

Australians at War Film Archive

Frank Reiter (Blue) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **All righty. Okay Blue, we'll make a start now. If you could just give us a bit of an introduction to your life story?**

Where I was born, etcetera?

Yeah, starting with where you grew up and where you were born?

Right. I was born in the 10th of March 1918 in a small town down near Wilsons Promontory called Meeniyah. My father was a grocer by trade but a bushie at heart.

01:00 I went to school for eight years and went to six different schools. We were always on the move. After schooling, I left school at thirteen and went out and the first jobs I had was milking cows on dairy farms for ten shillings a week and keep but after twelve months of that I found there was more work money made in contract work digging potatoes, blowin' stumps, splittin' posts and all that.

01:30 You were dealing with older men and the harder you worked the more money you made and after that I done contract work right up until then joined the army in the war in '39. I had when I joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] in '39 I had three years with a militia battalion, the 22nd 29th in Victoria. Will that do?

That's a great start.

Yeah, yeah good.

Um so ah going through your enlistment and

02:00 **just sort of introduce us to your service history.**

Well in enlistment I was first sent to the 2nd 5th Battalion. I only lasted there a couple a months because the 2IC [Second in Command] was a company 2IC was a school teacher and the company commander went in an advance party overseas and he treated us all like we were still school kids and after working with men for the se previous eight years of me life I just couldn't tolerate

02:30 him so, I was a sergeant then, I reverted to the ranks and transferred to the 2nd 7th Battalion, I went with them as a troop deck sergeant going to the Middle East in April 1940. Went to the Middle East. We landed, we thought we were going to Eng... to Europe instead of the Middle East. We landed at El Kantara up the Suez Canal, put in cattle trucks and then up to the desert in Palestine on and we got out of the trucks at about two o'clock in the

03:00 morning. We woke up next morning, all we could see was bare barren hills, not a tree of anything and I always remember the funny part about it was one bloke woke up and he said, "If this is the land where Christ was born I wish to Christ I was in the land where I was born," and we had a quite a few months there, about six months there, and then moved to ah Egypt. Well on the movement I was left behind with my platoon sergeant

03:30 as to fill in all the old tents were all dug in four foot deep. Well we had a good time, because before that the canteen caught fire and everybody else went to rescue and all they were interested in rescuing was the beer supply, but a lot was still buried in the ground. Well we done quite well cause we were takin' the empty bottles into Tel Aviv and sellin' 'em and we found a lot of full ones too. After a fortnight of that then we joined

04:00 the unit down at a place called Helwan, just outta Cairo. Ah there we learnt patrolling and all everything like that and we come very good on patrols because next door to us was... King Farouk had a beautiful orchard and you had to beat the Egyptian guards and that, rattin' his orchard, you become quite good. Quite a few months there and then we went up to just out of Alexandria for another month's training

- 04:30 at Amiriya and from Amiriya then it was up for the first desert campaign, which we went through took two ah Bardia, Tobruk and I always remember from Tobruk we done an encycling, encircling thing of the Italians. We done a hundred and three mile in seventy two hours, three attacks and every time we went to attack the Italians they withdrew then we went through
- 05:00 to Barce where it was the first time anywhere we come across irrigated land and the Italian settlements. Well after a week there, I can always remember, Mackay the general come and visited us. Well after all the wine supply there the two the two ah guards were swaying, so he sent us away through and we went two hundred mile the other side of Benghazi right out in the desert and
- 05:30 that was as far as we went. We ran out of you know mechanic and not enough mum numbers to keep on going or we could have gone to Tripoli if we'd had the numbers and the back leg support. Well it was there then we first come across the Germans and ran into Germans and the bombing and all that. That was where we had the started. After a month there we withdrew back to Amiriya and to ready to go to Greece but when we got
- 06:00 back to Amiriya everybody after three months in action no and plenty of pay they were all going AWL [Absent Without Leave] into Alexandria. Well I only ever had one of my platoon, I was a sergeant in charge of the platoon for the whole of the campaign and I only ever charged one man with being AWL because the company commander wanted him. Well the reason why they'd have hundreds of men on pack drill parades every night and the reason why none of my platoon
- 06:30 were ever charged, as I said I was a troop deck sergeant goin' to the Middle East on the Strathaird and on there I become very friendly on my deck with the 6th div provost [Provosts - Military Police] officer and sergeants so we used to take the my platoon and go in to the provost headquarters AWL in Alex and write out leave passes and we were quite safe. That was how we got away with it. So then we went to Greece. Well like as that poem once said, three weeks it took us gettin' there and we halved it
- 07:00 gettin' out. We got up as far as Larisa and the bombing and then from then on we knew what how bad the you know the German bombing. You hardly seen a British or Allied plane at all and bombed back. Ah on the way back at ah Lamir Pass doin' a rear guard there I went out on a patrol and when I came back the battalion had withdrawn but
- 07:30 two blokes in the 2nd 1st Machine Gun unit had stayed behind because I knew them in peace time, for letting me know, and their officer stayed behind, a bloke by the name of Dick Sampson, who was later in the 51st Battalion to become Metty McInnes, our 2IC. It was just you know one of the coincidences that you met up with. From there it was at that pass on there I first got sorta partly wounded. Lost part a the sight of one eye
- 08:00 and part of me hearing. Well I never had any trouble getting out through any medical exam after that because when I got back to Palestine later on a medical exam the ah RAP [Regimental Aid Post] sergeant give me the chart to learn off by heart, so I was able to pass me med [medical], loss of eyesight but I was still able to pass it then after three weeks in Crete we got back. Going back from Greece
- 08:30 to Crete on the Costa Rica, a Dutch ship, we got sunk. Ah bomb come and land on the back and makin' water and as I say you see part of the funny things that happen and everybody's dead serious. We're just jumpin' onto the British destroyers, carryin' our rifle and what we could and I always remember there was an Indian jumped over, boostin' a tin hat out and he's yellin' out, "Help, help.
- 09:00 I can't swim," and one bloke yelled out, "Pull your flamin' finger out and scuttle yourself," and I'm bein' polite. That there and with that that broke the ice and everybody just roared laughin'. It was really amusing in wartime how the number of times when the situation was serious how somebody'd come up with a wisecrack like that and broke the ice and everybody laughed. Any rate we landed in instead of gettin' back to Egypt we were dumped in
- 09:30 the wharf at Suda Bay in Crete. All we had was the clothes we stood in and we stayed there in the Mediterranean and that more or less round the Equator it never gets cold. I'll tell you what, it's like we found in the western desert and in Greece and Crete. It can get cold and we got nothing. We're just laying out and then somebody remembered we had seen piles of blankets on the wharf. So I took ten of me platoon and if you want a
- 10:00 hard job, we had plenty of practice as I say raiding Farouk's orchard in Egypt of gettin' past Pommy [English] MPs [Military Police] and our own guards to carry a bale of six hundred blankets. Next day we distributed them all round the battalion. I was never asked where they came from cause everybody was pleased to have a blanket. We had about a week's nice quiet there at a place on Georgiopoulos cause we were expectin' a sea invasion, which Mountbatten with his ships
- 10:30 stopped and then it become an air invasion on the Georgiopoulos beach. From then we were take the major the invasion started and we could see all them piling out even though to the east and onto Maleme up at the at the west dromes. I can always remember one day seein' three hundred and ninety six planes above us. Bombers, fighters, troop carriers and anything like that, and the amount a
- 11:00 times you seen a guy just pulling in and carryin' troops and not a bloke jumped out of them because everybody just firin' at them and they were all killed in the craft. Well we got half way up to the Maleme aerodrome to help the New Zealanders out and they were all withdrawing back and any rate I was sent out on a patrol and found if you strike the Germans, start firing the battalion'll come out and help ya.

Well we got

- 11:30 into a food dump, food had been rationed then, we were startin' to eat and somebody spotted Germans the other end. So then it was on for young and old. We had a Maori battalion on our flank and they happened it was a full scale bayonet charge. We chased the Germans back for a mile and a half and I always remember the beginning of that attack. I had ten men on the patrol with me, five of us were hit through the tin hat. I still have the scar on me head today and there was only one
- 12:00 of us killed and always another thing about there Reg Saunders, who become the first Abo [Aboriginal] officer in the Australian army, he got hit in the front of the tin hat and it blew the top out of the hat, he never got a mark on him, and I went and pulled him over lookin' at him, he was half knocked out, so I used to tell Reg after that I said, "It mighta scared hell outta, you didn't go white," I said, "But by Christ you were a light shade of grey," that there and further on, then we withdrew back. I stayed with the
- 12:30 platoon. It was only just a bloke bandaged put a field dressing on me head and I stayed then and then from then on it was retreat all the way back over the mountains and everything to Sfakia where we done the rear guard and we were the fourth platoon on the road. Cause I remember once ten ah motor bikes with side cars and machine guns come down the road. Well there was a cliff one side and a three hundred foot drop
- 13:00 the other and they never got any further than our than us. They all wipe wiped the lot out and they went over the side and everything. Well we hung out there and then we were told to withdraw, we were goin' off that night but when we got back to the beach there was thirty men got off and then we were told the navy wasn't comin' back, "You're all the island capitulated. You're all prisoners of war." We'd done the job, we got left behind like a shag on a rock and that was to change me life
- 13:30 and me outlook to all higher the ranks and everything like that from thereafter for the rest of me life. Well any rate we were all gettin' rounded up goin' to prisoner of war camp and I said, "Behind barb wire to me is only for cattle. I'm goin'," and nine of me platoon we had we were down from thirty men we went to Greece with ah we were down to nineteen men. I was except for a fortnight I was a sergeant
- 14:00 in charge of platoon commander through the whole campaign. Well of the nine of us that escaped seven of us were eventually to get back to Australia over the next ten months. Ah I was got back in six months and we just wandered the islands. We first of all we started annoying the Germans and then we found out we had to give that away because they were takin' it out on the Cretian population. They'd raid villages. I seen a village surrounded and burnt down
- 14:30 and all the blokes shot you know. The way they treated the they took it out on the civilian citizens so it was just a leave 'em alone and at least the Cretians were still with you but if we annoyed the Germans they took it out on the Crets. Ah I remember once one of our blokes was badly wounded and we just took him, left him on the outside of a village and a course then a German patrol found him next day and he was treated all right but we'd gone in, there was only two of them recaptured.
- 15:00 After what helped a bit by British intelligence put us onto where we could pick up a boat and I got a boat and there was about seventy of us on the boat then set off to go back to Egypt. We had a German a captured German flag with us and next morning a Messerschmitt come and it was blitizin' us and we ran the German flag up and all the blokes, except for a few fishing,
- 15:30 all hid under nets or down below decks so that it only looked like a number of fisherman. He buzzed us for about ten minutes and then left us. Two days later we were directed by a British submarine surfaced and found us and directed then to Alexandria. When we got back to Alex we had ah a couple a weeks in a British jail because ah we were being debriefed and we found out the reason why we were put in jail was
- 16:00 two months after the surrender we were all lined up one day, the British submarines were comin' in gettin' escaped prisoners of war but some bloke had got back, got on the grog in Alexandria and told how he got off and, the Gypos [Egyptians] being pro-German that meant it was sent back to the German ear and of course we were all ready to get off that night and seven of the nine of us escaped again, the other two were captured,
- 16:30 and that was the reason why we done the jail sentence. Well it wasn't then till we got back then it was say Christmas 1941 that we found that the Japanese were in the war. We never knew a thing about it, had been in for quite awhile. Well from then on ah we were back in the training battalion in Palestine and the battalion had been up in Syria. We withdrew 'em back and we rejoined the battalion. Ah went back to the old platoon
- 17:00 and ah then from then on it was back then to Ceylon, which is now Sri Lanka. We had a couple a months there cause they thought the Japs would try to take the islands to get round Ceylon and after a few months there or most of the time was spent in hospital gettin' plastic surgery and operations done from what had happened in Crete. Oh what I shoulda said was when I was doin' the rear guard in Crete I was wounded again the
- 17:30 second time with bombing and that and there was you couldn't dig in. You were all behind rocks

Actually sorry, can I just stop you there for a moment Blue. Sorry Blue you were telling us about your second wound.

Anyway ah digressing a bit in Crete in the rear guard

Yeah.

I got wounded again the second time because we couldn't dig in and we just had rocks put up and from our front end we were guardin' the road and a bomb dropped and I don't know whether it was the shrapnel or a piece of rock cut through

- 18:00 my boot on the right foot and broke two toes. That ah there and as ah and then I can always remember another bloke got hit through the arm. Never broke a bone, and I bandaged him up. He was a bloke always good at action stayed with us, he was a bit nervous and I can remember tears bowling down his face and I said, "What the hell are you crying for?" He said, "Look sarge," he said, "I'm cryin' for joy, not because it's hurtin', cause," he said, "when
- 18:30 I go back to Australia I'll be wearin' a wound stripe," he said, "and I'm buggered if I'm ever comin' back to a forward unit again." And I will say this for that bloke, when he got back all us blokes were taken prisoner of war and he contacted all our families, he wrote to all our families and told where we'd seen them where he'd seen us the last of us and I always remember another thing about after we escaped at Crete. When I returned to Australia I struck the local paper at a place called Korumburra in
- 19:00 ah Victoria, where I joined up, and he said he seen me elder brother, he was the only one of five of us were in the army of our family or at least four out of the five of the males were in the in the army and he said, there's tears runnin' down his face. He said and I said to him, "What Keith has Blue, you got news of Blue? Has he bought it?" he said, "No I just got a telegram to say he's back safely," that there he said, he cried but I remember this bloke cryin' you know. He done that and I always admired him for it and yet
- 19:30 I was never ever to see that bloke again in me life time. It was just you know some of the coincidences happen. Well do you know digressing a bit for that was me daughter was nur... One of my daughter's was a nursing sister and she was to nurse him in hospital in her twenties you know and then sort of caught up with his history again, but we were never to meet. We just you know some of the coincidences happened. Ah from then we went to Milne Bay
- 20:00 and I'll never forget a funny thing happened. When we got back to Australia we had one bloke with another redhead, Blue Hadham, was in my platoon and when we got back to Newcastle up there I had to go to court. His mother wouldn't sign, he was under age and he was listed under age and he enlisted in her maiden name and we had to go to court to get him changed back to his real name. Well any rate
- 20:30 that same bloke, when we got up to Brisbane and we were at Eagle Farm racecourse, camped in the grandstands and everything, and one morning about three o'clock in the morning I got woke up and he said, "Sarge come on. You gotta get Blue into hospital. He's fallen down the steps and broke his arm," which we did, got him in and the funny incident was later on, years after the war, one of his mates saying about it I said, "He never broke his ruddy arm fallin' down the grandstand. He
- 21:00 broke it in a fight with the Yanks in Brisbane." They said, "How did you know?" I said, "I was AWL too. I was comin' down the street and seen you blokes and I cross crossed the street before you seen me." Otherwise if he'd a been fined AWL he'd a had to pay all his own expenses and everything. It was no skin off my nose. Well any rate then we got from there we were sent to Milne Bay. We just got to the end of the Milne Bay show and there we come against the bombs again with the Japs comin' over every night bombin' us
- 21:30 the hide there and we were unloadin' ah boats and cargo and that and I always remember two things about it. One thing that I had a bit of a ha down on the wharfies ever since. While we were there and the whole place was still in danger the wharfies went on strike in Australia for a quid a week dirt money and they were gettin' danger money, they were gettin' more money as danger money and dirt money than we were gettin' as front line soldiers and I was always crooked on them after that. The ah and
- 22:00 the other thing about it was one night we'd been unloadin' petrol we were gettin' a lift back to camp and a bloke, you could smell the petrol and that we were sit ridin' on the truck, and a bloke struck a match to light a cigarette. Well you never seen so many blokes evacuate a truck so quick. That bloke we were tellin' him his past history. He never ever had lit a cigarette again. Any rate there one day called into the CO's [Commanding Officer's] tent, fourteen of us sergeants from Middle East
- 22:30 experience and told we were commissioned officers and half of us were to be posted to the militia battalions in Australia. Well I was promoted to a lieu and sent to the 51st Battalion far north Queensland unit. Well when I got it we were known as AIF bastards and a course then they used to call the militia 'Chockos' [chocolate soldiers - militia] and to me then I was to learn with that unit there's no such thing as a bad soldier, there's only bad
- 23:00 officers and NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers]. They're only as good as you train them. As you train them so will you fight. That was always drummed into us and those blokes were just as good as any AIF units. It was like when we joined in '39 all us young blokes said, "You'll never be as good as the 1st AIF." Our attitude was, "If those old bastards could do it, so could we," and we did do it and I still have faith today, the younger generation you see bushfires and things like that how the younger generation today still come

- 23:30 through and their attitude'll be, "If those old b's done it," which I am now one of them, "We'll do the same." That there. Well from there we trained with them and the thing that horrified me was when I got back there that the whole a north Queensland from Townsville north with the Japs in the war there was one only one under strength militia brigade to defend the whole of the North of Australia. That rather you know rocked us until they moved in
- 24:00 the AIF. Well after training with them for about six months and training them up and gettin' them sorted out we were then sent up to Merauke in Dutch New Guinea. There only part of the battalion come into action. They land in river against the Japanese. After that we came back to Australia. Oh well I was wounded again in it was through mortar fire from our own blokes on an exercise. I were wounded in the neck and in the groin, again. Came
- 24:30 back to Australia. We had three weeks oh I had a fortnight's leave in Australia and then were sent to Bougainville. We were sending up to take over from the Japs the Yanks in Bougainville. Well at that time Torokina was, the Yanks had just had a base and they sat there and Savage the general was you know, "Go out and keep them active." Well see a thing was with the blokes, the Yanks, a lot of them goin' mad and and
- 25:00 ah commitin' suicide and things like sittin' in the base. You're better to be doing something than nothing. Nobody had casualties but just before going back to Australia I done a school down at Beenleigh and was made a liaison officer with the brigade. Well in ah from that ah I didn't like the job and what have you and it lasted for three months but in
- 25:30 it I learnt a lot this way. I had a different appreciation of battalion commanders. They had a lonely job. They couldn't consult anybody higher up because they'd wonder how good they were. If they consulted with anyone lower down they'd think, "Oh they didn't know what they were talkin' about the CO was," and I found that when possible I used to get a bottle a grog, whisky, rum or anything, and take it up and have it with the CO and we'd sit down at night, drink a bottle of it and have a yarn and one day
- 26:00 I said to brigadier, "What I'm doing is front line service with the whole three battalions and I'm only supposed to be doin' me own battalion. Why?" He said, "Look Blue when you go up," he said, "you got the front line and you see what's goin' on and you tell me what's goin' on." He said, "The others only tell me what they're told to tell me," he said he said, "and I know a lot of the things you hear you don't tell me." Cause I found out with the COs a lot of things and I was to remain friends with all those COs for life and
- 26:30 from then we went up to the central sector. Well on the they sent me out on the on the northern flank. They'd had a battalion a Yanks there, it was relieved by a company of Australians and they thought, "Oh well bloody Blue, he's had a bludge for three months, we're gonna send him up with his platoon," and they sent me up with forty blokes plus a half a platoon of Papua New Guinea infantry on there and we got
- 27:00 the majority of ah the Japs then ah then happened the rest of the battalion got on the other central section, the southern flank, and I always remember that there one thing about it once. We got on this there and they couldn't get make any advance, the Yanks couldn't make it there and we got in amongst them one morning, shootin' 'em all up and gettin' 'em pretty hot so we decided to withdraw
- 27:30 and I remember that as I was saying before this bloke got wounded, he's groanin' and moanin' and the RAP bloke give him an injection. He's still goin' and I said, "Give him another one." He said, "No I can't." I said, "It'll kill him." I said, "Give it to me and I'll give it to him if we don't kill him it'll kill one of our blokes get one of our blokes killed." Well he came to back in Greenslopes in Brisbane. He's still alive today. Ah any rate I said, "Oh we'll go round the there." Well it took us three hours to get round the back of them
- 28:00 and we found out then why they couldn't take the ridge, because every time shelling or bombing happened they just jumped over the cliff. About a hundred foot down was all caves and they got into the caves and as soon as they fired they got back up. Any rate I said to the blokes, "Open fire and we'll blitz you do 'em over," and a trench mortarman said, "Ah how far sir?" "Oh," I said, "Three hundred yards, low trajectory"
- 28:30 because the mortars had a high traj... low trajectory. Well a bomb and this one went straight into a cave and the blast at the back with the thing out came Japs, tables, coppers and everything and I suddenly realised there wasn't a shot bein' fired. The whole of the platoon was just layin' on their bellies laughin', thought it was all funny, the Japs comin' and all that two hundred foot down a cliff. We developed a weird sense of humour and after
- 29:00 that the Japanese withdrew off the ridge and they called it the they nicknamed the ridge then 'Reiter's Ridge' after me. Ah from there on oh we done done there we withdrawn back, had a week's L [Leave] and then we were sent up to the doin' up there at north Bougainville. Well the most thing of the North Bougainville was the Porton plantation. We went in with a hundred and eighty
- 29:30 blokes and came out and the company commander was killed, the 2IC was wounded, the 2IC was Blue Shulton from the 2nd 5th and he was wounded, he had five bullets through the arm, and I bandaged him up and he said like the bloke did in Crete, he said, "When I get back to Australia," he said, "It's the last time I'm comin' back to the ruddy islands," and ah but they patched him up at the local hospital and he

came back. Any rate I got the thing to pick the remnants up and when I was reforming

- 30:00 the unit again I had started all with twenty nine men. That was all that was standin' on their feet out of the hundred and eighty nine that went in. That there and ah so after that and well the highlight then after that was one night we were gettin' ready to go down south. We knew we were goin' down south and Blue Shulton, an experienced bloke, and Bluey Ainslie company, we were gonna be the first companies in, and workin' up commander's battalion commander's conference
- 30:30 and I said to sar major [Sergeant Major], "Wake all the blokes up and tell 'em gettin' ready to move," cause I thought we were goin' to action again. When we got over the battalion commander told us the war was over. Well as far as I'm concerned these people were all down to big bombs and all that. After six years in the infantry, as far as I was concerned they never dropped enough of them and they never dropped 'em soon enough, and I've never changed me mind since. Well then we decided to drink everything we to possibly
- 31:00 could and I always remember another funny thing over at he later become minister of defence under Menzies, he was the mountain battery officer and of course he fired all his ammunition off cause he said otherwise it had to be carted back but the only trouble was we had to rush ammunition up again cause we knew the war was over but the Japs didn't and that that was all you know another laugh. Well then through after Porton the 2IC, Dick Sampson, that I told you I met in Greece
- 31:30 and they were puttin' report reports about Porton and as we were thirty nine of us and the war was over, all the others were sent back to Australia for immediate discharge but because we wouldn't rewrite our reports in favour of brigade we were sent up to take the Japanese off Osharuwa Islands. Well in a way it was done as a bit there cause we had three months goin' takin' 'em off and although we were probably part troppo,
- 32:00 but after three months drinking and that and a rest well we only come back part troppo and we didn't land back in Australia again and then more plastic surgery tryin' to improve me looks, which was a failure, they ah then I was discharged in the 6th of February '46. After the war

Excuse me, just hold on.

Okay Blue, so you were discharged and...

- 32:30 After discharge

Yeah.

Ah well I was going to stay on in the army but then with the at the end with the amount of people that'd been Australian-based and they're tryna get in for their six months overseas service to get repat benefits and a lot of them pullin' rank and things like that I knew without any experience and with the amount of fights I had I decided to give it away. So then I came back, discharged. I

- 33:00 then put in for a farm under repat [Repatriation] scheme and then went dairy farming down there. In the 1960s was to get the champion dairy farmer of Victoria. After farming, we done quite successfully at it, and only two daughters. I married an army nurse. We decided, they'd grown up and they were nursing, we decided
- 33:30 to go on our hobby, which was chasin' gemstones and we went then chasing opals up in western New South Wales. We left to come do, come round Australia and we were goin' up the opal fields in Queensland, couldn't get there for the floods, so we went back to the sapphire fields. We were first in the sapphire fields in 1950 and I always remember with wife saying to a bloke we said, "You shoulda stayed here today mate, you'd have been a millionaire," and I said, "Yeah with my luck
- 34:00 I'd been in the old people's home in Nambour with the backside outta me pants," and the wife always used to say, "The reason we stopped here," she said, "After three weeks with Blue at a reunion in Cairns with his mates," she said, "I was sufferin' from alcoholic remorse and shell shock and I had to have a rest before I could drive home," and then we done that until the wife passed away at seventy nine and I went back for quite a few years and when I was nearly eighty I felt I'd had it, so one day I just threw the
- 34:30 jack hammer down and said, "That's it," and sold the lot and ah came back to Nambour, which was our had been our home. We'd bought a home here and ah and you know been here since.

Well

See you know time caught up with me but we had a lot of good time... you know had a lotta good times up there.

That's wonderful, Blue.

Yeah.

Fantastic.

Tape 2

- 00:30 **So Blue can you tell us about your family life and what was your thoughts with four out of five men signing up?**
- Oh well actually I was the first one to sign up and then there was a brother after me. Father signed up and the younger brother, he joined the air force at sixteen and a half and the war was over before he got into action. The father
- 01:00 got knocked around a bit with the bombing in Darwin and he died in '45, partly through the bombing and that, in Melbourne and the other brother, he was an RAP sergeant in the 29th Battalion and he went through okay. No, it didn't the only thing about others in there in the army or in the services the elder brother could claim a younger one to go into the same unit
- 01:30 and I was definitely against it. In the Middle East we had four brothers in 11th Platoon and as soon as any bombing or any action was over, they were Poms, and you could hear 'em yellin' out, "Are you all right Albert? Are you all right Joe?" and after that I swore I'd never have brothers if possible I'd never have brothers together in my platoon
- 02:00 and for the rest of the war I never had it. Only once, different ones'd want it there and I'd tell 'em you know how I seen and I only ever had one bloke went and there because the number of times together in the same unit, the brothers were killed but when you're different a unit the chances are one a youse'd survive and but you know it never worried me as my attitude was you know
- 02:30 just you know your luck runs out, your luck runs out. Go on. Is it
- Maybe the brothers wanted to be together so if one of them got hit...**
- Hit the others'd look after him, yeah.
- The other one would look after him.**
- Yeah and I can always remember this. There was nothing more depressing and it wasn't only me, but the amount of blokes you know they'd be yellin' out for one another and the amount a times you'd hear blokes yellin' out, "For Christ's sake shut up." You know they didn't
- 03:00 want to hear it. Like it was it had... it was affecting the morale of the others.
- What was the feeling in the town about the war breaking out?**
- Ah well when it was there was no great feeling about it, like the first thing in the town was said a lot of us, "You won't be as good as the 1st AIF," and things like that. In the very early days with the war just in England and Europe, you know until we went
- 03:30 overseas, nobody thought you know great thing much of us and it wasn't really until Japan came into the war that a lot of the civilian population their opinions changed and one thing that always got me about it, during wartime, we come home on leave we were all heroes but when the war ended we came home, all they were were scared we might take their jobs. The way
- 04:00 the attitude completely changed and as I say, like goin' later on and the way the attitude was to the blokes that served in Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam, and a lot of people's attitudes towards them. As far as I'm concerned they still had to do a job, and ex-service man I had one bloke just recently at an RSL [Returned and Services League] meeting. He said, "I was only an ambulance driver in Vietnam." I shook him by the hands and I said, "Thank God for that mate." I said, "If it hadn't
- 04:30 been for an ambulance driver once I wouldn't be here today," and it's but it's just the way people's attitude changed.
- Mm. Now you'd been in the militia Blue for about three years before you enlisted.**
- Three years before the war.
- And what got you interested in the army?**
- I don't know. It was just one of those things you know that happened and too oh part of it I think was it was something else to do and you got away for a couple a weeks in camp with other blokes every once every year and other
- 05:00 different weekend camps here and there and you know you got used to well havin' a say working in the bush, mixing with people and as I found, one of the greatest education in wartime was and in the army was mixing with people from all walks a life. You thought pre-war and things that happened you had a pretty tough time but then when you found out what the way a lot of other people you found you actually had a good time and it was just mixing with people from all walks a life
- 05:30 and the other thing I learnt was to never judge a man by what he had, it's his character and what he'll do and the thing is, the friends you made in wartime still remain friends for life. Sixty years down the track, but people today in peace time as I say you wouldn't want one hand to count your but friends. If

you win the lotto or somethin' like that they'll say, "Ooh he's a friend a mine," there, but you go broke, how many people could

06:00 you go and ask for a few thousand dollars to get on your feet again? They don't want to know you. As I always expected after the war that there'd be blokes carryin' their swag'd come and visit me at Meeniyah and I tell ya if they'd a come and visit me carryin' a swag they'd a just been as welcome as anyone and I found mixing with people in the job I done in wartime, it was not the decoration that they got but when you had after the war when peoples from privates

06:30 to generals come and visit you on that farm and stayed with you and that was when I realised, "Well I mustn't a done a bad job after all." You know it made you and they things they talked about.

Can you tell us if your family were affected with the Depression?

Ah in the Depression we were workin' out in the bush. We were father was managin' a big sheep property and then we went share farming and dairying but back in those days,

07:00 in the Depression, all farms had an orchard. This was back in the horse transport, and everybody had a garden and you had your own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. You had your own milk so we had half the you know we had meat and vegetables and that laid on whereas today in you know at the turn of the century with all the depression and that's goin' on today you hardly see a person with a garden. Now close to here, we have a professional

07:30 I call him a professional unemployed. He wouldn't work in an iron lung but he hasn't got a garden expects you but the only people round here that a got gardens are people of my generation. They've still got a bit of garden and even today, as I say mid-eighties, the only thing I don't grow here meself is potatoes and onions because I haven't got enough room, but all me other veggies I grow and it was just you know you looked after it. For instance here in Nambour I could still have six

08:00 WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in my back yard but no rooster, because the crowing but you know I just you know not interested but you know out on those farm and in those days your own garden and that you know and that you grew your own vegetables and the fruit.

Can you remember where you were then the war broke out?

I was. War broke out I was working at a place at to in a district called Leongatha

08:30 in the Shire of Korumburra in south Gippsland, Victoria, and plus actually I was out you know doing potato digging and like that and that was where you know the joined up that there and I found like in those days working too as I say for awhile after I left school it was ten shillings a day and your keep, but then I found out go and do contract work. The harder you work the more money you made

09:00 and it was the difference in the way a bosses I always found bosses were like army officers, good bad and indifferent. You always strode some smart bloke. Well I think I don't know whether I should tell you this story or not but one bloke once we're diggin' potatoes for him a shilling a bag, thirteen bags to the ton, and we were making we were getting our brother and I digging twenty bags a day, a pound a day. Well that was big money in those days in the thirties, you know we were only about sixteen

09:30 and we asked him for an extra penny a bag for next year and he said, "I'll think about it." We asked him, "I haven't made up my mind yet," and when he paid us up at the finish he only paid a shilling a bag, which is about one he said, "I didn't say whether definitely I was gonna pay you or not." Well we thought, "Smart bastard, we'll fix you." Next year we went back and the next paddock to where we had the potatoes he had a crop a pumpkins. Well if you put one pumpkin in the middle of a spud bag, you get a good tally.

10:00 Funny thing was, we were never asked back to dig for him again and after the war I was to meet him again and he said, "I suppose," he said, "I might as well talk to you again." He said, "That was a smart thing you blokes you and your brother done to us," and we said, "Yeah and that'll teach you to be hungry." He said, "I learnt a lesson from it." He said, "Because all me mates I told about it they thought it was funny and told me that it served me bloody self right," but I remember

10:30 you know just some of the but as I say some of the boss a good boss I maintain it pays to look after your men in the army because you treat 'em well and you'll always get that permanent job. They'll look after the boss. I remember a bloke in Melbourne a few year back I was talkin' to him, had eld... a lot of elderly people working for him and I remarked on it and he said, "Yes Blue, look at it this way." He said, "They won't work as fast as the young blokes will but," he said

11:00 "they'll be here every workin' day." He said, "A young bloke on a weekend he'll go on the grog and he mightn't be here on Monday." He said, "I can count on 'em," he said, "and I get more work outta them and they're got a permanent job and the loyalty to me that everything they do is good." He said, "Whereas the young blokes that are on part time work and that you just don't know how good they are," and he said, "and I maintain this, if they put permanent staff on they would do better," but this idea when you get to your fifties you're too old to work that's just to me it's a lot of hooley.

11:30 They've got experience and they take pride in their job. I have a mate up here at Gympie on doing ah compressor and things like that. He's just now retiring at sixty five and he's got more work than he can do and he doesn't advertise or anything but you do a good job and you do it properly you know and you

make a name for yourself you'll all the self publicity is better than all your advertising, word of mouth.

12:00 Did you like your farm the farming days?

Well actually after the war after back in the Depression we left school in the bush. There wasn't the education and we'd a had to go and live in Melbourne or in a some big country town a long way away from home and we couldn't get the education that you can get today with all the school bus and high school and I often think, what mighta happened to a lot of us

12:30 if we coulda had the education that you get today but you know we had good times. You know back in those days with the horse days you had to make your own fun and the like before TV and that and I can always remember me father. We had four boys and three girls and he used to come in at night and the amount a times he'd say, he'd have a saying, "For Christ's sake shut up. The place is like hell with the lid off." The noise we used to make makin' fun and me elder sister I can

13:00 always remember that today, she's still alive in her seventies. Me brothers are gone but she still complains today she was never allowed to be a girl because with four elder brothers she had to be a boy to play with us. She said we went and threw her in the dam and told her to swim. That was how she learnt to swim. She just had to do you know what we done, and we made our own fun. We made our own you know toys and things like that and I think a thing was it was an illustration, a grandson was

13:30 done a tour a Timor and he was lookin' next door and for a young kid there they got about a thousand dollars worth a plastic stuff in their back yard and he said, "Look at that." He said, "I can remember one day on a patrol, I found a little pretty stone and I brought it in and showed it to the mates," he said, "and next night we come back from another patrol." He said, "These Timorese kids are still playing with that one stone an Australian soldier give 'em," and I said, "Well that was more or less what we done the same thing

14:00 when we were there," like for instance out in the bush. A sheet of tin turned up in the front and we used to make it for slides down hills and things like that you know and the things we done on the horses and I can even remember my girls after the war. The TV never went on unless it was raining or at night. They had their horses and they had more fun like that and I remember once they said, "Come out and look what we want," and I said, "Where'd you learn that?" I'd taken them to the Russian circus in Melbourne and they went and practised it on their own horse. I said, "Where'd you do that?" "Oh we learnt it over

14:30 the back paddock Dad where you couldn't see us." No at times I thinks of them you know I often used to have to threaten to take the horses off of them, the things they'd do but no, you made your own fun whereas today with everything organised and things like that that I can't and the way it changes. Like all these fast food places and TV. Well I remember one bloke at Cairns. I his son come home from school and got TV and sat there for three hours and somethin' went wrong

15:00 and he pressed the wrong button and all he done was swore and I said, "If I meet him in years to come," I said, "you won't be able to talk to him, have a conversation with him." He said, "That's why I'm sellin' out and goin' bush again," and even me grandson, the fast food places, he's a chef, and he said there when he started work he used to have cut all his own meat and vegetables up. He said, "Now," he said, "all your steaks come... chops come up wrapped like sliced cheese, each in a bit a cellophane." He said, "A lotta people soon won't be able to cut their own meat up." He said, "Vegetables are all

15:30 put through a machine at the works. You don't even have to cut and mix them yourself." It's just like the way you know things are changing and like as I say you know here I remember like it was only recently and they said, "Oh we'll come here and we're gonna talk there," like we are today, "take you out for dinner." Well they're talking now and I went and in about five minutes and I said, "Well dinner's ready." They said, "We were gonna take you down to the club." I said, "Yeah it'd take me longer to get

16:00 changed." I said, "Just as easy to put it together." No, as far as fast food place and that people can have them. I don't begrudge 'em but to me they're just a pain they'd all go broke if they depended on me.

Can you remember what you ate in the Depression leading up to the war?

Oh meat there was always meat and it was the same after I married with me wife, she was a country girl too and you always had a feed of meat and at least three vegetables. Three or four vegetables, your own vegetables, and you know as you when you're young well you eat anything that's going

16:30 nearly and there was no such thing, we had to eat whatever was put in front of us and I always remember a grandson, goin' back many years. I went to his place and he's arguin' with his mother about it and I said, "But you eat it at my place." He said, "Yeah Blue," he said, "if I don't eat it at your place I'm told I can bloody well go without and go to bed." I said, "You eat it," and I said, "You're only spoilt." Now after the army he eats anything.

What about dessert?

Desserts, we always the mother,

17:00 wife the same, always bottled vegetables. The old Fowlers bottling outfit. Always the fruit when the season was on you had it fresh. When it wasn't on, ah you know it was always actually you know bottled and you got it out a bottles and you know like puddings and things like that. Well the reason I don't have 'em today with not doing any work, you know I say, "Well here's me belly and I'm comin' behind it." You

know I can't

- 17:30 you know I can't stand to keep it well I gotta keep it down on account of my legs too that you know you don't you see a lot more people overweight today but I'm still a great believer at least one feed a meat and three vegetables a day. Three or more.

Can you tell us about the first lot of training that you got?

In the army?

Yes.

Oh we started off in the drill hall at Korumburra you know learning exercises and how to handle weapons and that and then we'd go out

- 18:00 the weekends once a month have a shoot down the local rifle range. In those days practically every town throughout the country had a rifle club and you used to go and shoot there on it and then we'd go away for a fortnight's camp once a year you know to practice exercises, but to what we done in those days we like we joined the AIF in wartime there we were doin' it much more vigorously but it was good you know

- 18:30 to mix with people and see you know another way a life.

Did you have a lot of practice from being in the militia, so when you started training in the army you felt pretty comfortable?

Oh I felt very comfortable. Well see I was a sergeant in the militia and I was promoted you know immediately to a sergeant again in the AIF to be able to train and handle blokes that there is actually a knack really

- 19:00 in handling men. Some officers could be good staff officers but put 'em in the field and try to handle the men they were hopeless. Has to get through and I found too through it, in all me experience, you look after the men they look after you. While I wear my decorations I still feel part of those decorations belong to the men who served with me because we were brought up with a saying 'As you train so will you fight'

- 19:30 and there's no such thing as a bad soldier, to me there's only bad officers and instigators. Like in private life, they criticise the workers but I reckon they should look at the bosses first that there. The you know there's you gotta look after the workers, the men, under ya they are the ones the country depends on.

So when you enlisted Blue, what was the training like then?

Well the training was then was like going back in the militia days all over again.

- 20:00 A lotta the people being in the country right from young kids, we learnt to handle shot guns and rifles. In there it was part of our life in the country with you know vermin and that around but when you joined the army there was a lotta people that never ever handled a rifle in their life. They hadn't a clue and you had to treat 'em you had to train 'em as to how to handle 'em, how to keep 'em clean and everything like that. As the first thing is to

- 20:30 learn you know you're gotta really look after your weapons.

And were you excited about the possibility of going overseas?

Well we were looking at goin' overseas, get around, see some other part of the world. You know to us you know we were very interested in had a look at you know lookin' around and like as they say about overseas, see India and the Middle East and they show you all these castles, churches and all

- 21:00 that but they don't show you the poverty, the disease and the hatred that goes on in those countries which to us being Australians ah you know rather it rather shocked us you know to go on and as far as Israel and Palestine is concerned I still today can't see any difference between a well-fed Jew and a well-fed Arab. They look to me the same. Well you go right back centuries ago they were all part of the same family but then there's the you know

- 21:30 it's just the hatred that goes on and the army days was a great education to you.

How much training did you have before you went to the Middle East?

Well we were doing that a certain amount of like handling your weapons, shooting and that and exercises. See for instance when they started off they had the idea everybody had to be a crack shot and then it would develop there they found out no,

- 22:00 as long as he was a good average shot because it was the cone of fire that often got people, not a crack shot and I can always remember once in Crete there was a bloke cut out in front of us runnin' and we thought he was German and we all opened up on him. He made our lines without a scratch on him. With all the good shots and everything you know and we reckoned, "Oh you were the luckiest b goin'." I'll tell you what, he was rather shaken and a bit white.

22:30 **What were you thinking when you found out you were going to the Middle East?**

Well we didn't know until we were nearly there and oh we thought, "Oh you know we've heard all about in Sunday school and all that this holy land and we were gonna see what the holy land was like." Well we would soon learn out about it. Palestine, we used to call it the land of mangy dogs and thieving wogs, the Arab wogs, because with the Arabs at every night when we were in there

23:00 in the Middle East we had to chain our rifles up round the mid tent pole in the middle of the tent otherwise the Arabs were the most light people population you've ever come, the way they'd pinch things. That you know just the thieving that goes on cause they could go and they could sell it that anything moved and the other thing that rather rocked us from an education point of view, you go out on exercises in the Middle East and the amount a times you'd find an Arab that tried to sell his daughter

23:30 or his sister to you. You know all they were interested in just the money. No, I know you look a bit unbelievable but you know the sort of the first time it happened it rather rocks you, but yeah but then it got like as well we finished up naming the Middle East the land of the three s's, sin, sand and syphilis.

How much were the daughters going for?

Oh they'd generally try to get you know put it this way, the Arabs'd always go for as much as they take a look at ya and think how much they can get outta ya and then you might

24:00 haggle the price down.

And what was your impression of what it looked like?

The Middle East or the what they were trying to sell us?

Both.

Well as far as what they were tryin' to sell us, as the wife used to have the saying, "All cats are grey at night."

And what about what it looked like, the Middle East in general?

Well the Middle East you know

24:30 at Sunday school and that you were all taught the land a milk and honey but when you got there, with all the trees and that that are done the only place were the irrigated areas near the coast and where they had vines and that and it wasn't until the First World War and they started puttin' eucalyptus trees, growin' 'em in the Middle East, there was very little timber and that around. It was just bare barren rocky ground. As I said when we landed there and a bloke got up the next mornin' and we looked out on these hills round Beit Jurga, they were just bare

25:00 barren rocky hills. Not a tree in sight and this bloke made the great remark, "If this is the land where Christ was born I wish to Christ I was in the land where I was born," and we were all agreein' with him.

Did you go into the town at night though and see what it was like?

There was, no there was no towns at night. No towns there. We had to get leave to go to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Tel Aviv and that and the thing was the Middle East war and the desert and the jungle warfare island campaign were two different wars.

25:30 In the Middle East you had leave every so often and you might get a weekend, you might get a week, and you always had a town to go to and there was always grog and that about but in the islands there was no difference the only reason when you're in and out of action and the islands you weren't bein' shot at. There was nowhere to go and nothing to see.

Mm. So what did you think of Tel Aviv?

Well to me it was just another town. Grey town. Had a good beach

26:00 there and you know a large Jewish population but you know you just you can't and you're out lookin' at places you seen you become a bit blasé in your outlook but my attitude has always been all me life, if you go to any town and you reckon it's a dump you'll never enjoy yourself but if you go to a town and say, "I'm gonna have a good time here," you'll have a good time. It's your mental outlook.

26:30 As my motto in life has been, "If you're going to hell have a hell of a good time gettin' there," and I've tried to do it all me life.

So how long did you spend in the Middle East before you went to Tobruk?

Ah Tobruk, the first time ah we were in we were in the Middle East from April until in December we moved up on the front line near Mersa Matruh and Hellfire Pass and that and went up and took Bardia. Well

27:00 we took then a week after Bardia a week or so later we had the attack on Tobruk. We took it in thirty six hours and it was later on the 9 division who give Tobruk the name of the 'Rats of Tobruk' but we took it in thirty six hours. In fact we had a saying in the Middle East desert campaign, the thing that rocked us

was they were all concrete emplacements these fortified places and the Italians, the amount of wine and

27:30 stuff they had there well as we said the Middle East campaign was, it wasn't the places we fought our way through, it was the places we drank our way through and I can remember takin' Tobruk for the first time and I seen Australian soldiers nearly crying cause an officer was breakin' bottles of wine with his revolver and the whole thing was a waste of time and the other thing that rocked us too, we took Bardia and Tobruk the first time. They'd evacuated 'em before we got there but we found each one of these fortifications

28:00 there the Italians had bottles in them. You know it rather rocked us the... you know you're camped in mega, as soon as you walked in you could smell it. You never seen you know any of what they had or what they were like, but they'd got them out but it was you know it was just then and there and we just like you know it was just as I said, we drank our way through the first campaign. Like as I said to you, Barce there's Mackay in fact and these guards and of course they're all half drunk on the wine and that. The Italians with it there.

28:30 When they used to, they hid the wine in all the manure heaps outside the stables. Well we soon found that out, we dug 'em out and drank it that there and the two guards a bit wobbly so he sent us out to El Aghelia way out the other side a Benghazi and

Had you heard much about North Africa before you went there?

No, never did hadn't heard much about it at all. Just you know a lot of it was desert and there was a part of it up towards Benghazi where the

29:00 Italians had you know settlements with irrigation and that, and that was the only greenery we seen and the thing was we the Australian army had a thing, if the enemy occupied territory you had to treat the population as if you were treatin' 'em back home because if they weren't with you and you treated 'em bad they'd be against you, but at least if you treated 'em right they'd be probably pretty neutral and that turned out true and I often used to wonder

29:30 what had happened if the Germans throughout Europe and things like that and in Russia, particularly in parts a Russia, if they had treated the people the same what it mighta been the different outcome how much more longer the war might have ended. Lasted.

How did you find North Africa when you first got there? What were your feelings?

Well we got there. It was the coming on the hot season there and it was quite good but

30:00 then winter came and we were in the desert in the campaign Christmas and that on and we used to wear leather jackets. Jerkins they used to call them. Down nearly to between your hips and your knee and of course a lot of the Italians think we were bullet proof vests. It was that cold like as the saying was, "When the sands of the desert grow cold," and I'll tell you what, North Africa although it was near the tropics, in the winter it was the coldest

30:30 place I'd ever been. We used to sleep fully clothed at night you know when the campaign was on and all we'd ever do was take our boots off that there and even like in camp, there well as I say the thieving wogs as I called 'em you had to put your boots under your bed near your head to make sure they weren't even pinched outta your tent at night. No you got no idea you know, the thieving that how light-fingered they were.

That would have been hard to sleep

31:00 **with smelly boots.**

Well put it this way, you often struck smelly troops too cause one thing early days or things of the war we joined up was the hygiene. The different hygiene standards of different people. I've seen blokes forcibly take take down and washed. You know for instance we talk about ah the Abos. Oh how dirty they are

31:30 and I've seen Australians since that are just as bad as they were and I can always remember once after the war we took over Ashlu Island bringin' back thousands of Jap prisoners of war to Torokina. The smell of that ship, the sweet sickly smell of human bodies and yet I always remember one day this place and this woman you could smell her two hundred yards off comin' down the street and when I went into her house balin' hay

32:00 from the contract baling when I was payin' for me baling tractor, the same smell and I thought, "I've smelt that before," and it took me about a month to realise it was like when we had these prisoners of war places and I thought, "God now I know why she wears so much scent." So you wouldn't smell her and I always remember goin' to another place and I was passin' the wash house and I seen maggots crawlin' out through the door. You know it's just the different hygiene and there and it was the same with the blokes in the early days of the war and

32:30 you know then it was you know you made sure they had to have a wash every day. You've got really you know no idea. As I say I the old saying about the Abos. There's a lot of Abos I don't want through my front door, and I tell you what there's a ruddy lot of whites I don't want through either.

You were in the front line in Tobruk. Can you tell us that can you tell us about the fighting?

Well with the Italians, the front line, this is before the Germans come into Tobruk, they'd fight until

33:00 you got really close to 'em and throw 'em up. The worst thing I seem to remember in Tobruk we took it ah there was one Italian surr they were all surrendering, hands and white handkerchiefs and flags and that goin' through and one Italian out in amongst all the surrendering prisoners he pulled a revolver out and shot the company commander, Saul Green and the English an English machine gunners on fifteen hundred weight trucks supportin' us

33:30 and this bloke was just about gonna open up on firing into the surrendering Italians and the officer jumped up on the trail on the truck and hit him on the head to stop him firing, otherwise he'd a killed hundreds for this stupidity of this one man. His own mates killed the bloke himself but it was just you know, see it was the same when we got into the island campaign. You used to when you were goin' through you used to put a bullet into every Jap to make sure he was dead because a lot a quite a number of times

34:00 they'd feign dead and as soon as you walked past they'd shoot you in the back and that was the first time you know I seen you know the stupidity of it you know he shot into the other mob and you know cause if the officer, Pommy officer, hadn't have stopped this machine gun bloke he'd a killed hundreds of 'em, twin Vickers.

Did they did he kill a few anyway?

No, he didn't. The officer stopped him. He could see woke up he could see you know jumped up and was you know just gonna fire

34:30 into 'em when he stopped him.

What was your experience of the Italian prisoners? Did they did they treat you well?

Well actually we'd never it was how we treated them. We never had there. They they'd find when you got close to them and then throw you know so as soon as you got close, then they'd surrender. I found the Italians they weren't very ,you know they weren't very trustworthy.

Why do you say that?

Well the things you'd sorta you know the things

35:00 that they'd sorta do and that and I don't know it was just you know sort of an experience you had to a like sort of livin' with your own men and the way they treated us and the way the Italians treated their own blokes and there and you know the officers in the Italian what's that? Somebody...

Tape 3

00:30 **Okay Blue just**

Yeah.

I just wanted to start to see if you could actually give us a detailed description of your the first operation in North Africa and Bardia, actually taking Bardia. What was that like?

Well they actually it was over that quickly we never closed up with them you know that much. As soon as we got within about fifty or a hundred yards and that they immediately surrendered. There was no very close combat on to it

01:00 at they fired from long range but it seems there was no close there was definitely no close work at all and with these leather jerkins we had on, they used to call 'em leather jerkins you know, they thought we were wearing bullet proof vest and you know they just surrendered in thousands but for instance I don't know why we just got that idea of a few of the little things we had happen, I can't quite remember there, but we never really found with the Italians you could never

01:30 really trust them that to the there.

What was it I mean that was the first time you'd come across the Italians, was

In

At Bardia?

In when we took when we took Bardia the first time

Yeah?

And then we took you know then the next was, it took three days to take Bardia and then we took Tobruk in thirty six hours because after the first action we were more confident and went in to them.

Can you give us a blow by blow description of Tobruk, of taking Tobruk?

Well put it this way.

02:00 Finish on Bardia first.

Oh okay.

I'll always remember, oh no Tobruk it was, well I had the job part of it was guardin' the platoon guardin' battalion headquarters and the shells were landing on us you know shellin' us quite a lot. At the people that had to clean this concrete dug out out, this concrete emplacement, hadn't done their job properly because we later on found there was an Italian officer with a wireless in the dug out still

02:30 passin' the information on to where we were and who was there comin' and goin' in it and but of course when we found him out he had a one way trip quick to hell that there but we just found out you know I don't know for some or other reason we found out we just couldn't you know we just never trusted them.

What were you expecting to find I mean just taking you back to Bardia again for a moment, but what were you expecting to find in Bardia when you first got there?

Well we thought, well put it this way, we just thought it'd be you know a typical

03:00 defensive position taken. We didn't expect two things a couple a things that rocked us was the poor effort the Italians put up defending it and the amount a grog and that in and as I said when we found out that in those placements in the front line, which then was a front line emplacement between them and Egypt, we found that having you know a brothel in it rather you know rather rocked us but as I say things like that then you start to accept as your education improved.

03:30 **And in terms of taking Tobruk, what were your...**

Well we just went through Tobruk like we took ah took Bardia straight through and then after that two days later then we done say done an encircling movement right out. One brigade went along the coast through the populated area and we done an encircling movement with a hundred and three mile and we done it in three hour ah in seventy two hours

04:00 we done three attacks but each time we done an attack against the Italians they'd keep in front of us. Then we went to Barce and we stayed there for about a week and then we went up past that through Benghazi, our first big town we'd seen, and then onto El Aghelia. In fact it was at El Aghelia I had actually I still look back at it as the worst moment of the war. I was a sergeant second in charge of platoon and in platoon headquarters

04:30 you had four men with you. You had two to each mortar man, a platoon runner and you had attached to you a fifteen hundred weight truck driver. Anyway I got my fifteen hundred weight truck driver attached to us and in those days you used to show people your photos of your family, friends and your girlfriend and all this sort a thing and this new truckie he showed me this photo of his girlfriend and I thought, "I've seen that before"

05:00 and during the night it struck me, "Hey one of me that one of me two inch mortar men have got it," and I went and asked him next mornin' could he show me photo of the girlfriend and he showed me the exact same photo. Well I got four blokes with me, two of 'em are engaged to the same girl and I'll tell you what, as far as I was concerned shits were trumps. So I got him, the truck driver and I raced him up to company headquarters and I told the company commander.

05:30 "Oh God," he said. He said, "I'll get rid of him," and he transferred him off and any rate reported it back you know for the military police and intelligence and when I got back out seven or eight months later after Crete you know I asked 'em about it, what had been done about it and they told me when the intelligence caught up with her in Australia she was gettin' two bob a day allowance off each of all these blokes she was engaged to, and she was gettin' an

06:00 allowance off twenty blokes in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], AIF and that. Well as the old saying goes, if you gotta use it you might as well make it pay.

That's not a bad scam really.

Oh no, she was doin' well on it but you know but I tell you what though. I'm expectin' I thought, "God if they see one another I'm gonna have a murder," you know two, but I tell ya it was a I reckon it was one of the worst moments I ever struck in the whole war

Hm?

That there

06:30 but you know but then again as I say some girls played up or some families played up in Australia but then again some blokes played up overseas. I always remember one sergeant in the Middle East. Anyway he wrote back and told his girlfriend, engaged to a girl in I won't name the town in Victoria, that it was all over and she wrote back

07:00 and said to him, "Why is it all over? What's she got that I haven't got?" Well he was advised write back tell her, "She's got nothing you haven't got but she's got it over here." No they played up on both sides and one bloke always in mind after the war, he came back, other stories, and these are true, is that his wife, had had three years of POW [Prisoner of War] and his wife had had an infant to another bloke, but that

07:30 bloke brought that kid up as his own. I always admired that bloke for doin' it. Another one, me mate up here at Gympie can confirm this, a POW in Germany he got back to New Zealand there was a wife, letter there waitin' for his wife in Dunkin Victoria and told him not to come home. She was shackled up with another bloke and had two kids to him and the whole time she was still takin' allotment off of him. You know it the both sexes it played both ways.

Did

You as I

08:00 say the as I said to you before, the army was a great education which you come you know across...

Yeah.

Well look at this today. Look at Warnie [Australian cricketer Shane Warne]. The things they're sayin' about Warnie today. If you and I as average people were doin' the same we wouldn't even get a mention in the paper.

Exactly.

As I said, best of luck to him.

Did you or any of the other fellas take advantage of the brothels that were set up in Alexandria?

Ah no. When I went down as an army school to Cairo very early in the Middle East,

08:30 in Cairo they had a museum of natural history, all the natural things, and all the venereal diseases as I said the Middle East we called it the land of sin, sand and syphilis. They had them all done out in coloured wax and the blokes'd come over and they'd say, "Oh we'll go to a brothel," and we used to take 'em down the museum, show 'em at how all it could affect 'em and I don't know funny thing but look the rest of us stuck to beer. At another thing like a tragedy of these brothels,

09:00 things like that, see in the Middle East if you got VD [Venereal Disease] it was, you were charged with a self-inflicted wound because all the brothels and they had condoms and that to hand 'em out there to deal with it and I remember a bloke, he was a sergeant with me, he was a good bloke. He got VD, he got cured of it, but after the war he butch... butchering business he become a millionaire but through being VD in those days most of the people went sterile and he couldn't

09:30 have a family. He finished up commitin' suicide and yet he had everything goin' for him. He just you know it finally got 'im down and there wasn't the treatment there is I think around today but a lot of the VD cases how the number of 'em that went mental in the early days. It's like the one the story is a bloke had VD and the doctor looked at it what have you and he said to the doctor, "Are you gonna operate?" "Oh," the doctor said, "no, I'm not gonna operate." He said, "Leave it another

10:00 week it'll drop off." Go on.

So what if you and the fellas looked after yourselves in that way, what did you get up to when you had your leave?

Well mostly had we mostly actually stuck to the grog. You know we just you know we put it this way. In those days it was good you know drinking but then the well in the Middle East the beer we had a Victorian issue, Australian issue of beer, we used to drink the Australian

10:30 stuff and then go onto the Stella beer, which was the local brew you know it wasn't anything up to the Australian beer

Mm.

That there.

I had

And the other the other drink was, which I couldn't take, and a lot of it was the only drinkin' the Arabs, was Arak, you know and a lot of the home made brew and that and it was rather potent. That I can always remember one bloke you know on it and he finished off shootin' himself

11:00 but you know he just went round the bend with it.

A was a fatal shooting or

Fatal shooting, yeah. Commit suicide.

Mm.

That there.

I've I've read that I mean you know I've heard the Australian fellas could be quite heavy drinkers over there. Did any of them ended up getting into any mischief?

Mischief? Oh no the Aust we actually put it this way, as far as gettin' into mischief one of the things

11:30 the Australian army was tough on 'em you know. The moral standard of the Australian army while serving overseas I thought was very high. In you you did not mistreat any of the population that there. The well when I say mistreatin' 'em when I say like thieving wogs and that. I remember when I done the rear guard in Palestine to Egypt and the thieving wogs and we had to patrol

12:00 two hours on four off, twenty four hours a day. Anyhow the officer we had he went off in Television so I thought, "Well the easiest way to do 'em is put a platform up on the highest building and every time you see a wog, take a shot at him." I'll tell you what. Two days later the local chief come and had a yarn to us about us shootin' at 'em. I said, "Well you keep your mob away and we won't shoot at 'em." It worked. That to there. They heard you say

12:30 you developed a weird sense of humour.

Well Australia it's well it's a new place isn't it? Wayne was telling us earlier about a story that you had or an experience you had with the brigadier's drinking water. Could you tell us about that?

Beg your pardon?

With the brigadier's drinking water.

Oh.

Can you tell us about that?

The brigadier's drinking drinking water. When we took Tobruk sent up that was taken all over, had to

13:00 clear this dug out out from brigade headquarters and when we'd cleaned it out and all and cleaned it up we found there was two forty four gallon drums of fresh water. Well we hadn't had a fresh water bath or anything for months. All we had to do in all the desert campaign was to go down to the sea and have a wash. So we decided to have a wash, me and the twenty blokes that were with me. Along come the brigade major, who would later become the CO of the 51st,

13:30 and I'm immediately put under open arrest for using the water and I said, "It's captured Italian water." "No," he said, "it's the brigadier's drinking water," and he's tellin' me off and the brigadier come up. He was a First World War bloke. He was a really terrific bloke cause as I say even as he finished up in Bougainville, lieutenant general in charge of Bougainville, and visitor status on the farm. He was Stan Savage, the founder of Legacy in Australia, and he told me, "You shouldn't have done that son," and

14:00 I said, "Yes sir, but," I said, "We thought it was Italian captured water," and then he said to me he said, "Matter of fact son, if I was in the same position as you were I'd a done the same. Charge dismissed," and the embarrassing thing after about it was he never forgot it. Even when he was general I met him in Bougainville and he comes round one night and we're havin' official mess after comin' out of action and invited the brig... the general around for there

14:30 and he walked in to the room, he looked at me and he pointed a finger at me he said, "Mr Reiter I want to see you," and I walked over and I said, "What sir?" He said, "My driver outside in the car," he said, "was in your platoon in the desert." He said, "Take him out a drink," he said, "And by the way," he said, "You had any more showers you had any more baths in the brigadier's drinking water?" He never forgot it. Well I took a drink out to his driver. I never got there to dinner and the general had to drive his driver home.

15:00 As I say back in those days we were you know pretty good drinkers.

Yeah I bet.

Cause I always had the motto if you're goin' to hell have a hell of a good time gettin' there.

What did you what were your impressions of I guess some of the British forces that you ran up against?

Well the British forces we had had a good opinion. We had the Northumberland fusiliers, Vickers machine guns twin machine guns on fifteen

15:30 hundred weight trucks supporting us and we found they were quite good. Ah the Scottish we found they were good. We give the Scottish some names. We used to call them 'the ladies from hell' because they went in you know with their kilts on that there but the you know I often used to wonder you know did they wear anything under 'em? It was like the bloke you know went into the brothel the Scotchman did she said, "Show us what you got under it," and he lifted it up.

16:00 "Oh," she said, "Gordon went blonde." Go on.

And so why were they I get the ladies bit but why were they ladies from hell?

Well they all wear their kilts. See it only used to amuse me even in the desert they still wore their kilts. They never wore the you know the slacks that there. No that was what the ladies of hell they just you know just wore the kilts all the time and I often used to

16:30 feel they musta been you know really cold. As I often think, one of the greatest things you ever seen did not happen till much after the war when you know the women always wore skirts and dresses but then today you see as many in slacks as they did. Like I can always remember that after the war me you know uniform officers' uniform the first thing me wife knocked off you know was same height as I was, you know,

17:00 "Your officer's trousers the quality of 'em they'll make good workin' out slacks," and when she used to walk down the street she was one of the first females in the town that ever wore slacks. People used to look at it in horror and to me you know I reckon dresses they must be really cold at times.

Just wondering Blue I mean you're in North Africa at this stage, what did you know about Hitler and the Germans and how close

Well all... we'd hear all we'd hear about Hitler and the Germans

17:30 was what come over on the news and it wasn't until we got to El Aghelia on the other side of Benghazi when we started to first run into the German bombers and the thing was with the Germans and even after Greece and the (UNCLEAR) of Crete. As they said the German front line soldiers even in Crete and what we done with the paratroopers the way those front line blokes treated the prisoners-of-war but when the

18:00 base blokes come in or the younger blokes base comes in and the way they treated 'em you know they used to say they'd almost reckon they were two different races that to there but there's good and bad there's good and bad in all countries. That a story of the Germans I think and prisoners-of-war, one mate he escaped with me outta Crete and he finally got captured like there was nine of us escaped and then two of us in the thing, he got captured he then a prisoner-of-war and

18:30 he was a good front line fighting soldier. He was a good soldier but a bad drinker and anyway he was he was in the salt mines in Poland and escaped and he shackled up with this German family out on the farm. Her husband had been killed on the Russian front and when the Russians come through because an allied soldier was with her they left her alone and any rate when he got out

19:00 come back to Australia he used to send food parcels over but his the day after he was dis the night he was discharged he went to a party still drinking and as he walked through the door a bloke threw a girl threw a glass and it broke on the door jamb and he lost the sight of one eye and he said that woke him up that what a fool he had been for forty years. Any rate he's in his seventies, heart attack and he gets found out where I was

19:30 and I get this letter he wanted to see me urgently he'd had a heart attack and he's address was Coburg. Well Coburg is where Pentridge is in Victoria and I thought, "Yep, he's in the right place. Every time he gets outta Pentridge he wouldn't have far to walk home." Well when I got to see his house it's a house like this. A brick veneer house and a beautiful garden and I must have saw the amazed look on me face when I knocked at the door cause the first thing he said to me he said, "Yes sarge I can see you're thinkin' every time I get out of Pentridge

20:00 you wouldn't have far to walk home." Well I said, "Yes," and I went in. He introduced me to this woman and then he told me the story. He used to send her food parcels after he came back and he thought no, he'd invite her and her family out, she had four kids, to Australia and they all become good Australians and the way they treated you know he he said and we there was no love or anything like that, "She looked after me and I done the right thing and looked after her."

20:30 He finally married her and the day I was there all her family and that all had to come home and we all had to be there for tea together you know. Big reception put on. You know I was sorta I felt like meetin' 'em all I was standin' next to God and when he finally died, his wife died, he just gave up the will to live and died a month later. Just the way they got on together but you know he just some of the funny things that happened in wartime.

Mm.

21:00 **First time you were shot, was that in North Africa?**

First no the first time I was shot was I never got well it was the first injury I got was in Greece

Oh it was in Greece.

Through the bombing

Oh okay.

And the first time I was really shot, and you can still feel the scar on the side of me head today, a bit of a groove here, and just there and through it through the tin hat and out the tin hat and the blood pourin' everywhere and you know you just got the what they call a field dressing

- 21:30 you know put on it and then I just went round with the felt hat on for the rest of the campaign but it happened that quick you know. I you know I don't know you just took no notice of it. I had a beautiful headache for a week that there but then as most of the mates said, "We knew it wouldn't affect you. You're pretty bloody hard headed."

Absolutely.

Mm.

I was just wondering Blue, you were talking before about the museum of natural history in

- 22:00 **Alexandria**

Yeah no in Cairo.

In Cairo sorry that you'd actually take the fellows to, to dissuade 'em...

Yeah.

About the brothels. Can you actually describe in detail the actual things that you saw in there?

Oh well they showed you know all the parts a women and men and how these diseases in colour affected them you know just affected 'em. You know I used to take the blokes there and they'd go out and you know be sick after seeing it. Couldn't you know take it, but we used to do it as I say you developed a perverted sense of humour. We used to take

- 22:30 the blokes in and then look at their faces that there.

So were you doing it more for that than actually protecting them?

Oh no well we no well put it this way, we heard the amount of venereal disease and that was going on through the Middle East. We used to be fair dinkum and take 'em there to put 'em off but to stick you know if we told 'em to stick to beer like us and leave it alone they wouldn't believe you and that there. See Cairo was a with the you know the way they mutilated whisky and distilled

- 23:00 you know the way they'd there we used to call Corten, which was a whisky then made in Geelong you know in the early back in those years they used to decry our whisky. We used to call it Corten, which is like petrol. You know the old Corten petrol, and I could always remember talkin' about whisky. With the Arabs and the things they done. When the train was pulling out they'd all be coming up trying to sell you wine or stuff like that to give it to you on the cheap and you knew it was all diluted and one day

- 23:30 this bloke sold it there, some young platoon got it off of him and he's goin' along screamin' mad and the military police are blowin' whistles and what not you know, said the Australian pinched it. Well we tipped the diluted whisky into our water bottles, urinated into the whisky bottle and handed it back to the military police. I don't know what the next bastard that bought it thought. As I say you got you developed a weird sense of humour. Well you know what they used to call grog don't you? Piss. Well it was

- 24:00 getting it.

Had to come from somewhere?

Yeah it's gotta come from somewhere. Same colour. Go on.

Blue I was just wondering, when I mean cause your brothers and your father signed up at the same time that you did, were you were you kind of partly signing up for what, Empire, to protect King and country, or was it for Australia?

No well actually it was you joined up for, you know, the duration of the war and six months after

- 24:30 but I don't know you just felt it was your job to do it. You were trained and it was your job to do it. See I can always remember like all the blokes in the militia battalion they all joined they nearly all joined up and I can remember one bloke, grocer's shop, won't mention the town he was in ah he was the quartermaster sergeant the company quartermaster sergeant in charge of supplies.

- 25:00 Well when the war broke out he immediately got out of the militia, never ever joined the AIF you know got on well at the council and what have you and I remember years after the war the governor was openin' the local hospital, their roll of honour, and he's the shire president and he comes along and he said to me, "Oh good to see you again Blue." I said, "I wouldn't shake hands with you, you bastard. You're a bloody dingo." You know while it was in he was all in it. All he was in it for the money but I

- 25:30 found most people there were a lot a people would have joined up like me elder brother. He was on the railways, an engine driver. Well he was called you know they wouldn't let him in out because the job there because his main mates were in the air force and he wanted to go into the air force with him but

they wouldn't discharge him and he was the only one that you know of the five of us males in the family never rejoined but then again you know whenever we

26:00 came back we always had a home to go to there.

Did you consider yourself a British subject at the time?

Beg your pardon?

Did you consider yourself a British subject at the time or a dinki di Australian?

No it was just a job to be done and you know all you're interested was look after yourself and your mates. You know you become you become a close family that there and I can remember a mate, he only died last year, he was a quartermaster sergeant and all the ones in that

26:30 company that hundred and forty men he had under him, he treated every one of 'em like you know they were one of his sons and you just become a very close knit family and the thing was the friends you made in those days to today are totally different because friends you made in those days when your life depends on one another. They're still your friends today and a lot of people can't make out even today why you're still mates sixty years down the track whereas today you won't you don't want one hand to count your true friends

27:00 on. You win the lotto or something like that the same friends a yours you go broke how many people could you go ask for a few thousand dollars to get on your feet again? They wouldn't want to know ya and I always remember an interview a few years ago when Sir William Gains, chairman of the wool board, went bankrupt and was temporary estate in the territory with the Yanks and he said what was the he was asked on TV, "What was the worst part a goin' broke?" He said, "I was walkin' down the," he was with his son-in-law and daughter in

27:30 central Queensland, "I was walkin' down the street and I knew this bloke I went to school with and I thought, 'I'm gonna have a good yarn to him.'" He said, "He looked up and seen me and he crossed the street rather than come and talk to me." He said, "That was the biggest shock I ever got in me life." As I call it, you got plenty of fair weather friends but when the going gets tough that's when you know who your true friends are.

And you made some good mates in North Africa by this stage?

Made some good mates right throughout the war. It did not matter what your rank was and that but you looked

28:00 after your men like your mates. You're all you're same family. As I say I didn't give a hang what people called ya, it's the way they called it to ya.

Mm. Were there any close shaves in the campaigns in North Africa before you went to Greece?

No, actually we went through with the whole company, C company I think we only had one wounded in North Africa and then

28:30 with Greece and Crete as I say we went to into Greece thirty nine strong in the platoon had a platoon commander and a fortnight after in action he was bowler hatted, which means what they call bowler hatted, promoted outta the road or sacked back and the ones that were made well we used to call 'em snarlers, S-N-L-Rs, Services No Longer Required, and they were sent back and left with the RAP blokes, regimental aid, on battalion orders

29:00 and as people different things but that bloke in Crete, although he was no good in action in bombing and that you couldn't get his head above a slit trench, when he was with the RAP in Crete we sent him to us between us and the German lines and all he's got is a red cross on his arm and he was goin' out as if he was walkin' round the bank safe as the Bank of England. We always changed our opinion after. In other words, when he was made an officer he was a round peg square peg in a round hole. They just weren't

29:30 cut out to the for the job and as the war went on, and officers come up through the ranks, they were better officers then than they were in any time durin' the war. Early in the war if you'd went to the right college or the right school or whatever had to or your right occupation they made you an officer. For instance there was one battalion once in the islands, the CO was a school teacher

30:00 and so were nearly all his officers because they thought there well the officers I thought at least in the war were school teachers because they used to teach you like they were talkin' to kids at school. It's just the way life goes.

Mm. Blue you you'd been promoted to sergeant in North Africa hadn't you?

Yeah, I was a sergeant

30:30 in North Africa through North Africa. Well there was only about a month in the war when I never had rank and that was when I fell out with the school teacher and the two 2nd 5th and reverted to the ranks so I could transfer to another battalion rather than be court martialled and then I rose again to a sergeant to go and then a troop deck sergeant you know on the ship over and the thing was throughout

the whole of North Africa, Greece and Crete campaign

31:00 I only had this one officer for about a fortnight who was the only time I had an officer otherwise I was the sergeant in charge of the platoon. Well for instance after Crete and the escape these blokes were in the desert and what have you when I rejoined the battalion, all the blokes that had been sergeants and that there well when I rejoined the battalion they were officers, cause I know one of the sergeants as soon as I got back he grabbed me to be his platoon sergeant, cause he knew you know of the experience I had

31:30 that to there and say later on we all got it. If I got outta Crete earlier well I'd a probably been you know made an officer then, but didn't worry me.

Did you know much about Greece before you got there? Like did you know that it was gonna be a bit of a lost campaign?

Well we ah we were a bit worried about it because like the German strength had taken practically the rest a Europe and they were tryin' to take Greece

32:00 so the Germans'd get round you know cut 'em off and go round the Russian for the Russian war and all we knew about it you know are the Athens and the old Acropolis and all that and we knew that you got Mount Olympus there was snow on it then you know. That was about all we knew about it and we knew actually you know there was plenty a wine there and we were more interested in the grog than anything else. Cause like as I said

32:30 to you I often look at the Middle East and it wasn't the countries we fought our way through as the ones we drank our way through.

That's a defining signature for the war.

Yeah but like the other thing was, the Middle East campaign and the islands campaign you know there was two totally different wars.

So can you tell us about those some of those first days in Greece and what

Well the first Greece we got up to Lumea and then

33:00 we found with the Germans comin' in while the Greeks were stopped the Italians and were there they were only fightin' the Italians, the Germans come in then they retreated and then coming back. Well then that was when we first got to know the strength of the German air force, the Luftwaffe, and I'll tell you what, we got very quick at moving off of trucks and moving out of troop trains when the bombing and strafing come over.

Can you describe one of the, you know one... what was that was like, one of those days?

33:30 Oh well the bombing was the noise, dust and what have you and hoped it wasn't going to hit you and the strafing was you know just like as you're on the ground just under intense machine gun fire but they often you know sometimes they come close and others once that I'll never forget once was in a slit trench, this is in the desert campaign, and dived

34:00 down gettin' shelled to hell and I looked up and there on the edge of my ah slit trench was a shell goin' like that, wobblin' and I just without thinking I just put me foot up and kicked it back over the thing and a bloke next to me he said called me after, "You stupid bastard, you could have lost your leg," and I said, "Yeah but if it had come in this trench we would have both lost our bloody selves," but somethin' you do you do a lot of things automatically without thinkin' but then again you know as I said after I said, "Yeah it must have been a dud otherwise it'd a exploded

34:30 on landing." Which was to say a lot of it is just the luck of the game and a lot of things with the training and that you done you done it instinctively, you never thought about it, and then after you think about it and then a lot of ...few people went round the bend or changed. Ah take blokes into action in charge of them there and then even after the war they way it affect them. They think, "I if I'd a done this or that at the time it mighta been a different outfit"

35:00 but you only done in that what you with the information you had in your hand and what you were finding out you instinctly done it and when it was over that was history. You forget about it. If you'd a worried or done this and that I'd a probably you know gone round the bend years ago. You just done it and I always think one a me daughters when she was a school kid go up. One day some people there and they asked her about something. "Oh," she said, "that was yesterday, that was history," and I think that's the way you do it there

35:30 and a thing I've found out then and right throughout life, if you were doing something you told people you were gonna do but you never told 'em how you were gonna do it. Cause if you told 'em how you were gonna do it they were watchin' you to see how you did it but the thing was with the things that come up and happened was to change your mind and there and if it come outta success and they'd say, "Jesus bloody hell, Blue knows what he's doin'," but you know it's it was just a matter of to be able to adapt very

36:00 quickly to what was on and not only that, but then was how you got on with your men under you. So you

know what you do. I two things durin' the war I'd a back on and as I said one of the proudest things I seen was when after the war privates to generals come and visit you and stayed at your home. Then durin' the war years I never left a wounded man behind, as I said like that bastard in Bougainville. As one bloke,

36:30 he become later a sergeant, "Don't worry about bloody old Blue. He might get you killed, but if you're wounded he'll always get you out," and the other thing was I never had a bloke jack up on me. You know which means never did I have a bloke refuse to go and do anything in action. I remember once in Bougainville I'd just come back from patrol and the sergeant, I give him a job. He said, "I don't want to do it"

37:00 but he said, "I know if I don't do it, you'll bloody well do it, so I'm goin'." I always admired that bloke for that. You know it was a sticky position but you never asked a man to do what you wouldn't do yourself and a lotta times, it was after the war since, people have told me some of the things I'd done and I thought, "Oh that's a load a bull," but then I've had other people corroborate it but you when you had men under you, you had to think of your men not yourself and you never had time to worry about yourself

37:30 because you're lookin' after blokes under ya.

And how did you find I guess leading the leading the troop the fellas that were under you in Greece

Beg your pardon?

How did you find leading the fellas that were under you in Greece when the Germans started to...

Well I knew I could count on 'em and they never let me down, but then again I suppose you know as they felt confident in me I'd do the right thing by them.

38:00 If you always done the right thing by them as I say you never asked 'em to do anything you wouldn't do yourself, that there and you know you just took it, it was just it was just like a job that had to be done and if you're doin' a job, you do it properly or not at all.

I was just wondering Blue what I guess what your what your intentions were I guess from your point of view going into Greece

38:30 **to start with were. What were you...?**

Well put it this way, goin' into Greece after the war caper we had in the Western Desert we were full of confident... we were full of confidence and you know we were always sure we were gonna win. I don't know why, never at any time durin' the war did I feel file you know we were gonna be beaten but even after we were kicked outta Greece

39:00 and got back and sunk in between Greece and Crete and then Crete you know we were caught and then as I said I was quite confident opinion and everything like that that after doin' it in Crete and we done our job. What we had to do, everything that was asked of us we done and as I say I got the military medal in Crete for the battle of 42nd Street, leadin' the charge there, held the thing and when we got back and the boat not there to fix us up saying, "The islands surrounded and we're not comin'

39:30 back." We done the job and got left in Greece, Crete, like a shag on a rock as the old saying goes. That was to change my opinion to the powers that be and everybody from there on for the rest a me life. You do a job and they leave ya. You feel like you're been dumped and I will never you know after that I was never backward in saying what I thought. I remember after the battle of Porton and General Blamey, the commander in chief, in Bougainville,

40:00 and he come up, he shook me by the hands, congratulated me on the job we'd done and he said to me, "What'd you think of it son?" I said, "Look sir," I said, "I've seen some SNAFUs, 'Situation Normal All Fouled Up,' throughout the war, Greece, Crete and that," and I said, "This is the greatest stuff up I'd ever seen." I said, "As far as I'm concerned I'd rather be a bloody live dingo in Australia than a dead sucker up here with this mob." Anyway he had a yarn and he shook hands with me, walked on his way

40:30 and the brigade major took to me, "You don't talk to the commander in chief like that." I said, "He asked me what I thought and I bloody well told him," and I my attitude to, you know senior officers was just the same as it were to troops.

Wonderful.

That there.

Thanks Blue.

As I...

Tape 4

00:31 And that and no you know a very dream a that that there and you have nightmares and that. As you if I was gonna say if you if he'd a said he had a nightmare I'd ask him to catch it and saddle it but with you I couldn't ask.

So how long did you spend in North Africa before you went to Greece?

Spend what?

01:00 Oh it was just like training and visiting towns

Oh.

And one of the things I found out very early in the war, a lot of married people things like that because you were single they thought you had plenty a money and were always borrowing money. Well I think in the whole of the war years ever cost me is a quid, because actually before I left Australia I made an allotment to me mother you know, which she never spent, so that I'd have that money

01:30 when the war was over to help me start up. She would never touch it and that there but a lot of the other single blokes they'd go out on the grog and things like that then they'd want, "Oh he's single," the married blokes, "Oh yeah you single blokes got money," and they'd try to borrow it off ya. You know you'd often find a lot of that but all I got caught for was a quid, in the whole a the war years. No, I said you know I could, "I'll make an allotment to me mother," that was it and like as

02:00 you went up in rank then your pay increased. In fact talking of pay, a thing I was horrified about after the war when I married my wife, and she was an army nursing sister, I picked her pay book up one day and all army nurses had the rank of a lieutenant. Well a male lieutenant was getting twenty one shillings a day and I found out as a lieutenant in a nursing service

02:30 she was only getting corporal's pay, nine bob a day. You know I thought I was horrified at that they had been officers and I knew a nursing sister out on Kilmountain Road, she was a sergeant and all, and a captain, and all she was gettin' was a sergeant's pay. You know to me that there's some things when they talk about the difference of sexes, there's some things you can do better than a man and a man can do better than you. Some a lot of jobs you can be equal. Well see

03:00 Maureen over the back, she was in the AWAS, Australian Women's Army [Service], and truck driving, doin' a man's job, and yet she was getting two shillings a day less than a male driver doin' it. To me that sort of thing you know is ridiculous. Like I only have two daughters and as I say, like running the farm, I had more confidence in them running the farm than any other one I employed, any male I employed. You know cause they'd do it right and you know if you do you do the job

03:30 you're entitled to the same pay and I'm still very in favour today they all should get the same pay.

I agree with you.

Yeah. No, no but it's just that it's you know just a lot of people different you know outlooks and we had a thing recently, TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated] association. The minister said well we get there, "You shouldn't be gettin' the hand outs you did," and you know all this like travel and that. Any rate

04:00 the secretary went into it and he told that when she retired she shouldn't be getting three hundred thousand a year. With the free dinners and the free travel and all that she's gettin' that's what she's get her pay is worth a year. It's costin' to keep her in parliament. She hasn't said a word since. No you're doin' the job you could be paid and as I say this today, I'm a TPI and I am only getting the pension I should. See years ago it came in

04:30 politicians said because every old ex-service man, once he gets sixty five he should go on the old age pension like everybody else. Try the try that on the politicians. No you do a job and you're only gettin' to what we're entitled to.

Did you meet your wife on leave from an operation?

No, I met my wife one of her mates was me drinkin' partner in hospital

05:00 and then I met I met her there. She my wife actually, a lot of people won't believe it, she never ever nursed me in hospital and a lot of my mates used to say to Ena, "How'd you get hold of Blue?" She was six years older than me and she said, "I got hold of him and I thought I was gonna catch him young and train him and did I bloody well slip up."

So she was a nurse in the army?

She was a nursing sister in the hospital. Full like you know full trained nursing sister.

So can you tell us the

05:30 **story how you did actually meet and your romance?**

No we just met at a party and you know we just drifted together. A month later we married. Three months later we told the family. Well this is it, my wife's saying was, "A wedding announcement's only a public announcement of a private intention and nobody's bloody business but yours."

So you met only a month after you married, only a month after you met each other?

Yeah.

It's a bit of a whirlwind romance.

Oh, oh I don't know.

06:00 I don't know, it might a been the grog. I never regretted it. We always got on well. A lot of people won't believe this, we were married for forty three years and I can honestly say this as I sit here today, my wife and I never had a blue, an argument, cause if she'd see I was cranky she'd walk down the garden and I knew she was that way I headed over the paddock and we never ever really got into a stand up fight, we never had a stand up fight, because she always had the saying

06:30 "Don't argue with a fool because they'll always win. They've had more experience."

That's a lovely story about getting married before the actual ceremony.

Yeah.

What happened on the day that you got married? For the first time?

Ah on the day we got married was Bacchus Marsh in Victoria. We'd had to go and see the parson cause you gotta allow three weeks' warning and we told him next week she was off somewhere and I was off somewhere else, so he married us. No we were havin' a party at

07:00 the pub. We went up got married, just with a one of her mates who had nursed me in Brisbane years before and the two of 'em witnesses then went back to the party at the pub and told no one and about a week later somebody in the theatre looked at her and asked her what she was wearin' a wedding ring for and she said, "I got married last Saturday." Told no one. It was nobody else's business but yours.

When you had the ceremony did your mother come down?

No. No family there, just two witnesses.

07:30 Two, a girl one of her girlfriends and his a mate. Just the four of us.

Oh I see you didn't so you didn't

No, no

So you didn't have a church wedding a few months later?

No didn't have a church wedding two months later. It was legalised. As far as I was concerned and my head looked then I'd a got married in a registry office but no, she wanted to go and be married in a church and so we got there.

Did you write to your mother and tell her?

Three months later we took her home and told her. Well how

08:00 it came the family, I said to the brother, "I'm comin' up and I'm bringin' a mate with me," and he rings his wife and said, "Oh yeah like Blue and a mate," and when I got there and they met me and I said you know, "This is the wife," he had to ring his wife quickly and said, "His bloody mate," he said, "it's his wife," and

What year what year was this in the war?

'46, no it wasn't till the end of the war. I wouldn't get married a few of us, I had a few mates, you know we sort of had an intention we would

08:30 not get married during the war years, because if anything happened to ya you might leave a family and that behind you know, the things I'd seen and that was one thing you had. You never got really serious about anyone or anything like that because you didn't want to leave you know a family or that behind for 'em to bring up.

Were there any movie stars or singers of the day that the men would have a crush on?

No, you just you just you know you'd look 'em over

09:00 and you'd say, "Oh geez I wonder what it'd be like to spend the night with her?" you know but then again as I said to you before, all cats are grey at night.

So when you went to when you went to Greece, you've just come out of North Africa. Were had you had any leave before going to Greece?

Oh yeah as I said we had this fortnight's leave. We were in Amiriya for a fortnight and we used to get leave every night, cause we were only about ten mile outside Alexandria. Well it was in every night and it was always actually just grog. Some

09:30 blokes'd make off for the brothels and that but mostly you just stuck to the grog and I always remember like as I said, I made friends with the provosts as a troop deck sergeant on the way to the Middle East and I used to go into provost headquarters, write leave passes, put the provost stamp on 'em and we were never picked up as AWL. I was you used to look in the companies, they'd have hundreds of men out on pack parade every afternoon and I never had 'em out on pack parade cause we had official leave passes. I know it was illegal

10:00 but it's not it's not what you know in this world, it's who you know. This is the great thing and another thing I'll never forget that leave, one night the Germans put the bombin' raid on. Charlie Downing was his name, transport driver, go out hail this taxi. Taxi pulled up. "May as well take us out to camp." "No I'm not gonna take you to camp. You're gettin' out." So we hauled him outta the driver's seat, Charlie got in behind the wheel, there's ten of us in a taxi hanging onto the side running boards and everything like that, the wog

10:30 jumps onto the back a the boot yellin' like hell and dangling around and we walked back ten mile to camp. Well when you're in the camps they had two forty four gallon drums of stones so we wiped the driver off there, left the truck in the taxi in front of brigade headquarters and walked home. Well next day there's a hue and cry about who left the taxi there. We were all innocent, we weren't caught. The in the army we had the saying, the crime wasn't what you done, the crime

11:00 was being caught but as I say we were young and foolish. I'll put it this way some people say we were foolish but I don't know, I reckon we were doin' all right.

Tell us about your first experience with the Germans in Greece.

Well it was the bombing. All just bombing. All you seen of the Germans in Greece I never met a German man to man of all the patrols and that I went out I never met them and it was just all the bombing you know. They bombed us, see they bombed us everywhere.

11:30 It was all bombing and the damage, you know, the damage there what they done and we never met the Germans face to face until we got to Crete. The first time went to Crete in the battle of 42nd Street, as I said I took the patrol out they were on and then in it as I say we chased 'em back a mile and a half and the amount a Germans we killed were in the hundreds and the thing was, they were goin' and you just they broke and ran and you know

12:00 you just after them till we ran out of steam and then they'd a got recalled.

Did you lose many mates there?

Oh I lost on altogether in Greece and Crete through the bombing and everything like that, I went to we went to Greece with thirty nine men and when the battle of, when this, on this rear guard action on the road to Sfakia to Tamaleen, Suda Bay really,

12:30 I only had nineteen men left in the platoon. The rest had like through, I think there was only two killed and the rest either wounded or knocked around with bombs and that. I remember one bloke, I put him on a hospital ship in Piraeus, the port of Athens, and of course the bomb dropped on the ship and he got sunk there but it was just the way you know things happened but you know it wasn't it wasn't a very nice job

13:00 as Wayne'll say like you know runnin' 'em over to see if they're dead and as I always thought one of the worst jobs I ever had in the army was always writin' to the next of kin that there. You found it was your job to do but you never you know you had to do it and it was the thing was, if you couldn't say somethin' nice about a bloke you said nothin' at all that you know the way some people you know go on.

13:30 **Can you tell us about what happened when you were recalled?**

Ah recalled?

Ah when you had to come out of Greece?

Well we came out of Greece, we got back and bombed back and the last night in transport at the thing, and you had to destroy all trucks all movement and everything like that. Anything you couldn't take had to be destroyed.

Did you end up having to destroy a few things?

Oh well all

14:00 the trucks and that and all we could have on all we kept was what we could carry and we got on and I'll always remember we had this two Boyes anti-tank rifle two inch there. Well it was it, well put it this way, the bullets only bounced off our (UNCLEAR). They were a horrible thing to carry and everything that and I remember four of us put it on the railway line and bent the barrel so that the Germans couldn't have it that there. They were an abortion of a thing and I remember go a bloke was counted

out and we jumped off the sunk at sea and a bloke jumped

14:30 off and he's carrying a Boyes anti-tank rifle. That weren't very polite what they said to him that there and as I say we jumped off and then when we jumped off the boat in Crete, all we had was what we had on our backs cause there was no goin' down below. The ship was makin' water quick so you couldn't go down and get anything and you know a lot of us had our rifles, a lot of us had nothing because with the German bombers comin' over everybody had anything that could fire was on deck firing at 'em.

15:00 **Blue, can you tell us how you got onto the ship?**

We just ah oh what, from Greece?

Yes.

No it was just took about a wharf about midnight and we just walked onto the boat. See the boats wouldn't come in till about dark you know and then be clear or fairly well clear out to sea by daylight and that was it and just on and down and all we were interested in laying down and somewhere to sleep after bein' bombed so much.

So where

15:30 **were you when the ship actually started to sink? Were you up on a deck?**

I was up on deck with that there. No I was up on deck and we just formed up everybody in rank and it was just like a parade. Everybody cause the navy for a spell in the bombing and strafing and the Mountbattens, the destroyers, were just comin' alongside and everybody was jumpin' off onto 'em and when we jumped off on the destroyer the navy blokes couldn't do enough for us.

16:00 **Were they all service men on the ship?**

Yeah all ex-service men and all British army, British navy blokes. No, they were good blokes.

So you jumped off and you got picked up by the navy?

Yeah we jumped, no we jumped off the ship. No, we jumped off the sinking ship onto the destroyer. We didn't ship out of the water or anything like that. We just jumped straight onto the deck of the ship.

How far in height difference was that?

Some sometimes it'd be four feet. Other times it'd be nearly twenty

16:30 feet.

Which end were you?

You know it depends on the tide, you know waves comin' up and down, but you don't think of those things in those days or something or it's either sink or swim.

And what happened when you got onto the destroyer?

Well the navy get us down get downstairs, give us a cup a tea and a biscuit and things like that you know. Reckon what stupid so and sos we were and that and you know then the next thing was once we they took all they could on

17:00 they just went flat out till they had us in Crete so they could get back you know into action again.

Can you tell us about the action in Crete then?

Well the action in Crete, we got to Georgiopoulos about there and we got in and the first night is as cold as blazes and I remembered this seeing these bales of blankets on the wharf, so I took ten men back and to get past the British MPs and our own guards to get a bale of blankets and we got our own. We slept very warm that night.

17:30 The next day we had enough blankets to give one to each surviving member of the battalion and no questions were ever asked, "Where did the blankets come from?" or anything like that. Everybody was pleased to have one and we formed, we marched then to Georgiopoulos, a beach near the Suda Bay, be a good landing beach, took up defensive positions there expecting a German sea borne landing but those that were gonna do the

18:00 seaborne landing, Mountbatten's destroyers a practically destroyed 'em all the landing craft and that near the shores a Greece and they never made a beach landing. There they were going to land on the Malame aerodrome plains, Retimo and Heraklion all air landing and they were gonna land on the beach at Georgiopoulos but you know four places but they only landed in three and so

18:30 when they didn't land on the second day third day I think it was, morning of the third day, of the landing and then New Zealanders were having a heavy time on the Malame aerodrome then we were then we took us up our battalion to help attack them, take the Germans and the Malame aerodrome. Well I'm no expert on tactics and that but I do think this. When we got partly

19:00 up, Fryeburg the New Zealand commander, the commander at Crete. He was going to send his own New Zealanders in cause if they'd taken all the honour and glory would a gone to the New Zealanders but as they'd been fighting for nearly forty eight hours then strongly, I think they'd a been better had they sent the Australians in too more fresh, cause all we wanted to do was wipe the slate clean with the Germans. Get evens with them. Mighta been a difference but no, he held us back. Well they never took

19:30 Malame, Malame aerodrome and they had to start fallin' back and then from then on it was retreat all the way back.

Mm. Just before we get into the retreat, what was your experience overall with the military police?

Military police? Ah they had military police you had corps ones, higher up ones, and you had the field ones with 6 division like which were say the blokes that were with me on the boat over

20:00 and the blokes the field military police, their attitude was totally different to the base blokes. The base blokes had a swelled head. You know they become little dictators there but the blokes that were the blokes that were in the field police were a totally different type a bloke to the field police. Like as I said to you there, the blokes in Crete and the way the Germans paratroopers, which we wiped three parts of 'em out, treated our

20:30 blokes as prisoners of war, but then when they went back to Germany and the way the base blokes treated 'em over in Germany, it was totally different types a blokes and even after the war on the Lugi gasification plant in the Huon Valley in Victoria, they brought a lot of Germans out from because it's a German thing, gasification the brown coal for electricity, and even there, I became quite friendly with a few of the you know ex-German paratroopers that came out there and the thing was

21:00 I asked quite a few of them, "What made you come to Australia?" and their attitude was, "It was the furthest we could get away from the war." They felt there was another war gonna happen. So that was why they come to Australia and quite good and even today, they become part of the family. While they're no relation, they know us that well that they're part of the family. They were they were a couple a kids from the family there and they live at Gympie up here and as I say they're that close to us

21:30 you know we always called 'em part of the family. You see you don't judge 'em the country they're in. There's good and bad in every country. They thought they were right and we thought we were right and I'm not sure who was right or wrong.

Can I bring you back now to the retreat in Crete? What happened then?

On the retreat in Crete? Well it was just pullin' back ah got back over the hill and they said, "You're all right you're the rear guard." Ah you know, "Your platoon,

22:00 you're gotta guard the road," and it was a bent on the road and I put me three Bren guns in one nest on the bend of the road, Tequila Road, while the rest of us were spread you know up the hill a bit and then I always remember that about twenty motor bikes come down, side cars, machine gunners on 'em and they thought they could come right through but you know the nine

22:30 platoon machine gunners wiped the lot out but you know cause they got 'em they just wiped 'em all out there but you didn't you know you never thought of you know what you might do it was just as I say a job to be done. It was your outlook.

What happened with their bodies? Did you help bury them or

What, the Germans? No no, they just fell over the cliff or laid on the road because they were attacking then when they couldn't get down the road, went round the

23:00 flanks and there was no forward attack from the we were just holding the beach head. So more could get off and if anything was wrong with Crete, I think a lot of base troops should have been evacuated long before they were, which meant there mightn't a been enough ships for all I know, because when we went down we had trouble gettin' through them to get to the beach and when we got to the beach it was that late at night there was only one barge load went out on the destroyers.

23:30 They weren't coming back for any more so as I said, you were just left like a shag on a rock.

What happened after the motor bike and side car incident?

Ah well then the Germans tried to outflank us, you know get round, but we had enough troops covering all the flanks and that and I feel if we'd a had more ammunition we coulda probably held out for another twenty four hours, but then I may be wrong.

What did

24:00 **happen Blue?**

Well they well actually we back to the beach head and said not, "The ship's not coming back to pick any more up, the island is surrendering." Well we found we'd been betrayed.

And what did you do?

Ah well then we just had we had to destroy all our rifles and all any equipment that mighta been of use to the enemy and you know wait to be taken prisoners of war. Well we waited

- 24:30 around awhile and they started gettin' around us and I thought you know, "Bugger this. Barb wire is only for cattle," and I said to the blokes, "I'm gonna have a go at escape," and eight other blokes oh a couple a blokes stayed with their wounded mates had wounded with us in the platoon, and eight others said, "I'm coming with you." Well nine of us got out all right. Ah two months later the submarines come to pick 'em
- 25:00 up, well somebody got drunk in Pales... in Egypt and they got back to the Germans how we were gettin' out and there two of them were captured again, then we sorta split up in mobs you know and different and in the islands getting out now for other instance in the islands, as I said this two machine gun bloke I struck in Greece, who later become the same unit with me. When I was in the islands and he got off with me he was a bloke, Pete Sparks, from Sydney.

- 25:30 After we had a farewell party in Alex after we escaped I was to never see him again and up in port in north Bougainville at the end of '45, I hear a voice say, "Where's the platoon commander? I want to talk to him," and I thought, "God I know that voice." He came up, he looked me and he said, "Jesus," and I said, "What the bloody hell are you doin' here?" He said he said, "I'm the forward

- 26:00 observation officer for the artillery." We met again in the last action. We were together in Bougainville and we were both to get the military cross there. We both... yet in Crete we both met up we were both sergeants but you know it was just one of you know the funny instances where you met people again.

That's a great story.

Yeah I know. It was there you know and that you know there's to you know to get him and one thing like talking about before about the difference between

- 26:30 you know male and females, the way they behaved. He was goin' with girl. She thought her boyfriend, never heard from him, went to Changi, 8 Division. Goin' with her. They were gonna get married. Anyway when it was over, came back, he came back from the islands if she said to him her boyfriend had come back and he give her up and even her you know and the bloke she married in Changi became great friends for the rest of their life.
- 27:00 You know I always admired Peter for that and for that there you know trying, cause as I say one thing and another she'd find you know she reckoned like bein' engaged to him and thought he was killed she'd betray him and I always admired that girl for that.

Is he still around, Pete?

No he died. Died two year ago. No I'm one of gettin' one of the last survivors now.

So how did you get out of Crete with the eight other blokes?

We got some help and information where we could pick up this trawler from British intelligence.

- 27:30 Got it. A lot of us got together. There was there was Greek some Greek Cypriots, Indians, New Zealanders and that there again so you know some of the New Zealanders us in the in a book of pictures I had there you know. Some of us with Australian hats and New Zealand hats on mixed up together that you know got to 'em. We were all escaped POWs and you know everybody was just the same. We didn't worry about their nationalities.

Sorry to ask again, but you hot footed it

- 28:00 **out of Greece with out of Crete with these eight other blokes. How did you come across intelligence?**

Ah they just in just contacted us. You know they the British were you know intelligence agents droppin' 'em off by submarine to collect what they could about 'em and you know put us onto us that there. No, the British intelligence was very good.

So this very licorice all sorts bunch of people got onto the

- 28:30 **trawler**

Yeah.

And got out of there?

Yeah, we got out and of course all we were interested in when we got to Alex was gettin' on the grog and a course then we found we all got locked up in this British military prison and well we were being debriefed they call it because then they told us what had happened, before some bloke had let it straight away, got drunk and said how he got off the Egyptians bein' pro-

- 29:00 German, they immediately sent the information back to the Germans and a course the next thing the Germans put a big blitz on. Well of the nine of us that originally escaped, seven of us escaped again from that blitz, got out of it, and were to get back over the next ten months and since then well I've had

a drink all me life. I still today have a very great dislike for drunkards because I always remember if it hadn't been for this drunk

29:30 I'd a been out four months earlier and it probably a made a difference to me whole military career but since then you know as I say, I don't mind people drinking, I don't mind people smoking, it's all their business. I don't smoke meself but you know these drunks that get drunks and you know loud mouth themselves, I just can't stand it.

What's that army expression, loose lips sink ships?

Yeah well yeah, loose lips sink ships yeah but no, it's

30:00 well you know different people and different ways.

But the ten months Blue that you were talking about, was that the ten months on the run in Crete?

Six months on the run in Crete.

Six months.

I got out just before Christmas, Christmas '41.

I wonder if you were listed as missing in action?

Was no all they done was posted as missing in action. For six months I was posted missing in action and as I said, that bloke that I bandaged up in Crete his head contact the

30:30 families was taken prisoner of war there and never got back and what done and I always remember talkin' to a bloke that run the local paper, you know once I was home on leave, and he said, "I'll never forget it," he said, "I seen your brother," it was the day before Christmas, "and he's walking outta the post office," he was the one that was a railway driver, and he said, "there's tears runnin' down his face and I said 'What, has Blue been killed?' he said 'No, he's back'"

31:00 and mother had sent him a telegram onto him a telegram so say that I was I was now no further posted on it. See I was posted missing wounded posted missing wounded in action and then you know and then the next thing they heard from me was ah six months late on just on over six months later you know I was an escapee. Now all it was the thing was the telegram, "Sergeant FR Reiter VX 4024 is now no longer

31:30 a missing person. He's now returned to unit," and that was all it said.

What a relief.

Yeah a relief for us but no, I always thought a lot either people I've admired are the families, especially prisoners of war and that, who didn't hear from 'em like in Changi and all that, all the blokes there cause see in the Middle East you'd get letters they were thinkin' they were you were in action all the time

32:00 and you're out probably paintin' the town red. See one thing I had, and I had this right through me army years, was makin' blokes, especially married men, write home every week to their families, even if you put a lot of bull in and I can always remember one bloke, he used to mutilate his letters. You know, censoring letters you're supposed to censor 'em, read 'em, and thing it was bad you cut 'em out and he'd cut 'em out and fill in between. Well the things his wife used to say about me,

32:30 and of course he'd give me the letters to read and after the war I was to meet her and what she told me off. Well that was all right, it was in Sydney, and one night Reg and I went out on the piss and we thought all the girls had gone to the bloody some concert but when they got there they couldn't get in and a course we're drinking away there happy at home and they arrived back. Well Reg dropped a bombshell what he done to the letters. Well God I won't tell you what his wife said to him there in front of us but they way they couldn't think of the

33:00 things they'd mutilate letters. As far as censoring was concerned, I only used to look for certain words and some blokes you wouldn't bother. Although I had thirty eight men in the platoon with me, in censoring letters I was doin' it for a lot of men in the company of a hundred and forty, because they knew that I'd never, because I struck some officers, a couple of 'em, they would censor a letter, they'd read everything through and they'd sling up some of the things they read in those letters to

33:30 to a bloke in front of all the other troops, and I thought that was a terrible thing to do and the result was I used to censor letters for a lot and another thing that's intrigued me and I still don't know the answer today, I had one bloke in Bougainville talkin' of this thing, censoring, I got a letter in Bougainville asked me would I her husband couldn't read nor write, would I read the letter to him. I got him

34:00 up and he went crook. I read it, and as I read it I ran my finger along every line, includin' what she said to me, and I said, "Do you want me to answer it?" He went crook. Half an hour later he come back and I answered the letter for him. Over time I was doin' it for three blokes in the company of a hundred and forty. Further on I was doin' it for nine blokes in a battalion of nearly a thousand men. I couldn't

remember one of their things who

- 34:30 their names were. I could write a letter from you sitting here in the tent, I'd walk out that door and I couldn't tell you a thing I'd writ or read to ya. You know your mind just become a blank. It was nothin' to do with me and as it wasn't repeated and this was the interesting thing, a few year ago Maroubra caught up with me through Billy Hughes, a bloke I know, and she said, "We've been trying to find you for fifty years to thank you for what you done for ourselves."
- 35:00 Her husband was a plumber and they wanted he went up in Maroubra and they wanted to make him manager of north Queensland and he wouldn't take the job on. Said he had to go to Cairns, live at Cairns, he said, "No I want to stay in Maroubra." His wife had beautiful copper plate writing and she he used to come every night and she used to write all the reports to the company and none of the company ever knew that he couldn't read nor write but once I read and wrote those letters to him, he become a totally different bloke, but the thing I'd like to know is today
- 35:30 how the devil did those blokes recognise one another? You know do they they'd get letters and they open 'em and show photos but there musta been some thing between 'em how they knew. Well I had a sergeant, buried him last September, you know a couple a years ago talkin' about blokes that couldn't read nor write, he said, "I never knew we had a bloke that couldn't read nor write in the platoon," but that was you know that was just some of the little odd mysteries that come up.
- 36:00 You just can't make out how they recog that's one thing I'd like to know, how do you recog those and yet I couldn't remember I couldn't I know there was three blokes in the company and nine blokes in the battalion and yet I could never remember their names, because as soon as they walked out that door you know I'd out the flap a the tent, I had nobody else in the tent with me when I done them, but your mind you know your mind just becomes blank but once this bloke I was readin' and writin' his letters he became, while he was a moody soldier
- 36:30 and that, once he was gettin' the information and that he turned he was a completely different bloke.
- So why did that private's wife go off at you in Sydney?**
- Because she found out, instead of me mutilatin' letters he'd been mutilatin' 'em himself. He'd been cuttin' all the bits out and fillin' in between and blamin' me. He knew, I knew that it was goin' on and I just used to laugh about it. I'd get this letter, no
- 37:00 say something to him, oh well she wasn't very polite when she told Reg off.
- So that was your job, to censor the letters then?**
- To censor the letters, but you only looked for certain words and you know a lot of them, you got to know the blokes. They'd come in, you'd just put your signature on and that was it.
- But what kind of things would they write to home?**
- Well they could have told the information or it might a been use to the use to the enemy and the enemy got the letters off the mail thing boat goin' back and that
- 37:30 you know what they coulda done with that information. To me it was utterly ridiculous.
- I see.**
- That to oh it might it mighta been a help in the Middle East but in the islands it was a completely you know different ball game.
- I wonder if the blokes that couldn't read or write ended up telling their wives that it was you writing the letters?**
- Well they said put it this way, when I called and seen this woman in Maroubra she had her grandson with her, oh he'd be in his
- 38:00 twenties, he even shook me by the hand. He said, "You're the bloke that used to read and write read and write grandpa's letters." You know he said the whole family knew about it that there and, "Oh you're the bloke that used to," you know the same grandson says it to me straight, "You're the bloke that used to read and write grandpa's letters." So you know mention you know mention.
- I wonder if any of them didn't tell their wives or their girlfriends?**
- Oh well their wives and that knew you couldn't read nor write
- 38:30 so probably find out either goin' to a probably had to go to a padre or something like that, but how trustworthy some of the padres were, it I never had a great opinion of them.
- That's probably why you were so well-respected Blue with from your men is that you were loyal?**
- Yeah well you can't ask loyalty to a man unless you're loyal to them. You've got to give and take but some of them, like a lot of people today,

- 39:00 it's got to be a one way street. See take business today, business today most businesses today are not run for the customer, they're run for the shareholder. They just, they looked after, as I say, banks and solicitors and accountants do today legally what they hung Ned Kelly for. You agree with that don't you, yeah. No, all you got to think of this ruddy shareholder and I remember
- 39:30 you know one woman a while back, she become very officious in a government office. I fixed her. I wasn't I wasn't rude to her. All I said to her, I said, "Look sister, if it wasn't for the likes of old bastards like me," I said, "All you'd do today instead of being in a good air conditioned well paid office, all you'd have been is in a comfort station to a Jap soldier." She fled and I meant it.
- 40:00 Don't ever forget. Well it was like when I done the cenotaph in Cairns, unveiled the plague blokes killed in action in Bougainville and I finished up to say, "What politicians, federal, state and local, councillors are to me are only politicians, if it wasn't for them men whose names are on that plague and the job them and their mates done, these politicians and all that wouldn't be in the job they're in." Any rate two blokes come up and met me at the reunion after
- 40:30 dinner. One was the local MP [Member of Parliament] and the mayor of Cairns and I got and all they said to me they said, "Shit mate, you don't pull any punches." I said, "No, I bloody meant it." Mm.

Tape 5

00:13 **42nd street in Crete?**

Well the battle of 42nd Street I was sent out with a patrol to contact the Germans, find out where they were. I took the whole platoon out and with the orders that if we found to have contact then we were to start fightin'

- 00:30 and the rest a the battalion they'd come over and help us out because after bein' bombed all round Greece and that, we were really browned off with the Germans and wanted to close in on 'em. Well we got to this food dump because rations had been pretty short. We're thinkin' of havin' a feed and one a the boys spotted Germans the other end doin' the same. So immediately we into 'em. Ah the next thing, fightin' away, the rest of the battalion come over to help us out

- 01:00 and on our southern flank was Maori battalion and they joined in and we chased the Germans back ah for a mile and a half you know and then we were recalled back. Outta that action I had one bloke killed, five wounded and we got two military medals out of it, out of the patrol we took out.

What did you

- 01:30 **sorry, did the Kiwi fighters sort of?**

Beg your pardon?

Did the New Zealand troops do you well?

New Zealand troops, they were really good. In fact we never thought of them as New Zealanders. They were just like Australians, their sense of humour and everything, except they had a slight difference when you got you know knew them well enough little things in their speech but men like as prisoners a war and that like you know when on the loose and to they were no different

- 02:00 to our blokes.

Mm?

That there.

The food dump that you mentioned that I mean what can you actually describe what that was? Was that a was that a like a supply...?

What's that?

That the food dump where you actually spotted the Germans?

Well the food dump was just a dump of food the English had put there for us you know and issuin' rations out to everyone, New Zealanders, Australians and some of their own blokes, Greeks and everything

- 02:30 and you know the Germans havin' a must a been hungry and started havin' a feed at the other end and we were in the other end and all we thought we came across a food dump and the rations we'd been on we thought we were gonna have a good feed and a course then we struck these Germans there we forgot about the feed. If it was a feed or a fight

Go on.

I know what you bastards are thinkin.' We picked a fight any day.

03:00 You're not you know what I was gonna say. You know one up on one up on you sister. You we have a fight any day. That there. So it was on then for young and old, cause all we were doin' that time bein' bombed you know for a month and knocked around all we wanted to do was get evens with 'em. That was all we was thinkin' of

03:30 and from then it was on.

So did you I mean you mention there were a few wounds and you lost one or two men?

One bloke killed, yeah.

Were they close by when you were chasing the Germans, did you actually see them get wounded, or?

Ah yeah oh two of 'em I put you know a bandage on myself, wounded. The fore of the tin hat was remarkable. That they were all hit through the tin hat. If the Germans had a been a bit lower, we'd have all got it through the head or neck but they were just firing a bit high and

04:00 for instance, mine went through the tin hat. I got the scar on the side of me head. I remember Red Saunders, that Abo there I was tellin' you about, he went in the front. Blew the screw out of the top of his top of it, the helmet, not a mark on him. Most remarkable one I seen was a bloke by the name of Potter, Harry Potter. A bullet went in, completely round his head was a circle like a halo and the bullet came out the same hole it went in but you got him, here he is, no hair,

04:30 the bullet had burnt it off right around his head in the tin helmet on. No, the old tin helmets were good that there.

Yeah if they protect you like that they're doin' all right?

Yeah to do it like that but it always amused us you know. We reckoned it'd be the nearest he'd ever have to a halo. You always said the right thing to him.

So can you talk to me about I guess the Germans that you did I mean did you pick off some of those Germans?

Beg your pardon?

Did you pick off any of the Germans that you were chasing?

05:00 Oh yes. No he's put it this way, we were workin' at that stage, the only good German was a dead one. You didn't like as we were taught these bayonet charges, it's better to shoot 'em before you get close to 'em and have to use a bayonet on them and most of 'em were shot because when they started to run and getting over stone fences and things like that, you know that you just you know open even open opened on 'em. I never seen

05:30 one thing I'll say of the Australians, I never seen anyone with the Germans anyone that attempted to surrender shot. I mean see with the Japs, you didn't wait 'em to put up their hands, you shot 'em first, but the Germans like when they put their hands up you let 'em surrender but there was no you know none a that happened. Well see in Crete at Malame and Heraklion the Australians took it and they surrendered. Well then because when the island surrendered what were pre ah

06:00 prisoners of war then become the captives because got it.

How did you get how did you get on with the locals in Crete?

We got on with the locals very well cause our attitude we were brought in was to treat everybody the same, because if you treated a person right, while they mightn't be with you they won't be against you. If you treat 'em crook, they'll be against you and I've often wondered that if the war had remained, if the Germans

06:30 had a treated the places they captured like human beings, especially in Russia, Ukraine and that. They sort of welcomed the Germans and then as they treated them wrong they become anti-German and I often wondered what had happened if they'd a treated 'em like we were to treat the people. We never ever you know I only ever remember once in the western desert that to ah a bloke you know stepped outta line from one of these Italian families

07:00 and he got twelve months gaol for it. You did anything bad you know bad. All today you'd probably get a reprimand and told off by a police sergeant but you couldn't against them. They weren't if they're not with you they're not against you. Oh what was that story I was gonna tell you I said I was gonna tell you about the Western Desert? When we were talking? Oh God. It'll come up. Go on.

Did any of the people in Crete take you in at all or

07:30 Oh yes but Crete they'd feed us and that but we found out hardly ever camped in a village with them because the Germans put on raids and they found one Australian one ah enemy soldier in there, they took it out on the village.

What did they do?

You used to camp out at night. They'd feed us and that or bring the food to us and I can remember seeing one village completely surrounded by troops

- 08:00 they rounded everybody up, shot all the blokes and burnt the village to the ground. I seen that with me own eyes and that what's happened. They'd take it out on the Cretians so you never ever the Crete people I can't speak highly enough of 'em and the way they it was what the Germans took off of them and they helped us out with what they had. They you know they were really good.

So what would the I guess the survivors who were left in the village like that do once

- 08:30 **all the men had been shot? I mean they'd**

Well the put it this way, see it was a funny thing about the Middle East, the Arab countries and the Greeks and that, it's the women seem to do all the hard work. I can remember in Palestine, you'd see the old bloke he'd be sittin' on the donkey drivin' along and the women and the kids'd be along carryin' everything on their head and shoulders and we used to take the blokes off the donkey, put the women on

- 09:00 and or put a load a food on. We weren't very popular with the Arabs at to that there but no no, the worry like they and you'd see it in Greece and Crete, the men sittin' in cafes and bars drinking and the women'd be out working the field. You know back in those days they still had this idea the treatin' like the women are like slaves or second class citizens but you know that was a

- 09:30 you know it was rather a shock to the Australians to come and see it.

The women that you'd end up putting on the donkeys and throw the fellas off,

Oh yeah.

Would they stay on the donkeys very long?

Oh until they got out of our road and then they probably the old man'd pull 'em back off again but you know they just had this thing that the male was far superior to anyone else but you know see as I say, comin' from Australia it was a rather a shock to us

- 10:00 that to that there.

We were just wondering from what you experienced in Crete, I mean I can't imagine what it would be like getting bombed out for a month, what was the worst of it?

Well just actually the bombing. Not knowing where they were coming, where they were gonna land. It hit like once you got that way, when you the bombs you as soon as they started to leave the plane and you'd see the way they were goin', you got very good at judgin' where they were going to land.

- 10:30 You know the thing of them is because you were seein' that many fall.

Were they were there different kind of bombs that you'd have to watch out for?

Oh mostly high explosive. Sometimes there'd be some smoke bombs put down but mostly high explosive that there. Go on.

I was just wondering how close to you would the actual

- 11:00 **planes get? How close would the fighters and bombers actually get to you?**

I suppose the closest bomb I ever had would be about oh a hundred yards from me that there you know and in the slit trenches layin' on the ground you could feel the ground shake you know vibrate and you know all you'd say, "Jesus that one was close," and that there but you know wonderin' who the you know what damage done to the others.

- 11:30 **I guess if you could feel the ground vibrate then you'd know you were pretty much all right.**

Oh yeah, that there.

Did you sorry, did you lose any good mates through the

Oh you know you lost a few good mates. Well for instance this bloke got killed the battle of 42nd street ah he was a cousin to a very close friend of mine. You know used to live near us pre-war. I didn't know him but I joined up with him in the same platoon.

- 12:00 You lost a few good mates but while you had good mates, you did not become very close together because see I can remember the battle a 42nd Street these two blokes were killed. They were in two different platoons and they were killed and they were only killed about ten metres apart and they were both killed together you know and often when people become very close mates

- 12:30 and one got killed, the effect it had mentally on their mate their close their close mate. No you didn't

you know while you made mates, you didn't become too close or attached to 'em you know I found that there, but then again I mighta been a bit queer but then there'd be a lot of blokes agree with me, that I was queer.

Oh that's a whole other story by the sounds of it.

13:00 **Stan did you sorry, Blue did you ever see any of the fellas you're talkin' about who did get a bit I guess close to their mates who had a bit of a tough time dealing with losin' their friends?**

Oh I think up there you had to sort of you got that way, I suppose they'd call 'em you know bloomin' counsellors or somethin' like that today but the blokes lookin' after 'em you know. Gradually talk 'em out of it that that there

13:30 and like as I said about these counsellors, I can't see how a person can counsel you unless they've been through the same experience themselves. For instance, when you lose your partner it's one thing. You know as you get older one of you is gonna go first, but when you lose one of your family it's a different ballgame and I can't see how a counsellor can pay, and I think the best thing happened. An old sister lives close here, nursing sister army, and sayin' to me one day, I was talkin' about counsellors and I said, "It's a pity you weren't round after

14:00 World War II the stories we coulda told," and she said, "Blue, Ena," that was me wife," she said, "and I nursed you bastards," she said, "and yet at every looney bin in Australia full of counsellors and psychiatrists you'd all have been outside laughin'," but no and I can't you know but then I was talkin' to a counsellor one day I was gonna meet this counsellor and she said, "No all you gotta do is sit there and listen," that there but I think a good one was, this

14:30 grandson that was in Timor in a truck accident and they got called all up for counselling and he got up. He said I'm going out. I'm takin' me grandfather's advice," and the doctor said, "What was your grandfather's advice?" "Pull your so and so finger out and get into gear," and he said half the blokes walked out with him.

There you go.

Yeah, but no the least thing today is oh you immediately got to be counselled but you gotta I think a thing is different people

15:00 handle things different ways and you know you just sort of I suppose in a way some of the things I done with blokes is sort of partly counselling but you just sort of you don't think it's counselling you just have you know a yarn about this and that and goes on all right.

Yeah. You mentioned this morning how you felt it was a really bad thing to have a couple of brothers in the one unit

Yeah.

Because you know

Yeah killed together, mm.

Yeah, did you actually see experience any of that or see any of that sorta stuff?

15:30 Ah

That sorta thing?

I only seen it once and as I said but like this as soon as an action was over or a bombing raid or anything like that they'd all be yellin' out for one another and I felt that it wasn't very good for the morale a the blokes all the other blokes in to hear. They almost got to hate the brothers yellin' out for one another than they did the bombin' raid. You know it was you were shaken and things like that but you didn't want to hear that sort of thing goin' on.

16:00 It was over and that was it and as I said, after that show, where possible I never liked brothers or even real close mates together in the same platoon.

Mm.

But but then there was some queer things. I remember once in Bougainville there was this officer sacked, bowler hatted. I remember seein' it done. His brother

16:30 in the same unit but ten mile inland. One brother was sacked for bein' useless and the other one at the same time was decorated for a job he done ten mile away. Practically the same moment. That was always a coincidence. Always you know amazed me that and just you know as I say you know just some of the queer things you seen happen in wartime but you just can't make out why you know. As if the brother won the military

17:00 medal you know musta felt somethin' happenin' just went half balmy or somethin' like that and done it but he deserved what he done but it was just one a the queer things that happened.

What was it like getting your military medal for the action in 42nd street?

Well I won the military medal in '41 and I did not know I'd won it until the end of '45 because see, the whole unit's captured and

- 17:30 when we were when the war was over, as the company commander was captured and was in Germany for three years and the decorations never got out to the Australians for the Australians till after the war was over that cause remember there was two you know another bloke that was in my platoon. You know he got the military medal too and he was killed up in the islands and his wife and daughter was at the you know
- 18:00 at the presentation when I got mine at Government House in Melbourne but you never you never thought of it. We just you know you nearly thought when you got it, "What the bloody hell did I get that for?" because as I said it was a part of you know a job and it was you know then a course when I got the cross in Bougainville you know I never expected anything and actually it was a funny thing, because as I
- 18:30 said I wouldn't rewrite Porton and neither would the 2IC and when we went to brigade headquarters, recommendations I made for blokes to get decorated, we found out they were all torn up and when it all came up, the bloke from the artillery got a military cross, the bloke from the water transport got a military cross and the general in charge of Bougainville said, "Why isn't there anyone's names here
- 19:00 from the infantry? There's not one decoration." So as I was one of the two surviving I was got the military cross and one of me blokes that got a military should a got a military medal, I remembered his name, got a mention in despatches but he should have you know he should have got probably a distinguished conduct medal, which is higher than the military medal, but there was a lot of things throughout the war years and as I was saying I read a book on Korea the same was that
- 19:30 if and some officers, if they didn't like the bloke and the bloke earnt the medal they wouldn't decor they wouldn't put a decoration in for him and some people doin' the things see it from a different angle. You know there's an arguments the medal. See a thing can happen out front there, you're over in that corner and I'm in that corner here. In principle we see the same thing but the angle we see it looks totally different and the amount of arguments I've heard about that thing there that no,
- 20:00 Australian army was recognised as one of the toughest armies in the world to get decorations. That for instance, see military cross and military medals were handed out. DSOs [Distinguished Service Orders] ah well they were known as two things. The Distinguished Service Order, which meant that was for the job the unit was trained to do and do there. The other DSO was, "Oh give 'em a DSO they

20:30 were Diddle Shot Off."

What was that sorry?

Diddle shot off.

Did that happen very often?

Only ever known it to ever to happen to one bloke.

Really?

Yeah. He finished up two stone lighter.

That's a shame and where was he when that happened?

Oh it was just got a bit of shrapnel hit him from a bomb that there but like I taught my daughters, you wanna handle blokes

- 21:00 and they get fresh there's only one to stop 'em. Kick 'em between the legs. Brings 'em all down to the same level.

That's good advice.

Yeah. You have daughters treat 'em the same. Mm.

Blue, can you tell me about Blamey's ragged arse disciples? Is that the...?

Blamey's well that was actually through the desert we were known as the Bengal Harriers, the speed which we went through the desert

- 21:30 and that and then as we were the thing is, for instance when we joined in '39 we were known as no hopper hopes, jail birds, wife beaters and all this sort of thing. Well you know and because our attitude was the first day you've done it we as good as those old b's and I always remembered there were gettin' on troop the troop deck sergeant see checkin' everybody up the wharf and this woman over near us cryin' her eyes
- 22:00 out and the officer went over and put his arm around her. He said, "Look who are you?" Told him. She said, "We'll look after him don't worry. She said, "I'm not cryin' because he's goin' away, I'm crying for joy." She said, "I got eleven kids. I won't have any more and I won't have him comin' home drunk every Friday night beltin' me up." She said, "I'm cryin' for joy," you know and as I say that was part of the early you'd heard about these things. That was part of the early the early education. He died a POW in

- Germany that there and you know that sort of
- 22:30 thing you know went on but you know if you ever read the book 'The 39ers' you know what they call us and that and
- Mm.**
- They actually they ah done it and we done it and as I say, you young blokes today'd still do the same if somethin' goes wrong.
- So well was there but there was a poem called...**
- Yeah oh 'The ragged arse disciples.'
- Yeah.**
- Have you got it there in that thing? I can always remember one you know bit, "Three
- 23:00 weeks it took us gettin' there and we halved it gettin' out." Where's me bloody glasses? Oh on the table that no, the poems they got you know through different areas. Oh we should a got it out before. Should we turn it off for a minute?
- No, it'll come. I heard a of a really illuminating brothel song from Alexandria.**
- What was that one?
- Oh I couldn't I can't I couldn't quote you but it was...**
- 23:30 Yeah.
- Ah it went on for about six verses.**
- Yeah. Oh no
- But it was a bit of a warning I think.**
- Warning yeah. Well see remember one thing in Cairo, they used to call it Sister Street in Cairo.
- Mm.**
- Ah that's the Burkha, and in the First World War, the First World War, diggers one time was known, pass me those glasses over off the table too please, and ah
- 24:00 and I had to battle the Burkha. Any rate we's on we're on guard duties like in Tel Aviv and this fight's on and I can always remember, this good time girl they'd thrown her out of two storeys up. Outta there on the bed come floatin' down towards the street with us. The fight was on again that there but the you know well put it this way, all of it were a lot of it was
- 24:30 was to get as much out of the much as out of the troops as they could and a lot of 'em you know while they were operatin' on the girl they had another one come in and pick your pockets.
- Is that a true story? So they threw...**
- Yeah, a true story that there. Oh no. Do you want this story? There's one on Egypt.
- Yeah no, it's just after the poem.**
- 25:00 Poem there yeah but that's
- No it's all right. We can**
- No that's Suda Bay. No. You back home tonight. No go on, sorry. I didn't quite hear you.
- So Blue what, we'll do the poem later, but**
- Yeah this is one this one of Egypt. Yeah I've got 'em all here in the book. Go on.
- I just**
- 25:30 **wanted to know what your opinion of the Germans were as fighters?**
- They were actually the Germans we found 'em very fair and very good fighters. They to me they'd stand they were as good as the Australian fighters. I'd rate them you know next door to us and the Kiwis together. They were all very good and the ones we come we found them very fair and when they took the prisoners of war, although we
- 26:00 wiped out seventy per cent of the German paratroopers the paratroopers, the blokes were taken prisoner of war, they said they treated 'em the best they ever were treated by any German. They said but when they went back to Germany and these base blokes took 'em over in prisoner of war camps they said the treatment was totally different. He said a lot of 'em were animals.

Mm. I'm just wondering Blue

26:30 **if you could while you were we were talking about the other poem you were telling you told me a story of some of some stuff that actually happened in I guess some of the brothels with some of the guys gettin' money nicked off them and all that sorta stuff.**

Yeah.

Can you just tell me that story again?

Well the story's told like you know what I heard

Yeah.

You know while the bloke'd be in bed with the with the girls, another one'd come in and go through the pockets ah of the put it this way, if you're in bed with someone you can only keep your eye on one

27:00 thing can't ya? Can't watch your pockets too.

And so in and so on this occasion when that was discovered, what happened?

Hm?

And on one occasion?

Oh well you wouldn't know until they got up and got out.

Yeah?

See it was like actually the old saying of the brothels with the Yanks, where in the Guadalcanal, the Solomons and one Yank asked the other, "What,

27:30 last night. What was she like?" "Oh," he said, "Gored her canal." Then there was the other one the Yanks too. He came out here and he showed a wad a notes. Went to the bar, asked for a beer and he give him a glass a beer. He said, "Look I'm from Texas. Everything's big in Texas." So he give him a jug. "Ah that's right." Pulled out a roll a notes that most people wouldn't have jumped over. "I'm from Texas. Everything's big in Texas." So after a few jugs he

28:00 gets this girl. She remarks the same thing. He pulls out a cigarette about a foot long. "Yes," he said to her, "I'm from Texas. Everything's big in Texas." As the night goes on he gets off and goes to bed with her and suddenly he stops. He said, "So sister, are you from Texas?"

One would hope,

28:30 **you mentioned before Blue that it was during I think it was sort of during Crete and you know that those campaigns there that you lost your respect for COs and**

Yeah well after, see you do a job and when you do a job and you're left on Crete, we done everything we was asked to through Greece and Crete and then you're left behind like a shag on a rock. Well you feel browned

29:00 off. You done the job and they left ya and from then on, my attitude to the powers that be become more outspoken and totally different. In other words, I thought the lot of the powers that be, all they're interested in is usin' ya up and with you when you can't come back we'll just throw you away and it was to change, for the rest of me life was to change me outlook on things. The powers that be that you know then I'd often ask come in people and they

29:30 start puttin' a sob story over. You just ask 'em straight, "What do you want?" I said, "You you wouldn't be talkin' to me if you didn't want somethin'," you know and that used to get rid of a lot of people quick.

So that's when you just started talkin' straight.

Straight you know. I become more outspoken that that there and you know they reckon I haven't changed since.

I think you're doin' pretty well.

No, no. You just ask 'em you know what it was and see a thing that used to amuse

30:00 me on religion, we'd have these for the amount a times we'd have these parades goin' into an action and it would always finish up with the padre saying, "We'll win. God is with us," and when we got to the Germans they had 'Mein Gott' on their belt buckles, "My God," and I remember one time at a church parade in Bougainville before Porton and of course the father sitting up, "We'll win. God is with us," and a voice behind me piped up, I'm standin' out in the front of the platoon,

30:30 "I hope the bastard's got an Owen gun," that, "or a submachine gun." 'Course immediately the CO and everyone, "Who said that? Who said that?" I turned' round, winked at the bloke that said it and yelled out, "Who said that?" They come up, "You coulda got us into trouble with that sir." "No," I said, "I was agreein' with ya." You know they always finished up with that you know. "Oh we'll win. God is with us." Mm. As I say, God is good and the devil's not half so bad when you get to know 'im.

So

31:00 **when did you fall out with the padres? Or was that...**

Oh the

What was your you said that you didn't have a high opinion of the

No, I never. No, padres no I never. The only good well put it this way, two good blokes we met. One was the original Salvation Army bloke for the desert in the Middle East. He was a top bloke. I had a lotta respect for him as a man and everything. I remember in Tobruk, we go to Tobruk, had to go and drag him in

31:30 behind our lines. He'd come in, took Tobruk and dagos were still out in the desert and that and he set up his canteen a hundred yards in front of the front line. Had to go and drag him back behind us and as I said, I'm non-religious and yet when the brigade in Dutch New Guinea and that, me best drinkin' mate was the RC [Roman Catholic] padre cause we both had, while he'd never criticise a man

32:00 it wasn't what he said but by his looks you knew what he thought of everyone but no, no, but the opinion of a lot of padres to me they left a bit to be desired. Another good bloke we had was a Church of England and they took him away from us, put him with another AIF battalion, but he was a top bloke that. As a piano player, poured a few the more beers you poured him

32:30 the better he played the piano but he was human you know, he made no bones about it.

And what was it about the others that fell short do you reckon?

What, the other padres?

Yeah.

Oh no they had this idea because they were taught you in the church that you were mighty and all that they thought they were as safe as the Bank of England you know and it was about all this attitude, "Don't do what I do, do as I say," that there and it's like goin' into action. You never asked a bloke to do anything you wouldn't

33:00 go to do yourself but it was easier to talk about say you know, "We will win and God is with us," and I thing I found him missin' more times that he was with us.

Can you tell us, excuse me, can you tell us what you thought when you heard that the Japanese had entered the war?

When the Japanese ended the war? Well the night the Japanese ended the war we were called up ten o'clock, battalion commanders' conference. Ah Blue Shulton the 2nd

33:30 5th and I had A company, we were both reds, we were as battle lords and that we were to be the two leading companies goin' into action and as we were 39ers, we were wonderin' which one of us was gonna buy it this time and got over, and we found the war was over and a course immediately all hell bloke loose. Everybody's shootin' off and yellin' and that and drinkin'. As far as the war ends, the atomic bomb

34:00 if you'd a been a front line soldier I think you'd agree with me, they never dropped enough of 'em and they never dropped 'em soon enough and I've never changed me opinion since. It's one thing in peace time to sit back and say you shouldn't do this, shouldn't do that. Put you in the front line and then you think a different ways. It was a good quick way to end the war, otherwise it coulda dragged on and we don't know how many of us woulda been here today.

34:30 For instance a thing that's not known at the end of the war MacArthur invaded the Philippines and pushin' on Okinawa and all that. He wanted to put one division of Australian troops in every American corp, which meant the Australian'd take the brunt of the fightin' but MacArthur he always had a few when we even had a whole at Bougainville, there was always a few Yanks hangin' around and he never ever called it then an Australian victory. It was always an allied

35:00 victory because there was always a few Yanks hangin' around but he never handed the proper due out where it was due.

So you didn't have much time for MacArthur?

No. We used to call him Dug Out Douglas.

What did you call him?

Dug out Douglas. For instance in I can remember when we were in Milne Bay, there was a great write up in the paper, 'MacArthur is moved his headquarters a thousand miles north.' He moved 'em from Melbourne

35:30 to Brisbane. He was still thousands a miles behind the front line. I never ever once see him. See old Tom Blamey, the commander of the Australian troops, I've seen him up the front line. I can remember

General Savige, corps commander in Bougainville, on the attack on December Ridge. He was up with the forward company that was doin' the attack and they asked him to remove his red hat. He'd draw the crabs. You know what drawin' the crab is, don't you? The enemy'd see this red hat and reckon he's higher up

36:00 and open up on him and you know we used to call it drawin' the crabs. That that there but no a lot of 'em you know that and a lotta places they never give due where service was due. The right people never got it.

Yeah it happened a bit.

Yeah. Well it probably still happens today even in public life.

And what about, Blue, just going back to I guess after your

36:30 **campaigns in Africa and after Crete and coming back to the unit, whether when you heard that the Japanese had first entered the war, what was that what did you think then?**

Oh we said, "God not them," and then ah we mighta we wanted Menzies wanted us all back in Aus... Curtin wanted us all back in Australia. Curtin was in then, thank God, but Churchill wanted us all to go to Burma,

37:00 save Burma, the Indians and that and we were half way nearly from Ceylon to Burma and Curtin won and we went back and we had three months in Ceylon in case the Japanese were attackin' the islands you know to come round and get a base in the bottom of India and there was Curtin, John Curtin the prime minister then, wartime prime minister of Australia, he was the one that got us back to Australia. As far as Churchill was concerned we reckon you know

37:30 "Oh we can take, the Japs can have Australia. We can get it later." In other words, we were just, too often the Australia used up. Like even in the Middle East, a thing we had and we had to fight to keep 'em all in one lot was Blamey. He always kept in one lot that the English in the Middle East wanted to break us up into different units in different areas but Blamey, you know, something I liked about him.

38:00 He liked to keep us altogether. He was in charge and he done it, and he done a good job.

So he was one CO that you had

He was no he was, Blamey

Oh well commander in chief.

Blamey was in command of all Australian troops.

Yeah. So you had a bit of respect for him.

Well I admired him for that. You hear a lotta criticism about him but it's like this, the Australian attitude, you go for the big fellas. Bring 'em down bring 'em down. He was known as a womaniser and all that

38:30 and I say good luck to him but if you and I done that, as we're only workers we wouldn't even get a bloody mention, but because he's in a big way you gotta pull 'em down and Blamey didn't give a damn for anyone. I remember General Savige tellin' me after the war, Blamey had four enemies to fight. He had the fighting enemy, which were the Italians, the Germans and the Japs. Number two he had the politicians. Number three he had the press. Number

39:00 four he had the Yanks and he said he found the en easiest enemy to fight was the fighting enemy, because all the others were just either grabbing on and glory or back stabbing and that. Savige, General Savige told me that you know a few years after the war was over when he stayed with us.

Mm.

And I think there's a lotta truth in that. You get on top and there's always somebody tryin' to pull you down.

Yeah, very true.

39:30 **Okay Blue we'll just hold it there.**

Tape 6

00:30 **Okay, go ahead.**

Nurses had the rank of a lieutenant.

Oh yes we

Two pips and after the war I was married a nurse and I happened one day to pick up her old pay book and while they always got the got the pay they had the rank of an officer's rank, they were only gettin' a corporal's pay, which was nine bob a day. To me that I always thought they were gettin' the full twenty one shillings a day like an officer'd get and there was one old nursing sister out here I mentioned before, she was a captain. Well a

01:00 captain'd be getting thirty bob a day and all she was gettin' was sergeant's pay, which was twelve bob a day. You know it was just the stupidity of it. You do a job, you're worth the money you're gettin' and that was the thing that amazed me.

Yes and also you had two daughters.

An old nursing sister is as probably as good as you know any doctor cause the amount of time the experience and the way they see it right

01:30 through. A doctor comes in and you're out in a quarter of an hour, but a nursing sister she's on an eight hour shift. She might be sitting here every hour and the way that you know the difference was. As I said like about the youngest daughter, she's Fitzroy, our all the Greeks and Italians used to come to her for advice rather than go to a doctor. That was the one you know Peg said was a better nursing sister than she was. That's there but as I say, a lot of 'em to me a lot of doctors, like a lot of heads a business, they get what I call the

02:00 God syndrome.

I think I might know what that is but do you want to explain?

You know, no, the God syndrome you know, you're better than anyone else. You know you're, they think cause they're boss you know they know everything. See I had some, when I was working with blokes, people in Melbourne'd buy a place and you'd be workin' for 'em and they'd come and try to tell ya you're doin' it wrong, "You should do it this way,

02:30 you should do it that way," and I remember one bloke, I handed him the tools and come up, I said, "Look stuff your job. Go and do it your bloody self," and he had to beg me to come back and work for him, cause he couldn't do it himself, but they try to tell you how to do it and they think cause they own it they get this holier than thou attitude. Now I always call we always called it as young blokes the God syndrome.

When you got wounded in the war, how did you find the nurses there?

03:00 Ah wounded in the war I never had a nursing sister with me at any time. For instance when the bombing I just went on. When I got wounded twice in Crete the first on the head, I still stayed with the platoon in command of the platoon. When I got wounded in the foot the next day we were prisoners of war. Never got near a doctor. I still got one bent toe there from the two broken toes and never went to hospital

03:30 and the only thing I got back to there I went to hospital the nursing sisters, the first time I was in the hospital was in Ceylon when they were tryna patch me up a bit, and I found the nursing sisters quite good.

Was that an Australian?

Yeah this is in Ceylon, but some of them for instance we had one sister, she couldn't give you needles. Just like some of them give you a needle and you hardly feel it. Others there, they get you. Well we nickname we nicknamed her Fixed Bayonets Charge

04:00 and we got her that way she wouldn't give anybody in the ward a needle. We nicknamed her Fixed Bayonets Charge. "Here comes Fixed Bayonet Charge." Mm but no, so most the all our nursing sisters they were good. Like as I say, those ones that come up through the ranks and worked their way up, they sorted them out. Some were better at some things and better at others but by and large I found 'em quite good. I can't say you know a bad word against 'em.

Blue I was curious

04:30 **to know when you were talking about when you were in Alexandria and they were giving you a debriefing**

Mm.

What did they say to you?

Well they questioned us all about what we seen of the Germans, how the Greeks treated us, and that and all they wanted to do was keep us off the streets and off the grog so nobody'd speak outta turn but while we were bein' debriefed prisoners we were treated very well by the English. I can't say anything wrong with the treatment. You know we were as escapees and on the run for six months, you know they made little tin Gods of us

05:00 that there and see another thing was, when we got back as escapees to Palestine, the training battalion. Well the training battalion the officers in the training battalion, as fighting men officers and sergeants,

they left a lot to be desired and the same thing happened out here in Australia in Canungra but training men to go forward to fighting units in action they done a very good job.

05:30 While they couldn't do it themselves, they could train men to do it and it changed my opinion a lot of officers that were bowler-hatted and went to these other training units and that and the way they trained 'em I changed me opinion of a lot of them. I thought, "You mightn't do the job yourself, but at least you're givin' us good men." We knew that when they came out of those training battalions to a front line there you knew the blokes were well-trained and they were trained to do things more than probably they might see in action

06:00 and it changed me opinion you know of quite a few blokes that. That so like as they weren't cut out for fighting units, but for training units they were cut out for good.

After Alexandria is that when you were chosen to go back to Australia to train men?

When I came no, after Alexandria joined the unit, training unit, then I was with a unit in Ceylon. It wasn't no I was never in the training battalion in the wartime.

06:30 I was you know front line, except for the three months LO'ing, that's a liaison officer, where the liaison officer is to do between your unit and the brigade headquarters to go back and report to the brigadier and what have you and, as I say, as I'd had the experience in the Middle East three years of fighting, they used me to go and LO to every fighting unit while they were in action. Cause I said to the Brigadier one day and I got him about it

07:00 and he said, "Look Blue you go and you've got the front line and you tell me what you see." He said, "The others only tell me what they're told to tell me." Well there was no skin off my nose. I made... it changed me opinion of the unit commanders. I thought they had a very lonely job in charge of a lotta men and if they talked to anyone higher up, the ones higher up, they'd be wonderin' how good they were and if they talked things over with the with the blokes lower

07:30 down, they'd think they don't know what they're talkin' about and I found out when possible, I always used to try to take a bottle a grog up to 'em. You know whisky, gin, anything like that, rum, and we'd sit down at night and we'd have a friendly yarn and some of the things they come out with and you only reported back things you know a lotta things were said to you in confidence, you kept your mouth shut and a lotta those

08:00 unit commanders I made friends for life with them. You know cause they'd have a good yarn with ya and nothing was reported back but as I thought, you know they had a very you know lonely existence on their own.

Well what were your thoughts when you were told you were going to be sent to Dutch New Guinea?

I don't well actually Dutch New Guinea was just another in the Pacific islands. After seeing Milne Bay it was just another place and we went to Merauke

08:30 on the south coast of Dutch New Guinea, which is now West New Guinea, and it was the worst place I'd ever been in the world. It was flat, swampy, you couldn't go five mile without walkin' through a swamp and put it there in the Australian language, it was known as the arsehole of the world and they never give you any toilet paper to wipe it up. It was there just stinking stinking muddy swamps and you go

09:00 wadin' through them and that and the stink of the mud there you know and smell and the people in Dutch New Guinea, the Ki Kis, they I think are the most backward people you ever seen. They all talked in grunts you know. Never seemed to have much of a language I could understand and those on patrol or anything like that we found out they were useless, whereas the Papuans around Milne Bay and the natives I was to meet in Bougainville,

09:30 you know they were quite good.

Where did you go from Dutch New Guinea then?

From Dutch New Guinea we came back to Australia, had a fortnight's leave in Australia and then I done a school for a fortnight at Beenleigh, tactical school, that was when I was appointed LO, and then we were off to Bougainville. Oh the place I was thinkin' to get to in Bougainville, Torokina on the west coast. It's about half way up the islands.

10:00 So what were your thoughts on Bougainville when you first arrived there?

Well actually we'd seen the hills and no swamps and the conditions there, we thought it was much better than it was after this holy whole awful dump in Dutch New Guinea that that there and the hills and that and a course when you went up to the hills, it was quite cool then. Nice you know coolish during the days in the southern swamps

10:30 and quite cool at night. As far as I'm concerned up the Numa Numa Trail I had the West flank, the northern flank I could have finished the war there because the conditions that there were much better than anywhere else I'd struck in the islands but after a month there, back we come for the northern sector.

Did you see any action in Dutch New Guinea?

No, there was only part there's only a company and a half seen action in Dutch New Guinea. When the

- 11:00 Japs started to come down the South and they got as far as Eilanden River. That was our furthest outpost and when they were wiped out there, they were all ambushed there and they thought you know no one was there didn't know and they never pushed down any further but we were sort of Dutch New Guinea. They were expectin' the Japanese to come from Timor and that. When they couldn't get over Kokoda Trail or around through the southern type Eastern side of Milne Bay
- 11:30 they might try to penetrate down the South coast of West New Guinea. When we wipe... they wiped out a few hundred on the Eilanden River and they never tried again after that but we were always out on patrol you know thinkin' they might try to come anywhere over the trails over the mountains.

Now you said before that the island war was a very different one.

Well the island war was different to the Middle East this way.

- 12:00 Every action we went to in the Middle East, we saved money and when we came out we were sent to a town or a place where you could go and blow it and have a good time. You know really let your hair down, but in the islands, the only difference in the islands between in and out of action was when you were out of action ah there was less chance of being shot at. You still had to have plenty of patrols and guards out in case there was Japanese wanderin' around tried to penetrate but
- 12:30 the you know physical conditions and that there, the other thing was of course when you were out of action there was always put on a picture show a couple a nights a week but the living conditions were you know was not much different.

Can you tell us about Bougainville? What first happened when you arrived there?

Well in Bougainville when we first arrived there we went straight into action. Took over from the Yanks who were just holding Torokina as there and for an

- 13:00 aerodrome and that and they thought no, you know, at least there that, you know, let the Japs go but when Australia there it was to move in and you know expand the area and what have you and then we went up the central sector up the Numa Numa Trail. Well as I say, the first couple a months I was LOin' there and then they sent me back to the battalion and they thought, "Well it's silly really. Old Blue's had three months bludge," and but by that time they reckoned while the Numa Numa Trail was my first three months,
- 13:30 I seen more action than anyone else in the brigade because what the brigadier was sendin' me up the front all the time and any rate getting up there with forty men, they'd had a battalion of Yanks out there then a company of Australians. They sent silly old Blue up there with forty men and we had a good time up there. Well first of all when I took over this position, there was nothing but lice and dead air. They put land mines out and nobody had ever kept a
- 14:00 copy of a map where they laid 'em, so you couldn't get in. So the first thing I was dug was filled all the dug outs and slip trenches in and dig new ones to cut out the vermin and then I done dug outs on the reverse flank side, you know what the side is, the hill, and I let the blokes at night time with these dug outs and a blanket over the door so no light showed they could be play cards till ten o'clock at night and where there was only three narrow tracks about
- 14:30 a two foot wide to come into the place, instead of havin' all the blokes on the previous ones did two hours on, four off. All the blokes used to do was two hours guard every night. I put two men on each flank, cause the thing was, you'd have to crawl up the mountains they were that steep and as three lots had been there before and all laid land mines and booby traps out and not knowin' where no map was caused, you know you just wouldn't nobody could get through without without blowin' 'emself up
- 15:00 and so and as far as the war was concerned, I could have finished the war up there.

Were you were you trained to know where the mines would be and how to disassemble them?

Disa... to disassemble 'em yes, but where they were, when you laid a mine field of booby traps out, you always had to make a map up. We were trained always to make a map up to show people where they were but the Yanks and the previous Australians

- 15:30 hadn't done it. It was just poor training. See you shoulda had a map to you know to show where they were. Well put it this way, well some of the places like say for instance in Seceli where we were, well it'd a been impossible to go up those flanks at night. You know during the day time even the day time because it was that steep and I was always remember about the mountains in Dutch New Guinea
- 16:00 at least in Bougainville, they were that steep and a lot of even even in New Guinea, but then on the top of the hill you'd be lucky actually a lotta the mountains the top'd be two or three feet wide and I could always remember at Milne Bay we stopped once out on a patrol. Reg Saunders is Abo with us and he said, "You know this country's not fit for a bloody white man." You know we used to have a saying, "Not fit for an Abo." He said, "Not fit for a bloody white man," and we just laughed over it.

Did many men get wounded in Bougainville because of

16:30 **the mines?**

Well I never had one man wounded because of mine the mine my you know myself. The Japanese we attacked the Japanese. They didn't seem to have many booby traps there at all or either that, or the barrages that we had the artillery put down before we attacked could have exploded the lot.

Can what did they look like? Can you explain what the mines looked like?

Mines?

Yeah.

Well actually all a mine is, a lot of

17:00 'em you put in you stood on 'em the pressure'd set 'em off. See you laid booby traps out. They call 'em booby traps, grenades. You put a thin string instead of like a pin through to hold the lever in, you put a bit a string and to it you attach a trip wire so that if anyone pushed against the trip wire the pressure would break the string and explode the grenade. Well if you ever come across them yourself, like you had to pull a

17:30 mine a peel down, well you'd always put your hand around the grenade and push the pin in before you know you found a safe. Then you screwed the base off and found out you know where the ignition was.

Did you have special men in the unit that knew how to do that?

Ah there was always actually a sergeant and two men to do it, but you were all trained to a certain amount that there.

18:00 **And how did the Yanks treat you when you took over their position?**

The Japs?

The Yanks.

The Yanks? Well they were that busy gettin' out and goin' up into you know goin' towards the Philippines and that they couldn't care less. The thing that most amazed me about takin' the Yanks over in Bougainville, the stuff what they were buryin' at sea was stuff we'd a given you know our bottom teeth for. You know good stuff and the

18:30 way the Americans this we found in Milne Bay, we used to say with the Yanks, they'd have one truck load of troops and the Yanks had these K rations [Field Rations Type K] and all we got was a tin of bully beef and biscuits and we'd have six truck loads of K rations and the seventh truck'd be full of heart purple hearts. See the Yanks, every time their bloke got a scratch or that ah he got a purple heart. For instance like today, if I'd a been a Yank, I'd a been wearin' five purple hearts

19:00 that that there but then while we found with K ration I found, after a few feeds of 'em you were pleased to get back to bully beef. Although you hated bully beef and rice it's you know it really stuck to you. We used to go out on patrols and we'd take bully beef. Bully, feed three men to a tin and cook rice. We could always find one place during the day where we'd cook rice and then we'd have it cold for the rest of the time then and that really stuck to you, you know, we had to go crook,

19:30 you know everybody went crook about it but you had to go crook about somethin'.

So the Americans ate food that didn't stick to them? Like cake?

Coke?

Cake.

Cake? Never seen cake in the islands.

What did the Americans have in their rations that...

Oh they had cake, tinned cake and that, in their rations but I mean Australian rations. No, they the thing is they the food they had the amount of space and that it took up wouldn't

20:00 ah you know it wouldn't last that long and it didn't seem to stick to you like bully beef and that. See you could take one tin of bully beef last a man all day but the Yanks, the packs and the size of the rations they had was remarkable.

Do did you ever fight alongside the Americans?

No, we had 'em not in the fighting. We had 'em close to us and supporting us but the way they used to shoot off at anything you know, planes comin' over and and the way they fired,

20:30 often we were more scared of the Yanks than we were of the Japs because you knew the Japs were firin' but the Yanks they as I said, a lot of Yanks they were trigger happy. They all thought they were John Wayne or Errol Flynn. They had this you know big idea and the thing that most got me about the Yanks

that came back to Australia, Brisbane, and talkin' to a Yank one day and he said, "I spent three years," and all we had then was the Africa Star after three years for servin' in North Africa

21:00 and yet he'd only been in the army two months and he had three decorations. One because he volunteered, another one because he got outta the state and as soon as he got on board a ship to come over see he's got a third decoration. That there and when you look on TV when you see the Yankees and you look at the rows a decorations they got and you look at Peter Cosgrove there. He's only got two rows through Vietnam and all that, Korea and that. No, it's ah it was a different

21:30 you know different places you know the way they handed 'em out.

So tell us about the action you saw in Bougainville.

The action? Well we used to actually when we were out on the west bank we used to go and raid the Japs every day. Stir 'em up, shoot 'em up. Cause we reckoned if we done that, that was one reason we could sleep easy at night. We'd stir 'em up and they wouldn't come and attack us at night

22:00 and I remember once this ridge, the Yanks had never taken it, nobody had ever taken it. One day we got in amongst 'em and I was about to make a drive on 'em. We'd had a few shots at 'em and suddenly a corporal tapped me on the shoulder and he pointed to each hill. On each hill they had a machine gun nest. They'd have wiped the lot of us out if we'd opened up. So ah discretion

22:30 bein' the better part of valour, I pulled out and of course durin' that little bit we had with 'em I had one bloke badly wounded and he's moanin' and groanin' and I thought, "God he'll draw the crabs," and you know what they are don't you?

Red hats.

Draw the no draw the crabs, which means they're fire had put the enemy onto ya. You know, in other words he'd let you know where you were.

Yeah.

So I said he said, "If I give him another injection I'll kill him." I said, "Give

23:00 it to me. It's either he gets killed or some of our blokes get killed goin' out." So I give him another injection. He come good three days later in Greenslopes in Brisbane. Doesn't remember a thing. He's still alive today and any rate, got out and I said, "We'll do a raid round the other side." Well it took us three hours to get round the rear of 'em and we found out why the Americans and the Australians had never taken that, because every time a bombing and shelling came on, they went a hundred feet over a cliff and went into more caves and

23:30 are quite safe and as soon as the shelling and that stopped, they're immediately back in their firing positions and I said to one two inch mortar man, he said to me, "How far across the gorge sir?" I said, "Three hundred yards," to have a go at the caves. I said, "Low trajectory." Two inch mortars had a high trajectory and a low trajectory. Well this bloke let fire with a two inch bomb, it went in the back of the cave and exploded. Well the force of the explosion and that at the back of the cave, it'd be like pullin' the table cloth off all the dishes on the floor.

24:00 Everything came out. There's coppers, tables, Japs and everything tumblin' down this cliff then suddenly I realised nobody was firing. All the blokes thought it was that funny they'd all they'd all stopped firing and were rollin' with laughter. As I say we had a perverted sense of humour. Well when they knew we were onto 'em and shot 'em up there, that night they pulled out. That they'd held it the place for over twelve months and so they named the ridge Reuters Ridge in the central

24:30 sector of Bougainville and from then on, you know then it was, went out on a patrol, ten day patrol after that and and well that used to move or disband we did what was supposed to be a ten day patrol we done the job in four days, came back and then immediately then we was back to the back to base, week's spell at base and then up to the Northern sector and from there we you know we got ready, we was only up there

25:00 awhile. We had different shows other way and then back and then the last show was the Porton show at Porton peninsula, which we were to take on and the other troops were to push up. Well it was a big blue. I reckon it was put on to this day to impress Blamey who they knew was comin' over, because all the troops were not in a condition to push up because of the fighting they done. This should a been waited till they got relieved by a new brigade and where they only sent a hundred and ninety troops

25:30 in, they should a sent the whole battalion in. Now again there we go and a course me bein' unlucky, I drew the central sector and in the central sector was the only water hole in that area. Well the Japs responded quite vigorously about it. Took a bit of a view a pale view of their water bein' taken but as I can remember one bloke there at Milne Bay got this water thing. He had one for arsenic. He

26:00 was gonna put the arsenic in the water hole and I said, "Oh no, that's against the Geneva convention." I tell you what, I reckon if we'd a put the arsenic in that water hole we'd a done a better job than we did in the raid. Well we were outnumbered and everything, outgunned and everything. Well we went in a hundred and ninety eight strong and come out with twenty nine on their feet when I re the company commander was killed, the 2IC was wounded, so I had to pick up baby and re-form the company and

that. You know what pickin' up baby is don't you?

Yes.

- 26:30 Yeah. Re-formed the company you know ready to go down south and it was then I say after it I met Blamey and congratulated me on the job we'd done and one thing and another and he asked me what I thought of Porton and I said, "Well sir," I said, "I joined in '39 Greece, Crete, left in Crete, etcetera," I said, "and I seen some glorious stuff ups," I said, "but this'd be the best one I
- 27:00 ever seen in the whole war," and with that, the brigade major told me off talkin' to the com commander in chief like that. "Well," I said, "he asked me what I thought and I told him." Cause as far as that stage, I was prepared to be a live dingo in Australia than a dead sucker in the islands. You know you were wonderin' where, you were gettin' that way well see at Porton, we had one original bloke that fought through Tobruk he was killed. Another thirty nine was wounded and I was number three and you know
- 27:30 it was a matter of, "When's my number gonna come up?"

What happened after Porton?

After Porton we got back down the blokes come out of hospital back in, formed the company up, some reinforcements come and training and getting ready to go down South. Well my idea, they always had this idea you were out of action do plenty a training, get fit. Well my idea was, the blokes wanted a good rest. So often I went out

- 28:00 on route marches things like that. We got well down a bit of fine good jungle playing cards and had a rest and a read and that and then that night we'd march back to camp.

I think you missed something out. What when...

Well put it this way, instead of we shoulda gone on a twenty, thirty mile march, we mighta done three mile and you had to stop there and cause I knew the blokes wouldn't let me down went into action. Instead of you know workin' the guts outta them.

Did you did you fight with the

- 28:30 **same men in Bougainville as you had been with in Dutch New Guinea?**

Dutch New Guinea and Bougainville still the same show. Mighta had a few ah you know a few new ones that there but they still like once there they were always still the same. You know like you might lose a few blokes through sickness and things but the men you know remained the same.

And what about the sickness that was the scrub typhus and malaria

- 29:00 **and...**

Scrub typhus and malaria, I never lost ah had a couple a blokes go to hospital with malaria and the thing was as to say those things, it was a matter of the hygiene. To keep the blokes clean, washed and everything like that. That for instance when we went to Bougainville first, we were horrified to see the state the Yanks were in. Unshaven and beards and things like that. Well in

- 29:30 the Australian army was to keep 'em clean and the hygiene come close to number one, and immediately you got into a camp and into an area the first thing you put down was good latrines and tried to fly proof 'em and that too cause, flies and that spreadin' disease quick and then it got that way the Australian army every man on malaria was given one tablet per night and they were given them personally. You didn't give 'em a thing and say, "Take one every day,"
- 30:00 which originally started and made sure they put it on their tongue. Well if you know a bloke made wasn't sure he swallowed it, you'd give him a smart whack in the tummy cause he done a gasp and down went the tablet and I never lost one bloke in Dutch New Guinea or in Bougainville with malaria. The whole time in the war I was in the islands I never had a day in hospital with malaria, but we get back to Australia we go out havin' a good time, we forget to take our tablets and finish up in hospital with malaria.

- 30:30 **Is that what happened to you?**

Yeah, it happened to me. Happened to me three times but goin' back but well actually put it this way, rum and beer tastes much better than the quinine tablet.

I bet. I was just gonna ask you, it might sound like a silly question but how did they fly proof the latrines? Did they have meshed wire?

No, when you dug the latrine you covered it well with timber and then put and

- 31:00 like wire and that and put things on and then put earth over it, right up to the box and the latrine you always made sure there was a lid on it, even if it was only palm fronds that there to keep the flies comin' out that I've seen latrines in the islands, all they'd have is a pole there to sit on and then go into the trench. Well I mean flies and everythin'll come and you know everywhere.

31:30 **Did the men give you a lot of rib for telling them to clean all the time and keep clean?**

Oh yeah no, oh yes they'd all go crook about it but they got used to it. As I said, blokes said, "Oh," you know, "you're nothin' but an officious bastard." I said, "You know," I said, "I know that but," I said, "I didn't have to practice, you blokes made me that way. Puttin' up with ya." No, they used to go crook but they knew they had to do it and most of them got that way and I found when I went to 51st

32:00 battalion, as we were AIF blokes and experienced, I got nearly all the trouble makers in my platoon. When I started off, my platoon originals, in the 51, had more red lines in their pay book than black ones. Well I had the principle of bein' through the three units years there and at that stage I'd only ever charged with man with AWL. As the old saying goes we had, "There's more ways a killin' a cat than stuffin' it with butter"

32:30 and you so they done somethin' wrong, you give them extra guard duty or extra somethin' like that and they say, "Oh we got guard duty, well we done it last night." "Yeah," but I said, "You told," yeah I said, "Yeah but," I said, "you just let me give you that job just letting you know the cranky old bastard knows what he's talkin' about," and I said you give 'em an extra job and they soon woke up that it was worse to get that extra work than it was to get a ten bob fine and I never had any, they soon woke up to it and that there

33:00 but I found quite a few officers and NCOs as I used to say with charge sheet happy. They think if they put 'em on a charge sheet they right thing but up in the islands you got fined ten bob, well a course that was two days' pay but they had nothin' to spend it on and that there and no and I you know had no trouble with the unit at all. They soon get the message and the peoples like they think you're dumb but they soon wake up. Mm.

You didn't have any men

33:30 **going, coming to fisticuffs at all?**

Ah only ever had once in the army. There wasn't in my unit. You know you know told me to take me coat off and fight me. He went to take his coat off and while he's had his arms in the sleeves I king hit him and never had it again. You don't give a sucker you don't give a sucker a fair break. He wanted to fight so when he had his arms turned and gettin' his coat off, I hit 'im.

34:00 **Right, well I won't offer to give you a fight then. Cause...**

I think you might win today. Mm.

So what happened Blue after you had that the three mile in lieu of the thirty mile march, you had your rest

We had a rest and we played cards and you know

In Bougainville?

And read then we'd get up and march the three miles back at night.

And then how much longer were you there in Bougainville?

Oh

34:30 well this was on and off. You know every time you come out of action they give you two days rest and then off training getting fit for the next action and we said these route marches and that were a good thing for it, but to me I couldn't see any sense in it. Cause I knew I always had confidence the blokes under me we had the saying, "As you train so will you fight," and if you look after those men, do the job they know you'll do, they'll never let you down.

35:00 I never had a bloke lettin' me down once in the whole a the war.

Can you tell us if you came across any of the ugliness or the atrocities that the Japanese had participated in in Bougainville?

The only thing I seen in Bougainville oh I seen it first in Milne Bay, they way they mutilated and hung blokes, tied 'em to trees and bayoneted 'em but never seen like

35:30 what was done to the prisoners of war and that in Malaysia but we seen it was there in Milne Bay what we seen, we adopt the attitude the only good Jap was a dead one, so if you took Japs and they looked bloke layin' there, to make sure he was dead you put another bullet in him because sometimes they'd lay there feigning dead and as soon as you'd pass they'd fire into the back a ya. No, the the Japs' outlook

36:00 well they all thought you know they were better than everyone else but as human beings, they left to me they left a lot to be desired. As I say, the only good Jap I met one I always remember once at a reunion up in oh up in Townsville, wasn't a reunion, was at a wake burying one of our blokes and the blokes was havin' a talk in there and one bloke got a couple of brought me over this Japanese high school

36:30 student and introduced to me and she put her hand her hand and it was a like a bit a dead fish and I said, "In Australia we judge you by your hand shake." I said, "A good firm handshake." With that she

decided to give me a big hug, which she did, and then I realised there were dead silence in the room there. Everybody waitin' to see this how I'd go with this Japanese girl and after a bloke come up to me and he said, "Christ," he said, "Blue you were rough on that girl." I said

- 37:00 "I was not it was done." He said, "Oh so and so told me," that was the son of the bloke that we'd buried that day, "He come and told me he said are you any grandfathers?" "Oh," she said, "yes I've got two," and he said and you replied back to her, "Christ that was two I missed." Oh yeah but you don't know the son though. He had a great sense of humour, yeah, "That was two I missed."

So all

- 37:30 **in all, in Bougainville it was a horrible place to be and you must have missed Australia terribly. What were the things that you missed?**

Well I don't know. We just knew it was a job to be done and done it and you know we looked then forward to gettin' home, goin' on leave and things like that. You sorta learnt to live you knew when you were in action you learned to live with a certain diet and everything like that and you know you just accepted it.

What about women?

- 38:00 Well women actually women actually in the islands never interested us. I was only ever to know in the islands of one bloke that went native. He was our company cook. He was a good cook and they wanted him to be an officers' cook in battalion headquarters and he didn't want it and they made him go, and I still maintain to this day they ruined his life because he went native when they made him battalion cook

- 38:30 but no, the native women never you know never ever worried us. We just you know accepted 'em like all they got round there with just a lap lap on and you know as I say, hanging boobs or anything like you just took no notice of. You know and even today a lot of women they say, "Oh what do you think of her?" you know, "The boobs?" I said, "I seen better boobs on cows."

So you were treating the

- 39:00 **natives with respect, which is...**

We just took well actually, the thing with the Australians, a lot of other countries couldn't make it out. Ah we treated them just like we treated our own. See I remember at Milne Bay when we come across the Americans first, we got on better with the black troops than we did with the whites. The white Americans had this holier than thou attitude. They were all like say John Wayne, Errol Flynn, but as we talked to the Negroes like we'd talk to one another.

- 39:30 You know they were really amazed. You know they were just another men. We in all the countries I was with, I never seen Australians talk down to people. They always talk to 'em as if they were another you know Australian and you know the amount of 'em you know surprised. As like Wayne was tellin' me you know talkin' to an American in Vietnam and because he took another bloke he sat at the table the American nigger was gonna get up and leave but you know never

- 40:00 been used to whites there. It doesn't matter there's good and bad people in all class, colours and creeds.

I agree. We'll just stop...

Tape 7

- 00:34 Any rate.

Okay, go?

And back in New Guinea I got wounded with this mortar fire. We go back to hospital. We're in an air force hospital in a tent, two of us in a tent, and we're on morphine every night. The other bloke was a shell exploded in the barrel of the gun and he got badly wounded and the unit was sent back to Australia. Well when they got back to Australia they give us all the jungle juice they had made up

- 01:00 plus what brew they kept and we had fourteen lockers in the tent with us full a grog and we said the morphine we were gettin' trip two three doses of morphine a day and we said to the squadron leader, "No we got goin' off morphine. We don't want to become drug addicts," and he came down about half past ten one night checkin' us and he found us half full of half full of home brew and that and he said, "And I've been tellin' everybody what willpower and things you must have and the pain you must be in," he said, "givin' up morphine"

- 01:30 he said, "and you're anaesthetising yourself," and he said, "and I haven't had a drink for two months," and we said, "You come down every night you can have a drink with us as long as you keep your ruddy mouth shut."

Blue can you tell us about how you got your wounds and

Well the wound the wounds ah the first one was in the Germans opened up, it was in Crete.

Oh no the wounds in Bougainville, sorry.

Bougainville. We were doin' this exercise attacking up there and we were getting you know live like under

- 02:00 live fire, artillery and mortar fire and that. Anyway we were out on the we were forward company and out pushing forward and over comes one explosion and I got a bit went in through the neck and off took half me jaw bone off and then I laughed, I thought the jugular had got it and it squirted out. Well if the jugular had got it I wouldn't be laughin' so put a dressing on it, walked back about a fifty yards
- 02:30 and another one come and I got it in the groin and then I was to find out later that what it was, they'd had a new bloke up from Australia with a mortar platoon and he wasn't puttin' enough charge in under the bomb. So that was the cause of the drop shorts and it was a funny thing, of serving right through the whole of the war and that was the only time in the company I served with I ever knew anyone was wounded with a drop you know
- 03:00 with a drop short or friendly fire on the Australians. While I heard the Yanks had plenty of it, course to America if I've heard, it was hushed up. They reckon during World War II the Americans had more casualties through friendly fire than they had through enemy fire. Anything happened, the Yanks used to open up en masse and I remember at up towards Finschhafen, not Finschhafen, Salamaua, we cleaned this beach for the Yanks comin' on their barges. There
- 03:30 wasn't a Jap within ten mile. We got it in, moved 'em into the area and durin' the night they opened up. Well we all dived into slit trenches knowin' how friendly fire was from the Yanks and the whole battalion opened up. Like it was a full scale attack goin' on and all musta been somebody musta seen a pig or somethin', disturbed 'em, because there wasn't a Jap within ten mile a us. At I tell you what, as far as the Yanks as allies are concerned, at times we were more scared a them than we were of the enemy.

04:00 That there.

So Blue when you got when you got the wound in the jaw and then...

One in the groin.

And one in the groin.

Mm.

How how long did you actually spend in hospital?

Oh I was in hospital about six weeks I think. The, I got back to, well when I got back into Brisbane the unit on the way back, they was on the ship and they all floated them on Horne Island for

- 04:30 a few weeks and when they got back to Brisbane, see they thought the way I was wounded I was never gonna come back with the unit and when the ship pulled into Brisbane I'm sittin' on a wharf waitin' for the blokes to come in and they said, "How'd you come back? We thought you'd never be back." "Well," I said, "I went up top." I said, "In JC I went through the ledger and I didn't know ya." He said, "Get down below." I went out below I seen me mate old Nick and he said, "Christ not you again." Looked through the ledger. I said, "He went over to the oven. Picked a shovel
- 05:00 full a coals up and he said 'Look here Blue get back up and thaw a little hell a your own'," I said, "and you blokes a gotta put up with me." Go on.

You were talking before or this morning I think you mentioned it with some of the Americans up in New Guinea around Bougainville that they were you know doing a lot of sitting around and going a bit troppo and suiciding.

Troppo and that, yeah. That

Can you tell us about that?

Well see it was all you know just hearsay and what I'd

- 05:30 seen but see when you're sitting and that around, it's worse to be inactive than active. While you're out givin' doin' somethin' though we had casualties and I often wonder in Australia if we'd a just sat the same as the Yanks, what our casualties would have been as if we went into action that that there because well they used to have the saying in in the Yanks when they were sittin' there comin' in. They said Japs'd put on
- 06:00 an American uniform and come and join the feed line. So it was just the same. I never heard a that and never seen that but ah there's better to do something to sit around and not do anything and like even at times like if you were in the islands going to action and sittin' around you'd be lookin' forward nearly to gettin' back into action than just sittin' around. You know puttin' up with the usual crap and bull dust that's goin' around the camp, you know the camps.

06:30 **So what did you hear about the Yanks? The ones that didn't fare too well?**

Well put it this way. The general discipline and that of the Yankee army that I seen, I'm only telling you what I seen, I didn't think a great amount of them. I you know as not only I but I struck other blokes in the Buna/ Gona show after that. They said when the Yanks come up and supported 'em they were more frightened of the Yanks than they were and I said with what I seen the few at Milne Bay

07:00 and that was the same. See and the Yanks we seen in Milne Bay mostly Negroes, they had them all as labour battalion, not in fighting units and they used 'em more as slave labour but I could never make out these whites thinkin' why they were superior, the white man is superior to a black man but even us in Australia after the war we saw, see we only, there were two loose in the same platoon and we're at the Caulfield races and people'd

07:30 see me just with a black couple, his first wife was a Negro Abo cross, because I was gettin' around with them they'd see me and they'd look at you, "What are you doin' with those two darkies?" and walk around ya. To me, I knew them and didn't make any difference to me that there but you know a lot a people had and even like a Papua New Guinea girl here, my minder, the first thing people'll ask me, "Is she clean?" Well you can see what the house is

08:00 like here, she's spotlessly clean. As I say washin' machine happy that to there. No, no but just no just a lot of people get these preconceived ideas about things.

I've been told quite a few times that

Beg your pardon?

Sorry. Frog in my throat. I've been told a few times about Australian forces up in New Guinea

08:30 **around Bougainville that they went in there with to be quite aggressive to the Japanese in terms of their manoeuvres and what you were doing, in action. Was that I mean was that was that something that you were doing? Trying to really stir them up and be quite aggressive to the Japanese to get an edge on them?**

No go on. Repeat the question again.

When you were up in Bougainville and you were

Yeah.

Your tactics against the Japanese, I've been told by a few fellas up there that the orders were to actually be

09:00 **quite aggressive towards them.**

Mm. We were always aggressive towards them. Well see my attitude was with 'em, if you stirred 'em up enough, they'd let you have a quiet night but if you stopped off they'd they'd try the same on you but they always had the idea of tryna come in at night time. That there but when you shoot 'em up durin' the day and that and we used to go out and always there patrollin' plenty of patrollin' towards the Japs and stir 'em up so you could have a quieter night and I

09:30 found like in Bougainville that did pay.

Can can you describe for me what you'd actually do to stir them up?

Well when you've got in on patrols you crept in as close as you could and I remember one day we knocked a couple off. We got in and there's a bloke twenty feet in front of us cleanin' his teeth. Well it was the last time he ever cleaned them. You know you get in to 'em as close as you can, shoot 'em up and of course they'd all dive for their slit trenches

10:00 to open up there and then you'd pull out. Go round and have another go at 'em somewhere else. You never kept to a set pattern. You know if you kept to a set pattern they knew what you were gonna do and they'd be ready for ya but the thing was to let 'em never know what hour you were gonna get in or when it was gonna happen. It was the uncertainty of it and as I say, by stirrin' 'em up well we stirred 'em up durin' the day hopin' for a quiet night. Oh another one, when I was out on this last patrol in the central sector,

10:30 we got amongst these Japs and decided to have a go at 'em right on dawn, instead of during the night, and what I didn't know and didn't know till after some time after, I mean this other lot had a patrol out and it set an ambush on the track a hundred yards outside the Jap... the Japanese position and of course I opened up at dawn with my blokes.

11:00 He said he said, "God," he said, "we wondered what was goin' on. You scared hell out of us," he said. "Shits were trumps." He said, "You really scared us." I said, "Well I didn't know you were there," and he said, "No and I didn't know you were there either." Mm.

Was the all these sort of tactics about sort of never you know moving round, was that stuff you actually learnt particularly for jungle fighting?

Well in the training you moved

- 11:30 you learned to move quietly, spread out, all sign language to one another. There was a member of unit one said to us in New Guinea he said, "The way you blokes," he said, "you're got two blokes where we've got about ten." He said, "No noise at all and this the way you move." He said, "The thing is," he said he said, "the Japs can't find you," and he said, "and but can you find the Japs?" but the noise the Americans went in, they always had this idea if they went in en masse
- 12:00 they'd do it but that actually all it increased was the casualties and they give the Japs warning that they were comin.' The thing was was to get in as close as possible to let you not know that they were there. It was ah be kept spread out and all sign language.

So what would be the signals that you'd use in terms of sign language?

Be all hand. All hand signals. You know you got these different hand signals to what you know what they knew. For instance a Jap you know

- 12:30 if you seen Japs, point to it and the number of fingers went up. You knew how many was there. Instead of gettin' back and you know tryin' to get back and whispering because if he didn't move there were no noise made.

Would you have other hand signals in terms of

Oh stop you know and the way you went for quicker and things like that and that you know the way we'd only well see the thing was the thing that'd give you a good way a lot you had to be careful of 'em but movin' quietly the birds keep singin'

- 13:00 and that in the trees but the birds stopped makin' a noise in the trees you know there was someone comin.' There was always give away and so by moving quietly and making no noise you always had the birds more or less on your side. It was just things like that you learned from bein' in the bush.

Was how I guess how would you compare the jungle

- 13:30 **fighting to the fighting that you had in the desert?**

Well most of it was was all open open country and you could see things well ahead a ya. In the in the islands there was nothing to come up till you were nearly face to face to blokes out on patrols because the Japanese on the Japanese position they were camouflaged well and they done and then they had this idea you know you stood and fight for the last.

Did you

- 14:00 **ever face hand to hand combat with the any Japanese?**

When we got yeah a couple a times we got close to them but we never put it this way, no company I was with or any men I was in was ever captured a Jap. We didn't we didn't wait to put his hand... we didn't for him to put his hands up but as I say it was just a job to be done.

Mm.

Well put it this way, wartime it's either them or you and I had more faith in it bein' them than me.

- 14:30 **There was because of the atrocities and things that had been reported I guess or stories that people had heard, there's a bit of hatred towards the Japanese. Was that stuff had you experienced that at all?**

Ah I've had a lot of people like a lot of ex-service men still hate the thing people but a funny thing in me upbringing I was we were never taught we were

- 15:00 never taught to hate people. My parents'd jump me if you said you hated someone because they actually had the attitude if you hate people and the things you're thinkin' of tryna to do to them, you finish up destroying yourself as much as you destroy them. While I didn't like 'em I was probably didn't change me way I treated 'em, the attitude, but there's a difference between dislike for a person to hatred for a person. That if you keep where I was brought up with was if you hate a person you finish up destroyin' yourself. I can always remember
- 15:30 once a younger brother come home from school and said he hated someone and me father hit him with a stock whip and I can still to this day, they had the cow muck in the stock yards, he's bawlin' his head off and he said, "Dad I don't hate him, but I dislike the bastard," and all me father did was laughed at him. You know youse always was brought up with that thing. If you hate a person you'll finish up destroying yourself that damn much but you know we just treated 'em we just treated 'em as animals but we never
- 16:00 [UNCLEAR] and I say never outlook until today even today some of the tourists out here, they're still quite aggressive. At times in the street where you see a lotta Jap tourists you'll see 'em walkin' along the street en masse and they'd even if I'd been in wheels they'd push me off into the gutter. I seen that happen in Cairns. I just walk straight through them but no I put it this way, I still don't like the Japanese for you know

16:30 what they done to our blokes in you know wartime.

Mm. Blue I was just wanting to see could you get you to tell us about Batmore plantation and I guess the fighting that you saw?

What plantation?

Batmore plantation? You were at

Porton plantation?

Oh was it Porton plantation?

Plantation?

Yes?

Well when we landed at Porton we were to go in and attack

17:00 and the rest of the brigade to push up towards but they never had the strength and that to do it. They shoulda waited till they were all done by a fresh brigade. Well I got the central sector where the water hole is was with my platoon and they reacted most vigorously. Ah just a minute

Yeah we'll just hold

Now we're back on air.

No the water hole then that there they took a very dim view of it as it was the only water in the area for the Japs that were out on the ridge

17:30 but we were on flat country and the Japs had the high ground, which there and with it and we started attacking them and then like as we knew we were outnumbered, pull back and hold it there and the Japs reacted most vigorously about it and the thing was we'd had more men and more ammunition and held out for another twenty four hours till we ran out cause they ran out of ammunition and the only thing in Porton, how we got out of it so easy, well when I say easy,

18:00 was Blue Shulton had a platoon in a company in his platoon and I had my platoon and we learnt in the Middle East, when you went to action you always counted tried to keep at least double the ammunition that was allotted ya and it was only us through havin' extra ammunition otherwise we'd have all been wiped out. Well then we went to withdraw back up in thirty six hours back to the barges, we were supposed to go out in two lots. We landed in the wrong place.

18:30 Instead of landin' at the point at the peninsula we were on the inside and the barges couldn't get in. Well the water transport come in and said, "We're not comin' back again. Everybody in." Well everybody went out in one wave but only it overloaded all the barges. One barge floated off and got out. The barge I was in stranded and I said to all the blokes, "All those that can swim get out." I said, "I'm stoppin' with the wounded," which I did and another bloke another bloke stopped with the wounded with me

19:00 and they swam out. Three hours later when we floated out, oh we went back took all the wounded back to Torokina and then I had an argument with brigade and the platoon. I wanted the barge to go straight back while it was still dark to help rescue off this other big stranded barge and the barge officer said, "No my troops haven't had any sleep," or they're too tired and that." I said, "Look the blokes on that barge haven't had a sleep for three days. I said

19:30 "Get 'em back," and it took me four hours to get the barge and I maintain to this day, if I got the barge all I got back I picked up eight blokes and if I'd a got the barge when I did we coulda got in and got a lot of those first wounded blokes off the first barge and it was them then muck you know mucked up and it was through that then I got into a lotta trouble by speaking outta turn.

But some of your fellas died.

Beg your pardon?

But some of your fellows died.

Yeah a lot of the fellas died. Now more could a been you know alive that there but

20:00 no, a lot of them you know different ones, different ways of thinking and as I say I hadn't all that time there I never slept for five days. We just out because then waitin' to you know get all the other blokes off all the injured and that all off the barge.

Blue can you give us a picture of what that I guess what that fighting was like I mean cause I mean there were obviously some quite high casualties so

You had casualties. There was just actually non-stop fighting. There was mortar fire and machine

20:30 gun fire and when the Japs attacked they didn't have they didn't care whether they were killed or not you know. It was better to die for the emperor than anything else, but I mean to say we were thinking instead of the Emperor or the King we thought, "Bugger the King, think of ourselves."

Healthy attitude too.

Eh?

That's a healthy attitude, too.

Healthy yeah that was our attitude through to it that to there but it's no, you know

21:00 different attitudes that they were just fanatics. Kept you know kept comin' and comin' that sort of there and well there in Bougainville I remember once we got in and we got six POWs, Indian POWs, and look the way they looked, I never seen the Changi blokes the wife in hospital seen 'em when they come back flown back from Singapore but seeing these half a dozen Indians you know and the way they looked that they were only scarecrows.

21:30 **Yeah. How many fellas did you actually have there at at the plantation and how many how many did you get...**

Well we went we went in a hundred and seventy nine strong

Yeah.

And when I re-formed I was given charge of the company and re-formed it after Porton plantation I started off with twenty nine blokes on their feet and then as the other blokes come back outta hospital you know we gradually built the numbers up and blokes from Australia ready to go into action again.

22:00 **So is it possible for you Blue to give us a bit of a picture on what one of those five days was kind of like, just in terms of what you'd hear what you'd see what you'd see going past you? I mean blokes that were next next to you? Things like that?**

Well no I found most of the Australian blokes they knew there you were with 'em and you were there in charge of 'em and see when the you had to move round and the see the blokes all the time and while you're movin' round and seein' 'em but if you never seen them

22:30 then their attitude'd be there and some of the things they told me after the war I done I found hard to believe there but you were thinkin' of ya you were thinkin' of your men more than you were thinking of yourself and some of the things you done I think one of the stories was a bloke in Sydney I met after the war, he come from Innisvale. I said, "What are ya doin'?" he said, "I'm drivin' a crane over the Sydney Harbour Bridge layin' painted riggers down." I said, "You can have it on your own," and he came straight back at me. He said, "Blue and what I seen you do in wartime you could have

23:00 it on your ruddy own too." It was just there but you thought you were thinking of your men, not of yourself and you know some of the things you found out was nearly almost unbelievable and I thought, "Well I was silly to do that," but you never thought of it at the time. That there. It was just to say it was this what you knew you trained 'em and they knew you were there with 'em they'd do the same with you. As I said I never had a bloke jack up on me

23:30 dingo or anything like that to me in the whole of the war I was with. Like as I said to you about Stumpy. He said, "He might get you killed, but if you weren't he'll always get you out."

But...

But see for instance when they'd barge was there well the ones that could swim could go out. I coulda swam out that there but no, I found I had twenty nine wounded blokes on the barge and somebody had to stay with 'em, so I stayed with 'em. It was just the luck of the game.

Was it

24:00 **a bit of a rough day though? I mean having pulled out with so many casualties and leaving that many fellas?**

It was sort of a shock to the system but like havin' gone been going through it for over five years, you'd sort of you become a little bit cold blooded in your outlook you know. You just got used to seeing it and that and it was you know if it'd a been like that in the first show you were in, your reactions woulda been totally different but as you'd

24:30 gradually built up and that and what I'd seen happen in Crete and that you know ah it was just you know another you know another casualty. You become a bit... you become quite callous in your outlook towards things. You know you developed a weird sense a humour that there and you know it was just the way you know you just accept it as part of the job.

You've talked quite a bit about humour and

25:00 **do you think that was having a sense of humour was a a thing that helped get you through?**

I think it did a lot, because the amount of times something'd be serious and some bloke'd come up with a wise crack or things like that and it'd just break the tension and everybody'd laugh and I think it was havin' a sense a humour you know, you developed a weird sense a humour that that there of you know some a thing I'll put it this way, some of the weird what we called a weird sense a

25:30 humour I suppose in civvie street you'd be in jail for.

You mention you mention the one example of the Indian in the water in between Greece and Crete

Crete yeah well

Were there other particular instances of that that you can remember?

Oh

Where a sense of humour actually made a difference?

There was sort of sim... you know similar things. I can't look recall them or that that there it as like I was saying, I remember once we got reinforcements up the desert

26:00 and the thing and the reinforcements comin' out from Australia they were still very white cause we'd had twelve months in the desert. We were quite brown and burnt off. Looked older, and the reinforcements seein' a casualty the first time were very jittery and this bloke come, I was talking to the sar' major, he said, "I found a dead dago [Italian] sergeant." The sar' major said, "Yeah what was he like? How'd you know he was dead?" "I felt him." "How was he?" "He was still warm." Well we had a saying in those

26:30 days, "Oh go back and stop him while he's hot." Well he said this to the bloke. The bloke took three paces, he chundered in technicolour and you developed a weird, you got a weird, you know, a weird sense a humour and it was another thing that happened you know officers you didn't like that they'd take two paces, salute the officer passing and then they'd go, "Woof woof," which meant

27:00 go get a woolly dog up ya. You'd see the officers'd go brick red and they couldn't charge 'em otherwise they'd, if they'd have said it to his face they'd been charged with ill language but one of the worst things comin' outta the desert, we had an officer we couldn't stand him. He walked bandy as if he had a hot onion up his rear so his nickname was Onion Arse and goin' back and he had the awful thing, he'd never call anybody by their rank. He'd always call 'em by their surname and we all put ten mill in each, which was roughly a shilling,

27:30 to who'd call him. We passed him over there and he yells out at me, "Reiter get that truck goin' to so and so." I said, "Okay Onion Arse." "Wait till I get back to camp," and when he come back to Alexandria he comes back 2IC our company. I'm on the mat under charge, usin' insultin' language to an officer. I go up before the brig major company commander. He said, "Do you plead not guilty," and I said to the other bloke that charged me, I said, "What did I say? I wanna know." "I'm not tellin'

28:00 you." The company commander said, "What did he say? I gotta know what I'm chargin' him with." He said, "I won't say. I wouldn't tell ya what he said," and I don't know, I said, "Look sir can I call my platoon up as witnesses?" Cause I knew no matter what they thought a me I knew what they thought of him. With that he withdrew the charge. After the war we were at the reunion about ten years after the war in Melbourne. He comes in and he says, "Hello Reiter, nice to see ya," and I said, "Well bugger me dead if it's not

28:30 Onion Arse." He stood up rigid. You could see in his eyes. "You bastard. You lied your way outta that charge," there and he said, "Look now Blue, the war's been over. How 'bout we get to first names," and the only thing he's known me nickname with a flamin' glory it was, he got his old man caught in a cash register. He married money. Well it's an easy way to make it.

29:00 **Absolutely. Can I take you back to New Guinea and getting your wounded out on the on the barges?**

Yeah.

And the altercation that you had in trying to get the barge back early. Can you tell us I guess what...?

Oh well actually

About the argument?

After enough of blaming the brigade major, he was two ranks higher than me,

Yeah.

You know we had one thing led to another so a thing you're not supposed to do, I give the brigade major a lift under the ear.

29:30 So with that I'm put on open arrest for striking a superior officer you know open arrest and the last CO of the 2nd 7th AIF Battalion would come up and visit him. He was an LO on Blamey's headquarters and every time he come round the islands seein' one of his old blokes he always brought a bottle a whisky. So any rate I was sent for at brigade headquarters and the CO got his own driver and ute and jeep out and he said, "For God's sake Blue keep your mouth shut. I still want a company commander."

30:00 Well when I got back down to brigade headquarters I went and seen the brigadier and I asked him what

he wanted. Didn't salute him or anything and a voice back behind me said, "Blue Reiter you're still as bad tempered as ever," and I turned round, it was the CO. Well the CO, Bluey Wynn, the brig and I sat down, drank a bottle a whisky over two hours and a yarn. When it was over the brigadier said to me, "You're no longer under open arrest." So in other words the charge was dropped and when I got back to the battalion headquarters the

- 30:30 Colonel said, "What are you doin'?" I said, "I'm not under open arrest," and I told him what happened. He went crook and he said, "And I've been sweatin' here for two hours wonderin' whether I've got a company commander or not," he said, "and you're enjoyin' yourself." You only live once, why not?

Absolutely. You've mentioned quite a few nicknames Blue while you while we've been chatting to you today.

- 31:00 **I'm just wondering if there were if you could kind of give us a few samples of the nicknames of people who were close to you in your unit?**

Well nicknames, for instance red heads I got called Blue and I been called that ever since, but we had Sunset with us, we had Ginger Meggs you know. All the different variations and different blokes you know. For instance like Stumpy Carter got sick of me because he was the shortest bloke in the platoon he got called Stumpy you know and this big tall bloke I tell ya I bandaged up in Crete, as he was well over

- 31:30 six feet tall he was known as Lofty and the different nicknames come and you know they really you know suited you know the people. Like this Blue Shulter of C company I first met in '39, it wasn't till the 1950s that I was home in Melbourne after the war that I found out what his proper name was and even today I still get people askin' me what me proper what me name is. It doesn't it's not what they call you, it's the way they call you but no, a lot a the nicknames

- 32:00 well see we had this colonel, this last colonel I tell ya I drink with, ah he had two nicknames. You know the main one he was called as he had the name Gwynne, you've heard of Nell Gwynne the great singer about the big the turn of the 19th century, well he got was always known as Nell Gwynne. The first company commander had a very solid bloke you know a thick neck. He was known as Bull, Bull Miller. The first CO we had was known as Myrtle like Myrtle in the way you know he sorta

- 32:30 walked you know like if he was a fairy and he got the nickname of Myrtle. You know it's just that the, you know the different nicknames. Like I said this bloke looked like he had an onion up his rear end it was always known you know as Onion there but no it was just you come back you sorta you know looked at 'em and just like if I meet 'em today I still call 'em by their nickname that there but the mate up at Gympie here, he was our first despatch rider. In the desert the amount a motorbikes

- 33:00 he went through wrecked and that he got known as 'Bike a Day Kramer' and you know that stuck to him for years, Bike a Day. You know it was just the way you know you know different you know through different actions they done or the way they looked and things like you know that and see we always had one bloke, he treated like everyone like his family, he was company commander, and he was known as Dadda. You know Dadda Crawford.

- 33:30 Like he treated everyone like they you know they were a young family to him and it was one day it was only about twenty year ago talkin' to him about Dadda and I found out his age. While he looked you know years older than me, I found out he was only five years older than me and but it was just remarkable how the nicknames you know come along.

Mm. I think it's very unique to Australia?

Beg your pardon?

Very unique to Australians?

Yeah very you know unique.

Yeah?

And

- 34:00 well over the... a lot a the Poms and the Yanks they couldn't make out these nicknames at all, that there.

And any enemy trying to decipher?

Decipher in Dahl.

Messages?

See you're talkin' nicknames and sayings. With all the Australians and the way they swore and what have you, I suppose you could say I was an example, that one thing that used to upset the Australians ah

- 34:30 strongly was a Yankee sayin'. 'Sons a bitches.' God the fights I've seen Australian Yanks have and that and even today that to hear 'em say it, it still you know makes me see red. Now we reckon one of the greatest insults going ah that to there and yet and the Poms had the saying 'Go f the effer' and yet they used to go crook at us when we called somebody a bastard.

35:00 You know it was just the different things there but I can always remember the Yanks though you know we, you know, we found I you know I seen a lot a fights through that that there but it was just you know as I say a lotta times it was insultin' a dog callin' 'em that.

Mm.

Just a different countries.

Blue, out of the all the fighting that you saw

35:30 **and participated in, were there any moments that I guess were particularly hairy or that you that were really fearful?**

Well no. No well actually as I say the only hairy moment I had was that time when I found out that night that two blokes were engaged to the same girl and there's four blokes in the same area but with the fighting, you were that much lookin' after what the blokes were doing and that you never had time

36:00 you know you think to yourself you always had a confidence we were gonna win that there and it was I think it was I often thought after the war I'd a hated to been a private soldier sittin' in a slit trench on his own. You know which just had to think of himself and probably his mate in the same trench with him and you never had time to think of others but it was actually I think it was you know think of the others that made the difference, but it wasn't until after the war

36:30 that that struck me.

Sorry. Mm. That's quite amazing.

Mm, but I suppose you look back I suppose there was more times and that but as I say you know that thing I told you about the two blokes was the only time I was really scared I'm gonna have somebody commit suicide or some bloody murder on me hands but after that, as I say you're that busy thinkin' of your bloke you never had time to think of yourself.

And

37:00 **I mean and that was a particularly serious I guess incident for you but I mean were there other so having somebody back home was really important for a lot of the boys?**

To?

Having somebody back home was really important for a lot of the troops?

Ah it was to a lot. A lot used to worry about their family but like out of the brothers and only sister and that I'm not that close you know to anyone else to you know think about what they might think.

37:30 **Did you know much... oh sorry**

You know people that when you're in action things like that, ah people at home are the furthest things from your mind but as I said, I know a lot were worried about it because as I said I was always onto the blokes when possible to get one letter a week at least home to them to let 'em know how you are because with the press, the way the press'd report it, you know they'd be thinkin' everybody was in action. Like as I said you could be you could be

38:00 swimmin' down the beach or you know out paintin' the town red and it was essential you know to get it and and in the islands what made a big difference to the blokes and the morale was gettin' regular letters from home. Like I've seen blokes that if they didn't get a letter from someone's close to at home after a few weeks you know they start to get moody and upset.

Did you write home every week as well?

I used to write home every week. You know

38:30 well to mother you know just say what the thing was and she could get it round amongst the relations that there and you know the other thing thing I hated most in the army was you know writin' the letters to next of kin. As I say you know what you know were gonna do and what have you.

What sort of things would you actually say to them?

Oh just you know partly how he was killed and you know what he was doin' and how he was and he didn't suffer that there. For instance after the war I called and seen a

39:00 family at Kiama their son was, only son, four sisters, was killed in Porton, and the blokes that were out on this patrol with him. The father had offered to pay their fare from north Queensland to Kiama to see him and none of 'em'd reply to come and see him and of course when the wife and I called and seen him oh you know they couldn't do enough for whatever see cause I was the first bloke that come and seen him you know and told him all at the end, you know how he was at the end, because a lot of them you know always had this

39:30 idea that you know they were sufferin' and things like that but that that there but anyway you just you

know went and made this you know and I seen oh well after that you know seen quite a lot and even blokes since that a died you know I've seen that. If I'm round that area I always still call and see the families. They're always pleased to see you. Another mate that was close to me, that Stumpy Carter, on the 9th of March we were both the same age. On the 10th I was

40:00 a year older than him. We were very close all our life. He died three year ago but still on me birthday every year from his two daughters I still get a phone call from 'em wishin' me happy birthday. They still haven't forgotten me.

Well that's very...

But that there. No, it's just to get you know go and call and see them and you know a bit of a yarn to them.

That's a good thing.

Mm.

Tape 8

00:30 Yes oh you've got it on have you?

That okay. Yeah that's right.

No well people wanderin' around. Ah I find a lot of people that migrate from overseas wander round more than Australians do. See for instance my brother's family had eight in it and I think there's only two of them ever been outside Victoria and I remember once a nephew brought his wife up and she was about fifty and that was the first time she'd ever been outside

01:00 Melbourne but you know some people you know sit at home and you know the world ends at their back there but I you know I well even now like gettin' away from like travelling but I always used to like travelling and lookin' around, see different places.

I I'm gonna ask you about the post-war days in a minute but I just wanted to to know Wayne brought up the fact that you were present at the Japanese surrender. Can you tell us about that?

The Japanese surrender at Nauru. I was there at the Japanese

01:30 surrender. As I said we were given this job of takin' the Japs prisoners of war off Osharuwa Island. Dick Sampson, who I told you I first met in Greece, was our 2IC, he was OC troops, I was adjutant quartermaster and go in and we watched the surrender and of course after the war there was a lotta blokes made a rush out of Australian-based jobs so they'd get their six months in to get all the repat benefits and this young bloke is there with the brigadier,

02:00 his aide-de-camp and when the Jap general handed his sword over there the brigadier handed it to this young bloke and a course I pulled rank, a tough old bloke, and I said, "Yeah I'll take care a that for John," cause you know he'd heard me call him John, the brigadier, before and he handed it to me and that's all right. Years after the war the brigadier's he was a speaker at house of parliament New South Wales down at our farm lookin' and he's lookin' at a sword on, the grandson's got it, hanging over the fireplace in the living room

02:30 and he said, "That's a better sword than I have got Blue." I said, "Yeah John," I said, "I got that at the surrender at Nauru." He said, "No I got it." I told him the story and you know he called me a thievin' bastard, got, you know, a different coating and that there and like as I think of these things now based in its after we got prisoner of war in Crete and that and when I got back and we got our kit bags and that out of you know

03:00 asked 'em for out of the store in the base unit in ah Alexandria. "Oh no we sent all your stuff back to your relations in Australia." You know souvenirs we got off the Italians through the desert and that and ah I was to find out the only thing they got was me letters. All the ah souvenirs, binoculars and things like that, the base blokes kept the lot for themselves.

What did you nick from the Italians?

Oh well put

03:30 it this way. There was a couple a .38s, cameras, binoculars and things like that I still had in me kit bag. I know it was illegal to have 'em, but I had them that there and ah we had a thing in it well we never used to call it pinch we used to call it souveniring you never souv'ed anything off another fighting unit, but if you get anything for nothing, not off the individual but off the unit, all as you know enter dumps and things like that are in bulk you know

04:00 base units were considered a fair a fair option, but another fighting unit you never touched and only once in the whole of the war did I ever see a fight where a one individual pinched a thing off another

individual bloke in the hut and he got such a beltin' we all just stood there and looked at him gettin' it. Bloke half killed him and nobody said or done a thing to him. There was never any more pinchin' after that cause if anyone came in said pinchin' what could happen to 'em

04:30 that was a le you know a lesson. You don't pinch off your mates.

Can you tell us about the (UNCLEAR) what the regalia was? What the... what it all looked like?

The what?

How it all looked? The surrender?

The surrender. Well actually we were just in this hut and the Japanese come in, the Japanese general with his two offsiders you know and the surrender terms were read out

05:00 to him through an interpreter and he just handed his sword over. It was all over in about ten minutes. Ah I don't it was on that box that surrender thing a photo on that on that box was it ah Wayne? Only the document like I got a copy of the document of the surrender. Oh it was o that that was at Nauru but like the surrender from ah the whole army to MacArthur was on board ship, you know the various generals and that cause I got a

05:30 there was a photo of this but it was all over you know in about you know five minutes.

Did everyone go out and have a drink afterwards?

Well what with the Japs? Not bloody likely. No no we ah well put it this way, when you're takin' over the Japs on these prisoner of war ships we used to still draw a company I had ninety blokes on the ship as guards on the ship as a guard and we used to draw a company's ration a beer, a hundred and forty. Well we'd have

06:00 some and we'd take it to the other blokes up the islands at ah going up we'd drink pretty well but with the Japs coming back we wouldn't have a drink you know because we were playing guard and that on them and ah well it really actually it was three months we done takin' 'em all and really lookin' back I think those three months on board ship with plenty of grog, good tucker and that after the war I was might be a little bit saner than when I

06:30 you know if I'd a come back to Australia like the other thirty niners that had hadn't been in trouble they they were all discharged in ah by September 1945. Well I never got out till February '46 cause we said you know ah well put it this way, we didn't speak outta turn we just said what we thought.

So it took you three months

Three months takin' the Japs off and I say I still maintain those three months on board ship and that done us a lotta good.

Mm.

07:00 They thought they were punishin' us but ah it you know done a lotta good.

Where were you when um it it was all o when war was declared over?

It was at Torokina waitin' to go into action again down south Bougainville. We'd come outta the north ah a brigade come down outta Green Island and that south of Rabaul and that you know to take over from us and the thing I often think about it, it wasn't till the end of the war

07:30 when VCs [Victoria Cross] were start you hand out some VCs and someone thought, "Well I haven't got one," so they picked a bloke out in North Bougainville and a bloke out in South Bougainville but for what they done they did deserve it, but if we'd a been in action it'd a been one of our battalion that woulda got it. You know it was just sort of a rashed up handin' the decorations out that they were you know the Australian army were really tough. See for instance second barge that landed stranded there on Tarakan

08:00 ah at least up in Porton for two days the last bloke off, he lives down at Redcliffe, well he was recommended for the military medal the job he done he was the last bloke off, but you know when I didn't see him till about ten year ago at a reunion in Brisbane and I said, "Why aren't you wearing your Military Medal?" I always thought he got it, but he never got it. It was just you know that the way they I suppose I still blame I said to him, "I'm partly to blame meself," cause if it hadn't a been for what Sampson and I said I said I found out that they tore all the

08:30 decorations up. They just didn't ever look at 'em. "Old bloody Reiter and Sampson and his mob they can go to bugg... they can can go to hell." That there but no some of them had you know a queer lotta the I maintain this, all base units all officers in base units shoulda served a period in the front line. That'd give 'em a different outlook.

So how does it how does it ah

09:00 **sorry I just want to go back towards in Bougainville, so when you had to take the prisoners of war back to Australia ah...**

No we took 'em from the islands back to a prisoner of war camp at Torokina, Bougainville.

Oh Torokina.

We didn't bring 'em to Australia.

And then you came home to Australia?

Well we done three trips to get them all off and then we came to Australia. Well when we come to Australia we were put aboard ah the Liberator bomber and they were notorious for the accidents

09:30 happened. Well we got plenty of whisky and everything we there cause the grog was still hard to get in Australia and get it for two and six a bottle. We get half way over the air strip of Townsville and one engine dropped out of the plane and we got three engines. We get a few hundred mile further on and one engine catches fire, so we're down to two engines. Well the Yankee captain said, "Throw all your gear out, we gotta cut the load small to see how we can get on." Well we drank

10:00 the whisky, threw the empty bottles out. Crew and all. We didn't I don't remember landing. The pilot didn't even remember landing. We wake we woke up next mornin' we're in an American jail in Townsville, military jail. We go before the colonel, Yankee colonel. "You stupid bloody sons a bitches. I don't know whether I should decorate you all or put you back in behind bars and throw the key away." The pilot didn't even and anyway when we done our kat or our kit we found out

10:30 we had one bottle left so we give it to the Yankee pilot as a present for his decent landing. The pilot said, "I don't even remember landin' the bloody plane." I finished up (UNCLEAR). As I say, just you know some of the things you done in those days. Mm. Well then if we'd a crashed we wouldn't a known about it, we were anaesthetised. Mm.

It wouldn't have hurt?

No, it wouldn't have hurt.

So after you got out of the military jail?

Yeah?

Where did you

11:00 **go then?**

Oh we got out there. The colonel said, "Get the buggery out of it." So we just went and reported in at the Australian thing, base in Townsville. "Oh yeah thirty niners you're to go back for Australian discharge," at least back home. So Dick was shipped at the Torres Sea, he joined here in Nambour but his wife was livin' in Sydney and the story of him was he worked at in the Commonwealth Bank in Launceston

11:30 and he was doin' a line for the bank manager's daughter and the bank manager didn't approve of him so he transferred him to Queensland, Nambour. He joined up in Nambour and when he was in England he went on the machine gun battalion, went to England and there like he met a girl he knew in Tasmania and they got married and settled down in New South and we're still friends to this day. That sort of there and the other bloke he got sent to South Australia.

12:00 **So how long Blue from the end of the war until you came back into Queensland?**

Ah end a the war ended in August. I didn't get back to Queensland till about December and then I went in and ah went down to Melbourne and then they done some plastic surgery. Me lips were down like that and me mouth was that shape like that and you know they pulled it up straight and like you can still see the scar there today. That there and I said

12:30 "You're wastin' your time treatin' that tryin' to improve me looks."

Well you look pretty good.

Oh thank you very much. How much do you want? Ha ha.

Was it hard after your army life getting back to normal civvy life?

Well in a way yes and in a way no. Um havin' married an army sister like I had a bit of an understanding of how we're goin' and we still like had a lot in common

13:00 but at times you're lookin' forward to seein' your army mates again and there was a lot of women complained after bein' on leave the husband'd be home for a week or so and the next thing they're wantin' to get with their army mates again and they'd go down the pub and talk to the blokes and I'll always remember one, quartermaster sergeant, he was a bit troppo. He bought a farm near us out in the bush. He wouldn't go to town. If there was anything wrong with him he wouldn't even go to see the doctor, he'd come and see my wife, cause she was an army

13:30 sister. He never got violent but times he got hard to live with and went troppo. He wouldn't talk to anyone but if it was an army bloke come and seen him he'd sit down and talk for hours and at times

when he got too bad Lila'd ring me up, "Come and have a yarn to Harry. He's just goin' round the bend a bit." I'd go and have a yarn, settle him down. It might be weeks or months before it happened again and I can always remember one day to Lila I said, "Lila did you ever feel like leavin' him?" She said, "No

- 14:00 Blue I never ever felt like leavin' in me life," she said, "but bloody murder often," but you know it was just how they're a lotta them were happier you know talkin' with their mates back with their army mates and the language they talked than they were with other you know civilian people and that but then as children come along you sort of dropped off a lot because your life revolved around the kids. That there and you know and as there
- 14:30 was and so on and cause that's what I say today. It's how you get on with the children in the early years of their age which remains with you how you are for life with 'em. You know I've seen people, well I had one army bloke here who had kids. He was down here one day oh he was he was an air force bloke Louie and he come down and he spent three days here with me. He didn't even contact his son and daughter in Maroochydore. You know how remarkable there but you know every year no matter where we went the two girls used to come
- 15:00 up and see us you know wherever we were round Australia they'd always come and see us. Like as they said they seen a lot of Australia through us wandering. My two grandsons I always get a visit from 'em every year. Last year one wanted to see we went up through central Queensland to Cooktown and then come back down the coast. Well I sh when we go round anywhere we always have a look at every town, we don't just drive past it. You know show 'em round all the towns. Lotta places I knew mates from up north
- 15:30 and came back and he said, "It was a better education than drivin' for himself," because a lotta people go from here say to Cairns and they probably haven't a town. Like you take now, well you only pass from B. You don't come into Nambour, you don't go into Caboolture now, where it used to be road the highway used to go through it. Bundaberg is bypassed and you know a lotta the towns now are bypassed. The people don't see them that there and to go and well you go round Maryborough and Bundaberg and have
- 16:00 a look at the old wharves and things like that. It gives you a totally different outlook to what they were.

What did you do after the war?

After the war ah I decided to go back farming, dairy farming again. I got it under a veteran affairs program helped they with the finance of it and I put what money I had in and they financed me with it. Well the first few years there wasn't much expense

- 16:30 because in those days thirty cows could give you a good living and I only had the thirty cows on but cleaning it up and gettin' it into production. Well over the years I was in it I increased the stocking rate by four hundred per cent and the production rate of butter fat by about a thousand per cent. Increased the value of the herd and that and as you built it up you know you made more out of it and then in the 19 late 1950's I think it was the 1950's somewhere around that area
- 17:00 I won the you know farming comp dairy farming competition of Victoria and as I only had two girls and they both went nursing after they were trained nurses we decided well it was only a three way split now. The taxation department, the share farmer I had on and myself. So we decided to sell out and give it away. Ah while I think I think I'd paid ah twenty thousand for the farm, sold it for
- 17:30 nearly two hundred thousand but when I was down last year a Legacy lad who'd become part of the family he said, "You'd get over a million dollars for it today." I said, "Look," I said, "It doesn't matter mate." I said, "We've had thirty good years knockin' around fun together." There's no use goin' wrecking all your life and that because the two girls, there was no school buses back in the days when they finished school so we sent 'em to boarding school and they said, "You put us educated us, you helped us through nursing," you know where they started off just on a small wage nursing at hospitals
- 18:00 "and you helped us out first home." They said, "What you've got spent enjoy. We don't expect anything when you die," and we said, "We'll leave the house tax free," or at least you know without any encumbrance on it and you know that was why we give it away and as I say you know we had we went chasing up through ah Lightning Ridge and White Cliffs, out western New South Wales opal and pushing on round Australia we went up to Queensland lookin' at the opal fields there but couldn't get there in the floods
- 18:30 so the wife said, well she'd been there in the 1950's, "We'll go and have a look at sapphires." Well we went to the sapphire field again, had a few months there and by that time as we'd had about seven years in a caravan she wanted a house again. So we came lookin' from Rockhampton down and she liked this place and bought it. Well I liked another place but she said, "No, this is the flattest place we've seen. Ah it's a brick veneer there's not much upkeep outside and as you get old the hills
- 19:00 are gonna get steeper." Well they're steep enough now walkin' from the mailbox up but that there, and which was so true, that there and then you know we're here and as I say I lost her fifteen year ago and been on me own since but I always remember going to the sapphire field in 19 there we went there and a bloke said to us, "What made you come to the sapphire fields?" and I said, "Come here," I said, "We were first here in the 1950's." "You shoulda stayed here mate. You'd a been a millionaire today." I said, "Look with my luck I'da been here with the he the backside outta me pants in the old people's

- 19:30 home in Emerald," and the wife always used to say the reason we stopped here, "We'd been for three weeks at a reunion and that and all his old mates up in north Queensland," she said, "and I was sufferin' from alcoholic remorse and shell shock and had to stay here for before we could drive back to Victoria." That the wife ah very quiet being a nursing sister and ah but you never know, like as I told you that one about her definition of marriage, what she'd come out with and I
- 20:00 remember once I had a niece here and the niece opened her mouth she said, "Aunty Ena I never heard right you sayin' that." I forget what'll come out you know like a bad (UNCLEAR) there but you know she just you know great sense of humour and come out with the you know with some a the sayings she had that there but ah there's one story of her, this girl had three kids and she raced into the church the church service started, "I want you to christen me three kids." This was out in the bush where parsons
- 20:30 were few and far between and they came along to parson there's the ten year old, "I hereby christen you II." See she was nursin' out at Moree. The second the five year old, "I hereby christen you MC." The little toddler goin' round, "I hereby christen you ABC," and the parson come over and he said, "Look why don't you give me the full names. What do the things stand for?" "Well," she said, "see that ten year old." She said, "I had her when I was sixteen, that was Injured Innocence. Then
- 21:00 that five year old I was twenty one. That was Misplaced Confidence and that little toddler there, ABC, was Absolute Bloody Carelessness." That was another one of her stories. Mm but no see back in see back in the early days where no what did happen there see parsons were few and far between and when any parson came to the area every
- 21:30 body'd collect round this one station and that where they'd have a parson you know for the church service. Why I don't know but you know that did happen that was did happen and that was one of her stories out of those days.

Can you tell us about the Anzac tradition? Are you a keen upholder of marching in the Anzac parade?

Well the thing of marching in an Anzac parade, you're there to see all your mates again and have a good day talking and like always a reunion after that or a dinner

- 22:00 of talking about the blokes you've seen and what you know was interesting and what each one was doing and all that and you know it just sorta become the day of the year when you felt you always had to get together that to there and you know you met 'em met you know blokes you wouldn't see from one year's end to the other. Some you come across you wouldn't meet 'em for donkeys years. See for instance when I went to the first parade here about ten year ago in Brisbane well I ran into blokes I hadn't seen for nearly
- 22:30 fifty years and you know it was to you know meet 'em all again and have a yarn and see you know what become of them but you know it just seemed to be you know you know the right thing to do. You know just to have this good you know get together and a good yarn and then away you went and I can always remember one Anzac Day at home goin' home a car followin' me. I was still drivin' pretty right. Had a lot to drink and that durin' the day. I got into this one town, police car
- 23:00 come up alongside me still see me with all me medals on, they all tooted and went like that and let me go home on their own. I remember another time in Melbourne oh no in Sydney after a reunion I had to go to a mate's place. I couldn't find it. I was lookin' around. Police pulled up, "What are ya doin'?" I said, "I'm lookin' for so and so, a mate's place." Policeman said, "Move over mate." He said, "I'll drive ya there." They drove me there and if they had a breathalysed then I'd a blown the ruddy thing up.
- 23:30 You know you think of some of them times you were lucky.

Did you... so you used to march in the parade?

I used to march every year in Melbourne and ah here last year I marched at Yandina. You know I marched in Brisbane but it was sometime oh no a few years a few when I were see the regional unit was Victoria and the second one was Queensland. A lot in there a couple a years I flew over and marched with the blokes in Sydney but you know there's gettin' so few of us around now.

24:00 Have you got any mates left?

Yeah of ah of my original platoon in the Middle East I took through the desert and Greece, as far as I know there's only two of us left. Ah the platoon I had was in charge of through the islands, there's one in Townsville, one in Rocky and the other south of Brisbane. There's four of us left. There could be others, but I don't know where they you know I haven't heard or anything from them but it's just ah no we're gettin' thinner on the ground. As I always used to

- 24:30 say, "How you lasted so long?" I said, "A clear good clean livin' and a clear conscience," but a mate said to me a few year ago, "The reason Blue has lasted so long, we've lived a godly sober righteous life." I said, "Yeah the truth is," I said, "no bastard wants us," and he said, "I think that's the answer."

Do you did you miss the army life when you were back in civvy street?

Ah for awhile there was patches you did.

- 25:00 Ah for three months while I waitin' on the farm and everythin' goin' through me brother after the war and that said wouldn't allow him to join he give the railways away and started a hay and corn store up the country and I drove a truck for him and I can remember before the war I had a motorbike and the amount of old cockys there, they had a car and they'd put the motorbikes on in the gutter. Well when I was drivin' a truck I used to put them in the gutter. They'd come and complained to Keith, me brother, or the police
- 25:30 and they'd get in touch with me. I said I told 'em why I put 'em in there and I'd go and front 'em and tell 'em why. I said, "I didn't have to be bastard." I said, "People like you made me that way." No, you see it even today. I always give a bikie or a or a pedestrian their fair share of the road but a lotta people you know oh you run over 'em or knock 'em off but they're they're just a to me a bloke on a motorbike doesn't take anywhere near the road I take up with me car.

You mentioned earlier today a time when you thought

- 26:00 **you were going troppo, a little bit?**

Bit oh well put it this way, we weren't mad or troppo but we weren't inclined to get any help. You developed this perverted sense a humour and things like that and the thing was that say meetin' your mates after the war it's when the first child come along, your family, and your whole outlook started to differ quite a lot. You were then ah livin' for the family and like as Ena was in her thirties and I was

- 26:30 round the thirty mark, the kids our life just revolved around the farm and the kids. You know all joining all these clubs and things like that, I still was in the RSL but you know gettin' involved a lot with these social life you know we both sort of I suppose you could say become anti-social. We just lived for our family and the life and you look at this way today, a lotta these people that are well up in these clubs and things like that and

- 27:00 politicians, how many have made a successful private life? Very few and as we always said, the family come first. That there and to me today they still come first.

I agree.

Yeah.

Mm.

And as I say like it's with your daughter, well Goebbels was the first one to ever say pre-war he said, "You give me any child from any country in the world for the first six years of its life and I'll make a good German of it"

- 27:30 and it's how you get on with those kids in the early days of the life go. Like this bloke I told you that was here never seen his son and daughter. Down town I was talking to his eldest daughter once and she said, "We feel we never had a father." Mum was very arty and always to arty things and Dad into lodges and that and she said, "As children we never used to see much of our parents." She said, "I always felt you know I didn't have parents." She said, "I couldn't talk to my father like your girls talk to you"

- 28:00 and you know but as I say and it's the how you got on with the early years of their life that ah that you know got you know re remained for the rest of your life and as I say if you have any more family always impress on 'em, "Your sister or your brother'll be the best mate you ever had," and that remains so true. You know close knit family.

It's true.

Yeah.

Can you tell us the story you were telling us before ah can

- 28:30 **you tell us the story about when you first arrived home on the train and what happened when the kid ran up to you?**

Oh this kid ran up to me, we came back the Middle East and they're all in Spencer Street Station the family watchin' their father and the mother pointed out, he was alongside me we're gettin' outta the carriage together, "There's your father," and a course the kid come along, grabbed me by the leg never seen her father and says, "Hello Daddy," and the father burst out laughing. He said, "I wondered who the father was." I said, "Jesus I musta been drunk that night cause I can't remember anything about it."

- 29:00 The poor old mother was brick red, didn't know what say but we laughed we laughed over it and see I always think a queer thing was after the war you go and see families and things like that, ah army blokes. You were never introduced as "Mr" you were always "Uncle" to 'em. You know you were always uncle to all the kids and you know and that never worried me. That was just you know a small thing. When I say the things we done, as I say, up in Cairns, a few year ago

- 29:30 a heart attack and went up and seen Felix and his granddaughter's there listenin' to us and after about an hour she said, "Uncle Blue I got somethin' to say," and I said, "What is it Sylvia?" She said, "I thought," she said, "I come to the conclusion listening to grandpa, Uncle Tom and you talking for the last hour." She said, "I'm convinced you were nothin' but bloody ratbags when you were young." I said, "We were only high spirited youths," cause you get back and you'll talk about the funny things that

happen. You never I never heard people get together and talk about the

30:00 serious things that happened and it's like this today. I used to have a sign up above my chair. Ah some people I find you tell 'em they look well cause you ask 'em how they are you got ten minutes half an hour on all their complaints and people used to come and start tellin' me and I used to point to the sign on the wall behind me, "Never have I heard a person with a magnitude of such insufferable problems. You have my deepest sympathy. Now please piss off," and they

30:30 changed the subject for some unknown reason. Like people say about your legs you know, "Don't you get pain?" I said, "No," I said, "it's like being married, you get used to it." No you ca you don't worry about you know. There's a lot of you know I think you only ever say that you're bad off but I remember one this last year I was at down for me annual flu injection. I was sittin' in the waiting room waited the more that come and went out of the waiting room, the fitter I felt.

What are your thoughts now on your grandson being

31:00 **in the service?**

All I done when he said he was in the service I just wished him luck. I said, "You wanna do it, good luck to ya," and I said ah that they're cause today and even after the war there was a lot of blokes were sq put square pegs into round holes. They took jobs and that when they wanted to do something else. You do what you want to do. Well the the father has spoilt him in a way. The

31:30 parents split up and he got the son out was in the permanent army to come back to play against the mother. Well with that there and I reckon you know where now he's still a private soldier he coulda been a warrant officer somethin' like that and I think it ah you know spoilt his life a bit.

I

That there but if you're gonna do a thing, go and do what you want to do you know. A lotta people rush into a job, take it and they're never happy with it. You know if I didn't like jobs I used to leave and then go on to somethin'

32:00 else but we set off in farming. We were gonna make the most of it and we did and done all right out of it.

So your wife liked working on the farm with you?

Yeah she liked she liked workin' on the farm. Oh well she lived out um you know on the river outside Sydney. Oh God I can't think of the area. Up past the aerodrome and that. You know the army place. Ah aerodrome north of Sydney on the river there. Not the Parramatta. Oh God I can't think of the name of the thing now.

Hawkesbury?

32:30 Yeah Hawkesbury. She was on the Hawkesbury River and ah went nursing. No she liked it on the farm because your own boss and you done what you want to and you done it your way. Nobody tellin' you what to do or that and I say it was the harder you worked and that and cleaned up well the better off you were but ah there's no such thing as bad farms, only bad farmers but you could be ma you could be um making a good living and another bloke alongside you could be battling

33:00 and as I say the thing in the farming, when you got a good year you grinned all the way to the bank and if it was a tough year you shut up and didn't whinge but the way like they spend money like as if every year was gonna be a good year, but you had your good and your bad years and that and when I sold it I had no regrets. We enjoyed it and we had a good life.

You don't have any regrets about the time your service in the war?

No, no. Not even being wounded. It was just

33:30 it was just these things happen and that was it and I say being wounded it happens that quick you haven't got you know time to think about it. It's that there and you know and all your thing like as I say you know when I got hit through the head just put a you know a field dressing on and bandaged me up and kept going. I think it was there it was only a you know a bit there and there wasn't well you know and I said when I got hit through the neck I thought, "Oh this is it," you know

34:00 blood and then found out oh it was only the if it'd been the jugular I wouldn'ta been laughin' and then you know got patched up but you just accepted it. I don't know how you found blokes acceptin' injuries Wayne. It was just something you know part of the game. Well look at this way more, there's more chance of being killed on the road today than there is bein' was in wartime. You know as I say if we want to pin the population down in Australia, give everybody a car.

34:30 **You said earlier Blue that you were brought up a Presbyterian**

Yeah.

But after the war or during the war your faith went away a little bit.

My faith waned and well early on in the war church parades were compulsory and then later on it become voluntary. We used to take it in turns, officers, go in the church parade but ah after the war the only time they'd ever get me into a church

- 35:00 was funerals, weddings. I went to church twice with the family of the kids you know wife wanted 'em both baptised. We then become anti-church and I always remember Peg the daughter, a parson come round one day and wanting to go to Sunday school and what have you and what coming. She said, "I go to school five days a week, why should I go six?" That was her attitude and I paid her for that but ah no, just when you see the things with
- 35:30 Christianity and what goes on but then when you come across as I say the Middle East, the disease and poverty and hate that goes on you know it makes you wonder and that was and then the things that happen in wartime. As the old saying used to be, "There's no Jesus and no justice in this world," and you know that was to change and the amount of ex-servicemen I've seen it happen to
- 36:00 was amazing and another thing I often thought of religion, blokes'd take you down for your you know the last penny ya got and when you're workin' for 'em how tough and thieving they were tryna take you down and when they get old they start all racin' to church every Sunday. Start gettin' religious. They think they're gonna be saved for all the sins they done but you know you look around you'll see it happen a lot and ah you know and as I say you can have your religion, I couldn't care what it was
- 36:30 but as I say we don't in the house here don't come and say, "Well you can talk about anything but politics and religion cause we couldn't care less about 'em." There's good and bad in each. There's things say like the Labor party I like about that, some things in the Liberal I like but ah and I say had one thieving ah grocery shop owner as I said he dropped out of the militia when war broke out and durin' the war
- 37:00 he wouldn't even sell an AIF bloke a bottle a drink and ah and you know and after the war you know he become a great religious church goer and what have you and I thought, "Oh God, you can have that on your own." No just what you see in life you know it just become an education and ah my daughter sent her boys to locally they all want to go with their mates from the school to a Catholic boarding
- 37:30 school for higher education and they went, but every Sunday ah they used to go to a different church cause they seen the light and today they're like me, open mind but something to me well look at Hindu and Muslims and they way they're playin' on that and the ah you know to me it's utter stupidity but ah and I'll say it, I'll believe in the hereafter when somebody comes back
- 38:00 and tells me. The only hereafter I believed in was a bloke takes this girl out in the car and he asked, "Do you believe in the hereafter?" She said, "Why?" "Cause," he said, "if I don't get what I'm here after you're going to be here after I go." That's the only hereafter I believe in.

You'll stick by that.

Yeah. No, well you slip by the years. Oh God.

And looking back now you've got lots of fond memories of the

38:30 **war?**

Well I've got a lot of fond not of the war but the mates you meet and some of the places you've

The mateship in the war, sorry.

Been and that and today when you're talkin' about wartime blokes, you don't think of them as today. You think of them as your day. I seen this bloke down at Orange. In a wheelchair and his daughter said to me, "Blue what do you think of Dad?" I said, "I still think of him back in the '40s when he was a strong going bloke," but I said, "Look at him today in a wheelchair." He's now ninety. I said, "He just looks like a frail old

- 39:00 man." I said, "I still think of him back when they were young." You can see them you know then when you were all young together. That's ah you know just the way things go.

Is that is that do you see yourself as a young person too when you look in the mirror?

No. Ah what's the no my grandson's in the army said to me the last time he was here talking about age. He said, "Look Blue you're not old.

- 39:30 You're only as young as the girl you're in bed feeling," and I heard that one first sixty-odd year ago but when your grandson tells you that

It's a worry.

No, not a worry. I thank him for the compliment that there but no, you ah you know.

INTERVIEW ENDS