Australians at War Film Archive

Francis Rowell (Frank) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:44 Right, well, although my family were not city people, they come from the South Coast, my father was a miner and he had miner's consumption so he had

01:00 to give up mining and we moved to the city during the Great War [World War I]. That's when I was born, the end of, towards the end of the Great War in Mascot. And immediately then my father took up a farm on the North Coast and that's where we went. And the, I mean I love the place, I love the farm, always did. I hated the city. That's not fair to say I hated something. I didn't like it, anyway, I preferred the farm. And 'cause of that I knew nothing about the city till

01:30 later on because I was only one when I left here to go up the coast. And came a time when Dad was worried about my schooling 'cause I hadn't been to school, I was nearly nine, and we moved back to the city, to Homebush in fact, and I went to school at Homebush. That's where I began school, two years before I was nine, and I was in first class but

02:00 I managed to get promoted twice through the year and I finished up in third class at the end of 1929. At that stage my father then again wanted to go back I think to where he was born; that's, I think that's human nature, you want to get back to where you started. And my father knew he was dying and so we went back down the coast, south, took up a farm down there,

02:30 and that's where Dad died. Because my brothers each wanted to be boss we sold out and came back to the city in 19, towards the end of 1929, and I went to North Auburn School and finally to Parramatta High where I did three years only. At the end of the my school years I

03:00 went to looking for a job, not literally looking for a job because I was interested in too many other things such as sport, but I...

Why did you leave school three years early, after three years?

Well, my mother was a widow and I don't think I had any ambitions to go any further than that, to be truthful, I don't think I did. I was

03:30 glad to get three years. I mean I was lucky to get three years, you know. I started school when I was nearly nine and by the time I was 15 and a half I'd done three years of high school. I thought that was pretty good really, and that convinced me that there... Actually, this business of sending kids to school at four I think's ridiculous because they don't learn anything, they learn nothing at all, but gets out of the mother's hair, I suppose. And

04:00 we had quite a big yard and we had quite a good garden, a vegetable garden. We didn't grow, didn't buy vegetables, you grew them. And of course to do that you need manure, and right opposite our place was a bakery and a horse, all horse-delivered. I used to go over and clean out the stables and as a result we had tons of horse manure. And

04:30 when I decided to look for a job Mr McDonald, who owned the bakery, he took me around to various places. In fact he took me to four places where in each place I was offered a job and truthfully I wasn't interested in any of them, in any of those jobs. But I did decide to take, [one] was electrical engineering and I was to start work on the Monday which was two days before I was 16,

05:00 and went over to the bakery and Mr McDonald said, "You start work tomorrow, Frank?" I said, "That's right." He said, "Would you rather work for me or for AGI, Australian General Electrical Industries?" I said, "I'd rather work for you." He said, "All right, you can start tomorrow at the cake shop." So I became a pastry cook. And towards the end of my apprenticeship the war started, and I finished my apprenticeship and I joined

05:30 the AIF [Australian Imperial Force].

Tell me, where were you when you first heard the news that Australia was at war?

I was at home. We'd expected that to happen. I mean, so far as I was concerned, war was inevitable in 1938, war was inevitable eventually. Just couldn't keep going giving in to Hitler, which was what was happening. I can

06:00 understand why they were giving in; it was only a temporary thing. I think that Britain knew that they couldn't possibly win a war at that stage. In 1938 they still had to develop armaments, they just didn't have them; and, I think it was 1930, even Australia signed a pact where we would reduce our armed forces. And Australia in 1936,

06:30 certainly in 1938 as well but certainly in 1936 when Australia sent a contingent to the coronation of King George VI, we had to send people who were officially artillerymen despite the fact that most were infantry, because we were not allowed to have an infantry permanent battalion or permanent infantry battalion. We were not allowed to do that under the pact. And

07:00 we could have tons of militia, [as] many militia as you want, but you couldn't have a permanent army of infantry. In 1939, January 1939, Australia had to or wanted to enlist a force, which they called the Darwin Mobile Force,

07:30 and every one of those people were enlisted as artillery because we could not have a permanent infantry force. And off they went to Darwin, and war broke out. Actually I tried to join that, I tried to join, but I was a sixth of an inch too short so I didn't make it.

Why did you choose the army as a service?

Well, even at high school I put my age up two years

08:00 so I could join the 25/24th Battalion as a senior cadet. Strictly speaking, I was too young to be a senior cadet, but I put my age up two years so that I was 16 and nine months instead of 14 and nine months, and everyone knew that I put my age up. And I become interested in the army, interested in defence, I suppose.

08:30 But I must admit that I didn't learn a great deal, I did not learn a great deal. I learned that, when I joined the AIF, that I didn't know much. I started off in the signals. We went to into the, what did they call it in those days? Had a different name. Anyway, it's the intelligence section, they called us "counter-intelligence" in those days, and I was interested

09:00 in maps and that sort of thing. But then time went on, I found that I couldn't carry on with that because work stopped me. I worked six days a week and I started work at six o'clock every morning, and whole time of my apprenticeship I never missed a day's work through sickness. And when, as I say,

09:30 when war broke out I took half a day off to join the AIF. It wasn't the AIF in the first place, it was called a special force, they called it Australian Special Force, of 20,000 men. And I, as I say, took half a day off work to go down to Homebush and join up because I thought, "If I don't get in early I'll miss out, be too many." And I completed the

10:00 testation form or the application form for enlisting, had the medical, passed the medical, and the doctor, you know, even though he passed me, he said, "I was surprised," he said, "your chest is not as big as it should be." He said, "I'm surprised because you have very wide shoulders and your chest is undersize." But the reason I had big shoulders [was] because bread making

10:30 or making dough you're working all the time with your shoulders. And he advised me, you know, to take deep breaths, "Exercise taking deep breaths and enlarge your chest," which is what I did, and I passed the medicals from then on with no problems. Then I didn't say to my mother that I'd joined the Special Force because I wasn't sure that I'd be accepted. I just didn't.

11:00 I thought there'd be too many, I thought it'd be rushed. And obviously it wasn't rushed because even at the end of end of December 1939 they was still enlisting people for this, for the Special Force, which by that time was the AIF. But I finally had a letter from the army to report at Homebush Drill Hall at nine o'clock on the 3rd of November 1939, bring with me changes of clothes, underclothes

11:30 etc., and two cut lunches, and I would be reimbursed for the costs of all that. To tell you the truth I was never reimbursed. I don't know anyone ever was reimbursed for that. I don't think we truly expected to be reimbursed either, but that's what the screed said. Before I turned up

12:00 on the 3rd of November I went into town and saw some girls I knew worked at Buttrick's Publishing Company, and then went back to Homebush and was attested. That was at nine o'clock that began. I suppose it was 10 o'clock one of the fellows said, "I wonder if we can get a cup of tea around here?" I said, "Oh, there should be one down on Parramatta Road, place to get..." So off we went the two of us,

12:30 had a cup of tea next door to the picture theatre, back to the Drill Hall and the fellows are moving onto buses. Well, we copped it then, we were told we were "ack-willy", AWL [Absent Without Leave], and we were under arrest.

That was your first day?

The first day, yes. Oh, it was a terrific way to start a brilliant career wasn't it, and

13:00 luckily we never heard another word about it, but they had to show some authority I suppose. I mean we just wandered off, we didn't say we were going, where we were going or anything else. And we knew where we were going, we knew we were going to Ingleburn. We knew that Ingleburn Camp had been in course of construction. Whole six weeks it took to build it, Ingleburn Camp, men working night and day, and carpenters were earning good money.

13:30 Even labourers getting good money. And, as I say, they're working night and day, overtime every day, and we didn't know what to expect really. I mean Ingleburn was the bush in those days. This was just a village here, Liverpool was just a village. And we came along Hume Highway,

14:00 and Hume Highway in those days was just, it was macadamised all right but only two lanes. And we passed through the village of Liverpool and I remember passing the Crosswords Hotel and someone commented about this fellow with used car parts on the left hand

14:30 side going out. That was Kenny, and Bert Kenny was son of this man that owned that place. He became my good mate as the years went by and we come to this place that was Ingleburn Camp and it was actually built on farm land. Now, the farm was given to the army by

15:00 McArthur Onslows, Densel McArthur Onslow. He later on become a good mate of mine but not during the war, after the war. Now, the McArthur Onslows gave the Defence Department that land and that's where Ingleburn Camp is today, or what's left of it. And there was a lot of comments about

15:30 this place from the fellows who were generally speaking unknown to each other, generally speaking we were unknown to each other in the bus, and there was probably 40 of us in the bus. Someone commented on the on the buildings, wondered if they could get down to the Crossroads Pub.

16:00 We pointed out that it'd be closed at six o'clock anyway because was six o'clock closing in those days, I say, someone did. We arrived at Ingleburn Camp and debussed, lined up and some very well-dressed warrant officers, they were permanent army fellows, took over

16:30 and we wondered what was next. But at that stage we were reporting to a clerk who asked me what my occupation was. Well, to tell you the truth, I put myself down as a as an unemployed labourer because the bread game, anyone in the bread game, in pastry cooking,

17:00 was exempt for enlistment, so I had to say I was a labourer and unemployed to make sure I could get in. Now, it appears that I wasn't the only one that said I was unemployed when they actually had a job, because later Members of Parliament said that the AIF were economic conscripts because they were all unemployed. You know, the school teachers, school masters,

17:30 were exempt. They enlisted as labourers and there'd be other occupations did exactly the same thing and, as I say, we were accused of being economic conscripts. There were not too many unemployed, there were some, and there were not all employed, some were unemployed. One of my good mates again, Bluey Peak who was part Aborigine, he told me that he'd never had a job and he slept under bridges, wherever

18:00 he could, he was. And yet after the war Bluey became a ganger on the railway, so he wasn't a fool or anything like that, just the opportunity wasn't there for part-Aborigine. Anyway Blue overcame that. Well, I actually, when they asked me into the, what was my occupation, I told them the truth, I said, "Pastry cook." "Oh, you'll be great in the cookhouse." I said, "Not me,

18:30 I've given up cooking for I've joined the army to be a soldier, not a cook," and perhaps I made a mistake in doing that because one of their big problems early in the piece were the cooking. There were no cooks. I've often thought that the army made a mistake there. They should perhaps have had professional cooks to start with and who would show recruits how

19:00 to do things.

What was the food like?

Food was terrific. Food was ruined because there's nothing wrong with the food itself, the way it was cooked. And of course the other thing was there was no, we didn't have refrigerators. The absolute best thing we had to stop flies was fly screens and it didn't work,

19:30 because more often than not the meat was maggoty. Well, so long as only just become maggoty you could wash it off and cook it, but there were times when [it] was uneatable and the worst part was that the cooks were not, certainly weren't cooks. "There's cooks and there's cuckoos," we used to say. They were cuckoos and it took a long time for the army to

20:00 really develop proper cooks, correct cooks, somebody who knew something about it. The sergeant cook - won't mention his name - our first sergeant cook, I often wondered how he became a sergeant cook. But I asked Johnny Bull who was one of the RSMs [Regimental Sergeant Majors] that

20:30 we had in the first place, after the war - he was a permanent bloke, Johnny Bull - I said, "Johnny, how the dickens did the Red Steer" as we called him "the Red Steer become a sergeant cook?" "Well," he

said, “that’s my fault.” He said, “There’s 200 men lined up,” he said, “I’ve got no cooks, and I said ‘Is anyone here, do any of you fellows know anything about cooking?’,” he said, “and this big red-headed bloke said ‘I was a shearers’ cook for a while.’” And Johnny Bull

21:00 said, “Well, you know, how’d you go?” He said, “Oh, all right.” He said, “Well, right, you’re sergeant cook.” So Johnny Bull had this fellow promoted to sergeant cook without any trials whatever. And as a matter of interest it’d be different now, but in those days the sergeant could not be demoted unless he was demoted by a court martial or he volunteered to be demoted, and of course no-one [who] wants to become a sergeant

21:30 is going [to] volunteer to be demoted, and the Red Steer was careful not to have any crime committed so he could be demoted. But of course he couldn’t stay a sergeant cook. He was atrocious. On one occasion the intelligence officer said to us, “Any of you fellows prepared to go and help the cooks?”

22:00 **Frank could you just tell me a little bit more about the routine of training at Ingleburn?**

Well, no real training took place for a few days because we went in as individuals. We had to be put into sections and into platoons and into companies, etc., that took time, and apart from that we didn’t have enough officers at that time

22:30 and we didn’t have enough NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] because everyone officially was enlisted as a private. It didn’t work out that way because some people come in wearing the stripes and they actually had stripes from their militia unit and they kept them, which is fair enough. The routine was that you first of all learned that you get out of bed at the right time, which is six o’clock, and you go

23:00 on administration parade. Your name is called (UNCLEAR), you’re marked off as being present and then you have a chance to have a shave and get dressed correctly, then breakfast, then afterwards you start work. You start, you had to start at the absolute basics ‘cause we, in fact we had no arms, we had no rifles at that stage. We had no armaments at all.

23:30 And drills we were doing, you know, without arms just forming fours, etc., ‘cause in those days the army did have fours and not threes as they do today. And we eventually had the use of Lewis guns. Now, Lewis guns were from the Great War, they were the light machine guns of the Great War and they were very accurate

24:00 but they were a bit more bulky than eventually Bren gun. And the permanent army fellows, the ARA, Australian Regiment Army, they were called AIC, Australian Instructional Corps, they were professional soldiers. They

24:30 actually knew, they taught officers, they taught us and they taught everyone. If you belonged to the AIC you were really a professional soldier and we listened to them, we learned from them. We still didn’t have any leave, officially anyway. We didn’t have any pay at that stage,

25:00 most of us weren’t broke but we had not been paid. We knew what our wages were, they were to be five bob a day, and if you’re married you had an allotment to your wife of three shillings which had to come out of your five, and the army doubled that, made it six shillings a day for a married, for a wife, and I think it was a shilling a day for each child

25:30 but I’m not sure about that. Someone, I’ve always thought one-and-six, but someone told me the other day it was only a shilling. They’re probably right. Most of it was done with, most of the work the early days was done with physical training, you were training with your arms, and none of us had uniforms,

26:00 that took time. We went on route marches, we went on runs down to the river for a swim, and of course we’re getting to know each other, that’s the other thing. The camp itself it was rough, it was rough. There, although roads were defined, you knew where the roads were,

26:30 they weren’t formed. There were no locks for the doors, any doors, and in actual fact there was no glass windows either. The windows were just simply covers that could be raised from outside. The floors actually, you know, actually were bare, just bare boards and all new timber, had lots of splinters in it.

27:00 The, oh, I suppose most of our time the first week was spent getting to know the fellows in your own hut, and I think there was 24 in a hut. We were all young, pretty boisterous, I imagine. There were some older fellows. Officially no-one over 35 I think it was

27:30 could join, and no-one under 20 could join without, under 21 could join without a parent’s consent and I think 20 was the actual minimum age as well. But there were a hell of a lot in younger than that who put their age up; the fellows over-age put their age back. My brother was one of them, he put his age back from 39 to 35.

How old were you when you joined?

I was 21, just turned 21,

28:00 so I had no problems. That’s why I didn’t have to tell my mother that I’d joined up, have to get her permission. And the first night was a funny night if you like. Someone said, “Where are the beds?” see,

in the hut. “What beds? You don’t get beds in the army.”

28:30 “Why don’t we have electric lights?” There was no electric lights. Electricity was, the equipment was there but there was no electricity. Lots of things were missing because the whole camp only took six weeks to build and that was to take over a thousand men. The, as I say, the food

29:00 was atrocious. In the first place it was good food itself, but ruined by the cooks because they didn’t know how to cook. They may have been able to cook a breakfast but they couldn’t cook for a hundred men. I mean that’s the bulk cooking that got them beaten.

You were never tempted to join the cooks and show them?

No, no, no.

29:30 We were asked to volunteer to help the cooks. I went down to help the cooks and the sergeant cook, this big red-headed bloke, he said, “Well, keep a big fire going underneath under that Soya stove.” I said, “What’re you cooking?” He said, “Corned beef.” I said, ’cause I was pretty brash, I said, “Well, you know, once it’s boiled all you need [is] have it simmer.” He said, “Who’s the bloody sergeant cook?” I said, “You are, mate, I’m off,” and I went. I never ever went back. In fact he was only a sergeant cook

30:00 for a fortnight because he lost his job. Someone else took over and they were just as bad. The, as I say, the cooking was the main problem really, it was very unprofessional. We did everything without arms in the first place, as I say. I actually joined the Transport which was horse

30:30 transport in those days. Because I’d come off a farm I knew something about horses. But we only had three horses I think at that stage, and that was one for the CO [Commanding Officer], one for the 2IC [Second In Command] and one for the adjutant, no-one else had a horse. But eventually we got about 15 horses.

Tell me, so

31:00 **when were you first given arms training?**

Maybe three weeks after we joined we were issued with brand new rifles and bayonets, of course, all with the original grease on them which we had to clean off, of course, and scald. I can remember a number of numbers that I had in the army.

31:30 One was my regimental number or army number, NX4021, and those numbers I can remember were my bayonet and rifle number which were 21509 and they [were] both the same number as a matter of fact because they were both in the one case when they came. And once we got that settled we could start on

32:00 the manual and military arms training which, you know, slap arms, etc., we could do that, and we learned very quickly. The thing is that, of course, we were volunteers, we were not forced into the army like a lot of fellows were later on. And when you’re a volunteer you can, it’s a lot easier to learn, you’re prepared to learn.

32:30 Three weeks after we went into camp we had our first pay day and that was something we never learned in city life, how you received your pay. I mean you step up, you salute, you get your pay, salute and step back, which was all new to us.

33:00 And we also had leave that day, official leave. I say there was a lot of unofficial leave, fellows did sneak off of course and come back, and some were caught and some were not, but when you... Somebody started a bus service, still has a bus service here now. He bought one bus, a worn-out bus, from people we knew,

33:30 when I was first born, my family knew them, Jamisons they were. Well, Eddie Jamison had this bus for sale and this fellow bought it and he started running buses between Ingleburn Camp and Liverpool Station, sixpence each way, and he was so successful he has a big bus service now around

34:00 Ingleburn. That day we had our first death, that first pay day we had our first death. Young fellow from Temora I think but I’m not sure. He rushed to get on the bus and fell and the bus ran over him, killed him. He was aged, he was my age. He was our first death and our first military funeral and he was given a military funeral,

34:30 it was our first experience of that. There was a story that an officer committed suicide. I think it’s true but nothing else was ever said about it. He shot himself - at least, he was shot. He was in the 2/2nd Battalion. We had a visit from the Governor-General Lord Gowrie.

35:00 But all this time we were training. Every day we trained. We learned that we, you’d be on parade at the right time. Whatever you did you did by the clock.

When did you first learn you were being posted overseas?

When,

35:30 we didn’t have a date but the Prime Minister announced that the AIF would be in a “theatre of war”, as

he put it, a theatre of war in the European spring.

And what was your reaction to the news?

Oh, we were all pleased. I mean that I'd say my reaction was the same as everyone else. That was the purpose of our joining

36:00 the AIF. It was not to stay in Ingleburn Camp. I remember on one occasion my brother, we never went to the pictures in our lives before together, and we went to the pictures in Auburn and Jack said to me "What do you think about...?" That's when I knew we were going. "What do you think about going away?" I said, "Well, I wish it was another, you know, a little bit later, I wish it wasn't so soon," because there was so many things I wanted to do

36:30 before I went.

Like what?

Well, talk to people, you know, get around to see friends, that sort of thing. You, it's very difficult to explain I suppose, but you're breaking, you know, it's you may never come back, that's the thing, you may never see these people again. You wanted to see them. I imagine that's what it was but I can't say that is how it was, but that's how I think these days it probably was.

37:00 We were pretty flexible. We were told by certain politicians that we, you know, we're unpopular. Well, that was a figment of their imagination. You could not travel in the train as soldiers in uniform, you could not travel in the train without some girl come up and ask could she write to you

37:30 and this happened every time in the train, and it happened to me so it happened to everyone else, I'd reckon. And the day we marched through Sydney, which was the 4th of January 1940, the crowd was enormous and the reception was enormous. And I can remember just

38:00 after we passed the Town Hall I saw two near relatives of mine on the side, they were boys in their shorts - this was school holidays of course - and their name was Hearn. Their father was a school teacher and I remember them standing on the side of the of George Street and they recognised me and I waved to them.

38:30 And one of those boys was killed on the Kokoda Track. They were school kids when we went away and three years later they were in the army and killed on the Kokoda, one of them was killed in Kokoda. We returned to Ingleburn from that march

39:00 and the papers next day was filled with photos of it. It was really an experience. I remember an old lady rushing out, and marching next to me was a fellow named Peter Kennedy and she pushed past me and handed him ten shilling note. I was jealous as hell. I don't think she knew him,

39:30 she just wanted to give something to somebody and she missed me.

Tape 2

00:31 **Frank, tell me now about the departure the day that you went away?**

Well, that was on the 10th of January 1940 we left Australia. We handed in the night before everything that belonged to the camp. We only had our personal gear which was a lot anyway, we

01:00 carried a lot. And we marched out of Ingleburn Camp down Errow Road - it has a different name these days - down Errow Road to Ingleburn Station. There was a steam train there - there was no electric trains of course - between Liverpool, after Liverpool, there was no electric trains in those days and there was steam train there, and we walked up onto the station and got onto a steam train and off we went.

01:30 I imagine that we moved out around eight o'clock but I can't be sure of that. And we went through Chester Hill, Sefton, and then we went on a line that I'd never been on before because it was not a passenger line. But just before we went onto that passenger line,

02:00 off the passenger line, I looked out on the side of the railway line on the bend and here was my mother and my sister and a niece, and I said, "There's my mother," and the whole carriage yelled out "Hello, Mum!" I don't know whether she heard it or not, 'cause I've not seen my mother since then, and

02:30 why she was there. I mean someone must have told her that the train would be going past there and she came up from Auburn to be there, and as we went through the lines the railway line was, there was people everywhere; not huge crowds, but always someone along the line, there was somebody and they were waving.

03:00 We arrived at Darling Harbour. Now, Darling Harbour in those days was different to what it is these

days. Darling Harbour in those days was a railway terminus and the train went right onto the wharf. We disembarked there and onto this huge ship. I'd never seen a boat as big as this one. I'd travelled on

03:30 the old Eden in the old days up and down the coast but I'd never been on the boat that you could hardly see the top of it from the from the wharf. And we walked onto the wharf. There was a lot of fellows in uniform there who were older soldiers. And we were allocated bunks or cabins, if you like,

04:00 and I know that my cabin was on E deck. Didn't mean anything to me, E deck, but that's where I was, and I shared a cabin with one other fellow. He came from Griffith in the irrigation area, and there was just the two of us in this cabin which was ordinary tourist cabin. The Strathnaver

04:30 had not been altered in any way. It was still a tourist passenger ship with stewards, etc., you know, the whole just as if we were on a cruise. And as the ship, we sailed down the harbour, there were hundreds,

05:00 literally hundreds, of small boats there, "cock-a-doodle-dooing" and all that sort of thing. And I was up on the deck and I said to a ship's officer "This supposed to be a secret move?" and he said, "How dare you speak to a ship's officer without permission." I mean, what rank he is I wouldn't have a clue, but I was abashed. I didn't,

05:30 I thought, you know, "Well, why would he speak to me like that?" I couldn't understand that. But I remember there was one boat had written across it "Hello Johnny Bull." Johnny Bull was one of our original sergeant majors. And we caught up with other ships outside the harbour. We were the last to embark. The others had all gone the night before, the day before,

06:00 we were last onto the ship, and off we sailed in down the south course. We had lunch at that stage, we [were] just on board in time for lunch. Then we sailed out into the open sea, caught up with other ships and off we went, it was a convoy. We pulled up outside Port Phillip Bay

06:30 and another ship joined us and that had army headquarters on it, and then we kept on sailing of course into the Great Australian Bight. Oh boy, I'd never been seasick since my first sea trip but I was nearly seasick this time. Everyone else I think was seasick except me and my mate. We were the only two on the (UNCLEAR) down for lunch, we were the only two turned up for lunch, everyone

07:00 else was seasick, and had one of us got seasick that order would've gone without any doubt. But it was a really rough voyage across the Australian Bight. And we arrived at Fremantle and we were given a day's leave there or the best of the day's leave. Went into Perth, back on board

07:30 that night, and then we sailed into the Indian Ocean and it was as flat as that. Indian Ocean, there's not a ripple on it, the only ripple made by the ships. And we had two or three escort vessels, the moor [Mauritania] ships. I can't remember the names at this stage; I think one of them was the Australia, I'm not sure. And we

08:00 sailed in, that's when we learned we were going to the Middle East. We didn't know where we were going, we were told we were going to the Middle East, and we were given instructions about how to behave ourselves and how dangerous the Arabs were and what thieves they were, you know, all the things that you do hear about things. And of course we were warned about venereal disease [sexually transmitted infections]

08:30 by the doctor, Doctor Tomlinson.

Were you surprised at not being sent to Europe?

Pardon?

Were you surprised that you weren't sent to Europe?

No, not really, because we imagined I suppose that this was only part of the way that we'd... Although we'd do some training in the Middle East we'd eventually go to Europe. In fact I think that

09:00 might have been the intention in the first place, but certainly that's what we thought, and of course Italy wasn't in the war at that time. Germany had very few colonies in Africa whereas Italy did, they had colonies there. And we eventually arrived at Colombo. Well, that was something brand new to most of us.

09:30 The exotic smell, you could smell it before you arrived there, but it wasn't a terrible smell, it was just something different that we'd never experienced before. And when we anchored, because you couldn't go into the wharves, there was no wharves there to take those boats, but to go ashore you went

10:00 by lighter. And we did have, we had leave there. But the main thing we noticed was a huge sign which said, "Ceylon for Tea", it was huge, covered almost a block in the city I'd reckon. And then the other interesting thing that we'd never

10:30 seen before was these naked little boys on the bum boats around and they would dive in for coins. Throw a threepence over and they'd let it go and then they'd dive for it and bring it up in their mouth, they'd, you know, put it in their mouth hoping to grab another one I suppose. It wasn't terribly clever after all because the coin doesn't go straight down, I mean it sort of

11:00 floats down, and so they it looked terrific to us, we were very new to that sort of thing. We went onto Colombo itself and everything was so new and fresh to most of us that we found it terribly exciting.

11:30 But we were back on board that night and off we sailed again to Aden. Now, Aden is just stung [dung] as far as I could see. They had a tune called The Barren Rocks of Aden which is played by the Scottish bands and they were right, it was barren. There was a story that

12:00 the soldiers told us, the British soldiers told us, "If there was a blade of grass they'd put an armed guard, but they never had to use the armed guard for some years," and I can believe that. But that was different again and it was a free port, whatever a free port is, but you could buy imported goods for virtually nothing, cigarettes for instance. I didn't smoke

12:30 so they didn't really interest me but a packet of Gold Flake cigarettes was a penny. Now, I think the right price was sixpence, that's what you'd normally pay, but it was only a penny there so fellows brought up big in Gold Flake cigarettes. Those who smoked bought them, but they made a mistake because they were all fakes, they

13:00 weren't the true Gold Flake at all. But they'd paid a penny a packet for them and they probably had a hundred packets some of them, you know, and so they didn't jettison them; they hung on to them and they sold them eventually to the Arabs in Palestine, and the Palestine blokes didn't like them either, the Arabs. I think their camel manure's different probably to the Aden manure.

So where did you go from Aden?

13:30 To Port, first of all, Tewfik we went past Port Tewfik, and into the [Suez] Canal then, that was something. Can you imagine huge ships sailing through sand? But that's how it appeared because the Canal is not very wide, not much wider than the ship, and you've got sand on either side. And the women and the men, the locals

14:00 ignored the boats. I mean they're simply walking through the desert and we're up in these, perhaps in some cases 60 and 70 feet above them on the decks looking down on them, but they ignored us because they saw this every day, but it was brand new to us. And we finished up in a place called El Kantara. El

14:30 is actually Arabic for "the". Kantara, don't know what that means. And we were received there, we had a huge reception there by the British Army where we were fed our first feed in the Middle East and it was sausages and mashed potatoes. And it was so

15:00 well organised that I mean they must have practised this, serving these meals, because actually that went on, to my knowledge, for two and a half years. Wherever you went through El Kantara you were fed sausages and mashed potatoes, thin sausages, long thin sausages. I don't know what they were made from but they were all right to eat. But we, you know, we'd been warned about,

15:30 "Be careful of the Arabs," and around in the darkness where we were was well-lit, where around us were these hundreds of Arabs with their Arab dress on, of course, and most of them had a curved knife. But I mean they were just curious, I imagine, as it happened, but we weren't to know that. Well, that night we

16:00 went onto the train, two o'clock in the morning we went onto a train and travelled north out of Egypt and into Palestine, and we were received by the Black Watch, soldiers of the Black Watch, who'd actually built our camps. They'd erected all our tents that we were going to sleep in for the next few years, as it happened,

16:30 and...

Was this Julis?

Julis it was, Julis. We alighted [at] El Majdal, M A J D A L, and we went by truck from there to Julis Camp. Well, Julis was built

17:00 on desert, you know, when I say, "desert" it wasn't sand, but nothing was growing there at that time. Actually it was very good soil, but just they don't have the water at all times. And we actually arrived there in the in the rainy season so it was actually mud, was all mud.

17:30 And we lived in tents and we were, that was our sleeping quarters. Everyone had tents but there were some administrative, administration offices built of timber, and the mess, the officers' mess and sergeants' mess, were timber whereas ours were tents. Even that camp was still being built.

18:00 And the intriguing part about that was that a lot of the labouring jobs were being done by Jewish women. They were Jewish carpenters, they were women, and you'd go to the toilet and be some woman working on the on the roof. But they ignored us and so we ignored them. I don't think any of those women

18:30 knew what a brassiere was, but I also don't think they needed any real support because they were, they themselves, because of their work, I'd reckon because of their work, they were very muscular. And I suppose most of them spoke English of some kind, but we didn't speak to them anyway. Next door to

Julis Camp was

19:00 an orange grove, and Jaffa oranges of course were famous throughout the world at that time, probably still are. But the war in Europe stopped the Jews, Jewish farmers sending their oranges to Europe, so they couldn't sell oranges.

19:30 And our CO [Commanding Officer] Colonel Parsons did what we thought was a great thing. We didn't know, we didn't realise what the economics of this [were]. He brought a truckload of oranges which cost 10 shillings, but he was probably robbed when it comes to the point because they couldn't have sold them anyway. We were warned not to eat

20:00 oranges without them being soaked first of all in permanganate, Condes crystals solution. We weren't allowed to eat them, but there was pure orange juice, I mean you could buy as much as you could drink for a penny or, if you like, less than a penny, a mill, which is one thousandth of a pound. The,

20:30 we always spoke in sterling terms, we spoke of pounds, and of course they were pounds, they actually were Palestine pounds, and we called five hundred mills 10 shillings, etc., and...

How long did you stay in Julis?

Julis? We were in Julis until about May.

21:00 At that stage the formation of the AIF was altered. We were changed from four battalions to a brigade to three battalions to a brigade. Still had three brigades to a

21:30 division, but by changing the format from four to three our division finished up with an extra brigade, so although we got away as a 16th Brigade the 17th Brigade were in still in the camp in Victoria,

22:00 and the rest of the states produced the other brigade of the division. We become a service battalion in our brigade. 1/2nd and 3rd Battalions and then the 4th Battalion, it was taken out. Of the 17th Brigade they took out the 8th and out of the 18th Brigade they took out the 12th which was a

22:30 Tasmanian, mainly Tasmanian battalion. And so we moved out of the 16th Brigade area, Julis, up to Barbara [Kantara?] Camp, [it] was called Barbara, and we waited then for our the rest of our brigade

23:00 to come to Palestine. Well, they took some time to get there.

So what were you doing?

Some of them were, the 12th Battalion for instance didn't get there in time, they went to England because Italy came into the war in June, you see, and it was unsafe to bring a convoy through the Red Sea. And so they, that particular convoy was diverted to England. And the 2/11th

23:30 managed to get there; they came from Western Australia. They became part of our brigade, so our brigade become the 2/4th Battalion, 2/8th Battalion, 2/11th Battalion.

So how did you fill your time while you were waiting for these reinforcements?

Oh, still in training, still marching across the desert doing... Oh no, we never stopped training. Then Italy come into the war. It was, there was no anti-aircraft regiments

24:00 in Palestine but there were eight anti-aircraft guns all in Haifa, and there were Royal Horse Artillery who knew something about anti-aircraft guns, but there were not enough of them to man those guns. So it was decided that

24:30 the 2/4th Battalion, which was at a loose end because we were the only battalion there of our new brigade, the 19th, and the 2/1st Field Regiment, which was the only artillery regiment there at that time, would combine together, be split down the middle and form two anti-aircraft regiments, and that's what happened. So we, by this time we moved again. We

25:00 were down in Keogh 89 [Camp 89?] which is just north of Gaza, and we were joined there by the 2/1st Field Regiment. As I say, we were joined together and halved and off we went up. The army experiment was something that I think the average person will say it's impossible to join an infantry battalion with a with an artillery regiment

25:30 and then for them to be good mates, but we were; we were good mates.

Why would they say it was impossible?

Because we're two totally different arms of the service. Too, see, artillery, they think they're gentlemen and infantry of course were just pretty common soldiers, but the artillery did have a superior complex, they did think they were better than the infantry. But they learned they were no better.

26:00 **How did they learn?**

Because we showed them.

How did you show them?

By simply learning their trade very quickly and they could not learn ours as well, as quickly as we could learn theirs. And that's true, because we had so many things that that we had to use, mortars, machine guns, we had all that. They didn't have those, they just had artillery,

26:30 heavy artillery, that's all they had. But we moved up into Haifa and they called them X regiment and Y regiment. At the moment I think I was in X regiment, I'm not sure - isn't that funny how you can't remember a little thing like that? And we were stationed, we were put into what was called, whether it ever was or not I don't know, "the Italian Hospital",

27:00 and that was a vacant hospital actually but why it was called the Italian Hospital I don't know. And that was stuck right in between, or among if you like, the oil storage tanks, the refinery, oil refinery, the aerodrome and the harbour.

27:30 We knew something about it, it was a pretty dangerous place if there's an air raid, because they probably wouldn't want to bomb the hospital but all around they'd want to bomb. Anyway first morning there we were out learning something about anti-aircraft guns, and we were keen to learn, you know, we just... That's where I think we had it over most armies because

28:00 we were not compelled, we were volunteers, and we learnt all about... That's not true; we learnt a lot about predictors and range finders and all that, we learned that 'cause that was part of being anti-aircraftsmen. But what was happening was we were, you know, an area where

28:30 there was a lot of malaria. Now, we didn't get so much malaria; we got a lot of sandfly fever, and there's fellows going down with sandfly fever day after day. They finish up in hospital. And one day I've got sandfly fever so I went to the doctor and he gave me medicine in (UNCLEAR). Well, that night I was sick, I thought I was going to die, and fellows in the room where I was, they wanted to send for the doctor. And I said, "No, he's given me medicine

29:00 in (UNCLEAR), he knows what he's doing." Next day I'm out on the on the guns with the rest of them and I'm laying on the sand bags listening to the drone of the instructor. And I remember him saying "Musso [Mussolini, Italian leader, also known as "Il Duce"] has promised to visit us soon." I remember him saying that. I'm laying in the sand bags just

29:30 taking all the warmth I can get from the sun, and someone said, "What sort of planes are they, sarge [sergeant]?" And someone else said, "Oh, they're ours, you can tell by the formation." And the sergeant looked up and he said, "Ours, be buggered. Those on the guns stay there, the rest of you scatter." So we scattered across the sand and I

30:00 thought I could run, but this great big bloke passed me as if I was standing still. But, you know, I've not had sandfly fever since, it cured it, so I found a perfect cure for sandfly fever, an air raid to catch. But it was, there was tremendous, as soon as that sergeant spoke there was tremendous explosion as if there was, perhaps I'm speaking the truth, a thousand tins being torn apart .

30:30 And the anti-aircraft guns of course opened up on them and we supposedly shot down three, but I don't think that's true, I didn't see any come down, but all these little white balls appearing in the sky and the planes flying through them it could have, it could have been some hit. The funny part about that is

31:00 we were using a civilian plane as a co-operation plane. He's flying across the harbour, up and down across the harbour, and we're using him to get aim, you see, but I think everyone forgot him. The moment the air raid, I think they forgot this poor civilian pilot, and he

31:30 landed. But before I go any further, on top of the hospital we had Bren guns set up as anti-aircraft machine guns. They were on a truck same as he had, see, and they, and you could, they were taller than the individual but the individual could stand up and fire the Brens,

32:00 and somebody asked this pilot does he think he was in any trouble when the air raid started. He said, "Oh, there wasn't any trouble till I tried to land and those bloody Aussies on the roof opened fire on me." And the, you know, there, that's laughable, but they could have shot him down, but who...? I suppose they panicked,

32:30 all they could see was a plane and there was an air raid on. We had two, officially we had two raids after that.

That was your first?

Oh yeah, that was the very first. Oh yes, that was our very first experience, yeah, yes.

Did you find cover when you ran?

There was no cover, you had to just scatter in the hope that if a shell landed it wouldn't get you, that's... Oh no, there was no cover, oh no.

33:00 You go for your life. And there was there was some civilian casualties, there was no army casualties. In the second raid, we were on the guns on the harbour when the second raid came, and it was bit later

than the first one and

33:30 they didn't try to bomb the aerodrome or the hospital or the oil refinery or the oil wells. They bombed the city of Haifa and they killed about 350 civilians. At that stage, at that time, the Sydney, HMAS Sydney was in Haifa Harbour and

34:00 of course they opened up too, but then I'd say that they must have had a British anti-aircraft regiment turned up and we were relieved. We went back to Keogh 89 and were straight away sent on a holiday to Adera [El Arish] which is on the Mediterranean coast. We had a week's holiday to do nothing, just eat and

34:30 lie around. I suppose that was because we had such an arduous time at Haifa, but I forgot this. When after that first raid, you know, the whole place was lit up like daylight with the oil storage tanks burning, and we actually slept that night in the ditches, where we could find a ditch we slept there. But the next day we moved up to

35:00 Acre, A C R E, Acre, which is an ancient city, very ancient city, Acre, and to somewhere outside Acre to a experimental farm, agricultural experimental farm, and there were signs there that says, "Unfit for animals". We were probably unfit for animals but we were issued with,

35:30 because a malarial area we were issued with green mosquito nets, just one-man mosquito nets, which we hung under gum trees believe it or not, Australian gum trees. In this experimental farm that's what was there, Australian gum trees, and we were like home from home and we actually slept under our

36:00 mosquito nets. We had one false alarm at four o'clock in the morning. The alarm went, the air raid alarm, and [there] was nothing you could do, I mean all you could do was stay there. But I noticed that one fellow got out of his bed, out of his bunk, completely naked and he huddled up against a gum tree, and another

36:30 one came out of his tent, laid down on the ground and put his tin hat over his bare bum, and neither of them remember doing it.

Well, what were they doing?

Just instinctive, just instinctive, that's all. They don't remember doing it. You know, it was funny at the time. But it was a false alarm anyway because the all-clear went just afterwards, and it was from there we had a lot of leave. If you weren't on duty

37:00 we could go into Haifa or we'd go up to a place called Zamir on the beach and there was a cafe there, it was run by a Doctor Rosenthal. Now, there was a lot of doctors in Palestine and there was so many doctors that they couldn't act as doctors. They had to take on other jobs. They were generally refugees from Europe, Jewish refugees, and they'd go into cafes, they'd go into

37:30 all sorts of jobs, but they were doctors of medicine and they were very nice people, they were, you wouldn't have found better people than those people. And the Arabs, we found the Arabs all right, there was nothing wrong with the Arabs. But some cities or some towns, for instance Acre, had a bad name. You would never go into Acre on your own, you just wouldn't do it,

38:00 and you wouldn't go in in any case unarmed. You'd, if there was a - you'd be armed, you'd carry rifles. But I've never known actually anything to go, anyone to be attacked there. To my knowledge that never happened. I remember coming back from Zamir one night with a mate. We noticed a light signalling from Acre. We reported it

38:30 and something was done officially about it, this message light going off. We don't know what it was all about, we weren't told the result of that, but the security people, Intelligence people took over and did something about it. But you'd walk along through a village, Arab village, no matter what time it was there'd be men

39:00 sitting outside alongside the road talking, I imagine, talking. You'd never find an Arab village completely quiet, there's always somebody there and along the road, and that's why you wouldn't go on your own anyway. You wouldn't go up to Zamir on your own, you'd have to have someone with you, and normally we carried arms,

39:30 we were armed. We didn't move round without arms, didn't, in the early part of going to Palestine we didn't go on leave without being armed 'cause we didn't know what was going to happen. We had no suspicion. And the and the Arabs and the Jews were fighting each other anyway, but they did desist to a great extent while ever we were there. During the war they didn't fight each other.

Tape 3

00:31 **Frank, can I ask you a bit about when did you make the push towards Benghazi, when did that...?**

Oh, that was not till February. We moved out of Palestine I think it'd be around October, I can't be sure of that, around October, and we

01:00 reversed our trip by train down to El Kantara and then onto an Egyptian train which took us towards Alexandria. And we passed Alexandria – well, there was actually an air raid on Alexandria, passed that at night while there was a raid on.

01:30 And I suppose it was 40 miles past Alexandria where we moved off the train and carrying all our gear, everything we owned we carried, including five blankets, and each blanket was pretty heavy. And we had three miles to march to our new camp at a place called Borgelarab

02:00 and we were carrying so much that we had to rest every 10 minutes, we had to rest, and we'd go to ground, we'd literally rest. But my platoon commander whose name was Matthews, he was a reinforcement officer and in the first place we didn't like him 'cause

02:30 he was a reinforcement officer, but he and I cobbered up sort of and he said to me one day in Palestine "What am I going to do about Roden?" Roden was his batman. I said, "What's wrong with him?" He said, "He wants to go down to the desert with us." I said, "Well, what's wrong with that?" He said, "I think he's too old." I said, "Well, he wants to go doesn't he?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, why not let him go? If he

03:00 collapses or something you can always send him back," so that's what he, Roden went with us. Now, Roden, the job of a batman is to help his officer, but the truth is that Matthews carried Roden's gear as well. As well as his own he carried Roden's gear, and that man never sat down the whole three miles march, he never went to earth like we did 'cause had he done so he had so much

03:30 on him he couldn't have never stood up again, that's how I worked it out. But Matthews earned a lot of respect that night. I don't know that he realised he was doing it, but he earned a hell of a lot of respect from us. And as a matter of fact he was one of our first casualties when we attacked Tobruk, but that was later on. And we into Borgelarab and we had to put up our own tents,

04:00 which is pretty horrible, you know, pretty lousy we didn't have our tents up for us like we had in Palestine. But what was happening was that every night everyone from, soon as it was dark they started bombing Alexandria, and to bomb Alexandria they had to fly over Borgelarab. Well, there was no problem about them flying

04:30 when they're going to bomb, but when they're finished their bombing on their way back, apparently bombers don't land carrying bombs, they get rid of them, and so they jettisoned the bombs and they'd jettison just about our camp.

Was that deliberate or just you happened to be there?

I don't know, there was, I don't think they knew we were there, just a coincidence that they dropped them in the desert.

05:00 And we never had a casualty, no bomb ever hit our camp, so I think it was purely coincidental. But we couldn't depend on that happening every night so we had to do something about some protection, so we dug holes in the rock, we dug six foot deep holes in the rock. We blasted it

05:30 out, we blasted holes and put our tents down in this these holes with just the roof above the desert, and that's where we slept. We had no lamps, we had no hurricane lamps. In Palestine

06:00 we had hurricane lamps but in the desert we didn't have hurricane lamps, we had nothing. But my platoon, my section in fact realised that we'd probably have a problem about boiling water. We brought a heater, a kerosene heater, to boil water and

06:30 carried that with us of course. But of course the next problem was where to get kerosene. But someone discovered they could pinch a four gallon tin of kerosene, which they did, and we dug a little hole in the side of our tents, outside the tent, outside the hole we dug, and that's where we hid the kerosene so it couldn't be seen. And our lights at night, we didn't have hurricane lamps, as I say,

07:00 we actually poured sand into a piece of cloth and then poured kerosene over that and lit it, so you can imagine kerosene burning, it puts a hell of a lot of soot and we finished up with half an inch of soot on the top of our tents, inside our tents. Every morning we finished up with our noses filled with soot 'cause we played cards till as late as we could, we played,

07:30 did something to pass the time away, and all the time this stuff is burning and filling our noses with soot and the tent of course with soot. But that was Borgelarab. And we had a, we're still on the move, we still carried out every day training. And our very last big manoeuvre was a whole division manoeuvre

08:00 and that took us away from Borgelarab, but while we were away it rained and these were, our tent holes filled with water. Of course everything was left, the tent was sopping wet and floated away down the desert. But as coincidence of all, that ours was the only camp that copped that water.

08:30 No-one else got it, just the 2/4th Battalion, and we were days drying out our clothes and drying out the

holes in the ground too of course because they, as I say, they were filled with water. I'll show you a photo of it later on.

So where did you move from Borgelarab?

Well, I went into hospital from there temporarily.

09:00 I finished up falling over guy rope of a tent, that becoming infected, and I finished up in the British hospital, in British Army Hospital in Alexandria for a few days, and then back to Borgelarab. And towards the end of December

09:30 we moved into Sidi Barani I think it was, I'm not sure - and no, wasn't Sidi Barani, Mersa Matruh - moved up to Mersa Matruh, and the British Army made a tentative attack on the Italians who were within

10:00 Egypt at that time. Egypt incidentally was not at war. Egypt was not at war at all, they never were at war, and in fact King Farouq's mother was an Italian so he was pro-Italian. We moved up to, as I say, the British

10:30 army made a tentative attack, I think it was only tentative. They didn't think it would be terribly successful and it was successful so they kept the attack going, but of course they could only go, they were unlimited as soon as they could go, because they were not prepared to go, and they had to pull out. And our 6th Division men didn't, with the 7th Armoured Division, British Army division, and they,

11:00 and our first attack was on Bardia. Now, we, my battalion was a reserve battalion so we didn't actually see any fighting at Bardia, only cleaning up messes that were around, you know, taking prisoners and that sort of thing.

11:30 And then we led the attack from then on, we lead the attack to Tobruk. We were outside Tobruk for a few days, some days, can't remember how many days, and what was happening we were sending out patrols every night seeing what was what and

12:00 gauging the defences, and the we had a few slight casualties there, no-one killed. We had one man wounded and we've not seen him since, we don't know what

12:30 happened to him. His name was Parkinson, Frank Parkinson, I think. We had one of our warrant officers, he got the DCM, Distinguished Conduct Medal, outside Tobruk for what he was doing outside Tobruk.

13:00 But there came a time, I can't remember the date either, we lined up and moved off and we marched most of the night into position immediately outside Tobruk. When I say, "immediately outside", that was probably 15 miles out. And we built sangers there to protect ourselves from... Sangers

13:30 are rock, using stones to build up a bit of a defence. And we spent the day there and a number of us went out and we did a bit of a raid on the D I D, which is our own D I D, which is Detail Issuing Depot. What we were looking for was tinned fruit but what we actually got was demijohns of rum, didn't get any tinned fruit. And,

14:00 as I say, I didn't drink and I filled my water bottle with rum, and we couldn't carry the demijohn back in, that was give the whole show away, but I had this water bottle filled with rum and no water, so when the water cart come up I got rid of the rum. By the time I got it out the water cart had gone. See, they only come up once every 24 hours

14:30 so I was without water for the next 24 hours and I went looking for water. I went to, I found a well and I thought, "OK, should be water in a well," but it wasn't a water well at all. It was a Roman well built in the time of the Romans where they stored grain, it was a granary. And I noticed the CO having a bath. The CO was actually having a bath in a canvas

15:00 bath. I'd have drank his bath water but I didn't of course. And anyway that night up came the water cart and I filled up with water and the next day we were, about four o'clock we were given a tot of rum, and I actually drank that. It was cold, we were freezing. The desert freezes at night.

15:30 You can be 100 degrees in the daytime but in the night it freezes. And we marched off and formed up on a start line, and it literally was a line put out by the Intelligence section, a tape, a white tape across the desert. You line up on that, and the idea of that is so that you don't get in front

16:00 of the artillery behind you, the artillery shells behind you. They moved 200 yards I think every two minutes so you, the artillery while they're firing they lift and move the next 200 yards further on and that allows the infantry to use them as a, to try to keep the enemy down. Anyway, we started the attack and

16:30 first of all the wire had to be blown, the Italian wire had to be blown, for us to get through, and we went through and might have taken them straight on. 2/8th battalion went to the left, the right, 2/11th was right, and we marched

17:00 to the first Italian defences. And tell you the truth I don't remember a huge amount about all this. I mean I can only remember spasmodic parts of it. I noticed a young fellow with red hair with a leg blown off,

17:30 cigarette in his mouth, grinning, and he said, "Give the bastards one for me." Who he was I don't know but he was certainly in front of us and as far... Sorry, our battalion was leading the attack so it was one of our battalions, but I don't know who it was. And then the mortar shells started to come off, enemy mortar shells started to land

18:00 and one landed between my section commander and the Bren gunner. And we tried to keep about 10 feet apart, 10 feet between people so that if a shell does land it doesn't hit too many people. Anyway, one landed between the section commander and the Bren gunner

18:30 and a hell of a lot of dust, and they stood up and the only damage done was the section commander's pants had a rip across the bum. Whether or not he had a wound or not I don't know, but certainly we thought it was a great joke, we laughed. And I'm 2IC of the section. The next thing, and I'm bringing up the rear of the section because I'm 2IC furthest from the leader,

19:00 and a shell landed between me and the fellow in front of me. And I heard someone yell out "Stretcher bearers!" About, I stood up, I must have been unconscious for a fraction, I stood up and by that time the section was 100 yards ahead of me and I had to

19:30 hurry to catch up. And I did catch up, but at that time also our platoon commander had a leg blown off so that's the last we saw of him. We never ever saw him again. Even after the war we didn't see Matthews any more, and he was the big fellow I was talking about who carried, he was... For some reason or other he gave us away completely,

20:00 I don't know why, I have no suspicions why. He didn't come to reunions, we never, we have not seen Matthews since, and of course he's well and truly dead now. We carried on and we took our objective one after the other because you had objectives you had to take. You take this objective, take the next one, and time was passing, and we were held up on the right by machine guns and we went to earth.

20:30 And Dougherty, our commanding officer, came up in a Bren gun [machine gun] carrier standing up and he got in front of our platoon and I remember him saying "A Company, detach your section to deal with those guns and we'll continue the attack,"

21:00 and then the machine guns were turned on him and he stood there. I know what I'd have done, but he stood there. He wasn't hit. The carrier certainly was but Dougherty wasn't. And the section dealt with the guns, silenced them and came back and it wasn't my section, was another section, and we continued the attack.

21:30 And time was passing away of course, and we made a left hand turn. Don't know why we made that left hand turn. We must have come to some sort of thing that, where we had to turn to go to the next objective which was going to be our final objective for the day, which was in fact an army headquarters. Well, they surrendered pretty quickly

22:00 and I'm not sure of the number, I think it was 400 prisoners, 440 prisoners altogether taken, 400 other ranks and 40 officers. And so they were probably not fighting soldiers actually, they were headquarters soldiers, but I thought, "Well, there's a house there, I'll go and see if there's anyone hiding there." I opened the

22:30 door, went in, there was nobody there, but on the bed was a sand brown belt and a map case. Well, there was no-one there so I thought, "Well, go and get me some souvenirs," so I put these things on, I put the sand brown belt on which actually had a Browning automatic pistol

23:00 in a holster - and I didn't know it was a Browning automatic at that stage, I had to find out later on - and put the map case over my shoulder and I walked out. And a chaplain, Italian chaplain come up to me, he was obviously a chaplain, and he said, his words were "His Excellency will surrender, will you take his surrender?" And I

23:30 said, "Yes, all right." Well, I didn't know who His Excellency was, could have been anyone. Anyway, they went in further, the last of the firing was going on and there was a pistol being fired from this building, and he went in and brought this... The firing stopped, of course it was the officer surrendering, he was still firing his pistol, and he came out and he

24:00 handed me his pistol and I didn't know what to do. I mean I'm carrying enough as it was, I didn't want his pistol and he was surrendering anyway, so I said, "No, I don't want it." He said, "Where do I go?" I said, "Down with the rest of the prisoners," and that's what started it. He started raving, roar - perhaps I'm exaggerating - he started to put on an act.

24:30 And at that stage up come my Platoon - no, 2IC - come the 2IC and he said, "What's the trouble?" I said, "Well, this bloke's surrendered but he won't go down with the rest of the prisoners." And his name was John Coplin, this officer. And the Italian officer said to him "Officer?" and Coplin said, "Yes."

25:00 And so the Italian officer handed him his pistol and Coplin took it. Then he said to me “You take over these the other prisoners; I’ll take this fellow down to Battalion or I’ll probably have to take him down to Brigade, so that’s what happened. And

25:30 I didn’t know who this officer was, I had no suspicion who this Italian officer was until years later when I’m reading the history and John Coplin’s story where this officer surrendered to him and handed him a, he said, gold-plated pistol. It’s not true, it was not gold-plated, it was a normal everyday Italian pistol and John Coplin said

26:00 that as he took the pistol he said, “salagar”. He didn’t say, “Salagar,” he didn’t, that John Coplin’s story, it’s not true. But then two of us had charge of these I reckon 400 prisoners and as we’re standing there a voice out of this these prisoners said, “Does anyone here speak American?”

26:30 and I was so surprised that I said, “Yes.” So out he came and he told me his story. He told me that he, his family all lived in America, that he had also lived in America but he came back on a visit to Italy, he’d overstayed and because he’d overstayed he was called up to the army. He was in the Italian Army and he’d not been able to contact, he

27:00 was not allowed write to his family in America, he was not allowed do it and he asked me how he could get in touch with his family. I said, “Well, the best thing to do is get in touch with the Red Cross, get them to do it.” And then he said, because by this time I was calling him “John” and he was calling me “Frank”, he said, “Is Italy, Frank...?” and I said, well, I couldn’t say anything else but “Yes.” I couldn’t say

27:30 “Oh well,” you know, “we hope.” I said, “Yes, oh, we’re going to invade Sicily next week.” Overstayed and everything. And he said, “Well, I thought so.” He said, “I’ve been in hospital in Tripoli.” He said, “Tripoli is filled with Germans, mostly tankmen and airmen.” They were his words. Well, I pretended to be not interested

28:00 but I took the first opportunity to go to my Battalion 2IC ’cause he visited, and I told him what this Italian soldier had said. He said, “That’s ridiculous. They’re going to turn, they’re going to declare Tripoli an open city.” So I thought he’d know better than I did so I didn’t do any more about it, but we all know what happened. Tripoli was filled with German soldiers,

28:30 airmen and tankmen, because they attacked in April, they attacked across the desert where we thought we couldn’t cross. We thought we couldn’t cross this with tanks, but the Germans did it, and hence we had Tobruk. But, as I say, I had this

29:00 pistol, etc., carrying it and a map case filled with maps, you know, we were never told that these things were of value. I’ve got a map case filled with Italian maps, Italian army maps, and I threw them away ’cause I thought, “This is a good thing to carry letters in,” and which is what I did for years, literally for years I kept it for that purpose.

29:30 And someone else pinched the Browning automatic that night so I’ve not seen that since either. But the next day we had actually entered Tobruk and I remember standing near the flag pole and I saw an Australian soldier come out carrying a Gladstone bag which

30:00 he couldn’t close ’cause it was too full, filled with jewellery. I don’t know where he got that, I don’t know, but I’ve not seen him since. I didn’t see him before, don’t remember seeing him before. But also what happened was that another Australian soldier came up and he pulled down the

30:30 lanyard from the flag pole and put the digger’s hat on it and he heaved it up, hauled it up onto the top of the flag pole. Now, there is a story around that before that happened someone took down the Italian flag, but probably it happened but it didn’t happen at that stage. The only thing I can see on that flagpole at any time was this digger hat and was a lot of controversy there.

31:00 I’m not sure that that was the original time that hat was raised. I think it was re-enacted, I think it was, but everyone tells me it wasn’t; even the fellow who did it tells me that it was not re-enacted, that was the one and only time he’d done it. But I still think it was a re-enactment. Otherwise why would, why were all the photographers there? And then the next day we moved off to

31:30 Derna. That was a Sunday morning. Off we went, and we travelled by, didn’t have to walk, we travelled by New Zealand trucks, New Zealand Army trucks. And in the afternoon we were outside Derna, couldn’t see anything at all, was just sand, and

32:00 we were told that that Derna was undefended. That’s what the Intelligence told us, it was undefended, and my platoon was ordered to put two sections across the wadi [water channel] that night

32:30 and my section was to remain on the original side. Well, they off they went and they had to send a message back by runner to say that they were across. That took two hours to get, it was four hours that we got the message that they were across, and he [the messenger] was immediately sent back by another message

33:00 and he finished up he’d had it, you know, as I say, it was two hours each way to cross that wadi. Strange thing is he was found the next day, there were Arab farmers down in that wadi still carrying on their

farm work, they were ignoring the war, they were still down in that wadi doing whatever they did,

33:30 and when I say this runner couldn't do it any more, I took over his job as runner and I crossed that wadi four times each way in 24 hours. And all the time this [was] happening there was mortar shells landing. I mean they were

34:00 haphazard shelling, it was not, they were not trying to get me. But finally they actually did get me 'cause I got a piece of shell splintered in my arm and in the elbow here, another piece in the foot. It was not serious, I mean just no real consequence, I was able to carry on. Around midday

34:30 a number of planes, aeroplanes, bombers come towards us, Italian bombers. They were searching south and I was on the far side of the wadi at that stage, and behind them was coming a fighter, British fighter,

35:00 a Hurricane, and he was firing, shooting at them, firing at them and then he – well, they kept moving towards them in the same direction as they were. He was not gaining on them and I couldn't understand why. Later on I asked him why a Hurricane couldn't catch the bombers. He said, "I was out of bloody ammunition," and he only actually went back to

35:30 try and, as he said, 'cause it was his 13th, he shot down three of each plane, that made 13 he claimed, and he went back to get the skull cap of the first bloke he'd shot down or the 13th bloke he'd shot down, and he landed on the desert to do it, got the skull cap off the dead German, the Italian.

36:00 By that time he was surrounded by some of our fellows and he said, "That's why I landed, to get this skull cap." He said, "I'm sure to have some bloody bad luck now," he said, "after the 13th." Got in the plane, slided off across the desert, hit a rock, landed on his nose and he come out laughing. He said, "I've had me bad luck, had it on the ground." He was killed in Greece

36:30 couple of months later I'm told, and for some reason or other he was called Imshir. Why he was called Imshir I have no suspicion. Imshir is Arabic for "go away", but he was called, for some reason he was called Imshir. He might have been because he was telling those Italian planes to go away. How that come about I don't know. He might have been telling them to "Imshir, Imshir." I don't know. But we had

37:00 quite a few casualties there. We were told – well, we could see it happening. There was a whole motorised brigade, Italian brigade, assembling ready for an attack on our forward troops and they

37:30 did attack our forward. And we had a total of three platoons, we had three platoons across, that's all we had across that wadi, and a whole brigade, a motorised brigade, were going to attack them. And another plane came over and it was searching, obviously searching.

38:00 And I believe the message went through to Dougherty, Colonel Dougherty, about this plane and he sent a message to RAF [Royal Air Force] headquarters reporting it asking for assistance. Then he received another message

38:30 and he got in touch with the air force again saying "Ignore previous requests, our forward troops have dealt with the plane." Apparently some silly beggar, I mean just imagine it, with a rifle having a shot at a plane and he believes he actually hit a vital part of that plane and the plane crashed. I think the plane was

39:00 sick in the first place. I think it was on its way to crash when he fired because I can't imagine a .303 bullet going through the armoured part of a of a plane underneath the plane. I can't imagine it happening, but he claimed he did it and he got the credit for it, but I've got my doubts, that's all. I can only say that I don't know.

What about the rest of the troops? Was there much, were they sceptical?

No.

39:30 Our forward troops defeated that armoured brigade, that armoured motorised brigade, defeated them. They beat, killed about 40 of them and I think we lost six.

I mean, was that story believed? You didn't believe the story, what about others?

Oh, they all believed it. It just doesn't, I think the plane was sick in the first place, that's what I think. I think it was on the way to crash, that's what I think, but

40:00 you know it's… Fantasy I think is better than realism sometimes and so everyone prefers to believe that one of our forward troops brought that. He certainly fired at it, he certainly did that, there's no doubt about it. It was stupid to do it but he did it, but he must have fired at a psychological moment that the plane was about to go anyway.

Tape 4

00:36 We estimate that was about fifteen hundred yards across from rim to rim and five hundred feet deep but that's only an estimate, we don't really know. We know that there was water coming, the farmers were getting water out of

01:00 the earth. I mean it was coming from a spring, and [it was] estimated there was 400 gallons an hour coming out of that spring, pure water out of the desert, but whether it's true or not I don't know. But to cross that wadi, I mean it was, the first time I crossed it was in broad daylight so I knew the other blokes crossed in darkness,

01:30 and intermittently a mortar still would come across. As I say, I don't think for a minute they were having a, trying to get me, I don't think they even knew I was there, but they'd send one over every so often. But where they were coming from was something that had us worried. We didn't know where these shells were coming from. It appears that

02:00 this particular mortar crew were in the side of a wadi and they were firing these mortar shells out of this cave sort of thing, and those farmers I mentioned, they told our fellows where they were and our fellows went over at night and got them. They took 12 prisoners there. We didn't have any trouble with that the mortars after that.

02:30 But I can tell you this: that anyone who says they were not frightened, and that's anyone who even pretends they were frightened - we all pretended to each other but we weren't fair dinkum about it. You didn't show fear to your mate, but you had it in your heart and in your mind.

Why didn't you show fear to your mates?

03:00 You had a certain amount of pride, you know, you don't... No, it's hard to understand human nature but that's, you just don't do it, that's it. I think if you do show fear or do admit it you're on the way out, you're going to collapse, you're going, really go to pieces and, you know,

03:30 we just didn't. Fellows say that they were wounded and they didn't want to be, want to leave the unit. I mean I believe they did say this, which you had to pretend that you didn't want to leave, had to do it, and just hope that you would go,

04:00 because you didn't know that you're not going to be the next bloke to go, to die.

What about yourself?

I was as frightened as hell, I was as frightened as hell, but when they get back to the right side of the wadi, the safe side of the wadi if you like, I mean I wasn't frightened then. I remember on one occasion when I came back I saw an Italian on our side of the wadi going for his life and I chased him

04:30 and he surrendered. He handed me a pistol, the same sort as the general handed me, and I belted that, I gave it a hiding on a rock and break it up, you know, I didn't want it, and I've not seen him since. I took him back to headquarters, to the company headquarters, and I've not seen or heard of him since.

05:00 I told you I was slightly wounded. I went back to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] later on and there were Italian prisoners there and there were actually mortar shells landing at the RAP orderly, and the most frightened people were the Italians. And they, I mean they were screaming in fear. The doctor, Thompson, he threatened to shoot them if they didn't shut up. I don't know what he was going to shoot them with but he

05:30 threatened to do it while I was there. What he did then with me, he froze my elbow and gouged the piece of shell splinter out. I've never come across this before or since, this freezing business. He simply sprayed something that froze my elbow and, as I say, I've not come across

06:00 before or since, but even when he was taking it out it was sickening. I mean there was a sickening feeling when he was taking this piece of shell splinter out, but that was unofficially a wound 'cause it never shows, I was never shown in the records as being wounded, but because that was just an RAP, just stretcher bearer's job, I imagine doing that it doesn't count.

06:30 He...

So did you go straight back to your unit?

Yes, yes. It was not, it in itself was not serious, but it did develop into something more serious later on, which... At that stage it was of no consequence. Fact I, you know, I'd gone 24 hours with it without even worrying about it, you know. When I had this time off I wanted to go back and

07:00 get something done with his. I don't how I'd have got on if I had to use a rifle, but the... But you're frightened, there's no doubt about it, you're, anyone who says they're not frightened, they're telling lies or they have no feelings whatever. Then after Derna we moved on onto Benghazi, and further than Benghazi

07:30 a place called Adjadabeer [?] in fact, which is the other side of Benghazi, and Italy, the Italian soldiers surrendered and Dougherty was appointed Military Governor of Cyrenaica which only lasted a very short while, but the civilian police took

08:00 over, I mean the civilian authorities carried on. The Mayor of Benghazi still carries on as Mayor. We didn't try to replace any of those and once they surrendered I think they were happy that they were out of it as far as they were concerned. Don't know what happened when the Germans came back and took them over, I don't know what happened after the Germans

08:30 took the place back, but our troops then moved back and were taken over, were replaced by this 17th Brigade and one of my brothers in the 17th Brigade, the 2/17th Battalion in fact, and he actually relieved me at Adjadabeer...

09:00 I don't think that's literally true. I don't think that's where I saw him, that's where I first saw him after they took over from us and we started to move back. But then this wound started to affect me. I finished up in hospital 'cause it was, my whole system became poisoned.

How long did that take to develop,

09:30 **how long was that developing?**

Oh, around 10 days before, you know, before it manifested itself. I can only imagine it came from the from the shell splinter. Actually I went to the doctor with, to get dressing on this, I was getting dressing on this, that's right, and I said, "While I'm here,

10:00 you know, do something about my foot," took my boot off. He said, "How'd you get here?" I said, "I walked." He said, "You walking back?" I said, "Why?" He said, "You're going to hospital," 'cause I also had a shell, piece of shell splinter in the ankle that I didn't even know about.

Was still there?

No, it's out now, no, oh no, he took it out. It didn't affect me, I didn't even notice it. Didn't take your shoes, didn't take your boots off.

10:30 We didn't have time to change clothes or anything.

So the first time you were treated that went unnoticed, you're saying?

Oh no, unnoticed as far as I was concerned, yeah.

So it was this second doctor that found the shrapnel in your foot?

In the foot, yeah. Then, as I say, I was evacuated by ambulance to Tobruk. From Tobruk we went on

11:00 to the Gorsenshira [?] Hospital Ship into Alexandria, Alexandria by train down to, I forget; it was a New Zealand General Hospital. Anyway Heliopolis, and each day a girl would come, a nurse would come, and she'd cut off

11:30 the tops of these little eruptions that were on my skin and they took a sample from one of them and they made a vaccine of that. I was getting injections for another month I suppose after that. But while I was in hospital I had a number of visitors, and to this day I don't know why I had these

12:00 visitors. Perhaps because as far as I was concerned I was the only Australian there in New Zealand Hospital. One of the visitors was the High Commissioner's daughter, High Commissioner for Palestine's daughter. First name was Anne. McAllister I think, McAllister. I started to grow a moustache, must have been a horrible sight, and this Anne was

12:30 talking to me and she said, "Frank, did you grow the moustache for a joke or a bet?" So I shaved it off. The other visitor was the piano soloist with the Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra. Her name,

13:00 Zeus, oh I've forgotten. Zelma? No, I'm wrong. Nina Zalman P N I N A Zelsman. And she came to invite me to a recital she was giving, and I went too as a matter of fact, in St. James' Hall in Cairo. And then a big fellow came in,

13:30 an officer of course, and he introduced himself by saying "My name's Flyberg, I'm in charge of the New Zealanders." Well, as soon as he said his name I knew who he was. Flyberg VC [Victoria Cross]. He was the man who actually was an Olympic swimmer, he swam ashore at Gallipoli to light the beacons.

14:00 Now, I don't know whether he got the VC for that but he certainly did get the VC, and they called him "Tiny" because he wasn't. He was about six foot five, a very big bloke, and he asked me how I was going, etc., and I told him, and he said, "Your Prime Minister'll be at the pyramids tomorrow. If you like I'll

14:30 supply you with transport to go and see him." You know, I was brash, forever brash. I said, "Well, I think he should come and see me," and he said, "So do I," and I never did see the pyramids. I never have seen the pyramids, you wouldn't believe it, to be within a couple of miles of it and never see them.

Did you see the Prime Minister?

Hm?

Did you see the Prime Minister?

No, I didn't, no.

15:00 No, well, I didn't, I had no wish to go and see the Prime Minister. Not that I had anything against him but I had no wish to go and see him and always thought, "I've got tons of time to see the pyramids," but I didn't you see, I didn't, I never did see the pyramids, never did get there. But that was a, you know, people can't believe that you could be so close to the pyramids, have

15:30 the right to go, the transport supplied, and not go. You know I can't understand that myself but, as I say, I was just being brash. But it was, I'm surprised that those three people came to see me, and why I simply don't know because they never gave an explanation, they didn't say why. And I think it could be because I was the only Australian in that hospital, that could have been it.

How long were you recuperating there?

16:00 I must have been in that hospital for three weeks, perhaps, can't really remember. I went from there to Moascar. Moascar was a convalescent depot. Mind you, had no Australian uniform, I had nothing left of Australian uniform because they cut my pants off me, they couldn't get them off. Once they took the boot off they couldn't get the pants off over the foot and so I

16:30 came out of the desert with my underclothes, part of a pair of pants and a pullover, that's all I came out of the desert with, so not even a pay book because I left my pay book in my jacket before I walked down to the hospital to the doctor and I couldn't go back and get it, and I didn't have

17:00 a pay book for three months, which meant I had no pay for three months either. As I say, I went to Moascar and they issued me with a uniform which was actually a New Zealand Army uniform, and then I was evacuated again to

17:30 Palestine up to I think it was Adera [El Arish], where the convalescent depot was there, and I was getting injections three and four times a day of this vaccine they made up. It worked because it cured the

18:00 eruptions, but by the time I got back to the training depot the battalion moved to Greece so I didn't join the battalion, go to Greece, thank goodness. I didn't want to go either, you know, given the choice I wouldn't have gone.

Why was that?

Well, I mean, you know what happened in Greece of course, we had more casualties in Greece than anywhere

18:30 during the war.

That's in hindsight. I mean at the time.

That's right. I say I'm glad I didn't go.

But at the time were you relieved or disappointed?

I probably would have wanted to rejoin the battalion, yeah, I probably would have done. I can't actually remember how I felt. I probably would have wanted - I expected to, put it that way, I expected to rejoin the battalion, but they... What had happened, they sent back

19:00 from the desert, they sent back men to man a new unit which was a training unit, and I went to that, a specialist training unit training specialists in their particular art. See, a specialist in the Army earned an extra two bob a day, so instead of getting five bob a day they were getting seven. Actually

19:30 in there, in Palestine, [to] bring some parallel with sterling you got an extra shilling a day. We actually were on six bob a day but the specialist got an extra two shillings. If he was a corporal he didn't get that extra two shillings, see, only the private got the extra two bob and the (UNCLEAR) got an extra two bob, Signals got an extra two

20:00 bob, Bren guns got an extra two bob, mortar men got an extra two bob, but the bloke doing the actually fighting, he got the least, and that's true, that's literally true. You wouldn't believe it. The air force got more pay than we did. The lowest rank in the air force got more pay than infantrymen and I'll never understand that, I'll just never understand it, but that's how it was.

So what did they do with you at the training depot?

20:30 We went on training, simply training again, yes, waiting till we're sent up as a reinforcement because you're let off strength of your battalion once you left it. You're taken on strength of the other unit. Of course the other unit then claims your food, etc., and you and your original unit loses that

21:00 food for you and probably gets it for someone else who took your place, because you have to be... A reinforcement really takes somebody else, but the word reinforcement's an interesting word. We use it as a derogatory word and most reinforcements accept it as being derogatory and I've heard fellows say,

"Oh, I was only I was only a reo [reinforcement]." I began to think about this word and I said to one fellow one day

21:30 "Do you know, what do, you know, what a reinforcement is?" He said, "Yeah, a," he said, "someone who takes the place of someone." I said, "No, wait a minute, mate. The word reinforcement means to make stronger, to reinforce means make stronger. There's nothing to be ashamed about being a reinforcement." And he said, "I've never looked at it like that," and he was an officer. His name was Jim Brown, a Member of Parliament. It was Jim Brown who I said this to

22:00 down at Cootamundra and he said, "I've always thought it was something derogatory to say I was a reinforcement, a reo," you know, he used the word "reo". I said, "Mate, Jim, it simply means that you were there to make stronger, that's to reinforce, that's what it means," and he never looked at it like that.

Why did people look down on reinforcements?

22:30 Because we always felt that that, particularly reinforcement officers, that we had privates who probably made better officers than they would. One particular Lieutenant, Colonel England, in fact I heard him say to his reinforcement officers, and this is at the specialist training group 'cause officers were there too

23:00 to be trained, he said, "I have privates in my battalion make better bloody officers than you blokes," that's what he said to these reinforcement officers. They'd never been in a battalion, remember, they'd never joined the battalion at that stage. But he was a funny bloke, England. They called him the Black Panther. His hair was as black as your pants and he must have been in his,

23:30 must be close to 50. He was from the Great War. And we had an officer there, his name was a Jewish name, I think it was Cohen but I'm not sure. I remember Cohen asking him could he have leave to go to Jerusalem

24:00 and England said, "Why would you want leave to go to Jerusalem?" "Well," he said, "I'm a Jew, sir, you know, I'd like to go to Jerusalem before I go down to the desert." And England said, "Do you know that I was here for three months before I went to Jerusalem?" And he, Cohen, said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well you're a bloody liar, I wasn't."

24:30 He didn't pull any punches, England. He was killed, I think he was killed with General Vasey when their plane crashed coming back from New Guinea [actually England was not recorded as a casualty].

Tell me then about the training battalion. What was your, how long were you there and what happened to you after?

I was there until they came back to Australia actually, with the training battalion. I think it was disbanded then.

25:00 No, I was an expert if you like on Bren gun.

Was that extra training you received in the...?

Well, everyone learnt something about a Bren gun but only the best were classed as Bren gunners, but everyone had to be able to fire a Bren gun

25:30 and use a Bren gun. We all carried ammunition for a Bren gun, we all carried ammo for Bren guns, 'cause it was still the same as we used in the rifle, same sort of ammo, 303, the same, exactly the same machine ammunition. We at the

26:00 training depot which was in Keogh 89 again, we'd have fellows come in for a fortnight's training as specialists because they were getting paid as specialists. They weren't specialists, we found that out in the desert. Fellows were supposed to be specialists in a certain thing and all they were doing was getting the pay for it without being able to do the job, and that's why they formed specialist training groups. Each division formed their own, 6th, 7th and

26:30 9th. I managed to get a lot of leave from the training depot. I was given a lot of leniency. If I wanted to go away for a night I could simply ask "Could I have a leave pass?" and go, or for a day if there was no no-one to train, you know, between groups. I could spend

27:00 two days in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, and when I was there I made friends with the various people in those towns, particularly a photographer, "Photo Perjamengic", his name was Perjamengic and "Photo Perjamengic" is the name he traded under. Now, he had a girl who was the touch-up artist, if you like. Her job was to

27:30 titivate every picture, every photo, by putting a little glint in the eye with a little - you blokes probably know more about this than I do - just using a little white spot in the eye [on] the photo to give a bit of a glint there. Well, this little girl, she was 16. Her name was Lola Catz, C A T Z, and I became friendly with Lola because

28:00 I became friendly with her boss and I was friendly enough with the boss that he even invited me to the, couldn't call it the christening, his new son, I think it was after so many days the circumcision, they treat that as we would treat a christening if you like, and

28:30 after his wife had the baby I was invited to the to this little party that they had. I was down on the beach when the Australians were putting on a demonstration of, this is in Tel Aviv, of life saving, and there was a little girl there, well, two little girls wanted to, trying to get through to the front so they could see, and there was two big Jewish boys stopping them. Well, I

29:00 took those two girls and I put them in the front of these two Jewish boys and later on one of these girls was talking to me. She said, "You come to Tel Aviv often?" I said, "Yeah, now and then." So, you know, "My father's place then," and I was thinking of course everyone was interested in cafes and 'cause very café sold beer, etc., and I said, "Oh well," you know, "what's your father's café called?" She said, "Oh, not a café, he's a tailor." Well, I wouldn't be interested in tailors, you know,

29:30 but I had to pretend I was, and I asked where his shop was and she told me and, "Oh," I said, "I might call in there one day." And next time I was in Tel Aviv I did call in and she's speaking German to her father. Apparently he couldn't speak English. She could speak pretty good English and she's talking to her father and he's nodding his head, you know, but everything she was saying in German. I don't know, but it wasn't the same thing she was saying to me I'm pretty sure, because she was telling me all sorts of things, she certainly wasn't telling her father the same thing, whatever it was.

30:00 But she was, her name was Pressela.

What was she telling you that she wasn't telling her father?

Oh, she was telling me that she loved me. Oh yes, she'd say something to her father and he'd nod his head, you know, he was, and then she'd – well, she was teaching him German she was teaching some German but she was only a, she looked maybe 12,

30:30 she probably was 16. She didn't even have a breast, I mean she was flat-chested as can be, but she was a very nice kid. I can't even think of her first name now. I know her second name was Pressela and the... Oh, I introduced my mate my mate George Holmes to him and she said to me

31:00 later on, she said, "Your friend, he has a black girlfriend," and I said, "No, he hasn't." "Sure," she said, "I saw him," she said, "and his black girlfriend." I said, "No, you're making a mistake, no." She said, "No." "He must have been doing something for the army or something." She said, "No, if he was doing something for army, why would she have his arm through her arm."

31:30 Of course I was, she beat me, but she was a nice girl. I'd visit that family too. They invited me up to their, had musical evenings and I'd go there. Her brother was said to be the best recorder player in Palestine. Don't if you know anything about a recorder? A recorder is a very old Jewish instrument

32:00 apparently, and he was supposed to be the best in Palestine, in Tel Aviv, that was Tel Aviv. In Jerusalem on one occasion I was there and Photo Perjamengic, he had a branch in Jerusalem, and I went into the shop and the girl, Honi, I called her Honey but Honi, H O N I, I think it was her name,

32:30 and I was always asking her to go out with me but she couldn't go out with me because we didn't have an understanding. An understanding was I'd be engaged to her you see, but I knew what she meant by an understanding but I pretended I didn't understand. And I was there one day and three young officers came in, obviously reinforcement officers, and they asked her how much to have their photos taken and she told them and she,

33:00 and I said, "Honi, you're overcharging." She said, "No." I said, "Wait a minute, you told them so much and the right price is so much." She said, "Oh, they're officers, they have plenty of money." Well, I said that didn't ring true to me. I mean just because you're an officer you're overcharged. So I said to these three blokes "The right price is so and so.

33:30 If you want to pay the price she says you pay it, but I'm off," and I walked out. Well, that night 'cause I was still in Jerusalem Perjamengic rang me. "Oh," he said, "the girl made a mistake." I said, "No, she didn't make a mistake, she knew what she was doing 'cause I told her she'd made a mistake and she said she didn't. She said that you over charge, you charge double because they're officers," and I said, "and I know that's not true." But that was that little bit. And

34:00 while there I met another family. He was a doctor of dentistry, his name was Lewin-Epstein and actually he was an American and so was his wife, and I think she might have been a sister of Eleanor Roosevelt because she was just as ugly. And I was invited to a party, a number of parties at their place. When I say, "parties", they were just little get-togethers. They'd invite certain soldiers

34:30 to meet some of the Jewish girls and they all were professional people. I know one night I was talking to a woman, her name, all she was introduced to me as Ruth Hoffman and somewhere or other a question of malaria came up and she asked me had I ever had malaria. I said, "No, I've had sandfly fever, I think that's the same as malaria," and then she explained to me why it wasn't.

35:00 She was a professor at the university and she was concentrating on a cure for malaria, but they didn't say she was a professor, they just said, "Ruth Hoffman", so you can imagine how I felt after me telling

her what I thought of it and then she told me the truth of it. But I met a girl there, her name was Carmel Abardi, among others.

35:30 There were quite a number of Ruths. Ruth was quite a common name there but Carmel was an uncommon name I think for a Jewish girl, because she was named after Mount Carmel in Tel Aviv, I'm wrong, in Haifa, and she was a very nice girl. She was a university student. She was 17 I think and she was studying History

36:00 and Mathematics. That's a strange mixture but that's what she was studying at university, and whenever I was in Jerusalem I'd meet her and we'd go out somewhere. And her mother, I rang there once and her mother said, "Frank, will you do me a favour?" I'd met her mother, she said, I said, "Yeah, if I can, Mrs Abardi." She said, "Don't ask Carmel to go out with you at night." Well, I never had, and I said, "Well, no, I have no intention." She said, "You can always go,

36:30 if the family's there, you can go, you can come with us, but not on your own, not on her own," and, as I say, I never did go with her at night but we were just friends as far as I was concerned. And one of the visitors one night was this Anne McAllister that I'd met in the hospital,

37:00 but whether she recognised me or whether she didn't I don't know, but I soon recognised her. But I didn't have a moustache by this time, of course.

What was the most popular leave activities for the soldiers?

Drinking. I, you know, as I say, I had a very good mate, this part-Aborigine, and he and I went out together, we went on leave together.

37:30 He did all things I didn't do, he drank, he smoked, he did everything. In Ingleburn he said to me one day, he said, "You don't smoke, you don't swear, you don't

38:00 drink, you ought to be a bloody padre," and from then on I was known as "Padre". He had such a sense of humour, Blue, he could he could make a joke out of most things. Then another good mate in Ingleburn was the post boy.

38:30 He was pretty young, I think he was only about 19, and he just got married, and if a letter come for me he'd bring it to me. And he was officially the runner, I mean he took messages between companies and from battalion headquarters, etc., and he always walked except when they gave him, they finally gave him a pushbike.

39:00 And soon as Bluey saw him on the pushbike he said, "Look, they've even mechanised the bloody runners," he said, and from then on that fellow was called "Mechanised". Yeah, well, it was true and of course they mechanised the transport too, that's why we went out of horse transport but...

Tape 5

00:31 **Just before we had a break for lunch you raised... Sorry, we were talking about working in the 6th Div training unit.**

Yeah.

And you said your specialisation was a Bren gun?

That's right.

But you haven't told us anything about how you came to be an expert in the Bren.

Well, it started possibly when I was in the militia before the war when I found that I was a good shot with the Lewis gun, and there's no comparison with the two guns

01:00 in my opinion. I think the Lewis is a lot more accurate than the than the Bren because the Bren sprays a bit and the Lewis is pretty accurate, and so we learnt to use the Bren. It was, you know, a lot easier to handle if it comes to the point and you just become adapted and you learn, that's it.

01:30 **Where had you gained so much experience, though? Were you training at Ingleburn on the range or anything like that?**

Oh no, we didn't get Brens until we went to Middle East. We didn't get a Bren until maybe March 1940; until then we had Lewis. And then

02:00 when we changed over the organisation of the AIF to British system we also adopted the Bren which was actually made in Czechoslovakia originally. Originally they're Czechos [Czechoslovakians] and that's where the word Bren comes from, I think it's "Br" for British and

02:30 a city in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, that's how they get the word Bren, you see, it's a combination of two words, or two parts of two words and the... I actually wasn't a Bren gunner in action, [it] was only when I went to the training depot that I

03:00 become an instructor in the Bren. I didn't, I was not recognised as a Bren gunner in the battalion at all.

And yet you were good enough to be training people to become specialists?

Oh yeah, well, they knew nothing about it, see, they had to start from scratch, and at least I was in front of them there.

Did you receive new armament or new guns when the 2/1st Regiment and 2/4th were merged to create the anti-

03:30 **aircraft?**

Oh, anti-aircraft guns, they were three-point-sevens, you see. They're big artillery.

Were they introduced just at that time then?

Oh no, they were in force before that. Oh no, they...

The 2/1st were using them were they?

No, they weren't, no, they were using 18-pounders.

OK.

Totally different, field artillery's totally different to air artillery, and no, they were using 18, I think 24-pounders, perhaps, the heavy stuff.

So there's very much a very steep

04:00 **learning curve for both the battalions?**

The principles are the same, the principle is the same, but there are technicalities that come in to alter the system. For instance you use a range finder with heavy artillery but you probably don't have a predictor. Mind you, I don't I don't know that I'm right when I make that statement, but you do use a predictor with the with the anti-aircraft and

04:30 a predictor gives you the speed of the plane you're trying to shoot at because you don't hit them directly, I mean you spray around. It wouldn't explode, your shell spray explodes as it sprays around, you don't get a direct hit or not often anyway, and the cone on the shell, on the on the projectile itself, by

05:00 pushing that into a setter that sets the range or the timing fact, you know, the time it leaves the gun until it explodes, and that's how they... And although you might think you're aiming exactly at the plane, in fact the gun is pointing in front in front of the plane see, 'cause you're you've got to allow for that time that plane has travelled

05:30 before it gets near the projectile, before it explodes.

So was there quite a bit, quite a lot of new technologies that the Australians were picking up once they were over in the Middle East and having to learn?

Oh yes, we learnt nothing before we left really. I mean we could march, we were pretty good marchers, we were pretty good drillers, but from the point of view of fighting war, you know, we knew nothing of course. We thought we did but we didn't know how little we knew till we got there.

Did you enjoy that steep learning curve then?

06:00 Oh yes.

Was that one of the things that kept it exciting?

Everything's interesting you see, everything's new, anything new is interesting. I mean after a while you get blasé about things, then you get careless.

So you said that you weren't a Bren gunner in battle. What was your role?

I was 2IC of the section see, well I was there to take charge if something happened to the section leader.

Who was your section leader at Bardia and Tobruk?

His

06:30 name was Stumpy Wright.

And you had a good relationship with him?

Oh yes, oh yes, everyone, well there was no enemies among members of the unit, I can tell you, no enemy really, it just didn't happen, we were all mates.

What were the important attributes then of a leader, what separated someone out above the rest of the section?

I think we were all capable of being leaders, I think we all were, and it's just the opportunity makes the leader

07:00 when it comes to the point, so you... My grandson, one of my grandsons has just been made a lance corporal, he's in the permanent army, and actually his father is a squadron leader in the air force and so is his brother-in-law a squadron leader in the air force at the moment. And when my daughter rang me to say that Noah had been promoted to lance corporal I said, "Well, tell him to look after a bigger house."

07:30 That's an old English joke. Someone arrives home to his mother to say he's just been promoted to corporal but "Don't move, Mum, I," you know, [not] justified in getting a new house just because I've been promoted to corporal. Well, in those days, our day, lance corporal was not paid; these days they are apparently.

Did you have the opportunity to lead the section? Was there ever an opportunity where you had to step in and fill the command?

No, I didn't, no.

Did

08:00 **the section leader consult you? Did you consult one another on issues and...**

Oh, we all talked about it, we all did a bit, like a convent student we were. Oh no, we talked, discussed everything, yeah.

You mentioned before the assault on Tobruk that you had a number of key objectives that you kept working through there, one by one?

That's right, we are given certain objectives to reach by a certain time, and if you fall behind that objective you could be in trouble because

08:30 you leave someone else in trouble. We, I missed that time where the machine gun's on our right. Well, just before that, the 2/8th Battalion went to ground and stopped and we kept going. They left us undefended on our left and we didn't like that a bit,

09:00 we couldn't see why they'd go to ground and leave us unprotected.

Was that ever discussed?

Oh, among ourselves, yeah.

With the 2/8th?

Oh no, not to my... Well, we would have done it anyway. If it had been discussed by all, would be a higher level than us. No, we didn't do it, no.

So each of those objectives is known by each of the men in the section?

Not necessarily. We know that we have

09:30 to reach a certain objective by a certain time.

You all know that or just the section leader?

Oh no, we were told we must and we were told where our next objective is, then we must reach it by then, and actually Tobruk we actually worked to time, exact time, all the time because we didn't have a huge amount of opposition. Had we met opposition we may have fallen behind.

Did you have a sense

10:00 **in that North African push that the Italians were just falling away, that you were rolling towards victory?**

We were sure, oh yes, we had no worry about the Italians, we had no worries.

Did you have any sense that they would come back in the way they did with Rommel across the desert? Did you think that that land had been won for the duration?

I suppose we didn't. We thought we had it, yes, otherwise

10:30 6th Divvy [Division] wouldn't have been pulled out, I'm sure of that. Had my battalion 2IC taken notice of information that I gave him and then got this Italian who was prepared to talk, got him to the Intelligence section, and further on perhaps maybe we wouldn't have gone to Greece. But if we hadn't gone to Greece we'd have lost the war, believe it or not, because... When I say, "we", I didn't go. I tell

you

11:00 if the Australians had not gone to Greece in my opinion we'd have lost the war because what happened was that we went there to fight Italians in the first place and they were, I mean they were no problem, but then the Germans come to the aid of the Italians and they used troops that they intended to use against the attack on Russia 'cause they hadn't attacked Russia at that stage,

11:30 you see. I mean they had an entente with Russia, in fact, an agreement not to attack each other, but the Germans intended to do that all the time, to attack the Russians. Well, when the Germans had to use those troops that they intended to use against Russia they had to use them against the Australians in Greece and that held up their attack on Russia by six weeks, and six weeks was,

12:00 meant they were well into winter, well into the snow, and the snow was, not only beat the Russians, of course, beat the Germans; it beat Napoleon. It's the snow that beat them.

How did you feel about the Germans?

We think they were good soldiers. Always thought they were good soldiers. I mean I was surprised, we didn't know what was actually going on in Germany 'cause we had no suspicions about these death camps

12:30 or anything like that, we knew nothing about them. And the average German soldier's an honourable bloke. One of my best mates, he'd dead now, he was in the German Army, and I mean the first time I met him I was hostile to him but he was just an ordinary bloke the same as I am, see.

Did you feel that at the time then? Did you have a respect for them at the time or was...?

Oh yeah, we knew they were a good soldier, yeah, same as we know the Turks are good soldiers.

13:00 See, in the Great War, although they were fighting each other, the Australians and the Turks, they respected each other. You know, the Australians evacuated the Peninsula without opposition from the Turks, and the story is that the Turks didn't know. Well, I'm pretty well convinced the Turks did know but they

13:30 could see no point in keeping Australians there if they wanted to go, so they didn't attack, just let them go.

So what drove you to put your life on the line and be willing to kill those guys without surrender or some hate?

Oh no, we didn't, I don't think I looked at it, at that stage I probably didn't look at it like, no, not before I joined the AIF, no.

No, no, I'm talking about in Africa. You're in there fighting, your life's, there's mortars going off around you, you have to fire at people, there's people dying around you.

That's right.

Without anger or hate, or what's keeping you

14:00 **there if you respect them and think they're nice guys?**

Wasn't much else, no, I don't quite say it that they were the same as we were. They had a job to do and when they surrendered they surrendered, that's it, that was the finish, that's... There was a couple of things that happened in the desert that we didn't like. On one occasion some Italian soldiers surrendered, they come out of a cave and

14:30 surrendered, and our fellows went into the cave and these blokes were outside then started throwing hand grenades in. I mean you don't surrender and then entice the enemy in and then try and destroy them. Well, to tell you the truth, those fellows outside were dispensed with, they were mowed down, but that was that was a lousy act. I mean if you surrender you've surrendered. We had the same, as far as I'm concerned we had the same opposition

15:00 with Bennett in Malaysia. He surrendered his troops and then, he surrendered, then he did a bunk. I mean if you're going to surrender your troops you stay with them, you don't leave them in the lurch. Well, that's what Bennett did. As far as I'm concerned he deserted his troops.

Did you make a distinction in your feelings towards the Germans versus the Japanese, was there different feelings towards the Japanese?

15:30 Yeah, yeah, has there has to be.

At the time?

Yes, because of what they did, the way they come into the war. They were negotiating peace and all the time they were preparing to attack. They were negotiating with the Yanks [Americans] and all the time they're well and truly preparing to attack, and they did attack, what, ten to eight in the morning or something?

16:00 **Were you in the training camp at that point?**

No, I was in... I was, yep, I was, yeah, when they came in I was actually in Jerusalem that night, I was in Jerusalem on weekend leave, yeah.

How did that news come through? How did you hear about it?

On the radio wireless, yeah.

And what were your initial, what was your initial response?

Well, we were, we actually wanted to come home.

16:30 I have only two letters I had that I wrote during the war. They were letters I wrote to my mother straight after that, and somehow or other my brother had them for years and I got them a couple of years ago. But in that letter I said, "There's not one of us who would not like to, would not want to be home to defend Australia." At that stage that's what I wrote.

Was there that immediate sense that Australia was directly under threat once Japan entered the war?

Not immediately, we

17:00 believed that Singapore was defendable and it wasn't, because the assumption was that the attack would come from the south and it come from the north. So was, going back on that first attack on Haifa, there in fact we expected them to come from the west and they come over Mount Carmel from the from the east, which meant they had to go round through Syria

17:30 and back out to get us from behind in effect. And first we didn't believe they were enemy planes, they were coming from the wrong direction.

So the news came through shortly after Japan entered the war for you to return to Australia?

Oh well, almost. No, we weren't coming back to Australia. The intention was not for us to come back to Australia; our intention was to go to Rangoon, that's my opinion, and I can only go by

18:00 events. We moved off in January to the Canal and then down on the railway to Port Tewfik and the story is I didn't see this but some of the fellows said they saw the Queen Mary with her bow bombed off, her [bow] blown off. I didn't see that, I only heard that. And

18:30 we went onto the Mauritania which is about 64,000 tonnes I think, about three times the size of the other ship we went on. And from there we went to Bombay and we're in Bombay about, oh, about 14 days, I suppose. We left that ship, left the Mauri [Mauritania], and went into a camp

19:00 at Colaba which is a British camp, and we were, oh, great curiosity to the British kids. They were children of the British soldiers, they were, and out of... Our blokes were surrounded by these British kids and I said to one of these kids "Is your father a soldier too?" He said, "No, he's a sergeant major,"

19:30 which is fair enough I suppose. But we, you know, we had to deal mostly with kids but we had tons of leave there and we went into Bombay itself, into one of the service clubs. There's probably only one service club there but it was huge and it was looked after by the wives of British soldiers and plus the Indian

20:00 women. And I had a relative, not a relative, actually my sister-in-law's cousin who was a jockey in India, and I knew that Wally Sibbett was there somewhere in India, so very idly I said to one of these women "Would you know of a jockey named Wally Sibbett?" "Oh yes, his wife's here tonight,"

20:30 which was rather remarkable, I thought, you know. Anyway she went and brought her, and Wally's wife I can't even think of her name at this stage, she invited us, myself and my mate, to go to their place the next day, which they lived on Malabar Hill, and that's the high, really high class part of Bombay, and she said, "You'll have no trouble finding us. All you have to do is ask someone and they'll tell you where we live." So we got there and beautiful

21:00 block of flats they had and each flat had its own private swimming pool. You wouldn't, you can't believe that, but that's an absolute fact, and Wally of course is there. I say he didn't know me from a bar of soap, nor did his wife, and his father-in-law was there, and his father-in-law was Frank Bullock. You've probably never heard of Frank Bullock, but Frank Bullock was King George V's jockey and then afterwards his horse trainer. And

21:30 he was, whether he was visiting there or living in India I don't know, but his son Frank also, he was in the British Army up on the border. And while we were there the Indians, the poor Indians, the poverty-stricken ones, were coming to the door and asking for a tip for the races, and the races in India are on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

22:00 And while he was telling them, but he said he can't tell them the truth so he'd tell each one a different horse 'cause he was... And one of them would get a winner. Now, one out of that perhaps 10 would get a winner and they'd think he was absolutely fair dinkum but he said he couldn't be fair dinkum because how could he tell them the truth, and he told me that every race is fixed, every

22:30 race is fixed in India. The jockeys fix the races but the jockeys can't bet on them because the moment the jockey has a bet everyone knows.

Did a lot of the Aussie lads go down to the races while you were away on...?

No, we didn't have an opportunity as far as I'm concerned. It was arranged though that my mate and myself, we'd go to the races on the Friday, we'd meet Wally's wife at the races, she'd tell us what to back. Well, that suited us, but the truth is that this is on the Wednesday.

23:00 On the Friday we sailed on the Egret and we never got to the races and I never had the opportunity to tell Wally's wife that we wouldn't be there, but I hope they understood that we just couldn't tell them. And Wally rode three winners, as I found out when I got to Colombo and read the race results.

Was gambling an important part of the Australian troops' culture? Were a lot of guys into the gambling?

Oh yeah.

23:30 Yes, that's right. I mean it was banned, officially it was banned, but never enforced. I mean people have to have some sort of diversion. And no, officially there was no such thing as gambling, you're not allowed, but two-up games starts, any old thing like that, crown-and-anchor, banker, all these games. And I ran a banker game at one stage and nothing else to do, I ran a banker game,

24:00 made some money out of it too. I don't know that this happens anymore. I don't think it happens in the Australian Army any more, I don't think that happens in Australia because they have plenty to do. They can go to a club and play poker machines if they want to gamble. And I also think that the way

24:30 some of these places officially play two-up it's not two-up any more, they don't play the correct game. It's supposed to be two-up but, and if you throw a head and a tail you have another spin. Well, the way they run it now, you lose your money if they do it so many times, you lose your money, lose all their money, everyone loses their money, goes to the banker and that

25:00 so it doesn't, it's not two-up that they're playing.

Frank, is gambling an important, or the gambling spirit an important part of warfare did you find as an infantryman? Is the gambling spirit or a gambling nature amongst the leaders and the infantrymen important?

Oh, I don't say that, I don't say the leaders, I can't answer that one. But certainly...

Oh, I guess your immediate commanders within the infantry, is the gambling spirit...?

Oh no, they didn't, not to my knowledge, no they wouldn't do it. I mean that would be a bad example.

No, what I'm saying to you

25:30 **is taking a gamble in the warfare, not flipping coins, I'm just talking about a gambling spirit?**

Oh you're, no, I think you'd think a long a long time before you did, before you moved, you wouldn't just, unless it was... You had to be involuntary such as people who get a VC [Victoria Cross]. I mean they don't think about it. Ned Kenner,

26:00 ask Ned Kenner how he got the VC and he'd say, "I just happened to be there at the time." That's what he'll tell you, that's exactly what he'll tell you. I remember some brash young reporter asking him once, was a female I think, I watched it on TV [television], Ned's a good mate of mine and she pointed to his VC and said, "What'd you get that for?" He said, "Buggered if I know." What the hell did she expect him to say? Did she expect to get all the detail? You know, it was just a stupid question

26:30 and she must have known what he got it for, surely to God before she interviewed him she'd read up something about it. Anyway that's Ned, anyway that's Ned Kenner.

How important were medals and recognition to you guys?

Not important, we didn't, no, they were not important. No-one gave a thought to them, no-one gave a thought to medals. See the Great War, I don't know whether it's known, in the Great War no Australian soldier got more than three medals unless he had a

27:00 a gallantry award of some kind, but the most they could have was three. Most of them only had two 'cause they had to be there in 1915 to get that third one or the first one if you like. The others were just certainly Victory Medal and War Medal, I think they might have called them. But we come back to Australia in 1942 and the place was overrun with Yanks. Most of them had two rows of ribbons and they'd just come into the war.

27:30 Seems silly we had none except those that had the Victoria, no Victoria Crosses, those that had the war medal, the DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal], and very few of them, or the Military Medal. Some maybe was in our battalion at that stage, maybe seven people had a medal, and this is after two and a

half years of war.

Did that not make them more valuable then or make them more prestigious?

28:00 Well, of course they did the way we did it. You know I've got 10 medals there, I mean ridiculous, yeah. It's, by giving medals for everything you cheapen the medal.

Which of those is really important to you? What's the most important medal to you?

I can't, I won I think an unofficial one is, the most important is an unofficial one. That was not issued by the army at all and that is the Front Line Soldier

28:30 Medal.

Who issued that?

We bought it. It was made up by one of the I think the 2/16th Battalion evolved it and sold it, and we bought it and wear it because that's the front line soldier. I mean that's, that clerk back at headquarters couldn't get that, you know, you had to actually be in the battles.

What about rank, how important was that?

It was important only from the point of view of money as far as I'm concerned,

29:00 extra money. It wasn't the authority.

Was the distinction between ranks greater or less in the battlefield, in the heat of battle, was it more important or less important?

It was of no importance whatever. I mean no, rank didn't, you'd respect the rank but I mean it wasn't terribly important. Even the fellows that had the rank

29:30 didn't use it in battle to show their authority, they didn't, because each knew the other one, the blokes they were ordering knew as much about it as they did. They were all capable of carrying that rank so it's just that in the first place one got the rank, he hung onto it, he kept it or he lost it, but no, we respected rank but I don't think anyone with the rank

30:00 tried to exploit it, I don't think so.

In the training environment it's kind of a similar being an instructor, being a leader. Are there special qualities you required to be a good instructor?

You'd have to have a lot of empathy I think to understand the other bloke's point of view too. I did an Officers' School and this taught me something. At that Officers' School I was

30:30 the only one who'd been in action, and one of the instructors, his name was McKikran and he was a staff sergeant. Now, most of the instructors were called, were staff sergeants, and we had a passing out parade or a dinner actually, and McKikran come and sat down next to me. He said, "Frank, I want to say thank you." I said, "What for?" He said,

31:00 "You know that everything I was teaching was bullshit and you never, and you didn't tell the others," and he said, "but I had to go by what's in the book, I had to teach," he said, "and you know a lot of it's wrong but you respected me and didn't make a fool of me by telling I was wrong." But as he says he had to teach from the book, and he knew he was wrong.

Was that a

31:30 **frustration that you encountered as an instructor?**

No, because I don't think I did go by the book. I went by common sense, yeah.

You think that that was an important approach to take, given the circumstances?

That's right. You, not only do you tell them what to do but you tell them why. I mean don't have them asking them you "Why am I going to do this,

32:00 why are you telling me to do this?" Tell them why in the first place and they do it.

That's interesting 'cause it's part of, the opposite of the normal military approach, isn't it? "You infantrymen don't need to know why, you just do it?"

Well, they probably do know why without being told. Australia particularly but I see the way the Yanks train people, I mean using them and yelling at them, I mean that's not, gee, how can you

32:30 get respect out of that? I can't follow that. And I think the Australian soldiers these days are doing it following the Yanks on that. All you're doing is creating an enmity that's not a camaraderie at all. That's in my opinion, but that's only an opinion.

So why do you think it's important to explain why you're doing a certain task?

33:00 Yes, of course it is it is. You have to, they have to know why they're going to do this, and of course you may not be there in five minutes because you could be dead and someone else has got to know what to do and why they're doing it, so it's best for everyone to know. Yeah, that's, again I'm expressing an opinion. I've known a lot of blokes who'd disagree with me but that's my opinion of that.

This is interesting coming

33:30 **from someone in the position of an infantryman and then as an instructor that you've developed that opinion, because of course many would say they don't need to know why at all. Just get in there and follow orders.**

But that was the old system, you know, "theirs but to do or die". I mean that no, theirs is to do but not necessarily to die. That's, you know, of course that's what Hague made the error in the Great War, he kept sending in thousands of troops, being mowed down, send another thousand

34:00 and mow them down, but didn't work, and Hague from what I can gather was hated 'cause he was doing all this from England, he wasn't anywhere near the battlefield.

Speaking of getting back towards the battlefield, were you in Bombay when you heard about the fall of Singapore or had you moved on to Colombo?

Singapore fell on the 15th of February.

34:30 No, we in Bombay, no it hadn't fallen at that stage, no.

So you were on your way to Colombo or in Colombo?

No, we'd left Colombo, I'm moderately certain. I can work out the dates. We left on the 14th, Colombo. We were on our way to Colombo when it fell. Yeah, we knew in Colombo, we knew.

That must have been quite a shock?

35:00 Yeah, because it happened so suddenly, yeah, and we knew that - we felt anyway, we were never told officially that we were going to Rangoon. And I told you about meeting Wally Sibbetts and his family. Well, when we were going back, walking back into Bombay from Malabar Hill,

35:30 was a huge crowd in - it's one of the main thoroughfares walking into Bombay, can't think of it. Anyway, doesn't matter. Was a huge crowd and I saw on the other side of the footpath walking past me was a fellow dressed completely in white. White beard and a robe right down to his feet,

36:00 and I touched my mate and I said, "That's the fakir [holy man]," I whispered it, and he said, "What's a fakir?" The next thing there's a tap on my shoulder. I looked around and this fellow was there. He said, "I'm not a fakir, I'm a holy man." Well, I didn't think he could hear me, I was really surprised. And he said

36:30 "I will tell you your future for one rupee." Well, I mean I'd insulted the bloke by calling him a fakir when he was a holy man, so the least I could do was give him a rupee. So I gave him the rupee and he produced from somewhere a tray of sand and he said, "Rub your fingers through this, through the sand," and I did, you know,

37:00 felt stupid doing it but I did it, and he said, "You think you're going one place, you're going another." Well, I knew where I thought I was going, I thought I was going to Rangoon, but how would he know that is what I was thinking? And

37:30 "You will be disappointed, you are going to have a disappointment," that's right, a disappointment. Well, I had lots of them, everyone has them. "You will be in your own country in one month." Well, that was stupid because we were going the other way. "You'll be in your home in three months,"

38:00 and that was even more stupid because if I'm, once I'm in my own country I'm not going to take another two months to get home, that's how I worked it out, see, so it was all hooey. And he said 'You'll marry, you think you'll marry the fair one, you'll marry the dark one." Well, I had no intention of getting married anyway, but there was a fair girl that I was writing to and there was a dark girl

38:30 that I was writing to, that's true, but anyone can guess that and, as I say, on the Friday we sailed so I didn't get to the races. That was the disappointment for a start, I didn't get there. And we left, we arrived at Colombo and were there one day and then off again in the Egret, and we, around Colombo

39:00 and sailing north, and on the Sunday night we ran into what we thought was a hail, a storm, a lightning storm, that's what we called it, that's what we, we were actually admiring it. And then suddenly we turned and ran, the ship turned around and the convoy scattered. It was a sea battle we were running into. It was, and there was two British cruisers sunk in that sea battle.

39:30 In fact we fridged [?] her back in Ceylon and that's the only time we decided to come back to Australia. That's when it was. I mean what the fakir was saying, the holy man was saying, it was not correct until we started back to Australia and that was maybe a week later and, well, more than a week later, and we

40:00 finished up in our own country in Fremantle and a week later in Adelaide, and two months after that home, I got leave. He was absolutely right. One month's time in Australia, three months' time in my own home and, as I say, I had no intention of getting married

40:30 but I wrote to these girls, told them I'd be home. I knew I was getting' leave, I'd be home within a week or so, whatever it might have been. I get a letter from one of the girls saying that when I came home she would be in Armidale.

Tape 6

00:31 I got this letter from this girl saying she would not be home and I thought, "Well, OK, that's one way of getting out of it. That's the one that she's saying she doesn't want to see me." As a matter of fact she insists that that's not true, she did have to go to Armidale, but I actually wasn't broken-hearted about that. And when we arrived in Sydney, we arrived in Sydney on

01:00 the 1st of June, and that was the night that the sub[marine]s came into Sydney Harbour and I don't know, I can't even remember how I found out about the subs. I must have had other things on my mind. But I certainly don't remember reading about the subs coming into Sydney Harbour that day. I'd have bought the paper and I'd have read the paper but I can't remember. And

01:30 to go back a bit, on the 6th of January 1940 I was in town with a with a mate and we walked down George Street and we were eyeing the sheilas as we normally did, and finished up at Central Station at the Central Station milk bar, on the concourse leading up from Eddie Avenue. And so we decided to have a milkshake, neither of us drank beer, and so we had a milkshake and

02:00 got talking to two girls there, and as the usual thing they wanted to know if they could write to us and we gave them our names and addresses to write to and off we went, give them, as far as I'm concerned, I didn't give them another thought and I'm sure that Eddie didn't give them another thought either. But one of the first letters I received in Colombo on the way going away was a letter from, addressed to me and starting off "Dear

02:30 Private Rowell" because I didn't put my first name down when we gave these addresses, I just put my initial. And it was "Dear Private Rowell, you probably don't remember me. I'm the girl from the milk bar," and so she went on. And turned out that her father had been in the Divisional 4th Battalion and he told her it was all right to write to me because, you know, it'd be all right because I was in the right battalion. But I'd written her, this girl,

03:00 the whole time I was away and so I went home and saw my mother for the first time in two and a half years and my sister and brother-in-law come down, you know, and then I decided well, I'd go out to Belfield and see this other girl that I was writing to. And oh, before that she was at Central Station, as I told you,

03:30 and so I called in at the milk bar and asked for her and the girl said, "Oh, are you Frank?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Oh, Norma's taking a week off. She said for you to go to her home." Well, at least I mean she wasn't going somewhere else, so I actually went to her home and knocked at the door and actually her sister came to the door and she called out "Norma!" and Norma came out. She'd had a, she'd been asleep,

04:00 her hair was all over the place, she was barefooted and I remember she saying, you know, "It's been a long time," and I agreed it had been a long time. I went in and that's when I met my wife for the second time; we were married the following Saturday.

You were married the following Saturday?

We were married the following Saturday, yeah, and we were married for 57 years.

04:30 **Tell me about that decision to get married so quickly?**

Because I didn't want to get married in war time but Norma said, "If we don't get married now you won't marry me at all," and she might have been right, I don't know. But I tell you I wanted to marry her but I thought it was unfair in wartime, that's right, and I just thought it was unfair to marry

05:00 in wartime. And turned out to be all right. I mean she was right and to get married, and we were married on the Saturday afternoon and I went back to my unit on the Saturday night so we didn't have a honeymoon. It was...

And did you have to wait till war's end to be able to start your marriage, so to speak?

05:30 No, because I saw, I got leave in March the following year so that was that, and our first son was born exactly 18 months after we were married.

And did you develop a good relationship with her father, was...?

Oh yeah.

06:00 Oh yes, he... No, she went home, I'm told that, by the family, she went home that night and she said, "Today I met the boy I'm going to marry," just like that so as far as she was concerned, you know, it was love at first sight. I had to wait for the second sight but that's absolutely true, and the family would not have told me that

06:30 if it wasn't true.

What sort of role did writing letters home play for you when you were off in the desert?

Oh, major. You wrote whenever you had the opportunity. You didn't, most important thing was to write letters and, as I say, not one of the letters I wrote except those two to my mother are still around, and I didn't keep any letters in the finish. I mean

07:00 I kept them in the first place but in the finish there was too many and didn't keep them, so there's no correspondence, unfortunately.

You were quite good at English, weren't you?

I topped the Qualifying Certificate for English in the state, I topped that the year I sat for the QC. You don't have the QC

07:30 any more. You had to have a, you had to pass the QC to go to a secondary school and we called the QC a Qualifying Certificate. Officially it was called the certificate to enrol in a secondary school, but in those days - I'm talking 1930, early 1930 - there were very few high schools and it was all competitive. You had to,

08:00 only the top scholars got to a high school and it was selective high schools, all high schools were selective. For instance Fort Street and Sydney High were the two main schools. If you get to Sydney High I mean you were top, but almost you had to live in the eastern suburbs to do it just the same, and Fort Street would be the second one. I suppose Parramatta might have

08:30 been the third; that was my school, Parramatta, it might have been the third. But [there] was only about nine high schools in the whole of Sydney and so you were lucky to get into a high school or you had to be smart.

You had a good control of the English language, though, I guess was what I was getting at. You could write a mean letter, could you?

Oh yeah. I still write letters to the paper running people down, yeah.

09:00 I get a lot of fun out of it.

So you were only back in Sydney a very short while before you met your wife and were married. Can you tell me about your homecoming in terms of seeing your mother and sisters again?

Oh look, it's... I get a bit emotional about this. No, it was, the feeling was indescribable,

09:30 how I felt was indescribable. I found difficulty in talking but I couldn't help but touch my mother, touch her, yeah. She had a big sign up outside the door, "Welcome home". She must have cut a sheet in half to do it I think, and because with three of us - I mean I wasn't the only one,

10:00 I had two brothers in the Middle East as well, but they were home long before I was and so perhaps this same piece of cloth served all the purposes, the three of us. But no, Mum was, I'm convinced that Mum thought I'd never come home. She even gave my dinner suit away, she gave it to a fellow named Hurps

10:30 who afterwards was an opera singer. I don't know whether he wore my dinner suit on the stage, I don't know whether he did or not, but Mum gave it away. She gave my clothes away. There was none of my clothes were left when I come home, Mum'd given them away. She, I think she was convinced I wouldn't come back. And anyway I did come back.

Had that image of

11:00 **seeing her from the train stuck with you throughout your experience? Was it something you thought about when you were cold or hot in the desert?**

No, you didn't think about it a great deal. You remembered it later, but poor old Mum, I saw her that time and then she moved down the south coast to where she was born, that's where she died, so that was just one time that I saw my mother so...

Was on your return?

11:30 That week that I was home that was it, and she, I mean I kept writing to Mum and she kept writing to me of course, but we, strictly speaking I spent very little time with my mother when I came home because every day I went out with Norma, my wife-to-be, and I'd go home to sleep, that's all,

12:00 which was unfair, I was unfair doing it. I realise all that now but you don't think of it at the time. I was unfair to Mum doing that. And she, before I sailed Sunday before, so the last of my final leave, which was only I think five days anyway, on

12:30 the Sunday Mum said, "Well, let's go down to the Domain," and I had, all my gear was packed with everything to take back to camp so we went to the Domain. I'm carrying everything, rifle, bayonet, the whole lot. And I'd never been to the Domain before in my life unless it was when the Harbour Bridge was opened, I'm not sure, I think we went to the Botanical Gardens

13:00 again with my mother but I don't think I'd been to the Domain. But there was a lot of spruiking going on, you know, and there was a speaker there and Mum said, "Oh, that's Mr Ward." And Mum was an ardent Laborite [for the Labor Party] and we walked towards them, and Eddie Ward pointed his finger at me, he said, "There's a five bob a day killer," you know.

13:30 Well, the policeman then come to me. He said, you know, "You're carrying a dangerous weapon." I said, "Well, it's not loaded." He said, "Yes, but it's pretty heavy. Would you like to put it in the police van?" I said, "On one condition." He said, "What's that?" I said, "That I can put all my gear in the police van so I don't have to carry it," and he allowed me to do that. And

14:00 by this time a crowd had gathered, and my mother collapsed and an ambulance came, and there was some photographers there trying to take photos, from the newspapers I guess. Well, I fought them, I pushed their cameras all over the place, and they wanted to know my name and I didn't tell them.

14:30 And so Mum was taken off to hospital, so I collected my gear and I went to Sydney Hospital where Mum was. And she was released from hospital, she didn't stay, she was all right, and I went with her. Instead of going back to camp I went home, so I admit I was ack-willy [AWL – Absent Without Leave] for that night. And the next day in The Telegraph it's, in the front page of The

15:00 Telegraph is the back of my mother's head on this ambulance stretcher and her poor old grey hair's there, and the article said that the police confiscated - that's the way they put it - confiscated the rifle off Private McIntosh. Well, my mother's name was McIntosh, Mum had remarried after, I think two years before the war,

15:30 and, you know, no-one confiscated anything. The policeman had no authority to make me put that rifle in. When he suggested I do it I did it because it saved me carrying it, so long as I put the rest of my gear there as well. Any rate I've not brought the Daily Telegraph since then. It's a, what's there was an absolute

16:00 lie, you know, and why put the back of my mother's head as a big photo in the front page of The Telegraph, why do it? Absolutely unnecessary. But they obviously got my mother's name thinking it was mine from the hospital.

How did the war fit with your mother's politics? Was she against the war?

No. I don't

16:30 say that she was for it either, you know, we never discussed it, to be truthful, no. I'd say that I think my mother understood that it was inevitable, I think she understood that.

She was proud of her sons?

Oh yeah. That's why I'm convinced we went down the Domain. Mum was hanging on to me for as long as she could, knowing that that was the last time she'd see me till, or perhaps forever, and that's why she was

17:00 hung on to me for as long as she could by saying "Let's go down to the Domain, instead of going back to camp go down to the Domain and then go home back to camp," and because I don't think Mum wanted to go down to the Domain really, I don't think she did, it's just that that's how it worked out. No, she was…

And it was a Labor politician, Ward?

Eddie Ward, yeah.

Who had a go at you personally?

That's right, yeah. Mum knew him, you know, she

17:30 was proud to know him. I don't think she was proud after that, but I mean she certainly was previously, when Mum was… All my family except me at this stage were ardent Laborites. I joined the Labor party the day I turned 16 and I gave it away when Eddie Ward pointed to me and said, "There's a five bob a day killer," you know, I gave the Labor Party away that day.

Did you feel at that time that the war was

18:00 **beyond politics, it was beyond politicising, it was a just war?**

It had to be a just war. It was inevitable. Hitler had to be stopped, that's all there was to it. I mean appeasement didn't work, it didn't work. I can't blame Chamberlain really because I think that he was in a position where he knew that we didn't have the army,

18:30 he didn't, Britain didn't have the army or the equipment to fight a war at that stage, and actually 12 months later they were in a much better position. But England could not have won that war unless the Germans attacked Russia, and that saved England. No, no matter what anyone else says, that saved England, the Germans attacking Russia.

19:00 Germany could have, after Dunkirk Germany could have walked into England without any doubt because most of the arms that Britain had was left in France, they were unarmed, so that was one part of the war where Hitler certainly made an error. He should have got on with it if he wanted to win, and I think he wanted to win but he probably thought England was stronger than it was. There again,

19:30 he probably thought, "Well, I've got the whole of Europe, why do I want that little place like England? Let me go the other way and take Russia as well."

Frank, how important was the notion of the Empire to you?

Terribly important, yeah.

Did you make a distinction between fighting for the Empire or fighting for Australia?

I don't think we did, I don't think any of us looked at it that way.

You were fighting for Australia and the Empire?

20:00 Yes, as it happened. But I don't think we went into it as deeply as that. I can remember sitting in the tent one night in Palestine and we were talking about why we joined the army, and whatever we said I think we were all telling lies. But one fellow said, "To fight for King and country," and someone

20:30 else said, "A bloody patriot," and the, but no-one would acknowledge that they were patriots. I mean none of us would have said we were patriots, I don't think so, but chances are we were but we wouldn't have said it.

Why not?

Well, no, we just wouldn't have, no fear. We just said, as I just said, the moment the bloke said he fought for King and country he was (UNCLEAR) for being a patriot.

21:00 Now, the fellow who made that statement was probably just as much a patriot as he was, they were probably just the same, but you had to pretend that you're not.

So you have a code, a funny duality going on here, where you're with these group of friends who you're fighting alongside and fighting for. You've become incredibly close, have very strong bonds, and yet there's a lot of examples you've given us of where you lie or you pretend. You pretend you're not scared,

21:30 **you pretend you want to stay with the unit when you're injured, you pretend not to be a patriot and you pretend not to be fighting for the Empire. It's a funny world isn't it, a funny relationship you have within the group?**

Oh, I think we all understood each other, you know. See, you just didn't admit it, that's all. So no, I don't think there's anything really strange about it, it's just that every man is different. There's no two people really the same,

22:00 there's a little difference somewhere. Really the funny things interest me more than the serious things in the war. I don't laugh much, I'm not a great laugher. I was on TV in the Anzac Day march. The film stops on me

22:30 and that night a lady rang me, said, "I saw you on TV, you were laughing." See, you know, the remarkable thing that, not that she saw me on the telly but that I was laughing, because I don't laugh. It's just, doesn't mean that I'm not laughing inside but I'm not laughing outwardly and they're probably... You heard that girl today. She was fair dinkum when she said, "He's cranky." She meant it

23:00 because that's how I appear, and be impossible to stop me, to change me. I couldn't change, that's the way I am. I'm also very truthful. I mean I can't see any point in telling a lie. Once you tell one lie you got to tell another one, so a girl wrote to me. Some guy said to her, she wrote back,

23:30 "Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we set out to deceive," which she was only, she was quoting Bobby Burns, whether she knew it or not, but that's who she was quoting. But it's true. I mean once you tell one lie you've got to cover it with another one, and where do you finish?

How does it fit then with not being honest about how scared you were?

No, that doesn't come into it. No, you're not telling a lie to hurt somebody in that way, you're,

24:00 and you don't say, "I'm not frightened," you don't say it. I mean that's the last thing in the world you'd

say, that I'm not frightened, 'cause everyone knew you were telling a lie, but you don't say, "I'm frightened," you just don't say it.

And yet many of the guys we speak to still say, "Oh no, mate, I was never scared. Oh, I wasn't scared at all."

Total diddle. I mean if they weren't frightened they were back at headquarters.

How did you cope with those moments

24:30 **where you were terrified? What do you do?**

Just carried on. What else could you do?

Did you focus on your job?

Yeah, well you had to do something and so you kept doing, that's it. No, the fact that you're frightened, the real strength I think is overcoming that fright. I mean if you've never been frightened you haven't overcome it at all, you overcome nothing if you've never been frightened,

25:00 and I read that the other day. You, what's the old saying? "Our strength lies not in never falling but in rising after we are down." I think it was Shakespeare said that, but that is the – how, I don't know how to put this - you just, you're not telling a lie but

25:30 you're simply not telling everything; you're leaving some things out. It's a sin of omission, I guess that's what that would be, not a commission, omission, but I...

That's necessary in that environment very much over time?

Yeah, but once one bloke shows fear the other bloke does. I have mentioned about seasickness. If my mate had got seasick so would I or vice versa, you follow,

26:00 and most everyone on that boat that had never sailed before was seasick, that's all there was to it.

If you're not going to show fear, how important is humour in coping with those?

That's the saving grace, humour, if you can laugh.

Did you learn to laugh a lot more when you were there?

Oh no, you don't necessarily. Well no, you may say something rather than actually laugh.

26:30 I guess the reason I don't laugh much is because I was brought up as a lone kid. I don't mean I was the only kid 'cause there were eight of us, but I'd wander off on my own on the farm, I'd disappear for the day when I was five years old, I'd go walking around the place. I was interested in everything that was going on that I could see looking into hollow trees and everything else, but

27:00 I didn't have any playmates. And I'm not saying this as a complaint, I'm just making it as a statement and so that's why I was a loner if you like, and even now I mean I live alone with the dog. I can put up with that and lots of fellows can't. They have to have someone to talk to. I don't have to have someone to talk to. I can get along by reading or writing. I can do, I can get along all right.

27:30 My kids come here. I don't go to my kids' place, they come to my place. Well, one of the reasons I don't go to their place is I don't have transport any more; I gave up driving 15 years ago. But I can travel by public transport, I have no problems, I can get along all right with public transport. I'm only like 50 yards from the bus stop. Yes, it's a...

28:00 No, I can't, you know, you laugh in relief, you giggle or something like that. I've told you about the Stubby Wright had his pants almost ripped off him. Well, we laughed. Could have killed him but we laughed, we thought it was funny, but I suppose there was a laugh

28:30 of relief rather than anything else that he wasn't killed.

Tension breaker?

Hm?

Tension release?

Yeah, that's right, yeah.

How close were you to your two brothers who enlisted?

How close was I, you mean physically?

Oh, I mean as in relationship-wise, were you in contact with [them] throughout?

Oh well, one of them's with my own battalion. He was CQMS [Company Quarter Master Sergeant] of C Company and so I saw him

29:00 now and then, not often because the companies didn't mix a great deal. I mean we ate in different tents, and he being staff sergeant of course he was in the in the sergeants' mess so I didn't see a great deal of Rex. I never went on leave with him during the whole war. We never went on leave together.

Did you sign on together, enlist together?

No, we didn't.

29:30 I went to Homebush and enlisted and then first day in camp, was it, Rex drove in in his Essex Super Six and I thought, "Oh, Rex." I recognised it of course and I thought, "Rex is trying to tell me what a silly bugger I am," but Rex was in the… Neither of knew the other was joined up, we didn't know that, no.

And which was your brother from the 2/17th?

30:00 That was my brother Ted.

Was he older?

Oh yes, I was the youngest boy, yeah.

Oh, you were the youngest boy?

Yeah.

And what was Ted, infantry as well?

Yes.

2/17th, and he managed to survive the war as well?

Yes, he survived the war, but Ted died when he was 63 which is comparatively young. He died of a huge cerebral haemorrhage.

30:30 No, Ted was a very quiet bloke. He and I were the best of mates. When I was a kid we were the best of mates. He was five years older than I was but we were still the best of mates and, as I say, once he was 13 or 14 when I was only nine so I was I couldn't be his mate. That's,

31:00 we had different interests and eventually I played sport and none of my brothers did. I played cricket only.

What made you enlist in the CMF [Civilian Military Forces] at such a young age of 14?

Oh, I suppose it would be a little bit like

31:30 the wife of a shopkeeper said to me after the war, and I disagree with her, but she said, "Oh, but you were always military-minded." Well, I wasn't. I mean I can't say that I was military-minded. I don't know why I, my two brothers were in that

32:00 same unit and I knew a lot of the fellows in the unit because through my brothers. And one of the company commanders there, he was killed in Greece, he went to Parramatta the same as I did although not at the same time, and so I had no problem about

32:30 being accepted. I was accepted, everyone knew I was under-age, everyone knew that, and I was comparatively small, too. Even when I joined the AIF they couldn't find a uniform small enough for me. I mean they were two sizes too big or too little but my case I could never, I could not in the first place get something to fit me. Even my hat, I made the mistake with the size of my hat. I thought I put five and six-eighths

33:00 but, ah, six and five-eighths or seven and five-eighths, whatever it was. I was an eighth too small. I was an eighth bigger than I thought I was so my hat always was bedraggled because I had to push it down, force it down on my head, and it intrigues me when I see the present day soldiers wearing their hats square on their head. Looks stupid. They don't look like diggers at all,

33:30 they, I don't know what they look like. The Canadian Mounted Police, that's about the closest I can get it, or Boy Scouts.

Your brothers were already enlisted in the CMF when you decided to join?

Oh yes, they'd had some years there. As I say, Rex was a staff sergeant then in the CMF. Ted was only a private. He was a machine gunner.

Do you know

34:00 **what lead them to become involved?**

I think boredom. You come off the farm and, you know, got to do something at night and yeah, I guess that was it. I don't know what their, I can't, I could guess but I could be wrong what their intentions were, but they liked it, they liked the

companionship of the other blokes.

When you were in the CMF prior to war breaking out what were your attitudes towards the permanent army?

I wanted to join the permanent army. I wanted to join but I was always found to be too small.

Did you experience, when you joined the AIF was there any tensions between the CMF and the guys who had volunteered purely for the AIF?

We probably engendered a bit of it ourselves.

We, you know, we referred to them as “chocos” [chocolate soldiers - militia] and all that sort of thing, and I did too. I say when, I was as bad as anybody else, but when I was in New Guinea and I saw these kids I changed my mind. I still call them chocos.

Even though you’d been one?

No, we weren’t chocos at that, no we weren’t. Chocolate soldiers were blokes who have no intention of,

I don’t know how you can put it. But when I went to New Guinea and I saw these kids and they were kids 18 19 year old and I saw them in action and coming out of action, I still call them chocos but it’s not derogatory any more. It’s not meant to be derogatory and it isn’t. It’s with a huge amount of love, that’s how I, because we...

I had one particular fellow in New Guinea used to come to me, “Anything I can do, Sarge, anything I can do?” and the poor beggar was dying. He didn’t know it. The army wouldn’t send him home because he had tapeworms or something,

and he should have been sent home but they kept him there till he died. ’Cause he was typical of them. Look at the 39th Battalion: on Kokoda they saved Australia, those kids, the 39th Battalion, because had the Japs got to Moresby it was just a stepping stone into Australian from then and they,

39th Battalion stopped them. There was the 54th there as well, ah, 53rd as well. The 53rd didn’t do so well but the 39th certainly stopped the Japs and even when they were relieved - I think it’s by the 2/16th Battalion, I’m not sure of that either - they didn’t want to leave, they wanted to stay. And they fought all the way over the Owen Stanleys

and they wanted to keep on fighting. You can’t do better than that, so how can you refer to them in a derogatory state and just say they’re chocos, you know? They were as good as any AIF unit.

So when you actually switched to the AIF, where you left CMF and joined the AIF... Oh, sorry, you were part of the Expeditionary Force, is that, and that’s before that time is it?

Oh yeah, they were two totally different armies.

The expeditionary force that you joined, were there tensions between the guys

who had been serving with the CMF and those that were fresh volunteers?

No, there was no tension.

And no concern about the carrying over of rank from the CMF into the Expeditionary Force?

I think we accepted it. It was not supposed to be so. We were all supposed to start as privates and we joined as privates but some blokes were immediately promoted because they were already sergeants

or corporals or something of the kind in the in the CMF. There again their own CO was probably our, well, not our, but CO of their particular unit. Dougherty was not our CO in the first place. Dougherty was 2IC of the 2/2nd Battalion. Dougherty, his lieutenant colonel was CMF in 1938 when he was aged 30 I think,

which was unheard of, you know, he was a school master, school teacher and Dougherty dropped a rank to major to go away with the AIF. And we had a Colonel Parsons who was, and he told me, he skited [boasted] to me, he said just after we went

into camp, he said, “Oh, you’re only a private today, son,” he said, “but look at me, I was a private in the Pioneers.” Well, you know, our opinion was he would still be a better private in the Pioneers, but anyhow that was just our opinion because he was a bloke who raved and roared but he didn’t get anywhere. After we’d finished with Haifa we went into this

“rest camp”, as we called it and we were coming out of the camp and this we saw this young bloke looked like a lieutenant, and someone said, “Who was that, who’s the new lieuie [lieutenant], but it wasn’t the new leiuie, he was a new Lieutenant Colonel Dougherty aged 31, but Dougherty never raved or roared. I’ve seen fellows go in to Dougherty

and he’s fined them five pounds and they’d come out almost crying saying what a great bloke he was. “He only fined me five.” But that was his limit, that’s the most he could fine them. That’s, they didn’t,

most of them didn't know that, but that was the CO's limit. He could not fine anyone more than five pounds or give them more than 28 days' detention. But Dougherty would tell them how they're letting their mates down and they'd be ashamed, he'd actually shame them.

41:00 And they'd come out praising him, and some of these blokes were, you know, out and outers, but they had such respect for Dougherty, we all did.

Tape 7

00:32 **Frank, you were just telling us about the time that Lieutenant Colonel Dougherty fined you. Could you tell that story again?**

Yeah. Well, he, as I say, I'd been sick all day with migraine. I didn't know, I'd never heard the word "migraine" but I knew that I had a terrible headache and you couldn't talk to me without me nearly crying with

01:00 the pain of it. I couldn't stand the noise, I couldn't stand the light. Anyway came time for mess at night and I walked up, my one ambition was to get a cup of tea, I hadn't eaten all day. And when I went to get the cup of tea and nothing else I was ordered to the end of the ranks, you know, follow the rest of them in. I said, "All I want's a cup of tea." "Get back to the end of the rank," so I did first, and then I said, "No, I want a cup of tea,"

01:30 and I refused to go back this time and I was charged with refusing to obey lawful command. And I say I did refuse to obey a lawful command. And next day up before Dougherty. I could have gone before my own company commander, he could have given me seven days' CB [confined to barracks] or something of the kind but I chose to go to Dougherty. And

02:00 Dougherty heard the story and he said, you know, "What do you have to say?" I said, "Well, that's true, sir, that's what happened," and so he fined me two pounds. And the following, well, I don't know, within the next week anyway, I was on guard at General Blamey's headquarters in Gaza and Dougherty came up and said, "How're you going, son?" I said, "All right, sir." He said, "I had no alternative, I had to fine you," and I said, "I understand that, sir," and he said, "There was nothing else I could do." And he

02:30 was saying, virtually to me he was apologising, you know, for doing it. And I, so I say, two pounds was a lot of money to me at that stage and as I told you earlier I lost my, I had to leave my pay book and jacket when I went to hospital, I never ever saw them again, and

03:00 eventually get a new pay book after it goes, the whole thing has to go back to Australia and come back to Middle East, they had to check all the records. And that two pounds was never deducted from my pay. It was certainly put in my pay book but never deducted in the pay office, and I couldn't understand that until there came a time when I

03:30 myself put someone up on a charge when I was acting RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major], and I didn't put him up on a charge. I took him in to be charged and he'd been ack-willy, and he said he'd gone AWL to marry a girl he'd got into trouble. That was his story and he told CO where he lived,

04:00 well, he actually lived where I used to live. Well, when we went outside I said, "Who was this girl you got into trouble?" and he said, "Oh no, that was only a story." And anyway I gave a lot of thought to it and I filled in his pay book to deduct the five pounds and the pay that he lost when he was away, then I tore up the charge report. See, there's two copies of the charge report.

04:30 One is kept in the unit and the other one goes to records. And I tore it up and I suppose to this day he wonders why he got all his money back because it never got deducted, and I'm convinced that Dougherty did that with my charge as well. I'm convinced that Dougherty did that.

Was the money important? Were you trying to save for your post-war life?

Oh no, how could you save? You couldn't, no, you couldn't save.

05:00 In some cases perhaps the banks for instance, the fellows who were working in the banks, they received their full pay less what they were getting in the army and it was credited to them with the bank, but that doesn't happen when you joined up as a labourer and out of work 'cause there's no-one to pay the money for you, and so that... I mean I was on

05:30 five bob a day, that's it, and until I was promoted that's what I was getting, five bob a day. Well actually, as I say, in the Middle East we got six bob a day. We got made up to the equivalent of the sterling and so we had more money to spend which made us more unpopular if possible with the Pommies because they were, most of them were on one shilling a day. So we were rich

06:00 compared with the Pommies [English], and yet they weren't volunteers, generally speaking anyway, they weren't volunteers. They were compelled, FIA [Forced Into Action], forced into action as we put it.

And where did the Aussies like to spend their money in the Middle East? You say there was

quite a drinking culture.

I imagine they, I imagine because it didn't apply to me, I didn't go to

06:30 pubs or anything, I didn't go in to drink, I didn't. If I spent money it'd be on something that I could send home or if I had to pay to go into a place I'd go into a place, but not to go to brothels or for the obvious purpose of going to a brothel. See, a lot of the brothels were purely meeting places.

07:00 You'd get, you'd say to a mate, "Well, I'll see you at the brothel," or you didn't call it a brothel, you called it a "regimental". I think they consoled themselves by saying it was run by the army but never was of course, that was just an expression, and you'd go there too for social reasons. That's, well that's what I went for and

07:30 others would too, of course, that's all they went for. But I liked to, I went sightseeing. I mean if I went to Jerusalem I wanted to have a look in Jerusalem, I'd want to have a look at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and there was a convent there, I was interested in the convent 'cause in one part of this particular convent - it was referred to as the Little French Sisters, that's what it was called,

08:00 but that need not have been its official name - and in that, go back a bit, that was where [Pontius] Pilate's summer palace was, that was part of Pilate's summer palace, and there was a mural depicting Christ picking up the cross where it is said he actually did pick up the cross.

08:30 And in the flagstones – of course this, when I was there it was covered but in Christ's time it was open space I imagine - but there was flagstones there and there was incisions on the stone where the Romans had played gambling games, and there was a was a well there that the Sisters were still using for water. There was a well

09:00 that was there in the time of Pilate, it was part of Pilate's palace. You can believe it or you don't believe it, but I prefer to believe it because I can see no reason why it wouldn't be true. That's if I could find a reason for it not being true I'd probably have doubts, but I have no doubt. I had a Salvation Army padre, I can't think of his name,

09:30 he and I become good mates and we discussed Golgotha. He was convinced and he convinced me that what we think is Golgotha is not the right place. It is right within the walls of Jerusalem and he convinced me that Golgotha had to be outside the walls of Jerusalem.

10:00 But where it would be, would be a certain amount of doubt about that, although one British General, he thought he'd found the place and it's referred to by his name now. I can't think of his name. He was the one of the generals in the, Form Cartoon, can't think of his name, Ford Cartoon [?]. I

10:30 think that maybe what we think is Golgotha is the wrong place simply because it is within the walls of Jerusalem and I think that Golgotha had to be outside the walls, at least that's what I think, and yet again 'cause remember Jerusalem's been destroyed four times and rebuilt.

Were you a strongly religious man at the time that you went off to war?

I

11:00 really just now even, I mean...

You were a practising Christian?

Oh yeah, of course, yes.

So was that quite inspirational for you, to be visiting sites of such significance?

Course, yeah, has to be, it has to be, yeah. Even if it's the wrong place the significance is still there. At Gaza

11:30 [of] course what is actually inscribed and stated to be, names get away from me. Who was the bloke who David killed? Goliath. Goliath's tomb - I'm wrong, Samson's tomb, and everyone's told it's Samson's tomb, but the Bible doesn't say that. The Bible says that he was taken by his brethren to Hebron, the hills of Hebron,

12:00 that's what the Bible says, so how could he be in, how could his tomb be in Gaza?

Were you also struck by the military history of the place, the fact that it was, it had been fought over back and forth for so long?

Oh look, you would have to be. Acre now, outside Acre there's a hill and it's referred to as Napoleon's Hill. Now, I

12:30 don't know whether this history's correct here or not. They say that Napoleon had this hill built so he could put his cannons on top of this hill so he could fire down on Acre. It's logical but is it true? I mean I don't know. The hill is still there and it's referred to as, and it is logical that it could be done but I don't, I can't remember that Napoleon was ever in Palestine. I can't remember that. He might have been

13:00 but I don't know.

Was there also an added sense of tradition in terms of the first AIF?

Oh, my word.

You passed through places where they had trained in Palestine before?

Oh, you see, we, on one occasion one of our, before we went to Egypt we re-enacted the Light Horse attack on

13:30 Beersheba. Now, we did it on foot, of course they did it on [horseback] and of course we didn't have to go 24 hours without water or anything like that, but we covered the same ground as the as the Light Horse did. And at that time the Turkish, a lot of the Turkish trenches were still there and, you know, we did that.

14:00 In Gaza War Cemetery, beautifully-kept cemetery - it was then, I hope I hope it still is - you could go there and you read the names and you could cry of the ages, you know, these young blokes. And one name there I picked out it was Tibby Cotter. Tibby Cotter was an Australian fast bowler.

14:30 He was killed I think the third attack on Gaza. On one occasion at Julis we were just walking over the ground, all the time they covered the same ground, and eventually part of the soil was worn away and a white spot appeared in the soil. Someone decided to dig it up. It was a skull

15:00 and they dug the whole lot up and it was a whole skeleton there, and it was obviously a soldier because he had a handful of bullets, but we couldn't tell whether they were Australian or Turkish bullets. We did conclude that it possibly was a Turk rather than an Australian so he was there, was someone who was probably blown up

15:30 and covered with soil. He wasn't buried there, he finished up there after he was blown to pieces, but that was, Julis would have been about 10 miles I suppose from Gaza, north of Gaza. The hospital was at Gaza Ridge, what they call

16:00 Gaza Ridge, which is maybe two miles from Gaza. That was where the Australian Hospital was, the AGH [Australian General Hospital], 1st AGH, and it was all surrounded by orange groves. These days, well again I've got to say in those days; it could be different now, I don't know. And the oranges of course were a drug on the market, as I told you earlier.

Mate, did

16:30 **the enormity of, I guess, the historical and military past that the area had and the spiritual significance of the place, did that change the way you viewed the war, viewed what you were doing there and why you were there?**

I don't think so, no, you know, you had a sense of awesomeness because that was,

17:00 gee, this goes back into real history as far as we're concerned. I'd have no hope of ever getting there except for the war. I had no hope whatever of getting there and I'd love to go back there to be truthful. There's one place I'd like to go back to. I'd like to go back to Palestine and yet it'd be totally different to what it was 60 years ago. Have a look here, Liverpool.

17:30 When we were in Palestine Tel Aviv had a few two-storey places, the last photo I saw of the beach huge multi-storey places, and yet in my day there the beach'd be deserted at night, there'd be no-one on the beach 'cause there's no surf or anything like that there.

18:00 If there's any surf it's only because it's blown up by the wind, it's not normally, it'd normally be pretty placid, see, inland sea of course and…

Frank, how important was your religious faith for coping with your war experiences? Was it something, did you pray a lot while you were…?

My word, I mean you, yeah, my word, yeah.

18:30 Yes, I think it was very important as far as I was concerned. The, I can't say that I'm an insidious religious person, I can't say that at all, never have been but, and I don't show off about it either. I mean it's private to me but I can tell you, I told

19:00 you about wadi and I prayed the whole time I crossed wadi, Derna, I prayed and prayed and prayed and it worked, I'm still here. I think there's a lot of thing in, a lot of power in prayer. My wife, 16 years ago she should have died. Everyone thought she'd die and

19:30 doctors operated but they warned her that, you know, they didn't have much faith in the operation and they convinced me I shouldn't have had much faith in it, but if they hadn't operated they told me she'd die. The thing is with absolute certainty if they did operate the chances are she'd die and I was given the choice and I said, "Actually doctor you're not giving me a choice at all." The doctor said, "Why?" I said, "Because I have to say 'Operate'

20:00 to give her the chance." And they operated and she had a double cerebral haemorrhage and next day or day after that I stayed at the hospital, I couldn't... I was at the hospital most of the time and I said to Norma "Let's say some prayers,"

20:30 and she said, "Will you help me?" and I said, "Yes. I'll say them and you repeat them," and that's what happened. I went home that night, no-one rang me, went back the next day didn't know what I'm going to find because, you know, she was out of her mind, she was - you can't interfere with the human brain without the brain itself reacting to it and they'd operated on her and, you know, what

21:00 it was, what happened when I got there? I walked into the ward and there she was sitting up in the chair. It's, I'm convinced that the prayer helped. I mean she may have been all right anyway, but I'm convinced that that praying, just saying a couple of prayers...

21:30 The doctors had given her no chance. You know that's, and not only did she make a full recovery but she was brighter than she'd ever been. She was, I mean I do crossword puzzles and I'm not bad at them. She was better than I was. She wasn't before this cerebral haemorrhage, she wasn't.

22:00 There again I might have deteriorated too, I mean I probably went backwards. We played Scrabble [board game] and she'd beat me. She'd come up words that, you know, I'd say, "Where'd you get that word?" "It is one," and she'd prove in the dictionary, but she wouldn't have been able to do that before, I'm sure, before that cerebral haemorrhage, I'm sure she couldn't have done it. So double cerebral haemorrhage and she recovered

22:30 fully. Just doesn't seem possible.

You spent quite a bit of time with ill health, bad health during the war from one thing or another, whether it was your...?

Yeah I did.

The shrapnel wounds or the migraines, malaria?

Yeah, that's right, yeah, that's right, yeah.

How important were the padres in that healing process in the...?

I don't know that I had any faith in them.

I mean what you saw within the hospitals, within the medical facilities, within the army

23:00 **system, how important were they to the healing of the troops?**

They must have had some influence but they actually didn't on me. I mean I knew the priests and gone Catholic as a matter of interest, but they had a sense of humour. Paddy Youle, Father Youle shared a tent with Doctor Tomlinson. Now, whether Doctor Tomlinson was a Catholic or whether he wasn't I don't know, but they shared a tent and Paddy Youle put a,

23:30 you know, he had a sense of humour, he put up a sign outside, "Souling, S O U L I N G, and H E A L I N G done here" so I thought that was a real sense of humour, real funny thing. He told me that, whether it's true or not or whether he was just saying it, he went to, on Friday he went into Tel Aviv and he

24:00 decided, you know, he'd have to eat fish. So first of all he asked for shark and they didn't have any, that's what he told me. Anyhow, did they have some whale meat? No, they didn't have any whale meat. Well, how about porpoise? No they didn't have any. He said, "Well, I'll have to have steak and eggs because the good Lord knows I tried to buy fish," but whether or not Paddy's telling the truth or not or just that was his way of a joke I don't know, but it would be typical of Paddy Youle to tell a story like that.

24:30 He said to me once "You don't drink, you don't smoke." I said, "No, Father." He said, "Well, pity help you when the end comes."

What was your vice, what was your outlet?

I probably had a vice but no, whenever I could I read. Whenever I could I wrote, I wrote letters,

25:00 I wrote a hell of a lot of letters and when I could afford it I played a bit of two-up, that's it. Oh, I played the other games, pontoon, we played cards as a pastime, not as a gamble at all. I learned to play Crib, I could play that really before, but I had a good mate who

25:30 was a good player and we played Crib and Euchre [card games]. We did, we played at night, we played cards at night, not for money but for just to play cards, yeah.

This may be a strange question but I was wondering which was worse, being in the heat of the battle or being injured and trapped in a

26:00 **hospital or convalescent camp?**

Oh, heat of the battle was worse, oh yes.

How frustrating was it for you to be injured or sick? Was there a sense of…?

Just accepted it, you accepted it. That's part of the deal.

Well, was there ever a sense of guilt or obligation that you weren't with your battalion or with your unit?

Not as far as I'm concerned, no. Sometimes I

26:30 envied them, sometimes envious, yes I must admit sometimes I was envious, and in the same sense you're talking about… But to say that I would beg to be back with them, no, that wouldn't be true, no. I could be envious without actually wanting to be there.

Was it with the 2/4th that you reunited back in Australia after you'd returned and had some leave?

27:00 Oh yes, we meet every month.

No, for the training camp when you returned to Australia and you'd got married?

Yeah.

And then started instructing?

Oh yes, well…

Was that the 6th Div [Division] training unit again?

No, that was something similar. I didn't go to New Guinea with the unit, New Guinea didn't go to, I was there maybe six months before they were there and

27:30 most of the time there I was instructing fellows who'd actually been in action just to keep them going.

Where was the camp based?

That was at, how can the word get away from me?

Was that up Atherton Tablelands?

Oh no, this was in New Guinea.

28:00 **So you didn't do any training in Australia? You weren't instructing in Australia before you went to New Guinea?**

Only a little bit, yeah, only a little bit.

How long after your marriage did you sail for New Guinea?

After we were married that would be about 18 months, yeah.

So you were training in Sydney, instructing in Sydney?

Yeah, and in

28:30 the first army headquarters in Toowoomba, yeah.

And then you volunteered for New Guinea?

That's not true. I mean they called for volunteers and this was maybe six weeks before our baby was to be born, and

29:00 one night one of the officers said to me "I was talking to the old man. He can't understand why you haven't volunteered for New Guinea." And I said Joe "How could I volunteer for New Guinea? My wife's having a baby. How could I volunteer to go away at this time? I said if I was ordered to go I'd go but I'm not volunteering." I was on the list next day so I didn't volunteer but

29:30 my wife thinks I did even though I told her that I didn't, but she does not or did not believe me, but I did not volunteer. I mean I would not have willingly gone, but where did I go?

What was your, officially what was your position recognised as in Australia when you're instructing in Sydney and Toowoomba?

30:00 **What were the actual positions referred to as?**

Well, generally mostly was called "general duties" but because I did all sorts of things. I was at Ingleburn for a while and there I was assistant to the senior combatant officer. I wasn't an officer, I was, he was a major and I was his 2IC. And

30:30 I said to him one day "What are the chances of doing a school?" because I was sick and tired of being at

Ingleburn and just doing virtually nothing. And he said, “What sort of a school?” I said, “Well, I don’t care. How about a gas school?” He said, “I’ll have a yarn to the old man at lunchtime.” He came back and he said, “I had a yarn to the old man. He said he wants to know if you’d rather do

31:00 a gas school or an officers’ school?” I said, “Well, an officers’ school.” He said, “Well, there’s one starting in the next few days. I’ll get you onto that.” Well, I did the school naturally because I was experienced in all of this. I mean I was instructing most of what I was already being taught by these blokes at the officers’

31:30 school. There was two things I did not know about and that was administration and quartermaster, A and Q see, I didn’t know much about that, I had to learn from that. But even then I still topped the full wings after seven weeks, I was still, I was the top there. And then I should have applied for a commission

32:00 but I contended they should have given me a commission if they wanted me to have one, I should not have had to apply for it, so I didn’t apply for it and I was never made a, didn’t get a commission. But I mean the same fellow officer I told, said that, I’d asked to go to the school, he said, “You’re wasting your bloody time.” He said, “You go to that school, you top it and you won’t apply for a commission.” I said, “Well, if they give

32:30 me one I’ll take it, but I’m not going to ask for it.” And you had to make an application, fill in what they call an A22, army form 22, and I didn’t do that and so I was told that the CO considered me his most efficient NCO. Well, I should have been too because I had the experience, and even he didn’t.

So you sailed from New Guinea as a

33:00 **senior sergeant?**

As a sergeant, no senior, no such thing as a senior sergeant, no, a sergeant, yeah.

And you arrived in Lae after the battle?

Yeah, Lae, I couldn’t think of the name of it. Yeah, Lae had fallen when we got there. Yeah, Lae was... I’ve never seen such devastation. There was not a tree standing around the city of Lae, there was not a fruit tree still standing. Everything was off, cut off,

33:30 and you wouldn’t have thought there’d been a town there at all, you wouldn’t have thought so. There was there was one mystery house still standing as far as I can remember, the Lutheran Church was still standing, that’s all there was.

Did you fly in or come in by boat?

On boat, went in on the Katoomba.

And what, was there a landing barge from the Katoomba?

No, we actually,

34:00 there was a wharf there.

How long had it been since the battle occurred, do you know?

Only a matter of months.

And so there was a base camp had been established, had there, for the Australian forces moving up the coast?

No, the 2/7th AGH was there.

34:30 There was a, there were stevedore operating company wharf loaders, you know, Australian soldiers doing wharf labourers’ work. There wasn’t much there, we had to establish a place to work from, put up our own, put up tents, etc. We lived in tents of course and we had four-man tents there.

35:00 I shared a tent with three other sergeants. Each one of them’s name was George. There was a thing in Palestine, we called each other George. Everyone was called George and simply because the Arabs called us George, and why they called us George I don’t know. I think it probably because of King George, you know, we think that, but everyone called each other George. And there was some reinforcement fellows come and

35:30 apparently the CO of this particular unit asked one of these fellows, you know, “How’re you enjoying the army, George?” And he said, “Oh, good, sir.” and when the officer left he said, “How’d he know my name was George?” But everyone was called, you just, it was just a general name for everyone. Very often we used other names that even we...

36:00 We invented names and I can’t remember most of them but, you know, “sanger”, what’s a “sanger”, you can ask “What’s a sanger?” Sanger is, we call a sanger a defence made out of rocks, made of stone, we called that a sanger but don’t tell me where the word came from, I have no suspicion. And of course we use a lot of Indian words because they’ve come from the British Army. We’d never have said, “tea”, we

said, “char”.

36:30 “Monger”, well, “monger” is the Arabic for “food” so we said, “monger”. Not “monger”, we cut it short and of course said, “monger”. Some of the, we learned songs not written by us, written by some English soldiers and they weren’t terribly wonderful songs

37:00 but they were part Arabic and part English and the some fellows went on leave to Cairo. They went to the pictures and before the pictures started they played this song that they’d learned so the boys started singing. Actually they sang the words that the Pommies put to it and in fact it was the Egyptian National Anthem.

37:30 **Come on, we want to hear it.**

Oh no, I can’t.

Come on, yes.

Oh no, it’s a bit crude, no I can’t do that. But the, you know, they’d bring in King Farouq and translator and his wife and everything, it was all, and mixed up with Arabic words and the Arabic words, you know, translate them into English they don’t make sense at all.

38:00 They were Arabic words so we used just Arabic words and the names of the King and the Queen came into it but no, they were pretty rude, pretty crude, and I’ve... I don’t know that I could repeat the words these days, I can’t remember, but the boys really thought that they were being honoured. They thought the Gyppos [Egyptians] were

38:30 playing this tune for their benefit, you know, because they were there, and actually it was the tune of the of the Egyptian National Anthem at that stage.

Tape 8

00:31 **Right, mate, I might just go back up to Lae. You said it’d been a month or two since the battle had occurred and things were quite stable in Lae at that time, is that right?**

That’s right, yeah.

Were you introduced, was your unit introduced to set up training for people who were coming out of hospitals?

That’s right.

Out of a convalescent situation.

That’s right, yeah.

Can you describe how your unit worked?

Well, before they went back to the unit

01:00 they come to us and we’re, course we had plenty of doctors, was actually a medical unit if it comes to the point.

You were a medical unit?

It was a medical unit but we were [the] combatant part of that unit, we were the armed part of that unit.

What was the unit referred to as?

112th Convalescent Depot ACD [Australian Convalescent Depot]. It was a, I don’t know how many we could have taken

01:30 but we had to have built, we had to have everything built there ’cause we’re all built out of the local stuff and...

What were you building?

Generally speaking I was permanent orderly sergeant, generally speaking, and/or Acting RSM, one or the other.

02:00 I was, my promotion to warrant officer was put through. Every month we filled in a return, a manning chart, manning return, and you’re entitled to a certain number or ranks that you, and we were entitled to one WO1 [warrant officer 1]. Well, we didn’t have a WO1,

02:30 I was doing his job, and you’d fill in that you’re entitled to it, you didn’t have one you put after than “NR”, not required. Well, land headquarters would ignore that and they’d send someone up that, ’cause

they had warrant officers doing nothing because they'd failed in the first place and within a fortnight they'd fail when they come

03:00 to us, they didn't... The way they were promoted in the first place it was very difficult to say, but they were probably promoted in the first place for good reason, but that good reason disappeared and they become surplus to requirements, but we'd get them and they had no suspicion. We had one fellow who was WO1A [warrant Officer First Class Army]. Now, I'd never heard of such a thing and I'd only ever met this one bloke who was a WO1A and

03:30 he was the quartermaster as a matter of fact, and I still don't know what a WO1A is, I've no suspicion, but he actually had that rank. He had the galloping horses with a laurel wreath around it, that was his insignia, whereas the others only had the galloping horses and we called it... And another thing I did there was radio announcing. We had a short range

04:00 radio station going and I was running that. I become a sort of radio announcer. We could broadcast the news for instance that came in through this. I say it wouldn't go more than five miles if there was anyone within five miles, 'cause it become bush. Anyway it didn't really go very far at all and...

04:30 **Was the idea behind that for the morale of those in the local area? Was it a bonding idea?**

Oh no, it was, we'd, once a week we'd get Guinea Gold which was the newspaper which gives the results of the sports perhaps the week before or something like that, and a few articles of no real worth in them, but everyone wanted one. I don't know that anyone ever kept one but everyone wanted one anyway.

05:00 But you could get the news from the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] and re-broadcast it over the local, see. In many cases we could get the news direct from, if you had a strong enough radio you could get it direct, but we didn't get much. We didn't get the news really through a direct

05:30 line from Australia. I could get it but I'd have to re-broadcast it.

Was your project, was it, were you behind getting it happening?

No, it was, I don't know whose idea it was. But that always went off at six o'clock. I always stopped at six o'clock which was dinnertime anyway, time for a meal.

06:00 And sometimes then afterwards I'd go back with a number of fellows who wanted to listen to records. We had records, tons of records, mostly pretty good ones, operas and that sort of thing. Anyone who wanted to listen to an opera, very often I had those records there, we could do it, but that was not broadcast, that was in the hut.

06:30 I had a number of fellows who used to, who really loved music. I could take it or leave it but they loved it and I was the only one who was allowed to play it so that was it.

Did you have a favourite record?

A favourite record? I wouldn't say so, no.

Anything that reminded you of home?

Not that I can remember, I don't think so, no.

You mentioned before that you were building through your unit, through the convalescent unit. What

07:00 **were you building, accommodation, classrooms, what?**

Oh no, not classrooms. Accommodation yes, because they were big long huts. We used native labour, we didn't literally do it ourselves, we had to instruct the native labour. Not that I knew anything about it either, but the,

07:30 most of us, just leaves, the roofs were made of leaves and they were waterproof.

What were relations like between the Australians and the local indigenous population?

They were thieves without any doubt. I mean they believed in sharing everything you had. They

08:00 were lazy beggars. I can't blame them, they weren't getting too, they weren't too well-paid. These were from ANGAU [Australia and New Guinea Administrative Unit], Australia New Guinea, what does the A stand for? Australian New Guinea, AU, certainly U was for Unit but I can't think of the others. But I remember on Good Friday 1944 I had 360 of

08:30 these native labourers delivered to me to clear, this is on Good Friday, to clear a space. Well, I spent most of the time chasing the boss boys so that they'd chase the labourers, 'cause nobody, they went to the river to swim, they didn't work, but you couldn't leave anything in your tent. I mean they'd pinch razor blades, they loved razor blades.

09:00 If you left a razor blade there, used one it doesn't matter, they'd want it, they'd take it. And there was so many of them course you couldn't keep an eye on them all. But why deliver them on Good Friday? That's always intrigued me, why on Good Friday?

Three hundred and sixty?

Yeah.

And it was organised, did you say, with best boys, there was leaders amongst them?

No, the boss boys.

Boss boys, sorry.

Yeah, they'd probably be in charge of 10 blokes

09:30 and I mean they were as bad as the fellows they were supposed to be controlling.

But they were they were forced into it were they, or they were paid? No, they were paid but there was no…?

They were paid, they got a nominal pay, but it wasn't very much, so the fellows on the Kokoda track the carriers there, they were paid probably a pound a month and their food. But they were pretty loyal, they were pretty loyal blokes, those

10:00 fellows on the Kokoda track. They were, they all had a sense of humour, they're all laughing, they thought everything was funny, and most of those South Sea Islanders are like that. I worked in New Guinea in Mackay after the war and

10:30 a lot of the girls that we employed were the Polynesians, Kanakas. Do you know what kanaka means? Kanaka means "man", it is exactly the Hawaiian word for man, kanaka, which I didn't know till a couple of weeks ago in fact and I thought it was a derogatory term but actually it's Hawaiian for man, so it's a logical word to use.

11:00 But there was one girl, her name was Lola and she was alias Sin, but she would, when a lugger came in she would disappear from the time the lugger was there, and the other girls used to complain about her. "Oh," you know, "Mr Rowell," they said, "she'll get a disease." There was nothing I could do about it but I remember one day I said to Lola,

11:30 "Lola, you're uneconomical, you're not worth keeping," and she thought I was complimenting her. She went in to all the other girls, "Mr Rowell says I'm uneconomical," and she thought it was a great joke. But she was a, most of them were good workers, but this particular Lola she was not and she was dirty, but she kept, that was her job, to keep things clean, her job was to,

12:00 was a dirty job, put it that way. She couldn't help being dirty I suppose, but the New Guinea natives were like that. Those New Guineans are different to the Papuans, you could tell the difference, and I can't remember what the difference was but you could tell the difference when you get in a Papuan. You'd think that they'd be, look so much alike but they actually don't, there's a difference in them.

Was there a sense they understood that you were helping rebuild

12:30 **Lae to rebuild their homes, or was there a sense of blame at having destroyed it in the first place?**

Oh no, they didn't necessarily come from Lae, they could have come from anywhere.

Oh, they came from all over?

From anywhere, yeah.

And is that essentially what that rebuilding was about, was it for native population or was it for the army?

No, for us to use. See, the average building there would last about 12 months because the white ants'd eat it. You didn't, you couldn't build

13:00 with the timber, you couldn't build for permanency at all. Twelve months would be about your limit. They'd start to start to fall to bits at that stage and simply because of ants.

Within the 112th what would, how broad was the training that you were doing?

Oh, all infantry of course because we still had artillerymen there but we, basic military training, basic, just to keep them going,

13:30 to keep them…

It was just to get those - fitness back out, get the skills back locked in?

That's right, yeah, and physical exercise. We had PT [Physical Training] instructors. One of our PT instructors was Jack Reardon, don't know if you've heard of him? You wouldn't have. He was a, he

played Rugby League for Queensland and he actually was a 1936 Kangaroos. We had three fellows there from the Kangaroos

14:00 who [were] PT instructors from that particular tour of England, 1936. Two of them were named Jack, the other one he played for, oh, one of the Sydney teams here, I can't think what it was, but they were PT instructors.

It was in Lae

14:30 **where you began getting migraines was it, was that where you first…?**

Oh no, I'd had migraines since I was at high school.

OK.

I just thought that everyone had a headache, had what I had, and was with first army headquarters. I went to the doctor once, said, "Could you give me something for this headache?" He said, "What's it like?" and I told him. He said, "How often do you get it?" and I told him.

15:00 "When do you get it?" I told him. He said, "Anyone ever tell you have migraine?" I said they'd never told me that but I've never even heard of it, "What is it?" And then he said, "Oh, it's a woman's disease." He said, "I mean mainly women get a migraine," so and I said, "Well, what can I do about it? Can you give me something for it?" He said, "No, nothing I can give you for it, just

15:30 got to put up with it," and he said, "I'll put you in hospital," so he did. I was in a hospital for a month before I had an attack of migraine, you know, when all I wanted was to have an attack of migraine so they could see what was happening. But when it did come it was colossal and was a team of doctors around me and one said, "This is a classic

16:00 attack of migraine." What happens is my sight, I start to lose my sight, I get blurred vision, lights flashing, and this is absolutely true, I still get those things, this still happens. The lights'll be flashing, not actually coloured lights but just lights, and then after maybe quarter of an hour that will clear and then

16:30 the pain will start, oh, terrible pain, just in one eye, and the only way I could get any ease from it was to get in a dark place and cut out all the sound. And this happened when I was at high school, I was in first year at high school it happened, and I just thought it was, I thought when you had a headache that's what they had, the same as I had, that's what I thought.

17:00 I used to sympathise with them but I spent the last three months of my army life in Concord and one of the things that they were looking at was migraine and one doctor said, "Do you know you're going to get an attack of migraine?" I said, "No, it just happens."

17:30 He said, a friend of mine is a doctor. He said that he knows he's going to get an attack because he gets out of bed and he's never felt fitter, and that's true, I mean that's how it [is with] me too. It never occurred to me there was a connection. You'd think you could beat the world, and then the pain starts and the flashing lights come and then the pain starts. And he said

18:00 "You have one consolation. Only highly intelligent people get migraine." Well, I don't believe that but anyway that's what he said, and then he also said that eventually you'll grow out of it, and I have grown out of it. I mean I've not had an attack of migraine for 20 years but I get the preliminaries, I get the preliminary loss of vision and lights flashing, but that lasts maybe 10 minutes.

18:30 **What were the other major health concerns up in Lae?**

Dermatitis, oh, dermatitis. I woke up one morning, I've got dermatitis from head to toe. That was actually in hospital. They put me in hospital to do a sudden mucusary [?] section because I was, they thought that might have been something to do with the headaches I was getting a blocked septum, and the man who did that was named Doctor Nye

19:00 and he did that under local anaesthetic, with cocaine in fact. Put 14 lots of cocaine into my nostrils and then he took that out and then he did the operation. Well, I realise why people get stuck on cocaine because you're really on a high and we were joking. We were, while he's doing the operation we were joking and I

19:30 mustn't have been able to see what was happening because my eyes were covered but I could actually see all these bits of bone for, and blood coming out of [my] nose and I had visions I'd have a fat face. I said to him, you know, "Why don't we go into business?" He said, "What sort of business?" I said, "Blood and bone, we could make a fortune out of this sort of thing. And he said, "I've never thought of it," but he wasn't high, I was. But I would never have voluntarily

20:00 taken cocaine again, that was because you really think you're wonderful, you know. I know what they mean by being on a high. And he counts the pieces of cotton wool with cocaine that he puts in and he counts them as he comes out so he makes sure they all come out. But I really thought I wouldn't have a nose left, the stuff he took, he

20:30 appeared to be taking out. I mean I thought there was tons of it but it was all, most of it was imagination, I imagine.

And while you were recovering from that you were struck with the dermatitis?

Yeah, that's right, yeah.

Which was full body?

Yeah, from top to bottom.

What caused the dermatitis?

Well, this is a question I was asked in Concord by a Doctor Belasario. He said, "What do you think caused your dermatitis?" I said, "Atebrin [anti malarial drug]," and he laughed. He said, "I've heard

21:00 them blame Atebrin because their wives don't have babies," he said, "I've heard them, Atebrin, never heard of it causing dermatitis." Well, I could only say what I thought. I didn't argue with him or anything like that and he asked me why I thought that and I told him. I said I took Atebrin. Every time I had to take Atebrin, needed to take Atebrin, was forced to take Atebrin I took it. I even forced other people to take their Atebrin, made sure they took it 'cause I did not want to get

21:30 malaria, and I didn't get malaria and my skin didn't change colour either. Everyone else's skin changed colour to yellow. Mine didn't but I got this dermo from top to bottom. Three years after the war a little article in the paper that says "American scientists have discovered at the moment the main cause of dermatitis in New Guinea was Atebrin," so that was, you know, justified my belief. But oh,

22:00 and I had to give up my own trade because of dermatitis. The job aggravated it all the time.

Did the dermatitis lead to your being brought back to Australia?

Yes, it did, yeah.

What month did you return?

I got back about June I think it was.

Of '45?

1945.

Were you home, so you were still there when you heard of victory in Europe?

Oh yeah.

Tell me about that news coming through.

Well, we,

22:30 I mean we listened to the news, we'd get the news all the time. We knew what was happening and but there were times when we had our doubts I think. Well, certainly I had my doubts when they were held up and the Germans were counter-attacking. The Germans were a strong army. They may, they're a good, they were a good army without any doubt. I think the only - and I have

23:00 to exclude Australia from this - I think that the Germans were better soldiers even than the Scots and I think the Scots are terrific, but I think the Germans were better soldiers. And I can't say that we, I can't compare them with Australia because it was a totally different type of people. We, the Germans are, don't have a sense of humour, there's no... My good mate the German, I mean you couldn't have a joke with Joe because he couldn't see the joke. You'd have to explain it to him.

23:30 Saw the joke in the paper and it was they had a translation of a German joke and there was a hole in the wall in a prison wall, and the prison guard says "What caused the big hole in the wall?" He said, "Oh, mice," and had to explain it. Of course it wasn't mice at all, he was trying to dig his way out,

24:00 but an Australian would see the joke straight away but you had to explain it to the German, you had to explain it that you couldn't, mice couldn't do that.

And you can't compare them in terms of the effectiveness of their fighting abilities?

Oh, they were good fighters, they were good, yeah.

The Australians versus the Germans?

No, we fought in a different way I think. We, as I say, I have to leave Australia out of it because I can't,

24:30 I just, there's no comparison because we're totally different type of people, that's it. But in my opinion the British Army the best fighters were the Scots, that's my opinion and I've no Scotch blood in my veins, I've just not at all.

So VE [Victory in Europe] Day must have been quite hollow in the sense that you were still at

war in the Pacific?

That's right but of course we also

25:00 knew that Britain will now start sending more troops out here. I mean everyone's criticism, I say everyone's, a lot of people criticised Britain because they didn't send troops out here to defend. How could they? They were flat out defending themselves, they couldn't, and a lot of people can't see that. They think that Britain let us down because they didn't rush down to help us when we rushed to help them, but they were flat out trying to save Britain.

How did you feel

25:30 **about our requirement of greater reliance on the Americans? At the time how did you feel about it?**

Well, we were very pleased that they came into the war. They took their time but we were very pleased they were there, and of course I think it made victory more certain than without them. We were probably pleased the Japs come into the war because it brought the, because we didn't know the Japs were as good as they were either.

26:00 **Did you get on well with the American servicemen that you met?**

Oh, what I saw of them, which is very little, I'm no great admirer of American soldier. I see they have huge casualties and it's their own fault. I told you we spread as far as we, from the other bloke as we can but they get close huddled together. I mean one burst of the machine gun'd

26:30 kill a dozen of them whereas one blast of the machine gun couldn't do that with us. It might get one, it might get two, but they won't get a dozen. They had no, they had terrific equipment, that was their advantage, the equipment not their soldiers. I think that anyone who has to yell at their troops as they appear to do in films you see, become abusive, etc., I can't see the point in

27:00 that and that would not interest me to be a better soldier in my opinion.

Were you in Concord Hospital when news of the atom bomb came through?

Yep, sure was, yeah.

What was the response within the hospital?

Oh, huge feeling of relief, huge.

And when that actual surrender came through?

Oh well, I'm putting two [and two] together because

27:30 the atom bomb of course was not long before the surrender. No, I think that, oh we were terrifically relieved when that, when the war was over.

Were you able to leave the hospital or you were bedridden?

Oh no, I could go home on leave, you know, for afternoon and that sort of thing, oh yes, and I...

Tell me about seeing

28:00 **your baby when you came back for the first time.**

Well, by that time he was 15 months old and I had some photos of him, and strange thing is that he appeared to know me because there was that photo I showed you that was on the wall, a big full-size photo

28:30 that my mother had had done, and he was taught "Look at that photo and say that's Daddy," that's the... And then when I'd take him, everyone out, he'd tell everyone on the train "That's my Daddy." No, he died when he was 12 years and eight months old, died

29:00 of polio, as a result of polio. He died of pneumonia strictly speaking, and what caused that was the iron lung; I think that's the killer, that iron lung. I'm reading a book there, a story in Reader's Digest about this doctor who just before the war started went to some imaginary island in the Pacific

29:30 where they were having a lots of cases of polio. Well, this author uses Sister Kenny's method of treating polio. I mean Sister Kenny would not touch anyone who was going to get a serious case of polio. She wouldn't touch anyone who was going to die anyway or

30:00 likely to die, and in all probability she killed a few people because she did things to those people that didn't help them at all. And when Noel got his polio Noel's sister, Sister Ayres was her name, she

30:30 said to me one day "Mr Rowell, never let them use Sister Kenny's method." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because she would only touch people that were going to get through it anyway." And this fellow in this book describing he's using hot blankets, boiling hot blankets to put on the legs, as if the legs were the only things that were affected, and massage,

31:00 and it would only work if the person was going to recover anyway. That's the Sister Kenny method. And he also has someone bring brought into the hospital with polio and he gets in a plane and goes to another island to borrow an iron lung to bring it back in the plane. I mean why not have taken the kid straight to the other island?

31:30 It's, you know, it's just he's just so wrong, he does not understand polio, this bloke who's written that book. He's never seen it in his life. He's probably heard of it but he's not a doctor. I mean it's imaginary, but someone should tell him that he's so wrong.

How did you settle back into the role of family man after?

I had no trouble, I

32:00 had no trouble. I mean I immediately had a job, I had no problem getting a job and...

How long did you have to remain in Concord for?

I was still in Concord when I was discharged.

Was that October of '45?

I think that would have been October, was after the war ended. I saw

32:30 a psychiatrist, a Doctor Arnott, and I suppose everyone saw a psych, I don't know, but whether they did, but I suppose they did. But he asked me so many questions I thought, "Well, gee whiz, if there's any bloke need psychiatry it's not me, it's you." And he said to me, 'cause by that time we were entitled to apply for discharge under the points system, he said, "Why don't you apply for the for discharge under the points section?"

33:00 And I said, "Look, I signed the paper that I would stay for the length of the war and 12 months after if required. If they want to discharge me they discharge me, but I'm not going to ask them to discharge me." And years later I read his report on that and he said,

33:30 "He is the most honest man I've ever treated," that's what he wrote, yes, Doctor Arnott. I reckon he was mad.

That's quite a compliment.

Well, Belasario, Doctor Belasario the dermatologist, I'm told that he suffered badly from dermatitis so as a matter of "physician,

34:00 cure thyself" so he, but he laughed when he said my opinion was Atebrin had caused it. Had my skin turned yellow and I got dermatitis, OK, I would never have connected the two, I would never have done that, but it didn't change colour. I was for I think 15 months not a sign of dermatitis and not a sign of yellow colour. Suddenly I overnight

34:30 and in hospital, so why?

You picked up a job quickly as a pastry chef?

Oh yeah, no problem at all.

Picking up on your apprenticeship again?

Oh well, see I just finished my time before I joined the AIF, I was just out of my apprenticeship. And so I'm walking past a shop in Burwood, in fact, cake shop so I went in. Wanted to know if I could see the owner or the manager whoever it might have been,

35:00 and I saw him, told him. He said, "When can you start?" And well, I could start any time because I was just discharged. And he said, "Well, what about wages? Better talk about wages." I said, "Well, to tell you the truth, I haven't been in the game for nearly six years, six years since I made me last cake,

35:30 so I wouldn't expect to get even full pay yet." He said, "See those women out there?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I'm paying them pastry cooks' wages and they're not pastry cooks, they only know how to do one job." And I should have seen the point, so what he offered me was double pastry cook's pay, double, clear of tax.

36:00 And I grabbed it of course, and then I remember something that happened during the war when I had nothing to do for a week and I thought, "Well, I wonder can I get a part time job pastry cooking," see, to get back into it. And I rang the Master Pastry Cooks' Association and they told me to ring Sargents.

36:30 Well, as far as I was concerned Sargents only made pies and they made the best pies, best made in Australia. I know it was the best pies in Australia 'cause that's what I was brought up on too, making those Sargents pies. I knew the recipe, I still have it, and so they gave me a job. And what they did, and this is only a matter of days, perhaps four or five days, every few

37:00 hours they'd put me on another job and I could do every job. No-one else at Sargents could do the lot

’cause they specialised in just one job, and they learned the rest of their trade at a tech, they didn’t actually have the their true experience.

Frank, we are right coming towards the end of the tape. I just want to ask you how you feel that your wartime experience helped you in your career later on.

37:30 **Could you see direct links between them?**

I don’t think so.

Not in the way you organised yourself or the way you approached your work or anything like that?

I probably had an inferiority complex before I joined the AIF, I probably did. I was never terribly confident. I was sometimes brash but not confident and maybe,

38:00 well I know that the army did give me confidence. You’re responsible for men and responsible for a job to be done and you do it and you get praise for it so OK, that must, you must have the right thing, that’s the way I look at it. And strange enough, I might have had trouble getting jobs before war, I had no trouble after war, no trouble at all. I mean I could ask for a job

38:30 and get it and very often on my own conditions, although I never did put conditions on. Normally the employer gave me more than I’d have asked for normally. But after 20 years I’d had this dermatitis and I gave it away, I gave up pastry cooking and I became, I went into insurance and I stayed there for 20 years, oh, actually, strictly speaking, 19 years.

39:00 And I gave that away simply because of war-caused disabilities. I mean my neck went on me, cervical spondylosis, and I couldn’t sit talking to people for any length of time, I’d have to get up and walk around rather than bend over, see, I couldn’t bend over books and I’d have to find an excuse

39:30 to go and have a look at a photo on the wall or something and then sit down again.

So it was more a lasting physical effect that the war had on you rather than psychological?

Oh yeah. I don’t even know what causes it but they’ve accepted it as war-caused. I’m happy that they’ve accepted it. It’s the damage to the cervical spine.

Mate, we’re right

40:00 **near the end of the tape. Is there anything else you wanted to say, to put on record? We’ve got maybe a minute, minute and a half left.**

I’ve got something here, something I’d like to read.

Yeah, sure.

Right. One of our RSMs, Alf Carpenter who was President of our association, 2/4th Battalion Association, he wrote something and it goes like this. “Their marching days are over, now their fighting days are gone/

40:30 they’ve carried out their last fatigue, their victories are won/ but although the world has changed today and fame’s a passing thing/ along the road of memory the old battalion swings.” That’s, Alf always says that at funerals and I don’t know that anyone else ever uses it, but I’ve always been impressed with Alf on this, he’s a terrific

41:00 President of our Association and I think that we might fall to pieces if we ever lose Alf, that’s what I think. Strange enough, someone asked me would I would I stand against Alf for President and I said I’d have to think a long time about that before I’d try to replace Alf.

INTERVIEW ENDS