from the air force coming over from Morotai everyday striking. The beachers were all mined. They had oil pipes running into the water, the Japanese did. They were prepared to use that to fire the water along the foreshore.

03:30 They set it all up for the landing but fortunately enough, some weeks before the engineers got in. The Secret Service came in quietly and they demolished a lot of that equipment...the spikes and things that were in the water that would cause a major problem for the landing - apart from the bombing too. Coming up to the early morning, the D Day

04:00 at Balik [Balikpapan], we were coming in and we got very close to the shore, around about a hundred metres. But prior to arriving at Balikpapan we had all our tanks water proofed at Morotai with the Frog tanks and the gun tanks and whatever we were bringing in, with a steel mesh across the back louvres of the tanks

04:30 which was welded on, just spot welded on, with a canvas over the top. The canvas was sealed completely so that no water would get in to the engine under the louvres. We had run the tank up about an hour before to get them running in good order to go. The Yanks were a little bit nervous. They wanted to drop us too far out.

05:00 So Dick Bennison the crew commander said "No we want to get a bit closer." So we went a bit further but eventually they just dropped us, opened the flap on the front of the landing craft. Now we had no option but to run in and we were practically right under water and nearly out of sight. The water came up right over the louvres and right up to the turret. The snorkels were sticking out of the water.

05:30 We got ashore and when we arrived on shore we set the detonators off and blew the canvas off the top of the louvres to get air into the engine. In the tanks we proceeded on and across the landing area was called Vasey Highway after General Vasey, but you couldn't find it on account of the palm trees and the destruction

06:00 and everything. You couldn't find a highway. So we proceed on with our tanks and the infantry was coming in with equipment, engineer, signals the whole show. We were moving in, the show was on and there was strafing coming over head from the rockets on naval ships. The bombers flying overhead of us. They were dropping

06:30 ahead of us... the navy was dropping shells a little bit ahead of us to get us in. Once we landed on Red Beach - we had formations, locations where to assemble on the beach. We had plans to go up to Parramatta Ridge which was a big steep climb up the front into Parramatta Ridge.

07:00 The gun tanks that came, our gun tanks that had the dozer blades on them - the Matildas - they weren't used. They didn't get much use. There was no need for them. The engineers had normal bulldozers there that could clean up any major problems. The bridge layer was not needed. We had a bridge layer on from the Recce Squadron,

07:30 but the Frog tanks... we started to move forward into Balik and started to climb. We started to have problems with the Japanese.

**In regards to the landing, it was a very planned landing.**

08:00 **There were a number of waves of different infantry and....?**

Yes the landing was planned exactly...the beaches we had to land on were marked. I think... I'm not sure about that but they were coloured, red, blue and green. We all knew exactly where we were going to land. We didn't land on someone else's beach. The infantry landed on the same beaches in groups.

08:30 We all got in together and the whole group that landed were planned to stay as a group.

**And did that happen? Was the landing organised?**

Yes it worked quite well. So we preceded up towards Parramatta Ridge with our tanks, the Frog tank with the infantry.

09:00 There was quite a bit of trouble with the Japanese. With the flame thrower we were firing into foxholes and there were a few casualties going up. The weather was all right, it was fine. Some of the infantry

09:30 were in a bit of trouble and a lot were killed on the approach. The gun tanks broke down but they picked up and followed later. We got up to Parramatta Ridge and we took that about...I think it might have been eleven o'clock in the morning that that was taken.

10:00 So we kept proceeding up under difficult - very difficult conditions.

**How strong was the attack from the Japanese?**

Oh it was very strong. We couldn't find them anywhere, off the sides of the roads or tracks or where ever they were. But up on the top it

10:30 wasn't good. This landing it wasn't good. We just battled and we did the best we could with out tanks against the Japanese. They were concealed everywhere.

11:00 Getting towards nightfall, after casualties, we dug in for the night up on Parramatta Ridge and the navy were sending over the star shells to keep it illuminated to stop the Japanese from infiltrating into our tanks and into our area. Those star shells were dropping about every twenty minutes.

11:30 The oil wells up on Parramatta Ridge that were blown up were running like rivers. They were flat and you could see the oil flames just like a big creek running everywhere. Luckily we were up on the top of the ridge and it wasn't running into us. We were up top looking down on it. So we slept with our tanks, not under the tanks but next to the tanks for the whole night. We had a few snipers

12:00 through the night, but the infantry that were with us surrounding us all, they disposed of any Japanese that tried to penetrate into our group on Parramatta Ridge.

**So this was your first day and first night of action?**

Yes this was my first day of action ever.

**Can you tell me what that experience was like. Were you frightened?**

12:30 Oh no. Of course we were all a bit nervous and a bit worried about it all. We didn't know what was in front of us. None of us did when we got there. But they were on top of us up the top and we were down the bottom trying to get up to them. Major Ted (UNCLEAR), I think it was that day, He was a 60th Cav [Cavalry] man. He was with another tank unit, another small unit.

13:00 He dropped everything and he ran ahead to give them a bit of help, knowledge. By night fall we dug in for the whole night. That was the first night which wasn't good. So the next night we kept...we opened up in the morning. We had more targets to deal with. Where ever we went we had infantry with us and we were supporting them and they were telling us what to do with the gun tanks,

13:30 and the flame thrower tanks. Even other tanks of ours were down in Balikpapan working on the oil refineries and the workshops and things like that. The Japs were every where. The second day

14:00 we were moving on. We had a lot of casualties. On the third day... I can't quite relate the days exactly for each day. But I think one of the worst complete couple of days was the 8th July, 9th and 10th, particularly the 9th and the 10th. On the 10th we were working with the 2/31st Infantry Battalion

14:30 up the top at Milford Highway. It was a very narrow closed in track and there was Japanese both left, right and the side of us. They were everywhere. Along the side of the road they had two hundred pound bombs, booby traps

15:00 and we had to be very careful. They could detonate the booby traps, but the engineers found the wires and let us get through.

**What were the booby traps like? What did they look like?**

Oh they were bombs just covered over. Quite big bombs they were. They would blow the whole road up, dangerous. I think they were slightly covered. You could see them on the side of the road. The engineers could pick them up and destroy them.

15:30 Also we were burning fox holes as we went up with the Frogs. And we had machine guns from the turrets of the tank. Also the gun tanks were firing their two pounders.

**What were you operating on the tank?**

I was the flamethrower in the Frog tank. Devil was the name of the tank.

- 16:00 Dick Bennison was up in the turret and Ted my little mate was driving the tank. Just the three of us and it was all happening - the whole thing was happening all around us. On the 10th July, that was the worst operation in the war as far as I was concerned. On the 10th Colonel Robson, the CO, the command officer of 2/31st Battalion,
- 16:30 he called us up to Coke. You could see in the distance there were a lot of big logs, two or three feet in diameter cut and packed up along the road. And up on the crest of this feature we called Coke, you could look down into this re-entrant down the bottom to these big hills with cuttings, you couldn't climb them. They were too steep.
- 17:00 We were up there for about two or three hours. We had six pounders and different guns up on the top observing what was going and Colonel Robson put a lot of fire in around there at the bend down into Coke. And there wasn't a murmur from the Japs, nothing. It was absolute complete silence. You could hear
- 17:30 nothing. So then he decided that we would go down into Coke, advance. So he gave instructions. We had the infantry with us and he gave instructions that we were sending three tanks down to support the infantry which were beside us and at the rear of us.
- 18:00 The first tank he sent in was a two pound gun tank, a Matilda from our Recce Squadron. Les Murdoch was the crew commander, Bob Dalton was the gunner, Bill Dougherty was the wireless operator. They were locked down and they went down very slowly down this re-entrant, no problem. The second tank that he sent in was the tank that I was in, the Devil,
- 18:30 the flame thrower. That went down no problem. We got in all right. Then he sent the third tank from the 1st Armoured Regiment, another group that we were with up there. That was a four inch Howitzer - that was a gun tank. So the three of us arrived down the bottom of this re-entrant with the... out in front the sent...I think it was the engineers. They were in front
- 19:00 to clear any mines or booby traps. The infantry were coming down with us on each side of the tanks, down this re-entrant. By the time we got to the bottom it all happened. Everything happened. It opened up, absolutely and completely.
- 19:30 When we got to the bottom we could see these logs, piles of logs up on the right hand. There was a bend on the road at the bottom and it turned to the left and there were logs piled up everywhere. The Japs were apparently buried in, in large numbers into that hill amongst the logs.
- 20:00 and everything opened up and we lost a lot of men. Some of the infantry who were with us going down. The tanks were peppered. Les Murdoch in the front gun tank. Bob Murdock was injured in a tank through the slits and things from a sniper. Cyril Curley didn't lose an eye but he got one in the eye.
- 20:30 And my Frog tank was the next tank. I was flaming up into the hill and other targets with the Frog. I ran out of flame, it was all gone, then I used my machine gun coaxial on to targets and then I had a stoppage. That means I had a fault in the gun and then I went onto single shot.
- 21:00 The other tank, the Howitzer tank... I don't know what that was doing but that was working on the side of the re-entrant. A message came through from the Commanding Officer Colonel Robson up on the top of the hill to Dick Bennison my crew commander on the radio, to
- 21:30 order Murdoch in the front gun tank to get out of his tank and climb the logs. But just prior to that, Bill the gunner in the first tank...he was the two pound gunner - Les Murdoch directed him on to a couple of snipers and a couple of positions up there.
- 22:00 He knocked him out with his two pounder traversing his turret on to them on the hill. Things were just getting out of hand completely. So a message came down for Murdock then to go up and climb up amongst it. Mistake was the name of the tank..., to tell the infantry to come down, to retreat, to get out.
- 22:30 So he went up in amongst it to bring them ...to get them down. He was just about really...at the stage when he was going to turn the bend in the road. But our Crew Commander Dick Bennison sent a message to him confirming something about the message about getting them out of the place.
- 23:00 The road was that narrow you couldn't turn a tank in it. There was only one way in that was in and there was only one way out and that was to back out. So Les Murdoch went and helped our wounded fellows on the road and loaded them on the back of the luvres on the tank. Dick Bennison my crew commander was out and helping our wounded, the fellows from
- 23:30 2/31st Battalion onto the back of the tank. And there were other fellows that were dead on the road. Then he called... one of the infantry fellows, I can't think of his name, a sergeant, he picked up somebody's machine gun and he started into them up on the hill there. The whole lot,
- 24:00 uncovered. He stood up in front of the Japs and he killed a lot of them up there. The infantry... we had a phone call on our tank at the back the Frog tank, one of the soldiers was in desperate trouble. He wanted help and we could do nothing for him. They were hiding behind our tank and trying to climb the side of the re-entrant

24:30 but there was no way they could get up there. So then Colonel Robson called for a retreat. They called it off otherwise it would have got out of hand. So it's getting late. It's about five I think and he gave the instructions for the tanks and the infantry, all of us to withdraw from the summit. Prior to us going out

25:00 Colonel Ted Wirey who was one of the 6th Div Cav, a marvellous soldier, a wonderful man, he was standing up there as an observer watching everything and he was killed by a sniper up on the stop looking down. So we started to withdraw and the only way we could come out

25:30 was to back out, back up the hill, reverse up. So the first tank to come out was the last one, the Howitzer tank from the 1st Armoured Regiment. The next tank out was our tank, the Frog tank... my tank, the one I was in with the flame thrower with the wounded loaded on the back of the louveres. The last one up was the lead tank which was the gun tank, Les Murdoch who was out before

26:00 giving instructions about what to do to tell them to get out. So after getting out ...we couldn't get out. There were dead soldiers, our mates, all along the side of the road and there was no way - because the Japs were still there they, were buried in, we couldn't finish them off,

26:30 and there was no way we could get them out. So they were there over night till we cleaned up the other part of the action where the Japs were. When we went in the morning a lot of them were all booby trapped, our dead mates. The Japs knowing that we were going to pick them up and move them. We had to get all the booby traps and things off them so we could take them out.

27:00 I think we lost...After the withdrawal there was eighteen killed of our fellows and twenty-three were wounded. So night was setting in and we could do nothing.

27:30 we just put a perimeter around and called in artillery and different things and then we blew all the logs up, cleaned it all up. The next morning... we stayed in the area for the night so the next morning we went down and took out the rest of our dead soldiers.

28:00 We took another tank down. I'm not sure, I might have gone down, I don't remember. Some tanks went down there to have a look and see and we didn't get any resistance. It was very difficult not to crush any of the dead soldiers where they were. But Les Murdoch got a mention in dispatches for his work, and some of the infantry.

28:30 Two or three of them that got mentioned for bravery. That was the worst operation, practically the worst of the whole of Balikpapan because the war finished only days after that happened.

29:00 All these fellows, particularly all these Middle East fellows who had fought right through the Middle East and never got a touch and came out well. Ready for the war and then to get killed in the last operation of the war. Terrible, it was very bad. Then

29:30 there was a lot more cleaning up around the place. There were small pockets around the place, and they were bringing in POWs. The commandos were finding them everywhere that the Japs had had up in the hills and things. We then finished up and went back to Peterson Junction right down the bottom into Balikpapan where we made our staging camp. But there were

30:00 a lot of other battle areas. There were smaller ones. There was one down before Coke where we had to put up at night. And the Japs used to have the banzai charges at night. They used to make spears and we used to put booby traps with wires across everywhere. The infantry would put strings and things right around the perimeter with tins and things like that that would rattle if anybody came in.

30:30 We all dug in all the way up the hill there. At night time we would have to dig in with perimeter guards on and everything. Night was just as bad as day time because they attempted to do a banzai charge at night. That's where they came in with a load of ammunition on their back and they wouldn't care. They wanted to do away with themselves.

31:00 Quite often that would happen. The infantry and the perimeter guard would usually pick them off. They were dirty little animals. They wore funny little boots. Like our boots have a full toe in it, their boots had a space for their big toe and the rest was in the other part so they would climb trees and things. They were never clean or washed. They were dirty.

31:30 They were very cruel to the natives. They used to strike them behind the legs, behind their knee to cripple them. I have seen it. We took a lot, a lot of prisoners into the big compound and we used them for working parties

32:00 when we went back to our camps. We set up our own camp at Peterson Junction and relaxed a little bit then when it was basically over. A lot of the soldiers got leave - the fellows from the Middle East got leave because they had points built up and they got them home. We had amenities. We built a nice little camp there with a basketball court and played basket ball.

32:30 The natives came and used to work for us. We had a couple of boys there, Bully Beef and Banjo we called them. They were kitchen boys. We had a few concerts down in one of the gullies over there. Gracie Fields was over there. But it was a bit relaxing and that was the main part. Then there was the demolition and cleaning up

33:00 and getting rid of things we didn't want. We took them and they were all put in the graveyard. We didn't want to bring a lot of stuff back.

**Were there any Australians taken as prisoners by the Japanese?**

I don't think, no we were right there I think. There were quite a few Japanese

33:30 that were taken prisoner.

**So how long did you finish up staying there after the battle up on Coke?**

We were up there for a couple of days in that area and sending out commandoes out into the jungle to comb it out to see what was going on and everything. So we cleaned it all up fairly well.

34:00 Most of the Japs were taken prisoner, the ones that weren't killed. They were brought down into Balikpapan. There was a big barbwire compound where we had guards. They were kept there. Then a bit of recreation and

34:30 preparing our tanks and getting things back to normal and having a bit of a swim down at Balikpapan Harbour. Then we had a bit of time to have a look around the whole place there. It was incredible place to see the oil refineries. It was a magnificent place, but it had to go on account of the oil.

35:00 But apparently MacArthur wanted... that last operation of the war, General Blamey and the Australian Government - Blamey in particular. He considered that one was really not necessary - the war was practically over and they would have dried themselves out with bombing Balikpapan. We would have cleaned them up but MacArthur wanted another show.

35:30 General Douglas MacArthur being an American, he wanted a big front to go in again and the big conference was at Headquarters of the Americans and Australians. MacArthur said if you don't want to go in I will put in an American Division, and Curtin said, the prime minister said "Well he's the commander of the operations in the South Pacific

36:00 I'm going to go in if you won't go in." So in my opinion it probably wasn't necessary because they couldn't escape anywhere. We would have bombed them out and they would have surrendered. So that was the story and that was the end. We went in and lost a lot of good men.

36:30 It was terrible as far as I was concerned.

**Was that the general feeling amongst the men, that it was unnecessary?**

Oh I think so, yes.

**Did you talk about that with each other?**

Not much at that time. I didn't know about that till after the war until I read about it. Gavin Long the war historian he wrote it up and it was all there. Why it happened...

37:00 ...because MacArthur wanted it, and why we didn't want it, it was Tom Blamey. He finished up a Field Marshal in the Middle East. A great soldier of First World War. He said we don't need another one like Balikpapan, its not necessary. We can clean them out without going in. We could do it with bombing and things. They'll surrender.

37:30 That was basically the end of it and all these fellows went home - home on leave a lot them, and guy like myself without many points... They were 39ers those fellas, and we were '41, '42 and they stayed on. A lot went to the occupation forces in Japan. Some of our fellows went there and other went to places cleaning up.

38:00 Cleaning up remnants of Japanese on small islands. Then they all went back to Morotai from when we started. We took a lot of tanks back there and cleaned them up. We had plans to bring them back to Australia but we staged a camp there.

## Tape 6

01:15 **Okay it was literally an ambush at Coke?**

All those fellows from the Middle East and everything, at the last operation they were killed in that operation which was unnecessary

01:30 The landing at Balikpapan was not necessary.

**So was it a very emotional experience for you?**

Very. You could see where the crosses were where we buried them on the side of the road. They had their names on them. It was a shocking thing. Not that we knew any of them. We were working as a

tank group supporting them.

02:00 We knew Colonel Robson and Captain Glasgow and different ones. But we didn't know them, we were doing our thing and they were their thing in the war. But by reading a bit more into it and the books I've read, there were young ones and old ones. It was a terrible emotional thing for me that that had to happen.

02:30 **When did the full impact of that emotional effect hit you. Was it while you were there or was it later?**

I think probably the next day when I went back again. We took a tank up there to make sure it was all right to go in. We took a tank and we had to be so careful as I mentioned, even to turn the tank around in case we ran over our own mates on that little narrow track

03:00 where they had been lying and booby-trapped. The Japs must have got in at night and booby trapped them. There were wires and detonators and little charges that sent it all up again. It was not a very pleasant experience that second return in.

**Were you concerned, when you were returning, that**

03:30 **the same battle was going to happen?**

Yes we were concerned. We didn't quite know what could have happened. It was very quite and everything but they must have retreated and moved on. We recovered a lot of dead Japanese up there in the logs. Not as many as we expected because they were well and truly buried into that hill. But we did find them up there.

04:00 **Was it part of your job to find...?**

Oh the infantry went up and had a go at that. We didn't get out of the tanks and do that, but they came down with us and had a good look at everything before we started to move our wounded and the deceased ones before we took them back.

**Did the flame thrower... was that very devastating? Did that kill a lot of people.?**

Oh yes that was quite effective

04:30 as far as we were concerned. Up in that hill there, it started fires and all sorts of things. But I can remember the infantry trying to get out but they couldn't get up. They were like in a cage. I will never forget the officer behind our tank, he was in a terrible state. He couldn't do anything. He was on the telephone and there was nothing we could do,

05:00 nothing. I don't even know his name or what happened to him...if he was killed.

**Was he the tank commander?**

No, he was on our telephone on the frog tank to Dick Bennison. I was up in the turret and Dick Bennison was up with me and we could hear it all coming through on my phone. We all had head phones and I could hear the terrible commotion, the desperation.

05:30 "We've got to have help!". This is half way through the operation - to get help, to do something.

**Who was he calling?**

He was talking to our tank. He couldn't talk to anyone else. We had a phone on every tank. He picked up our phone on the back of the Frog Tank, the Devil tank that I was in. He grabbed the first one and he was behind a little bit of the fire at the back of the tank

06:00 and he was in a terrible state, a shocking state.

**But who was he calling to try and get assistance from?**

He was talking to our tank commander - talking into our tank. "Can you help me and the men." All we could do was just continue on with what we were doing. We couldn't get out and lift him in. But we did lift a lot in up in that....the fellows who were on the road while the Japs were still operating

06:30 on the hill, the wounded ones. We put I think three on each tank or more, I don't know... to carry them out. They were under fire and Bennison my crew commander, and Murdock was under fire down there loading them in from the back. That was the worst, the complete worse thing that ever happened.

07:00 After that we tried to settle down a bit back at Balikpapan. The Dutch were running the show. They had the oil refineries and we were dealing in guilders, the Dutch money. We were doing a bit of trading there with natives and everybody. You know, the Aussie's always liked to do a bit of trading,

07:30 selling machinery and stuff we didn't want and any thing we could get our hands on. And they were getting a bit concerned about it because too many guilders were coming out of the country - getting into our pay books, going back to Australia. So we were only allowed eventually to put in about ten pounds a week or something. Well we weren't there that long. It was delivered to the post office where you paid



your money in.

08:00 You would pay in the guilders and the post fellow at the post office, you would give him a couple of guilders for himself and he would let you pay a little bit more in. A bit of wheeling and dealing. And the Americans were mad on the Black Jack and the two up. They would play these games all night, particularly the Negroes. One of our fellows in our workshops, when we set up the workshops, he was always charging up the tank batteries

08:30 and we had a system on with the Americans. At night we would go out with a jeep and hire them a battery for a about five guilders, charge them and come back with the next lot again - with the Yanks. We were dealing with the service of the batteries. But there was all sorts of wheeling and dealing once the war was over with everything. Even the Japs up there were grinding glass into the rice we found out for the natives -

09:00 finely ground in. After that we took the tanks back to Morotai then.

**What were the American actually doing on the island?**

Oh, they were actually... they had their own small groups there with supplies and things like that. They didn't play any major part. They would

09:30 bring supplies and things in off the ships. There were not a lot of them there, but a unlimited number of Negroes.

**And what were the relationships like between the Australians and the Americans?**

We got on all right with them. They used to like our beer and we liked their cigarettes and there was always a bit of dealing, and the whiskey...we liked their whiskey. It all sort of worked out a bit.

10:00 **And after all that time of training and testing equipment back in Australia, testing the tanks and making changes, reinventing them, all of that and then you are finally got away in action. How did they work, were you happy with the way they worked?**

10:30 I was quite happy to do the landing. I wanted to go. I had to put my bit in. Nobody was worrying about it. We were a bit concerned about what was going to happen, but we weren't panicking or anything. There was no panic whatsoever, nothing. Every one was stable when the operation was going through

11:00 following these procedures. We had a staging camp, the recce squadron. All the units had staging camps down back at Balikpapan and they sent their units up. They changed them over and others would come up. We used to get our food sent up from the staging camp every day..., fuel supplies for the flame throwers, all sorts of things

11:30 I think it might have been four or five days before I could change my shirt. We slept in the same thing right the way through, boots and everything. You didn't have time to get your gear off in case you had to make a move. We were on call pretty well every minute. We might have to be moved on or be directed to another operation some where.

**So was the staging camp under threat at all?**

No, not really

12:00 because they were behind the perimeter. We were up front of the perimeter and they were down below, but they seemed to manage to come up all right, to bring up supplies and every thing. That wasn't any problem. We played a lot of Housie Housie after the war. There was a great big re-entrant there where they made the

12:30 concert are for different concert parties... like Bob Hope used to go overseas for the yanks. I can very clearly remember Gracie Fields when she arrived there for the Aussies. We had a concert there one night. We had jeeps and cars at our own disposal after the war. There were a lot of American cars there... good quality cars which the Dutch had.

13:00 We took them all over. They were our cars and we used to drive them around a bit. And we had jeeps, our own jeeps. We had a free run of the place. There were no leave passes or anything. If you weren't on duty you could go off on your own, into to Balikpapan or anything and have a look at the oil wells and everything.

13:30 **So when did you realise that the Japanese had retreated and you had control of the island?**

Oh well they stopped. On that landing they had the twin 100mm or 125mm twin anti aircraft guns up in the mountains firing out to sea. They were all knocked out and all captured, particularly at a place down at Manggar.

14:00 Manggar air strip was another bad operation. The 1st Armoured Regiment went down there. It was about 8 or 10km out on the foreshore from Balikpapan. They took a couple of features and they got out of their tanks in the morning to make a brew and these big mountain guns blew one tank to pieces, damaged another one, and I think one got out.

14:30 They were lucky. I think one might have been killed and I think they did the wrong thing by having a brew. That seems to be the main thought.

**So with the clean up, you talked about demolition and cleaning up. What can you tell me..?**

Oh we packed up a lot of stores that had to come back to Australia from the Q [quartermaster store] and that.

15:00 You know, crates and crates we brought back. Even a lot of the search lights, the Dutch searchlights. We were using all that stuff. They said you can't take it and we said we own it, we took the island and we sold it back to them. The diggers did and we said if you don't buy it back we will blow it up. So we took a lot of good gear. A lot of fellows took stuff home with them from there.

15:30 Some people went directly home, those with the high points from our squadron. But quite a majority went back to Morotai, back there again to another staging camp where all the POWs were. All the big boys and other ones, the ones from Balikpapan. They were all moved to Morotai in compounds, generals and all types. And our tanks went back. We were going to bring them back

16:00 but we decided that we would dump them in at Morotai. There was a reef where we were camped. You could walk out for about half a mile in water about a couple of feet deep. Then it went straight down at 90 degrees into the sea and we took out a lot of tanks out there with a lot of care....

16:30 in combination with other equipment behind them. The driver had to warn him to get out before that first tank went in. Once that went in that was the end of it and the others would follow in with tow bars and chains behind. I can remember, I don't know if it was Teddy Leeman or... one of our mates got his foot caught and nearly went.

17:00 That was a bit touchy that experiment, getting rid of the tanks. And then of course we had the war trials there, the Japanese war trials. We had no option, the squadron was detailed...Ray Bells one of officers was a solicitor in Lismore before the war. He's written up a lot in books.

17:30 He was a prosecutor during the war trials and other parts of the islands. And Ray Bells successfully prosecuted some very senior Japanese generals that caused major atrocities to our Australians. They were in the compounds, the senior ones that were seriously bad people.

18:00 What we used to do with them every day... on the reef it was all coral. All of the Japs had to dig the reef with picks and it took them a long time to dig a bit. And then they would have to put it back and dig another one some where else. And we would cut palm trees down and the officers had to wear tin hats when they were working. And we had them

18:30 marching around carrying these palm trees on their shoulders like walking along at the double. It was very hard work and our soldiers, our diggers were supervising them.

**What was the point of digging the reef?**

It was to make them work, give them something to do, to set them up a bit.

19:00 at the end of the war trials our squadron and all units on Morotai were detailed to go into firing parties, execution parties for war criminals. We had no option. We were called on parade, ten at a time one day, ten another day We had training

19:30 out in the jungle. We set it all up there. There were mounds of earth and two big mess tables set up with ten rifles on them. One of those rifles had a blank bullet, it wouldn't kill anybody, but the other nine were active. The reason for that was so nobody knew if they had the blank bullet.

**20:00 So when you were asked to do this were you given...was it discussed with you? Were you given any information?**

No, no, no option. It was a proper parade. We were marched and halted and lined up and prepared. The padre was there and the officers were there and the doctor was there. We lined up and knelt down and these generals were strapped up in chairs

20:30 in front of a mound. The Japanese had their own men behind to do the burial. And he was dressed in his full uniform and polished boots and he gave his banzai and his calls and everything. screamed out and did it all. Then we were told to ...and there was a little thing pinned on his jacket, a cross where his heart was.

21:00 But we didn't know, we were told to fire at that spot. Everybody was told to fire at that spot, but a lot of them did different things. Some went for the head and other things. And after it was all over the doctor would go and examine him

21:30 to see that he was deceased, and the provost marshal was there to see that everything was satisfactory. Just before he was shot he would scream all his banzai and the ones behind the mound would scream. That was very emotional, but I have no regrets about it.

**22:00 How many executions did you do?**

I think I might have been on a couple at least but there was quite a lot of them. It was basically compulsory unless you were very serious and you didn't want to get into it.

**Was there anyone that didn't want to do it?**

No not that I know of. We all stepped forward when we were told to do it. We were told that one would possibly not have killed him.

- 22:30 The one with the blank bullet. That was getting towards the end, so after that it was a matter of preparing all our tanks, cleaning them up to bring them back but we didn't. We were having a bit of fun over there then. There were plenty of paw paws and fruit, and some of the little civilian Japanese that were working around the place who weren't soldiers, they were doing a bit in the kitchen and
- 23:00 washing the sheets and our clothes and all that sort of stuff. Even one bloke was cutting my hair. They were detailed to do certain things, and a lot of the equipment except the tanks were put in a graveyard up in the mountains. I've got a photo somewhere. There were hundred and hundreds of vehicles dumped, all in perfect condition. Then we took these tanks... we loaded up... I can't remember what we came back on.
- 23:30 We landed in Sydney. There were only about six or seven of us. I put in to do the job. Gordon Glasgow came back and we had a jeep with us. So once we hit Sydney we were our own bosses to organise, and we were there for about six weeks unloading eight or ten vehicles. We had leave of course every night
- 24:00 and day, what ever we want. And in the end Gordon Glasgow was about but he lived in Sydney up at Point Piper out that way. We said to Gordon, "I think we've had enough now I want to go home, we want to get home to our families" but we could have still been there. A lot of us brought things back, a few tools and different things like that.

**What did you bring back?**

- 24:30 I brought back a few tools, and one fellow Jimmy packed up and brought back some major machinery, some big thing he brought back. But a lot of stuff came back. A lot of them brought equipment and things like that.

**So when you realised that the war was over**

- 25:00 **you were still in Borneo. How did you feel, were you pleased, were you looking forward to getting back home or ...?**

Oh yes, we were then, but as I say, a lot went to Japan. They volunteered, a lot of the younger ones. Bruce Ruxton was up with us. He was with the 2/25th Battalion. He didn't do Coke, he was in another operation.

- 25:30 Bruce was a young subaltern. I didn't know Bruce but I think he might have been seventeen or something. That's when he first came... He came in as a reinforcement but he had no option on account of his age, and he's the secretary of the 2/25th and the 2/31st Battalion of that group that I was with. I know Bruce quite well.
- 26:00 I've done quite a bit of work for him... bronze plaques to put back on Balikpapan. I was one of the lucky ones out of a couple of thousand. Remember 'Australia Remembers'? 1945 to 1995. I was selected to go back to Borneo with the army,
- 26:30 navy and air force. All personnel who served in that war zone. We went up... I think we took one of Keating's planes at that stage, the big one, and we had a marvellous experience.

**What was it like returning?**

It was devastating for me particularly when we went...

- 27:00 The first port of call was Jakarta, then we went on through it all right up to Labuan, to Sandakan where the POW's were. But it was a terribly emotionally for me and knocked me right out - going to Balikpapan. To stand on the beach exactly where I landed and just look to the left and the right up and down
- 27:30 that beach. That's where it all happened. I just sat there by myself. I used to go down and sit and look at it all and think of all those fellows. The beach that we came in on and they didn't go off the beach. They were still there.
- 28:00 And Labuan, that was another place I went back to. The war graves up there are magnificent, lawns, immaculate. The natives keep them in perfect order, and I looked for mates and I found Major Warry, Ted Warry, 5th Cav in the Middle East. He was the one shot up at Coke and everybody loved Ted. I took a photo.
- 28:30 **Could I ask you one more thing about returning. What you just said then about when you went back to Borneo and the celebration and the honouring...what was that like to be with these**

29:00 **people who showed so much respect for what had happened?**

Most of the ones that went back were fellows who had been there. We were all a great lot, all together. We had POWs that went back with us that were up there. It was a wonderful thing, and the war widows went too and the nurses.

29:30 I think we had six of them with us. We went to Singapore and went to Changi that was very emotional and we went to ...in Singapore, right up on top of the mount. There's a magnificent war memorial up there. There was a very big service up there. Everywhere we went Labuan, and Singapore was the last one. But to me

30:00 Balikpapan was very special, and to others Labuan was special, Tarakan was special.

**When you went to Balikpapan, when you returned there, did you go back to Coke or did you travel all around?**

Yes I will tell you about that. When we went back this trip

30:30 Gordon Glasgow who was our CO at Balikpapan, his Great Godson... he is a young fellow, and Unicol is a great big oil company and they are up on Parramatta Ridge which is a high feature on Balikpapan . He's got his office up there. He's part of the whole oil organization and he had us up there for morning tea

31:00 when we went to Balikpapan. That was the first thing he did. It was overlooking Balikpapan, right up on Parramatta Ridge, right up on the top. I didn't know the man but we just got talking together and he asked whether I knew Gordon Glasgow. He told me who he was, he was the boss. I said "Yes he was my CO." He was so excited to meet me. We've always kept in touch with him. Gordon's passed on.

31:30 He's at Santos now, at Rio Tinto. He was chairman of the board or something. He's got a big job now in the oil business. He said, "I have got Bob Edwards up here who works in conjunction with me, and he's been trying to find out what happened to all the tanks and everything." He introduced me to Bob and I had all my history with me

32:00 and that night we had a big formal dinner. There were about four hundred of us there, maybe more. All the dignitaries from the Dutch people and ourselves and everybody. And after the dinner Bob and I sat from ten o'clock till half past three in the morning and I enlightened him on practically everything that he was looking for - particularly about down at Manggar airstrip. He had photos. And he even pulled a track out.

32:30 He was endeavouring to recover a tank to have as a monument, and he recovered a tank track as a step in a native village. It was acting as a door step. And the turret he took off was blown to pieces. And all that was in conjunction with Gordon Glasgow's, John Elliott-Flint. He arranged for them to plan it and he financed it.

33:00 It's a monument up on Parramatta Ridge, and I arranged with Bruce Ruxton to have three plaques made to be put on the monument about the operations - one on either side and one on the front. They're stored at the moment in Melbourne because the Dutch people in Borneo destroyed our monument

33:30 in Balikpapan. You know, anti Australians as you know, and we have rebuilt that and sorted that out again, and the new plaques won't go on till we feel they are ready to go because we don't want that wrecked. That's up in the gardens of the grounds of Unicol's factory area right up on the top of Parramatta Ridge. There are gardens and everything all around it.

34:00 It's protected to a point but there are no guards. So we correspond quite a lot with Bob and he has sent me a lot of photos. He took me on a wonderful trip with about ten or twelve of us. He took us back to Coke and we found it from my photos. And he wasn't quite sure but it worked out perfect. You could see the bend in the road but it's all changed. They've got huts and things up there now at

34:30 that part there. It was terrible... like the beach, to get up on that Coke again. I had a look around but I couldn't find anything that I could back. There was a hut there and he said that's it, he had his maps and photos and he knows the area very well.

35:00 It was a highlight to be able to meet Bob, to get together and to correspond together. I sent him a video of our expedition of the whole thing. He's got that up there and that was given to us - a couple of marvellous videos. The hotels up there at Balikpapan, we were looked after so well. It was unbelievable. It was on twenty six acres of land some of them.

35:30 And the reason they had the army, navy and air force, they were looking after us. We didn't touch a bag. They would pick up all our bags. They would be in our rooms at night. We had a Hercules up there to take us into places that we couldn't get into...for shows, different ceremonies.

**So did it close the door on that period of your life, that experience of your life, returning?**

36:00 **How did it affect you returning there?**

Oh it was terrible, just as bad. Going into fox holes and seeing it all again and especially going up the

road to Parramatta Ridge from the beach. We stood on the beach, the landing beaches where we were. Not many went down there but I wanted to go down there.

36:30 I went down with a couple of young air force girls. They took me down. I can still see it right now as clear as a bell - the water splashing in, lovely blue water, trees. Different to those photos that I showed you.

37:00 The beach. But the oil wells have all been rebuilt now and it is a thriving little city, Balikpapan. But that was the highlight of the whole trip when I went back.

**Were you worried before you went back, where you worried about how it might affect you?**

I don't think so.

37:30 It was wonderful to talk to the natives. We had a couple of boys at Balikpapan, Bully Beef and Banjo we named them. But the natives we talked to and discussed it all with and everything, they were lovely happy people and I took a lot of photos of them, the little children and everything. And then the homecoming, when we came back to Australia. We flew out of Singapore at about two

38:00 in the morning and when we got to Sydney and then on to Melbourne... Our passports, when we went away were posted in before we left, and our photos were sent into the Department of Veteran Affairs. We never saw them again until the passports...until we were declared through customs and everything and we were just going to get into our taxis.

38:30 They looked after everything and they really looked after us. And of course there was another tour, New Guinea had one prior to our one. But it is something that I will never forget that trip back. And I wrote a letter to DVA [Department of Veteran Affairs] and told them that I was doing a history on it and I would be very anxious to be selected to go back.

39:00 I got the letter one day "Mr. Varley you have been accepted." There were medicals and this and that and paper work. Then we all met. The Melbourne group met at Essendon Airport and shook hands with one another. I didn't know any of them they were all different units. We flew up, met up there and we were taken to the Lady Davidson Hospital, it's about twenty miles out,

39:30 one of the Second World War big hospitals. It was a marvellous night that night, the food and the wine was unbelievable. They turned it on really. The red wines were out of this world and we helped ourselves. I said to the cooks, you had better bring a few bottles so we can take a good stock of wine with us on the plane. The first stop was Darwin to refuel, and then we were on the road then

40:00 up to Jakarta, that was the start.

**Just going back to your experience in the war, did you have much to do with the service women?**

Oh I have quite a lot to do with them now. You see I'm the President of the Second World War Recce boys. I think I mentioned before about when we started to get together and the little fellow we helped

40:30 who was in financial trouble. And I have set up the whole thing and what ever I say they sort of want to fit in. We don't have too many meetings. After the war it was about... well we didn't have a reunion until about five, six, seven years after the war. Every three years we have our reunions because a lot of them are from the country and interstate, and it's a bit difficult for them to come to Melbourne. So it worked out perfect the three year scheme, but they were scratching to get there to the next one in three years. And also I made contact with the 4/19th Light Horse in Melbourne, to the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] there. I spoke to him. I had never met him before. I said, "Our digger mates from the Recce Squad want to be able to go back to Puckapunyal to see what's up there."

## Tape 7

01:20 **At your leisure Wally.**

All right. After the war when we were discharged. I came back to Sydney. Did I talk about Sydney on the tape?

**No. Briefly, but we haven't heard the full story.**

I haven't got any of that Sydney business in. Did I give you the Morotai things, the war trials? We'll close off from the Morotai thing and the discharge back to Sydney.

**Let's just start from Sydney and arriving home?**

After leaving Morotai when the war was completed, the squadron broke up and they went in different directions. A lot had a lot of points.

01:30 Many went to Japan to the occupation forces. A lot of us went up into the different islands and did their

own thing, and a small group of us went back to Morotai and did our jobs there, and then back to Sydney. Now Sydney, it was interesting to see the Australian mainland after being away.

- 02:00 It was good to meet a few girls and to have a bit of fun and we bought a jeep back and a lot of equipment with us. Gordon Glasgow came back and he was in charge of us. He lived in Sydney. We were there for about, oh many weeks returning equipment, clothing, machinery, guns,
- 02:30 all sorts of things and we were having a ball. We had a great time in Sydney. We had a jeep which we bought back with us. In the end we got to the stage where we had had enough, we wanted to go home. There were a couple of Sydney guys with us and they were going home at night and coming back in the morning. But Harry my bother and myself and two or three of us living in Melbourne decided that we would go home. So we arrived back in Melbourne,
- 03:00 reported to Royal Park where I joined and unloaded all our documents and put our books on the table, our demob books and picked up our discharge. At that stage they gave us ten pounds each for tools of trade they called it. That meant if you were going to be a doctor, books and journals. If you were going to be an engineer or a plumber you could
- 03:30 get a few tools. I thought, what am I going to do? I was going to go back into the clothing trade where I was prior to the war. So I got a suitcase and I thought that will be handy. I wanted to be a traveller so they gave me a suitcase. My brother became a dentist. He went on and studied and I went back to work
- 04:00 for a short period. Then I left the company and started on my own, and then after being there for some months...it might have been about 12 or 18 months I thought it's about time we did something to get together again - to form an association which we should have done before we left to go overseas when we were all together, names and address and all the details. With a lot of research,
- 04:30 finding people and the help of two or three other pals I thought it would be a good idea to start something. We eventually got about ninety percent of them from one to the other and I know where so and so is. The thing is, most of them, the majority I would say, 50% of them would be bushies in different states. I think I mentioned previously
- 05:00 about the fellows I found from overseas.

**Not on tape.**

Well we had a story, this is a very interesting story. I found one of our members in Copenhagen. Interestingly one of our pals was in Telecom, the PMG post master general]. I used to go in there occasionally at night and put on a khaki coat and he would be working the phones and one thing and another.

- 05:30 And over many years we were looking for Archie Ross in America and he was looking for the Canadian Broadcasting Company. And one night he found him through his girls when they were not busy. "Do you know an Archie Ross?" And then all of a sudden the next time I went in, I picked up the phone
- 06:00 and there was Rossy on the phone. So that's how I found Arch. And Kurt Knudsen, he came from Copenhagen. Kurt joined the AIF. He was out here as a wool buyer. I can't think of the company. He stayed here when the war started and he joined the Armoured Division and became one of our members.
- 06:30 After the war he went his way and the same thing again. Arthur Clark found him in Copenhagen and called him. So they were a couple of special ones that we found for the roll. In general talk over all we found a lot of fellows through the Telecom fellows. Then we formed an association and our first association meeting was about eight years after the war.
- 07:00 They came from all over Australia. That following Sunday we had a reunion and in the meanwhile... did I mention to you about the Armoured Regiment when I arranged to go up there? No. Well the boys wanted to go back to Puckapunyal to have a look at the old camp.
- 07:30 I said that would be a challenge. We know where it is. It was just a matter of organising it. So I rang the 4/19th Prince of Wales which is a Light Horse unit in Carlton, and I spoke to the RSM, Bob Browning. I said "Bob my name is Walter Varley, our squadron were tankies in the Second World War and I was wondering if it would be possible to go back to Puckapunyal
- 08:00 and whether we would be allowed to go into the camp again." He said, "That's no worry, easy." He rang the regiment the next day and he spoke to Mr. Frank Beattie, the RSM of the regiment and he agreed to it all. They would open their arms. It was Sunday and we took a day out to go and have a look at the place, our old stamping ground. So we took a bus from Flinders Street
- 08:30 and arrived up there duly at half past ten. But immediately we knew we were going I made plans to get a cup. I told them I would bring a cup up and we took the cup with us and I presented that to Beattie in the sergeants' mess. I said it's for a POGO, personnel on garrison operations, which means the soldiers do well but the cooks
- 09:00 and the others get nothing. So its been presented every year on the Cambrai Day parades which we

attended every year for many years. That is their regimental parade, Cambrai Day, the battle of Cambrai in the First World War. That's where the name came from. I take it up and it became a marvellous, wonderful day you know.

- 09:30 The old soldiers came out, the tankies, and we got the royal treatment up there. So that started a regular thing every year up there, Cambrai Day at Puckapunyal. But the night before we would endeavour to have a reunion on most occasions at Caulfield Central or something like that. That's gone on, and the other thing that we have done is have reunions at the 4th Prince of Wales Light Horse in Carlton, in various places, different hotels and things.
- 10:00 It got stronger and stronger but now its fading away. We were also running three days trips to Tocumwal every year in about March, which meant that they could come from the country, a few interstates and local and be there with wives and talk and enjoy one another's company.
- 10:30 On numerous occasions the Tocumwal golf club would be booked out for our functions. They always looked forward to that. We've had them coming from Darwin, even from Broome. The other thing, what I'm doing now, that's faded. Over the last few years - we are meeting in September, the second Monday in September at the East Malvern RSL.
- 11:00 No names no pack drill, just turn up if you want to. I'm expecting about twelve maybe fifteen or twenty to come to that. So we still keep in touch with one another as much as we can. As far as the war widows are concerned, I've helped a lot of them with disabilities. One man in particular I would like to mention, Don Forster, Lieutenant Forster. He was a Middle East
- 11:30 veteran and officer. He came with our CO Major Maloly to the 2/10th - because a lot of the officers in the divisions when they were broken up - the Cavalry Divisions were brought to the armoured divisions to train them and help set them up. And Paul and Maloly said, "Don you'd better come with me." I'm coming out of the 2/10th Armoured Regiment in Perth."
- 12:00 So Don came... and he went away with us and he was a sick man. He used to smoke about a hundred cigarettes a day that sort of thing, coughing and spluttering. I said "You're crook Don, you're in a terrible mess. Do you get a pension?" And he said, "Oh I'm not worried about that." So I organised with the Waverley RSL, Allan Mill, a good mate of mine that looks after that section. I took him out to see Alan and sat him down and we talked and talked.
- 12:30 And he finished up TPI, totally and permanently incapacitated, which is the top pension. He's passed on, and the main thing, not so much for Don, but his wife is a war widow and she is fully covered. I could name quite a few that I have helped. I'm even doing it now for fellows. He said "Oh I don't want a pension Wal, I'm all right." But I know they're not and they know they're not.
- 13:00 And one fellow Arthur Clark, the chap from Telecom that I used to work with, over in the west in the sand plains over there, the sun was just unbearable, and Red Robbie wouldn't let us put our tanks under trees, and he had a lot of melanomas all over this back. I said "We had better have a look at you." So I took him in and even though he's passed on, he got a TPI pension too.
- 13:30 That's something that I'm proud of, that I have been able to look after a lot of them which I still endeavour to do.

**That's wonderful Wally. Can we talk a little bit, still post war of course. Coming back home can you describe to us what the reunions were like with your family?**

- 14:00 Oh yes I'll tell you that. I will tell you a very special story. When my brother Harry and myself were discharged. In the interim from Canterbury Road Canterbury we had moved to Burke Road, Camberwell, the Lady of Victory Church up on the hill. And we didn't know where it was. We went to the wrong house first, and we eventually got home. So we settled in and Mum's got an odd bottle of beer put away for us, and of
- 14:30 course during the war she used to make advocaat and pack it in like a polythene bag in a tin loaf of bread and stitch it up in calico. You could throw it at a brick wall and it wouldn't break. But she made champagne and all sorts of thing. When we settled in a bit we wanted a welcome home party. My mother was a real character you know, being in the hotel business. So she said that's no problem boys,
- 15:00 who do you want to bring. I think I had about twenty of my mates and they were all there. So we were setting the table up and everything was ready. Things were on coupons you couldn't get anything, fruit and stuff. And she made the most magnificent fruit cake that I have ever seen in my life. I said, "Where did you get the fruit?" and she said "I've got a few contacts with the grocer."
- 15:30 So the cake is all set up and the boys are all there and Joe said, "I'm cutting the cake." So he's got the carving knife out, the butcher's knife, and he couldn't get the knife into it. It was over cooked and he tried hard, and big Dick Bennison, my mate said "Oh Mrs. Varley give me the knife, I can handle it." And he's having a go and he couldn't get the bloody knife in. So
- 16:00 everybody was looking and wondering what's going on here. So eventually they broke it open and she had made it out of beer bottle tops, nails and cocky seed and you name it. That was one of her little tricks. Just prior to the cake cutting she made .... ham was hard to get, but she could get a little bit of

ham and she made beautiful ham sandwiches all cut up and she wanted to

- 16:30 serve the ham sandwiches and she did, to all the fellows. What she made the sandwiches from, she had cut some pink flannel with scissors and served pink flannel sandwiches, and we were chewing away. That's what my mother was like, she was unbelievable.

**So she was very proud of that son who drove into Perth**

- 17:00 **on the Staghound?**

That was a good story but apart from that... Well we settled in fairly well but of course going back to work was hard, very hard and I picked up a lot of mates that I knew before the war that I used to deal with. I was working for wages then, but of course when I started off... in Flinders Lane as a young fellow there was a man.

- 17:30 I won't mention any names but there was a man that was at a firm called Mantons in the city. It was a big drapery business, a very big company. He was the fashion buyer there for the whole store, an English gentleman. He did all the buying and when I came back he would never speak to me. But during the war when we went to Rokeby, he was a colonel.

- 18:00 He was a nothing before the war much and I don't know where he got his commission. He walked up the main strip at Rokeby and I said, "G'day John," and I gave him some respect, I saluted him and everything. I said, "Do you remember me?" He said, "I have never seen you in my life before." Didn't want to know me. But after the war when I started on my own, he was the first one to come in to my warehouse for a sticky beak

- 18:30 and I just told him a little bit about it all, what it was all about you know. Little things like that. And we met him, my brother and I met him about twelve or fifteen years ago accidentally in the Safeway's at Mornington. He was there, quite a little old man then. I said that's Mr. So and So over there and Harry said, "That's him, that's the fellow." I said I would like to talk to him.

- 19:00 so we waited out the front of Safeway's until he came out with a basket of goodies, and I said "Excuse me sir are you so and so?" And he said, "Yes." And I said "Do you remember me?" And he said "Of course I remember you, you are so and so." And I said, "You remember me now but didn't remember me when you were on divisional headquarters. I'd love to know where you got your commission from as the colonel.

- 19:30 You were a nothing before the war." And I said, "Well I'm pleased that I have been able to speak to you about your attitude during the war." That was another little story and I will always remember that one.

**Do you know how he got that commission? How he became a colonel?**

Oh I did ask him and he said through training.

- 20:00 He was a soldier that I would never want to go into battle with at all. He was a bit of an administration man. He might have had a few little things going for him to get in, but I don't know. But mostly business people I knew before the war, they all went...when I went into the lane and started on my own, things were on quota then. It was very hard to get any materials, fabrics, particularly from the woollen mills.

- 20:30 All those companies, it was a quota, and the wholesaler was on a quota, a limited amount and they would always give me a little bit which was good, they were fair which was good. And the reps from different companies were all the boys who had come back from the war and went back to their old jobs - they got a bit of respect.

- 21:00 **Did you feel that your experiences in the army and the war itself helped you in terms of setting up your business and dealing with people?**

I don't think so. It was just something I always wanted to do, and I was lucky that I did have good training from the previous company that I did work for. But I was quite successful and I was merchandising all over Australia in major stores and everything.

- 21:30 Then after that I got married to Trish and we decided to have a break and do something different and we did a couple of silly things. I opened a coin laundry and we built a house out of that after a couple of years. Another thing, the last thing I had, I open up a brass antique furniture manufacturing business.

- 22:00 A pal of mine was a problem shooter for the brass foundries, and Bob used to have to around the foundries when they were casting brass to make sure the sand was all right. If the sand wasn't right it was falling apart and he was a bit of a collector of antiques. Bob had the biggest collection I have every seen of beautiful old English door knockers and big old lovely door knockers.

- 22:30 And he said "I'm sick of this business and I wouldn't mind getting out of this business." So I bought that business, it was only a little run down thing and I ran that business for some years. And the same thing happened to me. One of my clients was sick of his business and I sold it to him on the understanding that he would work with me for a while and learn the trade.

- 23:00 He wouldn't turn up to learn anything though and at that stage of that business I had Myers, their



hardware department nationally buying all over Australia. I built it up to a big business. He collapsed. I went into Myers one day and the quality wasn't there. So I don't know what happened but that was the last venture.

**You have achieved a lot. Can I ask you,**

**23:30 after the war did you ever get back into a tank again, I think you showed me a photo?**

Yes of course, that's the time we got involved after the war with the Armoured Regiment. We took our squadron up there. I rang the RSM and he arranged for us to go up there and he said I'll have you fellows up and he asked me to bring twelve up and he said he would take us out on the range on a Leopard tank. Colonel Jerry McCormack was the CO of the regiment.

24:00 And we arrived in our civvies and he paraded us at the regimental headquarters, and all the soldiers were looking at us. He marched us down to the Q store and put us into suits and took us on the blitz buggies and the trucks out to the range over every bump he could find. And we all drove the Leopard tanks on the range.

24:30 I've been through most of the range of the current tanks that they've got up there and I have been though the schools a lot. I visit up there quite a lot and I have had a lot of input in the museum, the tank museum when they were getting that off the ground. I gave advice and setting up. I was there for well over a couple of weeks working, scrounging paint companies in Melbourne for paint and

25:00 carpets companies and things. So that been a sort of ongoing thing. I still keep in touch with the 1st Armoured Regiment which are now in Darwin. They're situated up the top end and I think a couple of years ago Trish and I went up there for a holiday. We did the tour up the top end and we stayed with the RSM up there and had a good time. It was good to go back and have a look at the regiment.

**Do you still think that perhaps you could show these young tankies a thing or two?**

25:30 Oh it was nice to see these tanks. The facilities are absolutely out of this world up there. The roads in the regiment are all paved in bricks, and officers mess and the sergeants mess are out of this world, beautiful. So we had a good a week and I picked up that there were such a lot of young soldiers

26:00 who in the early days when we first started going up were officers. They had gone up through the ranks. So it's been a very good ongoing thing and particularly our fiftieth dinner. I don't think I mentioned to you our fiftieth dinner. Well our fiftieth dinner for the squadron, I think that was the biggest event we have ever had in our lives. I walked in off the street one day and booked the Camberwell civic centre which is a big one at the Camberwell junction.

26:30 I said we are going to have our fiftieth dinner there and I said put me on hold. I had to ring the Regiment and go and see them, and I spoke to the 2IC Gordon Jones. I said, "Gordon we proposed to have our fiftieth dinner, the biggest one we have ever had, not the little ones..." I said we can't have it unless you go with us and co operate. It's a two year plan ahead to get it right.

27:00 So Gordon sat down with me and we discussed all about the dress and I said, "I don't want you coming in your while mess dress, come in your service dress and relax, and have a good night." "That's all right Wal, service dress." I sent a lot of letters out and they sent out a lot of letters out about knowing us from the POGO Cup days, we were part of them, part of their family and it built up into a major thing.

27:30 We had three hundred and fifty for that dinner which is a reasonable sort of number, and from the regiment I think I had about seventy and they all came down. I didn't tell our fellows until the last minute where it was going to be, I said you will be advised in due course. I advised them and they all arrived in due course

28:00 and their minds boggled and I had the 4/19th band there, The chief of general staff from Canberra. They were all there, the whole lot and Jerry McCormack came Colonel McCormack. We had a lot of our trophies there, the POGO Cup and the whole table set up. And a magnificent cake that my daughter made, it was about nearly a metre long the cake, with plenty of brandy in it. I helped Anne make the cake.

28:30 She was paraded by one of the officers with a sabre and she cut the cake and there were raffles. But one of the highlights of the night, one of the funniest things was... Colonel Jones who organised the night and about the dress and everything. Everybody was there in their service dress and he's in his white mess dress and everybody looked and he saw the others and he backed off and went home.

29:00 I saw him a week later with the RSM. We went up to see him up there. We went up to see him and I saw Peter Brannigan and I said, "You remember Gordon, it was definitely mess dress. He said, "No it was definitely not mess dress at all, it was service dress." And his wife must have been embarrassed too because he wouldn't come in. But that was a great occasion. On

29:30 another occasion we had a Leopard tank for one of our reunions. One of the COs arranged to bring it on a training exercise for a weekend down to Melbourne, down near the airport at Heatherton. He said, "Wal do you want the tank on Saturday night at the reunion?" And I said, "No thanks." It was an official exercise for the crew to bring the Leopard down, and it fronted up at the picnic on the transport.

- 30:00 It was there on Sunday morning and Freddie Derorawich, he was the crew commander and he enjoyed the job of lowering the ladies down into the turret, but that was another highlight.
- Pardon me Wal before you were talking about the colonel you met in the supermarket and how he was not the sort of soldier you would want to be fighting with,**
- 30:30 **can you describe the ideal soldier you would want to have beside you in the thick of it?**
- Teddy Leeman who was in my tank. He was the driver. He was the most wonderful man. He was loved, he was illiterate a little bit, the most wonderful bush man you have ever seen. At one picnic one of the CO's came to our picnics,
- 31:00 he said I would love to have Ted up at my regiment to instruct them about bush craft. But he was happy, he had nothing, he lived in a small house out in the bush and everybody loved that man, Ted Leeman. A little fellow. He would do anything for me or for anybody. He was a top number one man.
- 31:30 The next one was Wiley Habbich of German extract. He was a bit of an old slow talker. He worked before the war as a young fellow for the Emu winery in South Australia. He worked himself up to Hardy's and he was a connoisseur of wines. He had a very big cellar. He rang me some years ago and he said "Wal I've got a port barrel
- 32:00 that might suit you." He had an old a cooper, he was about 765 and he said he got him to make this barrel for him and he had it for some years. He said it had brandy in it and the port in it and its all full action, top shelf port. And knowing Wiley Habbich, it would be. He said how would seventy-five dollars suit you, the port the barrel the lot, marvellous.
- 32:30 Wiley, he sent the barrel over via road transport, and it's about time I got it topped up again. But he sent me one special bottle of port, a liquor bottle of port. I opened it the other day, a 1951 vintage. Now liquor port will go a long way and it's made by the Emu wine company and there were only eighty bottles made by the directors.
- 33:00 It's been lying in my wine cellar and I was a bit dicey about it. You let it stand for about six weeks to let the sediment drop before you decanter it off. I have still got a bit left to drink. But Teddy Leeman and Wiley Habbich, great blokes.
- 33:30 **Can you think of a time, going back in training Pucka or WA, or at Balikpapan or Morotai when mateship really came to the fore? When it was really a matter of you guys coming together**
- Oh yes in Perth there were a few fights. One of blokes was getting a bit of a belting. They'd all be
- 34:00 at the flick of a finger, our fellows.
- Is that with the Yanks?**
- Oh just hand to hand and of course if a fellow got a little bit over the top with a bit of booze or things like that and we would make sure we got him back into camp and into his bunk and everything, and look after him. It doesn't matter. We've all got to go in together, stick in.
- 34:30 And it's the same in the war, and even now, any of us that are sick or in trouble we are still there for their beck and the call. It will never change while we're here. It will be down to the last man. The love and understanding and comradeship, there's too much.
- 35:00 **You know a lot of guys who made the ultimate sacrifice in war time, do you think as a country as a people we have learned from that experience? Has the country grown, has it become a better place to live in do you think?**
- Since we went away and come back as diggers and that, I think definitely yes. I think in 95%. I know there's some people who are a bit against the RSL,
- 35:30 but generally I think this is a better country to be living in. Apart from our own reunions there are some wonderful things going on with groups in school, lecturing schools and getting children to understand. A lot of them know nothing about what the war was about.
- 36:00 **We are getting towards the end of our tape and I notice that you have got something there that you would like to read. Maybe you could explain what this is and where it came from?**
- It came in the mail from different units and different people, I don't know where it came from. But somebody gave it to me. It's just a few words that I think sums it up the whole thing.
- 36:30 There is a little memo that I have here, a little letter on A4 sheet that was sent to me in the mail and I don't know who sent it.
- 37:00 It's a message to all young Australians. To have served in the Australian Imperial Force was in my opinion the high water mark of ones life time. Every man was a volunteer. There were no conscripts and I may be wrong but I think that makes the AIF unique

- 37:30 in world military history. Every man who volunteered had made a personal sacrifice, either the forced separation from his wife and family, the suspension of his career, and his financial security. Every one had risked permanent physical disability or even death. The generations of today say why on earth did they do it? The answer is to preserve a life style in which they believed, and
- 38:00 which was in jeopardy. Europe was in flames. Two dictators, Hitler and Mussolini were sweeping through country after country without resistance. Off the coast of France was a small island. It was Great Britain. The leader Winston Churchill said, "We will fight them on the beaches, we will fight them, and we will never surrender." Great Britain was the
- 38:30 last bastion of democracy, free speech and liberty against the tyranny of dictators. She was entirely alone but suddenly she had amazing support. The entire British Empire rallied to help the mother country, to fight for a way of life. Three things combined to cost Hitler his dream of world conquest. The indomitable British Islands,
- 39:00 the overwhelming support of the British Empire to the mother country and the Spitfire fighter plane. There was nothing to compare with the esprit de corps of the men in armour. We went out of way to denigrate fellow military units. The artillery were the 'drop em shorts'. The machine gunners were the 'mug gunners',
- 39:30 the infantry were the 'footsloggers'. But underneath they were our friends, our mates to the end. Thank you.

**Thank you very much Walter.**