Australians at War Film Archive

Carlton Parrott - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:39 **So Carl, can we start off by you giving us a summary of your life, from start to present day.**

From the start to the present day. Now what would that be from?

From your birth perhaps, maybe, where you were born.

Yeah, I well I was born in Wickham, Newcastle. Suburb of Newcastle.

01:00 And lived most of my life, though, in Cooks Hill. And I went to Cooks Hill School. And then out to Broadmeadow Technical School. Another suburb of Newcastle. And I left there when I was about fifteen years of age, and I sold papers.

01:30 And from there….work was very scarce because of the Depression years. And I got another job in a brass foundry, doing a man's work, for seventeen and nine pence a week. Working on the moulding shop floor. And that only lasted for a couple of years, because they would only employ you for

02:00 two years, and then they would employ somebody younger to pay a lower wage. You got one raise, from the seventeen and nine pence to twenty-two and six. And then they didn't want you any more. And after that I had a job at the dairy farm, a milk place, the night shift, washing bottles for the milk. And you had to do a quota every night so it could all be

02:30 bottled in the morning. And you were stood over all night, to make sure you got the quota out. And after having an injury, washing these bottles, on a rapidly running machine, with machine brushes, the bottles would break and crack and they'd cut your hands. And I suppose about a dozen chaps

03:00 before me had been on this job, and had injuries the same way. Well, after you got an injury, you'd be off for a week or something until your hand healed, and when you went back to work the week after they'd sack you because you were too slow. So, I was doing that just prior to when the war started in 1939. And I had joined the CMF [Citizens' Military Force] before that.

03:33 After the Czechoslovakian crisis, the CMF got a bit more active and we did more training, and fired a bit more old First World War ammunition at their weekend turnouts, and the camps that they had. And, of course, a lot of people were in these camps, because they got a few shillings for it.

04:01 Work wasn't plentiful. Just before the invasion of Poland, the government called up CMF personnel to guard strategic points. They were worried about fifth column activity,

04:31 espionage, all that business. So they guarded petrol stations and bridges, and petrol depots. And I went into the duty of guarding the Caltex oil company in Newcastle. It was then known as the Texaco oil company. Texas? Texaco, that's right. And I was there, on

05:00 guard duty, the night that Menzies announced that Australia was at war. As Germany had not retreated from Poland. And after that, the government decided to draw up a force of twenty thousand men, to form the basis of a second AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. And

05:30 you had to recruit independently for that, which I did. I think it was on the 8th of October, 1939, I attended west end drill hall, which was where my CMF unit was based. And we were sworn in as a member of the second AIF, told to go home, get my affairs in

06:00 order and be ready on Newcastle station on the 21st of October, to go in to camp, at Liverpool in Sydney. This I did. So I went into camp at Liverpool on the 21st of October, 1939. This was just before the new camps that were being built at Ingleburn had been completed.

06:30 And we were there about a fortnight or three weeks, then we moved down the nearly completed camp at Ingleburn. We were there some months. We had no uniforms or anything. We were given what they called giggle suits. Terrible outfits, didn't fit, and you were supposed to go on leave in these. And the

food was lousy,

07:00 absolutely atrocious. And they used to say, every day, “Oh, another two hundred men marched in today, and we only got the rations for yesterday.” And this was within twenty mile of Sydney, where they could have got plenty of food. But still you didn’t get any help form the people that were in charge. The frustration and the disorganisation was pretty crook. You know, they just didn’t know

07:30 where they were going. And of course we were in camp there until Christmas, 1939, and just after Christmas we got uniforms, proper uniforms. And the food never increased much better, never improved much better. Then we marched through Sydney and then on the 9th of January we

08:01 embarked on the….well, my battalion, the 2nd 2nd Battalion embarked on the Orient liner Otranto, at Pyrmont Dock. And we anchored out in the stream until the next day, and the Otranto was the first ship to leave Sydney Harbour for the Second World War.

08:30 Other ships in Sydney Harbour picked up the rest of our brigade. Like there were three battalions in a brigade, they followed us out, but we were on the first ship, because brigade headquarters were on that ship. So they went out first. So we were the first ship to leave Australia for the Second World War. With troops. Do you want me to

09:00 go any further with that?

That’s a really significant thing to be able to say.

Yes. And we were the first ship to disembark at El Kantara, in the middle of Suez Canal, on foreign soil, towards Australia’s involvement in the Second World War.

That’s a very significant thing to be able to say.

Yes, I’m very proud of that.

Just to sort of keep us on the

09:30 **track of the summary, just say where you served throughout the war…**

Just a quick one?

Yes, just giving us the points where you served, rather than going into detail of the particular areas. Just so that we know where the basis of your story is. Then we’ll come back and go into the details. So, if you would like to continue from where you finished.

Yes, well, we proceeded from El Kantara, that’s in Egypt.

10:00 Up to Palestine. And we were there, in Palestine, training. And during this period, Italy came into the war, and the phoney war in Europe ended, and Germany conquered France and that, and we were moved up into Egypt. And we took part in the first desert campaign.

10:32 And the capture of Bardia and Tobruk. And other units went on to Benghazi, etc. But then we were pulled out and sent across to Greece. And we were positioned right up near the Yugoslav border. When the Germans attacked, we were nearly surrounded. We had to retreat back down the

11:00 peninsula. And then we fought a delaying action at Tempe Valley, Pinios Gorge. And we were overrun there. Our battalion, a lot of them escaped in one way or another, and about one hundred and fifty of them were captured. And I was able to escape, and got back to Egypt. And after we got back to

11:30 Egypt we were stationed guarding the Suez Canal, at El Arish, where a battle had been fought in the First World War by the Light Horsemen. And then we were moved up to Syria….at this time, it was a very precarious position, the Middle East. The French had gone with the Germans in Syria.

12:00 And we were on eight hours notice to….what was left of our battalion, was on eight hours notice to go and take part in that. But just before we did it, the French surrendered. And this was about the time that Germany had declared war with Russia. So then we went to Syria and occupied the place. And we had to build defences, because of the theory that the Germans would

12:30 come down, beat Russia in six weeks, and come down through the caucuses, and join up with Rommel, who had now attacked in the desert, and taken back Bardia and Tobruk, which we had captured. We were in Syria, digging fortifications in the high country between Beirut and Damascus and the coast. The theory was

13:00 that the British navy would supply us. We would not be able to stop the Germans, but we would be able to harass them as they come down through the plain. Syria joined up to the take the Suez Canal. We would be in this defensive position, supplied by the British navy, would keep control of the Mediterranean, until we could take the offensive, which

13:30 now we know, was unrealistic. While we were there the Japs come into the war. And of course they didn’t come down through the caucuses. They were beaten at Stalingrad, and we were pulled out, to come back towards Australia. And on the way back, there was quite

14:00 a confusion. We left Suez, and sailed down the Red Sea, past Aden, then we had to turn back. Suddenly one night we changed course and came back, because at that time, Churchill and Curtin were arguing as to where Australian troops should go. And Churchill wanted us to go to Burma, but Curtin wanted us to come home. So we stopped back at

14:30 Aden, and then we moved off again. And we finished up being dumped on Ceylon. And when we got on at Ceylon we were told that Mr Curtin and Mr Churchill have come to the agreement that Ceylon, we could be put off at Ceylon, to defend Ceylon, because Ceylon was vital to the defence of Australia. And we would be relieved as soon as possible. So, we were

15:00 there. And ten days later, the Japan task force that attacked Darwin, attacked Ceylon. Attacking Colombo and Trincomalee. But fortunately they didn't land. Some Hurricane fighter planes, which were on their way to Singapore before it fell, were dumped there. And they discouraged

15:30 the Japanese from landing. Because they inflicted a lot of casualties on their aircraft. So, after the Japanese, we were pulled away from Ceylon, we were relieved and brought home and then given a fortnight's leave in Australia, and raced up, quickly, to Port Moresby, to take part in a counter offensive against the….on the

16:00 Kokoda Trail. Which we did. Our brigade, all the way over the Kokoda Trail, right to Sanananda Point at the beach-head. But by then it was worn out, exhausted and depleted. But not defeated. And we were relieved and after a long period of

16:30 convalescence, we sailed again, just before Christmas '44, to take part in the Aitape. Wewak campaign, which we considered an unnecessary war. But we were there for the next eight months, at least, eight not eighteen. And while we were there the bomb was dropped and Berlin fell.

17:02 I came home a few days after the Japanese surrender. On the points scheme, I got home earlier, see, on the points scheme. Had a nice pleasant cruise on the Katoomba, to Rabaul and other places where it was taking replacement troops. Knowing that the war was over and enjoying good weather.

17:30 And back to Brisbane. And by then, of course, the war was over. The excitement was all gone. We come off the boats very quietly and went to home leave and then discharged.

And what has happened since the end of the war?

Well, I worked on the waterfront in Newcastle. Where my father had worked before me, for thirty-five years,

18:01 and then retired.

And I believe you were also married as well? Where does that fit in?

1952, I was married. And our daughter was born in 1954. And we've been together ever since. We have our little squabbles, but we're quite happy.

18:30 **Sounds very healthy.**

Oh, yes, I have had a heart bypass operation, and I'm on quite a bit of medication. Eight tablets in the morning and five at night. So I've got a few problems, but I'm very fortunate I'm here. I'm here now, at 83.

It sounds like you're doing all right.

19:00 Is that all right?

That's fantastic, Carl. Thanks very much for that summary. That's given us a very clear idea of the chronology for us to follow. It was very clear and concise, so thank you for that. So what we'll do now is go right back to the beginning, and it might seem a little bit repetitive, but just to get everything in a concise answer. Can you tell us when and where you were born?

19:30 I was born in Wickham. That's a Newcastle suburb.

And what was the date of your birth?

27th of June, 1920.

Now was Wickham the suburb where you grew up in?

No. My mother was killed

20:00 in a motor accident, on the corner of Auckland and Hunter Street, six months after I was born. A taxi hit a tram and it went into a telegraph pole. And I was reared by my uncle and he lived in Cooks Hill, in Newcastle. Near Union Street. It's near the corner of Union and King Street

20:30 And that was where I was reared. And I went to Cooks Hill School, which is just near where the sports ground is, up there.

So you obviously didn't get to know your mother?

I never knew her, no.

What about your father? What can you tell us about him?

Well, he had been in the First World War. He was in the 1st Tunnelling Company

21:02 in France and that. He left me to his brother's wife, and she reared me, more or less. But he married again, and had another five children. But I stayed with my uncle and auntie.

21:30 **Did you get to see your father often?**

Oh, yes. He worked on the waterfront with me, after the war. He was working there before the war. I was on pretty good terms with him, but I didn't get on very well with my stepmother. So I stayed with Auntie.

Well, obviously your auntie and your uncle were quite significant in your life…

Very good, very good.

What can you tell me about your uncle?

22:00 Oh he was a hard worker. He worked for Brambles, in they days when they had horse and carts and things like that.

What was his personality like?

Well, he was all right. But the adults at that time were all stricken with the effects of the Depression. And I think this should be emphasised. Like, my father

22:30 was traumatised. My uncle, he was stuck with this business. And money was very, very scarce. Very scarce. A shilling was a lot of money. Two bob was a lot of money. People don't seem to realise that today. But you never had much.

23:02 People never had washing machines. A lot of people didn't have electricity, you know? You didn't have nice bathrooms, people washed in galvanised tubs, and boiled the copper to heat the water. The women had a wash and scrubbed the stuff on scrubbing boards, and all that business. This right up to the war,

23:30 1939, you know. It was a different world altogether, then what it is today. Just the ordinary living conditions. I've got a lot to thank my auntie and uncle for. They put up with another child, they had two of their own. But people were like

24:00 that then.

Can you describe the personality of your uncle?

Well, he was a good man, but he was a bit short tempered. He worked hard, and all that business. He shared what he had with the family.

24:30 But he got tired and grumpy and everything. Work, in them days, like if you worked for Brambles, you had to do a couple of hours overtime every night. You didn't get paid for it, and if you asked for the pay, you got the sack. And not only that, you would get a black mark against you at all the industries. BHP, Lysaghts and Rilands, all the big industry.

25:00 If you got a start there, you might start, and then they find out that Brambles or someone else had sacked you for asking for better conditions, you'd be out. And that's the way it was. See, when I worked at the brass foundry, they used to tell you every morning, "There are fifty kids at the gates looking for a job this morning." Bend your back, you know. Keep moving.

25:30 And, like, you'd only last two years. They wouldn't sort of just sack you, to say they were sacking you because you wanted a second raise, they'd provoke you. They'd speak back or something, then they'd sack you, you see. But this was the way it was right throughout

26:00 Newcastle. Lots of adults were working for money, and say, signing for three pound a week, and they were taking two pound, otherwise you didn't get a job, you know? There was no government rules and regulations. Compensation was lousy, if you got hurt. You couldn't live on it. And if you got on compo, you were a nuisance. When you went back to work they'd sack you, after a week or something, because they'd already put someone

26:30 else in your place, So that was the way things were in Newcastle.

Tell me about your auntie? And what she like as a person?

A very good person. A very kind person, a very good person. Worked hard. As I say, they scrubbed clothes on washing boards, and boiled coppers, carried the water, all that business, you know. And still tried to look good and go down the

27:00 street to the pictures, if they were lucky enough to have a shilling to go to the pictures.

Were you close with your auntie?

Oh yes.

I imagine she must have been like a mother?

She was, yes.

Now you mentioned in passing that your father was traumatised…

Well, everybody was. With the war. With the Depression, you know.

27:30 With the Depression. You see, he just came back from the war, he was married, they had me, and then she was killed in a motor accident. And then, the Depression was starting to move in by then. Any dreams they had went out the window. That applied to everyone around

28:00 about that period. There was empty houses. My uncle was out of work, with Brambles there, for years. Well, ten bob a week was a rent. And the landlord didn't even bother to collect that. He said, "Stay in the house." It wasn't much of a house, then, at that time, "Stay there and

28:30 in time to come you can pay me back," sort of business. But I don't think he ever paid him back, but he didn't push it. And some people were living in houses, because the people that owned them preferred would prefer them to stay there, then put them out on the street, and vandals would wreck the houses. And lots of people were living at Knobby's Camp. In tin shacks and

29:00 over at Carrington, in a place they called 'Texas', between the steel works, which is a fairly desolate piece of land, between Carrington and the steel works there, and they had put shacks and tents and made places out of old boards. They had whole families there.

Did you ever go down to that place?

29:31 I knew lots of people that lived in them. And soup kitchens were going during the Depression. You'd go from Cooks Hill School, you'd go over to the Salvation Army, they had a plate of hot soup and that, a bit of bread, for lunch, sort of business.

So you would go to the soup kitchens yourself?

Yeah. I went there on and off. During the peak period of the Depression. As I've often said, I lived on….

30:00 people talk about food, I lived on mullet. Which was cheap. You could get about six mullets for a bob when the fish were running. They'd come round in a horse and cart singing out, "Fresh fish." And then the rabbit-oh, horse and cart blokes selling rabbits. A pair of rabbits for nine pence or something. At the height of the business they might have been one and six for a pair. They were dear, then.

30:30 Saveloys and things you know, this is the life, the mid '30s. Quite a lot of people, I suppose, a lot of people in Sydney would have been the same. But a lot of people in Newcastle were living like that. A lot of them are too proud to admit it today, but I'm not bloody too proud to admit it, I know it, what it was like, even though I was only a kid.

31:03 I often heard one of my auntie's say…..oh, you could get dole tickets, those were worth about six bob a week, dole tickets or something you got. You could only buy certain things on that. Basic foods. I remember the auntie saying when she ran out of money for the week, coming home, she picked up six pence.

31:32 And she had to get something for her husband's tea. A pound of mince meat and something else. Is this too much?

This is great. This is really fabulous, keep going.

I lived through it. And sort of kids don't worry much about it.

32:00 We used to poke about, all the kids in Cooks Hill were the same. You laugh about things and you got by. Often, you were flat out buying the necessary clothes.

What did you do for fun?

I'd hate to tell you.

32:31 **It would be great to know.**

We weren't like some of the kids today, the brutal things they do today. But we had our fun.

I imagine you must have gotten up to a bit of mischief?

Oh, we did at times, yeah.

33:00 **Can you recall anything in particular that…..?**

Nothing specifically I don't suppose, you know.

What about your schooling? What do you recall of that?

33:30 Oh, we had a teacher there. Georgie Blair. He was a hard man. He used to walk in and out of the classrooms, and you might have a good teacher in there giving you something interesting, and he'd walk in, "Righto, put all them books away." And he'd get over the top of your class teacher. "We're going to have some arithmetic." And he'd put

34:01 one to nine up on the board, and mental arithmetic, you know, boom, boom, boom, and, "Righto, what's the addition?" If you couldn't say it straight away you'd get a slap over the knuckles with a ruler. But he was a bugger. Georgie Blair.

What was your favourite subject at school?

Geography.

34:31 **And what did you like about geography?**

Well, I liked geography. Learning about different countries. What they did in different countries. We had one teacher that was very interesting, very good at it. He used to talk about Australia, and different parts of Australia, and it always interested me, and other parts of the world and everything. I always thought, well, I was fairly good at geography.

35:03 I liked that. I wasn't really keen on mathematics.

Now, you mentioned that your father was in World War I.

Yeah.

What did he tell you about World War I?

Oh, he never said much. But he always said to me….see,

35:30 when I joined the AIF I had to get his permission because he to join the AIF you had to be twenty years of age, with your parents permission, and under thirty-five. You had to be as old as twenty and you had to be under thirty-five, but this was a fallacy. They didn't enforce that.

36:01 My father came to me and he said, "Are you going to join the AIF?" "I said, "Yes." I said, "I want you to sign my papers so I can join…." I was going to say I'm twenty and I was only nineteen. And he said, "Well, if you don't sign it, you'll probably go to Sydney or somewhere else and say you're twenty one." I said, "Yeah."

36:30 He says, "Well, look, for Christ's sake, don't join the infantry." And I said, "Why?" He said, "Oh" I was a bit ignorant at the time, and naïve. And, "Oh," he said, "That's the dirty end of the stick." He said, "Don't join the infantry. Get in anything else. Get in the AFC [Australian Flying Corps]." I said, "What do they do?" He said, "They cart the supplies. The Army Service Corps." He said, "You'll always have food." Always kept comfortable.

37:03 I was influenced by my peers, my friends, they joined the infantry, so I joined the infantry. And even though I'm proud of my experience in the infantry, I always remember my father's warning me. I got what I deserved. He gave me good advice.

Do you wish that you had taken his advice?

See, when he joined, he

37:30 was working as water side worker, but he had worked in a…..mine for six months. So when he enlisted, they said, "Righto, you worked in a mine, good. You're in the 1st Tunnelling Company." He said, "What's that?" They said, "That's tunnelling."

38:01 He went over as a reinforcement to the 1st Tunnelling Company. They were already overseas. And they tunnelled under the German lines, and all that business. "We want miners." He said, "But I was a water side worker." They said, "Yeah, but you worked in the mines so you're in the tunnelling company." So that's where he went. 1st Tunnelling Company. So he was at Messines and that. He was gassed there and went to hospital in London for some

38:30 time. He came home. But he had a lot of pictures and that of the Western Front. This place, they blew up what they called "Hill 60." A tunnel under the German lines. It was the biggest tunnelling explosion that took place. They packed it with explosives, and they exploded that. And the German trenches were all on top of it.

39:00 But that was one of the episodes. He didn't talk about it much. But I remember he had a beautiful silk sort of picture thing, about that size there, of the cathedral at Ypres on fire. It was done in by French women, embroidery, all done in silk and framed. I remember.

We might just pick that up on the next tape.

Tape 2

00:32 **So tell us a bit more about your schooling?**

Well, when I left Cooks Hill Primary School I went out to the Broadmeadow Technical School, junior technical. It was crowded. There seemed to be a problem with overcrowding in them days. It seemed to be overcrowded.

01:00 The classes were full and the teachers were very agitated and irritated all the time. They seemed to be working under difficulty of what I can remember. And I left before…..I'd done the three years. As I say earlier, I left school and went to sell papers. But I used to like there the science

01:30 classes and things like that. And the woodwork and metalwork parts of the business. It was interesting to state that when we left Australia, the chap that was the teacher in the metalwork section, he went over as colonel of

02:00 the 2nd 1st Field Regiment of Artillery, that went with the Sixteenth Brigade. The first contingent. He went over with us. I left because it didn't seem that I was going to do much good there. They didn't have much time…the classes were too

02:30 full and they didn't have much time to concentrate on anybody, you know. But money being scarce and the family saying, "Well, you can get a job selling papers down at the paper shop." That's what I did, left school and picked up a couple of bob a week selling papers.

Would you like to have stayed on at school do you think?

Yeah, under different circumstances I would, but it wasn't very comfortable at Broadmeadow

03:00 Technical, by that time. The school buildings are still there. In those days it was a fairly good school, nice brick buildings and all the rest of it, nice big areas and that. But it seemed to be overcrowded with kids and the teachers all seemed to be under some sort of pressure, you know.

03:30 It was part of the Depression atmosphere I think.

So tell me a bit more about your first job selling papers after school?

Oh yeah, I used to sell papers. In them days I used to read about our different heroes. Amy Johnson flying from England to Australia. Kingsford Smith and his different flights.

04:01 During that period, this was when Italy invaded Abyssinia and took Abyssinia and of course I used to read all that, type of thing. The first thing to do in the day when I picked up my papers, things would be slack for a while until people started knocking off work, and I'd read the paper.

04:30 So that's where I got an interest….and as I say I always had an interest in geography, and a bit of history. So I used to read the papers.

So can you talk us through step by step a typical day for you, being a paper-seller?

05:05 The first job was selling the afternoon papers. There used to be papers morning and night then. The Newcastle Sun used to be operating, though that's not published any more, Sydney Sun and all them. There used to be a morning and afternoon paper. I started with the afternoon paper. I started about three o'clock and

05:30 pick up the papers and work up till about seven, you know.

And where would you sell your papers?

The corner of Union and Hunter Street. Newcastle West. In those days that was a busy period, a busy area. The trams went up to Glebe, past the sports ground. And

06:00 the trams went up and down Hunter Street. And the railway goods yard and railways workshops were just across the road. The Honeysuckle Workshops. It's all being developed now as the Honeysuckle development area, but that was all railways good yards and workshops. And of course when the men knocked off from there, they used to buy papers.

06:30 And of course, people would be coming and going in the trams. There wasn't that many motor cars in them days. They were all using trams. And you'd jump on a tram and sell papers and go to the next stop and jump on a tram coming back with your papers on your side, and sell the papers to people while you're travelling on a tram. And this was sort of tolerated. The tram drivers or the conductors never kicked you off or anything. This was tolerated.

07:00 Sometimes you might sell a couple of papers on a tram, go up to the next two stops, three stops, four

stops, this type of thing.

So would you have like a special satchel or bag?

Yeah, you had a bag, a money-bag, and you had a strap over your arm that held the papers.

Like a leather strap?

Leather straps, yeah.

07:31 **So how old were you when you left school?**

Fourteen and a half or fifteen, somewhere about like that. Getting onto fifteen.

And did you complete your Intermediate Certificate?

No.

You mentioned also that you joined the CMF? At what point did you join the CMF?

About 1936 I would suppose

08:00 it would be, ’36, ’37.

So you would have been about sixteen or seventeen at that age? Okay, what was involved in being a part of the CMF?

Well, just following your peers, the other kids. And you got a couple of bob

08:31 every six months for attending. You generally went to the one night a fortnight, and then they used to have camps sometimes of a week or so, but then they’d have weekends of training. And it was something to do.

And what would you do at those training sessions?

Well,

09:01 eventually you might do firing at the rifle range at Adamstown. They used to do rifle range not far from here. And you’d do all different Army drill and practise. At first I was first involved in the machine gun platoon, and we used to put up machine

09:30 guns quickly. You’d go through the drill of pulling it out of the box and see how quickly you could slap it together. Fix the gun to the tripod and put the ammunition belt in, all that business. See how quick you were and all that caper. You practise this. And on the camps and that you would do a little strategic work, like

10:00 where to place the machine gun and why you placed it there and all that business. You learn the characteristics of the gun and all that the rest of it. When I joined the AIF, I took on another aspect of the military life. The three- inch mortar.

10:30 And that was what my service was mainly in the AIF, for the six years I was member of the mortar platoon.

Well, we might go into more detail a little later about what was involved in being a part of that. But I would like to know more about the CMF, in particular how many of your mates were involved?

Oh, about four or five

11:00 of my class mates.

And what were the other people like who were part of the CMF?

There were all sorts there. People who had nothing, and working class people and those other people connected to business. For instance, our

11:30 local grocer, Richard Owen, he was a captain in the battalion that I was in. There were all sorts of people in it.

Now tell me how long did you sell the papers for?

Oh, I suppose for about three years.

And was it while you were doing that job

12:00 **that you heard that the war had broken out?**

No, no. I was already on full-time duty at the Texaco Oil Company in Wickham, as I mentioned earlier. The government called up those of the CMF that could. It wasn’t compulsory, but those that could go on

full-

12:30 time duty and guard strategic points. Bridges, oil companies, gas installations. They had this phobia about fifth column activity. Which was happening in Europe. Amongst nations that were opposed to Germany, German agents were

13:00 carrying out activities, and they were called Fifth Columnists. So we guarded these strategic points. For instance, they had the Hawkesbury Bridge guarded with the CMF, and this would be about a fortnight before war was declared.

Now, just before war was declared, can you talk us through what your job was at the Texaco company?

Well, we just had to guard the place of a night.

13:30 There would be a man on the main gate with a rifle and bayonet and a dozen rounds of ammunition. And during the night, two men together would walk around the plant. What they called prowler guard. They just walked around together around the whole perimeter of the plant looking for anybody or suspicious activity. And they would work

14:00 two hours on and four hours off.

And this became full-time for you?

Yes. This was a fortnight before Britain declared war and I was at the main gate of Texaco Oil Company. We were able to use the staff room for our

14:30 meals and that, and of course we had a wireless set in there. Just near the main gate, and I was on guard at the main gate the night I heard Menzies, “Seeing that Germany has not retreated from Poland, England has declared war on Germany, so that means that Australia, we are at war.” I remember that quite clearly, in Wickham, Newcastle, Texaco Oil Company.

15:00 Now known as Caltex, but still in the same place.

What impact did hearing that news have on you?

Well, I never thought it would happen because the scares had come up during the Czechoslovakian Crisis and they had all been dropped. But the amazing part of the Czechoslovakian Crisis, what developed in Newcastle was a rise in employment. The BHP Company, they got big

15:30 big orders for corrugated iron, heavy gauge corrugated that the British were using for what they called Anderson air-raid shelters. People would dig a shelter in their backyard and put this steel over the top, cover it with dirt. And BHP in Newcastle got big orders for that. Then other orders started to come in, and this increased the shipping in Newcastle. And of course,

16:01 that compounded other people getting jobs, too. But the Depression hadn’t entirely ended, but it was starting to improve after the Czechoslovakian Crisis. But then the war didn’t break out until the end of September. It was only the other day, the anniversary, two days ago. But I remember Menzies statement

16:30 that night. I was on the main gate there and I thought, “God, we’re really in the war.” And later on he announced that he was going to call up twenty thousand men to form a second AIF.

And when he made that announcement, what went through your mind?

Well, I thought, within a couple of days

17:00 I thought, “Well, I will join the AIF.”

At this stage was Empire important to you?

No, I wasn’t real patriotic. It was a sort of a job, and the other blokes had the same idea. It was something to do. A little bit of a thought about adventure, I suppose. Seeing the world. I couldn’t say I was really

17:30 patriotic. As a matter of fact, I might have been a bit anti-patriotic. Because my father was always crook at, that the war and the all the rest, and the Depression afterwards, he was always hostile. And the whole fact that he had even been in the army. And that his brother had died.

18:01 His brother died five years after the war. He was in an infantry, the 35th Battalion, he was injured and he never recovered. And then the Depression hit them, and he got the story that the Depression was on us because things are tough in New South Wales. We’ve got to pay back…the government got a loan to build

18:30 the railways, we’ve got to pay that back to England. We’ve got to pay the war debt, all that business, so people have got to suffer. And this was the attitude that the working class in Newcastle were given here. And people weren’t very happy at all.

So was this anti-patriotism directed towards Britain or directed towards Australia?

19:02 Well, it would be more or less directed to Britain I suppose. People would talk about the Pommies…I'm not crooked on the Pommies. There are a lot of good English people. I hate the Pommie hierarchy. And I'd seen enough of it during the war. The ordinary British soldier was browbeaten by these people.

19:31 But the Australians weren't. I think this attitude….Like, my father and my uncles on my mother's side, one of them were on the first landing at Gallipoli, and another one had been in the Light Horse. They talked about how over in France there,

20:00 what the Prince of Wales at the time, would come and inspect the troops. He'd be guarded by different people and be in a flash uniform, making out he was a soldier, and he'd come near the front but not too close. And hid away. And now they were living in luxury and we were suffering the Depression. And this…I'm not exaggerating. People weren't

20:31 that happy, and they weren't that bloody patriotic either. In some ways….we all come from England, in those days. I didn't condemn them, the British people. When you referred to a Pommie, you would be mainly referring to the hierarchy.

21:04 With the cricket, like Jardine, and the Test Cricket. We thought Bradman was God, you know. And Jardine is this arrogant Pommy. Bodyline bowling and that. It was easy to get anti-Pommy sentiment in them days.

21:30 Those days of the cricket and that, it really brought it out. But Gardine had come from the Jardine Matheson family. A wealthy multinational in them days. They made money from heroin growing in India. They used to export it to China and all that business. There he was out here running the cricket and trying to kill our Bradman.

22:02 All this attitude. This was spoken of.

That's great. It's really interesting because….to what your views of the British Empire were, because people have differing opinions about that. Some are very patriotic and some have the same feelings you're talking about.

22:30 **But, you did bring up an interesting thing there about cricket. I'm wondering, before the war broke out, but what did you do for entertainment and for social occasions?**

We used to play cricket in the streets and everything. In them days you could have one telegraph pole be the wicket, and you'd bowl across the street and in between horse and carts going by, you could have a good

23:00 game of cricket. But now you'd never do it in the same streets we used to. But that was true. You could do that.

It'd be a bit dangerous now. A few more broken windows. And what else did you do for fun?

Well, prior to the war I used to like to, I'd go on a pushbike with a couple of mates, we'd go bush for a week or so, and I used to have

23:30 a .22 rifle, and I had a shotgun at one stage. And we used to go camp for a week. Not so far from Newcastle, you could ride forty miles up the road, on the North Coast Road, and you could be in the bush. That's a bit different to today. And there were plenty of rabbits around, there were still kangaroos and wallabies and all that business. We'd camp out and we'd live on the smell of an oil rag. You couldn't

24:00 carry much on a pushbike. And sometimes we slept in old sheds on farms with the permission of the farmer. And we'd have a royal time. We'd be living on rabbits. If you were lucky to have sixpence or threepence, you'd get a pound of sausages and you could cook that. Where we lived, I used to like to go shooting and that.

24:30 Of course, before I even got in the army I could use a rifle. I saved up to buy my first rifle. Lay-by, I put in on lay-by. You could be sixteen and carry a rifle, in them days. But now you'd go to jail, I think.

25:03 **Now getting back to your enlistment. Can you talk us through what was involved in the actual enlistment?**

Well, the day I enlisted, I think it would the 8th of October, and we went to the West End drill hall, and there was two lines of people, because it had been announced that they would be recruiting

25:30 that day, and I had to join that separately from the CMF. There were two lines to go through what they called, to get a 'testament', that was to sign up for the AIF. And you'd go in and have a doctor, a rough doctor's examination, and if he was satisfied then they'd sign you up.

What was involved

26:00 **with the doctor's examination?**

Oh, very rough. Just your height, your teeth, a quick look over your body, and then they'd say, "Righto."

Then they'd sign you up. I remember them making the crack that, "Righto now, go home and fix up your affairs and report on

26:30 Newcastle station on the 21st of October for the train for Liverpool. The camp in Liverpool. And bring a tin dish and a knife and fork." A few things to eat with. "And if you don't come," they cracked the joke that, "if you don't come, we'll arrest you for desertion." Like you've already signed up, you're in the army.

27:00 And I was always crooked on that. We were never paid for the fortnight we spent at home. We were only marked down as enlisting on the 21st of October. So that's what we did. We went to the station, got on the train, went to Liverpool Camp, and we went into Liverpool Camp on the 21st of October, 1939. We were thrown a chaff

27:30 bag, and pointed to a heap of straw. "Fill that up, that's your bed." And there were these old sheds that were relics of World War I, we slept in them. They put the first meal on, it was lousy food and everyone kicked up a row. And the bloke in charge got up and said, "Look, we were only supposed to cater for two hundred

28:00 men today. And there's two hundred extra marched in." And someone said, "We'll, Sydney's just down the road, twenty miles, there's a ton of food down there." No we didn't get any food, just had to put up with it. And this went on day after day. Extra troops would keep coming in, and after we were there a fortnight, they said, "Righto, Ingleburn camp down the road is now finished, or nearly finished, so

28:30 you all go down there." So we marched down there. It was a hot day, and we marched down the road and into Ingleburn Camp which was…the workman were still doing the finishing touches. We moved into there, and we were there until we sailed on January 10th, 1940.

29:00 **What do you recall of your training at Ingleburn?**

We did a lot of training over back country there. Over the hills there. Mainly just route marches. The army and especially infantry soldiers, they're mad on route marching because at any time you might have to march long distances to do things. And this was typical of the infantry. You haven't always got

29:30 transport. And they try and keep you fit, you see. So a ten mile route march or a twenty mile route march is nothing to them. They were liable to put that on at any time. So we did a lot of that. And just routine stuff, weapon training. As I say, putting a machine gun together and putting a mortar together. You know what a mortar is, don't you?

Can you talk us through the mortar that you were using?

A three inch

30:00 mortar is like, well, a lot of people call them 'stovepipes'. They're a very primitive form of artillery, really. But still very effective today. And of course they're a little bit more advanced than they were originally were. But they're just like a stove pipe and then you've got the tripod and you've got a base plate. And you put a bomb down the barrel, something like the bomb they

30:30 dropped from an aeroplane. It's got tail fins on it. And you have a primary charge, and four secondary charges in it. They fit between the fins of the tail. And depending on how far you want to fire, you take some charges off and you leave other charges on. It's a high angle weapon, whereas a gun is more or

31:00 less a low angle, flat trajectory, and more high velocity. Where the mortar fire is a bomb up in the air, when it reaches the top it comes down like an aerial bomb. It's a very good infantry weapon, they're still using them today. Even with all their modern grenade, and rocket grenades, and all that business they've got in these present day wars. The mortar is

31:30 still a very good weapon. So that was my speciality. I stuck to that.

So how did you come to be chosen to do mortar?

Well, in the support company….Every company has a support company. You have rifle companies and then you've got a support company, which is generally, these days is called headquarter

32:00 company. And in the headquarter company you have the signal platoon. That's a vital part of an infantry battalion, runs the signal wires out to the different companies and sections. The telephones and that. They use wireless sets and everything, too. And then you've got….you might have a carrier platoon. These were the small armoured vehicle.

32:30 Bren gun carrier they called them, no top on like, just an armoured tractor type thing. And then you have the machine gun platoon. They have the heavy Vickers machine guns. Apart from Bren guns, which were light machine guns, and the Thompson and the Owen guns, which were sub-machine guns. Well, the mortar is

33:00 a back-up weapon to the infantry man with a rifle. The basic infantry man has a rifle and a Bren gun and a Tommy gun. And the medium machine gun, the Vickers gun, and the mortar, is the back-up weapon to

them. Close, close back-up weapons. And of course behind the infantry battalions you've got the artillery regiments.

33:31 Do you follow me?

Yes. Yes I do. Thank you. I'd never actually heard how they all kind of connected with each other, so that was very useful. But why did you specifically get chosen to do mortar?

Followed my peers, my mates. "What are you gonna get in, Bill?" "I think I'll go into mortar platoon." So Carl goes into mortar platoon.

34:01 It was a natural thing that happened with everyone.

So how many mates had you enlisted with?

Well, three close mates and about six or seven others. Some of them come from my same street, in King Street, Newcastle.

And were they….You'd obviously gone and

34:30 **enlisted with them and gone through the training with them as well?**

Yeah.

Now, at this point from where were you getting information about the war?

What do you mean?

You mentioned that before you enlisted that you were getting information about the war through newspapers. When you had enlisted and you were at Ingleburn,

35:00 **where were you getting information about what was going on in the war?**

They weren't giving out a lot of information I can tell you that. You were just learning it day to day. After we sailed….when we sailed in our convoy, prior to us sailing, the Grafspee was

35:30 loose in the world's oceans.

Sorry, what was that? The Grafspee?

What's the…..German warship that was sunk? In went into the River Plate to….

Oh, the Graffspeed?

36:00 It was loose on the world's seas. And to escort the first contingent of Australian troops back to England, the British sent out as part of the escort the battleship Ramallies. Because it was thought that the Grafspee might be around when this convoy was on the water. So,

36:30 it came out to convoy us, but in the meantime the Grafspee was sunk. So we had the Ramallies as part of the escort. A battleship and a number of Australian cruisers. And one French cruiser.

So was that common knowledge, at the time?

In a way it was, yes.

I'm just wondering like how much

37:00 **knowledge you had about what was going on in the war, was based on rumour or how much was based on actual information you got?**

We had a lot of rumours. There were all sorts of things. There was a period after the Grafspee sinking and the invasion of Poland and all

37:30 the rest of it, that was known as 'The Phoney War.' They were sitting on the Western Front. I'd imagine they were lying on the Siegfreid line, looking at one another for about four or five months there. Well, this was the period that we sailed over to the Middle East, and we established ourselves in Palestine and that. Before they really started the war.

38:02 In that period…..I don't know what was happening. I think there was some politicisation going on. Hitler didn't move straight away. And I was in Tel Aviv on leave the day that

38:31 the Phoney War ended and the German troops moved across into France. And I heard on the wireless in this café I was in on Tel Aviv beach, that the Germans had pushed through into France, and they were into Belgium, and they were being welcomed by the Belgium people. I suddenly realised after sitting in Palestine for a couple of months that the war had really started.

39:01 And by the time that I got back to camp, the camp in Palestine was a really quiet and well established affair. The tents were all lined up, with lights in between the tents and everything, as if it was a little city like. Then they had to shift all the tents and dig them into four

39:30 feet deep, and rig the tent over that hole. Ten men to a tent, and four feet down in the ground, and spread the tents out, so many hundred yards between tents and all this business. And what's this for? It's against air attack. Italy came into the war.

We might pick up on the next tape.

Tape 3

00:33 **Carl, how did you first hear that you would be travelling overseas?**

Well, couldn't exactly say when it would be. Oh, that's right. Just prior to Christmas we were given final leave.

01:01 And we were warned then, because it was termed as final leave, that we would be sailing soon. So that gave us leave over Christmas. When we went back from the leave, we marched through Sydney and a few days later boarded the boat.

And what ship was this?

The Otranto. The iron liner

01:30 Otranto.

And just before we hop aboard the boat, was there any particular farewell from the family?

Well, everyone arranged their own little set-up. One woman in Cook's Hill that knew us arranged a bit of a turnout in the local dance hall in Layman's Street, for a few of us that were involved.

02:00 That's all the type of thing that happened. There wasn't much of that sort of thing. It was a fairly quiet departure I would say. It was supposed to be secret it was, but thousands knew it was going on.

When you got aboard the ship, did you know where you would be travelling?

No idea.

So

02:30 **could you describe the journey for us?**

It wasn't a very pleasant journey aboard a troop ship. Not for the ordinary rank and file. The Otranto was rapidly put up to take troops, and it wasn't converted very much from what it was in peace time, as a

03:00 cruise liner. And the officers and sergeants, they used the ordinary dining rooms, just as they did in cruise days. And they had eight men to a table and a waiter to each table, and they had menus printed and all the rest of it. But the troops were down in the ship's hold, just sleeping on

03:30 the floor sort of business. And they had very pokey quarters to have their meals. Like the ship was crowded, of course, and the food was lousy. Absolutely lousy. It was that lousy that.....it took us seven days to get to Freemantle, we had a day's leave there, that was good. And

04:00 I remember one of the remarkable things about that. Going back aboard the ship at the end of the day, there was an old Italian near Freemantle Station, and he had a barrow selling lobsters, just lobsters. In them days there was no export trade in lobsters, and the West Australian lobsters were plentiful. And they were one and six each. And just about all of us brought a lobster and took it back aboard the ship.

04:30 I remember we would pull the lobsters along the streets with a bit of string on them. We were all drunk of course, we pulled the lobsters along the street back towards the ship. People were looking at us and staring at us. We didn't care. Anyhow, that was a bit of a luxury. But when we go to sea, about halfway through the Indian Ocean, the weather's starting to warm up,

05:00 we're getting into the tropics, and there was hell to pay. The Captain screaming, there was the smell of decaying lobster shells all over the ship. Bits and pieces had been left in lifeboats and in corners and everything. And the heat was starting to take effect. And then did we get a roasting from our commanding officer for this sort of behaviour.

05:30 The food on the ship was terrible. Before we got to Colombo, there was an outbreak of dysentery, gastric problems, and the whole ship, except for the officers and sergeants, who had better food and were in better quarters, was affected. And the ship was a mess from one to the other with vomit. The eight nurses

06:00 that we had aboard the ship from the 2nd 1st Australian Field Hospital, they were flat out coping with this problem. It was violent sickness. You couldn't....like people were laying in the passage ways and stairways and everything like that. It come down all at once. But the amazing part about it, it was

06:30 over in about forty-eight hours, and people started to get better again.

So it was like some sort of contagion for about forty-eight hours?

It was. Apparently it come from the food source, which was really lousy. Our food at Ingleburn Camp had been lousy, but this was lousier.

So what was the food aboard the ship?

Oh, you'd get pressed meat, like Empire sausage and

07:00 that sort of business at lunch time. And you might get some sort of a stew at tea time. Very roughly dished out. And of course you didn't get bacon and eggs for breakfast or anything like that. It was deplorable.

Sounds like basic slops.

Yeah. There was a

07:30 lot of discontent on the ship, on the way over.

What form did that discontent take?

Well, quite a few of our people weren't too amenable to discipline, and the average Australian isn't, including myself. I don't like too heavy a discipline. But when I see that it's necessary I can cop it.

08:01 But quite a few of them were playing up. And some of them were put in the brig, and some of them, before we'd even landed were quite convinced they'd done the wrong thing by even joining the army.

When you say playing up, what sorts of things were they doing?

They'd talk back at officers, and strike NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers], and all that type of thing.

08:33 Punch them or assault them.

Did you get involved in any fisticuffs yourself?

No, not necessarily. I had been in the CMF and I'd been more or less a….see a lot of us hadn't been in the CMF beforehand, but I'd been in the CMF, and I could cop a little bit of discipline. Depending on

09:00 who gave it to me.

But it sounds like leadership was a bit lacking aboard the ship?

There wasn't time for leadership. We'd been put together very quickly in Australia. Then at Ingleburn and this rough training that went on. The senior officers that were forming the battalions were all trying to

09:31 establish some sort of a set-up, and an understanding of their own officers and NCOs. And this was all done fairly quickly. They hadn't had an army since the First World War and they hadn't all had this little bit of early CMF training.

And so this was purely Australians aboard the ship?

10:01 Well, there was a British crew on the ship.

So what were the relations like between the Australians and the British?

Amongst the crewmen, all right. I got on quite all right with the British sailors on the ship. They were all right.

What about the British officers?

Well, we never had any close contact with them. They'd dish out what they wanted and it would come down through our officers.

10:31 **So just to pick up on where the ship went. You sailed from West Australia, then the next port of call….**

Colombo. And of course we went ashore there and we caused a lot of upset with the British Raja. The way we spoke the natives and all the rest of it. For instance, if you can get the picture of an Australian soldier

11:00 putting a rickshaw driver in the street and pulling them along the main street of Colombo, and the average English person would mainly be relatives or employees of Lipton's Tea, which dominated Ceylon. Or the British establishment, military, etc that was there. Naval people. They were aghast at this. And of course we were chastised when we got back

11:30 to the ship about this terrible business. We'd pulled the white man standard down such a great deal.

This one Newcastle bloke, Lenny McCudden, he pulled this rickshaw driver just about all over Colombo. He was a big bloke, about six foot, and his attitude was, “You’re too small to pull me about, mate.” And this is the attitude, see?

12:00 It didn’t go over well.

That’s a great story.

Anyhow. And of course some of our blokes were diving off the ship in Colombo Harbour, into the water. It was that hot, they were diving into the water. And they were chastised for that. So discipline had not been fully enforced.

12:31 And of course there was more trouble when we were in Palestine with that.

Did you yourself get up to any tricks in Colombo.

No, no. We just got around, floated around, looking at the various places. On one occasion we spoke with a woman in a car outside of an establishment. Very attractive woman. We were going

13:00 past her and this chap that was with us, a sergeant, he spoke to her, and she spoke back. We got into a conversation, but while we were talking a great crowd of natives crowded around us. And all of a sudden, out of the establishment alongside, out of the gate, come this British naval officer in white uniform. All immaculately dressed.

13:30 And he went crook at her. And at us. And she more or less told him to go to hell, sort of business. But what he was going crook about, she was sort of making a spectacle of herself, talking to us, and the all the natives crowding around to see what we were talking about. They were all packing around, these strange Australians talking to this white lady, like

14:00 this isn’t done. It definitely isn’t done. She was telling us she was sick of the place, she wanted to get back to England. She didn’t like the joint.

But I find it hard to understand what he had a problem with?

Us. Us, I think. We were just ordinary ranking soldiers, and he was a bloody commander, or some other bloody thing. The Naval establishment was

14:30 there. Done up in his lovely whites and everything. Of course, over in Colombo, the same as Darwin, it’s thirty degrees heat everyday. The aristocracy there, in them days, they were….They had their own clubs with nine hole golf courses. Eighteen holes is too much in the tropics.

15:00 Nine hole golf courses, all in the club grounds. And all these tea plantations. That was Colombo in them days, I don’t know what it’s like now. And the Grand Oriental Hotel, that had five hundred rooms. That was one of the main hotels. It was probably the equivalent to the Singapore one. What do you call it?

Raffles. Raffles in Singapore.

15:30 And in there, there was about four different bars and a huge dining room that could take hundreds of people. It took up two floors. You could walk around a balcony around the top of the dining room and look down on all the tables, all set out down below. No air-conditioning in them days. They must have had a hundred fans. And

16:00 the tips of the fan blades would nearly touch one another. And they had a switchboard down below and they’d put as many on as they wanted to. And with this high ceiling, it made a nice cool room. This is the way they used to live. All the Rajas…..The Grand Oriental was one of the main pubs, and then there was the Galle Face Hotel. That was on the foreshore, there,

16:30 at Colombo. That became, in the period we were there, or on coming back, when we were put off there to defend Colombo, this was where Army headquarters was.

The Galle Face Hotel?

The Galle Face Hotel, yeah.

Now after Colombo, what was the next port of call?

We were straight all the way then to the Suez Canal,

17:00 and we stopped in the middle of the Suez Canal in what they call the Great Lakes. And aboard came Sir Anthony Eaton, and….The commander of the British troops in the Middle East then?

I think it was Wavell, wasn’t it?

Wavell, and three or four other sidekicks, told us how happy they were to have us, to help England and all the rest of it, come on our boat, and

17:32 pat us all on the back sort of business and then went away. Then we docked at Kantara, El Kantara. The British gave us a cup of tea and put us on the train. We went up through the Senai area and up to

Palestine.

Just before we leave Wavell, didn't Wavell make some kind of speech about the

18:00 **reputation of Australians during World War I?**

That was afterwards. But on the ship he patted us on the back. I'll get to that, don't worry.

Excellent, because it is a good story. Sorry, I'll have you continue the narrative. So you got off the ship, and you then journeyed to….

Up to a place called Dulas in Palestine. There we pitched our tents.

18:30 We had to pitch our tents ourselves and rig them all up and everything and get settled in our camp. We had only been there a few days, and we got the camp established and then we had a brigade. See, at this time there was only three brigades and attached troops in the Middle East. The 16th Brigade, the first part of the Sixth Division, the 16th Brigade.

19:00 Three brigades in a division and this was the first one. We had this parade and Wavell addressed us on a stand there. He got up and never spoke a good word about us, at any time. After his welcome on the boat, he turned around and told us we were in Palestine because we weren't welcome in Egypt. That our

19:30 ancestors, our fathers, etc., had upset Egypt and they didn't want us there, and all that business. "And don't carry on they way they did. You've got to prove yourselves yet, what you are." After the parade was over, we really felt put down. So we went back to our camp and we continued our training. Everyone was thinking, "What the hell?"

20:02 You get a pat on the back when you arrive in front of the politicians, and then you get this business. But it gave me the impression that Wavell did not like Australians.

Can you describe Wavell?

Didn't have much to do with him, just seeing him, but he was pretty arrogant British hierarchy type sort of bloody bloke.

20:30 **Was he more specific about what the Australians had done wrong during World War I in Egypt?**

Well, that's what he was talking about. What we'd done wrong, playing up in the towns and all this caper. The Egyptian people didn't want us there. Of course when Italy came into the war, they didn't mind having us in Egypt.

Big turnaround.

21:00 **All very convenient all of a sudden?**

Oh yes, yes. Anyhow, from there, what next?

You were at El Kantara I think at this point, were you?

El Kantara, that's where we disembarked from the ship.

So you were up at Dulas?

We went by train up through the Sinai Desert to Palestine, we were put down and we camped at a place called Dulas.

Now what did Dulas consist of?

21:30 It was just an area. There was nothing there, and we made a camp there. It was between Gaza and Tel Aviv, I would say. Be a bit closer to Gaza probably. And we made the camp there. Of course when we got there we were the first

22:00 lot of Australian troops, there weren't many troops. Only there were some British regular regiments that were keeping the peace in Palestine. And there was the Palestine police, which controlled Palestine. They had forts built on all the hills in Palestine, and they were all within signalling distance of another fort. And they had armoured cars,

22:30 and they kept the Palestine people in order. Together with these contingents of regular British troops who were there with them, helping. And outside every important building in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, you would have Palestine police guards, with a rifle and a revolver on the hip.

23:00 This was the way Palestine was run when we got there. And when we left the camp, to go on leave or anything, you had to take a couple of armed men in the bus. They were worried about snipers on the way. They were having trouble with both the Jews and the Palestinians, and the Arabs. The Stern gang was operating with the Jews, shooting British troops and the Palestines were shooting British troops. So,

23:30 that's the way it operated. And if you went on a school, a special school, they'd present you with a .38 calibre revolver and ten rounds of ammunition, for your personal safety.

Sounds like a very tense environment?

Well, we didn't have a Hell of a lot of trouble. The funny part about it was the Australian troops got on well with the Arabs. And for the first few months,

24:01 Arabs, they were able to set up tailor shops within the camp boundaries, laundry places, and this was a great asset to us. They would launder the clothes for practically nothing. They'd do good tailoring jobs on the terrible Australian uniform, which was always a rubbishy thing. And they'd make them fit you better. And they really did good jobs,

24:30 and in short time, too. But then, just prior to the Germans moving and stopping the Phoney War, starting to get across the Maginot Line, and breaking the Maginot Line, there. And Italy coming into the war, that was all kicked out of the camps. Not allowed in.

The Arabs were kicked out of the camps?

Yes.

Why was that?

25:01 I don't know. They didn't trust them or some bloody thing. But that was the end of that.

Were you working in with the British at this time? When you were at Dulas did you have any contact with the British?

At odd times. We did manoeuvres and god knows what. On one occasion there….The tucker was lousy in Palestine, frightful. For breakfast you would get

25:30 this black bacon every morning. The bacon you get now is nice and pink, this would be black, and the fat would be grey, not white. And you'd get a small boiled potato with it. One potato and one little bit of black bacon. And it caused that much discontent…..One of my

26:00 platoon, this bloke called Sykes Evans, he later won the Military Medal in Greece, he put his breakfast in a log cabin tobacco tin, he put it in that. And I remember to this day, he went up the Major Edgar's tent, he was our company commander, and Edgar said, "What are you doing in an officer's line, Evans?" And he said, "I come up to find out what you got for breakfast.

26:30 Did you do any better than that?" In the British Army you would have been hung for this. And he come down and he got us some extra food, but it wasn't much better. Tinned Heron or some damn thing. This is the way it was.

So what was his response when Sykes asked this question?

27:00 He was a bit sympathetic. He couldn't do anything else, it was such a good example. So he came down and he brightened things up a bit. And at the time we had one large building in the camp area, which was they used to have as a picture theatre at times. And the officers and all were allowed the front seats.

27:30 And the senior NCOs had the back seats, and what was left was for the men. Well, the whole brigade boycotted this night. And all around our camps was orange orchards. Beautiful Jaffa oranges, that was one good thing about it. They were cheap, beautiful oranges. All sweet, big oranges. You could break them up like mandarins, full of juice. They were big. And this

28:00 theatre complex had shutter windows in the heat. Just put the shutters up and open places inside. The crowd boycotted the theatre, and they all packed around it this night, and they started throwing the oranges through the things at the officers inside. Oh, there was hell to pay, after. We were put on parade and, "Did you know this incident was recorded in Germany? Australian troops playing up."

28:31 So we were punished. We went on a twenty-two mile route march in the rain. It was starting to rain in Palestine, getting towards the wet season there. Mud was clinging to our boots, and the officers rode horses. And we did this twenty-two mile route march in the rain. And when you do a route march you stop ten minutes to the hour.

29:00 For a rest. And of course we did that. We did the twenty-two miles and we got back. And then they blew the bloody bugles for us to get out for some other parade, and so we jacked up. That's it. We got away with it.

When you say 'we jacked up', what did you actually do?

Wouldn't go out. So after that,

29:33 they decided that, right, they even got tubs and everything ready, foot baths, Condies crystal foot baths, after the march, all this business And the next day they turned around and said, "Anyone can go into the theatre and get any seat." And all this business. This punishment was group punishment and even people that weren't in that

30:00 mutiny were punished. And this is illegal, and they did it. This group punishment. Make everybody suffer.

Why is it illegal?

It is a principle of British Law. This is what Hitler used to do. If someone shot someone in a village, he would come and wipe out the whole village. He did it in Czechoslovakia.

30:32 Or choose every tenth man, sort of business. Well, that's not according to British law, so-called British law, when it suits them.

You've referred to this as a mutiny. Was it a….

It was nearly a mutiny. It was on the edge of it. And this was when they started to wake up a bit. Just after that.…There were a lot of blokes who played up

31:00 on the boat and after we got to Egypt, were finishing up in battalion guard rooms, doing time, for disobedience and all the rest of it. They had this set-up and I was on brigade guard this day, and brigade headquarters…..they had about six officers, sat at tables,

31:30 and we escorted these blokes who had been playing up past these tables, and one officer might say to the bloke, "Why aren't you happy with the army?" "Oh, I should never have joined." And, "Do you want to get out of it?" "Yes, I don't want to be in the damn thing." "Righto." Go through the next one. "What's your problem? Have you got problems at home or something like that?"

32:00 Sort of psych [psychological] business it was. And at the end of it, they'd say, "Do you want to stay in the army?" And a few of them said, "Yes." A lot of them said, "No." Well, they were sent home to Australia, supposed to be (UNCLEAR) but really, what they did to them, as soon as they got back to Australia, I know this because two of them were friends of mine.

32:31 I met them when I came home from the Middle East, in Hunter Street, Newcastle. I said, "What are you doing?" "Well, I'm working at the dockyard." "What happened when you come home?" "Oh, as soon as we got back to Australia we were manpowered. We told the manpower blokes where we lived and everything. "We'll give you a job at the dockyard." Other blokes got BHP.

33:00 And I said, "How are you going?" He said, "Oh good, we're working overtime and everything. Good." So this was the attitude, the government took this attitude well, if they're that unhappy, get them out of the Army, get them back into civilian work where they can do some good for the war effort. Where they'll be happy. And that's what happened to them. But there were quite a few that were in that category, don't worry about it.

33:30 **I suppose the army was keen to get these people away from the rest of them?**

Away from them, they were disrupting the training schedules and all that business.

So what was happening in terms of training, at Dulas?

Well, you were doing manoeuvres, attacking places with blank ammunition. One ground against

34:00 the other and all that sort of thing. And of course, doing a lot of marching, and then doing it. Fitness and be able to do it in an emergency sort of business. Of course this was to come in good later. Kokoda and Greece and all the rest of it. The fact that you had to do this, as infantrymen.

So the fitness ultimately paid off?

Well,

34:30 this training, yes, you've got to be fit. You've got to be able to do what you do, instinctively, without thinking. If you're going to put a gun together, you haven't got to be thinking about that. You've got to be able to do it, and think about something else. This is the way the army tries to teach you. Like the text books tell you. I used to use the text books to train people later when I became an NCO. And

35:00 the object of this lesson is to train the soldiers to do this instinctively, without thinking. This is the way the air force, the army, navy, everyone trained. You haven't got to have your mind on that job that you're doing with your hands. You've got to be able to do that, and think of something else at the same time.

So after this period of training, what was the next move for you?

Well,

35:31 toward that end of training, as I say, Italy came into the war and we were shifted from Palestine down to Egypt. And we did a manoeuvre there out in the desert, near Cairo. We shifted to a place called Hulwan, just outside of Cairo. And we did a manoeuvre in the desert, and while we were there we were called off it in a hurry. They were going to move us quickly somewhere.

36:00 But then that fell through. We come back to camp, and that dropped off. Then they shifted us from Cairo

to Amiriya, that's near Alexandria, and not far from El Alamein, Amiriya. Between Alexandria and El Alamein. And we were there for a few weeks and the

36:30 Italians, then, were bombing Alexandria. And every night they would come over and the searchlights would go up from Alexandria. Anti-aircraft fire would be on the planes, and sometimes the anti-aircraft shells wouldn't be fused properly, and they'd come over and they'd land on us. This happened every night. And sometimes you would see dogfights

37:00 between the night fighters and the planes. You'd see the tracer bullets up amongst the clouds going from one plane to another, sort of business. Of course, we observed all this and then we got the shift up to the Libyan front there. And I remember this quite specifically,

37:30 there, I'd just got a wisdom tooth pulled out. And while I was in the tent getting it pulled out, the bloke opposite got six pulled out. And this New Zealand dentist, he had his knee in my chest, trying to get leverage to pull this wisdom tooth out. Took all that time. The other bloke got six out. I nearly broke my damn jaw.

38:00 And of course it's winter time, very cold, terrible cold in North African, in the winter. Terrible cold. We got our orders to move. I didn't know whether to go to the doctor. If I went to the doctor I would be kept back. I was in a bit of trouble with this tooth. Or go. So I went in

38:30 this truck, a two hundred mile trip up to the Libyan border. Very slow trip, two hundred years between trucks, going very slow, worried about air attack, on the way up. Got to keep this distance between trucks, because two trucks together make a target. And I'm going through this with this damned tooth. I couldn't eat or anything. I thought if I go and mention to the doctor that I've got to go back and

39:00 I miss this business. Anyhow, I got up to the Libyan front, at a place called Salum, the bay of Salum. And it was the coldest night I've ever had in my bloody life. It was freezing cold, there was a sandstorm blowing, and we pulled up there, just alongside the water. And over from the sea comes thirty

39:30 Italian three engine bombers, and about thirty fighters. And when they got over Salum, they all dropped their bombs together, and they never hit us. But they hit the water near the one jetty that was there. And the roar was terrific. All these bombs hit the water together and they shot up in the air. And I said to my mate, I said, "We're in the war." That night was the coldest night of my life. I dug

40:00 a hole in the sand, and the sand blew over us, the water froze in my water bottle. I had a miserable night. I've never had a night as cold. By the time I'd dug myself out of the sand in the morning, we were on the move then, up over the escarpment.

Actually, can I stop you there at that point. We're out of tape.

Tape 4

00:34 **So, we're here at the Bay of Salum, can you give us a bigger picture, description of what is happening, generally, at this point?**

Well, the Bay of Salum was right on the Libyan border and from there back running south to the Libyan Desert, or the Sahara, as you call it, was a great escarpment. Just beyond

01:00 Salum, the land rises abruptly in a cliff formation, several hundred feet, many hundred feet. There's a road that goes up there, from the Bay of Salum, and when it gets to the top it actually crosses into Libya. But this escarpment runs north and south, and the Italians had a fence going right

01:30 back along the top of this, indicating their border. Well, on the top of the escarpment was Fort Capuzzo, an Italian fort. That had already been taken by the British 7th Armoured Division, which was operating ahead of us. We'd taken over as the infantry force, the Sixth Division, 16th and 17th and

02:00 19th Brigades. And we passed that and took up positions around the Port of Bardia. A very small port. A few ships could get in. But anyhow, this is where the Italians had a huge fort. A well defended place. And we took up positions

02:30 in preparations to attack. Well, this took many days, well, quite a few days. I remember going up the hill in the truck and at the time I was attached to our company quarter master, to help them in. A chap called Sergeant Ernie Elks. And as we got up the top of this,

03:01 we went along in the truck, and then fanned out away from the road, to take up our positions around Bardia. We noticed a blue form in the desert ahead. And when we got to it, it was a dead Italian soldier. They have a blue uniform, you see? Very distinctive against the yellow sand. And we got up to him, and

03:30 he hadn't been dead very long. There were wheel tracks there. He must have been out of a truck. I'd say he got killed by aerial strafing, but he'd been hit in the femoral artery in the leg, and this was

heavily bandaged, with a white bandage. And he was a corporal. We went through his pockets and got Christmas cards and everything out. It's getting onto to Christmas 1940. And

04:00 there was a lovely photograph of two children and his wife. I felt a bit sorry for the corporal. We were all thinking, it's Christmas time, and these Christmas cards, and here he's dead in Libya. This was a bit of an impact for us at the time.

Can you go more specifically into what that impact was?

Well, you know, like, here it is Christmas

04:30 and here we are. And there's this bloke and it's Christmas, and his wife and daughters…..he's dead. It gave us a bit of an idea this wasn't a game. But Ernie Elks, the bloke I was with, he said, "We'll bury him." And we buried him, but we couldn't bury him very deep. The sand there is only a few inches thick

05:00 above the rock, and it's very powdery sand. Anyhow, we dug enough sand over him, and we made a cross out of the pine boxes that the petrol cases for the trucks used to come in. A lot of them scattered around where the trucks had been. And we rigged up a cross and we got his paybook and everything and passed it on to the Catholic padre to turn it over to the Red Cross.

05:31 And anyhow, we got into our position, and a couple of days went by. Word came through that some Christmas hampers had come through from Australia, and they were unloading them at Salum, and there'd be one for each man. A cardboard box with a few goodies in it. And

06:01 Ernie Elks, the company quarter master I was with, he said to the battalion quarter master, "Could I go down and get them? I'll go and get them." And he said, "Yeah, righto then. Get a battalion truck and leave the company truck here with Carl, and go down and get them." Well, this was Christmas Eve, 1940. He went down

06:30 there, to Salum. Of course, every day the thirty odd Italian bombers were coming over and doing one bombing lot and then going. They bombed something. And he was not long gone, and over came the bombers. He said, "Stay by the truck here, Carl. And rig a few sangers." We used to call them sangers, when you'd build a bit of a brick wall to stop the cold wind of a night. Of course, we'd lay down

07:00 in the sand and sleep, try and get away from the wind. Build a bit of a wall there for a night, he said. Sleeping in the truck was no good. The wind used to come up underneath, and it was cold. So the bombers came over and went away. And I was waiting there for a few hours, and a Pommy despatch rider came up, just off the road nearby, saw the

07:30 truck with a kangaroo on it. He came over and he said, "Those bombers," he said, "just hit the jetty of Salum, and they killed six of our blokes and one Australian." And I said, "Who was it?" And he said, "I think they got the paybook." He said, "It's a bloke called Elks." So,

08:00 I spent the night on my own. And I'd say Ernie Elks would probably be the first Australian soldier killed by enemy action in the Second World War. Not the first airman or sailor, but the first soldier. He was killed at the Bay of Salum on Christmas Eve, 1940. And of course later on that day, another bloke came up, and

08:30 the battalion quarter master said, "Carl, this bloke's taking over from Ernie." And I said, "Well, I'll get back to the mortar platoon." So I went back to the mortar platoon, and a few days later, on the 3rd of January, we attacked Bardia. And after a couple of days fighting there…the mortar was carried in on a Bren gun carrier….

09:01 **Just before we get into the Bardia battle and the involvement of the mortar, you said that you spent the night on your own….**

Alongside the truck. Ernie didn't come back to the truck. You see, the trucks were all kept apart, strict orders not too many together to make a good aerial target. So you've got to keep them

09:30 yards apart. I could see another truck in the distance, and know there'd be people there, but I was only, me and Ernie were only in this truck together, so I stayed there….

So Ernie had got up and….so you'd gone to spend the night there…

Yeah.

So what had happened to Ernie then?

He was killed that day down on the jetty, picking up these hampers. I must have got

10:00 things mixed up a bit there. But when he went down to the pick up the hampers, he was with the six Englishmen who were killed there, in the bombing, of the jetty.

What impact did Ernie's death have on you?

Well, I don't know. I had sort of conditioned myself to accept this sort of thing. After all, we were going into the war. I conditioned myself.

10:32 The next day I got back to the mortar platoon, I didn't particularly like the bloke that was coming to help to take over from him. But my place was the mortar platoon. I was only put there temporary, to help him.

But had Ernie been a friend?

Yeah, I knew him well. He was a sergeant, Ernie Elks.

But the loss….you must have at least missed Ernie when he was killed?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

11:00 But you've got to try and dismiss it a bit. It might be yourself tomorrow, sort of business. But this is a serious business.

Obviously you were at war, but it sounds like you had the ability at that point to put a bit of distance between yourself and the

11:30 **impact of something like that loss…**

Well, the Italian corporal was quite an impact to start. A dead man, you see. And you could see where they'd put him out of the truck, his mates, and they'd put a haversack under his head, made him comfortable, left him there to die, when they were fleeing….you could see the wheel tracks of the Italian truck had gone away and they'd dumped him. He was

12:00 probably dead, I suppose, when they put him out. I don't know.

So that had had initial impact, so when Ernie died….

It was just another one, but then, he was one of ours.

Now, to get back to Bardia and the battle. You were starting to talk about the involvement of mortars.

They were moved in on Bren Gun carrier. You know what a Bren carrier

12:30 is? Well, you'd get the mortar off the carrier and use it, then get it back on again when necessary, you see? And it carried the ammunition. The mortar attachment would walk behind the carrier, when it went in with the infantry. Then he would use the mortar on any target that presented itself, and get it back on the carrier again.

So that was the intention with this particular battle?

13:00 And that's the way it was with Tobruk, too.

So you were just about to describe this battle…

Yeah, well intense shelling. You moved up to the start line first. Our blokes got out in front, and after you were there a couple of days and you put patrols out and found the perimeters of where you were going to attack. You had to find out where they were first, then you put up start lines and then moved the battalion

13:30 up to the start line. And at a particular time the artillery barrage would start. And our guns would go, and the Italians guns would go. And you'd get these Italian shells landing in front of you, and around you, and you had to move forward, about ten paces between men, and keep moving. Don't go to ground, just keep moving. And you'd see the shells landing in front of you, and

14:00 behind you, and as you're walking you're saying, "The next one's going to be there when I get there." And luckily when you got there, it would be behind you. There is a lot of luck in war, a terrible lot of luck. But it was very traumatic and that. We were wearing grey coats, the terrible cold of the North African winter, and the wind, the wind factor. Not only did you have a grey coat on, but you had a leather jerkin.

14:30 A shiny leather jerkin, and the Italians thought it was some kind of armour. With some of the blokes that were shot, you would see the neat little bullet holes through the leather. It went through just as easy. And we kept walking, and they'd keep firing their guns until you got right up close to them. Then they'd put their hands up.

You're talking about the Italian troops?

Italian, yeah. And then they'd surrender in droves.

15:00 But they'd keep firing until you got up close.

So this is at Bardia?

Bardia, yeah. It finished up there were forty-five thousand in Bardia. There was men everywhere.

Now you've given me a very good description of the big picture at Bardia. Can you give me more of a description of your own involvement. You spoke about advancing forward and shells

coming down…

Well, we were busy, taking the mortar on and off the truck and firing, off the carrier, and firing bombs

15:30 and everything. And feeling the heat of the blast of some of the shells. And a few hits when shells landed on different people. Killed them.

Were there people being wounded and killed very close to you?

Yeah, there were. There were. But our casualties, really, were very, very light compared with

16:00 the Italians. The battle went on for two days, nearly three days. And when it ended, the weather was still very cold and the dead that were laying around were mostly Italian dead. And I remember truckloads of them had been picked up. And in the cold weather their arms would be stiff with rigor mortis and that, and the cold.

16:32 I remember helping pick one of our blokes up, a bloke named Norm Plunkett. He'd had one leg blown off, and the muscles in his thighs were hanging down in strips. He was frozen. Out in the cold night. Your water would freeze in the water bottle. You'd see truckloads of dead, mostly Italians, being picked up afterwards.

17:01 **So Norm was dead, by the time you reached him?**

Yeah, he was dead, yeah.

Now this was your first experience of battle, wasn't it?

Yeah.

I asked you about the impact, earlier, of your friend dying. But what was the impact on you of this first battle?

I was lucky to get over it, and proud of myself that I'd been in it. That was the

17:30 initial feeling. That I'd been in it, and seen that, and done that.

Can you remember what was running through your mind moment by moment as the shells…

I was scared.

You were scared?

Yeah.

What scared you the most?

Well, machine gun. Not so much the shells, the machine gun. The shells were frightening, but the

18:00 machine guns, they were sort of personal. And they had twenty millimetre guns, the Italians. And thirty-nine millimetre guns. Very similar to the Bofors guns. As a matter of fact, the navy, after Bardia and Tobruk, the navy grabbed a lot of them and put them on their ships. Breda, Breda thirty-nine millimetres. You could

18:30 sit in a little seat in them, and swing them round. They fired a shell about that big. Anti-aircraft, anything. They go boom, boom, boom, boom. And they hit hard. They'd go through a Bren gun carrier, like a knife through cheese.

Now can you just elaborate on your statement that you were most afraid of machine guns because they were personal. Can you elaborate on that for me?

Well, they seemed to me to

19:00 be personal. A bullet…..a shell might hit you, like you lob a shell, you don't aim it at a bloke, it just lands in a spot where a bloke is. But a machine gun or a rifle is aimed at you. I don't know whether you…

I do get you. But with the machine guns, were they a spray of bullets aimed at you?

19:30 Well, that depends, what sort of machine gun you're firing. If you're just firing a Tommy gun or a Bren gun, just a couple of shots in a burst. But Vickers guns, the medium machine guns, these are the ones that killed the people on the Somme, in the First World War. Well, they could fire long

20:00 bursts of five hundred rounds. Or more. Two hundred rounds. Well, they way they're rigged up, and the way the Germans rigged them up and the way we rigged them up, too, is for enfilade fire. That means you get a whole mass of men in a row, a hundred down that way, all in a line moving towards a trench system. Well, the Germans would line up the gun on the side, and would fire down

20:30 that line, enfallate, and that would bring down a long burst of two or three hundred rounds, a spray of fire down on that area. And with the Beaton Zone… I'm not going to try and describe that to you, that's a bit of a technical term, but it was ballistics and that. Those two hundred shots would come down in a

pattern. And that's how

21:00 they slaughtered the hundreds of men that were killed on the Somme, in the First World War.

How often, during the battle of Bardia, were you in a position to fire your mortar?

Oh, about three times there. And of course, my detachment, and the other detachments, I'm not sure what they did.

So could you describe the process for me, of what you would do?

21:30 **Would you begin by unloading the mortar from the Bren carrier?**

The attachment commander would decide on a target first, or perhaps the infantry company I was with, would designate a target. "We're being help up by something over there." So you'd get the mortar off the carrier, set it up and fire on it.

22:00 **For how long did the battle last?**

Three days at Bardia.

Did you have any rest during that time?

A little bit. A little bit. When you got a chance. The trouble is, all day long, it was very headachy and very like….stressed towards the end of the day, because there would be continuous shellfire, and the Italians were using

22:32 shrapnel shells and HE [High Explosive]. Well, shrapnel shells would burst over your head. They were not used that much in the Second World War, but the Italians had them in the desert there. And the HE shells wouldn't burst until they hit the ground, see? But often the batteries of Italian guns, generally four in a battery, they would fire two HE

23:00 and two shrapnel shells. So you would get shells bursting on the ground, and two shells bursting above your head. And the idea of the shrapnel shell was that that bits and pieces would fly down and cause casualties.

How did you regard the Italians as an enemy?

As I said, they fought until you were right up close to them and then they surrendered. And after the surrender, and amongst the prisoners,

23:31 they weren't bad blokes. They weren't bad blokes. Some were really good. And a lot of them weren't interested in the war. Some were. The artillery regiments seemed to be picked people. But the average Italian soldier wasn't that wrapped up in the war. And there was quite a few of them, a couple that we captured,

24:00 that lived in Queensland. And they had relatives on the canefields in Queensland.

Yeah, I was going to say, the Italian community was very strong in Queensland.

Particularly at Innisfail and Ingham. I'll have to tell you more about that later, too, but anyhow that's not for now. But Tobruk was the same thing. We did the same thing at Tobruk, in the attack on Tobruk.

24:31 We nearly got down by an Italian battery there. Our mortars attachment, we unloaded the mortar and we fired on an Italian battery. And we had a Matilda tank with us, behind us, poking about, firing shots and that. And it kept them quiet. And it went away. And when it went away,

25:00 it let go at us. We had the mortar out, firing the mortar, near the carrier, and it let go with a battery of four guns. And the shells were landing all around, and you could feel the heat of every blast, but no-one got hit. You can be real lucky. But the bloke that had the carrier, we had a Bren gun in the carrier,

25:30 a bloke called Alan Lacey, he drove the bloody carrier straight towards the battery and we followed him. We didn't know what was going to come of it. But when we got close to the battery, they all give up. In all about thirty or forty blokes in the battery, looking after these four guns, all came out with their hands up. And that was luck again. But they nearly got us.

26:01 This is the way it went on there, with the Italians. If it had been Germans, it would have been quite different.

Now as far as the time distance, or the time difference, between Bardia and Tobruk was concerned, Tobruk was your next conflict after Bardia?

3rd of January, Bardia, and the 21st of January, Tobruk.

So what happened between those two battles?

26:33 We moved straight up then and took up positions around Tobruk. And did the same patrolling and finding out the perimeters and everything. You can't attack a place unless you know where they are. So you've got to find out. And that means infantry has to go out and find where…both places were

surrounded by barbed wire and anti-tank ditches, but

27:00 luckily at Tobruk, when we did eventually, we attacked….there were anti-tank ditches that had only been dug to two feet deep. Other places it was four or six foot. And of course the patrol found out where it was only two foot and that's where our battalion…..the 2nd 1st Battalion attacked the Italian post near the wire, and while they were

27:30 doing that, our orders were to go through the centre of the Tobruk defence system, and go for the artillery. And that was our job at Bardia, too. We did the same thing. Tobruk was a much shorter battle. Just on two days. But it was a bigger port, bur there were less troops. There were twenty-five

28:00 thousand in there, there were forty-five thousand in Bardia. And there was Italian trucks and gear scattered all over the desert, hundreds of trucks, gear, all sorts of things. You'd never seen anything like it in your life. Our job then was to take out, out of these hundreds of prisoners, they were pretty thin for a while.

28:30 They were put into areas, and thousands of men in the one spot. And we didn't know what was going to happen. There was no facilities to feed them or anything. Of course, we had their food. And they were doing it tough for a while, in the cold and the wind, of the North African winter. But eventually they started carting them back to Egypt in their

29:00 own trucks.

Now you gave us a bit of a step by step description of what you did at Bardia, as far as your mortar activities were concerned, was it the same approach at Tobruk?

It was exactly the same.

What about the impact of Tobruk on you. You spoke of being afraid at Bardia, were you similarly afraid of…

I was afraid at Tobruk, too.

You were afraid at Tobruk…

Same thing going through the

29:30 shelling. You're walking along towards where you're going, and you see the Italian shells landing in front of you, and you keep walking, and then they land behind you. So where are they going next time? Big shells, and little shells, sixty pounders, and seventy-five millimetres shells. And then you had the rattle of these….

30:02 well, actually, machine guns. Twenty millimetre guns, and the thirty-nine millimetre guns. The trouble with them, they'd only shoot them when you got up close, then they'd turn it on. (UNCLEAR) for us. If they had been German troops, it would have been a different story.

These sound like two

30:30 **incredibly intensive battles to be involved in, particularly so close together. What was the impact on you by the end of Tobruk?**

Well, we were happy. We were soldiers. And we got stuck into their supplies. Instead of having Bulli beef and biscuits. Which was a field ration. A tin of bully beef per man per day. That's….

31:00 I had that written down out there. How many ounces a day in one packet of biscuits. Well, we were able to get Italian pomadore, tomato paste and make a Bulli beef stew, like you open a tin of Bulli beef, put some tomato paste in, warm it up, dunk our biscuits in, and thousands of tins of Nestles condensed milk. Same brand as here. Nestles. Made in Italy. Made in Italy and made

31:30 in Switzerland. You mixed that with your biscuits and made porridge. And a bit of Italian extra, they had tins of tuna in some places. We got some Italian coffee, and all these things. But above all, acres and acres of land, full of supplies. Which included barrels of cognac and stuff like that.

32:00 For this huge army that they had in Libya. You'd see this stuff, just stacked out in the open. The barrels all on top of one another, and of course, we weren't backwards in getting into that.

So you were actually allowed to, or you…

We did it. We weren't allowed to, but we did it. And paid a bit of hell.

32:30 Even Paul Cohen, General Cohen, he's still alive, 90-odd, he was at a recent reunion and he said we were all hooligans.

It sounds like there were very high spirits?

Paul Cohen was a Jew, his name was Cohen. He come from Newcastle originally. He was Samuel Cohen's son. They've got warehouses, and they've still got the names on the buildings.

33:00 And in Greece, he changed his name to Cullin, when the Germans crossed the border. By deed poll. I don't blame him.

I can understand that.

But he wasn't a bad sort of a bloke.

Just to get back to these high spirits after Tobruk. It seems the Australians were in very high spirits at this point?

Oh yes. Yes. This was the first real victory

33:30 of the war. Even though it was only over Italians, it was a victory of the war. It wiped out, it just about wiped out the Italian army in Libya. And Britain, there'd been no good news, much. They'd just won the Battle of Britain. That was going on when I was in Egypt, just before we moved to the

34:00 desert. That was in full force there. Now this was the next best thing. Of course, we were happy, too. We thought we were soldiers. We had a lot to learn yet. A terrible lot to learn. The Germans showed a bit of a different thing. The Italians had a good air force, they didn't know how to use it. The Germans did.

34:30 **Just getting back to the scenes following the battle, the Australian soldiers were helping themselves to all this food?**

Oh, anything you could get, grab. And of course we had the job of getting Italian parties, working parties, to pick up all their weapons and everything and compile them in different areas of the Tobruk perimeter area. Now this was valuable later, to the 9th Division, when they took part in a siege. Because we had all

35:00 this stuff pulled out of the Italian defences and put in the one spot.

We're talking about supplies?

Supplies, weapons, everything. As they were saying later, the navy used some of their weapons on their boats. The thirty-nine Breather guns.

So this was the activity of your unit after the battle?

After the battle of Tobruk, it was several weeks there, before they pulled us out, back to Egypt to take part in the Greece campaign.

Did you

35:30 **go on leave at all during this time?**

We got one day's leave in Alexandria. We were no sooner on the streets, then the British provos [Provosts – Military Police] were pulling us up, saying, "You're recalled to camp." And with that, we all said, "To hell with you." And we ducked around and hid, for the rest of that day. We had a leave pass to midnight, that night, so we stayed till midnight that night.

So what did you do during that day?

We kept dodging the provos. In and out of cafes.

36:00 And anywhere you could get a drink, sort of business. And this was the attitude of everybody, you know. Suddenly, after they sent us on leave they realised that we had to get on a ship and go to Greece. Bit of a missed business on their part, a mistake on their part.

It sounds like a huge mistake. How many men were involved?

The whole

36:30 division probably. Every one that had just come out of the desert.

There must have been some fairly peeved individuals amongst the...

Oh, there were. But they were getting back at midnight and all the rest of it, drunk and everything. I remember the officers there, they said, "Well anyhow, they came back. That's the main thing." We were rushed to Alexandria waterfront the next day.

37:00 And we got there and there was this boat, our battalion went on a boat called the Manchuria. Some of them went over on a cruiser.

Sorry, what was the name of the boat your battalion was on?

The Manchuria. It was a boat that used to be on the India coastal run. A little dilapidated, tramp thing, about three thousand tons. And we got there, and the

37:30 captain of the ship was arguing on the wharf with our commanding officer. He said, "I was told I had to come here and pick up mules. A cargo of mules." And our CO says, "We're the bloody mules, but we're not going to board the ship in that state." So we had to wait there all day in the sun while they hosed

the ship out. The holds and that. There was nothing to sleep or anything. So we piled on

38:00 the ship. Slept down in the holds, some of us had to sleep out on the deck in the open, amongst the winches and things. Anyhow, we got going just before dark, and we got out to sea and the CO said, "We've got Bren guns and everything here, Captain. Do you want us to rig them on the ship against any aircraft." "No, no, I don't want that congestion on a

38:30 working ship." Anyhow after a couple of days, it was a cloudy day, it took us about four days to get across. We were only doing about five or six knots. Took us about four days to get across to Athens, or Piraeus, and this cloudy day, all of a sudden out of the clouds come a couple of dozen Italian aircraft. And they bombed us, and they hit an oil tanker

39:00 alongside of us, set it on fire. And a couple of near misses on our ship. And our blokes got their Bren guns going despite the captain of the ship. When they left us, the planes left us, the captain said, "Oh, you can put them Bren guns up now." He changed his tune altogether. So we got to Athens where we were in more trouble. I'm not sure what happened

39:30 to the oil tanker, but I saw it blazing from stem to stern, alongside of us. Of course, we had other things to think about. All you had to go up and down the hatch was an ordinary ladder, a wooden ladder, and all the men crowded around hatches. If we had got hit, we would have lost everybody.

How many ships were in the convoy?

Oh, about half a dozen.

I'd like to pick that up on the next tape.

Tape 5

00:33 **So, before the end of the last tape you were just about to arrive at the port of Piraeus, in Athens.**

We arrived off Athens, and we were glad to see the green trees and everything after we'd had our time in Egypt. A nice, green pleasant land it looked, from the ship. We got off at Port Piraeus, and as I was saying, the German ambassador was on the shore to meet us,

01:00 alongside his Mercedes Benz. I remember that very particularly. And I was amazed and suddenly realised that Greece wasn't at war with Germany. But they had been fighting the Italians that were moving in through Albania. Got it right that time. And they were holding them, see? And the British had pledged to go and help them. So we landed in Athens and we camped at

01:30 very pleasant suburb of Athens called Daphne. A wine growing district.

What was your first impression of Athens?

We liked it. Especially Daphne, it was a green and pleasant area, with all its vineyards and everything. And the name sounded nice, and the people were nice. We weren't there very long. We had a day's leave in Athens.

02:06 The centre of Athens was fairly modern, and there was even one modern night-club there, amazingly, called Johnny Jones' Cabaret. It was so modern inside, and everything, and good facility, if you can understand for that time in Athens. Because apart from Athens, Greeks were still very backward. Back

02:30 in 1941. At this café, we ended up spending the night there before we went back to camp. We had to get back at midnight, and we spent the night in this night-club affair. This so called Johnny Jones…In our opinion, we often thought, well it seems that this place is a rendezvous for spies and God knows what. And he

03:00 was bunging on the great pro-British act. And we enjoyed ourselves, but I think it was a place of intrigue, because our experience in the city of Athens, going into cafes and other places. But the Greeks were a sort of divided people at the time. The business people and that were frightened if you spoke too harshly about the Germans. And

03:30 some of them would come up and shush you, saying, "Don't be talking about the Germans." And they'd be shaking their heads sort of business. They didn't want too much criticism of the Germans. Well, of course, we didn't know of the political ramifications going on at the time, but it appears that there was quite a bit of a difference of opinion in the Greek

04:00 government, as to what was to be done. The Germans were threatening, and a couple of days after our day's leave, we were all ordered to get down to the railway, and we got aboard cattle trucks. It was the most awful trip up through the centre of Greece. Took all day, in these cattle trucks, open cattle trucks. To Serbia,

04:30 up in Northern Greece, up towards the Yugoslav border. And we got out there and formed a bit of a camp, but we no sooner got it up then the word came through that the Germans had crossed the border. And this was when I was saying that Major Paul Cohen changed his name by deed poll, to Major Paul Cullen. And the notice was on the board

05:00 to refer to him as Major Cullen in the future not Cohen. And we didn't blame him for that, we knew who he was. I remember that today quite plainly, because we all had to rush and get an extra tetanus and typhoid needle, and then pulled out our tents to get ready to move. And from there we moved a bit further north to a position in the mountains, above the town of Veroia.

05:31 **Now just to clarify, the reason why he changed his name was because his name was a Jewish name?**

Yes.

Thank you.

We got up to the mountains above the town of Veroia. And we referred to that as Panic Pass, because to get up there, the roads of Greece were very narrow. And some of the roads were bitumen, and this one was.

06:01 But we were above the town of Veroia, which was just down below us, between the Yugoslav border and Greece, and us. We had to get out of the trucks and we had to get all our stuff to the top of the mountain, on donkeys. It was a bit strange for us, because we had to become donkey drivers. You strap the stuff on these donkeys (UNCLEAR) very quickly. And up the side of the hill to

06:30 positions above the pass, above the road. And it started to snow on the way up, and got worse. We made several trips up and down the mountain with gear. And we settled in, and it snowed all that night and of course we're laying in the snow, just laying on the ground. No tents or anything. And in the morning you woke up, everything was white around you, and you couldn't

07:00 tell where blokes were. They were covered with a light coat of snow. And it continued to snow. Then the sky cleared a little bit and down in the gully, we were overlooking….there were very high precipice mountains just in that spot, where the road comes up the side there. And it overlooks the Gulf of Salonica. And about six to

07:30 eight aircraft came down….we were actually above them. We could more or less look down on them. Six to eight aircraft came up this valley, from the north. And they were Messerschmitt 109 fighter planes. And we saw the swastika and the black cross for the first time. All of a sudden then there's word that we've got to pull out. The Germans have gone

08:00 a different way. They haven't come up the road, they've gone around us, and we had to pull out quickly or get cut off.

Just quickly, when you saw those planes with the swastika on it for the first time, what impression did that leave on you?

That we were up against a real enemy. We destroyed a lot of

08:30 our gear. But then we were ordered not to move. So then we had to spend another night in the cold.

What gear would you have destroyed?

Some ammunition that we carted up on the donkeys. Even extra barrels for the Bren guns, machine guns and things, we had to dump them. And of course we had to get out and march back some thirty mile or more,

09:01 to a position on the Aliakmon River. We couldn't go by truck, when we got down to the roads, because the Germans controlled the roads. With their aircraft. So we had to march over the mountains, and only move of a night. So we set off in the middle of the night, marched over two high

09:30 ranges of mountains that were snow covered on the top, and then we' d come down out of the snow, onto the snow free areas and we'd spend the day sleeping under trees, away from the aircraft. And then move on again in the night.

How many men were involved in this movement?

Well it was all our battalion, 2nd Battalion, and there would have been others. The 1st

10:00 and 3rd Battalions would be around somewhere. But I can only speak from my area….

And how many men would have been in the 2nd Battalion?

I suppose when we got to Greece we would have had about eight hundred men, I suppose, in our battalion. And we carried out this operation pretty well. We never had many drop outs.

10:30 It was very exhausting. We had to walk over the hills. I had a pair of boots that were worn out and I used to put cardboard in the soles, when I was walking over the snow. Some of the snow areas, the

snow was frozen to ice, hard and slippery and that, and I'd have to keep putting cardboard I had in my pocket to stop the water, the snow coming up through the holes in my boots.

11:00 As it happened, my boots were worn out when I left Egypt, and I couldn't get a replacement pair. I had a pair of Italian boots that I grabbed from a store depot. But one of the officers, a bit of a mongrel he was, he said, "You can't wear them boots, they're yellow. They're not our colour." Sort of business. They discarded them. I said, "I want another pair of boots." Well, eventually, I didn't get a pair, I got to Greece without them. So by the time that this come about

11:30 my boots were worn out. Anyhow. I carried on and we got to…

Just before we do move on. Was this your first experience of snow?

My first experience of snow, yes.

And what was that like?

Well, taking the stuff up the mountain, it kicked off rain and sleet, and before we got to the top with the donkeys it was snowing. And back down it was snowing all the way down, and back up again.

12:00 It was a bit of a novelty at first, but then it got colder and colder. We were in winter gear, grey coats and everything. Then spending the night in the snow, well that was very miserable, that was very hard. A couple of nights in the snow there, without cover and that. It was quite an experience. But we did march three nights, I think it was,

12:30 and a couple of days. Eventually we crossed the Aliakmon River. That was the point we had to get to to avoid being surrounded. And we did it. We got across on a punt. I've got photographs of the punt, and some of the crowd with donkeys, and that. It was worked by hand. It had a big windlass on each side

13:00 and a cable, and you could get about ten or twenty men on the punt each time and bring it across. It was a fast flowing river, taking snow water down to the sea. The Aliakmon. And we crossed it and we took up position on the opposite side, just in time to see the Germans. They were hard on our tails. As a matter of fact, they'd reached the river, in some areas

13:30 to our left and our right, of where we were crossing. But we got across the river without any trouble. And we took up positions on the other side, and then we were able to watch the Germans come right up the riverbank. We could view them pretty good, because a lot of us had binoculars and everything we had got off Italian prisoners. So every second man had a pair of binoculars and a Beretta pistol and things like that we had got from the Italians.

How wide was the

14:00 **river?**

It would have been hard to cross without the punt. It was fast-flowing and deep. And it wasn't that particularly wide, but it was wide enough.

So what was that like being under pursuit by the Germans?

We'd thought we'd had it really. The officers and NCOs were

14:30 flogging us along to keep going during the nights. In the pitch-dark, you'd be going over these tracks, over the mountains, slipping and sliding on the ice. And some of the donkeys carrying our gear would slip and go taking what gear, we had abandoned most of it, Anyhow we got across the river and we watched the Germans approach the river, with their trucks, tailboard to bonnet, down this main road. You could see

15:00 the artillery units spreading out either side of the trucks. And after a while, you'd see flashes coming from….the batteries would line up and then they'd start firing at our positions. You could hear the shells coming overhead. And we were watching through our binoculars, and even right up the close area. There was a bridge across the river, our engineers blew that. You could see them getting these rubber boats off

15:30 trucks and things to cross the river. And we went to sleep that night, there. I remember we were short of rations and our officer at the time, came up, and he had a bag of tins of bully beef. He said, "There's eighteen tins of bully beef there." He said, "Keep that and we'll ration it out tomorrow. We don't know when we will get the next lot." There was about,

16:00 I suppose, twenty-four men in the platoon at the time. Which we did. And of course there's a tale to tell there, too. One bloke ate two tins through the night. We were going to shoot him in the morning. Porky Lane they called him. Anyhow, apart from that, suddenly we were told we had to move. The battalion was to move from this position, and move around to a position on

16:30 the flank, a tributary of the Aliakmon, called the Pineas River. This was to stop a pincer movement from the Germans, which would cut the troops off on the Aliakmon. And we were to go there and delay them so the troops on the Aliakmon could withdraw. And we were to delay them for hopefully for forty-eight hours. So our battalion moved down in that position.

17:01 By the time we got in that position it got dark. We were pretty well exhausted, with our march and all the rest of it in the previous days. We never had time to dig in or anything. So we went to sleep, and a luckily it was a mild night, and the weather was a bit warmer, and we had a reasonably good sleep. In the morning we woke up at dawn, and we could see in front of us the valley of Tempe, a beautiful

17:30 place. Sparsely covered with trees, groups here and there, nice green river down the bottom, and an abandoned train just in front of us, that had been abandoned by the Greeks as they all took cover. And then the aerial activity started. Well, they sky from dawn on was filled with Stuka dive bombers, Messerschmitt 109s and spotter planes.

18:00 Which would be the slow planes, cruising, looking for artillery positions and all that. And they would notify the Stuka dive bombers, which was the main artillery that the Germans used. They used aerial and army co-ordination very, very smartly. Very cleverly. Not like the Italians.

Were there any British RAF [Royal Air Force] planes?

I never saw a British plane.

18:30 We never saw one on the air. Anyhow, when dawn broke, what appeared to be a smokescreen appeared over the Pineas River, then all of a sudden, you could see groups of troops on the opposite side of the river, lining up, coming up in groups. And they were preparing to cross the river.

19:01 On our right flank, a New Zealand battalion had already been engaged by the Germans for the previous day. This was the 22nd, I think, New Zealand battalion. They were on our right flank. We never had enough men to cover the area at all. We had to spread our troops out into small groups, with great wide gaps between them. You couldn't conform a front. We never had enough

19:30 troops. Anyhow, the company commander come up and he says, "Can the mortars do anything about those men across the river?" And our range find took the range and it was two thousand yards. Well, our mortar could only fire sixteen hundred yards. And what to do about it? It presented an excellent target, and

20:00 and a couple of our men, Sergeant Coyle and Corporal Sykes Evans. It was my detachment, we had two detachments of mortars, two mortars. And they said, "What if we take a couple of secondary charges away from the smoke bombs and drop them down the barrels first, and that will give us six secondary charges instead of four, and we might get the extra couple

20:30 of hundred yards. So we did that. And we got right on the target. So we hammered them, and took very good effect in this manner. But sometimes you would get misfires, the secondary charges are like little plastic tubes of explosives, which cushion the striker. You drop down the bomb down and the primary

21:00 charges is supposed to hit striker, well these things would be across the striker and cushion it, so then you'd have to tip the barrel up and pick the mortar up, well the barrel would be pretty hot by then, and you had the risk of it exploding in the barrel, and the bomb being thrown out to the bloke who was catching it. You were taught a procedure to catch the bomb, you see, when you had a misfire. This happened during an ordinary shoot, but when you're putting these things down, you had it more often.

21:31 But nevertheless we got quite a few across. That and the other mortar which was co-ordinated with us, the other detachment of the mortar platoon, that was organised to do that too. And they were further along our left flank, on the front. And we held them up all day, and towards dark, though, tanks got through on the New Zealand side. They went down through a

22:00 tunnel, a railway tunnel. And they got through and they got amongst us, and the word came out to destroy the mortars, destroy your weapons and get out. The best man for himself. Every man for himself. And this happened, we destroyed our mortar.

How did you destroy the mortar?

Well,

22:30 you couldn't do much about it. You just had to smash the sights, which was an important technical thing, something like a camera. It would give you the elevation and all the business. Destroy that, and try and break the tripod, which is pretty hard and heavy. But the base plate of it was already buried in the dirt, and is probably still there today. And so is the other one, belonging to the detachment, because in the soft ground,

23:00 every time you fired, it would push the thing in, you see? It fired a ten pound bomb. A very effective weapon, an infantry weapon.

Just for one moment, when you got that order, every man for himself, that must have been quite a scary moment.

23:30 At the time you thought it was the best thing to do. But by that time, some tanks had broken through, and the German infantry was fifty yards away. We had been firing. We had our mortar behind a sanger wall, a brick wall, which was common, dividing property. They'd build these loose bricks, with no

mortar, up over the boundary lines. We had the mortar behind that,

24:00 well, the base plate was buried. And we dumped the barrel in a hole somewhere where they couldn't find it. And tried to bend the tripod and smashed the sights. Then we took off, to get back. Well, there was no plans to retreat to a second line, because there was no second line. We never have enough troops. Our position there was guarding where the roads

24:30 come together at Larisa, a town in central Greece. And this the place that we had to keep clear of the Germans so that everyone could evacuate a bit further south. But we were the fall guys. We had to delay them, that's all, for forty-eight hours. Well we did that. When I got out, just from my own point of view, we destroyed what we had to and

25:00 we got out. We were running out to get past the tanks and Germans that were right on our hammer. I suppose they would have forty to fifty yards away, the troops. You could see the badges on their helmets. That's how close they were. We knew we had no chance. It wasn't a case of the night brigade, sort of

25:30 business. We only had to hold them. And we knew from the start, from the time we started to retreat from that area, we shouldn't have even been in Greece. The troops that were supposed to come with us, couldn't come. We didn't know it at the time, but Rommel had moved in the desert, and put the pressure on there, so the Seventh Division couldn't come to us. So we had to get out the best way we could, and I

26:00 run back through the area there, and I remember German mortar shells were falling in the village in front of us, and alongside of us. I remember the tiles on the roof, these big Roman type tiles, flying over and landing among us. The corporal of our other detachment, Corporal Crozman, he was hit by a fragment from a tank shell bursting, and he died there. But some of our blokes that

26:30 were with me, they decided they wouldn't go back towards Larisa, they'd go towards the coast. Our commanding officer went towards the coast and quite a few others, too. So part of our platoon finished up going to the coast and getting on boats and everything, small boats, eventually finished up on Crete. Some of them were captured,

27:00 about six of our platoon were captured. And I got in with another bloke from A Company. And I decided to try my luck and go back towards Larisa. And it's starting to get dark then, and the German air force didn't work the night shift, they were a good union people. As dusk was falling....The German air force had our

27:30 transport set-up absolutely stopped. You couldn't get anything coming up behind you. The roads were commanded. There were blazing trucks everywhere along the road, where anyone, fighter planes had strafed them. And each truck carried two four gallon tins of petrol, the reserve petrol. There were no petrol stations to pull up to, anywhere there in Greece. So when they were strafed, they immediately burst into flame.

28:01 And wherever there was a cross road or congestion of traffic, Stuka dive bombers would bomb that area. So in the daytime it was hopeless, so the battle was fought in the daytime, and nothing could come up to help us at all. But there was nothing there to help us much. So we had to get out and get back as far as we could. It was getting dark, and one lone truck came along the road, with some of

28:30 our blokes on it. And I got on it with and another fellow I was with, from Newcastle, too. Same street. He was in A Company. I was in the mortar platoon, he was in A Company, the rifle company. And we're getting in towards Larisa, and all of a sudden we notice a few trucks up ahead, stopped. And we pulled up. Then all of a sudden up the road these streams of tracer bullets, come up the road, from

29:00 the entrance to Larisa town. And some bloke come out of the dark and said, "I'm a New Zealand officer. Don't go through there, there's some German elements ahead of us are in there." There was a lot of confusion at the time. He said, "You can get around Larisa, by going out and taking this road out through this swamp." And another bloke on the truck says, "I don't like the sound of that bastard.

29:30 Someone shoot him." We thought we were being misdirected, you see. He said, "No, no, no," he says. "I've lived in Sydney. I know suburb so and so," and he rattled off the places he'd been. Another fellow said, "He must be dinkum." And with that, we took his advice, and went through this track, through this swamp. And quite a

30:00 number of burning trucks. Still burning. Because the rubber tires burnt for a long time. They would have been knocked over during the day. And I went to sleep then, and when I woke up it was dawn.

You must have been exhausted by this point?

We all were. When I woke up it was dawn. And we were on a tar road, and it was just starting to get dawn, and we all of a sudden realised we had to keep watch.

30:30 Well, soon as dawn broke, over come the planes again. And what we were doing all day then, was jumping on and off the trucks as the planes come down, strafed the roads, or bombed the roads. And in desperation we kept moving, even though it was daylight. We had to get as far south as we could. And we got to a point where our B echelons were. These were places like, even in

31:00 in the desert, like when the unit went into action, they would keep a small group back behind, to look after the paperwork of the battalion, the administration. We referred to them as 'Blokes Left Out Of Battle.' There might have been slight injuries, or a bit B class and that, but still in the battalion and liable to recover, well they'd be left out of

31:30 battle and they'd be in these positions. We got back to there, and we reorganised a bit what there was of us. And then we were told that the Greek army had surrendered. The government had ordered them to surrender, and they were surrendered on the spot. And they were streaming back from the north, and all the positions they had been holding. They hadn't been holding them too well, because they didn't fight the Germans

32:00 much. And they were streaming back under their own steam, just to go back home. Well, this caused all the confusion on the roads, and they were coming through like refugees. The problem then was, Germans would be coming through with them. So then we fell back a bit further, near Peloponnese and we were supposed to take up positions there to make a stand, and we

32:30 actually got out and took up positions. It was starting to get dark and a few shells landed nearby, and someone said, "They're on us, they're right up on us, already!" And to our amazement, brigadier Allen, brigade commander Toby Allen, he was a well liked senior officer, he come around on

33:00 a one-ton truck and he said, "Look, forget about it men. Just rest, stop." We were trying to dig trenches and things, which we hadn't been able to dig at Tempe. We had to face the Germans at Tempe without digging in or anything. Just out in the open. He said, "Forget about it, and just relax, and get ready to move. We've got to get out of Greece.

33:30 We've got to get to southern Greece as quick as possible and try to get off on ships. Our position's hopeless." And this we did, and then we had the ordeal of getting down, across the Corinth Canal into southern Greece. And we crossed Corinth Canal at two in the morning. German paratroops landed there at dawn. So we just got across,

34:00 and we got to a place called Argos where we thought we might get on ships. But the ships in the bay were burning, and so we smashed what trucks we had left, and moved on a bit further south to Kalamata. And at Kalamata, there's a bit of a harbour there, and a couple of concrete wharves, and two British destroyers

34:30 had come in there. And one of them was under the command of Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Kelly, and we were split up and put on the destroyers. And as it turned dark, they sailed some distance out to sea. And in the darkness we saw a blue light. And we wondered why this blue light was there. We pulled up alongside it.

35:00 It was a large ship called Dillwara. It was a troop ship that the British had built to supply their troops, to carry their troops to the colonies, to India, or Africa, or wherever they had the garrisons. In the peacetime. They were especially built as a troop ship. I say this because it was just like an ordinary cargo ship, really, but they

35:30 had wire bunks and everything down below, for a small peacetime contingent of troops. Of course, by the time we get on it, there are three thousand on it. The destroyer pulled up alongside it, and this blue light was there, they explained to us, that's the light that is least visible at night, it will give you a bit of light to do things,

36:00 so you won't walk into a door, but it was the least visible at a distance, these blue lights over the side. So we climbed up the nets, carrying our rifles and very little else, and when we got to the top of the ship, we were dragged over by the British crew, the naval crew, and they were opening cases of bully beef. "Here, get into it, chums." We were all hungry.

36:34 We slept the night, what was left of the night, and as soon as dawn broke, we woke up to the fact of where our position was, heard the bells ringing and everything. And this troop shed had sliding bulkhead doors worked from the bridge. The captain could just press a button and the ship would cut off into about five parts, by these

37:00 sliding bulkhead doors. In case there was, one hold was holed, the whole lot wouldn't flood. The trouble was with that many men on the ship, they had a position man near the bulkhead doors. As soon as the bells ring, if someone don't get out of the way, push them out of the way. Otherwise they'll get crushed. You can't be worried if they don't move quick enough.

37:30 Of course, from then on, right from dawn to dark we were under air attack.

Was anyone crushed?

No, luckily. They got the picture. The captain spoke over the intercom and kept telling everyone what to do. Some of them were a bit slow, and you had a job there, you were positioned there. There were air force men aboard it, there were Cypriots, there were Maltese.

38:00 There were all sorts of people that were getting out of Greece on it. About three thousand men on that

ship. I think it was built to take about six hundred troops to India, in comfort. Some of them weren't even down below, they lived on the deck. And we got our Bren guns, our machine guns we carried aboard with us, we tied them to the

38:30 wires holding the masts and that, and rigged them up as anti-aircraft weapons. The ship had a bit of anti-aircraft weaponry on it itself. We had three destroyers and a cruiser, escorting us. And there were two other ships, the Costa Rica and the City of London, taking off troops. And we were under air attack from dawn until dark that day, and our ships engines

39:00 were stopped twice for near misses. The Costa Rica was sunk, just off Crete and the City of London had near misses, but it wasn't sunk. Our ship was ordered straight to Alexandria whereas those who were picked up in the water off the Costa Rica, they went back onto Crete. And of course some of our people that had escaped from the Tempe Valley encounter had got to the coast.

39:31 The CO and a few of the men with him, they got to Turkey. And quite a few others got to Crete, and some of them got Cyprus.

We might pick it up on the next tape.

Tape 6

00:40 **So we just got up to the point where you almost got into Alexandria….**

Well, as darkness drew near, the ship's captain broadcast over the intercom on the ship,

01:01 "Well, it's getting dusk now. I don't think we'll get another raid." He said, "We'll keep steaming full speed ahead, and in the morning we will be out of range of the aeroplanes." And that's what happened. So when the next day dawned pleasantly,

01:31 things were quiet. Talking about, you like a cup, well, one of the only things that kept me going on that ship was the fact that the English sailors kept two great urns of tea going all the time. Down aft. They had plenty of tins of carnation milk there, and plenty of sugar. And you could go and get a cup of tea any time of the day,

02:00 and that was strongest thing….I had fifty cups of tea that day. The only other greatest cup of tea I had, just before we cross the Aliakmon River on that punt, we hadn't had a cup of tea for days. And we got the Aliakmon River, and there was an English engineer there that had this punt going, and they had cups of tea going there. And

02:30 that was the greatest cup of tea I ever had in my life. Or three cups of tea I think it was. And I drank them out of empty carnation milk cans. There was a pile alongside where they were cooking the tea. And that was all they could give. A cup of nice hot sweet tea. I love my cup of tea. And I missed it on Kokoda at different times. Anyhow, away we go from there.

So,

03:00 **during this time, the battle of Tempe and this extraordinary journey you went on, did you see any of your fellow soldiers suffering from shell shock?**

Coming back on that truck towards Larisa, we had an officer of the 2nd 1st Battalion

03:32 and he was hopeless. The planes were zooming about and there were bombs landing and all the rest of it. And we were trying to work out how to get through it all. And he was hopeless, he was just sitting there….speechless. He should have been a leader and all he could do was sit there, terrified. And people were affected like that.

04:00 Some people, others not at all.

Were you ever affected by shell shock?

Not like that, not like that, no. I dived into a bomb crater at a junction of one of the roads there, getting down towards southern Greece, and two other blokes were already in it and to my surprise, one of the blokes was a fellow who worked in Newcastle, on the council, and he used to

04:30 go past my place everyday. I was having a yarn to him and Stuka dive bombers were bombing nearby. I didn't mind them. Once they picked out a target you knew where they were going to hit. They had to take time to position themselves and then come down, and once you knew where they were going to hit, if you were to the right or to the left of it, and you had a little bit of cover you was right. But

05:00 with the 109s flying at low level over, low altitude, they'd come in so fast and machine gun fire, three machine guns in each wing, they would open fire. They would be on you in no time. I was more terrified of the fighter planes, strafing. This was the way the Germans operated. The Italians never, ever did that in the desert or we'd have never got near them. They had enough planes to do it, but they never did it.

The Germans used

05:30 their fighter planes and Stuka dive bombers to co-ordinate very closely with their troops. Especially when they had control of the air, there was nothing else against them. While I was in this shell hole, or bomb hole, crater, I think it was near Argos, where a couple of roads come together. That's where

06:00 the dive bombers would pick these spots, where there was a congestion of traffic. And in the tail fins of the German bombs, to make a whistling sound they had sort of black cardboard whistles, stuck between the fins. As they'd come down the air would go through them, make it sound more awful than what it really was.

And how did that sound affect you?

Well,

06:30 I didn't like it. But I sort of knew what it was and as I say, once you knew what target they picked, you knew it wasn't you. You only had to be to the right or to the left and take a bit of cover from shrapnel from the shell bursts. Bomb fragments and that. Unless you were the direct target, well then….on the ship it was very,

07:00 very nerve-wracking, because they would come down over the ship, and you'd say, "Oh, this bomb is going to hit the ship." Then it would fall to the side and explode. And as I say, on two occasions they stopped the engines of the ship, and then you're dead in the water. And you think "Well, we're sunk now, if they don't get going." But they used to get the engines going and you'd move again. And while this was happening, the destroyers would be running around you firing their pom-pom guns and

07:30 all that. Keeping the planes high. And of course our own Bren guns on the ship, on the Dilwara, helped to keep the Stukas high. We had a lot of them. Even though they were only small arms fire, they could be in trouble if they run into a lot of that. Anyhow, we got to Alexandria…

08:02 **Just before we do go onto Alexandria, what was your opinion of the Germans as an enemy?**

The Germans were very good soldiers. They're very well trained soldiers. There's no mistaking them. They knew their business. And like, there's no comparison between them and the Italian soldiers.

08:30 Or the Italian method of fighting the war. They had it all down pat. And I think if it hadn't been for the huge numbers of men involved on the Russian Front, later on, the Germans could have moved that force elsewhere, then it might have been a different story. Because,

09:00 when you look at the Russian campaign, well, there was millions of men involved in that. Even after Stalingrad, the German retreat back to Berlin was so slow….an army can be good in winning things, but a real good army is clever in

09:30 retreat. And the German retreat was very, very slow. And the Russians had to fight all the damn way, of course I'm thankful for the bloody Russians, too, but the Germans if they had been an inferior force they would have fell much quicker. But they were good soldiers. They were pretty competent.

What was your opinion of Rommel?

10:01 Well, we never had much to do with Rommel, 6th Division because the 9th Division was mainly in the desert with him. And apparently he was all right. He was a pretty fair fighter. And the German troops in the desert, they fought in a fairly….well, what you could say, I'm no religious crank, but

10:30 they were more Christian. They were more Christian than what they were in some parts of Europe. They were fairer fighters, and apparently Rommel was a pretty fair person, too.

Yeah, he seemed to have had the respect of a lot of Australians?

I'd say so, yes.

Okay, moving onto…Let's go to, I think we got up to Alexandria and your arrival there,

11:00 **what happened next?**

Well, getting off the boat. Several boats were docked in Alexandria with people streaming off them from Greece and that. See, Crete was still yet to come. There were still men stuck on Crete, and we were lucky we didn't get onto Crete. But some of our men did, some of our battalion did. But on the wharves of Alexandria, there was all recriminations and criticisms. Where was our air force?

11:31 And you could hear this being spoken everywhere. And little did we know, England had no air force to send. The only air force they had, they needed in England. They never had it. The few air force people they did send to Greece had nothing, and few planes. And what they did have were old fashioned. But we didn't quite realise that at the time.

12:00 And of course our blokes were saying, "Where's the bloody air force?" You couldn't operate. If you didn't control the air, you couldn't get supplies, you couldn't do anything. They controlled the roads, they controlled behind you for miles behind the line, they controlled everything that moved. If you were

up front, you was on your own. He couldn't get anything up to you.

So did you feel let that down by....

We did at the time.

12:30 A rumour used to be spread around while were in Greece, and I think this come from the top to that 'everything will be all right. There's fifty thousand Canadians landed at Selonica.' Well, this was parroted around for a while. "Oh yeah? Where?" They're up closer to the Germans. They'll be good support on the right flanks. But they could never have gotten fifty thousand Canadians

13:00 from anywhere at the time. But this was one of the rumours that were going around. And that's the way war is. You get these rumours and that. But I will never forget the valley there at Tempe, the Tempe Valley. William Dargie painted this picture, it's a huge picture, it's in the War Museum. The only thing he missed out on it, he's got the train and everything there. But the very position

13:30 I was placed. Before the day ended there, in the middle of the valley there was a Messerschmitt 109 fighter plane that's forced landed. And I remember the last half of the day, from about midday up to dusk, until we withdrew. Just seeing the plane sitting there, with a big swastika on the tail. This is right in the middle of the fight.

14:01 And the engagement is taking on all around it. But the valley itself is beautiful. And a nice name, the Tempe Valley. The Greeks referred to it as the Valley of Tempe. The Vale of Tempe, that's right.

I'll have to check out that painting the next time I'm at the War Memorial.

14:30 **Okay, so what happened when you disembarked at Alexandria?**

Well, we were given a feed and the chance to have a scrub, a wash, which we needed. And then we were entrained back to our original camp at Dulas, in Palestine. And there we started to rebuild the battalion. Only a few of us got back to Dulas. The 2nd 1st Battalion,

15:01 they had all landed on Crete. Practically none of them come back. They fought a grand battle there at Rethymno, against the paratroopers, and they actually won their part of the battle, but that was one of our sister battalions. They had won the battle but they were ordered to surrender, when the high command says, "We won't

15:30 fight for Crete. We'll surrender." So the 2nd 3rd Battalion, a lot of them got back to Palestine, unscathed. Well they put them straight up fighting the Vichy French in Syria. They started to play up. The Vichy French campaign in Syria started, that's just up the road from Dulas, about twenty miles up the road.

16:00 And the 2nd 3rd Battalion was sent up there to fight with the 7th Division against them. It took some of the blokes that were left, that had come back with us, took them out of the battalion to reform the 1st Battalion, which included a couple of men out of my mortar platoon. And they put the rest of us on standby, eight hours

16:30 notice, to go up and join the fray in Syria. They said, "We have no trucks or transport, but when we get there, there's a captured French truck that we'll be using and we'll join the fray." Well, next morning we're still on this eight hours' notice, and an Arab paperboy come across the road with this English speaking newspaper. It reminded me of my early days being a paperboy. He's singing out, "Palestine

17:00 Post. Palestine Post. English paper. Palestine Post. Germany attacks Russia. Germany attacks Russia." And this is a surprise to us. We brought the paper and read it. And practically the same day or the next day, the Vichy French surrendered in Syria. So our eight hours move was called off. There was only a company of us anyhow.

17:32 The battalion was fragmentised. As I say, some were in Turkey, some were in Cyprus, some were in Crete. So it was called off, and then we waited there. One member of my platoon, the range finder at Tempe Valley, a young bloke, young McDonald, he was eighteen years of age. We were sharing a tent, and he got a bit sick and he saw

18:00 the doctor, and the doctor said, "You've got sandfly fever." That was a sickness that was supposed to be common in Palestine. I don't think it ever existed. It was a sort of a fever. "Better go in the tent and lay down." Laid down in the tent for a couple of days, then he got worse, and he went up to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and they put him in hospital. And he was dead a fortnight later. He died of typhoid, he picked up

18:30 on Crete. And the bloke acting as our company commander at the time says to me, he said, "Carl, go and put two strips on, you're a corporal." I said, "I don't want to be a corporal." He said, "Don't be a fool." He said, "People will be coming over from Australia, a reinforcement battalion shortly."

19:00 He said, "And who do you want to take these positions? People like yourself or them?" And I said, "Oh, all right." He said, "The first thing I want you to do is to go into Tel Aviv," he said, "and get a coffin." He said, "I've got it fixed up with the brigadier." He said, "There's a plaque there, put young McDonald in it and we'll bury him in Gaza War Cemetery. With

19:30 the Light Horse Men from the First World War." So that was one of my first jobs as a corporal. I went and got the coffin and brought it back, and we screwed the plaque on and gave him a military funeral, and fired a salute in the Gaza War Cemetery, amongst the Light Horse dead from the battle of Gaza and that, in the 1914–19 war.

That must have been

20:00 **quite a moving moment?**

Yeah, he was a nice young bloke. Only eighteen when he died. Anyhow, just after that, we were moved from there to guard the Suez Canal area, down to El Arish. The railway line cut through from the Suez Canal to Palestine. There's a nice big oasis there, on the sea front,

20:31 at El Arish, where the Lighthorse fought a battle in the First World War. It's amongst the date palms. And during this period, people are coming back from Turkey, they're coming back from Greece. My mate Reggie Burgill from A Company, he come back in a submarine from Crete. He was a prisoner of there, but he escaped.

21:00 He got a British submarine coming back, and he rejoined us there. Reinforcements arrived and we had a pleasant time amongst the date palms there, while we were also guarding the railway line. They thought paratroops would come there, see. This was a position of very uncertainty in the Middle East, in that area. They fought it would fall.

21:31 They really thought it was gonna fall. When we got a few more troops and that back, and a few more reinforcements, we were moved then up to Garrison, Syria, and we moved up between Beirut and Damascus. In the high country there, there's an escarpment that runs right up the coast, like a mountain range there. And it gets snow just at the

22:00 back of Beirut. It's Alpine ski region. But it's a very pleasant time, it's warm in the daytime and all that business. It's an unusual place. At the same time you can go skiing, then you come down and go for a swim in the waters at Beirut. It used to be a real pleasure area in peacetime. Of course we had to dig defences up in these hills,

22:30 because they were quite convinced that the Russians were going to fall at any time and the Germans would come down. We had a lecture of this when we first got up there. What we were there for. We had to dig defences in these hills. And the idea was that we would build a fortification similar to the Tobruk defences, which were holding the Germans at the time. The siege of Tobruk was on at the time.

23:01 And the Germans would sweep down through the caucuses, the plains of Syria, and would ignore us and attempt to meet up with Rommel and take the Suez Canal area. And we would harass the German lines of communication from these areas, while the British fleet kept the Mediterranean a British controlled area. This was

23:30 all good thinking, and it turned out to be bullshit. They would never have held it. Until Britain could take the offensive, that's what he finished up on, this brigadier general who give us the lecture, this British brigadier general. Until the British can take the offensive, well, that would never have happened. They couldn't have matched the German production.

24:01 Germany had all of Europe. We were a bit naïve at the time to realise that. Anyhow, we started digging these defences, and we had to do it with hammer and explosives in this rocky ground. And we worked for days there. Getting towards Christmas '42, we were involved in a blizzard. Cold weather come down

24:30 and the woman from Ankara on the Turkish radio announced it was the coldest period for thirty six years and she believed that every snow fall had gone down as far into Palestine as Jerusalem. That was much further below us towards the south. But up where we were, we were locked in our tents for seven days. You couldn't get outside the tent. The wind was blowing,

25:01 the snow was pushing the sides in the tent, and we never had any snow gear at all. And every tent, I had ten men in my tent, and every tent had to live on what they had there. There was no facilities for cooking or anything, only what you had in the tent. The traffic had stopped moving on the roads. Trucks and everything were covered with snow.

25:30 **Was there heating in your tent?**

Luckily we had a kerosene heater that only a week before been delivered, and we thought it was a bit of a joke. A high type of thing, you put kerosene in it. And the amount of kerosene they gave us wouldn't have lasted us a day. But we were lucky in our tent. A Pommie truck with supplies on it stopped near our tent one day, and we took a couple

26:00 of extra tins off it. This was a scrounging, we used to call this. Little groups of men, you'd look after yourselves. But so we had this extra fuel. But it still pushed the sides of the tent in. Some blokes got the early stages of frostbite on their toes and extremities. But then it lifted.

26:30 And then the slushy period, because of all the melting of the snow, the slushy period, that was sort of worst than the damned snow. You couldn't go outside your tent while this blizzard was on, you couldn't

get back. Everything was white. If you turned around to try to get back to your tent, you took the wrong way, you wouldn't get back there. You'd have to stay out in the snow. There were holes dug around the tents, slit trenches against air attack. And the snow would fill these up.

27:00 If you fell in them, and couldn't get out, no-one would see you or anything. So you daren't go outside the tent. And it was a horrible five or six days. Anyhow, that's beside the point….

That's a very interesting story.

We were building barbed wire fences in the weak spots around this mountainous area, the gullies, and the slow areas are the easiest to

27:30 get up. I don't know if you realise what a double open fence is….

No, could you explain that?

You put a fence up, see, a straight up fence, and then you put another fence going down at angles to the ground. So one fence would cover from here over to there. In some areas you'd have thirty fences, so you would have a whole curtain of wire

28:00 going down the hillside. Of barbed wire. And this would impede anybody trying to get up through that, see? And this would be in the weak spots of this defence area. And not only us, the 6th Division, but they had hundreds of other troops and local Arabs and all building these things. But while they were doing this, after the snow receded and all the rest of it.

28:30 We were up there working on these things. We used to use the hammer and gad and fill it up with explosive and blow it, to build defensive holds that were supposed to fight in, see. While we're up there doing this, a Salvation Army truck come up and they used to do this. They'd make a cup of coffee and biscuits sort of business, in between breaks. And this was

29:00 one of their common practises. Well, he come up early this morning and he said, "I've got some news for you boys." And we said, "What is it?" He said, "The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbour and America's in the war. And the Australian Prime Minister has demanded that Australian troops come home." "Oh yeah, hooray." With that, we pulled out of….the only thing that

29:30 would have saved this so called strategy there, Churchill must have been dependent on the American troops coming in. They would have never held it. That set up would never have worked, in my opinion. Well, you know now. Anyhow…..

What did that news of the bombing of Pearl Harbour, mean to you?

We were surprised. We had forgotten America.

30:03 As a matter of fact, one of our men was captured in Greece, and was sent to an Austrian Stalag, he escaped and he went to the American consulate. And I went to his funeral here a couple of years ago. He went to the American consulate, yeah, they give him a feed and everything. Real friendly to him, and put him to bed, and when he woke up

30:30 in the morning, downstairs and straight into the arms of the German Gestapo. "Sorry, we've got to hand you over. We're not at war with Germany." So he done four years in the camps. Stalags.

Nice.

This is before America come in the war. And he was a 2nd Battalion man, and he lived at Cardiff, just that suburb out there.

31:02 But we'd forgotten America. As it was at that time, in the Middle East, we hadn't given it much thought that.

Okay, so what happened next?

They pulled us back to Palestine. We never went back to Dulas. We went back to a camp near Dulas, this time. There were several AIF camps, Dulas was only one of them. But we went back to this other

31:30 one and we sort of got into shape there a bit there. We did a bit of training. And much to my surprise, the company commander, Carl, he said, "Instead of having two detachments of mortars in the battalion, we're going to have six now. And each one is going to have its own Bren gun carrier.

32:00 So you'll be given issues of Bren gun carriers. And there will be six detachments, and each detachment will be commandeered by a sergeant. So you will be promoted to a sergeant." But we were not to see the Bren gun carriers in Palestine, because we were moved straight to the Suez Canal and aboard the ship, the Orontes.

32:31 And luckily for me, I had been promoted to sergeant, and the Orontes was the sister ship of the Otranto, same size and everything. And the same conditions applied there. The officers and sergeants nest in the saloons just the same as they were in passenger times. They hadn't been changed. You had eight men to a table. One waiter

33:00 to each table. Written menus, good food, and the troops of course were down below in the hatches again. So this time I was on the Orontes and I was in a bit more luxury.

Well, it sounds like you deserved it, after all of what you'd been through.

And we had a very pleasant trip from there to Ceylon.

Well, before we go onto Ceylon and the trip

33:30 **back home, if we could backtrack a little bit to R & R [Rest and Recreation] or leave that you might have had during your time in the Middle East. Can you talk a bit about where you took leave?**

Well, I had four days in Jerusalem.

And what did you get up to there?

We were looking for good places to eat. Get food something similar to what you used to get at home.

34:00 You'd be looking for steaks and eggs, better than the eggs that were in the camps. Some of the eggs you were given in Palestine, in your rations…You'd have scrambled eggs or boiled eggs or something, and there would be no yolks in the eggs, or only half a yolk. They used to get the eggs and everything from Arabs and that, and they wouldn't feed them. There was no nourishment. They'd been living on sand in the desert.

34:30 They were absolutely hopeless at that sort of stuff. But, of course, officers, they used to get extra money, and they used to get extra money to buy extra food wherever they could. And they had well established messes and that, in the standing camps. But the men just got dished out of a dixie sort of business.

35:00 For instance, they would cook stews and that….you know the old fashioned copper? Well, soya stoves they referred to them in the Army. They'd cook a stew in one of them, for the men. There'd be a hundred men in a company, or something like that. Well, they'd all go through and they'd cook a big strew in a Soya stove. The officers were looked after a little better.

35:31 **What else did you do in Jerusalem besides finding a good feed?**

Well, we went to some of the historical places. You'd suppose to go to Bethlehem and you'd be shown places like Christ's tomb, and all that business. But none of them impressed me. They were neglected and decrepit. Like I never heard anyone say they were impressed with it. Some of the things

36:00 I was impressed with was some of the old Roman ruins. For instance, at one stage early in the piece in Palestine, we had a job on a coast at a place called Echelon, it was an old Roman city. The Roman wall part of it was still there, and we used to sit up on top of this, and watch to sea out through the binoculars, to see if there was any submarine activity.

36:30 We'd telephone down to another spot near the beach where they had a wireless set, and they'd wire to the airport to send out a patrol plane. This sort of thing. In Haifa there was Roman ruins, and a crusader's

37:00 castle and all that business. Round Gaza and that there was remnants of the battle lines in the First World War.

I believe also on leave it was quite popular for the men to visit the brothels. and I'm wondering if anything like that…

37:32 There was brothels there, and in the Tel Aviv area….alongside Tel Aviv there's a fairly big Arab city called Jaffa. Well, this is where they were there, in that area there.

38:00 I believe they got quite a lot of business. That's a fact of life.

Yeah, I mean it was certainly common and an expected part of being a soldier…

Not to everybody. It was thought that was the case….but

38:30 it wasn't to everybody. And of course in Alexandria, there was a street called Sister Street. And this was patronised heavily by the British navy. It was a street of brothels with fancy names like California Kate. Or Jessy Lee.

39:00 They'd have a sign up. They'd have these names up, in Sister Street. And that was very popular with the navy. A lot of naval activity in Alexandria, between there and Malta, and places like that.

We might pick up on this topic on the next tape….

Tape 7

00:33 **At the end of the last tape we were talking about some of the establishments in Sister Street in Alexandria, and they had fairly colourful names. You were just starting to give us some of those names when the tape ran out.**

Tiger Lil's and all that business. Characters drawn on the signs, some of them even had neon lights.

And obviously you

01:00 **walked down that street and had a bit of a sticky beak?**

Well, you couldn't avoid it, in those places. There wasn't an actual brothel area, I don't think, in Jerusalem, but a terrible lot of women worked the streets, and the cafes and that. And under British martial law, the cafes would be officers

01:30 only, or sergeants only, or NCOs only, or field officer and above, that is from major up. That class distinction sort of business. A lot of prostitution revolved around these places.

Prostitution revolved around those cafes?

Yes. This is where those that weren't in the brothels would work. In and

02:00 out of these places.

And did you hear how they operated out of the cafes?

They'd just be in there and they'd meet people as they come in and out.

We've spoken to several people who said that even although they didn't avail themselves of the services of these places, they went in and had a bit of a stickybeak...

Oh yes.

Did you ever do that?

Oh yeah, I poked my head in the door a few times. In some of them they would have British soldiers

02:31 just inside the door, and they would have a little sort of an office set-up. And they would monitor blokes going in and out, and would give them preventive things and that.

What sort of preventative things would they give them?

Well condoms and certain ointments and things like that.

03:02 This would be sort of part and parcel of the British set up in the Middle East. They also had fixed prices marked up on the wall.

Do you remember what some of those prices were?

I forget now. Everything over there was on fixed price, everything you brought was on fixed price,

03:30 cafes, just about anything was fixed price to stop, I suppose, profiteering.

And also eliminate the hassle of haggling and bargaining?

You'd still be able to do a bit of that in the bazaars a bit, in Damascus and Jerusalem and Cairo and places like that. But in most of these places

04:01 when you got off the main streets, the atmosphere didn't appeal to you. And the only things that seemed a bit like home were the main streets where more important businesses were and things were a bit cleaner and a bit more up to scratch. But then you was limited by the class distinction. See, if you was in a place under your rank, you could be thrown out

04:30 very smartly.

Did you ever have that experience?

Oh, I come close to it a few times. At some places the proprietor would put up with it, and at other places he might ring up the military police to come and tip you out. And of course some of our blokes would be a bit arrogant and

05:00 prepared there to stay whether they liked it or not. I was mixed up with some of the different characters from the battalion at different times, and some of them were more democratically oriented than others. They would demand their rights, "I'm not copping this," sort of business.

They would go to these places, would they? To provoke a situation?

05:30 Yeah, whether they were supposed to be there or not, they'd go in.

Do you remember any particular incidents along those lines?

There were different ones (UNCLEAR). And it was quite common, you heard about it, different other ones in the battalion have trouble and be arrested by the provos for doing it and Christ knows what, and this type of thing, because

06:00 this was real objectionable to the average Australian. And the British carried out to a T, this class distinction.

Can you tell us a bit more about that class distinction?

Well, with the cafes and hotels and everything like that. Like sergeants only, senior NCOs only, or officers only. And then to the top of it,

06:32 field rank only, that's major and above. Of course the senior officers get away from the garbage, like the junior officers. To this extent. Specially with the British, and I think this is one of the things that killed them in Malaya.

How so?

I know our blokes, in the 8th Division, the blokes that I met, were disgusted with the way they were treated

07:00 in Singapore, and those places. This was very strictly adhered to other there.

The British class system?

Oh yeah. In Singapore. And of course when the Japanese struck, there was no support from the public. It would be one of the reasons for it, I'd say.

I'm sure. Just going back to the red light districts. When you went into these establishments, apart form the fixed prices on the walls,

07:30 **what sort of things would you actually see in these establishments?**

You could see the girls in there, waiting around sort of business. And mostly they would be some of the Arab girls, and the attitude of the average Arab people, they would be rejected by them.

08:01 **Sorry who would be rejected by who?**

The local Arab community, it rejected any of the Arab girls that done this. They would be outcasts. That's how I saw it. Of course, with the Jewish women and that in Palestine, they wouldn't consort with you at all. They'd talk to you in the

08:30 shops and do business with you. But they had no truck with Christians at all, the attitude of the Jews in what was to become Israel, was then Palestine. And these Jewish settlements were being set up all around on Arab land, and quite honestly, just my own personal point of view, they were stealing Arab land right from

09:00 the start. And the British were caught between the devil and the deep sea trying to please the Arabs and the Jews. They had this occupation force set up there keeping them apart, and trying to appease both parties, and keep their oil lines coming into Haifa and all the rest of it, without any trouble. And the more they gave the Arabs, the more trouble they got

09:30 into with the Jews. The more they gave to the Jews the more trouble they got in with the Arabs. That's the position it was when the Yanks kicked the British out and took over and gave the Jews the right to establish the state of Israel. And it never ended, and it won't end yet. It's pretty obvious to anyone's thinking that they went the wrong way about it.

10:02 **Especially to someone like yourself who saw a lot of that firsthand?**

Yeah, it just don't work. It could have been done differently, I reckon.

Now just getting back to our chronology, we had you getting aboard a ship. Now what ship was this?

The Urontis. We board the Urontis and we sailed down the Red

10:30 Sea and we pulled in at Aden, and we sailed from Aden, and we were only out one night at sea. At the time I'm travelling as a sergeant, I've got a cabin this time with another bloke. My poor troops are down the hatch, down the holds. I sympathised with them very much. But I

11:02 took my opportunity, you couldn't do anything else. And this night, going to bed, and I thought 'I wonder where we are going?' And I put my issue compass on the little table alongside the bunk, and I lined it up with the direction we were going, and went to sleep. And when I woke up in the morning, I looked at the compass, and I

11:30 looked at it again, and I said to the other bloke, there's two in the cabin, I said, "Look, we're going back the way we come." "Oh," he said, "you're mad." I said, "I'm sure we're going back." I said, "I set that up last night, that we were going that way, going east from Aden.

12:03 And now," I said, "we're going west. We're going back." "Oh," he said, "you're mad." So we went for breakfast, and everyone said, "Oh, we're going back to Aden." And I said, "I thought so." And we went back to Aden and we dropped anchor for a couple of days. When we first kicked off, we were told to study the maps of Burma, on the ship, see.

12:30 And then, after we'd been stopped at Aden for a couple of days, we kicked off again, and they start passing around maps, quickly drawn up by the intelligence section of the battalion of Ceylon. And they had drawn them up from the only map

13:00 of Ceylon they could get on the ship was in a Pear's encyclopaedia. And they passed them around, and it appears that we were going to Ceylon. We had a nice pleasant trip across the Arabian Sea. It was pleasant, it was calm. For nine days

13:31 the water was like a mirror. There wasn't a ripple on the water, day after day. Terrific weather. And it was that calm that our ship of twenty thousand tons, we passed a ship coming the opposite direction, about the same size, and they could sail that close together, without bumping into one another, the water was that calm. The captains were talking from the bridge with loud hailers, to one another.

14:01 So that's how calm the weather was. I was travelling in a cabin, I was getting good meals and all the rest of it. There was a bit of beer aboard the ship, even though it was stage of the war. I thought, "This is wonderful." Yeah, we got to Ceylon, and Ceylon Harbour was packed with shipping.

14:30 The crisis in the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific forced a lot of shipping into the India area. And there was very little docking space in Colombo, so the ships tie up with long strings to buoys, in the harbour, and they wait to be unloaded by barge and all that sort of thing. And we waited there for a while, and then when we did get ashore, we were addressed by our commanding officer and he said, "Mr Curtin and Mr Churchill

15:00 have come to the conclusion that Ceylon is vital to the defence of Australia, and Mr Curtin has agreed with Mr Churchill to let 16th Brigade and 17th Brigade troops off in Ceylon, to defend Ceylon, and Ceylon is vital to the defence of Australia. And you will be relieved as soon as possible by British troops." So with that, we

15:30 got off and we established a camp in a rubber plantation outside of Colombo. And within the next, I suppose it wouldn't have been ten days, the Japanese taskforce that attacked Darwin attacked Ceylon, and they attacked Colombo and they attacked Trincomalee, the other port around the other side of the island. But they didn't land. Luckily. We heard the night before about, we got

16:00 the message that a Canadian pilot in a Catalina flying boat had observed a taskforce of two aircraft carriers, three battleships, cruisers and a large transport force, two hundred miles from Colombo, from Ceylon. And we thought, "Well this is it." Next morning the planes

16:30 attacked, and the day after that they attacked the other side of the island. But luck happened, a heap of Hurricane fighters on their way to Singapore were dumped off in Ceylon, when Singapore fell, with their pilots and that. And they took to the air on both occasions and they caused casualties to the Japanese planes and that, and

17:00 I think this attributed to them abandoning any idea of landing. Another factor was, not that the Hurricanes shot down that many planes, but they certainly harassed them. I believe a lot of the planes didn't get back to the carriers. So they lost the pilots, and trained, this is the story we learned later.

17:30 **At that time what did you understand was going on? After you were addressed by the officer and told that Australians would be involved in the defence of Ceylon, what happened to you next?**

Well, we established camp in the rubber plantation. The ships with our supplies, every supply ship had fled Colombo and they didn't unload, so we

18:00 had nothing, if they had landed, and they fled to India. But after the Japanese force retreated, the ships come back and unloaded the stuff. And then we got these six Bren gun carriers to the mortar platoon. That's the funny part about it. Now this idea was muted when we were going to stay in the desert. But in Ceylon, there's

18:30 a lot of jungle and that, very narrow roads and everything. Well, these bloody things were hopeless, yet we used them in Ceylon, around the streets and that. Knocking over Arab stalls and houses and that, they were very difficult machines to get around narrow roads. Like driving tractors.

Actually I didn't ask you about this before, but just for those that don't know, could you describe a Bren gun carrier for us?

Well, it's a little armoured

19:00 vehicle with an open top, and it was just designed to be light protection for a machine gunner. A light machine gunner, a Bren gun. That's where it got the name Bren gun carrier. But they handy for carrying the mortar into position, that's why the mortar platoon got six of them. They would have been good for

the desert. They decided on this when we were in the desert

19:30 area, now we had them and we're in bloody Ceylon in the jungle. Now the rifle companies had some good training in the jungle areas of Ceylon. There's a lot of jungle there around the Colombo coast area. A lot of wildfire there, a lot of snakes, a lot of monkeys, all that sort of business. Elephants. But as far as using Bren gun carriers, well, we wondered what the hell for.

20:01 Anyhow we got them.

It sounds commercially inappropriate.

This is the sort of thing that used to happen in the army. Anyhow, we were eventually relieved by the British, and we left Colombo a very dull day, on a ship called the City of Canterbury. It wasn't as comfortable as the Otranto

20:30 or the Orontes. Much smaller. We were packed on. It had an Indian crew, and when they cooked their meals after, you'd smell it all coming up. They'd been cutting WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s heads off on the deck. They had live WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in crates. But we were on it. This dull day we sailed out of Colombo Harbour and it was very still. Hardly a breeze blowing,

21:00 and within the next twenty-four hours a blow came up, and for the next week we were in a….cyclonic activity. I never ate for a week. The ship would come up out of the water, the propeller would be out of the water and the ship would be shuddering, then down it would go, and on each side of you, you would see great walls of water. The convoy was spread out. You couldn't see one ship

21:30 from one another. They had to get that far apart to avoid collision. I never ate for a week.

Did you literally not eat anything?

Just about nothing. And a lot of people were the same. And it was very uncomfortable on the ship. You had to lay down on the floor. Some poor blokes were trying to sleep in hammocks, but it was useless.

22:03 But I asked one of the officers, one of the Scotch officers on board, it was a Scotch line of ships, and I said, "When are we going to get out of this storm?" He said, "The British admiralty say we're to stay in the storm. For protection." And he said, "While we're in the storm,

22:30 we're safe." At the time, the Japanese cruisers were sinking ships in the Bay of Bengal and parts of the Indian Ocean. And we were on our way to Australia, see. Tailing directly south in the Indian Ocean. Well, after a week, the storm subsided a lot, a bit, and the convoy got closer together, and we found out our only escort was a British cruiser.

23:01 And it was sailing around us, quite a modern British cruiser, very efficient, it was doing a good job. And a bit later on, we noticed the cruiser got very agitated, swinging this way and that way, and its guns were swinging and all of the rest of it. And we thought, "Oh, they're practising." But then it started flashing lights. And on the horizon, one of our blokes said,

23:30 "There's light on the horizon flashing." And, going further south and further south, and eventually a ship come into view. And this British cruiser raced towards it, guns swinging and all the rest of it. And as the other ship drew closer it turned out to be an American cruiser, an American heavy cruiser. And

24:01 as a matter of interest it was the cruiser they sold to Argentina, and the British sank it with a submarine. Remember that? There was the three hundred loss of life?

During the Falklands War?

The Falklands War.

Was that the General Belgrano?

It was called a different name then. But it was this American cruiser, and the British ship sailed around the convoy a couple of times and waved us goodbye and retreated back towards India, and the Yanks took over,

24:31 our escort.

So how long was this trip back to Australia?

Three weeks, without seeing land, from Colombo to Port Phillip, Melbourne. We sailed right down south, some of the convoy went into Freemantle, but we kept going south, until the weather got very cold and that. When we did come up, the first sign of land was the entrance to Port Philip Bay. Three weeks later, twenty-one days later.

25:00 **Did you make landfall at Melbourne?**

Yeah. Got off at Melbourne. And one bloke, that come as reinforcement during the Middle East, Lenny Howells, he finished up a sergeant there. He was on the deck, he said, "There's not many Melbourne people in our battalion." He was a Victorian, but he had joined up in Sydney, but his home was in Melbourne. He said, "See that church over there."

25:32 I said, “Yeah,” you could see a spire of a Presbyterian church. He said, “My home’s just near there.” So we got off there and we went up to a place called Mangalore….Oh yeah, before we got off, we’ve pulled in at the jetty, and to our surprise, all these trucks come onto the jetty.

26:00 And we’d never seen Australian servicewomen before. None of them in the Middle East, and hardly any British servicewomen in the Middle East, either. But all these girls driving trucks and everything, we thought they were great, that they’d come for us. But they hadn’t come for us at all. On the other side of the jetty as we pulled in, another ship docked full of Yanks. And they come there to pick up the Yanks.

26:31 We were just marched off the ship, and we had to march about half a mile down the road, where we got on board a train, and we went up to Mangalore.

What did it feel like to be back in Australia?

It was great. Of course, we got paid. And we noticed we were alongside an American camp there, and they had big marquees and they had an

27:00 entertainment group going. They had big canteens full of good things to buy, and we had rubbish, where we were. And this caused a lot of resentment, too. “What’s going on?” So anyhow, we got over that and we all went straight from there to home leave. Fourteen days’ leave.

What did you do during your leave?

27:30 Well, saw everyone I knew, and did pub crawls in Newcastle here, and all the rest of it. When we went back to camp…Oh, we marched through Sydney, that’s right. Got a bit of a welcome home, there. And we shifted from Sydney to Greta.

28:00 Sydney, there, to Greta Camp, a camp just outside of Newcastle, which was good for us. We thought, “This is wonderful.” And of course you weren’t supposed to leave the camp of a night, but us people living in Newcastle, we did. And we’d get back….You’d go back on the train at night, and the train line went past the Greta camp. Migrants were put in this camp after the war.

28:30 All the migrants were put in there. But the Greta army camp, as the train would go past, everyone would be asleep, half asleep, some of them would be half still drunk. And the guard would come through and say, “Listen men, we’re going past Greta Camp. Don’t pull the chain to stop the train,” you know them chains in the carriages? “We’ll stop and you can get off without having to go into the station. But for

29:00 Christ sakes, don’t pull the damn thing, it takes us an hour to start it again.” They had to build up pressure or something. “Yeah, yeah, righto.” But some of the blokes wouldn’t hear him. Someone would sing out, “We’re here, there’s Greta Camp.” A bloke would get up and pull the…the damn train would stop. But the railway blokes were good to us. Anyhow, we weren’t there very long.

29:30 We were ordered to get all the trucks and everything aboard flat top railway trucks. And we got these six bloody Bren gun carriers, I don’t know what for, drove them up onto the top of the railway trucks, our platoon. And we went up in the train to Brisbane. Sitting in the open trucks, it took us all day long, in the soot and the dust from the damn engine. Got off at Brisbane and we loaded

30:00 the stuff aboard an American Liberty ship called the John Steel. Just an ordinary cargo ship, with no facilities on, sleep down in the hold, there was just a ladder going up to the top deck out of the hatch, the cargo hatch. They arranged soya stoves and things for cooking on the deck, but you didn’t do much cooking. And we sailed up the Queensland coast,

30:30 through the Barrier Reef area and the Whitsunday passage, which opened our eyes. I hadn’t seen it before, and a lovely area, like (UNCLEAR). And after we left the Australia region and got out, nearly to Moresby, a storm blew up and some of the deck cargo started to shift on the ship. It was put on in an a hurry,

31:02 including some of these Bren gun carriers, these tractor type machines. They were sliding about the deck, and this is pretty dangerous. Working on the waterfront for years after the war, I know how dangerous this is. The worst thing that can happen on a ship if deck cargo…They hardly ever put cargo on a deck unless they have to. And when it does start to move, it causes a lot of problems.

31:31 But anyhow, this storm abated. Just before we got into Moresby, they told us to open a couple of crates that were in the bottom of the hatch. Well, we opened these crates and they turned out to be Thompson sub-machine guns. So whereas as we only had one or two of these to a platoon before, now we had half a dozen to a platoon, or more.

Just before we

32:00 **proceed with this. Had you been given any jungle training in Australia?**

No. But we had it in Ceylon. There was a lot of jungle area in Ceylon. But as I said, we in the mortar platoon were mucking around with these Bren gun carriers, along these roads, going through the jungle. The company troops were moving through the jungle getting actual experience.

So here you are arriving

32:30 **in Moresby….**

Yeah, we got to Moresby and we were told the Japs were thirty miles from Moresby and it was about to fall. We got there at dusk and the lights were on, on the wharf. We thought, "This is bloody funny if it's that dangerous." And the

33:00 people landing around the wharf didn't seem to be worried, and we unloaded, and we were trucked up to a place, some barracks I just forget the name of it. Up above Moresby, above Verona Falls, close to the start of what was to become the Kokoda Track. And we

33:30 got our khaki clothing, and that. We cut the legs off the trousers and made them into shorts, very roughly, and died them in coppers green, dyed them green. In the meantime we did a bit of live firing practise, with machine guns and mortars and things. Then we moved up to Owers Corner, this was at the start of the Kokoda Track. Well, when we got there,

34:00 there was a fair bit of activity. There was an outfit there, a CMF unit, the 14th Field Artillery, I think was the name of it. They had a couple of guns there, and they had cut a big of the jungle away and they had got them forward a bit, so that they could fire on the Japanese positions at Iorobaiwa Ridge.

34:30 This is the closest point they got to Moresby. It didn't get them very far into the jungle, it was just impossible. They only had two guns, and they got them there and they'd start to fire on them. This was the first time that the troops, our troops in Kokoda, had had artillery support. Right back. And the Japanese were nearly at Moresby before they got it. But the Japs had mountain guns that they could disassemble.

35:00 Seventy millimetre guns, and set them up, and they brought them right over, as close as Iorobaiwa. But this was the first time our troops were getting artillery fire back in support of them. Funny thing I passed one of them guns, a bloke came out and claimed me, he come from King Street, Newcastle.

Just like that? He saw you walking past?

Yeah, yeah. Oh, he

35:30 knew the battalion was coming. He knew I was in that, and he waited until I come up. But I couldn't stay long talking to him. We got up to Owers Corner, and General MacArthur was supposed to have been there that day. I didn't see him, because everyone was busy doing their own thing, there were a lot of people in the battalion. But he was supposed to have told our commanding officers,

36:00 "The eyes of the Western World are upon you." Like this is a…you've got to do this. All this crap. Then, of course, he went back to Brisbane. That's as close as he ever got to the Kokoda Track. Owers Corner at the end of the road from Moresby, where the real track started.

So when you got there, what were you actually doing, in terms of

36:30 **preparation? You arrived, you marched in, you marched to the beginning of the Kokoda Track, what happened at that point?**

We were then faced with the realisation that this campaign was all about. What we had Bren gun carriers for, Christ only knows. Whether they come off the ships at Moresby, I don't know, but we were never to use them again.

I'm curious to know, were these the same ones that you had in Ceylon?

Yes.

And the same ones

37:00 **you'd had in the Middle East?**

Well, we didn't actually get them in the Middle East. We were granted them in the Middle East, but then we sailed before they arrived. But they caught up with us in Ceylon. And then we brought them to Moresby, and then didn't use them. And instead of six mortars to a battalion, there could only be one mortar to the battalion and it would have to be carried by the men, strung on poles.

And how many men would it take

37:30 **to do that?**

There were three parts to the mortar, there's the barrel, the bipod and the base plate. There were two men to each part, strung on a pole cut from the jungle, carried on the shoulders, together with all your other gear, including your rifle, a bit of food, and everything, ammunition, that type of thing. And the bombs…the infantry blokes, or other members of the platoon

38:01 would have to carry a bomb each. A ten pound bomb each. So off we started, up and down these hills. And there was no such thing as a mile to here or a mile to there on the Kokoda Track. The way you estimated distance was two days to so and so, twelve hours to so and so, twenty-four hours to so and so.

38:31 You couldn't talk about miles. You had to go up and down, like that. Over this narrow track. You were in a single file most of the time. And of course we were going over the ground…The Japs had started to retreat from Iorobaiwa, and we were going over the ground, and the unburied dead were still there, and the smell of the dead, the stench was with you

39:00 all the time. And when you settled for the night, or took up a position, there might be a couple of dead bodies nearby, been decaying for a couple of days. Myriads of blowflies, maggots, all that.

Were these Japanese dead?

And ours.

So it was a mixture?

No-one had had time to bury anyone, they were too busy looking after their own scalp. So there was time to bury, no energy to bury. The only time you were

39:30 supplied with food and ammunition was by air drops, without parachutes.

We'll pick that up at the beginning of the next tape.

Tape 8

00:34 **Where did you start to encounter these bodies along the Kokoda Trail?**

Right from the start. As soon as we passed Iorobaiwa Bridge. You see, the brigade that had reached there from the Middle East before us, the 25th Brigade had fell back to Iorobaiwa, this was thirty miles from Moresby.

01:00 **And for how long had the bodies been there?**

Some of them were only recent. Some of them had been there for a few days. But in the Tropics, within forty hours the body deteriorates very quickly, in the thirty degree climate, with the humidity. Anything like a gut wound, that was the end of you. With a gut wound in that climate,

01:32 you would have to have immediate medical attention to survive, and that was never available to people on the Kokoda Track.

Why was a gut wound so fatal in that climate?

Well, just imagine your insides being torn out with undigested food and everything in it, it would deteriorate and become infected,

02:00 much quicker than any other part of your body.

Now how many of these bodies? Were they every couple of feet or were they….

They were fairly consistent along the track. You could always smell them, and often you would come across them. If you would like me to go into detail, we come across

02:31 one body tied to a tree with signal wire. That's the wire the signallers used between companies and units and that, tied to a tree, with the wire. The head was missing, and he was an Australian, and the head couldn't be found anywhere. It looked definitely like an execution job. Someone had surrendered or something,

03:00 or they had been over-run, and they just tied him up. They might have tortured him first, then lopped his head off. A number of cases you would find people still clutching their rifles with their bodies half decomposed, half skeletonised. I dug the paybooks out of a couple of them, 2nd 14th Battalion bloke. They had arrived a bit earlier, and they were in the retreat. They were helping the

03:30 CMF delay them back, done a wonderful job, delay them back to Moresby. Two of those blokes that I got their paybooks out of their shirt pockets. Well now, in your shirt pocket you used to carry your pay book in a plastic type of stuff, wasn't plastic in them days. But it was a plastic type of stuff. It was referred to as a gas wallet. Part of the gas gear,

04:00 the anti-gas equipment, sort of special stuff. You had capes and that made out of it. You kept the pay book in that and you had it in your shirt pocket and it kept it in good condition, see. And that would have their name and number and rank and all their particulars on it. Well, when you'd find these skeletons, their shirt and that would be decayed away, and if you dug down between their ribs, you

04:30 would find the pay book in the plastic thing. You could identify who they were. The only other means of identification was the plastic meat ticket. That was made of a heavy plastic and had your name, number and your religion stamped on it. And your blood group, But sometimes that

05:00 would be missing. You'd tie that around your neck with a bootlace. The Yanks were flash. They had a little stainless steel one, we had cheap plastic ones.

So on this occasion were you actually stopping to examine…

Well, you couldn't help but do it. You'd move a bit each day, see, until you got up to the front. The Japs were falling back towards the top of the Kokoda Range, at a place called Templeton's Crossing, this is right at the top of the range, at

05:30 about six thousand feet above sea level. And from then on, the range drops down steeply towards the Kokoda area, where the Kokoda airstrip was. And then out to the plain area, out towards the beachheads of Gona, Buna and Sanananda, where the Japs had landed. The only trouble in between there and the beach there were

06:00 these swamps. The swamps of Sanananda. We got up to the 25th Brigade. They were on top of the ridge, facing the Japs at Templeton's Crossing, and we took over from them.

Just before we get to there, just dealing with this section of Track where the bodies were…

All along the track there.

They were all along the track…

Yeah, and at one place, north of

06:30 Efogi, there were eight stretchers on the top of a ridge. Apparently they'd put down, these wounded men, in an attempt to wait to arrange to get them down this steep escarpment. Sort of a cliff face. They must have put them down there to arrange to get working parties to get them down. And apparently they had been over-run. Well, they had all died on the

07:00 stretchers. They were half decomposed bodies, there were eight of them, Australians there, laying on top of this ridge. And as you crawled up this ridge, we were exhausted as it was, when we got up there it was the first thing that faced us. All these bodies laying on the stretchers.

What sort of impact was this having on you and your mates as you proceeded along the track?

We were copping it. We were coping.

07:30 It seemed to be "Oh well, that's war." Some were taking it better than others. It's a funny thing. The little men were doing better than the big men. I'm afraid I've got to say that. We had some big husky blokes that were tough as hell. And they were dropping out of the fray quicker than some of the small blokes.

For what reason?

I don't know.

08:00 They just couldn't take the going. The physical endurance. Like every night you slept in the rain, you laid down and the water run down your neck. You had no hot food. You were dependent on a handout of bully beef and biscuits, from air dropped bent and broken tins. And the cases of the biscuits would be all busted open, and they'd gather up what they could. The nearest

08:30 dropping ground might be a days walk behind. And you had the native carriers carrying stuff up to you, but they couldn't carry it all. Sometimes you'd move a couple of hills forward, and then go back and pick up some supplies, and help them bring it forward with you, back from the nearest dropping ground. There was no helicopters or anything like that. The stuff was dropped from DC4s or

09:00 Lockheeds. Cargo aircraft. That's all they were. Empty shells, they were empty inside. And they'd have a door at the side, that wouldn't be shut, they'd just fly over and they'd just pile the stuff in front of the door and the blokes, you could see them, as they come over the dropping grounds, they'd have a strap on their backs strapped to the back of the plane so they wouldn't fall out and they'd pile stuff in front of the door, then they'd kick it out the open

09:30 door way, then they'd circle again while they piled another stack of stuff up in front of the doorway, to kick that out. Well, lots of times, eighty per cent of the stuff that was dropped wasn't recovered. The only thing that was dropped by parachute might have been a bit of medical gear.

The rest of it was just kicked out without a parachute?

Without a parachute.

That's extraordinary. How could they expect it to survive?

Well, that's the way it went.

10:01 And then what could be salvaged would be salvaged and carried forward to feed the troops. Well, this was what MacArthur and high command and even Blamey didn't realise what the conditions were, because quite they didn't go there and look enough.

I'm sure it's very different to kicking something out into the desert sand.

See, if you missed the dropping ground, up in those ranges, there would only be a little open area,

10:31 well it would go down a gully and you would never find it, in the thick jungle.

Now just to return to this point where you said the smaller guys were handling it better than the big guys, what was happening to the big guys?

I don't know.

How were they reacting?

It was a physical business. At the start they were right out in front. But as I often said to

11:00 some of my mates, "Look, who's here now." Some little bloke you never thought he would have kept up with it. That one kept up with it, they were there. And some of the blokes that you thought would certainly be with you, they fell by the wayside. To be wounded there, you had to walk back to Moresby, or be carried. And as I say, if you had a gut wound, well you

11:31 wouldn't have much show.

And were you relying to any extent on the assistance of the New Guinea natives?

I was saying, they did a good job carrying a lot of the stuff, but they couldn't carry it all. And as soon as they got up to an area where you would come into contact with the enemy, a few shots or explosions would ring out, they'd drop their stuff and scarper. And I don't blame them for that. They were just carrying, and

12:00 we were the soldiers. Not them. On the whole they did a good job. They were under the command of an Australian that understood them, and looked after them and that. And they did a good job.

I think there was an organisation called ANGAU [Australia New Guinea Administrative Unit], that administered them.

Yeah.

12:30 **Did you befriend or have a conversation or have any kind of interaction with any of them?**

Often. Our blokes….They got a ration of what we called 'boom twist' tobacco. Black tobacco, really dark strong tobacco, as part of the promise for their services. And our blokes, those carrying money or silver in their pockets, two bob or a shilling or something,

13:00 they would be giving them money for this tobacco. I didn't smoke. But a lot of our blokes finished up smoking tealeaves and anything at all.

Now I understand you first met the Japanese at Templeton's Crossing?

Yeah.

And we'd got up to that point in the narrative before. Could you describe what you saw and what you experienced when you got to Templeton's Crossing?

Well, we

13:30 got to Templeton's Crossing. The 25th Brigade was facing them, and we moved up behind them, and we prepared to take over from them as they went back into reserve for a while. And they were engaging the Japanese. And they wanted a mortar, so as I was

14:00 saying, there was only one mortar to a battalion. Actually, what happened there, the mortar didn't become the possession of any particular battalion, but the nearest mortar was public use. All the mortars around the place were pooled, whoever needed them, used them. So they wanted mortars to engage this Japanese position that was worrying them. They were using a mortar on it, and we brought ours up and we start using

14:30 that. And we used it quite well with the bombs that were brought up from Moresby, carried up. We were just about to leave, and some of the mortar crew of the 2nd 33rd Battalion, I think it was, the other brigade,

15:01 said, "Look can we do this shoot before you go? Use your mortar before we go?" "Yeah, righto." They wanted to have a go at the Japanese, so we stood back and let them. And they used some of the bombs brought up from Moresby, but then they used some of the air-dropped bombs, and I think they got one away, and the next

15:30 one blew up in the barrel and killed the three men who were around the mortar.

How could that happen?

Through the air-dropping. The mortar bomb has an intricate sort of a fuse in it. And it worked on a

series of springs. You screw the cap off from the top, and the spring pushes the striker

16:00 up. Now inside the fuse, the top part that screws in the bomb, there's other little springs that work, and one of them has a fulminator of mercury detonator, alongside of it. Now when you fire the mortar out of the barrel, it receives the shock of discharge. Now this is similar to the reason you have a seatbelt in a car.

16:30 When you hit anything it throws you forward. Well, when you fire the bomb out of the barrel, these spring arrangements, one pushes one way, one pushes another, leaving an open space where the detonator can be pushed out under the striker. This is supposed to happen when it's in the air. So when it hits the ground it explodes. Prior to that, it's supposed to be safe, see? Until it gets the shock of

17:00 discharge. Well, apparently the air dropping had upset the setting in this procedure. And when it was fired in the barrel, it was exploding in the barrel. The way we used to handle a mortar, three men would crouch around it, and three men would die when it would go off, in the barrel. And this is what happened. Lucky on that occasion it wasn't our battalion men, but we were standing by when it happened. Of course, as

17:30 soon as it happened the Japs saw the larger explosion on our side of the creek, sort of business, and they opened fire with their mountain gun and their mortars on the position, and we had to withdraw out of that. Eventually they withdrew that battalion, and we took over.

Can I just stop

18:00 **you here, I'm still just a little puzzled how the air-drop could have affected the mortar to that extent?**

The shock of discharge should have been given when it was fired by the propellant charge, in the tail of the bomb. It gives you this jerk reaction when you hit something in a car and you're thrown forward, see? Now that must have been affecting the fuse arrangements

18:30 and allowing the detonator to come under the striker. And when you fired it in the barrel, the spring brought the striker down on the detonator, inside the barrel. Whereas as it should have been no detonator there until it was in the air.

Causing the catastrophe which you witnessed.

Yeah. Now that was just the one occasion. Now this happened three times.

19:00 **On three times…**

On the Kokoda Track.

On the Kokoda Track, in separate locations.

And with two inch mortars, I think it happened three times. I'm not sure.

Did you witness all of those three occasions?

The three occasions I did, yeah.

And was that involving your particular mortar?

That one was our mortar, used by the 2nd 33rd Battalion, that killed their men. Could have been ours. We were going to do the shoot

19:30 and they asked to do it. Now, a couple of days after that, our battalion took over from them and attacked the Japanese at Templeton's Crossing. We had about twenty-two dead and fifty wounded or something. And we killed about forty Japanese and they withdrew.

Just before we move onto that, the other two occasions involving mortars…

Come after that.

They come after that? Okay. Seeing those

20:00 **men killed on that occasion what impact did that have on you and the other people standing by?**

I don't know, I was in a daze at the time. Every day. I didn't….like, I carried on. I must have been all right.

Were you in a daze…why?

We were starved, we were sleeping in the rain, we were dirty, we were ragged, we hadn't had a cup of tea.

20:30 That would have been wonderful. And we had a job to do and we were doing it, see?

So it seems like it was sort of coming through a slight kind of filter of unreality when it

happened. Would you agree?

I suppose you could say so. But we survived it, anyhow. After the Japanese withdrew from Templeton's Crossing, they fell back further along, and they got across

21:01 the main area of what is known as Eora Creek, onto the other side. Now this was a place, that was built for defence. The Japanese, they fell back from Templeton's Crossing, which was actually in reality on one side of the creek. There were a number of creeks and tributaries running together in this gorge. And this

21:30 would be about six thousand feet above sea level. And cold of a night and hot and humid of a day. The supply position was bad. The nearest dropping ground was some time back, and it was taking time to get stuff up forward to us, and the Japanese were resisting. When they fell back across the creek, the 2nd 1st Battalion took over the front running, and we fell in behind them. And they got across the creek, but then all of a sudden the Japs cut us off.

22:01 No-one else could get across the creek in the daytime. And they were stuck there for about ten days. And we're stuck there with them. No cups of tea, very little food, handful of biscuits, and you'd nearly kill your mate…..dishing out the rations, if he give you too little, you'd want to

22:30 kill him. And there's a couple of biscuits there, this type of thing. It was as bad as that it was.

So literally starvation rations?

We were all close to it, yeah. Well, just prior to that, just before we attacked Templeton's Crossing, one of our patrols finding their positions and strengths before the attack, three of the men were killed, and

23:00 Billy Ryan, the bloke in charge of them he was badly wounded and given up for dead. He crawled back into the area about two days later with about three bullets in him. He's still alive today, too, Bill. But the other three men, when we attacked Templeton's Crossing and took these positions, their bodies were found. There were a lot of jam razor blades laying around their bodies, and off their flanks, their thighs and that,

23:30 were strips of flesh, were cut. And it was quite obvious that after the attack on the Japanese position that some of their mess tins still had strips of human flesh in them. They'd been eating the dead, the flesh off the dead bodies of Australian troops. They were starving, too.

You found these mess tins?

Yes, there was quite a bit of evidence of that.

24:00 There's no doubt about that.

About approximately how many mess tins would have contained these…

Oh, about half a dozen that I know of. The bodies, they'd cut parts off the rumps. They were choosy. You know the jam razor blades with the hard back? They'd use them to cut the….There were plenty of them laying in evidence around

24:30 the bodies. So this was the desperate situation of both parties. Both things.

For how many days do you think the bodies had been lying there by the time you found them?

They were killed on the patrol one day, and we attacked Templeton the next, sort of business.

Now just to establish where we are in the chronology here. You were starting before to talk about a battle with the Japanese. Is this the particular battle…

25:00 Templeton's Crossing.

Templeton's Crossing. So we're still part of the chronology, we haven't missed a battle, and you're now dealing with that.

The 2nd 1st had taken over from us after that battle. The Japs had retreated back and had gone back across a creek known as the Eora Creek.

I'm just wondering….You've told us a little bit about that battle, but what others things stand out in your mind about that particular battle at Templeton's Crossing in which you were involved?

25:30 Well, it went on all day, from dawn in the morning until dark at night. Machinegun fire, hand grenades going off, all that business, it went on all day.

Can I get you to place yourself in that battle almost as if you were a camera sort of taking us through what actually occurred?

Yeah, well,

26:01 we drove the Japanese out of most of the positions at Templeton's Crossing. They were still holding a

few positions when night fell, but in the morning they had gone, all back across the creek. So we lost a lot of men, and they lost a lot of men, but we won the ground.

But if I can just ask you to place yourself in the battle there, in terms of what you were doing there, presumably with the mortar gun. What

26:30 **are some of the main memories that you have?**

In the attack we didn't use the mortar.

So what were you doing during the attack?

I was behind with A Company, and we were with a 108 set, that's a wireless set, I was guarding a signaller, moving up behind the attacking force, and the signaller

27:00 was trying to convey messages back to the battalion headquarters. This was impossible. The 108 sets, we found out, didn't work in the jungle at all. They were useless. So we were having a lot of strife there. The wounded from A Company were coming past me, and one bloke called Jimmy Shanahan, from the coal fields of Newcastle, he come staggering past bleeding.

27:30 He said, "Oh Carl," he said, "I've been shot. Shot in the heart." "What are you talking about, Jim?" He could still stand up, he was very agitated, as he would be. And the bullet had hit his plastic meat ticket and had gone in near the nipple of the left breast, and it had come out the back, immediately behind that. And he'd sit down one minute and then he'd stand up.

28:03 "I should be dead," sort of attitude. And I thought he should be, too. But I noticed his what we called his identity, his meat ticket, had been chopped in half. And he finished up getting back. I took him back a bit and showed him where the regimental aid post was, with a doctor and a few stretcher bearers

28:30 looking after wounded. The next minute, another bloke come through, old John Pennical. He was a bloody old man then, but he had three bullets in him. Not serious wounds, and he was pretty agitated. I showed him the way, too. Then moved up back behind the crowd that was fighting in front.

29:01 This went on through the day. The funny thing about it, the next morning, just before we moved forward to follow the Japanese down to Eora Creek after they retreated, Jimmy Shanahan come back up the track. I was amazed to see him. I said, "What's doing, Jim?" He said, "Oh, the doctor said the bullet hit the meat ticket and deflected, went into my chest, hit a rib, went right

29:30 around my body and come out the back, it went straight through." He said, "But look at me now." His whole chest was black and his back was black with bruise. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm going back to my platoon." I said, "You're bloody mad, Jim." I said, "What did the doctor say?" He said, "To stay there," but he said, "I'm going back to my platoon." He did go back to his platoon, but later on the company commander got him to get back to Moresby.

30:00 **I'm not surprised. That is the most amazing story.**

Yeah, Jimmy Shanahan. Unfortunately the poor bugger was shot dead at Sanananda, just before the war ended, on another patrol.

That's an extraordinary story. So did you see any direct action at this Templeton's Crossing?

Oh yes, yes.

What sort of things were you seeing?

Japs jumping up out of

30:30 foxholes and blokes riddling them with Tommy gun bullets, forty-five calibre Tommy gun bullets. See, we didn't have the Owen gun on that, we used the Tommy gun. The Thompson sub-machine gun. The Owen gun didn't come into general use until just after that.

So you could see Japanese jumping up and being shot?

Yeah.

What other things could you actually see?

31:01 Well, not a hell of a lot more. It was all in dense country, and you wouldn't see these people until you walked on top of them.

Were you on the move all the time?

Yeah. Most of the time, yeah.

So you were providing defence for the…

Signaller. And moving up behind the attacking forces at the same time. And the signaller was trying to contact…to get messages back to battalion, but

31:30 it was practically hopeless. These 108 sets operated in the desert for ten miles, but you wouldn't get two hundred yards out of them in the jungle, in the high humidity of the jungle. Hot.

And was the signaller laying cable as he went?

Well, that was eventually the only real good method they had of communication was to lay cable, yeah. So mostly they had to resort to that.

Now,

32:00 **tell me were any Japanese taken prisoner during that conflict?**

We didn't take prisoners.

Why was that?

That was the way it was.

Can you explain why?

Oh, I don't know. What do you do with them? Look after them when you got them until you got them back to Moresby? You couldn't get your own wounded back to Moresby. They had to walk back, or they had to be carried back, or they had to die on the spot.

So,

32:30 **if you captured a Japanese, what would happen to that Japanese?**

Well, they didn't generally capture them, they just shot them. They'd just shoot them. None of them were prone to surrender, in any case. They stayed until they died. You couldn't trust them, sort of business. There were cases of them surrendering,

33:00 or making out they were going to surrender, and then blowing themselves up with a grenade. So this was the attitude.

What opinion did you have of the Japanese?

Well, they were mighty good fighters. They were mighty good fighters because they weren't afraid to die. They were pretty tough opposition.

Surely

33:30 **the Australians would want to catch the occasional Japanese for intelligence…**

Well, they probably did, but I don't remember any in our battalion capturing any. Some of them might have got some others, you know. But I don't remember any Japanese prisoners, coming in contact with them, in my experience.

And how many Australians were lost in that battle at

34:00 **Templeton's Crossing?**

Well, our battalion lost about twenty-two dead, that day, and about fifty wounded I suppose. And we counted about forty Japanese dead, when they were through. And they must have took others with them, because there was evidence of….there must have been other wounded or dead, must have got out with them, early in the morning. We didn't get the whole area that day. We got

34:30 most of it, and we could hear them there of a night, chattering and going on, but in the morning they were gone, pulled back across the Eora Creek. That's when the 2nd 1st Battalion took over the front running, and we moved in behind them.

Now with other people that we've spoken to they've talked about the practise of taking souvenirs from Japanese bodies. Did that happen on this occasion?

Well, we couldn't have carried anything. You were flat out

35:00 carrying what you had, your food, and what you had to live with. Half a blanket, and a groundsheet, ammunition and rations, when you got them, and all that. You didn't want anything else. That became a non-issue, gathering souvenirs. Might have been all right in the desert and everything when you could relax to a bit of comfort, or carry

35:30 stuff. But this was impossible. You were living in the open, and you were living like a native there, on the Kokoda Track. You carried your weapon and a bit of gear, that was all….You couldn't be bothered about it.

Wasn't there some story about gold teeth being taken from skulls?

Well, that would be….

36:00 skulls that might have been dead for some time. The bodies that were quite decomposed.

Did you hear of that being done?

I heard of some of it, yeah.

What nationality were the bodies?

Japanese, yeah.

And who was doing the souveniring of….

Oh, some blokes, Australians were supposed to be doing it. I

36:30 never saw any direct evidence of it, though. It could have been, yeah. But you could see these teeth in some of the corpses.

Wasn't there a story about a hospital being bombed, at some point?

Yeah, I'll get to that.

We'll get to it. Can you describe Templeton's Crossing for me?

Well, a place high on the range, cold at night, with mountain mists.

37:01 Hot and humid of a day, thickly wooded. Maybe because of the time we was there and what was going on, a very forbidding place. With these gorges of the Eora Creek, and the other tributaries running nearby. Very difficult geographical country. And ideal

37:30 for defence. But for some reason, the Japanese when they fell back across the Eora Creek, they must have fell back in a hurry, after Templeton's battle, and never had time to reorganise properly. And the 2nd 1st got over after them. But then they sort of consolidated and stopped any other movement in the daytime. So the 2nd 1st Battalion got into a hell of a scrape, there, and they were holed up.

38:00 By that time, Major Cohen, or Cullen, from our battalion had become Colonel Cullen and he was in charge of the 1st Battalion. And he had charge of the first battalion over the other side of the Eora Creek. And they were in a very difficult position, but he got them through it, and for about ten days they were stuck over there.

38:30 We used to send parties over of a night, and I went on two of them, stretcher parties. You'd go over in the darkness, waist deep in water, or great rocks, quickly running water, to get across the creek. You couldn't go in the daytime, they had it covered with machine guns. And just before you left the creek, there were three dead Australian bodies.

39:01 At first they were all right, but after a few days, and you'd done a couple of trips across, they were starting to smell. You couldn't shift them or anything of a daytime or in the night, like. You had to pass them to get across on this track, across the creek. And you'd take about ten men over with you, to carry one stretcher, because you'd have to keep relieving the bloke each time. And the

39:30 men that you'd bring across would be gut wounds. And they'd been sending them across from their RAP, their Regimental Aid Post, with their doctor. Every battalion has a Regimental Aid Post, you see, with a doctor, and a few stretcher bearers. First Aid men. They would send them over from their Regimental Aid Post to our Regimental Aid Post. Safer, with the hope of trying to get

40:00 them back to Moresby or something.

Now I wouldn't mind continuing that on the next tape….

Tape 9

00:35 **Now Carl, we've just established what you were doing in the several days following that battle in which your battalion was involved, with the carrying of the wounded, etc. What happened to you after this? From this point onwards, if you can just continue the story?**

Well, on two occasions I was on stretcher parties. The both men I carried, as soon as we

01:00 got them over to the doctor, within a couple of hours of getting them there, they died. So we spent the night getting them across…the two nights getting them across for nothing. Yet, while you were bringing them across they would be talking to you and that, and quite calm and everything. But they didn't survive. And just after those occasions, the 2nd

01:30 1st had a problem with a Japanese position, mortars and that, and they come across, and a bloke that had been in our mortar platoon in Greece, Megsy Madigan, he's the secondary manager of the Harboard Diggers for thirty five years after the war, still alive, he was in charge of the mortar detachment from the 2nd 1st.

02:00 And he came over, and they mounted it in my area, on the southern side of the Eora Creek. And set it up, and he started to range on the Japanese position. And our armoured sergeant, a bloke called Ted Telling, he come up with a party that brought up some bombs from the dropping ground,

02:30 and he said, “I’ve got some more bombs here, Megsy. Where do you want them?” And, “Righto, put them down there.” And he put the bombs down there. And they fired a few more bombs and then one blew up in the barrel and killed the three men around the mortar. This was the second mortar tragedy. And of course the concussion affected Megsy, he was bleeding from the nose and that.

03:00 And he staggered past, and…when the explosion occurred, the top of the barrel flew over our head, where I was, cart-wheeling, you could hear this swishing and see something going over your head. That was the end of that. So, not long after the 2nd 3rd Battalion, that’s the other battalion in our brigade, they brought their mortar up

03:30 and they start firing from this position. And they start to range with smoke bombs, to give an indication if they were on the target. The three-inch mortar smoke bomb has a less explosive charge than the HE bomb, and when it explodes it releases a white chemical called white phosphorous. When that’s exposed

04:00 to the oxygen in the air, it goes into flame, a flash of flame and white smoke. It gives you an indication of where the bomb landed, you see? And then you can follow that up by firing HE shells. Well, they fired a couple of bombs and then the smoke bomb blew up in the barrel. It wasn’t as big an explosive charge as the

04:30 HE bomb, but the white phosphorous burns deeply. It sticks like tar and burns in. Well, three men were very badly wounded, of the 2nd 3rd Battalion. That was the third three inch mortar explosion. But this was happening with the two inch mortars, the smaller mortar, that the infantry used.

Did you see the second and this third incident occur? You saw all three incidents?

Mmm hmm.

05:01 **By the time of this third incident, I imagine it had a fairly deep impact on you.**

Well, by then the conclusion come that we wouldn’t be able to use a heavy weapon against the Japanese. They would have mortars and the seventy-five millimetre mountain gun, or guns. None of their stuff was air-dropped, it was all carried up by forced labour, native carriers and that.

05:33 None of their stuff was air-dropped, sort of business. But (UNCLEAR) use the heavy weapon on them. So that was the go. For a few days at Eora Creek, other units were involved, going round the back of the Japanese and going around the side, and together with the 2nd 1st’s tenacity on hanging onto

06:00 position, the Japanese were forced to withdraw from Eora Creek, and from then on it was all downhill. They fell back quickly to a place called Oivi. And this was where the Kokoda Track branched off to the beach heads, and then to one side of the Kokoda airstrip. Where the whole campaign got its name from. Kokoda. There’s an airstrip at Kokoda. Not a very good airstrip. It could only

06:30 be used in real fine weather. And of course, we fell back to there and the Japanese made another stand at this point. But they had pulled out of Kokoda, so one brigade of reserve troops went around to Kokoda and occupied it. And they were able to land a few planes there, not many.

07:00 And they landed some mortar ammunition, things like that. That wasn’t far to bring them up to us at Oivi. So we held up at Oivi for some time there. And a Japanese machine gun was giving us a bit of trouble there, in hold-up, and we arranged a mortar to fire on that, and it was a very difficult position.

07:30 To fire a mortar you’ve got to be able to shoot it up in the air. Well, when you’re in a heavily wooded area, there’s trees above your head, the canopy. You can’t hit them or the bomb will blow up above your head. But to get a position, we had to fire at the shortest range, that’s two hundred and seventy-five yards, that’s the shortest range, and only place we could get was right up near the front line, twenty-five yards from the Japanese

08:00 position. And the observation post was twenty-five yards. And we had to fire it at an angle across the front. For instance, like the Japanese are there, we had observed this gun here, and get the mortar there, close to the Japanese here, and fire it over there like that to eradicate this machinegun, see? And Dick Pye, another sergeant, he decided to do the

08:30 observing. And I worked with a mortar crew back at the gun, and we had a telephone arrangement between us. And we opened up with bombs that had been carried up from the Kokoda, not dropped, you see. At this stage we’re back to using good bombs, and we fired a few shots. And then a couple of hand grenades

09:00 landed alongside us, alongside the mortar. We’re only twenty-five yards or so from the Japanese line. So I said to the blokes, “Grab the mortar and move it over into this depression in the ground. We’ll get more cover.” And while they were doing that, when they finished I got connected on the phone again, and there was another sergeant on the phone, a bloke called

09:30 McPherson, Kenny McPherson. He said, “This is me, Carl.” He said, “Dick’s just got shot in the leg.” He had his sticking out from behind a tree, and a Jap shot him. “We’ve evacuated him.” So we carried on the shoot. But to give you this awkward position we had to get into, you know, fire the gun. Instead of being able to get behind the business, you couldn’t,

10:00 there were that many trees. You couldn’t get a clear space to shoot up in the air because the mortar’s a high trajectory weapon, it goes up and then it drops down. You drop it down like an aerial bomb. Dick Pye, by the way, was Australia’s first transplant case. And he died two weeks after it. You might remember in the hospital in Sydney. He was the first heart transplant case in

10:30 Australia.

Under Doctor Harry Windsor, wasn’t it?

Yeah. Dick Pye.

And so, you’re still on the mortar through this entire period?

Yeah.

And to kind of take the narrative on from here, what happened next?

Well, not long after the Japs….We pincer moved the Japs. We got around each side of the

11:00 Japs. In his rear area, Gorari? Gorari, they come in behind him, and they killed five hundred Japanese, they took them by surprise. Killed five hundred Japanese in a couple of days. Got in behind them where they thought they were quite safe. Some of them were having a shave, and sitting down, eating and everything. And they killed over

11:30 five hundred of them, and the Japanese withdrew from Oivi, and went hell-bent back to the beach-heads of Gona, Buna and Sanananda. Well we moved up behind them, right up to the beach-heads, and by then the 16th Brigade was just about worn out. And we were in contact with them for a few days. Everyone was sick then, everyone was very sick.

What was everyone very sick from?

12:00 Sick from malaria, dysentery, all sorts of things. But they were carrying on. You had to have a temperature of one hundred and four to be considered sick. And nearly everyone had that. But after a while confronting the Japanese at Sanananda and that, it was the end of the Kokoda Track, but it was the start of the battle of the beach-heads.

12:30 And this was to be very traumatic. And it took another couple of months there, because, as I say, between us and the beach were these swamps. And on the edge of the beach they had bunkers built with coconut logs. Forty-four gallon drums filled with sand, coconut logs put on top of them, and sand piled over. And you had to get through the swamps to get to the beach-heads. And

13:00 this was the way it was along from Buna. From Gona, Sanananda, Buna, along this strip. Well at this stage we met our American cousins, the Yanks. They had come over the Kokoda Track, on the right flank. Unopposed. But it wasn’t the Kokoda Track, it was another track, got to the coast, and come along the coast to meet us. They were supposed to be there weeks before, but

13:30 they didn’t get to us until then. And they were an untrained lot. Hopeless. They took part in a couple of skirmishes while we were still there and they got trounced each time, and they made no ground. The only good thing about it, we got some of their rations. And they were all fancy and everything like different than ours. Tins with cigarettes in them and

14:00 lollies and Christ knows what. The only good thing the tins of spam were all right. But on the whole, I think our rations, bully beef and biscuits was something you could eat everyday without getting sick of it. And even the Yanks were getting some of that off us.

14:30 Just before our brigade was withdrawn, as the position was starting to improve. As you can imagine, we were getting over the top of them. Just before we were withdrawn, I got sick, and I went to the doctor and he said, I was there night, that’s right, and they never had any

15:00 Quinine or anti-malarial drugs. They Japanese had a ton of it. The packets were laying everywhere, that they had been using. But we never had any. And he said, “Go back along where that track junction goes away there, just near Soputa,” that was about half a mile back along the track from Sanananda, “I’m expecting the 2nd 4th Field Ambulance

15:30 to set up a dressing station there,” he said. “They should be there any time,” he said. “Go back and wait there.” So I went back to wait there, and I just laid on the grass and went to sleep, and it rained that night. And in the morning, it rained again. And then the sun was out. We were out of the mountains now, and we were down on the flat, more or less. It was still pretty hot, of a day. And I went to sleep again,

16:00 and a bloke woke me up. He had a clipboard and another fellow was feeling my stomach, and I heard him say these words, I remember to this day, “Spleen’s swollen two fingers’ breadth,” the bloke wrote it

down. Then they shoved something into my mouth and a drink of water, and I looked around me and there's about a dozen other blokes laying there with me. And they start rigging tents and everything, and they established the

16:30 main dressing station at Soputa. And within a few days it was packed with wounded troops, a few Americans coming from the….Our new cousins who had arrived to help us. They told us, "You're right, you can go home now." But they were a washout. Anyhow, just about recovered from….

17:01 and getting a bit better from my initial sickness, you know, with my medication. The doctor said to me "Well, you'll be able to go back to your unit tomorrow." Well, the unit was only up the road. All day long, and of a night, you could hear the firing just up the road. The front line was just up the road. And during the day time there was American bombing

17:30 planes come over. And occasionally there'd be Japanese planes, and biscuit bombers would be dropping. They still hadn't established a good dropping ground. Kokoda airstrip wasn't much good, because when it rained the planes got bogged, and sometimes planes couldn't touch down a couple of days at a time. It would take forty-eight hours for it to dry out, and all that. They were clearing Kunai grass and that, just behind Soputa,

18:00 at a place called Popondetta, to make an airstrip.

Just to clarify for a moment, what was the illness that you had?

Malaria and dysentery.

So what happened to you after this? You could hear all this action going on in the background, what happened to you in terms of where you went after this point?

Well, I'm just saying….he said to me,

18:30 "Well, you'll be able to go back to the unit tomorrow." And I said, "Yeah, righto." I was prepared to go back to the unit. Well, that was in the morning. The day before, eight Japanese aircraft had circled the main dressing station, and the 2nd 4th had already rigged up a fifteen foot white

19:00 sheet with a red cross in the centre. Only ten flies. You laid it on the grass, that was the bed. And they operated in one tent with Tilly lamps, and they worked all night, and there was six inches of mud on the floor in places. But that was the way they were working. It was like a hospital there, because you couldn't get back to Moresby. You had to be looked after there.

19:30 So, these planes circled the place and flew away, and we thought, "They've recognised the red cross." Well, in the morning, as the doctor said, "You'll be able to go back to your unit the next day." That's the day after this…he said this to us the day after the Japs observed the place. Well, he no sooner got it out of his mouth and the Japanese planes

20:00 came in at low level and they blew the place to pieces. They killed the two main surgeons, twenty-two blokes, wounded fifty of the wounded and sick, again. Under my tent fly alone there were two men killed outright. One bloke had his feet blown off, and he was sitting there singing out "Help me! Help me!" With the muscles of his legs hanging down in strips. And I couldn't help him. I didn't even know

20:30 what to do. I did help some of the other wounded, and bandaged them up. Of course, most of the medical staff were wiped out for a while after that, and me and another bloke went around bandaging blokes up that were hit. There were a terrible lot of shrapnel wounds from the bursting bombs. And they strafed, they did a bit of strafing, too. When you wrapped their wound up and covered it, they thought it was wonderful.

21:01 But we probably did the wrong thing half the time.

You were helping with the wounded?

Yeah.

Were you wounded yourself at all?

No, I never had a scratch. A bloke next to me, laying alongside of me…because we rolled over when the bombing and that started, flattened out on the ground to avoid being hit with shrapnel. The bloke next to me had a slit right across his back, about a quarter of an inch deep, it must have been

21:30 two foot across, at an angle across his back, and it only went in about a quarter of an inch all the way. Just scratched him, you know. Haversacks in the tent were holed with shrapnel, boots were holed with shrapnel, and two men down one end were killed outright. And one bloke had his feet blown off. You could feel the heat of that blast, the heat of the explosion.

22:00 **So after this bombing, you were helping the others to try and save the wounded?**

Yeah, you'd bandage them up and that. But eventually the staff reorganised. I slept that night, and in the morning they got a bit of organisation going, and they cooked a bully beef stew. I remember eating a

22:30 Dixie full of bully beef stew, alongside I suppose there were a dozen of the dead wrapped up in grey Army blankets, just over to one side. And flies were over and over the bodies, but we were still eating the food. I surveyed the area where the tent flies were. If you can understand, they just rigged tent flies without any sides in the tents, because you couldn't have lived in the humidity,

23:01 with the full tents. All you needed was a bit of shelter from the rain, but there was no such things as beds. You just had a rubber groundsheet on the grass. Well, I looked back over that and there was pools on blood on the groundsheets where other men had been killed and wounded, and there were flies all over them. And I remember to this day perusing that. And suddenly, a couple of official looking blokes arrive on the scene,

23:30 and they were medical men. "Righto, all you blokes. You've had enough. Back, out of this place." He wrote a tag on us, 'Evacuate by plane to Moresby.' And, "Where's the planes?" And someone said, "They've cleared the Kunai at Popondetta and they're starting to land planes there now." So I went back to Popondetta,

24:03 and we were the first plane to take off. Funny part about it, how lucky you could be with what happens. I got there and a bloke come up to me and he looked at the tag I had on and he give us a few tablets and things. He said, "We're expecting a couple of planes in the morning. George here will look after you."

24:31 I turned around there's a bloody bloke from Newcastle I knew. He was an assistant in the doctor and medical crowd there at Popondetta, and he said, "I'll get you on the first plane in the morning, Carl." I said, "How will you?" And he said, "Well, I've got to go out and ask the pilot how many he will take." And it was a Lockheed Hudson and two Yanks flying it. "Righto, we'll take stretcher cases, and

25:00 ten walking wounded." So I was on the first plane back to Moresby. And in my rags and dirt I got on the plane. It had oil on the floor, a couple of empty five gallon drums rolling about in it. No inside, just the bare shell of a plane, and the two pilots up the front, sitting side by side, they had no arms or ammunition, except they both had

25:30 a Tommy gun each alongside them, stuck to the wall of the plane. But the space was open, you could talk to them through the business. And so we're taking off, and we're flying back towards Moresby, and then over the intercom I heard this voice say, "Where are you so and so?" "Righto, keep your course such and such. Eight Zero aircraft to the East." I thought, "Oh,

26:00 Christ." But we got back to Moresby…

What happened to the Zeros?

We never saw them, thank God. They were just warning the pilot of the position of enemy aircraft. I got back to Moresby and landed there. After those days in the mountains, a couple of months in the mountains, landing at Moresby, everyone's in clean uniforms and things like that. People

26:30 running around all fit and well. I thought, "God, don't they know there's a war on?" Eighty minutes away, flying time, over the range, back to all the hell along that track. If you was living in Moresby, well I'd say some people had good jobs in the army. A lot of people it

27:00 takes to make an army, you know.

What would you say you felt like at that time compared to the fit and healthy robust people you saw walking around?

Somehow I felt that I was badly done by. You had that feeling, "Christ, what's going on here?" We were on the rough end of the business. They were swaggering around. Moresby

27:30 was chock-a-block with troops, hundreds of Yanks. They were building airstrips everywhere. They machinery going, they had black troops there driving trucks. They had loads of petrol. They had about four airstrips going there. They were flat out. Down around the docks they were unloading ships and all this caper, there was a terrible lot of activity. Heaps of men. But up on the front, there's this thin red line of bloody men.

28:00 And they've got to keep them. No chance of considering you're sick if you had a temperature a hundred and four. This type of thing. What they were doing, they didn't want to use up front line troops until it was absolutely necessary. Those they were using, they were using to the end of the business. You can understand the strategy

28:30 of that, because they might be needed for other operations.

Now Carl, what happened to you next?

Well, I went into hospital. I couldn't eat anything. Christmas came and went. There was talk in Moresby that the Yanks were giving us all frozen turkeys to be cooked

29:00 for Christmas dinner for the troops. Of course, they cooked some in this hospital, but we couldn't eat any because we were sick. We strictly couldn't eat anything, only this arrowroot and beef tea, and things like that. We were already starved, but they starved us further. And this was right over Christmas Day, 1942.

So for how long were you

29:30 **in the hospital?**

Oh, must have been about three weeks.

And when did they return your diet to normal?

Not long after Christmas they returned the diet to normal. Then back to the unit, and what was left of the unit was reassembled in a place called Donadabu. And then from there, we went down to Moresby, and

30:00 my particular group we were all split up, they were just sending us home as mixed up battalions and all the rest of it. And I was aboard a Dutch ship called the Zwarte Hond, which the old Dutch skipper explained to us was, "In your language," he said, "that means Black Dog." He wasn't a bad old bloke. So back

30:30 to Cairns. And at Cairns I got off the ship and a company mate commander said to me, he said, "You stay back with the rear party and see that our gear gets off that ship, and you join us later." So I stayed on the wharf there for a couple of days in Cairns. We had the freedom of going and doing we liked,

31:00 so the pub just across from the docks in Cairns, we walked past there in the morning, this first morning, and the woman opened the door and she said, "You chaps just come off that ship?" And we said, "Yeah." She said, "Come in and have a drink on the house." So we went in and had a few drinks. The good publican in Cairns gave us a few free beers. "Beer is very scarce," she said. "But there's some for you blokes." So,

31:30 we had a drink of beer. And what had disgusted me more than anything, while I was there waiting for the stuff to be unloaded and that, with half a dozen men, this party drove up in these flash cars, anniversary Buicks and all that, big eight cylinder jobs and everything, all in Fiji silk shirts and the women in nice white frocks. And they come up, "Oh, did

32:00 you come off that ship that just come from New Guinea?" "Yes." "Were you on the Kokoda Track?" I said, "Yes, we was." She said, "Did you notice any property damage much on the Kokoda Track?" And I said, "No, I was too bloody busy trying to keep alive." And I never felt more disgusted with people in all my life. I said to the watchman on the gate, he said,

32:30 "I know that crowd. They come from the sugar plantations." He said, "They're the wealthy people of the area."

Talk about uninformed and out of touch.

Yeah. Property damage. Apparently they had some experimental coffee plantations and things up in that area. I said, "No, I wasn't anywhere near them. I couldn't tell you," I said. "We were too busy keeping alive."

33:00 But I never felt more disgusted in all my life. I thought to myself, "Look at them. They're all nice and clean and tidy. They don't know what's going on just a few miles away."

It must have been very hard to take?

Well, these things stick in my mind. Yeah, property damage, of all bloody things.

So to continue the story on from Cairns, what happened

33:30 **then? Between then and Aitape, Wewak?**

Well, what happened after that was a long period of convalescence, for everyone that was on the Kokoda Track. Everyone was more or less sent on leave. But then long before lots of them got back from leave,

34:00 they took sick somewhere along the way. In my own case, I had the fourteen days special leave and on my way back to the Atherton Tablelands, we were supposed to go above Cairns, a nice pleasant area. A good climate up there. A couple of thousand feet above Cairns, and it's amazing the difference. The temperature there…you go down in the Cairns area and you feel the heat soon as you

34:30 start to move down the hill. But when you're up there, it's beautiful. It's a good place for an army camp. They had intentions of camping everybody up there, which they did eventually. But on my way up there I got to Brisbane, and you get out of the train at Brisbane and you go into a staging camp and wait until you get a train, the Queensland Railway, up to the Atherton Tablelands. Well, that was a two-day trip in them days. Because

35:01 the troop trains, if you were only going back to the camps, you had low priority. So you'd have to stop and everything at places, where the more important trains would be allowed through. So it would take you two days to get to Cairns on a thousand mile trip by rail from Brisbane. So…

So what happened to you?

I got to Brisbane. I got to my staging camp. And I had only just got there,

35:30 and I was going to breakfast the first morning, I was fit one minute and violently ill the next. I collapsed, and when I eventually come to there was two young ANGAUs rolling me over. “Hello soldier,” they said. “We’re going to take you to hospital.” And they got us

36:00 into the ambulance and took us to the 2nd 4th Australian AGH [Australian General Hospital] in Brisbane. When the sister come out and received us, she said, “We’ve just heard news that the hospital ship’s been sunk just off Brisbane, with the loss of so many lives.”

36:31 Yeah, well it was the war, and I thought it was bad and all the rest of it. Anyhow, I got admitted there, and I got good treatment in there. One sister, she had sailed with us on the Otranto, to the Middle East, in the 2nd 1st AGH, now she was in the 2nd 4th AGH. You get mixed up with the Australian General Hospitals, and the 2nd 4th

37:01 Ambulance units. The main dressing stations at Soputa, don’t get mixed up with that. Anyhow, she says, “I’ll look after you.” And she used to make sure I got good food and all the rest of it. And then she said, “We’ve got to shift you to Warwick. Up to the 2nd 12th AGH.” She said, “Now, you’re going up in the hospital train, and we’ll

37:30 take you out on a stretcher.” And I said, “Bloody stretcher, I can walk out.” And I went to get out of bed, “No, no, no, don’t do that,” she said. “I’ve told them you’ve got to go on a stretcher.” She said, “It will be good.” So out in the stretcher and onto the ambulance train, all nicely painted white, red crosses on the side. It took us all bloody day to get from Brisbane to Warwick, and we’re treated like heroes all the way. People coming in and giving you things, all

38:00 this caper. And anyhow, I was in the hospital at Warwick for another week or more. Then we were put out into a so-called convalescent camp at Warwick. Warwick was sort of a big country town, but it was small when it come to the fact that thousands of men, troops, were put there in tented camps. So-called convalescent camps, supposed to be having

38:30 a restful period to recover from their sicknesses and that. And you had the freedom of the day to go in and out of the town. There were more troops in the town than civilians lived in it. There was about four pubs in Warwick, and most of the time they had no beer. The beer was short everywhere. So all you do, was groups of blokes wandering around the town, overcrowded with soldiers.

39:00 We met a few civilians and were made comfortable and welcome, and cups of tea and bits to eat in the houses and everything. But they couldn’t cope with everybody. So we were stuck there for six weeks.

So what was wrong with you?

Nothing, just recovering. Getting back to health.

But when you’d collapsed. What was actually wrong…

Oh, reoccurrence of malaria. I had about five or six reoccurrences. And some blokes were

39:30 collapsing in Sydney and Newcastle, on the streets. While they were on leave. And some of them never got back. They were lucky they were sick in Newcastle or Sydney, they’d stayed in Sydney for some weeks. And we envied those blokes. But getting back to Brisbane, I got stuck at Warwick and these places where there’s no population, just all soldiers.

40:00 Well, we’d had enough of soldiers, we were with them all the time.

Carl, we have to change tapes.

Tape 10

00:32 **If you’d like to continue the story, Carl?**

After the convalescent period at Warwick, we had already joined the battalion area, on the Atherton Tablelands. Where the battalion started to rebuild again, for the second time. The first time was after Greece. Now this was the second time, after Kokoda, rebuild with new reinforcements

01:00 and all that sort of thing. And a new training period began. And at this stage we had some American participation. They come up there and they start to teach us the fundamentals of the ship-to-shore set-up, invasion business. And we done a lot of training with them on and off landing craft on

01:30 the beaches north of Cairns. Which are now all the holiday spots. Up as far as Port Douglas and beyond. We landed ship tanks, and landing craft. We’d go out of a night and be out on the water all night, and land at dawn the next morning, all that business. We done a manoeuvre with them in the back of Cairns,

02:00 with the parachute troops. They made a mistake, and instead of dropping them on the enemy position, they dropped them on top of us. And some of them were dropping rifles halfway down, on top of us, and some of them were hanging in trees and all that. But then, all of a sudden after that, they dropped us. We were expecting a move to an operational job, active,

02:30 more active service, and then it was off. The Yanks went away from us and we never heard from them again. We continued with the training and everything, in the country around Cairns. The Bellenden-Kerr ranges are very similar country to Kokoda. We done some manoeuvres in that country, it's very wet jungle type country. And a lot of other things.

03:00 And a lot of field firing and that, in the dry areas around Atherton Tablelands. The Watsonville, Irving bank area, where the old tin mines used to be. We were starting to get a bit browned off at not doing anything. Then all of a sudden they had a special turnout, one night, with

03:30 all the originals and the early starters in the battalion to be invited to a big shindig in a big marquee they put up. And a lot of top officers, generals and brigadiers and everything, would be with us. And we were all treated like equals and we talked man-to-man sort of business. What they were trying to find out was our opinions of going further with the war.

04:01 These were the people we were going to depend on, the sergeants and the privates and everything, the hold stages, you know. And they were trying to get our guts, as we said. And of course the battalion cook catered for them with rissoles and handouts. This was so democratic for the army. We were all equal for this one night.

04:30 And they come round asking our different opinions.

What was your opinion?

Well, on different things, just my opinion. Some of them didn't like it, some of them did. I didn't care. Anyhow, that past over and then to our surprise we got a movement notice, and just before Christmas 1944, we moved down to the docks in Cairns and we boarded.…

05:02 what was it? Another Liberty ship, American Liberty ship, these were ships that were built for quick cargo transport, in America, and they turned them out by the dozen. But this one was fitted out to carry troops. A bit more comfortable than the James Adams we went to Port Moresby in, in a hurry. I just forget the name of it now. I should remember.…

05:32 It was so important, too. Anyhow, we got on that and we sailed from Cairns, and we sailed up around the edge of New Guinea, past Milne Bay, and up into Northern New Guinea to Aitape. This was near the Dutch New Guinea border. Just to the west of Aitape was Hollandia.

06:00 This was where General MacArthur had now established his headquarters. And the Yanks had been at Aitape, and they had a few clashes with the Japanese and the Japanese had counter-attacked, and they beat the Japanese with firepower. They didn't wipe the Japs out, they just contained them, they stayed there. And the Japs

06:31 stopped their offensive role. They were now getting no supplies from Rabaul and other places. The whole world situation was changing. And they were more or less isolated there, in the Aitape, Wewak area, going back into the Sepik River area of New Guinea. Where they established contact with the natives, they were living off native

07:00 villages and all this type of thing, getting the food and all that. They only fortified a number of places, strategic places with troops there, that were left to fight and die. And no surrender, type of thing. And when we arrived there, we took over from the Yanks. They were leaving and there was a huge convoy was assembled off Aitape. Hundreds of ships, all sizes

07:30 and shapes. One of the convoy was to take part in the re-taking of the Philippines. One of them was starting from Aitape, where it was assembling. And we were going ashore as they were coming off, we were taking up their positions. And one thing that stuck in my mind, was a huge cemetery right by the shore where the dead had all been dug up,

08:01 and placed in pressed steel coffins, ready to go back to the States. And these coffins were probably made by the motor industry, pressing out body parts, doors and hoods of cars and things like that. They were these pressed steel coffins, not painted, just black iron. And they were stacked in a row ready to go aboard a ship. And the place was rather smelly.

08:30 There were quite a few coffins there. The Yanks, if they don't kill Japanese, they kill their own. Anyhow, we took over from…

Sorry, what do you mean by that?

Well, I'll give you the case of this. Just before we went on that campaign we had a talk from an Australian naval officer who was talking to us about navy/army co-operation, and he said he went with this

09:02 American party, getting experience from them, and they bombarded this small island in the Pacific, he

didn’t mention what it was, for two days off and on. Then they landed, and he said I went ashore with them. He said they were shooting and firing and going on, all day long and into the next morning. He said then they declared the island was theirs. Righto,

09:33 everyone relaxed and everything. There was no Japanese on the island, but they had eight dead, killed by their own fire. Well, General Blamey’s nephew was killed at Sanananda by an American mortar bomb, and he died in that

10:00 main dressing station at Soputa, just before the air attack. But this happens in any army, but it was very prevalent in the American army. They’d shoot at anything that moved, before working out whether it was one of their own or not. But he said they had eight men killed and he said there was no Japs on the island. Anyhow, getting away from that. We took over at Aitape.

10:30 There was a small airstrip at Aitape and our planes were starting to use that. We had to move along the coast. Our job, the 2nd Battalion job was to move along the coast and the other units were moving further inland, back along from Aitape, back eastward towards Wewak. Which was supposed to be an important place.

11:00 From this area, different tracks led into the Sepik River Valley, where the Japanese were living amongst these native villages where there was plenty of food. They weren’t getting any good from home. No ships were coming in. But along that area were three airstrips, Butt airstrip, Wewak airstrip and…

11:32 another airstrip, I’ve forgotten the name of it. I should have my papers here….Anyhow, our first case was Butt Airstrip. And we took that with a bit of mortar activity and infantry activity. There was a number of derelict planes on the airstrip and quite a few

12:00 Japanese dead, that had been dead for some time. This gives you the idea of how the Japanese were feeling the pinch of no supplies, all that business. Some were being left to die, and other more fitter people were better supplied with what rations they had left, and they were in these strategic positions to fight to the death.

12:31 But it was quite apparent that a lot had been dying, for one reason or other, but of course there had been a lot of Australian and American aerial activity, attacking these aerodromes early in the piece. These were the ‘dromes that were bombing Moresby, and all these places, early in the piece. We moved past But Airstrip with its wrecked planes and Japanese dead,

13:00 corpses and that, killed, skeletons laying about, to the next airstrip. There was a valley leading in from this strip, back into the interior, which they considered pretty important. They had some quite heavy units of Japanese guarding this

13:30 area, and we had to wipe them out before we moved past them, back along the coast towards Wewak, our main objective. And while we were there, there was a lot of activity. These positions were on the top of hilltops and knife-edge ridges. They were very hard to hit with artillery fire, or mortar fire. You had to get a direct hit, because they were on top of hills like that, and if you missed them, the bomb would go down there, or down

14:00 there, and wouldn’t hit them, see. On some occasions there we were firing smoke shells with the mortar, to pin-point these points. And we had an air force bloke with a wireless set alongside of us, and he would talk to the Beaufort bomber squadrons that were operating there. As each flight of three planes come in, he would say, “Fire smoke now.”

14:31 And you’d fire a smoke bomb on the spot, and they’d see where it landed and they’d bomb that spot. And this went on for quite a few days, and there were quite a few skirmishes there. One of our platoon commanders, Bert Chowen, he led an attack on a place. They captured it, but he was killed as soon as they got it. He got the Victoria Cross,

15:00 for that. And the other position, a junior lieutenant, Noel Parkes from Tamworth, he took over from a senior officer, a captain, and

15:30 took charge of the company and he made a reconnaissance of this Japanese position. He led an attack on it. I went up with them on this day of the attack. After a lot of shooting and firing and throwing hand grenades and all the rest of it,

16:00 everyone says, “Okay, we’ve got it. They’re all dead.” There were about eleven Japanese in this one particular spot. And they were dead, or presumably dead, in their foxholes. And we got up there and we relaxed, threw our gear off and everything, to have a blow, sort of business, just to relax. But one shot rang out, and one of the dead Japanese

16:30 shot a bloke from Stockton, in Newcastle here, stone dead, with one shot. He was an original member of the battalion. But the war was nearly over and that was the end of him. A dead Japanese shot him. Laying doggo in the foxhole, supposed to be dead, see, and when everyone relaxed he come to life and shot this bloke. And of course he was finished off very quickly.

17:00 But Noel Parkes, he received the….he would have got a VC [Victoria Cross] for that. But he got the next

best thing. A Distinguished Service Order, which is generally only given to colonels and that, when they carry out a successful operation from an administrative point of view. But it's also given to lesser ranks for bravery and that. Well, he was

17:30 probably one of the youngest men to received a Distinguished Service Order. Most junior officers, like captains and lieutenants, generally get a Military Cross, but he got a Distinguished Service Order. Noel, he was not a bad bloke. He finished up later a politician for the Tamworth area. Country Party politician. I don't like the Country Party, but I liked Noel, he was all right.

18:03 He was a good bloke Noel. He was very popular in Tamworth. I went to his funeral up there and the whole of Tamworth turned out. The schoolchildren were stopped for the day and everyone. He was that well respected. But he died of a cancer a few years back. Anyhow, that's that.

18:31 And eventually we got past these two…Dagua airstrip, was the strip I was thinking of, But, Dagua and Wewak. Now on Dagua airstrip there was quite a number of derelict planes and there was long since dead Japanese corpses. They must have been laying down dying anywhere. But some of them seemed to be better looked after. The way the

19:00 General Adachi run his operation there. But he was back in his headquarters, back down in the depths of the Sepik River Valley somewhere. So we moved on then towards the Wewak airstrip. And along there, there were a lot of different things that stick in your mind. Like, it wasn't only casualties by enemy action. For instance, one night between Dagua and Wewak airstrip,

19:30 we had a hard day moving along, and we stopped for the night. I went to sleep and it rained all night, laying in the rain there. I went into a deep sleep. Purse, he was a lieutenant, he shook me, he woke me up, he said, "Wake up, Carl." He said, "That tree just fell down alongside you." And I said, "Alongside of me?" "Yeah." And there was a tree about that round.

20:00 It fell on two men, killed one and broke another bloke's pelvis. And I had a bag with some morphia needles in it, and he said, "Give us those morphia needles, and we'll give you this bloke….I think his pelvis is broken." It fell across there. So we gave him a morphia needle, and I said, "Do you think that's the right thing to do?"

20:30 He said, "Yeah, the doctor said, 'Use one morphia needle, but don't give anybody more than one needle. Send them back to me.'" Well, it would have taken him a few hours to get back to our doctor. So we give him that. And I thought, the other bloke, he got killed by the tree that night. He had two children…He had a picture in his pocket

21:00 of his two kids. But he was killed by a bloody tree, in the rain. In the rainforest, trees might have been standing for a hundred years, and that particular night with the rain and that, they're ready to fall. And I know in Kokoda of a night you would hear trees falling, through the night.

How far away were you from the tree?

I'd be sleeping here and the tree fell across

21:30 there.

About five metres away?

Yeah, I never heard it. I was that tired.

And what happened next?

We got on with the show. We moved on towards Wewak. And Wewak airstrip when we come to that, there were wrecked planes on that, but down one end of Wewak airstrip there were hundreds of planes, all

22:00 pulled into a heap, and it was a Japanese aeroplane graveyard. Those that they couldn't use, and were buggered up, they would pull them out of the way, off the strip, into this corner of the field. And some of our blokes were digging around, trying to get souvenirs and everything, but I was a bit frightened to touch everything because it might have been booby-trapped,

22:30 with explosives or something. In the jungle and around the place, you would come across searchlights that were covered with vines. See, they had no ships into them for the last nearly two years. No supplies coming in. After the successes of Guadalcanal and that, their access to the

23:00 North New Guinea Coast was very restricted. And they got practically nothing in, but we had command of it. So everything was overgrown. There were hundreds of drums of high-octane fuel, covered with vines at the back of the Wewak airstrip. They had put there, two deep, two drums deep, hundreds of them. You could look at it, and it

23:30 just looked all green. All the vine had grown over the top in the eighteen months or two years it had been there, with the heavy rainfall. And there was a lot of Japanese dead around there. There were Japanese establishments built out of the bush timber and that. Shelters and that. And what appeared to be a hospital, with about ten skeletons laying in makeshift beds.

24:02 There was big holes in the ground with skeletons in it, like they had been thrown into it, or fell into it, or something or other. And of course, some of these areas appeared to have been strafed by aircraft. You could see on the wooden supports and everything of the shelters, where it looked like say twenty millimetre shells

24:30 from strafing aircraft had cut through the….probably strafed by our aircraft. There was a lot of activity around the Wewak area, in the earlier part of the war, against the Japanese air force, and the Japanese areas there. By our aircraft. It was a heavily contested area, around about the time the Kokoda Trail

25:00 was going on. Because they were on top then. There was quite a bit of activity over Wewak, But and Dagua airstrips, the three airstrips that were supporting the Japanese push across the Owen Stanley Ranges, and the attacks on Wau and Bulolo and Lae and Salamaua, all those places. And this was where they were operating from, the three airstrips

25:31 in the Wewak area. But anyhow, during one encounter there with the mortars, we were firing the mortars on a position and during the night I put on the company commander, "Why don't we fire a few bombs every two hours

26:00 during the night to harass them?" We were standing north of the position while we were working out an attack. So every couple of hours during the night, we'd fire a few bombs, to wake them up, keep them on edge. And you wouldn't want to know it, two Japanese come up, got into the position one night, got right up to the mortar, and

26:30 one of my men, a bloke called Harry Curley, was sitting at the bottom of the mortar. When you're in the infantry in these positions, it might be one third security or two thirds security, means that one third of the men would be away all night, or two thirds, or all the men would be awake all night, depending on what was happening. Of course, Harry's on duty,

27:00 and this Jap came right up to the mortar, and Harry shot him at point blank range, in the stomach, and the other Jap behind him sort of dragged him away. When dawn broke we found a hand grenade and a large plug of explosive dropped alongside the mortar. They were going to blow it up, it was annoying them. He dragged the body down the side of the hill,

27:30 and we followed the blood trail and we found the body. Just before dawn we heard a small shot, it seemed to be from a light firearm. And alongside the body was a twenty-five calibre pistol. Whether his mate had shot him, because he was bleeding so profusely from the stomach wound, and he was on the way out, anyhow, and he felt he couldn't help him any further.

28:00 Or whether he left the revolver there for him to shoot himself, I don't know. But the twenty-five calibre pistol was alongside of him. But this was one of the things that used to make life happy. But that was on one occasion. And then of course we had the other tragedy, when we did an attack on one of the positions,

28:30 and we were giving overhead fire from the mortar, and it was supposed to be a creeping barrage. You get trained in the Army to do certain jobs, but you take it for granted that the training sinks in. But the company commander that was leading the attack, taking the attack, moved off and we fired the first six rounds of the mortar,

29:01 six bombs would land in front of the troops as they were advancing forward, and then you were to lift the fire, so there was another lot of bombs in front of them, and they moved forward under the cover of this mortar fire. Until they get up to the enemy positions. This is the theory of it. Well, you've got to be aware of the Beaton Zone of the mortar bomb. That's a technical thing, that. It would be

29:30 too long to explain that, and you've got to be aware of the explosive force of the bomb, which can cause casualties a hundred yards from the point of impact. Possible to cause casualties, bits and pieces flying. And, of course, this company commander advanced too far and he and another man were killed, and a couple wounded. By our own mortar fire.

30:00 **How did that affect you?**

Well, I didn't like it very much at all. The trouble is, you often wonder why….you should have got onto the company commander and made him understand the position a bit more than what he did. But you took it for granted, he was a captain, and he knew what the score is. But he moved

30:30 too fast

Was that the only time that that happened to you?

It has happened a lot in warfare, but on this occasion was the only time it happened with us. But as things went on, we heard about the fall of Berlin from the radio that some of the men on the beach, in lesser

31:00 dangerous positions, who were coming up behind us. These fortunate people in the army who knew the better life than an infantry man. Berlin was about to fall, and the European war was over. And then later on, of course, we heard the story that the Bomb had been dropped. And we didn't believe it. One bomb

could wipe out a city. A lot of crap, we

31:30 didn't believe that. But then we heard a second city had been wiped out, and we started to take a bit more notice. And it turned out to be true. And then word come through that the Emperor had ordered them to surrender. So we were still in contact with the enemy, and we had some English speaking Japanese,

32:02 of American origin, who came up and painted signs and they were put out in front of us by patrols to sort of warn the Japanese that the Emperor had told them to surrender, all this business. Of course, that didn't happen straight away, and we were still keeping guard of a night, just as if the war was still on.

32:33 The unfortunate part of the whole experience that got me, on this particular occasion, I talked to a bloke, a chap called….I better not mention his name. He was put down as killed by enemy action, which we did with everybody.

33:01 In his platoon, he was a corporal, and someone sang out, "Hey, it's your turn to go on tonight. You're first on." It was just starting to get dark. And he says, "Righto, I'm coming." And he put his hand down, and by this time we were using Owen submachine guns. And quite candidly, I didn't like them at all. They were good, they worked all right, but they were very touchy, and very dangerous.

33:33 He grabbed the gun by the muzzle and pulled it out from under his blanket, from this little bit of doover shelter that he had made. He pulled it out by the muzzle, which is something you really shouldn't do, and he definitely should have known that. And of course, we all knew these things and didn't do the right thing every time. Well, the thing went off, and he said, "I've

34:00 shot myself." And he stood there for a while, then he collapsed. I sang out "Make a stretcher!" You usually make a stretcher by cutting stuff out of the scrub and sticking it through someone's shirt sleeves, and another one on the bottom, sort of business, and you can make a sort of a stretcher to carry people. Well, another bloke that was with me,

34:30 says, "Oh, too late. He's dead." And that's the words he spoke. "I shot myself." The bullet went in just near his left nipple, but this time it didn't go round any ribs, it went straight through him. And the war was over.

How did you feel once the war was over?

Well, I felt a bit relieved when I knew it was over.

35:00 But after that happened, I thought 'How lucky can you be?' Not long after that, word came through that the Japanese were surrendering and they were coming in. Everyone had a point score, of so much, like on their years of service, dependence, whether you had children and that sort of business,

35:33 could go home on the ship Katoomba that was pulling into Wewak on such and such a date. And of course I volunteered for that, naturally. And of course, just before we went they said, "Are you sure you wouldn't like to take part in the occupation troops for Japan?" I said, "No way, I want to go home."

36:00 And of course, most of us in my category did do that. And I had the option, they could have went to Japan. "Oh, you'll get promotion. You'll get this, that and the other." They were on about promotion. Well, I'd had enough, finished. So I got on the Katoomba and we had a very pleasant trip, the weather was good. Already on the Katoomba was a heap of fresh troops, just fresh from Australia, on their way Bougainville and Rabaul.

36:31 But there was room for us. We went aboard. And one of our old commanding officers of the Kokoda campaign, Colonel Edgar was there, now a brigadier, taking troops to Rabaul, to occupy Rabaul, and also to supervise some other troops getting off in Bougainville to do the same. So we had his company on the way over.

37:03 The weather was pleasant, the food was fairly good, and we stopped at Bougainville, discharged troops, then we went onto Rabaul and we sailed through the Rabaul Harbour, past the rocks that come up out of the Harbour in 1936, in the big earthquake. Two big rocks are supposed to have come up, they were sticking up out of the Harbour. On one side was the volcano Vulcan, an active volcano.

37:30 It was still smoking, and all the yellow sulphur and that was running down the sides. And Rabaul Harbour was a sight there, a nice big wide harbour with a lot of wrecked ships, Japanese ships that had been wrecked there. And we anchored there while they discharged the troops and we said goodbye to Edgar. Then we sailed back to Townsville, then from Townsville down to Brisbane, then home for three weeks leave,

38:00 and come back and be discharged. So that was the end of my war. How's that?

Absolutely incredible. Carl, I feel like we've been on an incredible journey with you. We've almost done eleven tapes and I feel like we could have possibly done a couple more, had time permitted.

There's a lot more I haven't told.

And also

38:32 **exploring how it was for you back home. We've only got about three, four minutes left….I'm just wondering what it was like for you to settle back down into Australia.**

It was fairly difficult. I was discharged on the 11th of October, 1945, and I went to work at the end of November, on the Newcastle waterfront.

39:04 But, mixing with people and that.…I don't know, the older people seemed to be so ignorant of world affairs. In my youthful naivety I might have thought that, but they seemed to be….except my father who had been in the First World War, he seemed to

39:30 have a bit of nous. But everyone else was….and of course, the war was over. We got home late, so all the excitement of the war ending and that, we got none of that sort of business. Then you settle down to civvy life. Some people resented you and some….like it was a fairly mixed thing. So what you did most of the time, of a weekend, or when you were

40:00 free, you sought the mates you were in the army with.

Understandably.

They could talk the same language. That was the way you felt. If you tried to tell people about anything, you were a know-all, or some other bloody thing, so you shut up and you never said anything much. Not for years. Until later on, when the battalion

40:30 reunions and everything, you got together. And it was only in recent years the country considered that all this experience had a bit of importance. I've only just come out with this in recent years. But, I've always known step by step what it was all about.

Well, Carl it was very important, and I guess that's why Graham [interviewer] and I are here today, but

41:00 **we are at the end of the tape. And although we would like to go on further, I feel like we should finish it here. So on behalf of Graham and myself and on behalf of the Australian War Archive, I'd like to thank you so much for this epic, incredible journey that you've taken us on today. It has been absolutely incredible. And your honesty and your storytelling has been a real privilege. Thank you.**

Thanks very much. I didn't think there was that much important. I hope it's been some help anyhow to what you are doing.

It has been. Thank you.