Australians at War Film Archive

John McLeod (Jack) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **Well Jack, my first question for you is where were you born?**

I was born in Glasgow in Scotland in 1919. It was just after the First World War. Our dad was a Scottish soldier.

01:00 And in 1921 we migrated to Australia. It was mum and dad and three little boys. I was the middle one. We started off with bad luck right from the start. We got into the English Channel in a ship, had a dead heat with another ship. It was sunk. There was water coming into the ship. It was the middle of the night.

01:30 And eventually we were rescued and put into rowing boats and being a different world from today, we just had to float around in the English Channel 'til daylight came. Then we were taken to England. We spent a few weeks in England waiting for another ship. Then we came eventually to Australia. And the bad luck continued. We had a baby brother born and died and later on our mother

02:00 died. So, pardon me for a moment, our dad was left with three little boys and a daughter. And eventually we went to live in an orphanage, the three boys. The orphanage was in Brighton. It was called the Melbourne Orphanage. It was a Protestant orphanage. There was sixty-odd boys, all

02:30 ages from seven up to fourteen. And a number of girls and a cottage for the kinder children. It was interesting the very first day our dad took us to the orphanage. I've got a photo of it somewhere. And it was a huge, old fashioned, two storey number of buildings. And our

03:00 dad just vanished and we were taken over to the boys' section. We were met by an English lady, Mrs Hardy. And she became our best friend. One of the things in an orphanage is you don't have a Christian name. You have a number. I was McLeod 63. Mrs Hardy called us by our Christian name. One of the things we learned was

03:30 that she was the only real friend we had. We had a Master and Assistant Master. They had to control about sixty, in our case sixty-three boys. And so they couldn't afford to become pals with us. We went to bed at nine o'clock and the bell rang at six o'clock. Six days of the week we got up at six. We slept in

04:00 on Sunday until six thirty. We all had little jobs to do and being an upstairs building there were stairs, there were dormitories, there were rooms to clean, floors to polish. Downstairs was the dining room. It was a big room. The floor had to be scrubbed, the table tops had to be scrubbed. Each boy had a little job, not a hard job, but just a little job. And you

04:30 made your own bed of course. Bed was interesting, it was a straw palliasse. About once a year you filled it up. At the end of the year it was like a bag of chaff. Breakfast was interesting. You never got your breakfast until seven thirty. Which means that you were up for an hour and a half. I still have trouble eating breakfast straight out of bed. It was porridge, it was cold and there was no milk and no

05:00 sugar on it. We lined up outside and then we paraded into the dining room and we had to kneel down and say a prayer. I was in the orphanage for six years and I never learned the words of the prayer. What would happen we'd all be down there and in a real hurry to get to the porridge. And all you heard was aaah, aaah, aaah, aaah. Voices rising up and down. It wasn't until after I left the orphanage that I

05:30 learned the words of the prayer. Just briefly it started off Almighty and Most Merciful Father. The School was in our grounds. We were called the orphan kids and the other kids were called the outsiders. We had a real good lunch. We always came home for lunch. It was a hot meal, stews and all that sort of thing. But the night meal was interesting. You either had bread and syrup or bread and dripping or bread and jam.

06:00 Sunday night was special. You had bread and butter and a slice of fruit cake. So it was very, very interesting. The discipline was really, really severe but it was never brutal. There was never any

physical assault and there was never any sexual assault. Almost never would a Master abuse you. But what you did get was six cuts of the cane on your hand.

06:30 And it really hurt.

What would you had to have done to have got the …

Didn't have to do much. You might just have spoken out of turn. Or you might have been a bit slow at reacting to an order. When you got older, talk about discipline.We had a farm and a farm hand or manager .He was a vile man, a drunk.

07:00 He was really bad. Anyhow he'd take us older boys to the show grounds, to the show one year. Told us to meet him at twelve o'clock. I didn't have a watch, I had no way of finding the time. Eventually I caught up with him and he says get back to the orphanage. You didn't get here at twelve o'clock. So that was me punishment for not knowing what time it was. Lots of things were done for us.

07:30 Our schooling, just digressing here, our schooling only got up to, I'm not sure if it was the sixth or the eighth grade. Merit Certificate I think it was. There was no higher schooling. Higher schools were very rare and Tech schools also. So that was the limit of our education. Tremendous religious education.

08:00 We all walked down to St Leonard's in Brighton Beach Sunday morning. All the Presbyterians did, the others went to the other. We had Christian Endeavour, we had Sunday School, we had Band of Hope. Band of Hope was the Temperance thing, you may or may not've heard of it. And we really got hammered on that particular thing. Oh we also had it at school most days, religious instruction. For all that it sounds

08:30 bad there was a lighter side. Christmas time was marvellous. I should tell you about Father Christmas. We could all write a letter to Father Christmas. And it was in the days when you'd get a good present for two and sixpence, twenty-five cents. So we'd write and we'd ask for a pair of shoes or a watch or a pocket knife or something like that. And it was the days of the Herald Sun

09:00 Toy Fund. And they'd have the cinematic camera there and Father Christmas'd come up the driveway and we all had to sing out here comes Father Christmas. That was a great day. There were also some outings. Way back then they still had covered wagons. And they'd come one day and they'd take us down to Mordialloc And that was good.

09:30 It was always a carnival down at Mordialloc. And we'd have a marvellous time. On the swings and the merry-go-rounds and all that sort of thing. That was terrific. The RACV did an even better one. Volunteers would come in their motor cars and take us to Mooney Valley. And we'd have a marvellous picnic day at Mooney Valley Race Course. It was really special. I think the big

10:00 one was, I don't know if you, I doubt if you'd remember when we used to have paddle steamers go down the Bay to Queenscliff and Sorrento. Right. Well that was a marvellous day cause there was always somebody on the ship that would be interested in kids. And he'd take us all over the ship. And we'd have lots of fun. That was a tremendous day. So we did have happier days.

10:30 Mrs Hardy, I ended up getting the job of cleaning her room every morning. She'd give me a piece of cake or something and that was marvellous. And she taught us to knit, of all things, and she taught us to darn socks. I can knit but I still can't darn a sock. She also, yes this was very good, she would decorate the two main rooms. The living room and the dining room. And we'd have

11:00 a huge Christmas bell hanging from the ceiling. We'd make artificial roses from paper and streamers and it'd all go all round the room and it used to be beautiful. In fact when I got married, for a few years we did that in our kitchen at home. That was really tremendous. As you got older and the time came to leave school, you had the choice of working in the flower garden or the farm. We had a farm with a dozen

11:30 cows and a marvellous vegetable garden. And I did both actually. And finished up permanent on the farm. Well then when I'm about fifteen it was time to leave the orphanage. So the best part of the story's just coming. I leave the orphanage and I'm taken down to Inverloch. You know Inverloch? Yes.

I do.

I'm taken down to a farm on Inverloch.

12:00 But the farm is across the water, what they used to call the point. Right. And the farmer was odd. He was, how do I put it? The family, as I got older I thought the family, was a rich family, they'd put him down on this farm at Inverloch. It was a hopeless situation, his farm. With all the trees and no

12:30 fences it'd take you perhaps an hour or two to get the cattle out especially on a wet day. But he used to tell me awful things about his wife. He used to really rubbish her. You know he says, "I saved her from Tasmania. She used to have children and drown them." And you know I'm only a kid. So the day came when he hit me. I didn't answer him properly. So I wrote to me brother in Yarram and

13:00 told him. And he says well I'll get you a job. Well then when I gave him notice he says I want to see your letter. Well I only showed him half the letter. So he threatened me, you know in me innocence, he

threatened to take me to the police cause I'd done something wrong. So this is the real part. I've got a bike, I've bought a push bike. Seven pound ten a push bike, fifteen dollars. And so I worked out every, I'm about

13:30 fifteen now and I worked things out. About every odd day I'd have to ride the horse down to Tarwin Lower. And get the mail or whatever else, any groceries I had to pick up. And so I secretly organised a date with me brother. And when the day came I sneaked over the far side of the farm, it was a big farm, and hid me bike by the last gate.

14:00 And me clothes, I didn't have much anyhow. And away I went on the horse and tied the horse up at the gate and I wrote a little note on it. "Don't send the police after me or I'll tell them you hit me." So then I get on the bicycle and away I go. And I've got money in the Bank at Tarwin Lower., The store manager, he was a tease, he said you want to look out he'll be right behind you.

14:30 Well I got on the road to, would have been Langwarrin. I think it might have been Langwarrin and there's a little, it's getting dark now, there's a station with a shelter shed. There's a little store there. And I go in the little store and I buy a packet of biscuits and some cheese. I don't know why the cheese. And all night I sat in that store, got a train the next morning and up

15:00 to Yarram and a new life started. So we'll have a spell on that one for a minute. It was altogether different, he was a kindly man, a bachelor man and we were friends for life, he died a few years ago. We were friends for about sixty or more years. Bill White. Well then I tried farming for a little while but I wasn't a farmer.

15:30 And I went back to Melbourne, me dad was there.

Did you see your dad often?

Oh yes, we could see dad. Visitors could come every, I think the first and third Saturday. We'd be all up there waiting. Reminded me of another story. We'd always greet him crying. I always cry. And one day he said to me what's the food like?

16:00 I said it's like dog's meat. Well that upset dad. So yes we saw our parents or our parent, some had one parent, lots had none. And dad'd come on the first and third and he'd bring us some food and we'd eat it all that night. Cakes and fruit and chocolate. Yeah we never lost sight of dad. So I returned to Melbourne after a couple of years farming.

16:30 And settled in, eventually found a boarding house and I was accepted in there and became part of the, part of the family really. So that was the beginning of me city life and in fact the rest of me life. I forgot to say, this will happen with me, I forgot to say after our mother died. It was in the days when there was no social service.

17:00 You relied on your neighbours. And my memory of those two years I never knew where I was sleeping. It was always in a friend's bed. We had a huge Scottish circle of friends. And you always slept in someone else's house, someone else's beds. And that's all I remember for two years. So having gone back to

17:30 civilisation and found a boarding house and Beryl was part of the church circle. And we became part of a fairly large group of teenagers. We all got our mates and more than one married the girls that we were going with in those days. And they're still alive. And the war came, the war was announced in September

18:00 '39. And I said dad I'm gonna join the Army. Well he says that's alright I joined the Army in World War I. I put me name down. In those days you put your name down at Flinders Street Station or the local drill hall. I put it down at both. I got a call up from both. And we went into the Army on the twenty-first of October

18:30 1939. And we went to the Showgrounds for a couple of weeks. And I'm one of the boys. I'm twenty and anybody, oh twenty-four or five or six they were real old, really old. And the comical part of this is that now I'm eighty-four there's only one active member older than me. And he's eighty-eight.

19:00 So here I'm going in, a very raw twenty year old. I knew nothing about the outside world. And this continued with me for years. I didn't know what family life was. I had no idea of the outside world. And so here I am with all these mature men, old and young. And

19:30 I was always, in my mind, never important. I could mix but I couldn't have anything to say. So I just went along and learned a bit about life. We did a few weeks at the showgrounds and then we went to Puckapunyal up at Seymour. And the camp was only just being built. We would move into huts as soon as

20:00 they were built. And it was pretty raw too. You didn't have, no I don't think you had windows, you had shutters. One of the early things you learned in the Army was that you didn't have sheets, you didn't have a pillow. And your kit bag was your pillow and you just had a couple of blankets on a palliasse on the floor. You didn't have things like cups and saucers,

20:30 you had a mug. No table cloths and you learned all these things. Sometimes I think now it must have

been hard on people who came from a better type of home. But that was the way the Army did it. We had a long time getting uniform, we were almost months before we got a uniform. And when we got it, some of it was World War I stuff.

21:00 But we did learn, quickly, well me with me orphanage upbringing, the Army discipline was nothing. It was no problem at all. Whatever was, you had to do I did it without any trouble. And we, we were allowed to choose what sort of a unit we'd go into. I had a work mate who'd said to me join a medical unit so I applied for a medical unit

21:30 and joined the 2/2 Field Ambulance. And our officers were doctors. And we became medical orderlies and stretcher bearers. I became both a medical orderly and a stretcher bearer. Tremendous instruction and training. We would have had perhaps two or three medical lectures every week for about a year or more. Some of us went to

22:00 St Vincent's Hospital for our training there. And I'm chuckling at one of the little things that happened if nobody'd get offended. We were given a white coat and head covering, all the rest of it. We were allowed everywhere except when there was a lady's operation. I remember one day we went to the door and we got chased out of the operating theatre. But we went to the morgue, we saw post mortems,

22:30 the casualty room and the wards. And there was one man a lot older than us and he really looked the part. And one day a young lady came up to him she had a problem. She'd been friendly with a soldier and she was frightened she was going to be pregnant. And we always chuckle at something like this, but fortunately for her, she picked the right man. If she'd have picked me I wouldn't have known how to answer her. I wouldn't have.

23:00 And he very kindly explained to her that she'd have to be awfully unlucky to fall the first time and she went away with a bit of peace of mind. We weren't terribly popular with nurses in those days. You didn't have male orderlies. And somehow or other the nurses didn't note this in the hospital, St Vincent's it was. That made us a little bit unwelcome but we had a few weeks there.

When you say

23:30 **they made you unwelcome what did they do or didn't they do?**

Didn't do, they didn't want to know us. The real older ones in the casualty section. There was an older nurse there and she was a kindly nurse. And in fact we sometimes would help her. We had a situation there where a person had something wrong, must have been an

24:00 impacted fracture and we held the patient while one of us pulled it out so we were able to help and do things. But the nurses, just male nurses were not part of the set up in those days. That was the difference you see. But we thoroughly enjoyed it and we did learn a lot especially with the post mortems. The interesting part about that was the

24:30 male students would be looking the other way. The female students would be right over the top of the body. Yeah. Completely different to the men. But time wore along a bit and on April 14th, 1940 we sailed to go to the Middle East. Completely different from today's

25:00 world. All of Melbourne was there, two or three miles away. The police cordoned the whole area of Port Melbourne way back to St Kilda and nobody could get within cooee of it. Couldn't see it with binoculars. So it was a bit of a sad, oh I must tell you this little one. When we knew or we thought we knew that we were going away,

25:30 we all wrote notes or letters actually to our girls or our families and we didn't know what to do with them 'til we got to Spencer Street Station and the train slowed down. And we all threw our letters out on the platform. And the railway staff, they all came and collected all our letters and Beryl got hers from me. And I still wonder, would there be anybody alive,

26:00 I doubt it, that was part of that, they'd have to be my age. But wouldn't it be lovely to see someone that was part of that little bit of an action.

Yes, there must be somebody else around who would remember that.

Yes. I would hope so. I'd love to in fact sometimes I think of ringing the railway workers. I might still do it. I'd love to meet somebody because that was a marvellous thing they did.

26:30 We sailed on a British troop ship and we got our first taste of being sea sick. There was fourteen hundred of us on our ship and I was all right until I think the next day and I wanted to go to the toilet. And I didn't, I went. And I was sick, I was sick for a week.

27:00 You can die, I don't know if you've ever had it. It's almost a slow death. And fortunately for us our officers left us alone for the week. No parades, nothing, just left us there. And eventually we got to Fremantle. And the Fremantle people greeted us like long lost friends. They picked us up in cars and took us out for the day and we had a marvellous day in Fremantle. Went

27:30 on to Ceylon. We had a day, yes we had a day on land in Ceylon. Colombo was the capital. Another bit of Army stuff. Ceylon is almost on the equator. We had to wear our winter uniform and don't undo a

button. That's the way we do it in the Army. And that was an interesting thing for us, we'd never seen foreign lands and

28:00 foreign countries. We saw rickshaws and all that sort of thing, bullock wagons. One fellow got run over by a bullock wagon which you couldn't do. They almost go backwards they go that slow. He was Bullocky Bill for the rest of his life. And then we went on to the Suez Canal. Another novelty for us, the whole of this was a novelty for us. Up the Suez Canal, we get off on a pontoon bridge at a place called Kantara.

28:30 Catch a train over to Palestine. The train's got its own air-conditioning, windows without glass. But the big excitement, I go to the toilet and the toilet is a hole in the floor, two foot marks. Well I can't get back to me mates quick enough. Go and have a look at this. This was a real novelty for us. Particularly us younger ones. Our first stop was a town called Gaza

29:00 which still gets publicity. And we were told that was, Samson's birth place. We also started to get a sample of the boys and their selling habits. We bought a few oranges from them there but when we got further on, I don't know what the name of the station was. A young boy came in with a basket full of these. Tipped them on the seat.

29:30 One shilling. And when we eventually counted them it was about forty oranges. Oh one shilling or a packet of cigarettes. That's right. So that was our introduction to Palestine. Palestine to us was really marvellous. It was to me anyhow. It was the Holy Land. Jerusalem became our home town and we often went into there on

30:00 weekend's leave. And we saw everything possible that you'd find in the bible story. Everything. The whale across the church Holy Sepulchre, the Wailing Wall, the Garden. There's a beautiful church there. They call it, I think the Church of All Nations, I think they call it. The Mount of Olives, the River Jordan, the Dead Sea, Bethlehem.

30:30 Later on when we were going to Syria we even called it Damascus. Oh, the Lake and the beauty of it when we were there. It was before the tourist people had taken over. There was only one real hotel in Jerusalem and one in Tel Aviv only three or four storeys high. There was just no tourism at all. And it was almost like you'd expect it in the

31:00 biblical days. The clothing they wore, the long flowing robes and the burnous. And the women, you couldn't even see their eyes. And the women were so conscious of our presence that they would always turn away from us. Not just stop, they'd turn away whenever we were near them. One Sunday afternoon we went for a walk into the nearest village, (UNCLEAR)

31:30 And we were getting along marvellously. And around the corner came a few of the women and we picked up the camera and we were chased out of the village. It was a very big thing this.

You obviously had time though to visit all these areas? So you were actually training as well?

Oh yes, we eventually trained fourteen months before we went into battle. And

32:00 oh yes, we were talking about Jerusalem and things. Yes. We, the system was, Palestine became our home base. We would go into a battle area, come out, back to Palestine. Wherever we went it was back to Palestine. So we were in and out for two and a half years. We really got to know it and learned a little bit of the language. And it was really something special. Even had a

32:30 friend, Don McCaskerley, he became a preacher. Don got up one morning to catch the sun rising from the Mount. So he climbed up the Mount of Olives and he was quite happy to be up there and get his photo of Jerusalem. And it was just like they'd depicted in the Bible stories. It was really, really good. And we moved across to Egypt. We were camped not far from the pyramids

33:00 actually. But being twenty, I'm a twenty-one year old now, I wasn't interested in pyramids. I'd never actually hardly heard of them. There they were, when you got out in the morning, there they were a few miles away. So that was part of our upbringing you might say or our learning. Then eventually the Libyan campaign started. The Libyan campaign covered an area

33:30 from the Suez Canal, Port Said, almost to the border of Morocco. I don't know how many hundreds of miles it would have crossed but it was all northern coast of Africa. And that's where we first went into battle. And I think we could do with a little spell.

Tape 2

00:33 **Okay Jack, you were just about ready to talk about the first campaign. You're ready to go into battle.**

Right it was our first battle action. The Italian Army was our enemies and we started off at a place called Salum in Libya. And one of the beauties of Army ways, we weren't told we were going into battle.

01:00 We were put on trucks and we went for miles and miles and miles. And we stopped eventually and put some tents up and still nothing said. The next morning we get a, I think it was our Sergeant Major came to my group and he said I've got a job for you fellas. Just got a message they've got some wounded up the front. The enemy's shelling it and we can't get the wounded out. Come up and get em. That's how we

01:30 found we were in battle. So we went up, we took a truck up for I don't know what reason. But we took a truck and a few orderlies. When we got there the enemy was actually shelling the area. Now it might sound silly but it was our first battle action. We'd been told to go into an area so we simply got out of the truck and went straight across the paddock, which was being shelled. And after a while

02:00 one of the older soldiers said to us. Well you don't do it that way, you get down on the ground and you wait until all the shelling ceases when they've got to re-load their guns and you get up and run. And it was our first introduction. And when we got to our wounded, some of them were fellas we'd trained with. But their story was a pretty decent one. They were rounding up some Italian soldiers

02:30 and they were getting in closer and closer and one of them had a hand grenade hidden in his pocket. And as they got real close he threw the hand grenade at em. So the wounded list increased quite considerably. I'd expect it was the last thing he did but I didn't ask them. And eventually at the end of the day we had about a dozen wounded. And a little thing on the side.

03:00 The next our officer came to us and he said I want a report on what you did yesterday, you'll be mentioned in despatches. Well we were young and inexperienced. We had no idea how make out a report. We didn't make out a report. We never got mentioned in despatches. It's as simple as that. After that I became part of an ambulance team. I was the medical orderly and

03:30 two drivers. And we were on call twenty-four hours a day. We got a call up to the aerodrome one day. And I'm sitting in the back looking out the back. And the enemy was shelling the road. It was a bit like a movie. We're going straight down there and here's these explosions coming up each side of us. Not one shell landed on the road. And we got to our aero-

04:00 drome and we found a hangar. It was being shelled also. No matter where we went it was shells or bombs. It was being shelled and we were quite happy to shelter there. It was becoming dark. An English Army officer came over and he said, "One of my men is wounded out there. Go and get him." I think just for once I got really frightened because we had to go. No argument about it, he sent you out so we went out and found him.

04:30 And picked him up and took him back again. Another day, no it was another night. I found myself in a cave with an officer and a patient. The patient was laid out on a stretcher. He'd got a bit close to a bomb, what they used to call shrapnel bombs which were more concerned with sending shrapnel all over the place than making holes in the ground.

05:00 And he had holes all over him. And that sounds a bit comical but it wasn't at the time. The doctor was doing a bit of stitching and I got the job of cotton wool. Wherever blood'd come out I'd put a dob of cotton wool on it. That was my part in his recovery. But he wasn't terribly seriously injured it's just that he was full of little holes.

05:30 So that was that one. That was night time. Sometimes you're not sure how you got there or what you did. We were sent out one evening just the three of us, the drivers and I. And we, it was getting dark again and we ended up thinking well we don't know where we're going. So we pulled of the side of the road. And it's dark by now. We found some slip trenches and jumped into them and went to sleep.

06:00 Well the next morning when I woke up I got the fright of me life. There was a dead body in the trench. Well I think I jumped out of it quicker than I jumped into it. It frightened me but I thought now if I'd have touched him when I got into the trench I would have been making noises. Anyhow to further discomfort us, we found that we were lost. We were in between the two armies. One lot was shelling over us from the left and the other lot was shelling

06:30 over us from the right. So we got in the ambulance and went back home again.

And is this when you were at Bardia?

Yes, this was in the, there wasSollum, Bardia, Benghazi, Tobruk, Agedabia. Oh I can't remember all the names but yes, there was a lot of names we went in all the way through. It was just a matter of from one town to another. And you were hardly aware

07:00 of the town that you were in. But what used to happen, I should have mentioned this earlier, the way of attack was we had an English Armoured Corp. And they would sneak out in the middle of the night and they would creep up quietly and slowly on the town and then they'd blow up the aerodrome. Then the Navy would come across and

07:30 they would shell the place. Then the Air Force would come and they'd have a bit. And by the time we got in, you know there wasn't much left. But that's the way you hear people talking about civilians. But we never ever, or hardly ever saw civilians in any of the towns. Hardly ever saw them. Another story there later on. So, I've forgotten what

08:00 I was, oh yes. Yes we get sent out another day. And we went and we went and we went. And eventually we come to a hospital. So we park the ambulance in the car park and we go into the hospital. Plenty of patients. Plenty of either orderlies or doctors in their gowns and all the rest of it. Wandered all

08:30 through the hospital, nobody said a word to us. Nobody said g'day. Nothin. So after a while we looked at each other and we just quietly walked out again. We found out we were in the enemy hospital. Now how on earth we were able to drive, I suppose the ambulance protected us, but how on earth we were able to drive, obviously not through the actual

09:00 firing line. But we'd driven from one side of the battle to the other and nobody said g'day. There used to be things on the side. Apart from our picking up of wounded, I had a black mate Frank Stewart. And Frank and I were out in the desert one time. It wasn't at Bardia, it was a place called Fort Capuzzo. And there's just the two of us on the road and we can see a

09:30 huge black mass in front of us. And no idea what it was 'til it reached us. And it turned out to be thousands and thousands of Italian soldiers. Thousands of them. There was an officer in charge and he approached us and he said, where is Fort Capuzzo? Nine miles up the road mate. So away he went. And we just stood aside. And after a while a Military Policeman comes

10:00 up on his motorbike. "Have you see any Italian soldiers?" "Yes we have, thousands of them." "Where are they?" "Up the road." "Oh thanks mate" he says, I was their escort and I lost em. Now how the hell he lost em I don't know. You couldn't could you? He lost em so away he went quite happily. We used to now and then mix with the Italian prisoners, and as I

10:30 always say you're mates immediately. As soon as they're out of battle they're not the enemy. And we used to meet all sorts. And one day we met a little fella making a hell of a lot of noise. And we says to him what's wrong with you? He spoke Australian like we do. And his story was quite simple, he'd migrated to Australia. He gets a job up in Queensland.

11:00 He's going very, very well, decides to have a holiday back in Italy. The War is on, he's an Italian Citizen, he's conscripted into the Army. And the greatest insult of all, the Australians had him prisoner. He was angry. Nothing he could do about it. We used to help them also with their wounds. One of the things that happened to a lot of them,

11:30 whoever was looking after them, put tourniquets on here and there. And of course there was nobody there to take the tourniquet off, their limbs were swelling. And so we used to do a bit of that helping of them. I said we didn't meet much in the way of civilians. One day we were somewhere oh it was out of Tobruk. We were not in the big Tobruk battle, we were in our own. And a little boy came up to us one day and

12:00 have you got any milk please. And we said no we haven't. Mummy's got no milk for the baby. Well the only hope of milk that we might have had, we used to get tins, remember the coffee milk? We used to get tins of coffee milk. That wouldn't have been any good for a baby. So we couldn't help the little baby. So that was one of the little sad things on the side. Other things, getting back into battle,

12:30 we talked about shelling. Aeroplanes, particular fighter pilots, they were a real hazard. They would see us from miles and miles away up in the sky. But they wouldn't dive down on you. They'd fly low and come in just about tree top level. And you weren't aware of them until it was too late. And this particular day, you don't hear them, you don't see

13:00 them. And all of a sudden it's there. And I think this might have been a German pilot. They were coming in then. So he's come straight at us. We were in a little group this time. Two trucks and an ambulance in a triangle. And he let fly, I don't think he realised what he was doing. He let fly with his bullets and our ambulance driver was jumping out and he shot him in the leg. Eventually had to have it amputated. I

13:30 was out in the middle of the area and I don't know what's happening 'til all of a sudden there's a plane almost sitting on top of me. And all I can do is crouch down. And the big memory I have is that me tin hat came off. Now I don't know whether it was the draft from him or what is was. But fortunately he wasn't shooting when he came over me. But that was a sample. I had

14:00 that sort of luck all through the War. This used to happen now and then. It happened to us in New Guinea in a different way. They, a Jap...

Well before we get to New Guinea Jack...

Yes, yes, leave that bit out... Yes.

so you're in North Africa, so then where did you go next, after North Africa?

Right well I've got plenty of North Africa left. But it'll keep. Right, yeah well from North Africa we're

14:30 relieved after I dunno how many weeks. Back to Palestine then over to Greece and Crete. Now Greece was a, it was a suicide mission it really was. When we arrived there for instance the enemy had blown up the wharf. So we had to drop anchor out in the sea and go ashore in long boats. Which frightened us anyhow. Soldiers and sailors are two different things.

15:00 And we're only there for a few days and we're getting sent up Mount Olympus. Mount Olympus. We haven't got a truck or any vehicle at all. We go over to the railway siding, we borrow a steam train, two carriages on the back and away we go. We get half way up the mountain, there the engine stopped. That was the end of the trip as far as

15:30 the engine was concerned. Everybody out. I'm sent with George Thompson to try and find a road which we found and came back and reported to the officer in charge. And I then left him and went back to where me kit bag was. And the next thing they're all walking past me and I said where are you going? And he said well we've just got the order it's every man for himself. Now you couldn't get anything

16:00 worse. We're half way up a mountain in a strange land. We've no idea where we are, no idea where we're going. Get there anyhow under your own steam. And everybody except me walked down the railway line. I had told him there was a road, he didn't pass it on. And they all went down the railway line except me. I went across the paddock, found the road, Kiwi Army

16:30 truck came along. They give me a lift, they took me down the mountain and somehow or other they dropped me near our headquarters. The other fellas, within forty-eight hours a large number of them were Prisoners of War of the Germans. It's as simple as that. So, yes, if we're gonna do a bit of skimming, right. We

17:00 eventually were being evacuated from Greece to a place called Kalamata. We get on a ship and we get out in the Mediterranean. We're being bombed all day but, at last, one dropped a bomb close to us. I've got a tape of that. And one dropped close to us and the ship stops dead in its tracks and it's going to sink. And I won't tell you what I was doing at the time if you want something for later.

17:30 **Thank you.**

Right. And the Navy came and rescued us so there's more detail in that. Now the rescue was very good. But sadly for us it went to the nearest port of call which was Suda Bay in Crete. So when we get to Crete, it became more a battle for survival. Apart from any battle action that

18:00 came on. We were there without any spare clothes with nothing. And eventually we've got to get organised and find a food dump and all the rest of it. And that became the survival there. And eventually after a few weeks there, we were evacuated. And back to Egypt. From Egypt we went to

18:30 Syria and Lebanon. So we've gone from one extreme to the other. From the desert to the snow. And we're in Lebanon for a couple of weeks. Syria and Lebanon, Beirut, Damascus, Homs and all those places. We come out of that and back to Palestine. We're put on a ship in the Suez Canal. We think we're going home but

19:00 we thought wrong. We're out in the middle of the Indian Ocean and our Company Commander came down and told us that we were in fact heading for Burma. Where the Japs were. But the Prime Minister had said they're not heading for Burma, he'd had the ship turned round. We're actually on the way. We didn't know about it. Had no idea.

So you'd been told nothing?

No, you never did get told anything. We never, ever, ever

19:30 knew, even training back at Pucka [Puckapunyal]. You'd be going out on a bivouac, you had no idea where you were going. Nobody was saying you were going to Sugar Loaf Creek or this one or that one. You were never told anything. Never never never.

Did that ever bother you?

No, now and then it might annoy you a little bit. But the thing is it's the life you're leading. See

20:00 Beryl often says to me you know I did this and I did that. It was no trouble to us. It was par for the course. So we get to Ceylon, it was still Ceylon in those days. And of course we're in jungle and all the rest of it. Jungle and mountain. And there was no battle action there but there was medical action. We organised a special hospital

20:30 for special diseases. And we ran that. And then eventually we're back home in Australia and again, unlike today, nobody knows we're home. We go up to, what's that place next to Seymour?

You mean Puckapunyal?

No, there's another one, there's another, a bit of an Army camp.

Not Kilmore?

21:00 No, it goes through Seymour. It doesn't matter, it doesn't really matter. We went there anyhow. So

Avenel?

No, no Avenel's down Geelong way.

No there's another one up that way there too.

There's another one up there too is there? No I don't know it. It'll come out sooner or later. It's not vital. So we finished up back at Pucka anyhow.

21:30 And the family were unaware of it. The best we could do was sneak out and find a telephone and ring up one of the neighbours and pass the message on we're home. So we had a few, I think we only got a fortnight's leave.

Well when was that? That was early 1942?

That'd be getting into about the middle of '42. We have an awful lot of trouble.

22:00 We never had diaries. We didn't even have radios. You know today they carry everything. But we weren't allowed, I don't think we were allowed to have diaries. We didn't have em anyhow. And oh I can remember things, dates, it's quite hopeless. Really and truly. I would think it would have been round about June, July when we got home.

22:30 But I'm only guessing. We weren't home long and back up the tablelands and into New Guinea. Started off at Milne Bay and then we, it was mud and water and jungle just about everywhere you went. Yeah it would take almost hours to walk a couple of miles. And you had mud up to your knees, you really did. We had,

23:00 oh I think we only had these little things round there. And at the end of the day you weren't sure whether you wanted to take your clothes off and get back into them next day. It was really, really mud. Sometimes you had to cross a river and of course that was more than up to your knees. And they were fast running rivers. The jungle was so thick that

23:30 sometimes we'd be given a spell of perhaps two or three months up a mount. A real dense jungle area. You never saw the sun, you just didn't see the sun through the trees. And I remember when we came out after a spell. Somebody said to me you look sick. I wasn't sick, I just hadn't seen the sun. And it was really, really something. We did a lot of

24:00 what we'd call little outposts. Two or three people in a little spot just halfway up a mountain or something like that. Handling the, we didn't carry the patients, the natives carried them. But there was always something to do for them. In fact we would have, we had a little hospital, a place called Mubo. It was by the river and we did a lot of hospital work there. But we were spread all over the mountains. It was all mountains.

24:30 Even the aerodrome where we had our main hospital. The planes had to come down the side of a mountain and land up the aerodrome. And in return when they took off, they took off down the aerodrome and straight up to dodge the side of a mountain. So we're still abbreviating on things. So

25:00 that was New Guinea. Apart from the enemy, malaria was your big enemy. For some reason or other I never got any of those things. We all got bit by mosquitoes. But I never got any of them. But a large percentage of them, you got malaria. The occasional black water fever. So we had all sorts of things in New Guinea.

You must have had a very hardy

25:30 **constitution?**

Well it was me orphanage upbringing. It would have been. It would have to be me orphanage upbringing because we..... abbreviating as you suggested earlier. That was a good idea cause you could go on and on and on.

But we're going to get all the rest. You know, we'll...

Yes, there's plenty more.

Yes, there's plenty there. Yes I can see that.

Yes so

26:00 oh that's right, we were just rambling through New Guinea. You're running out of tape are you? Yes we were just rambling through New Guinea and we could easy leave it at that. Because I guess you could say that that was the way we were operating. You'd be sent here, you'd be sent there. There was even odd occasions when an officer would say to you

26:30 come on we'll go for a walk and you'd go for a walk for two or three days. And you were all over the place. In fact the only orderly war we had was the one in Libya. Really and truly. Because it was all cut and dried town by town. You had roads and you had vehicles. So it was about the only really orderly thing. New Guinea you were all over the place. Greece and Crete you didn't know where

27:00 you were most of the time. You really didn't.

That must have been very frightening.

Not frightening, see I have troubles explaining sometimes but one of the, I think one of the big things, at least for somebody like me, was nothing was ever going to happen to me. You might get killed and you might get wounded but not me.

27:30 And I also put in me orphanage upbringing, because in the orphanage there was no querying, there was no asking questions. I, in fact I never became an observant person. I simply accepted whatever went on. And there were things that went on in the Army, that, yes, you're right it could have been frightening. You know the bit up the mountain, when you're abandoned half way up a mountain,

28:00 it didn't bother me at all. I just, I knew there was a road, I just out on to the road and away.

When you say nothing could, you didn't think anything could happen to you, was this because you had faith in God or just faith in your own ability to deal with it?

No, not even that. It's a bit like the fella that's driving a hundred miles down the road. He's got no faith in anybody, but he's not gonna get hurt. Someone else might. No, I, we were

28:30 brought up religious. In fact, you'll laugh at this, I became a part time preacher. But I was never a, I never had the conviction that Beryl has. And no I never said a prayer, I get asked that question. It never occurred to me to say a prayer. I couldn't see the point of it to be honest. So no it was just, you're in all sorts of spots

29:00 sometimes, no, you're not even thinking of getting hurt. It doesn't occur to you. You also, as often as not, incidents happen so very quickly. I said the other day I was stranded out in the open with that aeroplane. He's over, I've only got time to lift up my head and he'd gone. See and that would happen.

29:30 It was just the way things worked out. I honestly never, to be honest, things annoyed me more when I eventually was boarded medically out of the unit and sent to, of all things, a salvage company up at Townsville. And things there really made me angry.

So this was after New Guinea when you'd been discharged?

No before I'd been discharged.

Before you're discharged

30:00 **When I was supposed to be discharged and I wasn't. So I used to get angry there. Told a drunken officer what I thought of him one night. My word I did. So, but I don't think I was every angry or frustrated. I can recall simple things. Getting us out of bed at two o'clock in the morning to catch a train at about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. And we would simply sit there, what could you do?**

30:30 **You see, so eventually we've done our spell in New Guinea of a year or so. We came home and got married. A lot of us got married that year 1943. And then it was gonna be a matter of back up to New Guinea again. But our officers commanding, although they didn't say so, I believe what they did, they checked out those of us who'd been through the whole war.**

31:00 **We had a lot of reinforcements. And they checked out those of us, the older ones. And any of us that were found to be not A1 anymore medically, I didn't know but our papers were marked for discharge. And we were sent down to, on the tablelands, we were sent down to Brisbane. I think that was one time I really got angry. I'm interviewed by a World**

31:30 **War I Army officer or a Major and he says to me what do you want to get out of the Army for? At this stage I've had about five years of everything. I says I've had enough. He never said a word. He sent me up to Townsville. A thousand miles north he sent me. What a mongrel. And I was really angry with that, I still am. Really angry with him. Well then we, eventually I was discharged**

32:00 **earlier but not as early as I was supposed to be. Coming out of the Army was I believe a bit of a frustrating thing. We'd had five and a half years roughly, not quite, of being in Army situations. We're all doing the same thing. Mates and sharing tents and all the rest of it. And I come home and**

32:30 **I'm on me own as it were. I went back to me job and I had nothin to do, nothing in common with the workers. Nothing in common with the civilians. I'd sometimes be on a train and I felt like saying, I've been in the Army. But you didn't you see. And according to Beryl I never spoke to people for years. And I wasn't**

33:00 **aware of it. Her father, she tells me, their father was so, he was the frustrated one. He said to Beryl more than once, he said the boy doesn't talk. What's the matter with him?**

What, about the war or about anything in general?

Anything in general, I didn't have much in common with people from this five and half years. And he was so disappointed I never told him anything about the war. And all that would happen was

33:30 occasionally some of me mates'd come home. And Beryl's mum and dad'd make em welcome. And we'd get in corners and dad'd sit in the corner. And he'd enjoy himself like mad. The only time he heard anything. And it wasn't deliberate. And I was not aware of it. I honestly wasn't aware of it. The only thing I was aware of was I couldn't, even with Beryl, I couldn't usually sit and talk with her.

34:00 I was aware of that and I'd be wondering what the hell am I gonna say? And I think that took years to get out of me system. But it wasn't a matter of horrors of war or anything like that. It was tremendous change from one life to another one. It was a terrific change. And I think little things used to annoy me about rationing and how crook things were and

34:30 all that. But generally speaking I just had nothing in common with the throng. Anyhow I got involved with youth work and church work. And eventually I was kindergarten, Sunday School all that. Eventually I was so involved in it I became what we used to call a lay preacher. And part time preacher. And I did that for a few years. And

35:00 enjoyed it. But eventually the time came when it was awfully hard to settle down and work out me service. That's when I decided I'd been doing it long enough. The children were born and all that sort of thing. I became involved with the Masonic Lodge. I became a lecturer in the Masonic Lodge and I really enjoyed that for many years. Sport, I played

35:30 football and golf. Played golf 'til I was about eighty and me legs went. And I guess the next highlight really would have been when we got that invitation to go back to Greece and Crete in 2001. And that had to be the greatest thing, don't hesitate, that had to be the greatest thing that ever happened to us.

36:00 Everything that could be done was done for us. We were clothed by Fletcher Jones, we had to have three doctors independently inspect us. The week before we left, the district nurse called on us to make sure that we were as fit as the doctor, because doctors'll help you to make sure that we were

36:30 as fit as they said we were. Everything possible for our comfort was number one. We can get onto that at a later date too. But it was a marvellous thing and as I said earlier, they still are in contact with us. They send us cards at Christmas, they'll send us some news sheets now and then. Even the other day I had

37:00 a man here who was interested in our tape and he would like one. So I rang up Cathy Moore and she says well I've got one left. Tell him to ring me up and he can have it. And this is the way it's been going with them ever since. And here we are today telling our story again. When I say again, I've spent years and years writing it. Never been satisfied with it. And I

37:30 write it again and again. Still don't get any satisfaction out of how I write. But I'm quite enjoying this, this morning.

Well that's fantastic. Look I think we might stop at this stage and then our next tape will take us in, we'll be going back again.

Right.

Over the potted history that you've given of your life today. Are you happy with that?

Yeah I'm quite happy.

Tape 3

00:35 **Jack, we're going to go back to your early life now. And I'm going to ask you a few more specific questions. And just some basics here. I don't think we got your parents names and your brothers and sisters names.**

Right. Parents was, my father's name, they're all Scottish names, Alexander Rankin McLeod.

01:00 I think we better just stick with Alec McLeod and our mother's name was Marion. And we children were named after traditions of the Scottish land whereby maiden surnames became a child's second Christian name. And I was christened John Sanderson. And my elder brother was

01:30 christened Alexander Rankin. But apart from all that, I was John, me younger brother was Bill, the older brother was Alec and our sister was Mary. And the baby that died was Norman. And mum was, mum and dad was Alec and Marion.

And do you know why they decided to come to Australia?

It was something, I believe,

02:00 there was a huge migration push like we had after World War II. And this time it was the Scottish migrants and English. And the opportunity was for Canada, New Zealand and Australia. And I believe that dad came out with scores of his old soldier mates. In our early childhood

02:30 all I knew was the Scottish tongue. Kilts, bagpipes, New Year's Eve instead of Christmas Eve. And in fact we used to have that little bit of a Scottish twang. And in fact us kids had a kilt. So I would say for sure it was this push. We decided or our family decided to come to Australia. Others might have went to New Zealand. New Zealand was a great

03:00 migration thing years ago and apparently Canada.

And can you remember whether your mother was ever in paid work? Or did she just…

I would say no. It was near enough to unheard of for elderly people, mothers and all. Just wasn't done. In fact women in factories and things just didn't work until the war

03:30 came. Women did work in service. They became servant girls and house maids and all that sort of thing. But no, anyhow she, in her short time, mum had too many small children. So never would she have been working.

And what did she die of, do you know?

Pneumonia and the treatment was open the windows.

04:00 **Well she wasn't a victim of the, no, I'm getting my dates wrong here. I was thinking of the big influenza… No that was…**

Mum had pneumonia and the family, the older ones used to make the point, they blamed the doctor. But that was the thing. I can remember visiting a neighbour who had

04:30 consumption. She was in a hospital down at Cheltenham or somewhere. And her room was a freezing chamber. This was how you got rid of germs apparently. Or whatever it was. It's as simple as that.

Well what do you think made your father decide to put you and your brothers in the orphanage?

It was fairly simple for me.

05:00 He had four small children from, there was the baby, Mary was only a baby, perhaps a couple of three year old. Four small children. I was the second oldest at nine, Bill would have been about seven, Alec eleven or twelve. And there was absolutely I believe no social services in those days. Nothing.

05:30 So you relied on your neighbours. And we were a Presbyterian family. And even as little kids I can remember we did go to Sunday School. And it was as simple, I'd say, as talking to somebody who said to me, well see the Presbyterian Minister. I'd say he never had a hope in the world to keep a job and be rearing four little kids. And

06:00 we accepted it. We never ever had any hard thoughts towards our dad. To me it was the most natural thing in the world.

When your mother died of pneumonia, was she, had she been in hospital?

I would doubt it. I can only remember her being in bed. It's strange you say about memories. I was six or seven, I think I was seven probably in 1926.

06:30 But you do remember. You don't know anything about them being dead or anything. But you know that something's wrong, something's happened.

Well did children go to funerals in those days? Did you go to your mother's funeral?

I wouldn't know, probably not. Women tended not to go to funerals. So I'd say probably not but I can only guess on that one.

Now I was just wondering what

07:00 **memories you have of the Great Depression?**

None.

Oh that's very interesting isn't it?

Well, we were in the orphanage. I was in the orphanage from '28 to '34 and I think the paralysis and the Depression were part of those days. Exactly when I don't know. But I do know that when I eventually went

07:30 back to live in Melbourne, getting a job was easier than getting out of bed of a morning. You could walk into a job today and walk out of it tomorrow and get a job half an hour later. It was as simple as that. So the Depression days must have been if not completely over then on their way out when I became a late teenager and a regular working

08:00 man.

And so you were fourteen weren't you when you had your first job?

Yeah I'd have been between fourteen andit was Christmas, Christmas '34. I might have been fifteen, fourteen or fifteen. I think I might have been fifteen. I wouldn't, yes I'd have to be, I was borne in 1919,

08:30 fifteen years to '34, yes.

Okay well before we get on to your working life again, I just wanted to take you back to your school days. Now you mentioned earlier that there was a group of you from the orphanage and then there were the outsiders and yes. So, how did you all get on? I mean did you like school?

I did eventually. It's a little bit comical. I was

09:00 never interested in school. And particularly as a littley. And then I moved into I think the fifth grade and we were given a spelling test. I can still remember the word. The word was ornithorhynchus. And I was one of the few kids that could spell it. And the teacher got hold of me and the.

09:30 other kids that'd done a bit of good spelling. And she took us back to our previous year's grade. And we stood in front of the kids and spelled ornithorhynchus. And from then on I was interested. I really was interested. I became a very good scholar particularly with arithmetic really and mental arithmetic. And I really, in fact I believe when I got

10:00 up to the eighth grade I just missed dux of the school, couple of points. But I really, really became interested. And this apparently was with me in the orphanage. Oh we're in the orphanage anyhow. We had a gymnasium and a gymnasium teacher. And I was a bit of a fool about. And one year the teacher said we're going to give a

10:30 cup for the best boy and a medal for the second. I've still got the medal. It's hanging up there. Incentive was the thing.

Exactly. Now at school, you're, what other activities were you involved in? Did you, were there sporting activities?

Yes we had our football and our cricket. But we also had

11:00 what they called a Drum and Fife Band. If you haven't heard the term. It's flutes and piccolos and kettle drums. I was part of that band. I used to play the piccolo. And we were part of a, at least city-wide, Melbourne City-wide Schools Band Competition. One of the ladies, whose children were in the orphanage. She was a funny lady. She said to us when we started to practise

11:30 every day at twelve o'clock. Say we will win. And we said we will win. And we lost because at the end of our play, the kettle drummer give it another tap. And so we just missed winning. So yes we were involved in that. Football and cricket of course. Oh that'd be about all there was, wasn't there in gymnasium?

Well what were

12:00 **your teachers like? Or what was the discipline like say compared with the orphanage?**

Similar. In fact we have not so fond memories of a very big dark lady, Miss Cooper. Be kind to her, she was big and strong. And one day I annoyed her for some reason or other. And she gave me six with the cane, no she only had a strap they didn't have

12:30 a cane at school. And she gave em to me. One of the things, we would never cry. Put your hands under there, never cry when you got it. And it did hurt. So that was Miss Cooper. Yes, the school, the teachers generally speaking, the teachers were as strict as you had. Well you had to be, it was a world of strictness. And the nearest we got to any relaxing. There were one or two

13:00 teenage lady teachers and we found that we were able to talk friendly with them. But generally speaking you never got close to a teacher. You never got close to anybody in authority. And authority in my world was a Post Master, Station Master, a teacher, a Boy Scout leader, a preacher. These were all people you dipped your lid to if you had one.

13:30 Policeman especially. I remember a day, some of us kids in the orphanage were in a train. And a policeman came in and he sat among us. Took his cap off. And it was the thrill of our life. Oooh, a policeman talked to us. Oh that was a real thrill. Yes, anybody at all, if they were important, Even, I didn't know at the time, but it was men who went to Lodge. You'd see them going to Lodge, you didn't know what they were going from

14:00 but they had a bow tie on. But they were important people.

So how do you think this respect for authority was inculcated into people or put into people? Was it the ...

Starts with your dad. He was, I can remember him, there was one little old lady, Mrs Hart. She lived in a cottage way out in the paddock somewhere. He would always, when we left, say

14:30 thank you to Mrs Hart. And we're only that high. So I've had it forever. Always thank me wife for me meal. Each dish she gives me I say thank you. Started with dad.

Oh that's very interesting. And I was just wondering whether you could remember a day at school? Could you describe for us what you

15:00 **did in a day at school?**

Yes, It is comical isn't it? See when you're talking a day at school, you're talking of more than seventy years ago. More than seventy. Yes a typical day at school, we'd get there and in the summertime we had a cricket pitch in the middle of the playground and we'd get out there playing cricket 'til we were going in to class.

15:30 We would line up, the flag would be flying. And there was some sort of a ritual which I don't recall. But there was a ritual for the flag and into class. One day in the week, probably Monday, there would be a preacher or a church leader of some sort come in and give you a half hour of religious instruction.

16:00 An interesting feature when I got into becoming a better student, the teacher allowed us, well he allowed me at any rate, the privilege of sitting up the back or sitting in the front seat. I sat in the front seat. We would be in a row right up to the back and the girls were there and it took us all our time to just do that.

16:30 Really and truly. We, there was no talking between, there was no life between us. Although comically and contradictory, somehow or other you'd get to like one and when no one was looking, you'd wave to her. But no you didn't, you didn't even think of talking to the girls. And this became a problem in

17:00 later life. Because I had no idea of approaching a girl. Or of wanting to take a girl out. I would really, really have to be awfully certain of what was happening. I just didn't, you know, have any confidence at all in the outside world.

Well with, at school, can you remember

17:30 **what you wrote on? Did you have a slate, or did you…**

No, we had our exercise books. And being a left hander, I never had trouble. But I'd have to get round the end of the desk to, you know, to get round to write.

And nobody ever tried to change you to writing with your right hand?

Only once, an Inspector came one day. And for that one day, quite foolishly, he made me write with me right hand.

18:00 He obviously didn't know that it was a part of my make up. That it was wrong. I saw a lecture once on the subject. And it was dangerous to change you. It was, nervous system was all set this way. That was the nearest thing. There was quite a thing against left handers. You rarely saw or heard of left handers getting jobs in banks and all that sort

18:30 of thing. There was even a thing against, there was two types of shorthand which I don't know. But there was a thing against one of them. When we grew to be parents we attended a parents' night one night and somebody, one of the principals told us that if your daughter does that type of shorthand, she won't get a job. How stupid, she's the only one to read her shorthand.

19:00 But there were all these biases.

And I'm taking you back to the orphanage now, did you have any entertainment at the orphanage? I mean did you play games …?

Yes, yes. We, oh there was things like the old Snakes and Ladders and all those sort of things. There was also a billiard table in the lounge room. And in fact we had one master who could play and taught us how

19:30 to play. But apart from that there were, oh yes we used to have, we had a big gymnasium hall. Yes, where they'd show us movies some nights. I don't know how often. We had a lady, Mrs Hutchinson, and I remember her. She was a lady that could sing like Nellie Melba. She could sing. She was a marvellous lady. And she would come towards Christmas.

20:00 And organise us into a concert party. She'd teach us songs and dances and all the rest of it. And that was a marvellous thing. What else in entertainment? No, I don't know if there was that much. I think kids generally, comics or whatever they could get, did them. Oh there was another thing, you were asking about

20:30 our bit of principles. The only boys books we got were boys magazines. Champion, The Gym and what have you. And the whole gist of their life was honour and decency. And these were the only books we read. And so we come out of the orphanage thinking that's how the world was.

So,

21:00 **you found it to be the contrary?**

Oh yes, me first job as a, you know it was a thunderous eye opener.

During your time at the orphanage, in this period, was, did you ever hear World War I brought up? Was it ever discussed?

Very, no it wasn't discussed, it came up very briefly. And the German fleet paid

21:30 a visit to Australia. Now it was in my time so it'd be round the thirties sometime. And it was being broadcasting on the radio. And that, that would be about all I was aware of. Although later on, I think as we got older, our dad used to march on Anzac Day. But I think that'd be, Anzac Day,

22:00 that'd be the beginning and the end of any involvement in any way.

So your father had never told you war stories?

He wasn't in the position. You see when we were in the orphanage for a, see I'm in there from the time I'm what, nine years old to fifteen. And I was, there was no, in fact I don't thinkthere was ever much talking between youngun's

22:30 and adults way back. I know I'm amazed today how young people can mix with me and talk with me on a level. When we were, even when we were young married's, the mothers and the fathers, we wouldn't dare speak to them. Never ever. And they were all old people when they were

23:00 about forty. Old grey haired people.

Well look talking about mates, did you make any mates at the orphanage?

Yes, I've still got him today. I've got two of em. Billy French and George Pilates.

And where are they?

Billy, Box Hill and George is, I think George is at Brunswick. In fact I'm going to invite George to a

23:30 Greek Day, where I'm a speaker on the twentieth, I think the twentieth of May. Are we end of May yet, we're not. Yeah the twentieth of May. And George'll come along as my guest. Yes.

Well that it wonderful.

It really is. We had a reunion if I'm not digressing from you. We had a reunion, oh it must have been three or four years ago.

24:00 Celebrating a hundred and fifty years of orphans. And one of the things that came out was that the first problem in settling Australia was orphans. There was orphans by the bucket full. Orphans, orphans, orphans. We found that out. What happened, they invited all the, I don't know how they found their names and addresses, we all got invitations. And it was some big Cathedral up,

24:30 it was Melbourne, I think a Church of England one, I can't think of its name. Up in the Flagstaff Gardens somewhere. And it was marvellous. It really was. We had our name tags. And a man came up to me and said hello Jack, how are your brothers? And I wouldn't have seen him for maybe seventy years.

That is extraordinary

25:00 **isn't it.**

It really is. And more so, a lady come up, she said you remember me Jack? I said you're one of the Hatton sisters. She says I'm Nellie. I said yes. And when it was all over I said to her well I wasn't allowed to talk to you. Give me a kiss. So we had a kiss. Yes, it's

25:30 most unreal. In fact there was a real development came out of this reunion. Because it also involved a, what are they call them, adopted children. There's some other word, foster children. And we then got involved with a group called AusChild and we used to go to meetings and meet these foster children and we became real great mates.

26:00 But the big thing about it was that some of them have a worse life than we had in the orphanage.

In what respect?

Well first of all you're not me mother. No matter how much you love me. Secondly they've got a daughter of their own the same age. The foster child's getting all the love and attention. So there's

26:30 real problems. And also they can get to an age where nobody wants a child, ten or twelve or fourteen year old. They want a little baby, cuddle a baby. So they have lots of problems. So we got involved in that after the reunion. And in fact we stayed involved with them, we're still in touch with them. Went to their annual meeting the other day, Some sort of a, oh the Annual Meeting of the Lost Child. Yes

27:00 we are, we're still in, one of the comical things. There's a couple of the ladies up the back. I went up and spoke to them at the reunion. And they said do you know this lady? I said no. Well they said she's Mr Graham's daughter. She's ninety-three year old. And I said to her were you in the orphanage or not? She said no. Mr Graham was my father. Mr Graham was our strictest

27:30 master. Strict, strict, strict. Man with a cork arm, big man. And one of the girls said to me, was he strict? And I had to almost you know, there was no way I was gonna say no, yes he was strict. But, I thought, you're ninety-three year old I can't say anything against your father. He was long since dead but

28:00 when she wasn't looking I told em.

So, what he wasn't likeable, I mean did you respect him or …?

No I don't know if respect ever came into the dealing with them. I think it was more fear. I, the older I get the more I understand this strictness bloke. It was strict and we became more or less

28:30 nothings. I think I told you we didn't have Christian names. And you were just a nothing really.

Well when you left the orphanage then and you went off to work, did you miss it?

Yes. Yes because I'd had sixty-three mates and now I didn't have any. Yes I did miss it. And I was almost sent to solitary

29:00 confinement. We mentioned Inverloch and you knew what they called The Point. His farm was over on The Point. So there was only he and I and his wife. Yes it was solitary confinement.

Well, when you worked there, I mean did you have any time off?

No you didn't have time off on farms. The cows had to be milked seven days a week. And what might have happened

29:30 was that when you called time off, perhaps Sunday and Saturday afternoon, you might have not done any work around the farm but you never had time away from the farm.

Did you come up to Melbourne or anything?

No, I forgot to tell you, I have to tell you now. This was the big drama. I get to Inverloch and it's round about, it's Christmas. Somewhere between Christmas and New Year's Day.

30:00 And over I go and you know the very sight of it would frighten you. And over on the news, there's a big carnival at Inverloch. New Year's Carnival. Over on the news there's a thirteen year old school girl has been murdered. Now this is going back, way, way, way before, you may not even have heard of it. And I'm on the farm one day. In fact I was taking the cream to

30:30 Charman Lower. And the old time posse that you used to see in the movies. Out comes a group of horsemen. Have you seen a school girl anywhere? Didn't even know what they were talking about. There was no way I could help them on that one. But that was the beginning of the drama. It turned out the fella that killed her

31:00 committed three murders. And they eventually caught him at Leongatha. And his push bike and his macintosh gave him away. At each of the murder scenes there was always a character with a push bike and a macintosh. So he did three murders. But I told you Mr McDonald was odd. And to catch his horse you had to have a dish of chaff and

31:30 an apple. So in the middle of the night he gets me out of bed. Go and get me horse, I know who did the murder. All right. So I get his horse and saddle the horse. I'm going over to Mr Lees, Mr Lees was the neighbour. Now Lord only knows what Mr Lees said when he got there. I know who did the murder. I had a farm hand here with pale blue eyes. He was a murderer.

32:00 I'm going over to tell Mr Lees. Wouldn't you be thrilled to bits if somebody says a man with pale blue eyes did the murder. Really and truly. That was Mr McDonald. He had a Friesian bull. When it got out the paddock as sometimes it would, he'd get his shotgun out and shoot it in the backside. Run back in the paddock. His calves, we had a lot of calves.

32:30 Every one died. Because all they had to eat was bracken instead of grass. And one day he said to me. I'm going to see the police. Someone's poisoning my cattle. Well even this kid knew what was happening with them. Yes he was an odd person. So I believe I created a record. I worked for him for seven months. Yeah, true.

33:00 **So it was a welcome release then to be able to make your way to Yarram?**

Yes, it was.

And how long were you at Yarram then?

I would have been at Yarram for a year or more. I was there for a whole football season, I remember that much.

So you played football?

Yes, kicked seven goals one day.

So who did you play for, Yarram?

Wanron. You know, you know the districts?

I know the districts.

Yes. Well the farmer was

33:30 **Bill White. You go out to Wanron, there's a little storeroom before you go up the hill. And Bill's property was right up the hill from that storeroom. And he was a lovely man. He really was. And fifty-eight years after I left him I've got the cutting in there, I decided I wanted to see him. So**

34:00 **I wrote a letter, hoping he was still there. Get a phone call from his wife. Come up and see us, fifty-eight years later.**

And so what year was that, that you went to visit him then?

You have to add fifty-eight to thirty-four. Yes and we had a marvellous weekend. Really marvellous. And he's dead now. I ring his wife every Christmas. Yeah.

It's wonderful isn't

34:30 **it to keep those long friendships, well they're lifetime friendships aren't they?**

Yes. Marvellous.

So the work, can you tell me a bit about the work that you were doing at Yarram?

In Yarram? Farm work. Milking cows, whatever else there was. There was always something to do out in the paddocks. Even sometimes you had paddocks that were full of tussocks or thistles. Get out with the mattock and chop these things

35:00 out. You had enough work to do almost with the cows. Because, oh on the first farm there was about twenty or thirty cows the two of us used to milk. And they were easy enough. Another farm I worked on we had about a hundred and twenty cows. It took longer. But just general farm work. Milking cows. They used to take many hours in a day twice a day.

So

35:30 **tell me from there, you came back to Melbourne. For what reason did you do that?**

First of all I wanted to go down and see me dad.

Yes, that's what I was wondering, you wouldn't have been seeing your father?

No, we were in constant touch with him, always writing to him. In fact for a long time after I was working, I used to send him five shillings every now and then. Cause I got the impression, that I think it might have been Depression days

36:00 I don't know. After a while he says you don't have to send me the five shillings. But I did it cause I thought he wanted it, he needed it. Yes I went back to, then when I got there I decided I preferred to be down there than back on the farm. I was never really a farmer. And it's not something you can just suddenly say I'm gonna be a farmer. I wasn't a farmer. The city was my life. And been in the city

36:30 ever since.

And so where did you come to stay in the city? What part of the city did you come back to?

I came back firstly to stay where dad was staying. He was staying with one of the Scottish families. And it was obvious they didn't have room for me. In fact I shared a room with me sister and the lady's daughter. So there, I wasn't really, I shouldn't really have been there. There was too many. Went and stayed with

37:00 Duncan for a while. And then I found a lady that ran a boarding house with oh, I think, six or eight young people. Mrs Harvey. So I was there. In fact I was there when I went away to war. But when I came back I went to live with Beryl's parents.

And had, your father hadn't remarried or ...?

No in fact, he died while I was away. And I'd been writing to him for three months. Dad.

37:30 Yeah, dad had it rough. Bad luck all his life. He was only about, I think he was only in his early forties when he died.

So what sort of job did you get when you came back to Melbourne?

I got a job with a farm machinery firm

38:00 called Sunshine Harvesters H.V. McKay. It wasn't much of a job. I was getting thirty-four shillings a

week and I paid the landlady twenty-three. So I clothed meself, and did clothe meself on eleven shillings a week. Shoes, you could get shoes for about six or seven shillings and all that. But there

38:30 was a firm called Olympic Tyres. And they were a firm where you worked like mad but you got paid accordingly. So I went to Olympic Tyres. And all of a sudden I'm getting two or three pound a week.

Well that sounds as if you really ...

That's a different story.

Yes. We've come to the end of the tape so we might stop there.

39:00 Right we'll stop for a little while yes. And I'm still thinking I'm taking up an awful lot of tape with you people.

Tape 4

00:32 **Well we're at your employment at Olympic Tyres. I was just wondering, how did you get to work in those days?**

You had three options. You could get on the train to West Footscray Station and walk down to the factory. You could ride your push bike which I did for a long time or you could buy a motorbike like I did. And ride your motor bike to work. So that, that's fairly

01:00 simple.

Okay, well tell me about your job? The actual work that you did at Olympic Tyres.

I was in, I was originally in what was called the tyre moulding department. That's where we made the motor tyres and motor cycle tyres. And it was a hot steamy job because each of the moulds was heated by steam heat. And the tyre, we'd make the tyre

01:30 bit like you'd make say a pie and then put it in there to be baked. And then it had to, after a while, to be taken out. You had an inner tube in it to keep its shape. And so after a given time, you had numerous sizes and types, you'd switch the pressure off, open the door and pull out the tyre, strip the inner tube out to go into

02:00 the next case. And then she'd be sent along an inspection line and stacked up and into the store room. It was a fairly simple process. One of the things about it was it was extremely hot. In fact we'd just have cold water bags hanging around the department. You worked a straight eight hours and you took time off

02:30 when you could, round about half way for your lunch. But while you were having your lunch, work was piling up so you had to get a move on when you finished your lunch. It was three eight-hour shifts. If your relief didn't come in you stayed there for another four hours. Yeah this was quite common. We also worked Saturday morning in those days.

03:00 And one day I'd done a full five days of twelve hours. The foreman said to me you coming in tomorrow? I said no I'm not. He says oh right, you'll lose it out of your bonus. Didn't know that I'd done twenty hours overtime. You'll lose it out of your bonus. So it was that sort of work. But then when I, they held the job for me when I went to war. When I

03:30 came back from the war I was given the same job again. But I didn't fancy coming back to shift work so I told em it was affecting me health. They then transferred me to another job. And one thing led to another. I went to tech school and learned to become a carpenter. Eventually was transferred to the carpentry and the maintenance department.

04:00 And did such work as building offices. You're forever building extra offices. Extra rooms and this, that and the other thing. Extensions to the factory, we did a lot of that. We did a lot of maintenance. The factory was built on a bit of a swamp so we had a lot of work there. And the day came when the foreman retired and I became the foreman. And life

04:30 was somewhat different. And eventually I was there for forty-two and a half years including me war service. And when I retired I got the princely sum of I think it was twenty-five thousand pound. For forty-two years. I left behind about ten months sick pay. I did not get a cent of that. I got what I was entitled to.

05:00 And that was that.

Well I was going to ask you, did you think they were good employers?

Yes they were. Because you got paid for what you did. Piece work we used to call it. And we did, because I think after the war the basic wage was,

05:30 oh I forget, round the three or four pounds a week. I just don't honestly remember. But we would be getting far more than that. Particularly in the shift work. Yes I suppose fair would be a fair enough thing. They were very hard but when I became foreman I learned more about that.

06:00 You couldn't afford to be soft. I found that as a foreman, if you're too soft with them they take advantage of you awfully. And they can work schemes whereby they could deceive you into what, how much work they were doing. You know in the tyre section they couldn't. Because every article you did, you

06:30 put a number on it, you stamped a number on it. So you were kept honest there. But I found some fellas, I had thirty or forty people. Europeans, Yugoslav, Maltese, Italian the lot. And one way or another I knew they were cheating me, but I, there was nothing I could do about it. Because there was no way of proving it until you got there, the right people in. Which eventually did happen after I, about the time I retired.

07:00 **Right, well I'll take you back to the 1930's now. And did you, were you aware of any discussion about the coming of war?**

No.

Right, so can you remember where you were when the announcement came, that Britain

I was in the lounge room with Beryl and her parents. And she still says as soon as Menzies announced it,

07:30 Jack said I'm going to join up. This was a simple enough thing to say because we were very much for King and country. We were brought up to stand up when they play God save the King. That sort of thing. Very very definitely. And in fact the reason he declared war purely and simply was

08:00 the mother country's declared war, we're with them. It was as simple as that. And this was our outlook. There was nothing noble or special about it. The country's at war, we join the Army.

Well that was very interesting in your case because you did have a good job.

Yes.

And there have been things written about the Sixth Division...

Excuse me.

I haven't asked you Jack

08:30 **about how you, oh you did mention how you met Beryl. It was at church wasn't it?**

Right, yeah.

Yes, so can you remember what year that was?

It would have to be round about 1937 I guess. The teenage groups that we were in, they were little groups. There were many of us in the

09:00 church situation. You'd have three or four in this group and three or four in that. And the likes of me never really got attached to any one girl, chiefly because of this lack of confidence. I just didn't have it. Really and truly I didn't have it. And how we exactly

09:30 got real mates I honestly don't know. I guess sooner or later you're going to mate up one way or the other. I don't really know how we really got together. I do know that we didn't have a very long, what you might call a courtship. It was in the days when

10:00 dad in particular looked sideways at young fellas. And me with the motorbike, I wasn't popular with him then. That him, that so and so with that motor bike. And I honestly don't know. But what I do know is that when I went into uniform he was near enough to my dad. He really

10:30 was on my side all the way. And in after years we really became very, very good mates. Really good mates.

So what was the make of your motorcycle?

New Imperial.

Sounds very impressive.

I think it was an English motorbike. Yes.

Did it have a side car?

No. No the bike was enough. And occasional pillion riders.

11:00 **Was Beryl a pillion rider?**

It was against her father's orders. Burned her ankle too one day on the exhaust pipe. Dad never found out why her ankle was burned.

So you're obviously going out with each other then at the time of the outbreak of the Second World War. Now what sort of a job did Beryl have?

She was up in the munitions. Deer Park.

11:30 Originally she was working, she was an apprentice milliner in Flinders Lane. But came the war and Jack's in uniform and there was a real demand for workers of all sorts in the munitions factories. And she ended up earning more money than her father. So that's what Beryl did, she was in the

12:00 Deer Park. During, for all of the War.

And what was her reaction to the announcement of war and the fact that you said you were just gonna enlist?

There was no obvious reaction that I was aware of. I think again a bit like me it was an acceptance of something. It was inevitable you might say. The war has been declared.

12:30 All right. The boys are going to war. So I wouldn't be aware of any reaction on Beryl's part at all. Perhaps if I wasn't there, there might've been something different. But she also, when I was away, I didn't tell you I got wounded. Tell you that some other time. But when I was wounded and reported missing. And she's in hospital

13:00 I think with an appendicitis operation. And her dad went in and says, well Jack's photo's on the front page of The Sun. So that was one of the things she had through the war.

Did she ever talk to you about that afterwards?

No. She doesn't always show her feelings though she did last night with the

13:30 grandchild. Yes

Yes a very exciting event isn't it?

Yes. Absolutely.

Well all right then, well you made the decision to enlist. So where did you go to enlist?

There were two places to go to. There was the Footscray Drill Hall, I went there first because I was in a hurry to get me name down. And then they opened up

14:00 an area at the front of Flinders Street Railway Station. On the footpath area there. And we went and enlisted there by our thousands.

So what did you do, did you just turn up?

That's right. You just turned up and give 'em your name and address and your age. And when they got it all organised they sent you a note.

So you just walked in that day, you registered.

As simple as that.

And you went away

14:30 **and they then notified you ...**

Went back to work.

Oh you went?

Went back to work. And then eventually when they've got it really organised you get a call, report to the Williams Street Drill Hall on a certain date, which I did. I got there early and I was the last one to get there. Group of about thirty of us I think it was. And we became mates for life. We all joined the same medical unit. And so

15:00 that was how you got in.

So, all right, well when you were called up, where did you have to go then? What was the next step when you received your notice?

You tell the, you give notice at work that you're going into the Army on this following Saturday. And that was all right. And we had to go to a drill hall up near the Victoria Market in William Street. An Army

15:30 drill hall. And so we go in there and we're signed on. And you're taken out to the showgrounds. And the showgrounds, you're there, something silly. You lined up, you've got your suitcase. You lined up outside the office. And the people in charge out there were old diggers. One fella gets in front and he says.

Righto, by the right. And his mate sings out to him

16:00 hey they've only been in five minutes. So that was our introduction to Army life.

What was your reaction to being called up?

I was quite pleased. Yes I really wanted to go. And in a way I didn't really have a tie. Beryl and I yes we made an agreement that we'd get married and all that.

16:30 But I didn't really have a tie that said you're a married man or anything like that. That you should stop home. And yes I was quite pleased.

And can you remember what you were issued with?

Nothing I think for a start. Oh we probably would have been issued with, yeah I suppose, our various mess kit you know.

17:00 I forget what we used to call the tin. Anyhow our mess kit for our meal. Meals, that sort of thing. We may...

So you didn't get issued with uniforms?

No, they didn't have any. We may eventually have got issued with boots I think. That'd be 'bout the limit. Yeah we were drilling in the clothes that we went into the Army wearing.

17:30 And I honestly don't remember how long but it took more than a week or two to get our clothing. It really did.

And what was the attitude of the senior officers to new recruits?

First of all they were drill instruction Sergeants. And more than anything they seemed to be out to impress us.

18:00 With their drill and their bearing and their manner. I don't recall them ever being obnoxious. They had a name of being oh these drill Sergeants you know. Top hat and all that. But initially all they had to teach us was to lead with your left foot, turn right and do a right turn or an about turn or a

18:30 half left turn. Oh one of the big things you had to learn was to march on a chalk ladder to get your thirty inch pace. You had to learn to get that thirty inch pace exact. Because otherwise if the fella in front of you was walking more or less you're gonna bump into him. You had to learn even how to march. Now believe it or not

19:00 we had one man, Max Martin. Max marched that way. You're supposed to march that way. And poor Maxie he could not march. Just could not do it. You'd think anybody could march wouldn't ya?

So what happened to him? Did he last?

I don't know. I don't think he did. In fact I was looking for Maxie all me life and I've never ever seen him anywhere. I even look on Anzac Days and for someone that looks

19:30 like Max. But no there were a few people that didn't last the distance. We had the occasional real drunk. We had one fella, what you called a remittance man. He was an English man. Family sent him to Australia out of the road and he lived on allowances coming from home. He was a regular drunk. Spent most of his time on his back. It's on record that when he was home

20:00 one day his radio annoyed him so he pulled out his revolver and shot the radio. That was the remittance man. A few of those fellas didn't make it. We had another fella, oh I can't think of his name. He was a bit of an alcoholic and he appeared on parade one day his shirt was going like that. And there's the officer comes round to

20:30 inspect it. He says what's wrong with your shirt? What have you got in your shirt? He says a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK sir. And, well what are you doing with a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK in your shirt? Well he'd found it, the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK wandering around the lines and he thought now if I leave it here the cook'll grab it for the officers' mess. So he appeared on parade with a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK inside his shirt. I don't think he lasted long. We had one or two

21:00 alcoholics but not much. The average fella was a real sober sider. Oh one thing that did, I never ever saw an enterprising entertainer brought up some girls in a caravan. And we used to hear about it but I don't know where he had it hidden. And he was running a brothel in the caravan. And as soon as the authorities found out he was no longer running his brothel.

21:30 So there were these odd sorts of characters. There was one fella, I can't think who he was. He was dirty. Dirty, dirty. And a couple of the other older blokes they picked him up off his bed one day, one on each arm and each leg. And they took him up to the shower. They dumped him in the shower and turned the taps on and left him. But he was about the only one like that. Sometimes you had the occasional

22:00 sporting personality. They were, I dunno what they were in the Army for. But they, sometimes they were

quite useless. So one way or another you had a few odd bods. But the average person, they were good people. And you did become mates. You hardly ever had an enemy. I would say that out of all the fellas I knew there was only one I wouldn't want to meet

22:30 after the war. Out of the whole lot. He was a bad tempered man. But no you couldn't find fault with your mates. We were all just ordinary people.

Well when you were doing your basic training, how many of you were, were you in a platoon or ...?

We were in a company of about fifty. I've got all that in there.

23:00 You'll never get round to seeing it. Yes you had A, B, A Company, B Company, Headquarters and Transport. That's right we had four companies. And our unit was roughly about two hundred and fifty people. So you're talking about fifty or sixty people to a company. Platoons supplied to the fighting men, the infantry. We were the, I don't know what you called us. But ASC,

23:30 the transport drivers, they'd be in companies. They'd be in companies rather than platoons.

Okay so this is your basic training at Puckapunyal. And so then after that you've gone to the Field Ambulance Unit?

No we came almost immediately we came, we were formed into a Field Ambulance group. And so that's how, basically

24:00 at the showgrounds all you had to learn was drill. But once you got to Pucka you had to get onto the real thing. Whether it's rifles or guns or whatever. And we had to really get on to this business of learning to be a medical man. And that's what we did. In fact one of the things that few people would know is that you spend more time in training, tons more time than you do in

24:30 battle. Really and truly. I met a lady when I was in the village earlier. And she was worried about her son going to Timor. East Timor. And he was gonna get killed for sure. And I said to her, I said, but he's not in battle all the time. Isn't he? She couldn't believe it. Lots of people, we might have only

25:00 had two or three months in five years of actual battle action. You're training, training, training.

Well in your training, what were the skills that you learned then? When you were at Puckapunyal?

Well the skills that we learned were, I'd say, the basic skills that a nursing sister would need. Apart from matters of childbirth

25:30 and that sort of thing. And one boy helped in that. We had to know things like pressure points. Shock treatment, all the different fractures that you get in limbs. And know how to splint them. And it's a bit of an art on its own. Proper splinting. And we had a thing called a Thomas Splint which was

26:00 a really technical one. You had to know what you were doing with that. We basically had to be able to handle any wound that we might come across without the help of a doctor. Because the doctors generally speaking were back at our hospital. Three or four miles away. Occasionally we did have a doctor with us. I told you about being in the cave that

26:30 time. There was a doctor there. There was another one and I might nearly chuckle at this one. An English Army officer again and a land mine. The land mines, you've heard of them. They're just that much below the soil. He was riding in his jeep and the land mine exploded under him. And we had a doctor with us this day. And apart from all the damage done

27:00 there, he had a broken leg but he wasn't interested in his broken. Didn't want to hear about the broken leg. And you had to take it seriously at the time. But eventually have a bit of a chuckle. But the officer, the doctor, they were mainly kindly men. Some were better than others. Some had a bit of what we call bedside manner. And he had a kindly manner and he was able to reassure the fella you've

27:30 got, no worries for the future. But I can imagine it, a young man. I dunno whether he was married or not. That, that's the last place you want too much damage done. So they, that was that. And I think I've gone off the track. Where were we?

Oh no, you were, we were, no you haven't. We were doing your training.

Oh that's right.

Yes and the skills that you acquired in your training.

This is right. You had to, see even,

28:00 silly though it might seem, you had to decide that a person was dead or not. I can recall that we were sent out one time. Report of a Sergeant who'd been de-lousing land mines. And when we got out there he was dead. He was obviously dead. But you can , you can sometimes not be sure

28:30 there's no sign of life. And we also, I've forgotten what we were supposed to do, but we were supposed to be able to give them morphine if needed. And we had field dressings to, so generally speaking we had to learn to be good nurses. We also did a lot of hospital work. And so even the little things, the pulse and the temperature and all the rest of it.

29:00 And there was shock treatment. I've forgotten all about that. But we had a fellow he was in Ceylon I think it was. He had one of those infectious diseases we don't talk about. And the evidence that the doctor found on him, I was in charge of the night shift this time. And the evidence of time

29:30 spans that had to elapse for this and that. And the doctor said to him you got off the ship when the ship was anchored in Aden. He said no I didn't. He said you did. And we knew he was lying and so did he. And so a smear was taken and it turned out that he had what the doctor said he had. And his reaction, we had to give him special shock treatment.

Really?

Yeah, I come in that

30:00 night and in me innocence I didn't mean it the way I said it. I came in and he was in an awful state of shock. And just forget the exact words he used but it was to the effect that he was gonna lose it. And I said to him well you haven't lost it yet.

Well when you say shock treatment, what did he get?

Well I've forgotten now what he, in fact it had a name, the three R's I think

30:30 we used to call it. But whatever it was, I think it would probably have involved some sort of medicine but I've actually forgotten what it was. You had the odd, we're getting on to an odd character, you'd better, I'll be side tracking you all the time.

No, no but anyway it was important to establish your training and the length of your training. So you, did you feel that when you

31:00 **were told that you were sailing to wherever, you felt that you were ready to do what was asked of you?**

More or less but we were only half way through our training you see. We trained, we got into Palestine, I think about the end of May. And it was January next year. So we had about seven or eight months of really intensive training. And

31:30 it was intensive, it had to be.

Okay well before you get onto that, we'll talk a little bit more about your journey over? Your journey in the ship, on the ship, on board the ship? What sorts of conditions that you experienced?

Well conditions, I started, I told you earlier about the sea sick thing. The conditions were fairly, well they were really basic. We had, you had a big mess hut.

32:00 And you had a hammock slung from the ceiling. So it was your meal room and it was your bed room. And that was about it, wasn't it. We simply had this hammock. Mind you it varied in different ships. But the one going over it was a troop ship. And so it was built purely and simply to accommodate troops. Troops going to war.

32:30 There was no such things as cabins for private soldiers. They were for nurses and officers. And I'm not sneering but it's a fact. They always had cabins. Rarely, occasionally we might have had a cabin but generally speaking you simply had a hammock or else just blankets on a floor. And your meal situation was a dozen or twenty of you to a table.

33:00 But again, as I suggested earlier, this was quite normal for us anyhow.

Did you ever resent the fact that officers got the cabins?

No. You might have made the occasional sly remark. But no, and particularly with us, our officers being doctors. They were way up in the pedestal in any world

33:30 weren't they? So we never had that, not really a problem. One of the minor problems, not necessarily doctors, but one of the common things that happened particularly abroad was many hotels were only available for officers. There'd be a sign over the door "Officers Only". Or you might find one that was sergeants and

34:00 above. And this was annoying but you'd just brush it off. There was a tremendous gap between an officer and a private soldier. Quite often your officers were men of education and experience in the militia. And we didn't have any trouble, or I

34:30 didn't, regarding these people as being better people, better educated, better moneyed and all the rest of it. And quite often better manners, not always but. No we never had resentment problems. You might have resentment problems among sergeants and corporals. But that never amounted to anything.

So you're a private soldier at this stage aren't you?

I am at that

35:00 stage yes. It took me two or three years to become a Corporal. Yeah I forget when it happened. They got in, eventually got it. Dunno if we got it before we went to Greece. No I think we got it when I was in Ceylon I'm not sure. So it takes a while.

All right, well you, we mentioned earlier on, or you did, the training. That you were only half way through your training when you'd virtually left Australia.

35:30 **What was the intensive training that you did in Palestine?**

Well the intensive training was that we had to assimilate actual battle front situations. And we would go out and patients would be scattered all over the desert and we'd set up a tent for a hospital tent and we stretcher bearers would get a message to go out

36:00 there And we'd go out and find a patient. And if needs be, bandage him up. If not, oh sometimes a broken bone, simply strap the legs together with a sling or something. If nothing special, and we had to be able to read did what was wrong with him, that was most vital. And back into the

36:30 hospital. It also included erecting tents was part of your drill. Even the correct way to walk a stretcher. And we still look at them at football matches and things. And they're all out of step and the stretcher's going like this. We had to learn the, I just forget now I think you walk this leg and his leg over there.

37:00 I'm not sure but you did have a special way of walking with a wounded soldier. So that basically was what it was. Getting out and assimilating actual war things, war situations.

And when you said you had to read the condition, what were you looking for?

Well mostly it was obvious anyhow.

37:30 He might have a, might be bleeding from the ear. And all you're going to do is bandage him round there. Not like a doctor looking for some hidden malady or whatever you might call it. So it was always obvious. Sometimes you would be in the dark and rely on what you'd been told. But getting back to training,

38:00 it was always very solid. But that's what it boiled down to, getting used to what's going to happen to you later on. And it did work except as I told you earlier when we, our very first day, in our innocence we went straight out into the shells. But you learn quickly.

I was wondering then what happened to your basic training when you went out there?

Exactly, exactly, yes. So that was the training. It was fairly

38:30 simple.

Okay, well I think at this stage Jack, we'll stop here. And we'll continue the story tomorrow.

Right, yes, what is the, quarter to one. You've got another appointment this afternoon?

Tape 5

00:32 **Well we were talking yesterday about your readiness for battle. I think you said that you felt that your training had been good, you'd been training for a long time. And, what happened, when did you know you were going into the battle front?**

When I got a message to go up there. Believe it or not.

01:00 We had a rough idea that sooner or later we would be going into battle. And if the truth's known underneath it, when we headed up from Mersa Matruh up into the desert, it's on. But nobody ever said so. And it was only when we got the message that next morning after we'd set up tents that well there was no argument. Go up there and get some patients. And that was our

01:30 first battle action. And that is where I made a mention somewhere in me notes that we had to make a report. The next day our officer came to us. And he said to us I want a report on what you did yesterday. And give me the report and you'll be mentioned in despatches. But in our innocence and lack of experience nobody

02:00 bothered to make the report. We were therefore not mentioned in despatches. That was our very first battle action.

Well when, your battle action, can you explain now how the wounded are brought to you. Do the wounded go to the RAP first?

Yeah they'd be picked up by their own stretcher bearers. Each battalion has its own stretcher bearers. And they'd be called upon, or they

02:30 sometimes, a person was able to walk back. But generally speaking, their own stretcher-bearers would bring them back to the RAP. And we'd get the message. Although the RAPs [Regimental Aid Posts] are such a, simply a block of land, it was never a building. We would get the message. We've got x number of prisoners here, ah prisoners, x number of wounded here. Come up and get them. And that's where I make the point that when

03:00 we went up there and we found ourselves in a field that's being shelled by the enemy. And that was our experience quite often.

And so what sort of vehicles did you travel up in?

At first we went up in a truck because we didn't know how many we might have to pick up. And in this instance, the first time we went up we ended up with about a dozen wounded. But other times you'd get a message, there might be only one or two, maybe only one.

03:30 And as you settled into the campaign so did all your responsibilities settle down. I became part of the ambulance team and we only ever went with the ambulance, the two drivers and meself. And we'd go thither and yon and a patient here and a patient there. Sometimes a dead one, sometimes not.

And what sort of wounds would you be

04:00 **treating?**

From memory most seem to be round this area but as regarding describing a wound you're in a bit of a problem there. You pick people up and there was something wrong with them. This doesn't last with

04:30 you but some of them do. And you recall them quite strongly. And they'll come along later on when we work our way towards this corner and that corner.

And what were the weather conditions like? Can you remember the weather conditions of this first battle?

Hot, hot. We were in north of Africa towards the Mediterranean Sea.

05:00 And it's hot, hot, hot for about eight months of the year. And you get some of those Iraqi north winds with all the dust. But it was rarely at that time of year that you got any cool weather. Towards Christmas time it was the complete opposite. The sands of the desert do grow cold. And it was really cold. But by that

05:30 time we'd gone to Greece and Crete and all the rest of it by the time Christmas came round.

So how long were you in North Africa all up?

I would suggest probably the first three months. Because I have to try and line it up with the time we got into Greece. And I think it was towards the middle

06:00 of April that we landed in Greece. So I'd suggest round about three months we'd have been into battle there. And we'd have covered hundreds of miles. Really hundreds. Right across that coast. We at one stage, we were pretty close to the border of Morocco. That's a long way away.

Well

06:30 **when you've picked up your wounded, where do you take them?**

Take them straight back to our, what we used to call, our A.D.S. - Advance Dressing Station. Straight there, that would be, I'd suggest that would be about four or five miles from the front line. It seemed to be anyhow. And all our doctors were there and the medical orderlies. And it was simply a matter of taking them to

07:00 the A.D.S. and they'd take over from there. We'd unload the ambulance, we'd then move aside until we got another call. Which might be the same day or two or three days or a week later.

And what's the difference then, what's the distinction between say an advance dressing station and a field hospital?

Field hospital's a term we never used.

Oh right, oh that must be a more modern term.

Yes it could be. In fact

07:30 we didn't even use it. There was another term C.C.S., a Casualty Clearing Station. I never come across them but there were units with that name so there must have been a casualty clearing station somewhere but. All I ever knew was there was two. The advance dressing station and the general hospital which was of course way back. Completely out of harm's way.

08:00 **And of course so then the more severely wounded patients would be. So you would take them back to the hospital?**

No, no they had their own transport. We were only concerned with the battle front and our A.D.S. If there was any other of ours doing the rest I wasn't aware of it. So I've no idea.

So okay with your unit then, how many of you were in it?

08:30 I'd say we'd have, our unit would be between two and two hundred and fifty. Four companies with fifty or sixty men. Be roughly two hundred and fifty. And you're split up, you had your A and B Company were the stretcher bearer companies. Head Quarters was the medical orderlies and Transport, well they're the drivers.

09:00 Trucks, ambulances what have you. So there was plenty of work for everyone.

There was. So there were lots of wounded were there?

Yes, I couldn't elaborate on em in the Egyptian battle. But in Greece the official figures which had something like six hundred killed and a few other things. Get onto that later.

Okay, well I think you mentioned the other day

09:30 **your senior officers. How did you get on with them? Did you have much to do with them?**

Socially no, you had nothing to do with them socially. But they were generally kindly people being doctors. That was the big advantage. We only had one who was inclined to be a short tempered man. But after the war he was the kindest man of

10:00 the lot. Once we got out of uniform he was a completely different man. Everybody loved him.

And what about your colleagues, your mates that you worked with. Were they all easy to get on with?

Most of them. You only got the odd one. There was one particular in me mind. A fella from Sydney. He became a sergeant. He was not a

10:30 nice man at all. Bad tempered aggressive man. But very few. There'd be odd irritations of course. You're living together for five years of war. No the average fella was never a problem. Hardly ever had dissension among yourselves.

And, so what did you think of the other services? What did you think of the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]? What did you think of the Navy?

We saw them mostly from afar.

11:00 The RAAF of course they had to be well away from the battle front. For the safety of their planes. We had tremendous respect for them. But generally speaking there was a shortage of supply of aeroplanes. So we had very little to do with them. But the Navy was a completely different thing. We sailed

11:30 on about a dozen ships in war time. The Navy rescued us from Greece, from Crete. Where else? They took us off, oh they'd have taken us off Ceylon. Whatever, the Navy became almost as good as the Salvos [Salvation Army]. Yes the Navy were, they'd be your

12:00 life.

Well that's very interesting that you say that. Because I think Naval historians feel that the Navy hasn't been given due recognition for the support that it gave the troops.

The trouble is they're out of sight. They're out of sight, they're out in the ocean. Shame you haven't got time to watch me video of Crete. Of Greece and Crete. Cause there's a little cutting there

12:30 showing our various Australian Naval ships. And in fact it's recorded that the Navy lost I think four thousand sailors and I don't know how many ships. So the Navy was well and truly in it. No we say thank God for the Navy. My word we do.

They'd be very pleased to hear that. But before you ended up in the Middle East in North Africa. I mean

13:00 **did you have any ideas of what these countries were like?**

Not the faintest. I had not the faintest. And I keep harping on this. Going back to me background. See I was not up with the world. Even in me early years in the Army. I still wasn't up with the world that I was in. I was a person that was sort of on the fringe of the pack. Because I wasn't important.

13:30 No we had in the orphanage, we had no way of knowing anything of the outside world. And Egypt would have been some sort of mysterious place with pyramids. A sample was we were camping at Egypt and the pyramids were only a few miles across. Get out every morning and there they were looking at you. I never bothered to go on an excursion to them.

Didn't you?

No,

14:00 didn't interest me. Didn't mean a thing to me.

Well what about the people, did you have much contact with the local people?

Very little. Very, very little. Your only real, well your only contact at all was with the people in amusement areas, say hotels or restaurants, picture theatres. The people who worked around the camp. Some of the

14:30 fellas went to church and met a few people but I rarely did. So wherever we were the locals, even in Australia you were, when you were away from home you had little to do with the locals. Almost nothing.

You've mentioned here in your notes, artillery open sights. Now is this relevant to our discussion here?

15:00 Yes it is. We were discussing wounds. And this was the reason I put that in. The artillery as a rule, they'd be many miles from their target. But on this particular occasion the both sides were getting closer and closer to each other. And the story we got was that the artillery from each side were

15:30 firing their guns as a man would with a rifle, just sighting them and firing straight at the other side. And on this occasion, we got a patient and the top of his skull was taken off. His brains were exposed. And so you know that really was worth mentioning. And the big part about it. It might sound comical. It's not. Was the doctor that

16:00 looked after him, Captain Jim Peters, it was just like a mother and a child.

And did he survive?

I don't know. We wouldn't know unless somebody died on us.

Well I mean how did you react to all this? I mean...

At the time, didn't react at all. I do now. Sixty years later.

So why do you think you didn't react then.

16:30 I think it, possibly it was part of our everyday life. Not as bad as that one. But particularly in battle it was part of our life that you were picking up not only wounded, you had some really sick people. And it never occurred to you to be sorry or involved in any way.

17:00 But later on you think about it.

Well and when you were there, were you worried about what was happening at home?

Not exactly worried. The concern really was were they getting our mail. See that was the only contact. And when we first arrived in Palestine we were three months

17:30 before our mail caught up to us. When we were in Ceylon, we thought we were going home. But we stayed there for roughly three months. And the result of thinking we were going home, we never wrote letters. And so you had this nagging thing all the time they're not getting any mail. Or are they getting any mail? That was the real thing. As regarding any thing that was happening back home. Ah,

18:00 our impression was that nothing was happening anyhow. The war wasn't down there and all was going normally.

And well did you get much mail from home?

Yes. Beryl loved letters. She really loved, I didn't realise it 'til too late but Beryl could have had a letter every day of the week. She could've but she didn't. See here again I keep making excuses but

18:30 I didn't have the nature or the upbringing that Beryl had. Beryl's very much a family person. Well I am too but not, I don't have the background that Beryl has. So yes she loved letters and I wrote. But when you're talking of letters, I forgot to put him in that note. One of me mates Freddie Pascoe. Fred was a very

19:00 vain man. We used to always reckon he was looking at mirrors. And Fred manages to get a girlfriend who was a beauty queen. Is the Pix newspaper still going? You never heard of it.

I've heard of it.

Right. Well they used to have these Pix beauty contests. And Fred somehow or other mated up with one of the beauty queen winners. And he'd write as many as three letters a day. But,

19:30 they never got married.

Well how often would you get your mail?

Well there was mail coming in practically every day. But it was a matter of was there any mail for me in today's mail. Incidentally when we were in Palestine, the flying boats used to land on the lake, Galilee. With our mail. We've got a man in the...

What a wonderful sight

20:00 **that must have been?**

Yes. Well I never saw it but it would have been a wonderful sight. So we've got a fellow here who was on the, what did we used to call it? They've got a name for em. Didn't call em flying boats.

They weren't the Catalina's were they?

No there was another one. There's another name. But they were a flying boat. Anyhow, it doesn't matter, but that's, we're told, that's how the mail came in.

Almost as good as Father Christmas.

Yes.

And did you ever have time

20:30 **to feel homesick? Or you just didn't allow yourself?**

Not until I'd had enough. The time came when I'd had enough of the Army. Really and truly. You know it's a decent spell. And yes towards the end and perhaps more so once I got married. But yes in that after a few years, we started, I think we all

21:00 started to get a bit sick of it. We'd really had enough and we'd covered the waterfront. We'd almost covered half the world really. And we'd been in sand and desert and mountains and snow and jungle. And in New Guinea, rivers and mud. We'd been in everything that you could possibly be in. And the day comes, well I'm sick of this. But

21:30 they just wouldn't let us out.

Well after the North African campaigns then, so you then went across to Greece. Now we talked a little about this the other day. But I think there were other points that you wanted to mention about Greece and Crete.

Greece was like, I don't know how much I told you. Greece and Crete were more

22:00 battles for survival. It was as much that as anything else. We had no regular situation. I think I may have mentioned when we got there the wharf had been blown up. And we were sent up a mountain and we borrowed a train. I think I mentioned that. And the prisoner of war situation. That was the, the first

22:30 highlight. Well, when we'd eventually got sorted out from the mountain episode, I was, became part of a very small, we just had mobile groups. Just a truck and an ambulance, and we could be moved here or there, wherever. And we had a little situation where they needed a medical orderly to go up the mountain for the rear guard action. And a soldier was picked and

23:00 he got nervous and he went to the Captain. And he says I don't think I'm experienced enough. So you'll never guess when they put the name in the hat whose name came out?

Yours truly.

My name came out of the hat. And I was sent up for the rear guard. Which we stayed, I don't know how long we stayed there. But we were there for any wounded that might come out of it. We went right to the top of the mountain.

23:30 And you could hear the enemy artillery down the other side. And we were there for hours and hours. And eventually the move out order came. And the thing that was happening. We had our, did we have the ambulance? Yeah we'd have had a, yes we'd have been on the ambulance. And we would come across soldiers simply walking along the road. Wounded soldiers. What we used to call

24:00 walking wounded. And you'd pick one up or whatever you saw. You'd pick em up and put em in the back. And it developed into a three night trek in the truck or in the vehicles. And the rough part about that was you drove all night without headlines round mountains. And occasionally you'd come around a corner where a vehicle had gone half over the side. And they couldn't retrieve it.

24:30 Obviously people would have got out of it and we, you couldn't travel in daylight because they had this, little habit. The Germans had this habit of just the one aeroplane coming over. And it'd just float around up there, not necessarily drop a bomb. Just be up there. And its very presence stopped all traffic. And occasionally they

25:00 would drop a bomb. And one day we were at the tail end of the convoy. And a bomb was dropped at the other end of it. And we got a report that a doctor from one of the other company's was killed. And when

we got up there eventually, it was one of ours. And the sad part about it was, when their trucks were all stopped, or their vehicles

25:30 he jumped out on one side and he copped the bomb blast. His batman jumped out on the other side and never got a scratch. So how would you be? Eventually the retreat came on. And we got to a place called Argos I think it was. And some of our truck drivers, there was always somebody had to go up to

26:00 the village. Someone that went up to the nearest village and never came back, they became prisoners of war. And eventually we get down to a spot called Kalamata. The convoys in the, and the rest of it. Yes that's right, I was on the way out. And eventually we get to this port of

26:30 Kalamata. The, quite a number of ships are there. And no problems getting on them. But when we got onto the Costa Rica, one of our fellows was in a real state of nerves. He'd got on a ship in the harbour and the ship was sunk. And he got off this, and this is an impossible story but it did happen. He got off the ship that was sunk onto another one.

27:00 And it was sunk. And Tom Manola it was. And Don McCaskill was one of our preacher type fellows. And when we, we all got on the Costa Rica including Tom. Don was telling me that they'd convinced Tom after all his troubles, once is enough, twice is impossible, three there's no way a third ship could get sunk.

27:30 Of course we went out into the middle of the ocean and we got sunk.

And this was the Costa Rica?

Yes.

Yes, so you must tell us more about the Costa Rica.

The Costa Rica, there was allegedly about two and half thousand of us aboard and many of them were infantrymen, the majority, and they had their rifles. And enemy planes were coming over all day. And the fellas were trying to shoot em down with their rifles which

28:00 was nearly impossible but they were showing some sort of a defiance of the planes. Late in the afternoon there's only one aeroplane left up there. He dropped a bomb. I'm gonna show it to you there, I've got it there. He dropped a bomb and it landed just there, enough to stop us. Split the plates, shake the ship. And we're gonna go down. We don't know

28:30 how long. Now I, believe it or not, this is another impossible story. I'm down below having a shave. And I only get half way through the shave and I don't know what's happened so I run up on deck. And the troops are all lined up like on parade. It was unreal to see. But the ship wasn't sinking in a hurry. So I ducked downstairs to finish me shave. It's sounds silly,

29:00 but I did. And I finished me shave and I thought now, for a change we had a cabin, I'll duck round and get me kit bag. So I ducked round to me cabin and just as I put a foot inside the cabin a voice behind me says what do you think you're doing? I looked round and it's one of the crew, a Naval officer. I says I'm getting me kit bag sir. Can you swim with it? No sir. Well get up on bloody deck. So I got up on bloody

29:30 deck without me kit bag. And joined the parade.

Sorry to interrupt you but I'm just intrigued, what sort of a razor were you using?

Oh there was only ever the safety razors.

Oh right okay.

Only ever used a cut throat once and I took a lump out of me chin.

Oh I was wondering about that.

So safety razors. And so I got up on the bloody deck as the officer said to me. And we still don't know what's happening because we're that high, and

30:00 what we don't know, there are two British Navy destroyer ships alongside us. We found out later that they'd tied themselves. They didn't just sit there. They tied themselves to us. They're rocking up and down like this. And when they'd come close together, we would jump. The sort of ebb and flow as they describe it. And one of the crew showed us what to do. Just jump. And one by, oh not

30:30 one by one, dozens at a time were jumping. And it's on the record that of the, they said there was two thousand six hundred, only one man was injured. Out of all that.

That's amazing.

That's amazing.

Now was this an unusual action for a ship to tie one to the other or was this a normal procedure?

To us it was. To us it was but I would believe it would be the normal thing with them. The Navy

31:00 that is though you couldn't stop em. Yeah, you could blow em up but that's all you could do. The Navy, it must have been awful in the Navy. You know the fella at the other end, pounding you. And where have they got to go? Got nowhere to go?

And when you got off the ship then, how long did it take for it to sink? Did you see it actually go down?

No but there were varying reports.

31:30 I think the best report I saw suggested about an hour and forty minutes. Roughly speaking. And the remarkable thing about the incident is that it was captured on camera. Where is it, I've got it, I showed you yesterday the photo. It's on video, I've got the tape there. And I've got to show it to you when we get a minute. It's just unreal.

32:00 In fact I believe that the overhead shot may have been taken by the enemy. I don't know but it could have been. Or whatever, there was. Yes and then I don't know how much I told you about when we landed on Crete. We were taken to Crete because it was the nearest island.

How did you do that? What ship did you go onto from the Costa Rica?

There were two British ships. The Defender and the Hereward. Yes.

Right, okay, and so now

32:30 **you're going over to Crete are you? Yes.**

That was the nearest island you see so they took us to Crete. And the fun started all over again. We land on the, we get off the ship and there's gunfire straight away. There's only one road, one made road. And it's up a mountain. So away we went. And you end up you break up. There's stragglers and there's some that walk faster. We finished up

33:00 with a group of about six or eight of us. We were walking into the night. We were walking, walking cause we've no idea where we are, where we're going, we're just walking. And I put it in me notes somewhere, like the babes in the woods. We eventually found a bit of a cave, no before we found the cave. It's getting cold and we don't know what to do. We lie down and huddle up. Still cold. Believe it or not, there was long grass. So we plucked long grass and put it all over us

33:30 We were still cold. So up and walk again. And we found a cave. And we all went into this cave. And cuddled up as close as you could get. And we spent the night in the cave. Well the next day, we still don't know where to go so we walk and we come across an Army food dump. And you're allowed to take one article each. Now not knowing what was in the tin, you grabbed a tin. And of all things I get herrings

34:00 in tomato sauce. Which'd be about the worst thing you could get. Especially when it's cold. It was awful. So we each grab a tin and walk and walk. And eventually somehow or other your group gets together. How I don't know.

How extraordinary, I mean were you walking in a particular, you must have been going in one particular direction?

This is right. There was only one way to go.

Up.

You see there was no side tracks or

34:30 no road the other way. And yes eventually we all gather. We've gathered by a little stream. Really clear cool water. And from there on we've got to become part of the island. We've got nothing. We've only got the clothes we're wearing. Nothing. I don't know where we ended up getting razors.

35:00 Because we did end up with razors. And strangely with the Army, you've gotta shave wherever you are. Really. There was a little village nearby where eventually we learned you could buy bread. And for those that wanted it, they could buy wine. The funny story was the cigarette smokers, those that rolled, whether they rolled their own or not. There were no cigarettes to be bought. And bark off a tree

35:30 and the wrappers round a vegetable tin, you know your tin of vegies, corn, bully beef or any. We'd take off the paper for your wrappings. I wasn't a smoker, it didn't hurt me. But that was what was happening with the smokers and the food and all the rest of it. So oh yes the next thing that happens, the General in charge, General Wavell. I think he was a New Zealander. [probably referring to General Freyberg]

36:00 He's visiting the whole island to see who's got equipment, who's got guns and ammunition. And we had a big meeting with him. And he found out that an awful lot of troops, if they had weapons they didn't have ammunition. And we had nothing. We only had what we were wearing. So, you know, you're sort of between the devil and the deep. What are you going to do and where are you going and all the rest of

36:30 it? And what did happen was that some of us would get sent out. You had to walk wherever you went.

Get sent out to make up a little post somewhere. Just somewhere. I never knew north, south, east or west. Anyhow eventually the day came when I'm taken somewhere and I still don't know where. Perhaps we were all there. And whoever

37:00 is in charge says now you stop here. And you stay there 'til everybody comes through. What he didn't say was how many were coming through. And I stayed there, and I stayed there. And I think towards the middle of the afternoon, I'd had enough of staying there and no bodies coming through. And I started to walk. And nobody did come through. Well this was the time when I got wounded. And

37:30 eventually you catch up with one or two fellas and you're stopping having a yarn. And this time there was some of us. And we could hear aeroplanes. And we didn't hear any bombs or anything else. But the next thing I know I'm picking meself up off the ground. And the man next to me was dead. The man next to me had a leg almost completely severed. And all I had was shrapnel there and

38:00 on the body.

Just astounding isn't it, it's just sheer luck isn't it?

It's unreal. Really is. I was also lucky. I went to the man with the almost severed leg and he was, he chased me away he was so upset. He chased me away and I left him. There was nothing I could do. He didn't want anyone near him. But lucky

38:30 for me, one of me old mates was around. Tom Mollinson. And Tom looked after me and he dressed me, I think it was around, yeah, around the face there and around here, I don't know where. So Tom looked after me. And in fact Tom took me to where the unit was.

Okay well look, we've just about come to the end of the tape there Jack so we'll stop there and we'll continue on in the next tape.

Right.

And while we're waiting,

39:00 **we've done the MID [Mentioned in Despatches] and the artillery, we haven't done the English soldier, broken ribs.**

Yes, that was another sad one.

Tape 6

00:05 ...,Tom Mollinson looked after me.

Did you know the fellas next to you?

Never seen them in me life. And I have no memory at all of anything happening.

That's astounding isn't it?

We were standing there and we heard aeroplanes. Nothing happened. I simply

00:30 picked meself up off the ground. Never, never heard an explosion, never felt anything. I don't know anything about it. I must have gone unconscious.

Were you knocked out?

I must have been knocked out. Because I'm simply getting up off the ground. Are we into battle? So yes this, I've just remembered. This was the day when we were getting our marching orders. We were

01:00 leaving the island. And I get back to the unit and report in and whatever. We have our evening meal. Right, on parade. We all lined up. Quick march, the old Army thing. No idea, we didn't know what was happening. We're just told to start walking. And it gets comical in the Army. But it's comical not funny. And purely and simply, start

01:30 walking. So we've started walking. And what we didn't know was we're gonna be walking for the next three nights. And we walked and we walked and we walked right across the island. And it must have been a mass evacuation. Not just our unit because more and more the, it became a bigger and bigger group of people. And eventually, yes it was three nights and

02:00 true, we didn't have anything to drink or eat. But you were trudging along. You wouldn't walk far in day time. And there was always this fear of aeroplanes. So you'd walk while you could in the night time, perhaps half the night. Whatever, it covered a time. And we get to the port called Sphakia, S-P-H-A-K-I-A. Yes, Sphakia [Sfakia]. And that's gonna be the port of embarkation. Well one of our officers

02:30 was there and he said now put your names in a hat. There's not room on the ships for all of you. It's a

ration thing. Put your names in a hat. And then we'll put the names, pull em out. If your name comes out you go off the island, if it doesn't you're still on the island. So my name came out and that was a lucky one. One of me mates, Billy Rough. Bill's name didn't come out. So Bill said to me, Bill was one of me close mates. And Bill says I'm not stopping here.

03:00 I'll get on the end of the queue. He got on the end of the queue. Got on the ship. When we told the sailors, they were angry. They says we could have taken all of you. They were really angry. Just where you get little slip ups, misunderstandings.

And what ship were you taken on?

The Phoebe. Yes.

03:30 Again it was a British ship. An Ack-Ack destroyer. We're taken off on the Phoebe. Of course they treated us like long lost brothers. Hot drinks and something to eat. That, it was marvellous. And then when we got to Egypt we were received by the Maori soldiers. And they fed us up and hot drinks for us and all the rest of us. And from then on we found our way. In my case back to one of our Army hospitals

04:00 in Egypt somewhere, I forget where, it doesn't matter. And I had to have an operation to get some shrapnel out of me chin. And the comical part of that was it was one of our hospitals. And they were obviously, the troops were recruits. With no experience. And here's the old soldier lying on his back. There was only a local anaesthetic. I'm lying on me back, I'm the hero while they're all staring to get the shrapnel out of his chin.

04:30 So there was always a lighter side to everything.

Were you left with any scars? I can't see any scars?

Quite possibly. I was always aware of it. I was aware of it for a long, long time. But there's nothing there now. That's for sure. But no, oh yes the other side of that. You ask about the folk at home, what they would do in those days instead of television and all the rest of it. The newspaper would have it on the front

05:00 page, all the missing soldiers and their photos. Beryl was in hospital with appendicitis. Dad comes in.

Isn't that extraordinary?

Yeah, there's all sorts of things. Yes. So that's the way the war goes at times. But we got over that. We were reported missing but they found us. Went back to the unit in Palestine. And where,

05:30 we've got off Greece and Crete. Where did we go next? Oh Syria and Lebanon would have been next.

Right, so you're up to Syria and? So you'd obviously recovered from your injuries then?

Yes. Yes it wasn't anything like a lot of stitches or anything like that. Simply bits of shrapnel here and there. Yeah we got over that all right.

06:00 To be honest I don't know how long before we eventually went to Syria and Lebanon. Don't really know. Doesn't matter I guess.

And was there a lot of action up in Syria?

Hospital action mainly. RAP action. We always had plenty to do. We, that's right. We had a hospital in a place called Homs. Yes we had a hospital there. We did work there and we also did

06:30 work up the mountain a bit. We established an RAP. The natives, they used to do a lot of road building and every member of the family worked on the roads. Mum and dad and grandma and grandpa and the kids. They didn't have much in the way of shoes. They had sandals. And they were breaking up rock and

07:00 carting it. And there was a never ending movement to us to treat damaged toes. It was on all the time. And we had a fella, Paddy Healy. Paddy was a hard case. He was an almost chemist. But he knew this from that. And he got some sump oil from the truck drivers and strained it. And put it into a bottle and he marked

07:30 it Olio Truck Sumpus. And that became the treatment for the broken skin and all the rest of it on their feet. And one of our doctors looked at it one day and didn't stop him from doing it so obviously it was doing no harm. Then there was the case of the black South Africans. This was a shocking case. They'd come from the heat of South Africa

08:00 up to the snow in Syria, and they kept them in their summer uniform, shorts and short sleeves. And we used to get pneumonia cases daily, they'd come in and they'd make such a noise in their lungs. (Phone rings). Yes, this was shocking. They'd been brought up from South Africa in the tremendous heat

08:30 and up into Syria in the snow. And they were kept in their tropical uniforms of shorts and short sleeve shirts. And they were going down like flies with pneumonia. They would come in, be brought into our RAP. And they'd be making awful noises in their throats. And we'd simply say to each other well he'll be dead. And I don't know if any of em survived.

09:00 We had to take them down to the Beirut hospital. But they were in an awful state. You just wondered at the thinking. It goes back to the days when the black man was a nothing. And that's how he was treated even though he was in the Army. So that was our, one of our experiences in Libya, not Libya in Syria and Lebanon. Another

09:30 little lighter one. We used to get the occasional soldier that had been drinking and got in a fight. And this particular night a fella was brought in, he's got a broken knuckle where he punched his mate. And he was making all sorts of noises with us. So I just went and sat on him.

What was his reaction?

He went quiet and I'm only a little fella. But there are times when you just get

10:00 so heartily sick and tired of a person like that. And they haven't got enough sense to know you're trying to help em. So I sat on him and told him to shut up and he did. So that was one of our little things on the side. We had a hospital as I said in this place called Homs. And we used to look after everybody. Including sometimes Legionnaire soldiers.

10:30 Now I'm told

Really?

Yes, I don't, there's the Foreign Legion and I think they're called, simply call it The Legion. I don't which is which but we had these Legionnaires. I had an interesting, I'm in charge on night shift. And we've got a Legionnaire in the hospital. And an officer comes to see, want to see whatever his name is and me trying to be friendly, I says well just a moment sir and you can see your friend. And he drew

11:00 himself up and he says he's not my friend he's one of my men. Just a little thing on the side. Oh another thing that was gonna happen to us, that did happen to us but it didn't get us anywhere. We were gonna become Simpsons [John Kirkpatrick Simpson]. We were...

What, as of donkey?

Yeah or mules I think they called em. I think mules might be bigger than donkeys.

11:30 And we had I think they were Indian Army officers that were training us and training us how to look after the mule. You know they used to get things in their toes apparently. You had to be able to pick his foot up and get a stone out of it. And all that sort of thing. How to lead him. I believe they are awkward to lead. But we had quite a few days of that. It would've been interesting but there was no more battle. Oh, what there was,

12:00 our fellas were in training with our infantrymen. And lots of them thought they could ski. And they couldn't. And day by day you'd be getting broken bones. Became a regular part of our hospital work. So we had all sorts of fun up there. We had an officer that used to think it was a good idea to get out of bed of a morning and go for a run in the snow. Which we did and

12:30 he led us. So one way and another Syria and Lebanon were interesting. We found ourselves in the biblical town of Damascus one time. That was interesting. We had some time in Beirut. Which in latter days was awfully damaged. The fighting there. But eventually it was back to Palestine.

Okay well before you go back

13:00 **to Palestine, I was going to ask you, with all these, the treating of wounded as well as treating people with pneumonia, were there any, did you treat people that you knew to have self inflicted wounds? Or would you have known that?**

Yes. There was a, I can only remember one. There was a young fella and I don't know where it was. It might have even been New Guinea but it doesn't matter.

13:30 One young fella was doing a bit of book making on the side. And he ended up with a bullet through his hand. And it was alleged that he was getting into debt with his book making operations, and this was one way of getting out from, in fact out from the unit. He probably would've been sent home eventually. So that was the nearest thing I got to

14:00 that. We did have accidental deaths. In fact yes in Ceylon we can, we've got to get a bit out of line sometimes.

Oh yes it doesn't matter, no we don't have to be going in chronological order.

In Ceylon we had a doctor, a big strong man, allegedly a surf life saver type

14:30 of fella from New South Wales. He got killed in the sea. He went for a swim in the surf, wave picked him up, turned him over and broke his neck. That was Captain somebody, don't matter, can't remember his name. That was one accidental death. I mentioned earlier yesterday about the little Chinese boy that fell out of the coconut tree. Louie Simmons

15:00 was driving a truck, possibly in New Guinea, and it went over the edge. Louie was killed. I can't recall

but there would be the occasional accidental death.

Were you aware of any suicides?

Yes. There was one suicide when we were at the Showgrounds in training. And I

15:30 don't know why he committed suicide. He was a young man. Have no idea. In fact we were on parade one day and the whole parade was given the order of about turn. And we did about turn. And it transpired that he was up on one of the electric light pylons. But we never knew what was with him. Again in Ceylon, yes

16:00 in Ceylon. We had a young fella who was a physical fitness crank. He was a sober boy, used to get a brick in each hand and lay on his bed and do his exercises with a brick in each hand. Well he decided one night to open the morphine cabinet and took a rather large dose. It took him hours and hours to die. Sadly, what he didn't know was that apparently a

16:30 morphine death is a very painful death. It didn't just put you, apparently it's a real griping pain. Inside you. So that's what happened with him. I think his name was, oh doesn't matter. I can't think of his name properly. So yes you did have your occasional suicide. You had your occasional accident. You had your situation where one day we were, not we,

17:00 I was called out of me tent and sent to the guardhouse. And when I get there, there's a line of soldiers standing outside the guard house. And I'm put into the line. A Jewish lady, an elderly lady comes out of the guard house and walks up and down and points her finger at one of us. We all change places, someone else comes out, points the finger at. And no matter where we changed

17:30 there was no argument. This same fella had the finger pointed at him. After a while we were sent back to our tents. Still no-one's told us what's it all about. And eventually the story came out that he'd been drinking one night in the, oh might have been the night before. Probably was. He'd been drinking at a local licensed restaurant. Eventually it's time for him to go home. He hires a taxi, taxi takes him back to camp.

18:00 He's got no money. He shot the driver dead. So what do you reckon about that?

I suppose anything happens in war doesn't it?

It really does, there are, sometimes there are no rules whatsoever. But you would never ever know what would happen to these fellows. Rarely heard

18:30 any stories about crime. There was sometimes a suggestion of drunken soldiers doing this and that. But I don't recall ever hearing anything more of just fellas getting into fights. And that sort of thing. But there was never to my knowledge any violence against women or any real violence at all against anybody. Just among themselves. So that was what you get in

19:00 accidents or drinking or what have you. There's always something happening.

Well that's for sure.

Yes.

Now you said you went back again to Palestine after you'd been in

We were always in and out of Palestine.

Yes, yes. I hadn't realised that initially either. So you're back in Palestine. I'm wondering now when do you set sail for

Anywhere.

Anywhere yes?

19:30 **It's as, it was as simple as having a home base. Palestine was our home base. And it was an ideal place for training. And comically, perhaps not comically but we'd do, spend much more time in training than in actual fighting. It's a, awfully lopsided percentage. Part of the reason could be, you've gotta be kept fit.**

20:00 **But the other thing might have been that each battle area was different from the last. And so you had to be up with everything. For instance we even had ship to shore training. Get on a ship and come down the rope ladder and get in a barge. We did a fair bit of that. There was only one hazard with that. Sometimes your barge, and it didn't happen to us, but sometimes**

20:30 **the barge'd come across a sand bar and let the back down and you're all out, and you're not on the beach. I believe that was one of the problems. We did that up at Cairns actually. That was an interesting side line. I was going to tell you, it is a bit late. But I was going to tell you about the boy with the broken ribs. We got a call out one night, in the middle of the night.**

21:00 **And no lights anywhere. And when we arrive, eventually arrive at our destination fortunately for us our doctor was there. And there was a little English boy. And he's a young English man.**

He'd come in after dark from wherever he'd been all day. And no lights allowed anywhere. Not even a hurricane lamp. And you've got nowhere to sleep but just lay on the ground.

21:30 **And he did. Later on one of his trucks comes in with no lights on and runs over him. He gets a broken ankle, he gets broken ribs and he gets partly scalped. Now the broken ankle was no problem and the partial scalping was no problem. As I see it he had simply a head of skin on top of your skull. And in fact it was our**

22:00 **Colonel that was there at the time. I don't how he was there. And he simply stitched it together again. But the broken ribs punctured his lung. He died. Yes I sat with him. So when you think of that it's not fair. But again we say there's no rules. There isn't.**

22:30 **Okay Jack well from Palestine, when do you set sail for Ceylon?**

Time I would not know. To be perfectly honest, time's almost, wherever we were. I don't have memories of. We started off, originally we were in

23:00 Palestine. Probably about the month of May 1940. And with all the different shifts and we did move an awful lot. And I just couldn't, couldn't honestly say we were two months here or six months there. It was near enough to impossible. And of course at the time it's not important anyhow. And one thing we didn't

23:30 have was diaries. Never occurred to us but I've got an idea diaries were forbidden anyhow. I think one of the problems on that was should you ever become a prisoner of war a diary could be useful but I would doubt it. I wrote a letter to one of my mates who'd become a prisoner of war. And told him all the changes in the unit and

24:00 the officers censored it. He says you can't send that letter to Germany. I says why not? He says well it's detailing all your Army movements. But I don't think it would've mattered for a little Field Ambulance unit. But this was the way. Censorship was very strong in those days. So there'd be no way that I could talk times. But we eventually and here was another interesting, everything's another interesting.

24:30 We find ourselves in Ceylon. And the Ceylonese were a peaceful people. But just about the time that we arrived there the Japanese had bombed their harbour on the other side. We come in at Colombo and their big harbour was a place called Trincomalee. And the Japs had bombed that and thrown a bit of panic into the island. We were taken about a hundred miles down to the coast to,

25:00 an area that had been a race course. And with all the various huts it was ideal for us to make a camp. And again it was the old business of getting back into training. But there were things on the side. For instance we were surrounded by banana plantations. And every bed had a bunch of bananas this big hanging over the bed from

25:30 the rafter. The little animals called chipmunks that you could take for a pet if you wanted. But we didn't want to. But they'd be running round the ceiling. I'm not aware that we, I don't think we did any, I can't remember us doing any hospital work. I think we simply kept on with our training. Which was

26:00 never ending. It didn't hurt us anyhow.

Do you know why you were in Ceylon for so long? You were there for three months weren't you?

I'd reckon yes, I believe we were. Yes, that's the next part of the story. We were in Ceylon and we had no idea. We thought we were going home. One of the reasons may have been a shortage of shipping. Because there would have been a tremendous casualty list

26:30 among ships of all sizes. I mean the first problem, another problem could have been the dispute between Mr Churchill and our Prime Minister. And what we didn't know was that we were the, I forget the term they use, but we were the thing in the middle. And eventually we leave Ceylon and we're out in the

27:00 open ocean. And one day our Company Commander came down stairs to us. And he says well I'm not telling where you're going but I can tell you where you're heading. You're heading for Burma.

Of course, you see you're part of Sixth Division, aren't you?

Yes. We were the first division. You see we led the way in all this sort of thing. See, so we were heading for Burma. Well if we had of been it would have been prisoner of war,

27:30 red hot sandy. Part of that story also was that we sent an advance party to Java. And when we, when the party got there, they were about to land, they got a message that the Japs were at the other end. So everybody back on the ship and let's get out of it. So we were more than doubly lucky. Particularly with the Burma thing cause that would have been

28:00 the end of the road for us. So it's just one little drama...

Your story is amazing isn't it? Because you were so lucky.

It is, yes. And it was luck until I was addressing a church gathering. Oh last Anzac Day, last year. And

one of the ladies says you weren't lucky you had a guardian angel. Which I believe now. I really do. Yes well it's

28:30 back home to Australia and like I may have suggested, it was a big secret. But one of the, I didn't get a very good reception at station pier. I'm in charge of unloading the sick and wounded from off the ship. So I'm down on the pier. And one of the wharfies come up and spoke to me and I said to him, would you send a telegram

29:00 for me to me girlfriend. He says yeah, he says I do better than that. He says there's a Red Cross lady here. That's what she's here for. So we go over. And he said to her, the boy's just back would you do him a favour and send a telegram for him. She did this.

Truly.

Oooh and he said to me, give it to me mate I'll go and do it. Oooh.

That's

29:30 **mean spirited.**

That's really mean. One of the problems sometimes with the Red Cross workers. It was the done thing perhaps in society.

Spot on.

We had it, but it didn't, it wasn't that way when we were over in Egypt. Libya and all. General Blamey's wife came over. And there was lots of noises. But she became a,

30:00 a Red Cross lady. A genuine one. Really one, she was round the hospitals all the time. So it wasn't all society ladies making waves. But back home in Australia and two and half years we'd been away and we...

Well how did you feel, getting home. What was it like?

We were quite excited. Of course we were. But it was a secret. We were whisked off up to,

30:30 I can never think of the name of the town near Seymour and it wasn't Puckapunyal. There was another town, I don't think it was Nagambie. It might have been. But it was a name something like that. Anyhow there was an Army camp up there. And we were whisked up there. And I don't know how long we're there. Eventually I was able to, yeah that's what I did. I was able to

31:00 get over there to the Post Office and ring the lady next door to Beryl to give her the message. And then I eventually, I'm staying behind looking after camp until they've all gone on leave and come back. So I decided I'm going down to home. Well I get out on the road, Saturday night. And I did a bit of hitchhiking for a while. And then,

31:30 only limited and then I get a taxi. And I don't know where I was, it was a long way from Melbourne. And she said to me well it'll cost you two pound to go down to Melbourne. Which was, that was all right. And she took me down and I get home to me girl and her family. Me girl and her family. But then the problem is to get back to

32:00 camp. You see. I leave Beryl sometime in the middle of the night. And how you gonna get home? Well there...

Bet she was thrilled to see you?

Oh yes and in fact her mother jumped the gun. Her mother opened the door first. And she said to Beryl I saw him first. I remember that. Yes so she saw me first. But then at the end of the night. See and they had almost no petrol.

32:30 Her father had a car but no way would he have petrol to take me to Seymour and back. Hundred and twenty miles perhaps. So I says I'll be all right. I says I'll hitch hike. Well I hitch hiked into town. Now where did I, oh that's right I stop a taxi man and he's going home.

So where did Beryl live?

Sunshine.

Sunshine.

Yes. I hailed a taxi and he asked me what about it and I told him. He says well I'll take you.

33:00 I think he took me to Broadford or somewhere up there. And then he had to leave me go. And we always had to, I forget the word we used, but we had to use our initiative. And he lets me off near the railway station and there's a push bike there. So I borrow the porter's push bike. I hope he found it eventually because I rode it to a hotel somewhere. And propped it up

33:30 against the front fence. Imagine his feelings the next day when it was gone. Yeah, you'd have to...

All in a good cause.

All in a good cause. And that's right when I get there, there's a group of three or four soldiers. They're having their early morning drink. And we got a ride. I don't know how we got a ride. Anyhow somebody gives us a ride back to camp. By this time it's ten or eleven o'clock in the morning.

34:00 And I eventually get back to our unit. An Orderly Officer spots me and he says where have you been? He says you were Orderly Sergeant this weekend. Well I didn't know about that. I says I've been over at the telephone sir. And he looked at me. And he turned to somebody else. He says is there a telephone in the camp? Matter of fact there was. Over somewhere or other there was a telephone. And I'm sure he didn't believe me

34:30 but he didn't say anything else about it. I'm supposed to be on duty. So these are the little things that, eventually I got leave and went home for a couple of weeks. And we enjoyed ourselves. And back into camp and up the tablelands. And then...

So there was obviously training was going on up there?

The tablelands, oh yes. It was a big camp there. It was the ideal

35:00 camp because you had plenty of timber. It was a tremendous timber area. You had tons of timber and plenty of area to march. No it was an ideal spot. And in fact camps, troops by the thousands.

So was that an indication to you that you might be going to New Guinea?

I think it was in our mind that we were going anyhow. I was never

35:30 very imaginative, I simply took things as they happened. But I freely believed that. That we were going to New Guinea. Oh yeah we had to dye our, we had our khaki shorts. So we had to dye them green. So we'd be given a bucket of hot water and put the dye in it and put some salt in it. And turn em into jungle greens.

36:00 **Did it work?**

Yes.

Oh it did.

Yes it did work. And away we went. And you're gonna get a note. It did work.

So you're in your jungle greens.

We're in our jungle greens. We get on a little boat and we go up to a place called Milne Bay.

So you went to Milne Bay by ship?

Yes.

So you weren't flown in? Some people were flown in to various parts of...

We only ever flew once. We flew

36:30 from Port Moresby up to Wau. And one of the not really thrills we got was when we were up in the air we could see we had a fighter escort. It never occurred to us that the enemy was up there too. We'd look out the window and there's our planes flying round us. So our first, sight of New Guinea was really and truly it was mud and water. And

37:00 when it rained, it rained that hard that we would sometimes just strip off. And just be wearing our underpants. There was just no point in getting drowned.

Well how did the climate affect you then in your everyday work?

It didn't affect our work but I believe it showed in us. One of the things we were doing or a lot of the time the things we were doing in New Guinea was being sent

37:30 to different outposts. And you'd be there for perhaps months at a time. And we were at a place called Mubo. It was an aerodrome and the river. And you couldn't see the sun. No way could you see the sun through the trees. And we were there that long, I got a little bit to tell you there too. You won't like it either. We were there for

38:00 many months and when eventually we came out and went back to Wau. I remember one of me mates saying to me have you been sick? I said no. Well he said you look like a ghost.

Tape 7

00:41 Right. Yes, Milne Bay was just our first example of tropical jungle and wet and all the rest of it. But we

weren't up there that long before we had to go over to Port Moresby, which we were done by ship. And then we flew from Port Moresby to Wau

01:00 spelled W-A-U. Sort of a central town at the foot of a group of mountains. Part of the gold mining area. The big surprise we got was when we got up in the air we had a fighter escort. Which all of a sudden made us realise that we were really in amongst the enemy. When we got to Wau, we were organised and sent out to

01:30 various little outposts. There were mountains everywhere and there were outposts needed everywhere. My particular, the area I was in for most of the time, was an outpost called Mubo. It was an aerodrome and there was a river going by. We did mainly hospital work. And it was always our own soldiers that were sick or wounded or whatever.

02:00 The native bearers did all the stretcher bearing. And that was a fairly permanent situation with them. It was almost a never ending thing. And they were quite happy about that.

And that was, they were the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels?

The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels yes. They were happy people. They were always happy people. It was quite unreal. They were also the only ones that could've quite easily gone across the mountains. Because you were up in the air, you were down in

02:30 the valley, mud. You were walking across rivers, swift flowing rivers. So they were the ideal ones to do the job. And they did it really well. One of the features of the wounds, and close your ears if you don't like to hear it. One of the features of the wounding things was that they used to get fly blown. And this at a first hearing sounds

03:00 quite awful. But it turned out that it was the, just about the best thing that could've happened to them. Because they really ate all the infection. And they were in fact a cleansing feature for the wound.

And people knew that then did they?

Yes they did. After a while they come to accept it. And that was part of the situation. So that was happening all over the place. But it happened particularly where we were.

03:30 And with our soldiers. One of my mates got shot through the mouth. Bill Clews. And I think Bill got infected too but the long story on Bill was that he was recommended for a medal for bravery. And he had to be interviewed by the General. Which he was. The General was not a popular type of man. This story'll tell you why. Bill was

04:00 fronted by him and he, the General simply said to him. Your unit's got its share of medals, you don't get a medal. So much for bravery. That was the General. So briefly what I've said would cover the unit for just about all the time we were there. We were in the New Guinea areas for round about a year.

04:30 And what happened with me would have been standard practise all over the island. Sometimes there were only two or three people at a little outpost. I remember going to one where there was only one person there. But whatever, this was our job all over the island. This was what we did, why we were on New Guinea. We weren't at this outpost all the time. It was like all other

05:00 battles you would come out and you'd go and spend time at Wau. And then you might be sent somewhere else. I remember going to a place called Sunshine of all places and we were there for while. There was another place they used to call it, I think they called it the landing strip. But there was just so many different names. Bulolo was a gold mining town. Or had been and one of the ironies

05:30 of them being part of the war, they were able to make large claims on the Federal Government after the war. Compensation for what they lost and what have you. Through all the battle that went on. So that was the, in fact I unfortunately got some fools gold there. And I took it home. And I had no idea whether it was good or not. And I took it home and gave it to

06:00 Beryl. She took it to a friend, a jewel maker, and he told her it was worth nothing. So that was my little gold story.

And well tell me, what did you think of the Japanese? Did you ever come across them?

Near enough to nothing. We, I can only remember a few, yes I remember a few Japanese wounded. We would have had

06:30 a hundred percent nothing to do with them. We just, it wasn't part of the action. It was very, very rare for a Japanese prisoner to be taken. Or even for a wounded Japanese soldier. It was a very, very rare thing. So we weren't able to form opinions one way or another. One thing we did learn was they were very crafty. We got a report once when we were

07:00 out in the timber somewhere. That there was a Japanese party creeping round the area. And we used to get daily reports on them. But they were still able to creep up. And they crept up on an artillery group and shot some of them. Even though they'd been tailed for days and days. So they were pretty crafty. They used to get up in the trees and tie themselves to a branch.

07:30 So that their arms were free to fire on you. Another thing they did. The trees were oh, huge trees. They would dig underneath a tree. And our people would fire all their shells you like at them. And they'd simply stay under the tree and come out and be ready for you when you come round the corner. So they were full of cunning. But as regarding meeting them, never met one in all me life.

08:00 **But you were at one stage weren't you, attacked from the air by the Japanese? When you were working near an airfield, is that right? When you were stationed near an airfield?**

Yes, our hospital was near the airfield at Wau. And Harry Birmingham and I were walking down the track into the hospital this particular day and I've said it before, all of a sudden and here's a Jap plane over the top of us. And

08:30 he possibly didn't see us, cause we jumped straight into a gutter. But he did fire on the hospital. And...

That's supposed to be against the Geneva Convention isn't it?

Yes but it's not written in Japanese, it's written in English. So we just had that odd... we used to get quite a mass bombing from them. They'd come over in perhaps twenty planes at a time. But one of the things we learned to do from all

09:00 the bombing we'd seen, we learned that if a plane was straight on top of you the bomb would go forward. So depending on where they were when you saw them, whether you either ran or you just stood where you were. And that was a handy thing to know. Well saved you getting frightened all the time.

The wounds that you treated in New Guinea, were they similar to those that you dealt with ...

09:30 Similar to anywhere. The only, the difference in New Guinea was the malaria mainly. Malaria was really red hot. I never got any of these things that mosquitoes or flies did to you. But there was an awful lot of malaria. We even had a case of black water fever which I'm told is a very deadly thing.

10:00 It's reminded me of another story that I nearly forgot to tell. I was saying how highly trained we were. Well young Keith Testrow. Keith was one of the younger boys in New Guinea. And he's going up a mountain track one day. And here's a young native lady trying to give birth to her child and having all sorts of problems. And Keith stopped and helped her.

What

10:30 **a wonderful story.**

Yes what a story. I keep saying well I'm glad it was him and not me.

Well did you have any opinions about the Japanese as an enemy? I mean did you ever have thoughts about the Japanese as compared with the Germans or as compared with the Italians?

Not in that respect. But

11:00 what happened was that you never got good publicity on them. All you got was the absolutely worst publicity that you could imagine. Principally brought about with the prisoner of war things that you heard and read about. But we didn't get anything in New Guinea suggesting that they were

11:30 any different from anybody else. They obviously were. But strangely I saw a documentary a couple of years ago. And it showed that there are some Japanese troops and Australian troops who have an annual reunion up in New Guinea. So no matter what we might have thought about em, when it's all over. But I would believe

12:00 that it'd be very few'd forgive the prisoner of war thing. I don't think you could. I mentioned Weary Dunlop [Sir Edward Dunlop]. I read his diary and he ended up forgiving them. Something happened and he saw one and saw it differently. But no you, I think you. at least I keep coming back to meself. But

12:30 you don't particularly form an opinion. You know, everything's day by day. And on this Japanese thing, we never encountered them. All we knew was what we heard and read. And that was about it.

Well when you were working in Wau, would you have said that, what

13:00 **would be the, were the non battle casualties greater than the battle casualties?**

I wouldn't know.

Were you treating greater instances of say malaria than you were the wounded, would you have thought?

It's possible. Thinking of our own company of about fifty, I think at one stage we had figures that showed there was about, I think it was round about thirty-seven out of the fifty had

13:30 malaria. I've got an idea that figure came out. And that would make sense because people were getting it. And getting it after the war. Going home on leave and going down with malaria. It was a pretty

rampant thing. It probably would be greater than the war wounds. But there's no way, see there's no way we had of knowing any figures.

14:00 You can only judge on what you're handling. And we just, in fact the only reason I've got figures on Greece and Crete is because I've got material there to tell me.

And well, can you describe what Wau was like?

Yes, it was quite a picturesque place actually. It was an aerodrome at the bottom of mountains. Which was

14:30 most unreal, unusual because when a plane came in to land, it had to come down the side of a mountain and when it got to the aerodrome it had to go uphill. And in reverse they had to take off down hill and up hill. But it was a, I guess in peace time it'd be a really picturesque nice area. Really and truly. It would be a nice

15:00 peaceful area. They had head quarters buildings for their Bulolo Gold Company. And then Bulolo Gold was further down the track. But if you're looking for a real nice area, your Warburton and all those areas, this'd fit the bill. Yes, most of your areas, most of your open areas, yes very

15:30 picturesque. When you see a map or even an overhead map, all you can see is mountains and trees.

Well how would you, was there ever a part of the Middle East or North Africa that you, that was imprinted on your mind?

I loved...

In terms of landscape?

Not so much about landscape. The area itself. I loved Palestine. I really did.

16:00 Palestine in those days was before the tourist got in. And so it was way back in the bible days. They dressed according to the pictures you used to see in the old bibles. And they had the same habits. Somebody riding on a donkey, dogs, women, they were veiled from right there. You could see their eyes, or you couldn't hardly see their eyes. They

16:30 were veiled as heavily as could be. They were dressed according to thousands of years ago. Men with the long flowing robes, the burnous, and it was just like the bible days. It was special. Other places, well Ceylon was a very nice area but no, Palestine was the only one that had special attraction for me. It was really, and the

17:00 weather was perfect.

Well look, just thinking again about New Guinea. Are there any other points that you'd like to make about your experience up there before we move on to your return to Australia?

No I would doubt it. It was a place, the heat was steamy, it was heavy heat. If you left your spare boots under your bed for

17:30 a week, they'd go mouldy. It was one of these things. But we would, I don't know if any of us did any thinking about the beauty of the place or the scenery. I'm fairly certain that we never would've.

Well did you suffer any illnesses while you were up there?

Yes. I got tropical ears with a temperature

18:00 of a hundred and four. Which put me in hospital. I also got ulcers on me body. I think, no the tropical ears was New Guinea, the ulcers would have been over in the desert. But the tropical ulcers was enough.

Well how did they treat them?

They, the tropical ears I mean. The tropical ears was the thing. Well somehow or other they weren't able to really

18:30 cure em. It wasn't til I'd been home for a couple of years that eventually we got the matter cleaned up. Sulphur (UNCLEAR) or something.

Well when they talk about a tropical ear, it's an inner ear or middle ear infection or?

They call it Otitus Melius. So that'd be the middle. And you had a real strong discharge. You had a real heat with the temperature. And it was enough on its own.

Yes I was reading somewhere about the

19:00 **troops when they were fighting in New Guinea, that they were absolutely putrid. They stank because they'd wash themselves in their uniforms and were all damp and...**

I don't know if that happened. That might have happened in some areas. But there was never a problem

with water and washing. Over in the desert's where you had problems with water and washing. But no there was never any problems. And we had change of uniform.

19:30 That's a possibility but I would never have experienced it in any way.

And in your war experience do you associate any particular songs with it? I mean can you remember any, what music was played when you went away or music was played when you came home?

Yeah they used to have that Wish Me Luck and all that sort of stuff. But I wasn't a fan of whatever her name was.

Vera Lynn

Yes. Come to think of it

20:00 Gracie Fields sang one of them didn't she. Yes.

Well did you ever sing songs?

Not really, I can't sing.

Oh I was gonna, if you sang, I was gonna ask you to sing us a song for us?

No, I never could sing. Never was any good.

Well, you were wounded weren't you? But I was just thinking, this is what your job was dealing with wounded people. Did you ever fear, did you ever think about being wounded yourself?

20:30 **No I was never gonna be wounded. I had no doubt about that. So what happens, you get quite a shock. But there's no way in the world. Everybody else is gonna get hurt except you. That's the way you see it.**

And we mentioned before when we were talking about you know dead bodies. What, when you came across them I suppose they were taken off by somebody else. I mean were there any rituals

21:00 **that you observed? Or somebody you knew died or?**

No. No but I was going to tell you about the, back in Libya. What happened was when the Army was retreating they'd leave everything behind them. Trucks and cars and guns, everything. Including dead bodies. And what they would do, they would gather them. And in our case they gathered them and laid them out in a paddock.

21:30 And one day, one of our doctors said to me come on, we're going for a walk. And we went to where the enemy had left their dead bodies and we had to go one by one to every body to make sure it was dead. Which we did. And he hardly said anything. About all he said was can't do anything for him, he's gone. And that's about all he said throughout

22:00 the whole operation. Now I don't know how many were there. There seemed to be a whole paddock full. But I wouldn't have the faintest idea in numbers. In fact it was me first experience of a mass dead body thing. But it didn't bother us, didn't bother me at all. Left no impression on me. It wasn't a matter of them being the enemy. It just didn't make any impression on me.

22:30 We were checking the bodies out and that's all there was to it.

Yes, so you were able to, yes, totally remove yourself weren't you from, from…

Didn't have to make any effort. It was simply the, I think we were all the same. We were simply doing what we were doing and that was it. The only time I knew of anybody getting upset was

23:00 one of our medical orderlies when a patient died on him. And they used to say your first one is the worst. And he was quite put out, quite upset over it. But no, generally speaking there was no conscious effort. It was just part of the day's work you might say.

So how important were your mates to you throughout all your war service?

Oh really, yes. Yes

23:30 because you were part of a group. And you almost never, whatever without your mates. And you had special mates. You shared a tent, eight of you to a tent. Your mates became very, very special. Really special. So yeah, they, and we, forever and a day. In fact most of them have died

24:00 now but forever and a day we were mates, special mates. Yeah, all the time.

So have you been one to march on Anzac Day?

Fifty-seven times.

I'm glad I asked you that.

Fifty-seven times this year wasn't it.

Does that mean that you've missed any?

Haven't missed one.

What a fantastic effort. And do you still march, you don't have to go in one of the cars, or?

24:30 No this year, yeah this year I went in a jeep.

Yeah well I think that's...

I've got a knee that's waiting to be looked at by a specialist in a couple of weeks.

Well when you came home from the war and you went back to family. Did you talk about the war?

No. Ask Beryl. Never said a word apparently. And it wasn't a deliberate thing. I wasn't aware of it.

25:00 I had no idea that I apparently had a problem. It never entered my head that I wasn't talking to anybody. Which might sound silly. But Beryl will tell you her dad was so disappointed I never told him anything about the war. I wasn't against telling him. I just wasn't talking. And I don't know how long that lasted. I got no idea.

So when did you start, did you talk to talk to your children about

25:30 **the war? Did they ever ask you about it?**

I don't think so, I don't remember. Did we Beryl? No it never cropped up with the children. It's only in the latter years when the girls have grown up and married and have children of their own that we're all interested. Because I'm fairly well involved with RSL [Returned & Services League] things and their own unit and what have you.

26:00 But no it wasn't part of our life. And I just wasn't, I believe I wasn't talking to anybody. I can remember at work fellas, most of them had not gone to war, and I had no interest with them. Me old work mates I went back to. But we had nothing in common. That might've been the problem.

So okay you'd go to the Anzac Day march then every year.

26:30 **And so you'd meet up with your mates then.**

And bring some home.

You would. And would you have seen them during the year?

Yes, sometimes. We had clubrooms in Carlton. We used to have an annual meeting. There was some we used to visit. George Thompson was one, George Tucker. These fellas we'd occasionally meet. They'd come out home or we'd go there. And yes we,

27:00 quite a lot of them we were seeing and visiting up til they died. We were always in touch.

So, well on AnzacDay did you used to talk to each other then? Were there stories that you'd tell each other every year? Or would you remember different things or?

No, there were always different stories. There were mysteries. Someone'd ask do you remember this? What happened there? And

27:30 it was more a matter of telling yarns rather than digging up, you almost never dug up battle things anyhow. In fact as much as anything when you got together, particularly the early days, we were young, our young families and all the rest of it. And, so many of em, we knew each other's wives and children. So

28:00 that was how we got along and we knew each other. Yes we were mates forever. And in fact the mother, no wait on, who did Alan Nicol carry, Margaret wasn't it? In the march? Yeah that's right, our daughter's nearly sixty now. And when she was a baby, one of me mates, she's one of the, the oldest one living in (UNCLEAR).

28:30 He carried her in the Anzac march one year. Yeah we had a good family situation. Lots of em used to come to our place for a meal. And Beryl and they all got to know each other, wives and what have you.

Well when you were discharged from the Army, how soon did you get a job back in civvy street?

I went back to me old job. Went

29:00 back to me old job with the Olympic Tyre Company.

Oh that's right, yes we talked about that yesterday. Obviously yes you were quite happy there and you continued.

Was there forever. Retired at sixty.

And do you ever dream about the war? Or did you ever dream about the war?

Yeah I did earlier. I dreamed about bombs.

Well bombs in what respect?

Just bombs. I'd be somewhere and it's bombing us.

29:30 **And that would be a recurring dream?**

Mmm. For a long time.

Well did you ever seek any medical help?

No I've been dreaming all me life. I couldn't have a night in bed, I couldn't have a night of sleep without dreaming. Haven't got the faintest idea what I dream about. But I'm a non stop dreamer.

Well everybody dreams don't they

30:00 **but some people seem to remember them better than others?**

I wouldn't have any idea when I wake up what I've been dreaming about.

So you wouldn't remember them? Oh you must, you must.

No I remember way back then when I tell you about the bombing things. But whatever I dream about now I've got no idea when I get out of bed in the morning.

So you don't dream about those bombings now?

No, no, nothing at all no. And it didn't bother

30:30 me. It's just I'd be in these situations and it'd be night time and the bombs.

Well when you went off to war, I mean I know we touched on this yesterday, did you think you were going off to fight for Australia, to fight for Britain, to, did you think about that?

Not really. It was a very, very simple train of thought we had. It was simply

31:00 this. The Prime Minister declared we were at war. That's all there is to it. We join up and go in the army. It was as simple as that. It was the way, that was the way of the world. Sixty odd years ago.

And I've just got a few general questions here. For instance, did you ever have a lucky charm with you?

Never, not that I remember.

31:30 I better be careful . Did I Beryl? No I don't think I had a lucky charm.

And when we talking about you've had recurring dreams after the war. Were you ever, did you ever meet any people in the war who could no longer handle it? You know.

I saw one fella one time. Tried to dig a hole in

32:00 the deck of a ship. There was an air raid. And he obviously was in an awful state of nerves. And he just got down on the deck and tried to claw a hole as though he was out on the ground. I saw that happened. We had a Lieutenant who used to drive the natives mad. And he went off but that wasn't sad. The natives thought it was the greatest

32:30 circus ever to see John Bowman going off his head. But generally speaking we did have the odd punch drunk as they used to call them after the war. But generally speaking I wouldn't say that any of our fellas came home nervous wrecks as you were. Not that I was aware of it.

33:00 **Well did you ever know anyone who deserted?**

It was a debatable question. When we arrived in Palestine we had a young boy who came from Canada. Roberts his name was. And we were hardly in Palestine anytime and he vanished. He was never seen again.

33:30 And the general opinion was that he'd got on a ship and gone back to Canada. He got a free trip home you see. Started off living in Canada. But desertions were I'd say almost non existent. We had the odd fella that got a bit frightened of things. We had a few were in Greece

34:00 who were, every morning when we got up and got dressed they'd climb half way up the mountain, out of harm's way. This was only three or four. But you didn't get any samples of being cowards or all nervy or anything like that. Just went about our ordinary way of living.

So do you think that you've

34:30 **received adequate acknowledgement for your contribution to the war?**

It's a thing I've never thought of. Had an Irishman that used to say blessed are they who expect nothing. They won't be disappointed. Sometimes when we get talking, Anzac Day and what have you. And make comments that we got nothing out

35:00 of the war. We got a little bit. I forget what our deferred pay came to. I think it ended up a couple of hundred pounds. Which would have been a lot of money in those days. See everything's gotta be in proportion. When your wages are three and four pound, a couple of hundred pound's a lot of money. Be equal to many thousands today. But no we never got thoughts of being badly done by.

35:30 We did feel that we weren't encouraged to go for pensions. When we got pensions we thought it was a bit rough that there was a limit to the amount of investments we could make. But the pension in fact was, I forget what they use the term for, but it had to be checked alongside, you got it according to your income. And we thought that was a bit rough. But that's

36:00 about all. No generally speaking we accepted things as they were. And that was it.

Well look Jack, we've got five minutes left. So I'm wondering, rather than me keep asking you questions, is there any other general points that you'd like to make? About, I was just gonna ask you a question and you can.

Well you can still ask it.

Oh well, it was just about

36:30 **how do you think your war experience influenced the rest of your life?**

Oh I think it was, I don't know how but it's been with me forever. In fact I think me eightieth birthday me daughter made some sort of remark about me in the Army. I think he's at his happiest on Anzac Day or something. But yes it's something that's with you forever.

37:00 And in fact how it's affected me behaviour I don't know at all. I tend to think that it's in your genes as they used to say. It's your parentage that decides what sort of person you are. And I don't feel that the Army did me any harm. In these latter years, I feel it's done me a lot of good.

37:30 Making me a bit more important in the community. Being involved with, I'm President of our Association and meeting a lot of people through the RSL, Anzac House. It's helped me a lot there. In fact I've got a speaking engagement in about three weeks at a Greek function in town. So in many ways it's helped me as I've got older.

38:00 But in me younger days, all that counted was your family. True you had your Anzac Day, but your family was all that mattered. Really and truly. There's no argument on that one. So what else I could think of I don't. It might have helped me to accept things. I don't know if it

38:30 did or not but. No I couldn't point me finger and say that the war has any particular effect on me. I think it boils down to now I'm an old veteran and enjoying being one.

Well I think that's wonderful. And if there's nothing more that you'd like to say...

No I think we've covered it very well, in fact I'm quite amazed how much we have covered.

Oh that's good.

39:00 I'd suggest we've covered perhaps six or seven hours in total. We've gone a long way round the world in two days.

Yes we have. Well I hope you feel that anyway.

I do.

We just thank you very much for your time

It's been no problem.

And I think we'll finish here.

Thank Beryl for giving you the house to play in.

Yes. Thank you Beryl, Thanks Jack.