Australians at War Film Archive

William Forward - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 30th September 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/643

Tape 1

00:31 **Bill, if you could tell me a little bit about growing up in Northam?**

My father had been on a farm and as soon as he came home from the war, the family were farmers at a place called Malabaine, just a little bit out of Northam, four or five miles, but he was incapacitated because of

01:00 a wound that he had received in his left arm in France during the war. Coupled with his physical inability and the loss of two crops quickly, one through fire and one through hail, he left the farm moved into Northam where his farming skills and normal education levels got him a job at the Agricultural Bank and he was a bank inspector.

01:30 So he would inspect properties on applications for loans and what have you to see if the loan was warranted and what value loan would be given to the people, so we grew up in fairly good circumstances, my brother and I. We were one year exactly apart, birthdays the same day. We went to school in East Northam Primary School. My father was a strong Liberal man and Sir James Mitchell, the Premier

02:00 of the state lived just around the corner from where we lived in Northam, so that we used to be able to go around his place and play, and we had a lot of relatives in and around the town so our lives were fairly pleasant. We had toys, my father was good with his hands, very adept at making things, so we all had flivvers and trikes to ride and

02:30 we had an empty paddock between ourselves and a family of boys. The Councils, who had a tyre company, the old Councils had a tyre firm but we used to play a lot together and the world was our oyster in Northam. We always had family around us. My father came from a big family and so did my mother. My father was fourteenth in the queue when he was born and

03:00 my mother was from a family of ten. Her people were plumbers and birthdays came around regularly and there was always picnics in Bernard Park down on the Avon River and generally it was a really good upbringing we had. When marbles came around we always seemed to have enough marbles and if we lost some it was too bad we would get some more if we couldn't win some back.

03:30 We had fairly good discipline around the house, my father wasn't one for belting or thrashing but he soon let you know when he wasn't happy. You would listen to the explanation of what we did wrong and what we should have done and we were always encouraged to tell the truth, which I think was good and that's was just more or less our basic living conditions.

04:00 **Northam must have been pretty small?**

Oh yes it was, but for a country town it was quite big because the escarpment was where the early settlers went, to York particularly, and then opened up the northern area around Grass Valley and they gradually moved out to Toodyay and out through to Goomalling, Valley Dew and these other areas. That came as the population grew and the land near the city was sort of being taken but

04:30 it was good farming area and very safe in Northam.

Did you have a few water activities out in the Avon?

Well yes. There was a pool just up from Northam on the west side of Northam that used to be called Burlong Pool and it was a very nice deep pool where everybody used to go and swim.

05:00 The swans and that never dirtied the water like they did around the town section but I never learned to really swim. I did have an occasion where I went missing and my Aunty Mill, my Mum's sister, decided that I was lost and sort of duck dived at the appropriate time and then I think psychologically it might have put me off swimming

05:30 because I have never been a good swimmer, but my brother, he was just like a duck and later on in life

we would go to Como to swim and I would pony my brother's bike home. He and some friends would swim from Como around to the causeway and would walk home. But in Northam I was ten and he was nine when we went to Dalwallinu but normally I could say that in Northam it was a good life.

06:00 We always used to be able to go to aunties and uncles to get this or that if we wanted, if we wanted to and play with cousins, but strangely enough once we left Northam contact with those cousins on those sides became very limited. Some of them we never saw again really and never contacted them even.

That's sad because Dalwallinu is not that far out. It's like about seventy k's or something.

Oh no Dalwallinu is quite a long way up. Dalwallinu is a hundred and eighty miles, about three hundred miles from Perth. Northam is only a hundred k's, Northam but Dalwallinu was quite a shift for us when we went up there. Yes Northam was good. There were two different factions in Northam. The

06:30 people who were really town people, their kids went to East Northam State School but the railway was a big centre and so was the water supply department and the flour mill

07:00 were down in the west end of town where the main railway station was. So your kids played for the, the people played towns football was down the bottom end of the town where west Northam, so they were all railway workers, water workers.

07:30 The bankers' kids and the shopkeepers' kids nearly all went to East Northam School and whilst it was sort of factionalised to that extent, there was never really any difference when we had a sports meeting we were keen to beat West Northam but the town was just divided in that way and I think there may have been a bit of difference in the culture.

08:00 We nearly all wore boots and shoes to go to school at East Northam. We used to sling off at the West Northam kids but it was just we were brought up in those days, the way that society was. The workers and the people that lived down in West Northam turned out some of the best citizens, but they were poorer because they were paid badly.

08:30 Up at our end of town we all just seemed to be that little bit better off, so socially I don't know whether that had any effect on us. I doubt that it did.

It was quite amazing to have such a small town that is divided.

Yes but it was quite noticeable. If you barracked for union or the town's football team you were really good supporters, a bit like Collingwood were to say Carlton.

09:00 But we didn't have any John Elliotts in our time at Northam, but Federals was the football team at our end of town. My grandfather on my mother's side was the president and then one of my uncles took over the presidency and two of my uncles finished up playing league football from Northam down in Fremantle. They played with East Fremantle.

09:30 Uncle Dom and Uncle Ted, they were plumbers. Uncle Ted left his brothers in Northam in the business and opened up a plumbing business in Goomalling where he lived all his life, but they were both good footballers. There was a family joke about Uncle Ted played for East Fremantle and had a bit of a write-up in the paper to the fact that his foot was very sore and was in doubt to play. Anyway no needles in those days, they gave him whatever they rubbed on in those days, a bit of kangaroo or whatever.

10:00 Out he went to play in the game against East Perth and lined up on his man and the blokes said, "Oh you are having a bit of bad luck with your foot Ted? Which one was it?" So Uncle Ted put his foot out and the bloke jumped on it so he got off to a bad start in the football final.

How about yourself, did you play a bit of footy?

Yes I played.

10:30 I didn't learn football until really, until I was fourteen or fifteen and we were then living in Perth in Victoria Park and there were two old men with lot of interest in promoting sport and they were what they called the Temperance League. They were anti-drink and it was quite a big organisation, the Temperance League and

11:00 these two men were very, very great workers but there was a lot of thoughts in the background that they may not have been as temperance as they should have been but the work that they put in managing the junior football, and cricket, but football was their speciality and it was a big competition because football wasn't like it is now or junior sport generally. So you played Temperance League football and there was no way back to the little under eights and under nines junior

11:30 football. You generally started off playing under sixteens, you didn't start at under fourteens, and I played for Victoria Park there. The competition there was quite big. There would be some hundred of boys playing every week in Temperance League football and I was fortunate enough to captain Victoria Park. I often look back and I was a bit keen.

12:00 I used to like to organise and you would get all the kids in the district playing football and I think they used to think, "Oh well, let him be captain," because he's doing all the running around. It didn't matter

about ability. I used to wear a bed beret. I don't know why and I can never understand now looking back. If I saw anybody doing that now I would think they were crackers so

12:30 I haven't changed, you know, but I went then from Temperance football, your next step was into a well organised competition called Metropolitan Juniors which was the stepping stone for young footballers. From Metropolitan Junior you normally went into League football then. Fremantle had the same competition but whereas round the Perth area it was Metropolitan juniors,

13:00 in Fremantle it was Ex-Scholars and they were both very strong organisations and fed a lot of the footballers both areas, the city area around Perth and Fremantle, a lot of them used to come from Ex-Scholars and they were both more or less the two organisations that were the feeders for the league generally. You would get country men coming in it to play but the Ex-Scholars and the Metropolitan juniors were two organisations.

13:30 So then in '39 I played with the Metropolitan juniors in Victoria Park and there again I was captain of that team and used to think, I often look back now, I used to think I was a little bit better than I was I think. I thoroughly enjoyed it and used to get kicks every now and again. Some in the head and some in the ball. And then of course,

14:00 the war started in '39 and that was the finish of football then. I played a few games in the services but after the war in '46 I had pretty well over six years out of football and went to Perth to train and there were a lot of men back at training. We'd had all played together with

14:30 the juniors in Vic Park and I had just had quiet hopes that I might make the League side. There was taxi driver that played a lot of football for Claremont, I think he played. A bloke called Reg Hustler was the coach for Perth. I couldn't get up soon enough on Friday morning to see the papers and all these blokes, Ron Tucker and Steven Jarvis, Allen Smith were all playing League and I was in the seconds so I sulked

15:00 and threw put my boots away. So I don't go back to Perth for a while but I had other interests that I was keener about at that time anyway. So that was football.

That's a bit sad, really, Bill.

Yeah. I did get into football later again. I played Sunday league. I was one of the organisers and instrumental in the formation Sunday football here in Perth and played with Telegraphs. I was in the PMG [Post Master General's Department] and the Telegraphs group

15:30 were very keen on sport and were a good group of people. I was a technician maintaining telegraph equipment and played with Telegraphs for some years and used to have good games of football and good competitions and good country trips and they were well disciplined. We used to have some country trips we would get the bus at the post office and

16:00 we'd head off, say, to play down in Bunbury and there areas. We wouldn't stop until we got to the Ozone Hotel for our first drink and then the next stop, we wouldn't stop and keep going and going, until we got to the Broken Hill in Vic Park and then we'd miss the Balmoral and pull up along the road, Dwellingup or somewhere like that and on to Bunbury and play football.

It sounds like a bit of pub-crawl. So much for the Temperance League.

Yeah, but they were good country trips

16:30 and of course every body used to look forward to the trip at the end of the year more than the football sometimes I think. They were good trips anyway. They were great. And then I went back to junior football. I was in Carlisle living (UNCLEAR). They had some really good workers with Carlisles, ex-service blokes and that.

17:00 We all had been eating our Weeties and our kids had started to grow up and one man in particular, called Jack Sheppard, and another guy, Harry Hawker, two fathers with sons, started to get junior football going in the Carlisle district and because everywhere you went people were starting to look at doing something with sport.

17:30 Nearly every person interested was an ex-service guy and it was a sort of fraternity in itself, just all the senior guys in the sport. And now whereas we were able to just get a team for Vic Park prior to the war, this is now the end of the fifties and into the early sixties, you came from Manning to Collier to South Perth and to Vic Park, to East Vic Park, to Kensington, all these

18:00 areas had their football teams so that Perth Junior Council in itself, we had fourteen teams in the competition. I was connected with Carlisle there and coached under eighteens there for fifteen seasons and then I got too old and grumpy, I was headed for fifty by that time, I took on the under twelves and coached them for three years and it was all good fun. You used to think you

18:30 coached hundred and hundreds of kids but I suppose over the time I'd be lucky to coach, say, in the under eighteens any more than about three hundred and fifty, maybe up to four hundred, but about three hundred and fifty men and it was nice to see them all grow up and most of them were successful. Even had some boys came through and played league football. I think Billy Vaughan was one of

19:00 them and Greg Brio, some of these blokes, and young Wayne Currie they all played league football and became real champions. The clubs themselves were always self sufficient. They were able to raise money and run the clubs efficiently so that they developed to the point where under eights and under nines

19:30 were the go as well. Little kids as soon as they could buy a pair of boots that fitted them they were playing football and a lot of people that really worked. Mick Lee the mayor currently down at Victoria Park, Mick and Thel had four sons and he was an ex Pommy submariner and he had been in Fremantle and had met Thelma, his wife, and

20:00 was married and came back here and settled down and ran a successful plumbing business. But he was a really good worker, there was no job too hard for him and he would tackle anything and he had done that himself with his business. I was building a house and this little bloke turned up on a bike with a bag across his handlebars who was going to the plumbing and that was Mick getting his start in the district you know.

20:30 He would just do it all himself and he as exactly the same with his application to the community. There was nothing that he wouldn't do for people and he made his way very successfully but it wasn't just a success story that happened. He got there because he worked for it, so what he got, he deserved. But there were a lot of people, the same sort of people that Mick was.

21:00 I don't think a lot of us had the same sort of drive but we took the jobs on to be having the success all the time. We didn't win a lot of premierships. I think I coached those fifteen games and only won two premierships but I had a good run with the little twelves because in the first year we lost and then we never lost another game for the three seasons. So that was a good run and I think that was the fault, well not the fault, but the families were all keen on their football

21:30 and everyone worked together and it was a good club and so that's how we got the results.

You had a lot of football going on in your life?

Yes. With six daughters it was often difficult to go and watch hockey and getting them to Brownies all this sort of thing but it all worked always and it went pretty well.

22:00 **Not a footballer amongst them?**

No and none of them married a footballer really. We only had one athlete came in. Deb our second daughter married Frank Markham who was a junior state rugby player but then rugby and football didn't seem to go eye to eye with me.

So you really lucked out. First of all you got six daughters and none of them had the decency to marry a footy player.

Yes but they all

22:30 made good choices.

Just going back when you moved from Northam to Dalwallinu, what were the major differences form Northam and Dalwallinu? It must have been a bit of a rude shock moving.

Well it was. From a normally organised schooling to start with. When we got to Dalwallinu, there were two rooms at the little school. There were forty kids. Quite a few of them came in four and five miles in horse and carts or sulkies or road horses.

23:00 And then there were the group to townies. There were the two Geskey twins, their father was the telephone man in the district and there was my brother Jim and myself and the Rowbottom boys. Their father was the policeman. A couple of kids came from the railway station, the Griffith's kids, their father was the minister and Toslins were the butchers, these sort of people.

23:30 So I guess that looking back there would be fifty-fifty kids. We had a teacher called Norman Jones, but he nearly always had a youngster, nearly always a young female, like they had done their basic training, but when I look back they would have been twenty, twenty two.

24:00 They would take the kids up to grade three, Year 3, and then four, five and six would be in the other room with Mr. Jones and he would be taking us all together. We used to do a lot of correspondence work but we were always fairly well taught. They did a good job at the school, but the life away from school was so different because

24:30 my father was quite prepared to let us try anything and do anything. So weekends we were able to just get an old wheat bag and put some tucker in it and our billy and shanghais and off we would go for the weekend bird nesting. We weren't allowed to take any more than one egg and once we'd got a maggie's [magpie's] egg we didn't take any more because they were different colours.

25:00 We were only allowed to get one egg. He was a bit strict on that sort of thing. He would not worry about us because if we bushed, got lost, which was very rare. There was always a farm to go to get a bit of help and if you just said you were the Forward kids, we were always looked after. He had a fairly good name with the farmers. I guess some of them wouldn't have like him when I look back, when they were

really battling to stay on a farm and

25:30 wanted money. In those days, at the end of the twenties and the thirties, there was a depression and it was very serious. He would go sometimes to a farm and they would have just gone, just walked off the farm, not said anything, most likely in debt and just gone.

Was there much of that going on in Dalwallinu?

Yes, quite a bit even in Dalwallinu.

26:00 It was quite a good area, fairly safe but they were still developing. There was a lot of clearing still going on and, I mean, people didn't have the where-with-all to do the clearing and even there were costs on getting supplies. They normally came up by train. It went through to Meekatharra, because of the gold interest up around Meekatharra and specially when we were there '30, '31, '32

26:30 there were continuous streams of men coming through, most of them just hitch hiking. They would ride the train to a station and jump off, just get in the trucks and they weren't severe on them, the railway guards and what have you. None of them were malicious. They were just people trying to make a living and my father was always very good. He never, ever gave a man a meal.

27:00 The man would earn it. A bloke would knock at the door, you know, "Any chance of a couple of bob?" He would never give them money because nine times out of ten they would go down to the pub but he would always give them a meal. My Mum was always knocking up some sort of a meal for people. Now when I say that, it wasn't every day of the week of course but it was regularly done and he'd just say

27:30 "Oh look give us a hand just chop up some wood. It will save me a bit of time," so the bloke would chop a couple of logs of wood and Mum would give him a meal and off he'd go with maybe some scones and a couple of spoons of tea in a bag. He wasn't very keen on giving them money and said it didn't really help a lot of them. It was not as if they put it in their pocket and saved it so, but it was always a bit of a lesson for us I think.

28:00 You needed to be like this with people. If you couldn't help them, don't harm them, you know. And we could ride horses of course and he had a horse and sulky that he could go out on to the farms and do his inspections. We had a horse called Christmas that we used to look after and do the grooming and the ride into town and out into the bush.

What sort of chores did you have as a kid in Dalwallinu to do?

28:30 We just had a bit of a garden that we had to look after and we had to clean out the stable, old Christmas' stable, and curry comb her down and trim the mane and tail and chop the wood. We always had to have the fire set, we had to get the deal ready, and put it on the paper under the copper and water was very restricted up there. You couldn't

29:00 use the water. We had to pump up the water from the big water tanks off the roof and pump off a hundred gallons, just to keep a hundred gallons for household use. My Mum had sort of married and gone straight on to the farm before they'd moved into Northam and even with a family of plumbers we sort of were always well aware of the fact that water couldn't be wasted. We used to like that because you didn't have to bath every day and big bath night was Saturdays.

29:30 You used to just clean through the week and Saturday, you were into it, you know. You had to really scrub up and so and it was a good life. We had two boys from the bank, the Kitchen brothers and the twins, the Geskeys, Jim and I and another bloke, Billy Sampi, we were a pretty good group. We used to play a lot together.

30:00 We used to play wars and I suppose that had rubbed off on us with our fathers at war. We used to have our little trenches dug about a hundred yards from each other through the bush and we used to attack one another and play wars, you know, and it wasn't unusual. You could talk war and play war because it was so prevalent. You would hear my Dad and his brothers, when we were back in Northam,

30:30 they often used to get together, the six or seven Forward boys that'd all been together, and you would hear them talking, but the minute they broke up was the only chance. My father never talked war or anything to me. I didn't know much about his activities until later on when I read histories of the war, the 51st Battalion, the 10th Light Horse and these sorts of things.

He was at Gallipoli?

Yes he was wounded at Gallipoli.

31:00 He was an early enlisted man. His number was 74 so he went down with his horse, Beeswing, and they had to take horses with them when they joined up and go to Blackboy camp just up from Midland, just up the road from Midland. There is an historic set up there now. So it was

31:30 just really a part of living, people talking about the war still because it was really such an encompassing thing. Everybody, even the people who stayed home, the war effort was huge for them and of course out in the country a lot of farmers joined up because they had big families and they would lose two and three boys.

32:00 **At Dalwallinu, it was a pretty good place to grow up and also your father would talk about his war experiences with some of his family. The Phillips, he was the station master at the time, and we kids used to go down and work like little Trojans, bearing in mind that we were ten and eleven, most of us in the group, with some smaller ones. And we used to – the trucks would be offloaded and just shunted into the loops at the station and**

32:30 **we would spend hours pushing and getting these railway trucks moving, and just rolling them up and down and when the bulk wheat sheds were put in and it wasn't sophisticated. They used to still bring the bags in and then the wheat would be put into the bins and**

33:00 **we kids used to go up and play up on top of the wheat. The Dorsets were a family in town. The father, Ken Dorset, was a car agent and sold motor cars and June was his daughter and we kids were playing around on the wheat one day and somebody said, "Where's June?" and she had got down in the wheat and scuffled away. I can still sort of recall the sense of panic**

33:30 **that June had disappeared. Anyway we were able to find her quite quickly. Just said to everybody, "Stay still!" and there was a bit of movement around where June was, so we found her pretty quickly and then we never went back into the wheat. We went home and explained**

34:00 **what had gone one to Dad and everybody was soon made aware and we were told at school that we weren't to go back and play on top of the wheat because it was just a scare that was good for all of us. We all learned a lesson out of it. We had a guy, it's only an incident, but Bert O'Brien's father**

34:30 **was a general rouseabout around the town. He would pick stuff up and deliver it from the railway station and do odd jobs and he was also the sanitary man. We had this little monitor, came up from Perth teaching us, and we were doing just agricultural science and general science and could we bring in samples of nature, anything at all, and so farming kids were bringing in lambs hoofs and wool and**

35:00 **all these sorts of thing, and Bert O'Brien came to school and he had all this newspaper with something in it and opened it for the little teacher and he said, "I got it out of one of Dad's bins at the hospital, it's an appendix." I thought the little monitor – I can still picture that. My brother and I used to think, "What about O'B with the appendix?" we used to say and that was enough to have us laughing, you know, it didn't matter about what conditions.**

35:30 **So we didn't have any more of that sort of natural science stuff while she was there. That was the finish of that.**

That's a very bizarre story, a kid bringing along an appendix to school.

Yes, they were good times at Dalwallinu. We weren't there very long only about two years and we shifted and came down to Perth.

36:00 **And why was that?**

Dad had started to have a little bit of a bad run as a result of war and we came down to Perth mainly for him to be close to medical attention.

Was this a mental or a physical thing?

No it was just a physical thing. He put up with it all pretty well and you didn't really know that he was poorly and he wasn't one to, you know, he was off colour when he had to go and get anything done to him and he had an offer through a relative of getting into the PMG as a technician.

36:30 He was fairly good with his hands.

Sorry what's the PMG?

Well, you know it as Telstra. It used to be the Post Master General's Department. The PMG encompassed the postal people and all the technical side, telephones and telegraphs, and he got a job and we moved and we were living for a little while in Hay Street East opposite Queen's Gardens, only a short time.

37:00 Then we went to Subiaco and we lived there for only ten months I think, then came out to Victoria Park, East Victoria Park and lived in Dundas Street. The heart of the park is there now, whatever they call it, the park centre and the street just disappeared, but that was right opposite the then East Victoria Park Primary School.

37:30 Our front gate was exactly opposite the gate into the school on the other side of the street so we came down to Perth to live then and my brother and I went over to school. We had another sister, a sister, and she was just starting school, so the three of us started school there and my brother, the baby bloke, was born in Dalwallinu he was only small.

38:00 We lived there in Dundas Street for quite some time. Dalwallinu did have a good effect on us, I think mainly because of the fact that we had so much freedom and we were able to become quite resilient and quite resourceful. It stood us both, particularly my brother, in stood us in our later lives

38:30 because we were able to do most things. We were good with our hands. He was a superman with motor car engines and then in Vic Park I went into Perth Boys' School. We went to school the first day at East Vic Park and all the kids were playing marbles and we didn't have any marbles,

39:00 so my brother said, "Look, the afternoon play time we'll get some marbles." He said, "We'll just go to school bare feet," and we just picked them up with our toes. Of course we got into trouble for pinching marbles which was quite right in retrospect but it got us marbles and I can remember we both got the cane for pinching marbles. We hadn't really had that trouble previously at school and Mr Jones in Dalwallinu wasn't that sort of man. Didn't believe in that sort of thing.

39:30 He managed us all just by his own ability to do so. So, the next day they found out I shouldn't be there. I should have gone into Perth Boys' School, that I'd finished primary school. Went in Perth Boys' School.

How big was Perth Boys' School?

Perth Boy's School was over in James Street and boys came from everywhere. They went up to Year 9 and it was,

40:00 I don't know what my guess would be, six hundred kids. Quite a big school. And you had only high schools then in country centres so there weren't very many high schools in the state. There was a high school at Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Albany and Bunbury had one and Northam

40:30 High School. From Dalwallinu, that was where – actually I had been to Northam High School. I forgot to mention that. I passed a scholarship and was accepted into Northam High School. Normally if you passed a scholarship in the metro area you went to Perth Modern School.

41:00 So I went to high school in Northam because my grandmother and one of my mother's sisters, had the little high school tuck shop over in Leek Estate in Northam so I had free accommodation with them and they lived in what they called Leek Estate on the high school side of the river. And I'd started off in high school so when I came down to Perth and was rejected at East Vic Park I went into Perth Boys' School and went to school there just until the end of '34 when I was still 13 and I was coming up to 14 and that was it. You got a job when you were 14. You just didn't hang around.

41:30 **You didn't consider continuing on with school?**

Oh no, you just – there was really no thought of that. If your parents had some money you went then to high school. You went on to school and went to uni.

Tape 2

00:31 **It must have been a bit of a difference though moving from Dalwallinu to Perth in that time?**

It was because even, see Northam, traffic was different to start with. The volume of traffic and living conditions were quite different. Trams you know, they were a big interest to us. I don't know why but

01:00 when we first went down, we were down in East Perth for a short time, in 79 Hay Street opposite Queens Gardens. That was what they called the car barn where all the trams were housed and it was a big repair centre as well and you had the little small bogey trams then the normal full length trams. But my brother and I used to collect the numbers of the trams

01:30 that we would see for the day, all the numbers that we would see on the sides of the trams, so that was their physical number in the fleet. But then we soon learned where all the trams were going to one day to town hall, the 7 to Nedlands, you know 10 to Vic Park and all this sort of thing. But, yes it was quite interesting because you could go to the

02:00 pictures quite regularly. There were a lot more activities and then of course there was our introduction to sport. Where we lived in East Victoria Park was right next door to what they called the Sussex Street Reserve it had a cricket pitch in it and a full length football ground and a congregating centre for all the kids. In summer time, I had learned to play cricket

02:30 in Dalwallinu, it was while the '32/'39 Body Line Test Series was on and my father wasn't a sportsman really but I was allowed to go down and practise with the men. They had a competition at Dalwallinu. We used to play Pithara and these places and go up to Wubin and play and we were allowed to go down and practise. And there was a man called Flynn, Morrie Flynn, they had,

03:00 I can't remember I think it was the Ford agency and another man called Tom Anderson played. They were good cricketers. We kids would go down and play but they would also, at the end of their session, give us a hit and you could have a bowl but they didn't, of course, mind you fielding and you could field as much as you like. That was my introduction to cricket and

03:30 of course, the love of the sport that I have retained. I've put a lot of time into cricket. So that there in East Vic Park with the ground quite handy, I was quite content to spend my whole summer playing cricket and it was how I more or less met Edwina. We only had a little short street, Dundas Street, with a few houses in it and there was another short street at the back, Morgate Street.

04:00 So Morgate and Dundas Street and Sussex Street would get eleven kids and we would hoick our fruit cases around because they exactly the same height and width as a set of cricket stumps or good enough. Or one and a half petrol tins. You would just take them around for your end of the wickets you'd be going to play somebody. There was that little traffic, of course, you would just set your wicket up in the street and just run some sand across for the creases and the bowling

04:30 and just play up and down the street and nearly always with a tennis ball. And that was how I sort of first got my eyes on Edwina. I went around to play in Esperance Street and there's this girl and, you know, and I found out who she was.

How old were you at this point?

I was sixteen and we were in town then and it was 1938 and Edwina's birthday is the 4th of October and it was the show and Wednesday holiday.

05:00 And she was in town with her friend, Joan Martin, and my brother and I and some of the blokes were in town. And I was seventeen but I had known who she was for a while and we met Joan and Edwina in town and I can always remember, I often say to our kids, I went home that night and I said to my brother I think I will marry that girl you know.

05:30 So eventually that came to pass but I was ready to get a job by the time I was nearly fourteen at the end of February and I applied for a job in the city in St. George's Terrace. I went in on the Friday before my birthday and they said, "Yes, you can start on Monday, you will be fourteen." It was with a firm called Learmonth Duffy. They were auctioneers and

06:00 estate agents down in the basement at 87 St Georges' Terrace.

Did your father know anybody at Learmonth Duffy?

No we just had to go in for an interview and the two elderly men, well to me they were elderly, I suppose they were only in their fifties you know maybe a little bit later but not that much. He was a big Irish man, Jarleth Stephen Duffy, and the other

06:30 man John Pherson Learmonth were, Duffy was not to my way of thinking not quite as refined. He would come in and yell, "Forward, boots!" He would yell out on a wet day and I would have to go and clean his boots, they would all be muddy and dirty you know. Learmonth would never say that to you. He was a different kettle of fish. I used to have to go and collect the rents for them,

07:00 walk around Perth. Sometimes I would have hundreds of pounds which was a lot of money. I was getting twelve and six a week, a dollar twenty five a week, and that was quite good money because a lot of people were only paying their kids ten shillings which was a flat dollar flat. But I had a dollar twenty five and paid a little bit of board to my Mum and

07:30 two shillings off my Malvern Star bicycle to ride to work because everybody rode to work. On the causeway some mornings there would be five thousand bicycles go over the causeway, from Victoria Park and Belmont area mainly, a few from South Perth and everybody would ride to work, you know all sorts of people.

It would have been a pretty responsible job that you had at the age of fourteen.

Well, it was but everybody started off somewhere at fourteen

08:00 and the year after my brother started off. He got a job with Sydney Atkinsons and kept it all his life. He got a job and in their spare parts area and we both had some affinity with numbers and you know in later years I would be down there at Sydney Ats just talking to him and seeing him and the blokes would yell out, "Jim, '50 Chev, what's the muffler number?" "Dah dah dah dah" and it would be six or seven digits.

08:30 It was just uncanny and yet he didn't do that well at school really and he kept that one job and he was quite happy with it. He was a spare parts man and good at it so – but I worked with Learmonth Duffy but I couldn't really see where I was going and the man that they, they had the two bosses Learmonth and Duffy, Al Foldarini was an Italian man and was their accountant

09:00 and Miss Wheelwright was the typist.

What a great name for a typist?

Miss Wheelwright, yes and I spoke to Mr Foldarini once, well, if I stay in real estate and become a real estate salesman, he said, "It's a good business," or you could do something like he was doing and go into accountancy. So

09:30 anyway I hadn't really made up my mind and I was nearly sixteen and had a good friend who lived

behind us in East Vic Park, a boy, Roy Corker. His father was an English bloke and worked with the PMG like worked with the equivalent of Telstra. He was in the office in what they called their engineering branch and Roy said to me one day, and we used to play cards at night some nights, and he said to me,

10:00 "I can't come up tonight. I'm studying for an exam. Dad wants me to go for this exam." So I was down there at the Corkers and Mr Corker said, "You know you should try for this exam as well that Roy is going for and I'll help you and tutor you along a bit for what the requirements were." So eventually Roy and I sat for the exam. There were over four hundred of us sat for the exam and they only wanted eleven.

10:30 I finished up coming up ninth on the list and got a job and Roy missed the boat which was a bit sad. So in 1937, in the January just before I turned sixteen I started as a trainee technical, or they used to call them junior mechanics, in the PMG work shops in East Perth and then I learned the trade as a technical bloke.

What sort of things would you be doing?

11:00 Well when I first started at the workshop, it was quite an up-to-date workshop. I was cleaning and assembling Morse code keys because Morse Code was still used right throughout the state. The only way to get telegraph traffic was to use a Morse key and what they called a sounder, it was just a thing that would click dots and dashes in response to what you were doing with the key. When you pressed the key you would make an electrical circuit

11:30 and the sounder would operate and these telegraphers were skilled. They were able to just read the messages and later on as I got into the job properly, I got to know telegraphists. Eventually after the war I used to work in the telegraph room with these blokes and they would be like you and I are, sitting face to face talking about somebody, and all of a sudden a guy would say, "Southern Cross wants you Jack," and they'd be over there and

12:00 Jack had got up to talk to another mate because he wasn't traffic coming from Southern Cross and this bloke would be taking messages and he would have told Jack that Southern Cross wanted him and he'd stop, the message would be finished and he would type up a complete telegram. He would keep it all in his head but once I got to understand it a bit more there were certain rhythms that they

12:30 wouldn't listen for. 'Dit da' for 'A' sort of thing. They would get the code messages for the word 'and' so it would just come 'Brrt' and they would know it was 'and' and you would generally get 'best wishes', 'good luck', 'on your birthday', all these sort of things. A lot of those words that, to us, were a bit mystic, to the operator were just one continuing sound and they would know the word. They were really clever with it. They could be typing a message that they had just received and still get the next message into their head and not miss it.

13:00 They were very clever, really skilled men at their trade but I don't think a lot of people ever realised that with operators, how good they were. So I left Learmonth Duffys.

How did they feel about that?

Well I was quite pleased in a way because they really were a bit sorry to see me go but realised that I needed to do something and in later years there was a young engineer in the PMG

13:30 called Mark Barker, and this was just prior to my retirement, a long way along the track, and we happened to be talking one day and I was just telling him what I had done and he said, "Al Foldarini, he's my grandfather,' and it was just a little connection later on in life you know.

14:00 So I started off with the PMG. We used to do a lot of training on the job and at the workshops and it was very comprehensive what you learned. And we would also go to the Technical College down in St. Georges Terrace, the old technical college, just along from the newspapers and we did a range of subjects

14:30 there. A lot of mechanical skills of course. We filed and filed and filed 'til you could get blocks, triangles and everything perfect, and weld and lathers and the milling machines and we learned all about electricity and all the facets that were needed and how to adjust switches in telephone exchanges and all the fine intricacies of the business. It had a name, the training routine for

15:00 telegraph trainees, and it was up to, and nearly as good as the schools in Kalgoorlie and it had a name for being about the best in the world in technical training. They used to have technicians, men came from all over the world to do the school of mines in Kalgoorlie. So I was well into my third year in the PMG and

15:30 war started in September and I was already in the militia, what they called the CMF [Citizens' Military Force].

What sort of things did you do in the CMF?

When I was sixteen you could join the cadets and a lot of us did 'cause it was interesting, you used to go out on bivouacs and you learned to fire a rifle and throw a grenade and I was a cadet in the 11th Battalion and we used to go to our parades

16:00 over in James Street. But at eighteen you left the cadets and went into the senior battalion then but the 16th Battalion had just been formed as a Cameron Highland Group. It was a social thing to be in the Cameron Highlanders but it was a bit difficult to get in and it was expensive because you had to buy your own kilt which was four pound

16:30 ten [shillings], that was nine dollars which was eight weeks' wages. But they did have a competition in the cadets where cadets at the cadet camps you used to get marked on your performances, so cadets units would come in from Kalgoorlie, Northam and Geraldton and all these places and you would run the competitions. Anyway I was one of the lucky four, I just made it and I got my free kilt

17:00 and was put into the Cameron Highlanders. So when the war started –

I find it strange that you have this Scottish business going on in the middle of Western Australia?

But there were a big fraternity of Scots here. A lot of migrants came out and Scots people when they came out had a lot of skills. They all did you know, even if one of the skills was often just fortitude. They were able to just tackle life.

17:30 The Poms and the, I often used to think the Poms and the Scots people were really great. Whilst the Italians were sort of put down, for some reason I could never understand European people, I always used to say to a couple of friends of mine, "You are nearly as good as the Dings." Now

18:00 you never said that in a derogatory way. Nowadays I would never be able to say that word outside but we all have to hand it to the Italians that they set the pace for their ability to work. That's just something to me and I look at youngsters and I think if your Dad's an Italian you must be able to work too, even though you don't look it now because younger people can't work like the oldies can.

18:30 So there were a lot of Scots men, young blokes joined the Cameron Highlanders and as soon as the war started we went into camp pretty well straight away. Within a couple of weekends we were in camp at Rottnest.

And this is part of the Highlanders?

Yes the Cameron Highlanders went in with some engineers. Then we were busy all the time at Rottnest. We did a lot of the work on the concrete and the formwork for the gun emplacements

19:00 they were in situ over there.

That's interesting. So all the tunnels you actually built them?

Yes the engineers and the Cameron Highlanders did all that.

Because that would have been a strange request at the time to go over to Rottnest and build tunnels?

Yes I often think they had the foresight to know that it was necessary and it sort of got us into camp routine because a lot of

19:30 those Cameron Highlanders went on to become top soldiers. When they called then for soldiers to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] to go straight into the services, and I look back now and think I might have been quite lucky in life military-wise, because the PMG wouldn't let me go. They weren't keen for technical people to go into the services

20:00 originally and yet the AIF needed technical people in their signals areas, in their engineering units and their vehicle maintenance groups and it was a bit of a sore point with me. Later on I was quite happy because a lot of those men that went into the 11th, 16th, 28th early battalions suffered heavy casualties early fighting in the Middle East in particular.

20:30 **Was the PMG under the banner of Manpower?**

Well to some extent they were. Manpower really controlled the use of men but the thing was too that they had an early thought on the technical ability of people,

21:00 looking at the air force particularly where the air force was shot without a huge technical group to keep those aeroplanes flying, because if you couldn't fly them they were useless. So then I went back to work in the December. I had to come back to work in the December to sit my third year exams and then I was kept at work until they decided if they were going to release us.

21:30 A friend of mine in the office at the PMG said, "Why don't you put in for the air force, the air force are now starting to call now and are going to need people?" So I joined the air force and was accepted and the PMG let me go and I think I might have been one of the early ones, second or third, to go into the services. There was another guy, Len George went into the signals section.

22:00 He was older than me and he had more experience than me with telecom [telecommunications] and then I went off into the air force on the 1st June in 1940.

How aware were you of the political situation?

I was a veteran. I was nineteen and joined the air force and left on the Saturday, signed up on the morning and on the Saturday caught the train to Melbourne and –

22:30 **Were you reading a lot of newspapers as to what was happening in Europe the war?**

Yes it was a big thing and you would go to the movies and you would always have the movies, unlike today you always had news first thing and then you would have a B picture up until interval then after you'd have news and a cartoon and the second picture so you always had plenty of news.

23:00 Or the newspapers had it and of course on the radio because there was no television and you used to get the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] and the Australian news services with what was going on and of course we were predominantly British then, the population, and everybody was interested because I suppose, I don't know what the figures would be but I would think there would be darned near eight in every ten people were

23:30 from England. This is like even our background, we were right back through to the early Forwards and they got here before Christmas in 1829 and on Edwina's side they were all Geordies, they were all coal miners. She was born in South Shields but came here in 1923 when she was about six months old. So, yes, we knew a fair bit about the war and

24:00 they didn't have any trouble in getting people to join up. It was a carry-on. Even though the First [World] War had been so ghastly and we had people telling us how terrible it had been, there were even a lot of men that were only eighteen at the finish of the war. Even in the Cameron Highlanders there were men that were born and only thirty five and thirty eight and old enough to know and remember a bit about the war even though they hadn't served. They

24:30 were keen to join up and did so. I didn't get away until June 1940 and then went up and did what they call your rookies' course at Laverton. Six weeks just learning how to drill. But I, of course, used to be a smart bum even though I was only nineteen, because I had done all this sort of thing since I was sixteen in the cadets and the Cameron Highlanders.

25:00 I was lucky enough, in every squad of forty eight people, you had forty eight who'd go into a squad, you had a drill instructor and you would have this great big gravel square and all day long you would be marching and learning what to do. But every squad had a counter, you would have your counter, and you used to know all the exercises and you'd be in the middle of the squad generally in one of the middle rows and

25:30 pretty well in the centre of the squad and as we did our exercises you would be counting. So there would be an exercise where you would be learning to march and then they would call, "To the front, salute!" You would have to stop and up with your hand salute and bring your hand down, about turn and march again, so the counter would have to say and the Drill Sergeant would call, "To the front, salute!" and I would have to go, 'Bang, bang, stop,

26:00 up, two, three away and about turn, two, three, left, right." Normally a lot of the blokes would get used to it. When you were doing normal marching, you could darn near doze off but when you were the counter you'd have to be awake all day long and you were out there from eight till four with only an hour for lunch and they were long days. But it was good and I thoroughly enjoyed it and I had gone away with only a few city slickers.

26:30 Nearly all blokes from Kalgoorlie and they were all real rough great blokes and what few of us weren't bushies or from Kalgoorlie, there were some farmers like the Radford brothers and these sort of guys but they were a really good clean mob of guys. Just they could drink and of course I wasn't used to a great deal of drinking and see these blokes, when we got to Kalgoorlie

27:00 all these guys had mates and wives and friends to see them leave Kalgoorlie and there was more beer on the train than there were blokes I think. We were mixed up, air force going but there was a lot of civvies travelling on the train as well because it was a normal civilian train service too. But we would pull up along the Nullarbor for a water stop to just get water and here and there were old semi quarries along the railway line where they had dug gravel out for ballast

27:30 when they were building the railway and they were still there. And two or three times there were rabbits in there and these blokes, these yahoos from Kalgoorlie were chasing the poor old rabbits until they just dropped dead with a heart attack. But it was just a good initiation for me as to what I was going to expect on occasions from bloke.

28:00 But there was no nasty people in it and it was a good six weeks learning.

Where were you actually training, doing the square bashing?

At Laverton just outside Melbourne.

How did you get over to Laverton?

We went by train, four days on the train to Melbourne and then we went out to Laverton and we camped in big huts. They used to call it tin city. It was galvanised iron huts and we had some weatherboard up to

about three feet and then

28:30 just galvanised and galvanised roofing and plenty of windows and about I suppose nearly always, I think there was darn nearly a squad, in a hut, about forty eight blokes and normally your corporal or your square basher as you used to call him. Your corporal was up in one end of the hut. We had a bloke from Tasmania. Apparently he had been a Tasmanian boxer. He was only twenty one, a chap called Tom Smart, and he was really good.

29:00 They had learned how to be hard and discipline was pretty tight. You had to be able to do your drills properly but the biggest thing I think was teaching us discipline. When they said jump, you didn't even ask how high, you just jumped. It was good but there were some guys, there was a guy without mentioning his surname, they used to call him Killer Dash,

29:30 and he was vicious. And he used to take it out on them and they were eighteen, just joining up, first time away from home and these guys would make them leave the squad and take their rifle run around the square, and it was a long way around the square, and pick at them all the time to the point that it came through he camp like wild fire one morning, "Did you hear about old Killer?"

30:00 Some bloke said, "Oh you are wanted outside," and when he wandered outside, they hit him behind the ear with a lump of four by two. But of course everybody thought well that's all he deserved. I guess it was an extreme case but it used to be, "Do you want a bit of Killer [UNCLEAR] treatment?" so that was it.

30:30 Then when you were finished there we were all posted away to do our what was called your basic training then. Even though these miner guys may have been technical, we went off to become whatever. I was, as an electrician was one of the basic needs in the service, and I had been doing a lot of electrical work. It was a big part of our training as technicians at the PMG. I was doing an electricians' course so then

31:00 I went up to Ultimo in Sydney just over from the Central Station there in Sydney. It is a Uni now but then it was Ultimo Tech, and we was there for four months and did our course there on basic electrical work. We just had instructors who where skilled in the business and by then we had

31:30 people come from other states who had been training up in New South Wales and other parts of Victoria, Queensland and we had of course, most likely about thirty guys I think doing and we were number eight electrical course, doing the electricians' course and when we finished that we were posted away and Sydney was good. Really great for us, we couldn't wait to get to the Sydney Harbour Bridge and

32:00 there was no Opera House but there was a lot to see and do in Sydney especially for bushies from the West.

What sort of things did you go and have a look at?

Well I sort of, we went all over the place. We used to go down and ride the ferry out to Manly and there was, in the Hyde Park, there was what they called the Anzac buffet, a huge shed and hall area where the ladies of Sydney would volunteer to come and look after us at weekends or even

32:30 of a night time during the week if you got lost you could go up there and sit quietly and write and play table tennis and get a cup of tea and a light meal and I – one Sunday this lady said would I like to go out. Would I like to go home to their place for a meal so, Mrs McLeod was very

33:00 kind and I said, "Yes I would," and she said, "When could we pick you up at Ultimo – at your barracks?" So I made a time, ten o'clock or whatever on the Sunday morning and I was standing waiting and waiting and this big flash car dove up and this man with his cap on gets out and asked was I Mr. Forward and I said, "Yes," and it turns out that these people Mr. and Mrs. McLeod, he was the big Sydney builder and they had built the T and G here in Perth, the Temperance and General,

33:30 but they had done all the big T and G buildings and other big buildings around the place. Really terrific people and they couldn't have been kinder to me. This morning we talked and went around the house that was out in Pymble which was one of the suburbs and anyway sat down for lunch and we had been taught pretty good table manners

34:00 at home and I was a little bit stymied because there was a fancy bit of cutlery outside my soup spoon and I'm sitting there looking and I didn't know if I should start from the right and work in so Mrs. McLeod said, "What's wrong Bill don't you like the soup?" I said, "Well, to tell you the truth Mrs. McLeod I know where the soup spoon is but…"

34:30 But you know they cackled and I heard them on later occasions, "Oh this is the boy with the soup spoon." I must have been a bit of – you know really amused them. They were really nice about it and on other occasions they would pick me up and take me home and we would just go out three or four of us, we used to go out as I say, ride the ferry or go on the trains to the Blue Mountains or out to Bondi for a swim

35:00 and enjoyed our stay in Sydney.

How often would you get the opportunity to go and do things like that?

Each weekend and a couple of nights a week. Some of us had done a lot of boxing when we were younger, my brother and I. You were always looking for something to do and used to hang a bag of sand off a bit of rope and we got an old punch ball we knocked up and we used to have these and some old

35:30 boxing gloves and we used to go into town. this was when we were fifteen or sixteen and a Yank bloke came out, a bloke called Todd Morgan. He had won the Golden Gloves in America which was big and I don't why he settled in Perth but he did and we used to go to his gymnasium so then I just carried it off. There was

36:00 a chap with us, Don Kernot, was a good boxer but a lot of blokes could box. Never for being boxers but just I suppose they were like us, just used to box on their back verandas and so one night a week we used to go around to the gymnasium and do some boxing. But it was never anything else than just really something to do. I did try to hit Don Kernot one night.

36:30 I was what they called a south paw, not orthodox. He just sort of had himself set up but I didn't realise until afterwards it was exactly what he wanted me to do. As I tried to hit him he donged me and sat me down. But it wasn't vicious you know, it was just, "You stay in your box because I'm better than you," and he was. He was a good boxer and a nice guy.

37:00 So then, that was Sydney. We were there for the first anniversary of the start of the war on the 3rd of September.

Any particular celebrations there?

Yes there was a big march through town. Being city based it saved a lot of messing around. Quite a lot of our blokes, because we weren't only just doing electrical courses. There were people at Ultimo doing other trade courses as well so there was quite a big contingent there in Sydney and we formed up in front of the railway station and marched down George Street to Martin Place and there was a service in Martin Place.

37:30 And even though I was short I was lucky enough to be in the front row of the air force group. When we marched down, somebody said the next day, "We're on the pictures at the State Theatre, we're on the news!" and when we went to see the news, we came right up to the camera. I must have sat through forty shows there. I had Edwina and all the mob at home waiting for the news just to see me on the news.

38:00 **That would have been a pretty big thrill?**

Well it was. Especially for a bushie from Perth. You thought that was marvellous being on the movies, on the news thing, so that was that. Yes, a good day. From there, when we finished in Sydney and did our courses we were posted all around

38:30 the country to different airports or aerodromes. And I was posted down to Point Cook, one of the bigger centres in Melbourne. It was on Port Phillip Bay and not far from Laverton itself. It was a western suburb area, Point Cook. I was posted there just before Christmas and as an electrician and the actual area itself, the aeroplane area

39:00 was down on the waterfront because they used to have amphibian aeroplanes, old Walruses and those. A lot of what would be really antique aeroplanes now but aeroplanes, wopities and some of these. They were the big go then. Your camp area was about a mile so you march backwards and forwards four times a day because you had to go down in the mornings and then back for lunch and then back again and back at night so it kept up fit as well.

39:30 Then I got leave home for Christmas so that was pretty good. Seven months in the service and you got four days home but it took for days to get there and four days to get back so you got twelve days leave, but we had four at home which was good and that was okay. Then went back to Point Cook and one day in February, one day before my birthday,

40:00 I was going to turn, what was it? '41 I was going to turn twenty on the 16th and on the afternoon of the 15th a bloke came up to me where I was working and said "You're an electrician?" "Yep." And he said, "They've posted some guys overseas and I know one of the electricians have been knocked back medically. Why don't you see if you can go?" I said to the sergeant, "There's a chance of going overseas." He said, "You'd better scoot off,"

40:30 and I ran the whole mile. I can always remember getting into the orderly and I was too puffed to tell them what I wanted. Anyway the crux of the matter was I went in and did my medical and I filled that bloke's place and I was posted overseas and that was on the 15th of February to what they call the air ambulance unit.

41:00 That was – we didn't know any more than that. It turned out there were twenty eight of us posted to the unit and we went from our different areas around the country and we went back to Laverton and formed up there into the unit and from there we finished up going overseas.

Where did they get most of these blokes from, for the air ambulance?

They came from,

41:30 some from Point Cook. Generally where there were the bigger aerodromes then. A couple of blokes came down from Amberley in Queensland and quite a few from Richmond from New South Wales. Nobody from Pearce was posted into the unit and some blokes were just finishing courses, two or three of them. We were a bit of everything.

Tape 3

00:32 **So when did you board the Queen Elizabeth, Bill?**

In Sydney Harbour, when we were posted away we didn't know exactly where we were going officially but we soon picked up on the grape vine that we were headed for the Middle East and we were sent then from Melbourne on a train up to Sydney.

01:00 Just took us in from Laverton and put us on the train and a lot of AIF army blokes were on the train as well in Melbourne and they had the barriers with all the well-wishers behind the barriers and the train started off slowly and a girl broke the barrier and ran over to kiss her boyfriend good bye, and as she stood back another big bloke from a couple of windows grabbed her and hoicked her into the train. So

01:30 the train had to stop the train then and get the girl out of it so that we could take off. That was all right and all the waving and the clapping and yelling started again and the train and they had got out on the other side of the platform and disconnected the back carriage so then we had to stop and they backed up and hooked it up again. So eventually we got out of Melbourne.

02:00 We got to Sydney and we were put on the north shore on a place called Bradfield Park and that was a holding depot for people going overseas. They call it an embarkation depot. We were there a few days until the Easter and on the Thursday we left Bradfield Park and went down to Darling Harbour and just caught a couple of small ferries were taken over and put aboard with the Queen Elizabeth in the harbour.

02:30 There were quite a few squadron blokes that went away because 450 Squad went away too and a lot of 3 Squadron chaps with us and our own little air ambulance group. We were under the wing of 450 Squadron. It was quite a good thing to watch the AIF blokes in action, they had a particular something about them. I guess you would hear it

03:00 spoken about as being the larrikins or the larrikinism of the Aussies. The police were going around the boat continually, the water police, to stop people throwing messages overboard just as a safety precaution. And there were a lot of boats of all sorts of shapes and sizes. Family members waving to their blokes, and

03:30 the thing was that you were trying to beat them to get a message so that you could let your people know where you were. On the one night, the second night that we were on board, the tea consisted of whatever and big whole cooked spuds and it was surprising the amount of blokes to have the one idea.

04:00 The trick was then to get a group of you somewhere along the side of the deck and throw an empty cigarette packet out into the water. The police would tear in and pick it up in their little launch and then they would pelt the daylight out of them with spuds you know. Very childish now I guess, but everyone shouted and yelled and clapped you know. It was quite a lot of fun and if we meet any of our guys now we all remember the spuds you know.

04:30 I was lucky, I didn't smoke but one our blokes gave me a cigarette tin and I wrote a quick note home and folded the envelope and put it in the tin and when the boats were sort of clear and we had a launch I just threw my cigarette tin over. Anyway we left Sydney in a convoy and came around to

05:00 Fremantle and we weren't allowed into the harbour. The two boats, I think it was the Nieuw Amsterdam and the Ile de France, had Kiwis on board and they went into Fremantle and the Kiwis were given leave. They had been at sea longer than we had been. After a couple of days we were in Fremantle,

05:30 I was called down to the CO, the officer commanding troops on board the Queen Elizabeth and I had to explain to him how 'this' had arrived, and 'this' was a big cake from my Mum to LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] Forward, care of the Queen Elizabeth, Fremantle Harbour. "How the devil had she found out?" but the day before, a good friend of mine, a very close friend, we had grown up within houses of one another

06:00 and he was working for the PMG. He was a telegram messenger and he had come on down to pick up telegram messages off the ship and he had seen me so I was able to say, "Oh well, Kevin Moriarty had been on board picking up telegrams, saw me and must have told my mother." That was accepted and there were no repercussions at all. The Kiwis had a good time in Perth

06:30 apparently, they did each convoy the let off. They did all sorts of things, lifted a baby Austin up into the

foyer of the post office and had a good time generally. The morning we were leaving I was on mess duty cleaning up tons of old saucepans and what have you down in the galley and some bloke came in and said, “Any West Aussies here?” “Yes I am.”

07:00 “You had better go up and have a look, it might be the last chance to see it. You’d better get up and have a look.” So I was able to go up but I didn’t know it then but Mum and Edwina were over on Leighton Beach just waving goodbye so off we went then.

How far out to sea were you when you came up for your last peek?

We were only about a mile off. We were between Rottnest – we were only just off the end of Gauge Roads, just off the end of the North Mole when that happened.

07:30 We had six thousand on board and we had a really nice cabin. We had a honeymoon cabin and there were ten of us in the cabin and she had been down in Tasmania and been refitted so that the bunks were all set up. There was a nice big bath in there. You had salt water

08:00 and I think we had hot water for an hour each day so you had to be quick and lively. You could have a shower or a bath and we had one bloke, Dave Alexander, he was from New South Wales. He was a really funny sort of bloke, he would sit for hours in the bath with his life jacket on making sure it worked.

Was he for real?

Yeah he was. He was really worried about being sunk.

08:30 And I think I was the only guy seasick on the Queen Elizabeth and it wasn’t really rough but I was sea sick and blokes would come up and say, “Hey son you missed a bit on the other side.” I don’t get much sympathy. The time was taken up normally on the trip with normal marching and exercises, the army guys were going through various

09:00 infantry drills all the time and rifle work but then there were games. There were inter-unit tug-o-wars and relay races. We won the relay race, our group, Air Ambulance. We had a couple of blokes who were good runners, I was fairly good myself. I was never able to beat my brother but

09:30 I was a pretty good runner and we won the relay race. I don’t think we got anything for it but we were at least the best relay team. There were eight of us in each team and you had to run around the deck, so many times, so that went pretty well.

Any gambling on board?

A lot of gambling. There was always the story and I have never seen it historically, not that I have done a lot of reading that covered the convoy but there was always a story and something did go on because in amongst the army

10:00 personnel there were a lot of stories and a lot of funny activities for a couple of days. But apparently a big two-up school had been broken up by a couple of service police and one of them disappeared on the trip, never sighted him again. They didn’t think that he’d jumped, he was pushed you know. That’s a story that I have always told but I always warn people that I have never ever seen proof of it.

10:30 It seemed to be pretty genuine that that did happen.

Sounds like good gossip.

Yes. One night, the ship itself was run by English Merchant Navy. They had it under their control. They were in charge of the anti-aircraft equipment on board, not a lot of guns but it was armed and the normal crew were English merchant sailors and

11:00 the food was okay but it wasn’t really great stuff. One night there was some fish and the story came up from the galley that it was, all the fish boxes were marked 1917. At the finish of the from the First World War, England apparently had taken a lot of this fish up into Iceland and a couple of the other areas and it had just been put in cold storage, buried in big ice areas up in the Arctic area

11:30 and then it had been pulled out again and all the Aussies objected to having 1917 fish, they reckoned. But there was nothing really wrong with it but they stood up and shouted and counted them out and refused to eat it and the Poms brought in the MPs [Military Police] to try and control the riot. And

12:00 and I always remember through the riot an Aussie, an AIF bloke, with his mate on his shoulder and the bloke’s got a bayonet prising great big stars off the ceiling for souvenirs. But anyway the meals did improve after the riot.

Was the riot pretty hostile?

Oh yeah, really hostile. A brigadier came down and got up on one of the tables and started, “Now, men,”

12:30 and he had only got the ‘Now, men’ out and he was plastered with little bits of sticky fish and mashed potatoes and everything. A proper Aussie mob. Anyhow it quietened down and it settled and from there on the food improved and the behaviour. But there was nothing really malicious in it except they just

reckoned they needed and deserved better food and thanks to them we got it.

13:00 So it was quite uneventful really, the trip. We didn't have any sub scares.

Was there any grog on board?

Yes but that was pretty – canteens were open but there was no take-away and you could only drink at the canteen and most of it was army glasses. Just put a bit of water and oil in the bottle and then just put your red hot poker in, a red hot bit of steel in and that broke the bottle off square then and you had just that much at the bottom of the big –

13:30 because they were only big bottles there weren't stubbies or anything. They were only just a standard bottle, six to the gallon. But there were a few fights here and there. If you didn't drink you gave a bloke your rations so some blokes had more than they could hold, so there were a few scuffles here and there. Six thousand men caged up on a ship.

14:00 It was different when the Poms used the Lizzie [Queen Elizabeth] and the [Queen] Mary. On the Lizzie they brought a run out with the Highland Division on a bit later in 1942 ready for Alamein and they were running eighteen thousand the same as the Yanks to a trip. So then you had red, white and blue tags, well they did. We didn't but they did, we didn't have any bed problems for the whole three weeks of the convoy.

14:30 But they had three men to a bed, so you had eight hours turn in bed, so some bloke slept say from four in the afternoon till eight or four in the morning then that bloke slept from four to eight so there was somebody in the beds all the time. They were doing, especially across from the States, they were doing a lot quicker runs. They were only six or seven days at seas. It all depends how far they had to travel dodging U-boats.

15:00 But we didn't have any trouble going over at all, we had a good run. And the speed trials were quite interesting because we would just leave the other couple of boats in the convoy, the destroyers and off we would go and then we would pull right back till they caught us up, just doing trials and still running in the engines. It was a good trip.

How many knots could she do?

15:30 I think, I always say she got to fifty two. At a reunion, one of the blokes said he was sure that they got over fifty eight but nobody ever said that. As far as I was concerned fifty two was it but it was still going very fast, especially when the ocean was nice there was this great big wash out the back. It was quite spectacular. They would just go through and upset flying fish because you would be on

16:00 them before they even realised what was happening. It was always something to be up on deck, if you were up on deck it was good to see it.

So you did a bit of sea watching?

Oh yes, had plenty of time. We went into Trincomalee in Ceylon, in Sri Lanka. I don't know what that was for because it wasn't for a fuelling exercise, but it may have just been to

16:30 pull into a safe harbour to throw intelligence people off so they wouldn't know what was happening. There was some thought, I didn't know until afterwards, that maybe we should go back to Singapore but of course at that stage Japan wasn't in the war anyway. Some of our blokes, one of the ships in the convoy, I think it might have been the Nieuw Amsterdam, did go to Singapore with some of the 8th Division

17:00 but we had the 9th Division on that went out and did well in the desert especially in El Alamein. So then we finished there we went on up through the Red Sea and went to Suez and we went to a Pommy air force camp at a place called Kasfareet just off the Suez Canal, oh about

17:30 one hundred and twenty miles, hundred and thirty miles south east of Cairo and we were there for six weeks. It was a huge staging camp.

Is this just for the Air Ambulance group?

No just for Air Ambulance. The AIF went to a place through TEK, Telkabeer. They went on by train up to Gaza and Tel el Eisa and places up in Palestine which is now, of course, Israel. But that's where the AIF were camped, right up there

18:00 in a great huge stretch of army camps. All the various units and battalions and training areas were up there. We stayed for six seeks there as Kasfareet because we were under the umbrella of the RAF [Royal Air Force] and they were wondering what they were going to do with us because Greece and Crete had been on

18:30 and just finished as we got to the Middle East. It was pretty well coinciding with all of the 6th and 7th Divvy [Division] blokes who had avoided capture that were coming back to Palestine and also a huge amount of English and Greeks. A lot of Greek soldiers and airmen had been evacuated as well and the Greeks were being settled down in Palestine.

19:00 Most of the English troops were down around the Egyptian areas. They were in camp down there, so we were there with all the Poms. We used to get on well with them, we had a lot of fun there. Amongst our twenty eight guys there was a chap called Stan Bolt who had worked for Willy Weeties at north Fremantle, was a bit of a part-time barber. He'd cut his brother's hair and so he was barbering for us. He took the job on. We were paying him

19:30 the equivalent of six pence a day, six pence a haircut and we were only getting five shillings, like we were only on fifty cents a day and I had made an allowance to my Mum of three shillings and she got two shillings a day help because my father wasn't there and he wasn't well. So you paid sixpence for a haircut. It was a bit of a slice out of your twenty cents

20:00 for a haircut but it was good value and he did very well, he was careful with it. He didn't waste too much of it. Anyway some of the blokes in the AIF started to come out on parade and they had fancy hair cuts, it might be like what we call now a Mohawk. So I said to Stan Bolt, we used to call him Ochie, "I think I will have one of those haircuts,"

20:30 and he said, "I think I'll give you something a bit different," so he went across and back and I had more hair then that I do now, but I had four little tuffs of hair so one of our guys, we were just starting – we had been together a few weeks now or some months, three or four months and we were all getting to be a good little close knit. There were only twenty eight of us. Dick Willis turned out, he was a bit of a smartie. He was ahead of himself and a long way ahead of us and he said, "No good

21:00 queuing with all these Poms," because the Poms would get there early to get into these mess huts to get a meal. It didn't matter what time you got there, there would be Poms there waiting, so he said, "Come on let's go down the front, keep your hat on," and we had our normal slouch hats on. Before we went, "Here, use this." He had a bit of hair cream stuff. "Dip these pointy things." So we got my tufts of hair all pointy and put my hat on.

21:30 So we walked off down the front and all the Poms, "Hey what are you doing Aussie, go on get back, we're here first." He said "Take your hat off." He said, "He's a Bush Baptist," he said, "and he got to be first. It's his religion." "What's a Bush Baptist?" "You know what a Bush Baptist is, you are not that stupid." And all the Poms are wondering what's going on,

22:00 "He has got to first in the meal. That's why we always wait." So then as the Bush Baptist I used to be down there first. "Where's the Bush Baptist, Aussie?" I never had any trouble with queues. It was always good for the time we were there and the photos I had taken! "Is the Bush Baptist around?" and I would have to stand there with my hat off and tilt my head a bit so they could get the tufts of it.

22:30 I have some photos of it even now. It was a bit of fun for us. And another thing, near us there were a lot of prisoner of war camps because the 6th Division had gone through and the 7th but the 6th Division had started the whole thing and they had captured – the Italians just surrendered en masse. There were thousand of them and you would see photos on the newsreels. There would be a couple of Aussies, hats back, one was always a gem of a one, a the bloke's rolling their cigarettes

23:00 and there's his Eytie [Italian] POW [Prisoner of War] carrying his rifle for him and Eytie prisoners for as far as you could see. They would come out with their white flannel things pinned to their [UNCLEAR] had little attaché cases, like mock leather things, and they'd have their with bits and pieces in those. They didn't really want to fight from the start.

23:30 They might have been good workers but they weren't good fighters. The Aussies sort of proved that. So that was our stay there at Kasfareet for the time we were there.

Sorry Bill, what kind of accommodation did you have there?

Tents, That was our first issue, getting into tents. We just had tents and it was good because there were very few dust storms. We did get some dust storms, but not like we started to get out in the desert. We got quite good. Every now and again we would, just for our own benefit, we worked it out ourselves, we would pull a tent down and put it up. We'd be sick of it when we'd finished but it was good for under normal safe conditions we were able to put our tents up and we got used to using the room and sharing it with six to the tent.

24:00 We had a few arguments to start with but we soon woke up that one sixth was all you were ever going to get, it was only your blanket and a bit of a roll to lie on. We used to have to live on that and that was it, so that was good training for us. But I've mentioned a couple of times where the prisoner of war camps were, there were some blokes from the 4th Indian Division looking after prisoners and some

24:30 English soldiers. And there was also an English punishment camp there as well and they were very strict. Blokes that went absent without leave and things that happened in action, they would bring them back. So it was a military prison and five o'clock in the morning they would have to get up, pull their tent down and they used to have what we called 'dig their tents in', so that they were sleeping below ground level. They would have to

25:00 fill sandbags so it was proper conditions, active service conditions, fill the sandbag and put a sort of a parapet right around. In the morning, all these blokes who were prisoners would have to pull their tents down, fold them up, empty all the sand bags and move along just a width of the tent and dig it all out again and go through it all,

25:30 put the whole tent back up, and when they had to fold their blankets, their stripe up the middle of the blanket had to match the top one, two, or three blankets if they had three. I think they used to only have two, one under and one over, but I don't think they had rubber ground sheets under them. They were being taught that what they had done was wrong.

26:00 They were really tough on them and they were Americanised. They were like the Yanks, only two meals a day, one at half past seven and one at half past four. They used to have two meals but they would work the daylights out of them, exercises and drills and I don't think too many of them would ever re-offend. The one issue would be enough. I often think that we should try that these days on some of our people. Give them one lick of the raspberry stick and they wouldn't want to go back.

26:30 **Why were the tents dug in?**

Well it was generally safety precautions against bombing because

27:00 shrapnel would generally stay off at ground level. You were unlucky if it came in and if it came down in a hole it was generally only dropping so it didn't have a lot of velocity and you didn't get too many big pieces that were like that. When we got out there, whilst we weren't soldiers, we'd picked up enough from our time on the canal that we used to dig, most of the time unless it was too rocky. Most of the time

27:30 we would dig in a little bit and some nights later on once you had gauged what an air raid was like you didn't even get up. You usually had enough cover to be just down under the ground.

How would you gauge the severity of the air attacks?

Just once you sort of picked if there were six or eight or ten aircraft they wouldn't hang around too long and if they were fairly high they were Italians. You had a bit more trouble if they were a bit lower. Once you could pick they were a bit lower they were the Jerries [Germans]. The Jerries were a bit more dinkum.

28:00 If you had an air raid, you had an air raid but often with the Eyties they would make sure they'd just drop it over the target and let's go home sort of thing so it wasn't too bad.

Where were you based after then you left the camp?

When we left the canal we went up to Gaza in Palestine and there was a bit of flying work. Our three ambulances were what they called De Havilland 86. They had four Gypsy Six motors, little six cylinders in line.

28:30 They were double wings and bi-planes and all fabric, wooden frames with fabric covering and they had been used generally through out the world. They had sold a lot of them everywhere. Quite a lot into Africa and into Europe and we were using them in Australia for outback flying. They were little airlines and

29:00 into New Guinea and they would carry twelve passengers but we had them fitted out for eight stretchers and one sitting person. So you had four stretchers, two along the sides, two up the sides and one bloke used to sit up the front, a wounded bloke,

29:30 and they flew the aeroplanes out. The people we had there, they were John McDonald, a chap Popponea and a Ron Duffield were the three main pilots that came out to start with and they were only comparatively young. They were

30:00 twenty-six and twenty-eight, their ages, but they had a lot of experience flying. And it was hard to do in those days, to get experienced blokes, but they had been flying these aeroplanes for different services up in Queensland and the North Eastern New South Wales, so they knew the aeroplanes well and were good at flying them. They flew them out on a pretty circuitous route, from Darwin across to Indonesia and Singapore and through Malaysia and India and

30:30 through the Iraqi and Irani area and finally to the Middle East. Went down to Heliopolis, which was the big air force aerodrome in Cairo and then from Heliopolis flew up about an hour to Gaza, which was north of Cairo. They each had a wireless operator

31:00 and a mechanic who flew out with the aircraft. Just sort of do it in a five or six or eight day run because they were having various problems along the way. They had dust storms in some places and just mechanical failure in others and they had to enlist the aid on a couple of occasions of people at various aerodromes and bases

31:30 to help out mechanically to get them going. So finally the three of them arrived and our initial work as an Air Ambulance, they had big what they call Geneva Red Crosses on a white background, just a big square shaped red cross, and we were doing various jobs. They flew to Cyprus to bring back a couple of blokes, one with bad appendicitis no war caused injuries really.

32:00 A couple of blokes were caught in training when a hand grenade blew up and they had to be flown down to hospital in Gaza because in that area up and down that coast there were big general hospitals, what

they called Number One and I think the other one might have been 7 AGH, which was Australian General Hospital and they were primarily for the army.

32:30 But if you had blokes that were badly in need of it, they went there and were treated. We were there as an RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] unit but we were to be used as the air forces wanted us. We just didn't cart Australians at all. We carted, over the time, people from all over the place, German prisoners we carted, Italian prisoners, South Africans, New Zealanders, Indians. If they were wounded and in a bad way, that was once we got out into the desert

33:00 that was our lot then to just carry them around. We had medical orderlies. One bloke had been a medical orderly, Norm Elliott, he was quite old. He was thirty eight or thirty nine. He had been a medical orderly in the First World War, right at the finish of the war and he'd been in the nursing game, male orderly in the hospitals in the twenty years between the wars

33:30 and was very skilled and quite unflappable. Just what we needed for different occasions. He had been there and done that. Then we had another guy twenty-one years old. He worked for a firm, Bucks, in Melbourne, they were fancy clothes, like Barlow. Sold top clothes, you know one of my week's clothes would have only bought a tie or a cufflink, at Henry Bucks.

34:00 Ray worked there. Quite a big well presented bloke, about six feet, very good looking and spoke well, and absolutely fantastic with patients, very good with them, nice modulated voice which often they would just need, instead of any of us just sitting in there, "How ya goin' mate?" He would really be able to approach it

34:30 in a nice way and very good at reading patients. I didn't have a lot of experience with it because very rarely did we get up there to help. Normally some of the fitters or the flight mechanics who were normal engine people, where they had most trouble. If there was an engine that was going to playing up, whether it was faulty spark plugs or the carburation. There were very few electrical problems.

35:00 A couple of times you would go up with the aeroplane and be there as an technician but you helped with stretchers and everything, loading them onto the plane. They would be brought in by the ambulances from the various groups, whichever were in action and getting knocked around. Their field ambulance people would look after them and bring them into the point.

35:30 It might be a mile behind if it was serious and they knew they were going to win, the army would say, "Look there is no way we are going to lose our positions. We'll have our blokes a mile behind at a point, come in there," or it's a bit dicey, we'll get our wounded out to you twelve miles.

36:00 So it was a matter of land, and often in those cases often you would land with maybe a Hurricane or something, a Tommy Hawk cover while they landed and took off again and landing and taking off was pretty quick and lively. We would land and just taxi up to the point where the ambulances were. They might even have left the blokes there with a couple of orderlies then gone off with another load. But Ray Smith was able to, sort of 'Hey!' and you would look at him and you would leave the bloke and by the time you got the eight blokes on the plane

36:30 he'd be gone. We had one man die on the aeroplane and that was up to the time when we were finished and we were relieved from El Alamein and it was all over there. It was starting to get to the point where they were going to go to Italy. I think by that time we had carted about four and half thousand people and we had only had one man die on an aeroplane.

That's an amazing statistic.

Well, see the thing was it was really no good saying, "Well he might make the trip,"

37:00 because it would be like the domino effect. He would die and another bloke would peg out. You could lose two when you only had to lose one if you were wise about it. And see, the medical orderlies out in the field they used to do all the basic work, put a sulphur alamide pad and bandage them up, plug them up and get them to the point that they would come into us. And then our Shorty, Cyril Dodson and Ray Smith and Jack Williams, they would be

37:30 the blokes then that would be on the aircraft. One would come back with them and the other couple would stay with them making sure that they were all ready for the next aircraft to come in you see. But we were out there when we went out there then, we stayed out there for seventeen months and we really never left the desert at all.

38:00 So we were in most of the activities that went on. We weren't to the point that we were nowhere near any of the active service blokes, the army guys that were always in action we were our there with our ears to the ground and a part of it all the time which was great to be out there and doing something especially like we were, saving blokes lives, it was good.

I imagine you would have witnessed quite a lot out there.

Yeah. See we had three aeroplanes shot down on the 8th of December.

38:30 The day after the Japs came into the war they were going up to pick up some patients and I think the landing ground number was LG 110. The Pommy survey group had gone through for air force and they

had what they called LGs everywhere, landing grounds that they had surveyed and worked out that these areas were safe enough just to land aeroplanes at. They weren't anything in particular.

39:00 If you were driving around looking for them you could never really find them because they were just a surveyed patch of ground that had just been raised and dozed off so it was fairly level and quite good under car so the undercroft of the ground was fairly gravely or granite-y and hard. You'd get these and they might just have a mystic marker that you soon learn to look for. Some of our blokes would go out, or be sent out to these landing grounds

39:30 to check to see if they were going to be okay, that Jerries hadn't sort of sabotaged them. It was a trick if they'd woke up to what could possibly go on to leave mines and that. Just mine it up a bit so they'd make it unserviceable once you'd had a couple of kites land and hit mines and be spread all over the place.

Were there already incidents of air ambulance being mined?

40:00 These three this morning on December the 8th were coming in to land. We had two of our Aussie pilots and a Captain Nell who was seconded from the South African air force to fly with them and they were coming in to land and they were jumped by some Smiths that had been strafing further away but they must have been going back to their base and just seen our blokes coming in shot the three of them down. We didn't lose anybody. A couple of the blokes were wounded but the pilots landed the aeroplanes.

40:30 Ron Duffield, was a top pilot, he landed his aeroplane in flames. When it landed they were lucky it threw the three of them out. Norm Elliott had been wounded, he'd been shot through the leg but Ron Duffield and Jim Ball hadn't been, the wireless operator, they were both okay but we lost the plane altogether.

41:00 That just burnt right up. The other two were badly shot up. Took a lot of repairing. It took us, I think, five days to get one of them flying again but this Captain Nell, actually they overshot him and when they came again he was able just with flying skills to more or less just move

41:30 the aircraft and he didn't lose control but he sort of stalled the aeroplane to the point it was almost crashing and side slipped and just gained a bit more speed to land it. It was too good a move for the Jerries. By the time they lined up, they over shot him. He's lumbering along at 80 or 90 knots in the old dragon and these blokes are coming in at 160, 200 but it was real skill and the ability not to panic.

Tape 4

00:31 **I was just going to ask it was common for the Germans to attack the air ambulance planes?**

No that was the only time that that really did happen. Other than that we didn't have any problems. We were always aware, when I say we, the pilots.

01:00 **Did you encounter many German planes when you were flying around wounded?**

No they left our blokes alone pretty well. Now and again they would come by and just check our pilots over, check the aircraft over. Quite a lot of the blokes were in the planes when that happened but I was never in the plane because I didn't do that many trips but you know they would come all excited and think that it was something to write

01:30 about you know. But it didn't happen too often at all when I was there because I didn't do enough of that sort of flying for them. Some of our guys, the mechanics, that were going up to be there to service aircraft, the idea would be to get your schedule from the air force people the previous night . There would be some activity

02:00 that would be certain to need air craft and then in the mornings as soon as it was light we would have the aircraft ready to fly out and we wouldn't go then till the army observers had notified their command group that aircraft were needed at such and such a point.

02:30 So there'd be grid points on their maps where they would be and what they considered would be a safe area for us to land and it was a period of miles where this could vary. The ambulances would be at that point at the correct time. And we would fly in and load the aircraft and take them to wherever. Sometimes it would be a port like Mersa Matruh

03:00 or when it was free into Tobruk or to Mersa Matruh was both a port and a railhead where they could be put on trains and taken back to Cairo, about two hundred and fifty miles, or to Alexandria. On the train they were fairly stable and they would have good nursing there. The nurses and the aides would be there to look after them so they were quickly by means of us flying them out of the

03:30 activity area quickly, getting some sort of top attention, which was a big thing in saving a lot of their lives.

Just a few questions Bill, what kind of checks would you do on the aeroplane before it took off?

We had normal routines. For us it was to start, the mechanics and the fitters would go through, start the motors up,

04:00 one of them would get into the cockpit and start the motors up and do the rev checks and see that they were coming up okay, see that the pumps were working and fuel gauges were reading right and everything was correct. I would just go, through or my mate George Henderson, we would just do our normal electrical checks and see that the gauges were working electrically.

Would they just be sight checks?

Yes, sight checks, yes.

04:30 And that would be all the riggers would go around to check the wheels to see that they were okay. Check the tail wheel, often just lift them up to see that they weren't locked and they were just working. Normally it was only visual. Some of the mechanics were very good they could just walk around the aircraft and say, "You had better pull it up, that number three is not too good," and or the port inner or the starboard outer.

05:00 It might be looking okay on the gauge and they were really good. We had a top crew of guys and everybody worked well and I was always sticky and interest apart from being as an electrician, there wasn't on those old aircraft a lot of work for an electrician. The generators were the main problems. The two Christmas Days I was out there I had to

05:30 put in new generators.

Christmas Days?

On the two Christmas Days. We had a guy called Colin Holley with us. He was a fitter, an engine fitter, very good and he was a real wizard and after the war he designed and became very rich because he designed a carburettor called a Holley Carburettor and it's world-wide.

06:00 I often think that it was nice to know that he did so well because he was really keen on the job and treated them always, the aeroplanes, they weren't just an aeroplane they were his, you know. If any body got into trouble with a motor, and that was very rare because they were all pretty good on their motors, but Colin would sit down and it wouldn't take him long and know exactly what was wrong with the motor. Even though he was a carburettor expert and

06:30 he knew what made a carburettor go and why it was needed so it was often, if we were in a bit of trouble, they'd say "If Colin isn't doing anything, send him down here," and he would go down to the aeroplanes and get them going. He was really good and so it was nice. When I chased them all up years later for a reunion.

07:00 but he had been killed in a car smash and his wife Daphne was still upset. It was quite a while after she had lost him. He had been into Brisbane for a business meeting and just had an accident and finished up hitting a tree going home and he wasn't a drinker or anything, and it was a bit sad for the family to have lost him. But I used to get down there and potter around and when they were pulling motors down they would always like a hand, somebody, and it was good for me

08:00 so I got to the point that I was fairly good on motors as well. Later on life, I never ever had a new motorcar, I always had second hand ones and I was able to do everything on them. Can I go off on a tangent? Our first trip east in 1952 was in a 1937 Morris utility.

08:30 So I was able to strip it right down to every washer and nut and bolt and put it together before we drove over to Melbourne and

09:00 a lot of that came from learning from the blokes in the Middle East.

I bet you get a hell of a shock when you look under the bonnet of a car now!

I know where the radiator cap is. Oh, it's terrible. I don't even try to do anything because you get all the warnings about the electronic this and electronic that.

09:30 I don't know where all the pipes and tubes go and why they need them anyway.

You can't see the ground below them.

No. I had Chevs [Chevrolets] for a while so that I was able to sit on the front of the Chev and you could get inside and sit under the bonnet and do all you wanted to and see it easily butut now it is just a real mass of goo isn't it? It's terrible. We had some chaps, a guy called Tom Barrett,

10:00 we always called him "Crewbie." He was a motorbike lover and one day they went off. We used to have to go to various places. When you were camped in an area, generally on an aerodrome with other units, you never had an aerodrome to yourself. It was feasible just to have three ambulance aircraft specially catered for by aerodromes that were on their own and then you had the problem of fuel to the aircraft

10:30 and just us for maintenance. So you would be camped with fighters, fighter bombers and bomber planes and it was often wasn't good because when the Jerries got wild with them and bombed them, of course you had to tow along with it all. It was just something that you got fairly used to. We didn't lose anybody in air raids. I have never ever

11:00 really thought about it but I suppose we were out there for seventeen months without a break and I suppose we would have had a bit over two hundred air raids, but it was enough to keep you on your toes. Good for your constipation, especially if you were on bully and biscuits for a couple of weeks and then you had an air raid, you could hit the eye of a needle at forty feet then. It was good for you.

11:30 **What kind of relationships did you have with the boys in the squadrons?**

Got on well with them because a lot of them were Aussies. Some of them were Aussie Air Squadrons like Number 3, 450 and the 451. They were Australian Squadrons and good performers. In 450 I had a particular mate, Billy Halliday. Bill and I had been at school for a short while together at Perth Boys' and

12:00 then he was working around the city and so was I and we would often see one another. Then I struck him with the 450 Squadron. Some our blokes went over looking for friends and said, "Oh, there is a bloke from Perth that knows you," so I used to go and see Bill. And this day I had got some newspapers from Edwina so I took them over to Bill and he hadn't come back. He had been shot down and killed.

12:30 It was a bit sad but some blokes, we had another guy that had a brother, Allan Towner, had a brother in the army and he used to go and visit his brother. It was easy when we first all got out there and it was new, the Middle East, because they were reforming everything, because all the army groups had lost that many people,

13:00 killed or captured in Greece or Crete and the people that came out with us on the boat were reinforcing these various battalions. And Alan Towner had a brother and I had a good friend called Dennis Lomas from Perth that was up there with one of the groups, and a friend of mine that had done the same electricians' course, a bloke by the name of Ron Williams, and his brother Jack. It was quite nice to go up and do a bit of a run to these camps and

13:30 you might only have to go forty or fifty miles south of Haifa or Tel Aviv and up in that area and visit these blokes and just make contact with them. It was good. We even played cricket that I'd just gone through a little while ago. We were camped in Palestine for a while

14:00 and Lindsay Hassett, he had been a test cricketer, and another test cricketer by the name of Frank Ward, Ray Robinson, and another big bloke called Ted White, and then a group of top state cricketers, and Doctor Ernie England was a doctor at one of the Aussie hospitals, and another chap by the name of Don Allnut and fill-ins from the other states. These blokes had formed a top cricket team and they were coming around playing the various units. Belting the

14:30 daylights out of everybody but you know it was a real break to get away from the whole thing and play a normal game of cricket. I had played cricket before I left here and I was fairly good at cricket. I was still only young and learning but I got picked in this air force team to play Lindsay Hassett and there was a chap, Bob Cox, a Pommy guy, was a good cricketer, and was picked on the side

15:00 We were bowling and this Coxy wanted to bowl Hassett and we couldn't get him out and he made 84 and all of a sudden I was bowling to him and I bowled him. And I still think to this day that he let me so at least the Pommy didn't get his wicket. It was a great talking point for me when cricketers got together, "Tell us how you got Hassett." I used to tell them I used to run up with a bag full of grenades in case we were attacked when I was bowling, all this rubbish. It used to take me an hour to tell them how I got Lindsay Hassett.

15:30 I maintained a short contact with him. We didn't become friends but he was always friendly and I only saw him on half a dozen occasions. When we'd be in Melbourne now and again I'd drop in. He had a sports store in Melbourne and I dropped in to see him and when he retired he was up at Surf Beach near Bateman's Bay in NSW and we had good friends in Bateman's Bay. We used to go and stay with them. So one day we went around and saw Lindsay and his wife was a very nice lady and we had afternoon tea with him and that was the last time I saw him.

16:00 He did a lot for morale with the cricket because they never ever showed us really how good they were but they played to make it interesting. Like the day he made 84, he could have made 284 but he just had a hit and gave a few of us a chance to bowl at him and then gave us his wicket. That part of it wasn't much of it. It was just playing and getting away back to something nice and then the blokes would always have a few beers afterwards.

16:30 The night that we played Hassett was the first time I had a beer. I just had a beer but I wasn't allowed to have any more. That was enough. One bloke said, "Yes, you know." I said, "I'm going to have a beer." But I did drink eventually. I used to have a beer here and there and but I've never been a big drinker but I think it's a good pastime.

17:00 **So you hadn't had one up until now?**

No, not until then. That was just an interlude to go back to. Out in the desert we used to kick a football around. You had the ACF, the Australian Comfort Fund. They used to run concerts right throughout, wherever there were Australian service people. It was similar to what the English had. They had what they called the NAAFI, the Navy, Army, Air Force Institute. They would set up tents or huts if they could get them or just turn up off the back of a truck and hand out bits and pieces. You'd get some new socks or mittens or balaclavas then the Salvos would come in always, it didn't matter where you were. Up would pop the Salvos with their cups of tea and the little sign on the side of their truck, "Tea revives you." Never got any money or donors, no Dilmah or Ann Guerie or Robur. You didn't get any sponsorship in those days it was just hard slogging for the Salvos but they really were fabulous. They were really good.

17:30 **It must have been a surprise to see them pop up.**

Yes because they'd just turn up. They didn't generally set themselves to do a target and you might be somewhere where you hadn't really had anything really decent to eat for a while and it was difficult when you were moving up and down that desert to often keep things going. Because

18:00 we got at point finally when we went down after El Alamein, we were about fifteen hundred miles west of Cairo and it was pretty difficult to try and keep things going. Before Alamein started, this is ducking and diving a bit but its only tied up with my chain of thought on supply, Montgomery came in and made sure that every man, and there were just over three hundred and thirty thousand people all together, that's navy, army and air force,

18:30 everybody, we all got ten days leave, everybody. And then the next thing was instead of, as we used to do to get supplies and we did somebody would say in our unit, "Do the ration run today." Two of us would go off in a little ute we had and we might have to drive twenty miles, you might have to drive fifty miles,

19:00 to where the Poms would have a great big army dump and you would go in and you would have your chit to say, from your officer, you wanted rations for seven days for forty blokes. So you would get your cartons of bully beef and packets of biscuits and they even gave us greens once, and there were these great big ton blocks just dropped out on the sand of dehydrated cabbage.

19:30 They just would say, the Pommy store bloke, would say, "How many? Forty blokes, righty-o," and he would just draw with a bit of white stuff and that how you would have to chop this stuff off the block and throw it in the back. And we were on a pint of water a day. There was hardly any water to soak your cabbage in.

Did it taste any good?

Oh we reckon it did. They reckon it cleaned up a lot of our hives and tinea and all those sort of things because tinea was the big killer you know.

20:00 And Monty [Montgomery], that was the start of my thoughts, Monty decided that we would all draw six weeks rations then, for six weeks it would save the army so much work and when you thought about it, that we had our rations so every few days we weren't driving vehicles thirty or forty miles to pick them up. It was there all the time and it was good, trying to get fuel supplied

20:30 for those numbers of trucks and tanks and vehicles. If you could save anything at all it was well worthwhile. This was the sort of planning they went into the 8th Army. Even though we were only a small unit and a subsidiary, we were all a part of it and we were appreciative of it afterwards of that sort of thing.

21:00 I mean you got sick of bully and a bit of hard tucker. Some of the blokes even addressed the biscuits and posted them home for souvenirs. It didn't take long for the field post office to stop that caper, but some of them got their biscuits posted home. It wasn't too good. You didn't have enough water to soak them in and you got sick of bathing in a tin that six of you were sharing in your tent. It used to get a bit stale.

21:30 We all had our little filters made. You would get an old kerosene tin and burn up a whole lot of old wood and papers and sand and a couple of sand bags and they would put that in the tin and just have a hole punched in the bottom and make a little hole and run that into your dixie or mugs, pour the water in and every hour put a bit more in and that would filter out most of the soap and dirt and grime and the water was usable again for washing and saved your drinking water.

22:00 **Bill what sort of relationship did you have with the ambulance truck drivers out on the battlefields?**

Really good. Everybody was – it was sort of a point of isolation because you were out in the desert and that was it. You were just away from everything. We did have our radios on the aeroplanes. We used to listen to the radios and now and again a concert group would come through, generally an English concert group.

22:30 But it was just a matter of everybody was isolated and if you were camped near Free French or the Greeks it was just that you got on well with them, you had to. Of course the Kiwis and the Aussies were really good and if you met up with the army blokes you had an affinity straight away.

23:00 You knew a bit about Carlton or Collingwood or Sydney Harbour Bridge. It was good to get in with Aussies. We always used to think of course they were ours so they were the best. The Poms were good, they had a great sense of humour. I was on a 'drome one day and we were sort of organised. We had tents up and they'd even come in and put up thunder boxes [toilets] in a foul area and I was there on the thunder box with a Pommy next to me and we'd had a pretty heavy raid the night before and

23:30 I said, "We got a bit of a plastering last night," and he said, "Oh, come on Aussie, my little brother sees that on the way to the pictures every Saturday." It was quite true so it put things back into perspective a little bit. They used to have had a lot more problems because it was often reversed, instead of bad news going home to rellies [relatives], it was rellies' bad news coming to the soldiers. In air raids all over England soldiers were losing families.

24:00 It was a big thing for them to keep the morale up, I often think, and they were such a force of them that you heard about El Alamein from the Aussies' perspective, and it's not belittling our blokes at all because they were given one of the hard jobs down on the coast to watch that first mile and look after it.

24:30 But we only had one division and the Poms had over a quarter of a million people. They put in a huge effort to the war and they were always good at their job but most of the troops out there were good. The Kiwis particularly, they were good. There was a place called Wadi Zem Zem when we got further along after El Alamein. They had a particularly hard fight and they had a lot of casualties and we pulled a lot of them out

25:00 of this Wadi Zem Zem and when we got there ourselves to have a look at it, it was a bad place to have a fight. But the Kiwis chewed up about three times as many Jerries as they were themselves and at a point that was quite vital at the time, so you know it was quite a big fight for the Kiwis, Wadi Zem Zem. In their battle history they certainly did well where ever they went.

25:30 **Bill what type of working relationship did you have with the ambulance truck drivers when you were pulling the wounded out?**

Well pretty good because it wasn't really close. They would come in and drop a load of passengers and they would go off for the next lot so it was generally just help unload, if they hadn't already unloaded, and then they would be gone. They would leave a couple of orderlies but then

26:00 when our blokes came and they would be loaded onto the aircraft and that contact would be lost. Their orderlies would stay with whoever was there and sometimes of course three kites would be quite busy making three or four trips each in a day. Now when you made four trips you had really only carted thirty six blokes for the whole day so it took a lot of flying to shift a big parcel of men and they had to decide, they just wouldn't bring a bloke in for just a hand off

26:30 they had to be able to be on the ball. A lot of it would be gunfire chest and body wounds that were serious, and a bullet through the arm or in the top of your leg didn't really get you a trip in an air ambulance. It got you a trip through the normal system. These blokes, especially the field guys for the various armies had to be really on the ball and you couldn't be too sentimental.

27:00 It was just something you had to develop the knowledge of an d it was like the little effort where I was saying about Ray Smith stopping us from loading that particular person. He could have gone on and died within a couple of minutes and then the next bloke waiting. So they became quite experts in their trade, the ambulance people and the field ambulance guys.

27:30 Because of lot of them were normal, you know, one minute they're just doing something outside in civvy street and the next minute they got a bit of rapid training and they have got men's lives in their hands. Generally they were very good at it and there would be a lot of men now that in hindsight would have those very guys to thank for the fact they are still here and have lived a normal life. It is a credit to the ambulance people.

What kind of medical experience did you pick up?

28:00 Well I used to pick up quite a bit although often the bits that I had to do, only on two occasions, it was pulling off old sulphur pads because it was over bleeding and then retie a bandage or a strap or whatever around them, because there weren't things like Velcro and all these fancy things like now. It was just a bandage and a safety pin or a bandage and just tear it down the centre of the bandage and sort of use that as a tie.

28:30 **So you were needed to re-bandage wounded?**

No, gosh, it is over two months ago now there was a knock on this back door and I walked to the door and said "That seems a very sombre knock," and it was my brother and he said, "Help me."

29:00 He was working for his son-in-law, just a job in Canning and he attempted to lift a big glass door and it had slipped out of his hands across his left toe. And they eventually had to save the toe but they had to pin it through the top and he's been months getting it fixed up. He is right now to the point that he is working normal. I thought about it afterwards, it was the first time really that I had seen something like that for a long time.

29:30 I was quite gratified when we took him to the first doctor. The nurse there said, “Who did this?” and I said, “I did,” and she said, “You do it better than I can.” So I thought that was pretty smart. Even with all my football playing I have never much to do with needing to fix people up and I was quite surprised and pleased that it was my brother that I was able to practise on.

30:00 **Did you tell the nurse where you got your experience from?**

Yes, I thought I’d let him know. Yes it was good, but our medical orderlies that we had with us were really good and they had done good training and they had a couple of refreshers. They went back into Cairo a couple of times. I think it was for different innovations that were being brought to the fore with field ambulance work so they were kept up with it.

30:30 They were very good, in that they were quite good with patients, particularly Ray Smith, although I shouldn’t give him any more pats on the back than the other guys because they were all able to handle people. When we watched, we learned to do the same, that maybe just hold a bloke’s hand, or press his shoulder, or do something to know that he wasn’t on his own.

31:00 I think that any of us that did it, we talked at a reunion about it, and we all felt through our own medical orderlies who we observed more closely that we all brought back something that was a plus for us, back into civvy life. It taught you a little bit of restraint and mostly likely patience with people. That in itself was worthwhile I guess.

31:30 **How composed were the wounded?**

Generally quite composed because most of them were still in shock. Shock lasted for quite some time and we were seeing a lot of them within hours. I didn’t, but our blokes did, picked up one lot of blokes within a half an hour of them being wounded.

32:00 The shock sort of quietened people down and if they were badly wounded and in deep shock, and often that’s what saved them too I think, the being out to it and also being flown out quickly and gaining a lot of time in them being serviced properly at a base where they had proper skills and anything they needed was available.

32:30 The ambulance areas or the hospital areas were always pretty well looked after. The English made sure of that all the time. It was good.

I imagine the field ambulance truck drivers would have been under a lot of stress or duress?

They were, all the time because they not only had a job to do in getting their patients from the wounded area, Point A to Point B to safety

33:00 but they had to be able to do it carefully and well. They were all good drivers. They had to be aware of the comforts of the patients. In emergencies, I know for a fact where we did hear stories of where they had to stop and make major alterations to blokes’ treatment, like the bandages and all this sort of thing.

33:30 They were a special group of people and you would often get feedback that patients were really thankful that they’d got this sort of service. We even have letters from patients come to the unit. We didn’t have a lot but we had letter where blokes just sent us thanks, I’m okay again, and it was good to get it. The, Allan Tanner, the clerk would be pin it up on the tent wall so that we could all see.

34:00 Sometimes they would get into the harbours and into Tobruk or Mersa Matruh, Benghazi and on ships then. Sometimes, if there was a lot of action and a lot of casualties, a hospital ship would come up from Alexandria but they had to be careful most of the time because hospital ships were done over once they were out at sea. They

34:30 were picked up especially at night time if they dropped flares on them and had some idea what was happening. They were able to do this often, pick things up and know what to do, because the Arabs would let them know. The Arabs weren’t really for anybody, they were for themselves.

35:00 We were the ones who were usurping their area in the desert and taking it off them. And there were places like Siwa Oasis, a couple of hundred miles south west of Cairo, maybe three hundred. It was a big area, Siwa, when you saw it and they had a lot of people depended on that area. They came in with camels and bags and boxes on the side of the camels with chickens in and sell us chickens and eggs. I suppose we had that happen to us three times while we were there.

35:30 But they did venture up into that area and they’d do same of course if the Jerries were there. They weren’t worried about whose side they were on. They wanted to sell some WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and some eggs. There were occasions we were at a place called Puka when a big ammunition train went up and caused a lot of

36:00 trouble. But about half an hour before the Germans arrived these two fires were lit at either end of the train, about less that half a mile from either end of the train and of course Jerry had his target then, straight up and down, and he got everything on the train, all the ammunition. We were camped at the time just near the railway line, we wouldn’t have been any more than 50 metres from it and no one was hurt.

36:30 It was a bit noisy while it went on. It was just luck and they always put it down the fact that they were Arabs that did it. They just came in, lit the fires, poured some petrol. Another night there was a petrol train went up. Petrol use to come out stacked just in the gallon cans and all they did was went along and just shoved bits of steel through the cans right along and just petrol going everywhere.

37:00 Then the Jerries came in and dropped some incendiaries and we lost the whole petrol train. It used to be a real hold up, especially if you had a train with hundreds and thousands of gallons. Tanks, particularly, would be hold up and then field generating units and trucks

Were you grounded there because of fuel supplies?

A couple of times we were short of fuel. We normally used to carry German petrol.

37:30 Whenever you could get, when we overran the Germans we used to get drums of Jerry petrol. It was poor old stuff. We didn't use it for fuel. We generally used it for washing our clothes because it was hard to keep them clean and your battle dress used to get pretty stiff in winter time, through December and all the cold months, through until about the end of February. You'd have to wear that, heavy clothes all the time and the woollies

38:00 and they'd get really lousy without being able to have a wash. So we used to wash them in Jerry petrol and hang them out and they'd dry quickly and they'd be clean enough and de-dag yourself and get rid of the tick and you'd be right again then, it'd clean you up but you could never beat the tinea. They used to try blue ointment.

38:30 They used to give you blue ointment for VD [Venereal Disease]. I don't know where they thought you'd get VD out, catch a camel maybe. I used to chase the camels but I could never catch them. We used to use the blue ointment on our tinea. It used to creep up right over your insteps on you feet and then your fork and it would be half way down to your knee and under your armpits right down to your elbows and it'd be all tender.

That would be agonising.

It wasn't nice but everybody had it in varying degrees.

39:00 **Did you say the ticks were bad too?**

Yes but you could keep the ticks down. Once you got on top of them. It was only your own fault often. We went into a couple of spots where the Eyties had been and had holes dug. But they were full of ticks so it was handy often to say there's no good going into there. They'd be nice holes in the rocks

39:30 little holes they'd dug in. We went into one, before we went to Benghazi, in an olive plantation and it looked nice but it was lousy everywhere, so you soon got out of that. And just used to de-tick one another with a little needle. Get it hot with a candle put the hot tip on the tick and then you'd be able to squeeze it out.

40:00 If you just did it the wrong way when were learning they'd go sour in your skin and you'd get a scabby sore but it wasn't too bad once you got into that. That was just part of the business. But I had tinea badly for I suppose, six of the seventeen months I had it really badly. Round your feet you could put a bit of paper around before you put your socks then your socks wouldn't go stiff.

40:30 The paper would absorb – they'd bleed a bit you know. You'd just keep your socks outside and wrap the paper around and put your socks over it. When the Comfort Fund came out, or the Salvos [Salvation Army], and you got extra socks, I had three pairs of socks once and that was great. You could just put the socks out the ground if you were just living out or hang them over the fronts of the trucks where the bonnets would pick up the dew and that would often be enough often to freshen up your socks a bit.

41:00 It wasn't any good using foot powder because it would just coagulate and go all sticky. They'd give you foot powder and if you had your feet all clean that was good. That was only just part of your five bob [shillings] a day. You got your tinea for nothing.

41:30 The soldiers, the army, we used to things they were a bit luckier. They weren't lucky in as much they stood a good chance of being killed. Our chances weren't that good. They used to get off the desert and that was the big thing, to get off where you could have a shower. Now and again there'd be a plane have to Helipolis, fly into Cairo from the desert for a major service and it was the only time we didn't like one another –

Tape 5

00:31 **Did you have any idea that Singapore could possibly fall at that stage?**

No, are we on, are we going?

Yeah, we're shooting. Because you know how one of the boats went to Singapore and I'm

thinking, was there some sort of buzz?

No we just took that as a matter of course, that Singapore was a base but with the Japanese not in the war

01:00 there was no real thought about it. And it was just something we didn't realise if it had gone with problems with the ship, or to drop. There was no sort of marriage between any of the units that would give somebody the idea, even to start a rumour. They just went one way and we kept going ours and that was it.

01:30 **So I'm just thinking of it chronologically at this stage. Where did you actually go from the time you were in Trincomalee in Ceylon?**

We went directly up into the Red Sea into Suez. Just out of Trincomalee and straight up the Suez. We pulled in only shortly at Massawa in Eritrea, but that was only to get a sailing clearance from there because of the fact that from Massawa

02:00 up to where the Red Sea narrows I think the convoy needed some clearance from would-be guards at that end to say it was clear, because as we got to Suez, on the night that we got to Suez, there were a couple of air raids immediately. They seemed to think the marines on board, the Pommy sailors, that

02:30 word had got out that the convoy was coming and they were just trying to find us. There were only a few aircraft and it was only for just a little while so there was no panic on anyone's part or any worries. They didn't man guns on the Elizabeth and that was it. While that was on, of course, the Germans were very busy anyway. They had their hands full with Greece and Crete so there wasn't much they could have done about taking time off, I would think, to chase a convoy.

03:00 **What were you hearing about Greece and Crete at the time?**

Well, only bad news off the radio. There was a report going up daily and it didn't read very well and some of the men on board were reinforcements for the very groups that were being knocked about in Greece and Crete, but they were still used of course because

03:30 some of those battalions needed replacing all together. They lost a lot of blokes there. We went back to Greece and Crete a lot later on with a good friend of ours. He had been taken prisoner on Crete and worked on the salt mines up at Hockenheim in Germany and we did a trip this day and we were headed in the train up to Munich.

04:00 And, Frank was saying "I don't know, we should see Hockenheim somewhere, it is definitely somewhere around here. It's just a little village' home of the whoop whoop car racing and it's now a great big place. He didn't have any idea of what he was looking for.

This is like fifty years later?

Yeah, forty odd years.

Did you manage to get off the ship at any point?

04:30 No. Just on for the three weeks then there we were.

I know you said you had a bit of seasickness did that continue for the entire trip?

No and I have spent a lot of time on ships since and only once I have been uncomfortable since under all sorts of conditions and in many places and I have never been seasick again since and I am not game to be because Edwina is such a good sailor and I have to keep up with her.

What did you think about the ship trip over to the Middle East?

Well it was so new. We'd been to Rottnest on the ferry when the war and we'd done a couple of trips before but that was the extent of my boating so

05:00 to get on the Queen Elizabeth, it was very enjoyable. besides doing things, we had a lot of time just to sit and write. I used to write a lot of letters, even now in that short burst and we were so new to each other and I had already started to write letters for some of the blokes who couldn't write letters, you know, "Write me a letter,"

05:30 so I wrote letters for them and I would write out a letter and they would just copy it.

Why couldn't they write letters?

They just didn't have any idea. A couple of them, they could all write but just couldn't put sentences to make a letter. George Bates and Dinger Bell were good friends from Melbourne and their mothers knew one another

06:00 and when we got out into the desert I wrote a nice letter about dust storms so they copied it. Mrs. Bell and Mrs. Bates meet and, "I got a letter from George and its not like George to write this sort of letter." They were identical, word for word they'd copied them. I used to write letters and I wrote every day when I was away something to Edwina.

06:30 Now it might take me two or three days to finish a – I would soak a label off a beer bottle and use those, or get letter from people. If I got Edwina's I would keep them but letters from family I used to write on the backs of their letters to post them back because we were often short of that sort of thing. Even though you got Comfort Fund letter paper and what have you, there never seemed to be too much available.

07:00 A lot of that sort of stuff was grabbed by the blokes for toilet paper. To save bags or paper of any sort was often hard to get, but I wrote letters on toilet paper to Edwina. I was the envy of the group cause she often used to put a nice lipstick kiss on the bottom on the letter. Two or three times blokes were fossicking in my blankets, not to read the letters, just to have a look at the lipstick. Strange but true.

07:30 **I'm interested to find out, because obviously the lady for you, you are still together sixty years later, why did you not decide not to get married before you went off to the Middle East?**

Well it was just more or less youth and we were only engaged when I came back on leave before I went overseas in '41, so I had just turned twenty and Edwina was only eighteen

08:00 and we just left it until I got home. Then when I got home I had applied to go into air crew and there was some doubt if I was going to go to Canada straight away, and there was some doubt about getting married where I could go off to air crew and a good chance that, as it turned out at that stage, that you might get knocked off.

08:30 My argument was if I got knocked off and we were married, you got a good pension. Anyway we waited a little while and then a bloke from 3 Squadron that I had met in the Middle East was in the orderly room up at Boulder where I had been sent to as soon as I came back home and he said, "You know you want to think about getting married because if you get married – " I knew that I was going to go to Cunderdin to start my flying training,

09:00 and he said, "If you get married while you are at Cunderdin there is every chance that you won't go to Canada, you will do all your training, stay in Australia." So I worked all that out and found out I was going to get four days leave at Christmas or New Year so I hadn't had a Christmas at home since the first one and I thought Christmas was Christmas, but New Year just had some appeal.

09:30 So I thought "Right-oh I will take my leave in the New Year," and got on to my brother's girlfriend in Perth and said, "You had better scout around and see if you can get a top class wedding ring, I've got five pound," that's ten dollars and then I got onto another bloke here in Perth and he found out yes we could get married even on short notice. The magistrate would do it and the magistrates were always around at the police courts.

10:00 Then the next thing Laurie had found out that the Reverend Hen was over at South Perth Church of England and this was all because a best man and a witness was going to be Harry Wrigley, a bloke flying with us who lived in Mill Point Road, less than a mile from the church. It all looked pretty good. So I'm down on New Year's leave and Edwina and I went into town on the Monday 3rd of January, that was a New Year holiday and we went into town

10:30 to go to the Metro to go to the pictures. So on the causeway going in there was the tram loop where trams from Victoria Park and South Perth went by to go on their trip. So I said to Edwina, "What do you think instead of waiting until the end of February to the end of the Cunderdin course for ten days we get married now, then we don't have to waste the ten days leave. We can go straight away on our honeymoon?"

11:00 "Yeah, that will do and how are we going to do it?" And so I said, "I can do this." One hundred and three degrees it turned out this day. We got to Town Hall, walked over to the police court in Rose Street and said, "Is a duty magistrate on?" "No there were only six drunks this morning and he has gone home to Nedlands, Magistrate Craig." "Oh so here you are," the girl got the telephone number

11:30 and rang Mr. Craig, "Yes come on out that will be quite ok," got out to Nedlands, walked right down to his house and he was a nice old bloke and we told him all about it and he said, "Certainly, here's your special licence, that's ten pounds." I said, "Ten pounds!" I didn't have a pound on me. I didn't even have two dollars. I had about seventeen shillings. We were only going to the pictures. So I said "I haven't got it."

12:00 So he said, "I will give it to you for a wedding present as long as you tell me I won't see you in the divorce court." Well what else was I going to say? I said, "That will do me." Back into town, bought Edwina a milkshake for lunch and got on out to Harry Wrigley's where we were going for tea anyway's. He was a bloke who was on the same course as us and he was already married with a little girl. We got out to Harry's and his wife said "Harry's is busy at the moment next door helping Mud Gut fix his motor car."

12:30 So I said. "We want you both up at the church in a little while, we are getting married." So Harry came out. We worked it out that we had twenty five minutes, so he just pulled his uniform on and never washed his legs or anything, cleaned his hands and five of us walked up to the church. It was less than a mile, just up on the hill and Reverend Hen was there and we were right on the knocker of four o'clock when I'd said to him earlier we be there, that we were going to go through with it.

13:00 This little old lady came out and started messing around in the corner and I said. “What’s happening?” She said, “We are just pumping up the organ for some music.” And I said, “Does that cost anything?” And she said, Seven and six,” and I said, “Let the air out of that, we can’t afford it.” So we did without the air in the organ. We got married,

13:30 Harry and Vi were witnesses and Vi had got Edwina a hat to wear, I’m in my just run of the day shorts. I didn’t have my service uniform on and I hadn’t had a shave. We were just going to the pictures. So we went back to Harry and Vi. I bought them a wedding afternoon tea. I – four ice creams. I didn’t have enough for one myself so I bought the other four wedding ice creams. And we walked back to the house and Vi had a really nice roast for us.

14:00 So as soon as we had eaten tea I said to Vi, we will have to go around now and let the family know, because I was staying with Mum and Dad and Edwina was staying with her sister. Her brother-in-law was in the services, so they’re staying in Brandon Street only about a mile or so away. I went into the car bloke used his phone because they didn’t have one, a taxi turned up and took us back to Edwina’s then home and I said to the taxi driver, “How much is that?” And he said, “Four shillings,” forty cents,

14:30 and I had to go in and borrow the four bob to pay the taxi. So in we went and told them all and we had a great night. I was right then, once I got to their place and then we raced over to Victoria Park and told my Mum and family. So we had quite a nice night. A bloke knew the owner of the Ellingham Hotel and rang for four bottles of beer for them and a lady two doors down gave us

15:00 a tea towel for a wedding present so we had a collect on the day.

Phone’s ringing, hang on. So you said you were given a tea towel for a wedding present.

We got a tea towel and that was it. So we were married on the Monday night and

15:30 Tuesday morning my wife came and saw me off at the station. Told all the blokes on the train, that we were down on leave from Cunderdin and that was great. There was a bit of a delay. We couldn’t get out of the station. The train wouldn’t go – the train wouldn’t go and finally it went and Jim Caruthers, he’s now Sir James, Jim Caruthers and two of the other blokes had raced over to Bones and bought Edwina a beautiful nightie

16:00 for a wedding present, so we got a tea towel and a nightie for a wedding present. That was it. Then when I got back to say that I was married, I didn’t have to go to Canada. A lot of them went to Canada and I went then with the group from Geraldton and finished my flying training up there. Here we are, sixty years up in a couple of months.

That’s wonderful. That was a spontaneous elopement.

Yes it was it was good and it worked out well and so cheap.

16:30 **So cheap! I’ll say. Just getting back to the Red Sea. By this time are you excited about what’s to come or are you tense?**

Well as excited as we could have been I guess. If we had known that we were going to join a winning side I think that would have been totally different, but all thoughts were chaotic. Even the people on the boat trying to talk manoeuvres in training to the army blokes,

17:00 they didn’t have anything to tell them. It wasn’t as if they could say, “When we get to the desert this will happen.” They didn’t know whether with the rush of momentum that the Jerries whether they would continue through this east end and come in through Cairo and then move back in a pincer movement. Their main idea was to get into Cairo and take all that end of the African coast to give them the oil wells in the Middle East.

17:30 So there wasn’t anything that was able to come fruition as far as good planning went. We were just excited because we were following on, as far as I was concerned, going to Cairo, my Dad had been camped before going to Gallipoli down below the pyramids at Mena House and when we did get there that was one of the first things we did, get up to Egypt to climb the Pyramids

18:00 and I pinched a nice bit of alabaster from one of the Pyramids about a hundred feet up, a cup from the Mena House Hotel where my Dad would have been. Then things started to turn around and there was a flow on to good effect from the Middle East because the Russians started to halt the Germans. Even though it was pretty quick and lively in the middle of ’41, they were still gaining momentum because they had only really gone in in the June to really tackle Russia, so that was all

18:30 just a couple of months after we actually got to the Middle East. The Russians were sort of in trouble for a little while but holding Germans up in other areas so he was pretty busy. He couldn’t do a lot but he did send Rommel over, which was a master stroke because Rommel got them all into pretty good shape quickly.

When you got off the ship, was the most immediate thing that you did, was it to go to Cairo?

19:00 Yes the first bit of leave any of us got, we raced off to Cairo. I think that everybody wanted to see the pyramids. What that was – I suppose that was one of the few things that we knew anything about. We

didn’t know about the wonders of the lower Nile down around Luxor and those places. You only picked up that knowledge once you had been there for a little while.

19:30 I often look back now and I suppose the only things that I knew about the Middle East was the pyramids and the Holy Sepulchre. I’m not a staunch religious bloke and I don’t know where the Sepulchre even came from or if I could spell Jerusalem.

What did you think of the locals in Egypt?

We go on fairly well with them but they were pretty good. Just before El Alamein when it looked as if –

20:00 in the June of ’42 the Germans had a bit of momentum and they got us right back to El Alamein, 150 miles west of Cairo and some of our blokes went down and had to work on an aeroplane at Heliopolis. They had to change an engine, and they went down to the bazaar area and there were stalls with the swastika on cushion covers, embroidered cushion covers and they has the swastika on them

20:30 and we hadn’t gone but they didn’t care. They were not out to offend us, they were out to make money. But it definitely changed once Montgomery took over from our end and I don’t think at any time he was really worried. I think that he was so confident that he was going to beat Rommel that he just passed it on to everybody, to all his commanders. And you heard stories especially from the English army,

21:00 of the so called and suspected good leaders they just sort of tramped, they just disappeared. But those who tended to have more experience were brought in, the Highland Division arrived and they were force marched right down at the canal where they got off, right down to the back of the desert up to their positions. They didn’t have trucks or anything, the marched up. I mean it was only a hundred and fifty miles but they came there

21:30 really at the end of summer, August and September before El Alamein. It was hot. All these poor old Jocks straight out of training for the D-Day landings from England brought them out into the desert, you know fifty, fifty five [degrees] throughout the day and it was hot.

It’s got to be tough. At what point did you actually find out that you would be based in the desert?

22:00 Well we knew that eventually that was where we would go. Pretty well when we got into Palestine and once we started to talk around to people, they said, “Well, there is not going to be any real fighting here, and why would we need an air ambulance?” Which was true, because the territory wasn’t really amenable to the use of air ambulances and distance to bases and hospitals because it is quite mountainous up that way and quite rugged territory.

22:30 There wasn’t any real war. There was a bit of an upset with the French in Syria, but the 7th Division had cleaned that up well and truly before we got there. It was only one way to go and that was to stop the Germans coming in off the desert to come across to that Middle East area after the oil, so it was pretty well known that was where we were going to go.

How did they prepare you for what was going to be life in the desert?

23:00 No preparation. All of a sudden one day you are, “Righty-o pack up, you’re on the twelve o’clock train to Cairo and you’re out in the desert.” That was it – and we were just lolling about. There wasn’t much to do. We had only done about a couple of aeroplane trips, a couple up into Cyprus and a couple up into Syria, two or three out into the old Persian area which is what, Iran now.

23:30 There were British bases there, most of them air bases, and just to bring, and most of them weren’t serious, brought them back to where ever they were going, generally to a hospital along the coast near Gaza and then off we went. So there were picture shows you could go and see and the Greeks were camped there. There were a lot of Greeks there brought back after Greece. The Middle East and Gaza was their base, just near us.

24:00 It taught us to speak a little bit of Greek out of that. I learned the Greek national anthem and I could whistle it and I don’t know one word of it but I could whistle it and I still can.

Oh please go for it.

We have a Greek grandson into the family. He married one of the grand daughters and they have just got a little boy, young Greg and I’m making sure that he is an Aussie Ruler. Last year when Simon Black won the medal I wrote over straight away and on special piece of paper got him to send the autograph to Greg Suklis and Nick thought that was good and so now these other three blokes have won, I have already posted their letters off asking for their autographs.

24:30 Yes we could [Greek words spoken – Kalamira kalanita posesta poleka laya] that was about the end of it.

25:00 but they used to get upset because they used to play the national anthems after the pictures and they would play ours and we would all stand up and they would play theirs and we would be off to the canteen to be first before the Greeks. So they said that was no good they would have to play the Greeks’ first and then the Australians so the Australians would have to wait to stand up, and righto the night comes

25:30 Play the Greek National Anthem and we still beat them to it off we went. So they just cut the National Anthems out at the pictures, that was the easiest way to go. They were good men to get on with and quite friendly and they didn't have any qualms in doing any jobs, other units would borrow them for various jobs and they would do whatever they had to. Some of them even wanted to join

26:00 the Royal Air Force there was a group of airmen at the aerodrome at Gaza and they were PAC people – parachutes and cables. And the weirdest thing, we could never understand it, because after Greece and Crete there was that much of a shortage of ammunition and normal armoury. There were no ack-ack guns to spare for the aerodromes. They devised this means of little canisters

26:30 with a small cable-mounted parachute attached to it, and they would just fire when these aeroplanes came in to strafe. They would detonate thee little charges and these parachutes would go up in the air with the wire hanging from them, four hundred feet, hoping that they would entangle the props of the aeroplanes that was their defence But having fired them once the Poms would have to rush out for the canisters and re load them

27:00 and there was all this wire and they had to fit it into these canisters, and set another charge. It was just dumb and some of the Greeks wanted to join the PAC group, terrible.

Sounds like not a very good plan?

No, it fell in a heap, they only used it for a little while. One of the guys in the parachute and cable was a guy called Jim Atto and we got on very well, so when we went to the desert

27:30 Jim and I used to still correspond so I met him, and he had moved into another unit and finished up out in the desert and I met him quite a bit. So that after the war we still wrote to Jim and his wife Helen. They had four children and we used to send them food parcels but it got that expensive, us knocking out our kids and it took us a while to find out what was causing it! So we had a herd of kids and Jim and Helen had theirs. We said, "Well look there is a scheme out here

28:00 for ten pounds, we can get you out here." So we nominated Jim and Helen and the four kids and they came out and lived with us and our six kids for about three months until they got a house in South Perth. So they became real Aussies and proper grandkids and Edwina and I did trips away on holidays together, but she is not very well now, she's got Alzheimer's and Jim died about eight years ago.

28:30 **That's sad but gee, that worked out well for the time. What did you actually think of being under RAF command?**

Well it didn't affect us, it was only paper work because we retained our own officers and our own staff. They did try a couple of times to infiltrate us.

How?

Once they sent us a cook, they sent us a cook but he didn't have anything to cook. Then one night in an air raid,

29:00 his tent burnt down and we said, "Well surely that's a sign for you." Instead of losing the cook we've lost the tent. And our CO said, "That's enough, take your cook while he's still alive, and we'll go back to looking after ourselves." Dave Alexander one of the blokes had been a shearer's cook and if we happened to get on run where you got some rations like we got some tinned meat now and again some tinned sausages, if you didn't get American ones that was good because the

29:30 Yank ones had more sawdust in them than meat you know. I don't think the Yanks got it but I think they had contracts to other people because that only happened for a couple of months then their sausages disappeared altogether the American sausages we were getting but that was quite factual yeah, and very woody, yeah, you could darn nearly see the sawdust

It sounds like you had some really terrible food?

Yeah it wasn't good. We didn't have too – it was great

30:00 when you got mail because you would get parcels and then we'd put it in the centre and every bloke could have one pick out of his parcel and some blokes would just get a nice little cake sent just for them. They would put in say tinned peaches and all that in because some blokes never got a thing, it used to be sad. I'd get something from my Mum and Edwina and a couple of my aunties and, my grandmother, and something from

30:30 the postal institute and there were other blokes in the same boat, they would get nice parcels. You would get that embarrassed you'd think, "Gawd, I have got to open these now!" And there would be poor old so and so in the corner and he might have just one little parcel with a tin of jam in it one bloke once, and nearly all of us. Oh, after the Japs came into the war there was about a three-month delay with mail, and that's what happened this particular time it was just like four Christmases we all had all this stuff

31:00 and then there was arguing, "How are we going to have it, have it now and have a whole night and just eat it all, no?" Let it make it last a week, let's farm it out for a week, anyway then we drew lots and we would have an evening meal for a week, had something nice every night for a week, it was great we had

too much of some things and not enough of others, but Weeties, and you'd have a couple of peaches and a bit of jam on your

31:30 Weeties and all sorts of things it was really good and soft biscuits, little biscuits not the postcard bully beef things it was great. I think those times gave you that little bit of lift that you needed, especially after the Japs when we got the one big issue it was really good, everybody was you know. "I'm going to have a shave tonight for tea," you know, because they had something special

32:00 and you would try and have a wash, it was really good blokes were doing their hair and It was really great

Were they any points during your time in the desert that morale was really low?

Yes there was a couple of times, we had a run on air raids and I think you dropped off if you weren't able to stay up with it all physically once you started to get a bit tired

32:30 full moons were always a bit bad because, then you'd listen in to Lord Haw Haw, he was the best and he'd tell you on the BBC network thing, you'd get Lord Haw Haw and he would be telling you, "You blokes at Fuka, or you blokes at Wadi Natrun or wherever you where, Castle Bonito," and all these places, "You have got ten minutes to get yourself ready and make sure that you have said your prayers and all this and

33:00 then the first kites could come in and then you might have a bad night." And then he would follow the moon down for say four or five nights but through the day there would be all the DAs going off – the delayed actions – and they brought in little whirly twirls, we used to call them. They used to drop the canisters and they would open the big canisters after a while with the whirly twirlie on the back of them would just force them open, and then all the little stick bombs and they would go off

33:30 two feet off the ground and they would have old nails and screws. But you know they would knock blokes off, then you would just get up and there would be aircraft to get ready to fly out on jobs and everything and then you would be wetting yourself when the DAs would go off, delayed actions and the shock was the Poms, they normally had blokes on their drome that were fairly good at it and try and pick the delayed actions up and put markers on them

34:00 and then they would either chase them up and let them off, blokes would come in bomb disposal men would come in, or else they would just mark them off and keep clear of them and be aware of them.

Delayed action? They're like unexploded ordnance?

Yeah they're just normal bombs, they're just timed to go off later just to keep you on your toes. But it was just that you got a bit tired so you'd be doing a job and a kite would take off and within two minutes you would be just be

34:30 leaning up against the wheel just sit on the side of the wheel and just to have a quick doze but you would go into a deep sleep and it would be hard for them to get you going, you'd wake blokes up and they would be all silly "Where are we?" and they would be that tired, but we only had a couple of sessions of that I suppose maybe four full moons of that where it was one night was great. We'd had a couple of previous full moons that weren't very pleasant we didn't lose blokes but

35:00 they lost quite a few we saw a lot of the poles, The Poles used to do a lot of the burying and they would be camped out around the 'dromes and they they'd come in and pick the blokes up and take them away. And anyway right on dark there's all this clutter and that and this Pommy Ack-Ack group came in. Gosh it was marvellous we made them extra cups of tea

35:30 and then nothing was done Jerry came over and Haw Haw told us, and Jerry came over and not a sound and we thought, "Where are these – the Poms?" and they had made their first run and dropped their markers and some flares and then all of a sudden they opened up, and the very first lot got three of these kites you know you saw em go down and they got eleven kites for the night, but we had never seen a kite shot down before they just come and done as they liked

36:00 fire your rifles and think you were doing good just to try and ease yourself off a little bit, but anyway that quietened them down and the rest of the moon they only came over three or four times only about a dozen planes of an hour and gone home so there wasn't much in that

That must have been pretty exciting to actually watch that?

Oh it was great yeah. One day we were in Benghazi and a shufti kite came over.

What's a shufti kite?

A kite that is having a look. They are taking photos and they were flying about twenty six thousand feet and they'd just come over and take photos

36:30 of the area and at Benghazi of course they had the harbour as well so they were trying to take photos and the Pommy ack-ack mob were there, and just fired a a shot, just a sighter and everybody's looking and all of a sudden bang, they got him on the first hit and one of the blokes bailed out and his 'chute didn't open and somebody said, "He's over near there." So we tore off, there was a group of us, about

six of us

37:00 and this bloke we got to where he was and we were the first so he was ours, and Dick Willis got a Luger and he has still got it and it was workable so

This guy was obviously dead?

Oh yeah, was he ever, we got some buttons and left the rest for whoever took him away, but yeah just got him on the first shot a sighter, it was great.

37:30 **With all these bombs coming down, like these delayed action pieces of ordinance, how dangerous was it to travel on some of these roads?**

Well it was quite strange you know, for all the bombing, and for all the bombs that were dropped, the amount of time and effort that was put into it, it wasn't really very fruitful. There'd be a raid some nights and there'd be four men killed, now they might have put in five hours of bombing

38:00 and it wasn't like they were suffering over in Europe where it was mass bombing thousands of aeroplanes there might only be forty aeroplanes but they'd be dropping bombs and the forty planes wouldn't be over at once see they never ever had that sort of they couldn't say put a hundred bomber raid over a desert airfield, they might have nine or ten or a dozen in a couple of flights come in and one they'd drop their load and go on home,

38:30 the next mob would move in just to keep it going, but sometimes we used to wonder just how effective it was, the Poms tired a couple of times different ideas, they would take out old oil or capture German petrol, and about a mile away from the aerodrome set it off and expect the Poms to go out there in a frenzy, but the times we saw that tried, it never, really ever worked

39:00 so they came in really we thought with a good idea with good navigation to know that they were pretty well over target, and wouldn't be sucked into it and I think sometimes the railway line as far as Mersa Matruh, anyway was a guide to airfields around because in most case they were all made in peacetime within the bounds of the air railway line, so there was not a lot of extra work in cartage,

39:30 and I think that sort of had an affect on the Germans, they knew where they were we were camped at a place called Fuka where there was a lot of bombing, but that was on a place called Kenias Bay where they come straight in and this big point on Kenias Bay went out into the ocean and on a moonlight night they would be able to pick that up and come straight down the side of the bay and know exactly so it was easy navigation

40:00 for them to get to their point of target and drop their bombs, but as I say we were quite luck there were times when some blokes were just dead unlucky, there were some young Poms who moved in one night onto a 'drome up at Marble Arch in to Cyrenaica and we saw them busily digging a big hole and putting corrugated iron on it and we said to them "best you leave it open because if anything happens and that

40:30 fills in you're gone." And they kept going, and anyway next morning that was it, they just filled the trench in on top of them, a bomb must have landed just outside of them it would have to be three or four metres away, not too far just to have filled it in nicely and they just suffocated, I suppose they were knocked out in the blast but you could get bombs pretty close unless they were darn nearly a direct hit and you were down in underneath it

41:00 It'd give you a bit of a shake up but might put you off your breakfast, but at least you were there to be put off your breakfast so we counted ourselves pretty lucky that we didn't lose a bloke at all which was good.

What did the campsite at Fuka look like?

Nothing, just a waste, but we had tents up because there was no idea of any military action at all unless

41:30 they thought that there was a good chance of being overrun in skirmishes or anything, you could put tents up, which was always better to have something especially in dust storms if you were caught out in dust storms say and it went for a couple of day it just really wore you down because you couldn't escape it, see even in your tent you had to have a hurricane lamp going all day in a dust storm in your tent and then you'd put a peg at your tent with some rope and then peg it to wherever the toilet area was because you just couldn't go out

42:00 looking for something

Tape 6

00:30 **I was wondering if Bill you could put things in a more of a chronological perspective for us from a story sense, what happened and when and why in North Africa. Just in an overall sense?**

I think really that the idea for Hitler to start with

01:00 was not to help the Italians to hold an area. The Italians took that Libyan area off the Turks in 1911 and I am most fortunate to be able to state that because it was in the paper this morning, on this day today. But the Italians had worked their way through and had a lot of North Africa and they were also down into Abyssinia and becoming allied with the Germans,

01:30 gave the Germans a good chance I feel, in their opinion to come around then get into the oil area which was of vital importance to Germany to keep their war effort going and to expand it. And England had already had a lot of time out in the Middle East especially in the areas where the oil was Saudi Arabia as we know it now, and Iran and these countries, the old Persia and they had a network of airfields

02:00 and army depots right throughout the area that they had manned so that when we were there even there was still men who had gone out to the Middle East in 1937 and here it was early ’41 and they had been away from home all that time and hadn’t even been back there. So this is to say that England was fortunate in having a core of experienced troops available and when they were

02:30 endeavouring to make sure that they soundproofed or safety-proofed the area and kick the Eyties out of North Africa, the 6th and 7th Divisions were able to do that quite effectively because the Italians weren’t really a fighting nation. But Germany was determined to hold onto what they had there and to give themselves every chance to get to the oil. So the first push by England

03:00 or the British side had wiped the chances out by pushing the Italians right back over the Libyan border but Germany taking France was able then to move troops across that part of the Mediterranean and bolster the Italians and then have another go at the British Army because they had been badly weakened by their losses in Greece and Crete in early ’41 and in mid

03:30 ’41 they pushed us back and there was a rush, everybody just turned tail and ran until it was decided that we would go no further than El Alamein. So by about August, El Alamein was pretty well established and then every effort was to be made to kick the Germans out altogether. There was an understanding that the Americans would come in with some troops and land over on the

04:00 on the western area of North Africa, and we were to have a push from our eastern side from west of Cairo but on the eastern of North Africa and then there was going to be a race to see who got to whichever point first. The Americans did have thoughts earlier on that they were going to beat us to Tripoli, the 8th Army, but after El Alamein which was so well organised, and supported by all the

04:30 armies, the 8th Army was so successful that we beat them well and truly. We were in Tripoli long before they came around what they called the bend so then they did link up and from there they were able to go off then into early ’43 and push up through Italy. And I think that was one of the big parts of the war where

05:00 finishing El Alamein and winning that African campaign and clearing Africa, and putting pressure on Germany in a confined space, combined with the Russian people starting to have victories, was definitely something that hastened the whole thing. Now I am not a war historian but to me that’s just the way that I saw it unfold being out there for part of the time.

And what were your movements chronologically throughout the African Campaign?

05:30 Well we came back on the run with our tail between our legs one night in April. There was an alarm called and we all got out and listened to the boss, our CO, and he said that owing to a deterioration in the military situation a strategic withdrawal has been decided upon. “What’s that mean?” “Piss off!” he said. So, excuse my French, I don’t swear normally –

06:00 so we got aboard our trucks and off we went and it was just an absolute mess. We were airmen, no fighting skills or anything and every now and again we would have French tanks coming up, we’d have blokes on trucks, men on motor bikes trying to find people to deliver messages to, and we just keep boring east and the Germans

06:30 were in behind us, and it wasn’t until they got to El Alamein, we went on through El Alamein to a place called Wadi Natrun, which was quite some miles back behind the El Alamein line and pulled up there. But El Alamein was an absolutely perfect spot and had been well thought out by the British because it was twenty five miles from the coast to an area they called the Qattara Depression, which was a great big

07:00 swampy area that went on further south, so there was only that twenty five mile front really, through which the Germans could push further and extend their lines of supply and what have you, as they had already come all that distance from the west, just wasn’t feasible for them so they had to keep their front fairly well closed and twenty five miles is a long front anyway and then Monty came on the scene and took over

07:30 and, I may have said earlier, that bolstered everybody’s egos up and changed his staff leaders around somewhat and gave different groups better jobs, a lot of English troops were down in the dumps because knowing they had the ability they hadn’t been given the best jobs on occasions, some of the other national troops, South Africans and some of these people had been given jobs that weren’t really

well done that I'm sure the Poms could have done properly.

08:00 But anyway, El Alamein came and there we were in '42 with them on the run and in February '43 it was all over. Churchill came out and there was a big parade in Tripoli and he came out and spent a day there with Monty and the other leaders and took the salute then went back home to make sure that he had everything under control in Europe so it was a good result

08:30 **What were you movements during '42 and '43 and which squadrons where you with?**

Well we were fairly busy right through from El Alamein onwards because there was a lot of fighting and he did run in a lot of places, but there were a lot of places where it was do or die with the Germans and Rommel realised this. So there were a lot of counter-attacks by the Germans when that would stop the momentum that the 8th Army had built up, and then

09:00 we would be busy for two three and four days bringing you know, carrying a lot of patients. I think in one week, and it doesn't seem very much, but we carried seven hundred and sixty six patients, so that if we carried seven hundred and sixty six the type we were carrying was serious, there would be a lot of minor injuries as well. In an army that was headed for victory and doing well there were pretty bad losses

09:30 on occasions.

Was that the heaviest fighting that you serviced?

Yes that was the heaviest for about five weeks. There was a bit of a lull around Christmas time and then it went on again because there was a lot of rain too around Christmas in their winter they get heavy rain especially down in that area south of Benghazi and around on to where

10:00 Wadi Zem Zem and some of these places, getting into Tripoli from Libya down to the marshes around El Agheila and these places, and that slowed trucks and tanks up, but once we did have them on the run even for their counter-attacks they were really 'do or die' efforts where they were putting everything in, and when they lost, then the front would open up and they would push on further and further

10:30 quite safely. Wadi Zem Zem was a place further west around from Benghazi and El Agheila and they were dug in there and the Kiwis had a job and there was some good fighting, and they sort of beat the Germans there and it was just they rolled them back from there on.

How far was the front spread?

It was only at any time, it really didn't get much wider than twenty five

11:00 miles off the coast at any time. Once you got in too far you were getting into real desert area that made tank warfare quite difficult. Also the air force was playing a big part because by then the air force was in full control and they were using a lot of Mitchell bombers, they were good

11:30 aircraft and the Tommy Hawkes and the Hurricanes, you know the fighter aircraft, they were converted to fighter bombers. And it was pretty difficult for him to do anything about building up supplies because the convoys, even though they were long, they were being chopped up all the time by the aircraft, and then we had what they called the

12:00 LRDG, the Long Range Desert Group, and they were a group of desert commandoes made up of Kiwis and Poles, Aussies and Poms all sorts of people but all top-notch at their trade. They were proper commando people, they were the sort of blokes that would go in onto aerodromes at night, with what we just called sticky bombs, it was the equivalent of a timed grenade with a bit of honey on it, they would just stick them on the aircraft and they would be timed mechanically

12:30 to go off say in an hour and they would stick them on aircraft around the 'drome and creep out again, get in their jeeps and off they would go, and that was causing havoc, when you didn't have a lot of aircraft if you would lose even half a dozen on a drome at night time, that really set you back and made a lot of difference, and they had all these skills, we got to know of few of them because they would come back sometimes just to have a couple of days' spell and they'd only come back a few miles

13:00 but they got in a habit of looking for us. Some of the Kiwis, I can't remember the second name but there was one bloke, Hughie, that was a corporal but a really strong sort of a character and he would make sure you know, "Oh we found out where you were," as if he was really paying us a compliment, which he was it was nice to have him sort of wanting to be in our company and look after us. We were in convoy one day and we had painted on the side of our trucks,

13:30 by law, we had to have a red cross on them, and we were not allowed to carry any arms at all and this was Geneva Convention stuff, and we were in a little convoy going along and all of a sudden one of the blokes driving the truck in front tore off the track we were on and thought we were being strafed. And it was Hughie and three or four of the blokes in their jeeps just firing the machine gun so we'd get off the road and let them go through. But we just had a sort of thing going with them we were always interested to know

14:00 how they were, but they didn't have many losses. They did lose people because they went in under extreme difficulties sometimes to achieve what they wanted. But it was good

I've heard they'd dress as sheikhs and all kinds of disguises?

Yes they would, and they would get into some of the villages because most of them could speak an extra language. Arabic wasn't very difficult to speak

14:30 because the desert Arabs particularly of course weren't well educated, so their general vocabulary was fairly small and you got to the point where you could carry on a little conversation. You know, you could ask a bloke his name – ana zmakia, you know, "What's your name?" ana ma gaus "Are you married?" and all this sort of thing, tam shiko "How many kids?" And these guys were a lot better. They could sort of talk quite fluently

15:00 and they would get into the villages to the bazaars and find out a lot of information. Sometimes two or three of them got caught, they were put into the Germans for a reward, so they had to take this risk but very rarely did that happen. I know there was a case where we always knew that there were two or three of them but we didn't know for sure how many so theses blokes were out there harassing the

15:30 Germans in retreat and whilst there wasn't a big force, when you are on the run and you've got your tail between your legs it doesn't take much to really give you the knock down and these blokes were capable of doing it. So the big thing for England was that the minute that it looked like as even if it was over they started to ship their troops home because they got them all back out of the desert as quickly as they could preparing for D-Day

16:00 later on in 1944 it was all long-range plan, but the timing and everything for that Middle East campaign to finish turned out to be really good.

What was happening at the conclusion of that campaign?

Well they pushed a lot of the forces, a lot of the English forces combined then with the Americans went up the south of Europe and started off in Italy and landed in various

16:30 places into Italy then worked their way into France and then back over onto the Croatian, side there Yugoslavia in through those areas where they had a lot of people on their side helping them and just sort of closed that southern side of the campaign off so that then it was only a matter of coming in after D-Day and the Russians taking just really squashed them then in the middle which was good.

17:00 Didn't squash them hard enough

What was the morale like amongst the Ambulance and the squadrons that you were with while the Germans were retreating?

Well it was really good because you know you got to the stage that, whilst you weren't firing a shot in anger, somebody had to be doing what we were doing, and as our boss used to say to us, the CO he said it doesn't matter that sometimes

17:30 some of the blokes would say, "Why can't we use a rifle?" And he'd say, "Somebody has to be doing this job and the only thing you've got to do is do it well." And that's all we tried to do and we didn't have really, I suppose we might have had a couple, but we didn't really have any blokes that belly-ached about it, and sometimes you could quietly I think sometimes, and I know I could and I used to feel a bit upset about it,

18:00 but you thought sometimes you would just like a little corner where maybe you didn't know what you thought well if I had a corner where I could have a little bawl. I didn't know whether that'd help me but it was just you got a bit worn out sometimes it seemed to be a bit futile. You knew that blokes were being killed and everything but you couldn't really see any result. But then all of a sudden Monty came along and see we saw Monty

18:30 a little unit of Aussies at the time there would have been about forty of us with the pilots and everything, we saw Monty. He came to see us now there wasn't a unit too small, he didn't come and say, "G'day Bill Forward," he came and spoke to our CO, he knew what the unit was doing he thanked him for it, now you would go anywhere for a bloke that was like that but some of the other blokes didn't even know the Australians had a division of soldiers out there the way they were treated

19:00 and for their own troops I'm sure they neglected a lot of troops that were some of the best soldiers in the world, so when you've got a bloke like Monty looking after you and making sure that we all got ten days' leave, we all had new socks and all the items. I think we got new romance buster pants you know the long leg johns, you needed them for the winter and it was just little things that counted

19:30 .that you were being thought of and looked after and you were on a winning team, it would be like barracking for the Lions and not Collingwood so there you go it was really terrific.

So at what point did you feel like a Lion supporter?

Well I would think on the night of El Alamein at eight thirty at night ,we were just sitting around outside our tents we had

20:00 just a little group of us and we had about six tents and we were all together and we had put them all

close. We knew that something was going to happen soon, and we just thought the less time that we have to waste when we get the go so we were sitting talking and all of a sudden the gas rattle went off And we started to sniff, just a wooden rattle they were and

20:30 it came from where one of the Pommy squadrons was this gas rattle and that was always a warning for a gas attack. And then we could get this smell and somebody said, “Gosh that is gas,” and Bill Slato, he was our storeman but he was a rifle shooter from Victoria and he said, “No, that’s cordite.” And then the sound started and this sound was really loud we started to hear what it was, and they’d swung into action,

21:00 eight hundred and fifty guns opened up the bombardment, bombing the Jerries and that went on for an hour and a half and then ten o’clock it just stopped. But then in the morning when they got into the Jerries they started off with the bombardment, the artillery fire was just devastating and it just set up the start for the whole attack.

21:30 But you could hear it quite a long way back because eight hundred and fifty guns we were only a little way behind, when I say little way we would be four miles away but that was nothing you know four miles you could hear a three point seven go off and to hear eight hundred and fifty of them it was really good. So that was it and I think we all put on another six inches in height I could do with it anyway, and you know, from there we never looked back.

So the Jerries had run into a dead end.

22:00 Yes that was as far as they got then, at El Alamein, and that was it they were on their way. but they were still, we saw quite a few prisoners on the move at different times but the Jerries were never like the Italians. The Italians had a little song, they would come in singing you know, “Oh, camp bella,” you know all happy ready to give in, but the Jerries wouldn’t. If you got close to them when they were marching

22:30 and they thought they could hit you they would spit at you and all this sort of thing, a bit like the Aussies were and the Poms they didn’t make too good a prisoner either, they weren’t keen on being prisoners. So there we were and that was pretty well the – at end of the war for me cause I got home and learnt how to fly and it was all over.

Just before we move on, Bill, I spoke to a chap who was at El Alamein, taken POW,

23:00 **and he mentioned that they saw Red Cross ambulances being driven in by the Germans which had been picked up or stolen from earlier confrontations, were you aware of that kind of thing happening?**

No but I thought the Jerries came in ambulance but they were only bringing their own wounded in I think. They were just surrendering, but they might have been. Yeah I didn’t realise that, that could have been

23:30 a fact you see because on overrunning, they could have taken British ambulances and just kept them, and they didn’t need to do anything to change them because they all carried the same, what they call the Geneva Red Cross, the square Red Cross it was just purely square on the ends and everything and geometrically square. Yes, but I hadn’t heard that

24:00 but I wouldn’t doubt it that they could have been coming in with British ambulances that they’d captured, because it was always if you could capture something that moved and you could use it. We were using some, we got word of some Gypsy Six engines that would fit our aeroplanes. They were made by De Havilland and they were a Gypsy motor, but of course they were used wherever

24:30 De Havillands were and De Havillands were being flown by the Italians as a transport plane along the coast before the war started. And we heard that these Long Range Desert Group people had come across some and we went down and got them, four of them. So I can imagine if they could get trucks and use them they certainly would, because we ran around in, we had

25:00 Our blokes were using, that Tom Barrett I mentioned earlier was using a [Moto] Guzzi motor bike that was captured he had a Luger that he got from a Free French bloke, swapped the Luger for the motor bike because they couldn’t get the motor bike going. Between Tom Barrett and this Colin Holly they soon had the motor bike going and he had it for quite some time. Sold it when we got along the desert

25:30 he sold it to an American guy because they were easy meat because if you could get Yanks they’d buy anything off you, they had a lot more money than us

What were the Yanks commonly after or interested in buying?

Normally just carry away stuff they liked revolvers and they would buy Lugers, and little thing that they could carry like German cap badges and buttons and all that but you always had plenty of them but

26:00 they would take anything. These blokes were a Liberator group that came out bringing war correspondents, so they didn’t have any trouble, they were converted Liberators that was sort of just for transporting people, and they didn’t have any trouble getting the motorbike into the Liberator but I think he got a hundred American dollars which was really good money, it was worthwhile making the

deal

26:30 So then Dick Willis, I mentioned earlier, Dick at Castle Bonito we found a big heap of Jerry tin hats they were just stacked on top of one another in wooden crates, and there were twenty-five to the crate, and Dick Willis got one of these crates and we never asked him just how, because he was a good

27:00 wheeler and dealer. But when these Liberator blokes came in with all the correspondence, Dick was getting twenty American dollars for each hat. He was rubbing them in the dirtying and putting a bullet hole through them and the Yanks couldn't get enough of them. We were only saying a while back, I ring Dick regularly he's still going and he often says he could have got a few of those crates but one was all he could handle.

27:30 At the time when he got it, but if we had've known we could have done well because the Yanks would have taken them crated them and done their own messing around. They would have doctored them up themselves before they sold them. It would have been a good business.

When were you evacuated from North Africa Bill?

We came home in April, May and June it took us to get home.

28:00 We left early April, about two years from when we'd left Sydney to go there we left to go home, and we went on the West Point. It was an American – a troop carrier, and it had brought American troops and equipment to North Africa.

28:30 And when North Africa was clear and the Germans had been beaten it was able to sail along the southern edge, like North African coast of the Mediterranean quite safely and it was going back to America and it had a job to pick us up. There were a lot of Kiwis, some Australians and some air force there was a few of us

29:00 it was nearly empty and they were going to bring us home to Australia, where we didn't know. In the Red Sea they received orders that they had to go straight back around the cape back to America and not continue on their voyage, so we were dropped off at Aden for some weeks and just left at Aden.

29:30 We were just dropped off at Aden for six weeks at Aden then a boat, it was a piddly little boat called the Varsova, we slept up on deck all the time because we thought well it is going to go over. It was that small and just had some Indian troops going back to Bombay. We went back to Bombay there were only

30:00 a handful of Australians, the seven of us and a few Kiwis that fitted onto the boat because they were filled Indians, had two or three hundred Indians on board and it was chockers. So we got to Bombay and had a week there and then joined a ship called the Hermitage, another Yank ship

What happened while you were in Bombay?

Nothing – just it was a holiday.

30:30 We were in a big camp. I went to the Parsee Burial Grounds I have never been back to Bombay, they lay the bodies out and the hawks just come and chew them all. Eat them all up, take all the meat off and then the bones dry and fall down through the grills to the bottom and they're squashed and broken up and used in some ritual I think but it was a bit interesting to see that and I went

31:00 to Willington Oval being a cricket fan to have a look at their cricket ground, and apart from that just walked around Bombay and spent a bit of time but we pretty well weren't allowed to go away too far because they didn't know just when we would get a ship and how much warning we would get. As it was, late one night they just said, 'You have to be ready by four in the morning' and

31:30 we went down and joined this ship they had took us on board and the Kiwis and the AIF blokes and seven of us air force men and down below was chock-a-block with Polish refugees from India that had made their way from Poland to there. And they were going to Argentina they were taking them to Argentina on their way back to the States. So we were then on that from Bombay down through to

32:00 Melbourne. We were going to go to Fremantle, we got to the pint where we could hear 6PR on the radio and we got on pretty well with those Yanks but we used to have to do watch, normal watches as if we were Yanks, and we only ate at seven thirty and four thirty each day.

32:30 only two meals a day but they were good meals and we just hadn't seen anything like it for a while so that was great.

What kind of tucker were they feeding you?

Top food, fresh milk and then there was ice cream and custards, bread and ordinary meat and eggs. Just anything you want it was just normal, it was just eye-opening. It really was.

33:00 **We often think that was the best step back into civilisation was that Hermitage. They had some troops, the Yanks, with a great big badge on their shoulders, there were about twenty of them on board. CBI – China, Burma, India, and these blokes had been up into India and they had done their nine months overseas and were going home, and we had AIF blokes well into their third year overseas,**

33:30 **nothing at all not even a medal, and there were these yanks with these great big CBI's and one bloke we used to call Babe, he was only about my age, he was just a bit younger than me he was twenty, and we used to get babe and say, "Any chance of a photo? You let these blokes take photos of you last night." "Sure come down and I'll be ready about eight thirty or nine o'clock or whatever." And all dressed up in his uniform and we'd take his photo, we never had a film in the camera.**

34:00 **He never knew that and we would get Babe posing. "Babe, any chance of a photo?" "Yeah sure, what time?" Get some ungodly time and down we'd go with the same camera no film but they were good except we had a few sub warnings and we had to go down below and they locked us down below and I didn't like that. I often used to wonder how I was going to go anyway I used to just think, "Well all I gotta do is just sit there and dog paddle."**

34:30 **Because I couldn't swim properly I was a poor swimmer and one of the blokes said, "Well if it happens you will be surprised how good a swimmer you are when you get out of the water." Which I suppose would have been true you would have picked up a few strokes in a hurry and become Ian Thorpe. But that was the way it went we didn't get torpedoed and we made Melbourne without any trouble.**

Whereabouts were the submarine scares?

35:00 Right off Geraldton and then the same night they picked up what they thought were two more, so they thought they may have been packing in threes. It never attacked us, so whether they picked us up or not I don't know and then we went down and we about seven days from Fremantle to Melbourne and we went a fair way down. We came in from the east of Melbourne, we went south of Tasmania

35:30 and came up round Tasmania and into Melbourne. All I remember at night time it was mighty cold up on deck doing it, and I didn't even know what I was looking for, you couldn't see anything out there really. All I used to think was the sensible thing if we were torpedoed I was jump while you were on the top deck rather than have them lock us up down below. But anyway it never happened so we didn't have to worry. So there we were, came home and started aircrew training

36:00 and got my wings.

What was your arrival like back at Melbourne?

Well quiet because the place was full of Americans and who cared because blokes were coming home on leave from New Guinea and all the blokes from the Middle East had been home already. So we just snuck into Melbourne the seven of us and picked up a rail pass to Perth and came home

36:30 **How long was it before you got on the train to Perth?**

Next day, got in one day and on the train the next day and came home.

Did you see any of Melbourne in the meantime?

No. We went into the embarkation depot in the city and we were in Melbourne and on the train. We could have gone out that night on leave. A couple of the Melbourne blokes went straight home, we weren't supposed to but they went home on leave straight away, but they didn't

37:00 **get their official passes till the next day, but they let them go and I just made sure I was packed and had everything organised for the train trip and that was it.**

How did it feel to be back on Aussie Soil?

Good, yeah one of the best feelings I would think, it was great. I just can remember when we did get off the boat, I said to one of the blokes,

37:30 "I don't know what to do to be home." And he said, "Well you could get down and kiss the joint," but he said, "I wouldn't if I was you, some of the wharfies might have been here." So that put us off doing anything spectacular we just got off and that was it, but it was just a great feeling in the morning you couldn't get up quickly enough to make sure you saw where it all was, and sometimes I think

38:00 now it was just a bit disappointing somebody hadn't been there to say g'day or you know but the blokes just said, "Catch that truck," and we were on a truck with four seats across the back of it and it was all open in Melbourne wasn't even a bus or a couple of cars or anything and we had our two kit bags each but it was just get on that truck and off we went so there you go, didn't really matter, we were home we didn't care

38:30 **And then off to the train?**

Yes, and back in the morning into the train.

What was this train ride home like after the one you had taken before?

Well It was a little bit different because now it was really a troop train and we did a cattle truck on the way back, I only did two cattle trucks on it the other trips I did each other time,

39:00 I did four trips on the train altogether and two were cattle trucks, all the rest, both cattle trucks were going back and I was a bit upset with one because I was a sergeant pilot by this time and I thought, I said to a bloke that we were with, and he was a sergeant, “Well at least we’ll miss the cattle truck,” so anyway there was a mob of us finished up

39:30 and the bloke said, “Oh I’ve got good news for you, you want to like to have a good sit up carriage all the way?” “Too right,” he said, “Well come back tomorrow there’s only a cattle truck left.” I said, “I’ll take the cattle truck.” But they weren’t too bad you know you’d slept in worse places, but you were home at the end of it, who cared?

You were going in the right direction?

Yeah, that was all you worried about you were going home, that was the magic word

I think we’re at the end of another tape

Tape 7

00:31 **Bill could you tell us what it looks like inside one of these De Havillands that you have got the stretchers in?**

It’s a cabin, and this is just from memory, but a cabin approximately just over two metres tall and about three metres wide

01:00 and long enough to get the stretchers in so we are looking at four metres or five metres to what they call the rear bulkhead and a door entry on the port side, which is the left hand side looking towards the front of the aeroplane, and it came in between two stretchers, so you had

01:30 two stretchers on one side of the door and two to the right with two directly in front of you along the far wall, the right hand wall. Then you went up to a point on your right or on your left, either position, but generally on your right, for a cabin area for the wireless operator and then two seats ahead of that for the two pilots and they were pretty well

02:00 in the main plane area with two motors set apart on main planes that I can’t remember the full width of I’m sorry, but it would be most likely a total of eight metres on either wing on either side of the fuselage stood up at the front of the main plane would be approximately a metre, just over a metre

02:30 off the ground and about five feet or one and half metres between the upper and lower main plane. Now measurements are only just guesstimate [guess – estimate] and the main planes weren’t square on the end they sort of came in to an angular, not a point but they were sort of narrower at the end than they were halfway along

03:00 the width of the main plane. Very good to fly and very stable and I think that is what made them so acceptable to the transport business prior to the war, and comfortable to ride in from the patients’ point of view. And just they had Gipsy 66 motors which were very acceptable in the industry in those days, quite cheap and economical to run,

03:30 easily maintained and just footed the bill for the job that they were required for. Later when they went up to Italy and they were transferring a lot of people and medical equipment around Italy they sort of discarded the use of those particular aeroplanes, the De Havilland, and they went for Bristol Bombers that had

04:00 been used as a heavy bomber earlier on in the war but had become outdated because of speed and manoeuvrability and what-have-you, but very roomy inside and they were and there were plenty of them lying around that weren’t in use so they converted a lot of those, they had about, I think after we came home there was a group over there for about eleven months, and took over Number One Ambulance duties and

04:30 they used a lot of these bomb bays but they were all just either abandoned or just more or less given away to some of the Asian or the African countries at the completion of hostilities. But quite easily repaired for some of the damage that they would get in air raids particularly. Bluey Richards, ‘the Dope’, we used to call him because

05:00 he was the dope man when they would get holes in the fabric and everything he would have to go around and paint them with special dope and put fabric on and the application of the dope shrank the fabric and tautened up the cover of the aeroplane and tended to hold it all together. It was quite simplistic and sometimes to the outsider the planes would look as if they had really had it and Bluey and a couple of his offsiders or a couple of us even to help him,

05:30 would have a couple of hours on the aeroplane and apart from the fact that it had aeronautic measles it looked quite good it was ready to fly again. But we had riggers with us, men that were good with their hands and wood-working men so that you would often get struts badly damaged with flying shrapnel

and what-have-you, so they'd have to be able to take the cover off and

06:00 replace or rejoin the struts and the spars and then they would have to re-dope and fabric over those. But yes they were a good aircraft. The position, getting the patients in and out was not difficult but especially if you got a bloke that was a bit heavy just to sort of lift over body height sometimes up over your shoulders

06:30 and move them onto the aeroplane on the upper levels used to be a little bit difficult only because you were so aware of the patient. If they were lumps of brick or something you could have done it quite easily but considering that you were looking after the patient as your prime concern than taking it slowly and being very careful, was a heavy job often but it was always manageable.

How did you regulate the air

07:00 **temperature inside the aeroplane?**

None, you didn't, that didn't change and there was no such thing as air-conditioning. If it was hot day outside you were not only wounded but it was unpleasant as well for you, but the patients generally didn't have any realisation of these things because they were in enough trouble and often I may have said a little earlier they were often in shock. So the temperature

07:30 didn't really worry them, it didn't have a great effect on the aeroplanes, they didn't seem to worry about the temperature and once you started to get up in the air and mobile you lost all sort of problems heat-wise so we didn't have any trouble with those.

What were the most common injuries that you would pick up?

Well I would say with

08:00 the men we carried, generally body injuries, we didn't worry too much about limbs, unless they had lost limbs. If they had lost a limb altogether, then we would often put them into the aircraft to make sure they got back so that their bleeding and everything was controlled properly. But normally they would be shrapnel, grenade and rifle bullets in and around their chests and stomachs and what-have-you.

08:30 But anything say bullets or shrapnel on their upper legs, they would be just an ambulance job to a local hospital or down to one of the ports in the trucks in the ambulances. The men out in the field, the ambulance people out in the field must have been really good at their job because as I said we only ever had one bloke die on an aircraft. We had a steady stream of them dying at pick-up point

09:00 but even then the numbers that died at pick-up weren't huge because they were also aware out in the field and became quite expert at knowing just how a bloke was coping by the time they had opened him up a bit, pulled his shirt out, and had a look at whatever and put a pack on it and plugged him up and just given him something and give him some tranquillising drug of some sort,

09:30 we were in a position generally to have some idea of whether he was going to make it or not. They became quite good at it and these men were normally just off the street they could have been doing anything when they joined up. I had a cousin of Edwina's, he was in the 7th Field Ambulance in Greece and Crete and he was only a milkman when the war started.

10:00 But he gained a lot of expertise and he used to say that was the best part of the day when you would be able to sit back and think, "Well that blokes going to live," and he was a part of it. But it was good, and those men of ours and our medical orderlies were expert at it and it must have been a good feeling for them sometimes to realise what they had done.

How long on average would it take somebody from being injured in the field to get them

10:30 **from the pick up point on the plane and to a larger medical facility, I'm thinking of blokes that have got a leg blown off they don't really have a chance to survive?**

I would say an hour from being wounded through their CCS, their casualty clearing station,

11:00 to pick up into the field ambulance, and then maybe four or five miles to our pick up point could be an hour. We would pick him up and possibly get him away, in the kite we could get the kite loaded in about fifteen to twenty minutes, get the nine people on board and then if we were flying them into a port or one of the areas, say Mersa

11:30 Matruh, or one of the bigger port areas where there was a good hospital, we would have them in there in an hour and a half, so with a lot of them they would be back under top care in well under three hours. And you would have bad days where you had to take them further and you could have poor conditions but normally all action was taken with a fair amount of knowledge of the area

12:00 so that dust storms were sort of known quite well because of the what would you say weather conditions and they had some idea if we were due for a dust storm or whether we were going to have one, so there wouldn't be any military action so then nobody was worried and the conditions normally when there was a military action on were clear enough to pick up our patients

12:30 and transfer to a good area. So three hours, five hours you would be thinking the man had a bad run. If

you had to go for five hours was a long time.

Did you mix with any of the nurses or the aides in the hospitals?

No. Some our blokes did. Now and again they had occasion, where

13:00 things would get a bit hectic and there would be some action and then one side or the other would hold one and other up and they'd stall and we would sometimes have aeroplanes that were due for a check and would have to go back to Heliopolis maybe for an engine change, or what they called one hundred and eighty hours, and you would grab these opportunities and as well as the plane going down there might be a chance for two or three guys to get on board and

13:30 have the night or two or three nights in Cairo which didn't happen that often but they would go down with a list of orders of what we all wanted and some of them used to, a couple of the medical orderlies particularly used to go to the hospital and check on patients that they had looked after just to go into the ward and have some idea. But often you didn't know if he was Bill Brown or Charlie Jones, it was only if you had some special occasion and the bloke said, "Oh you know I am

14:00 DLI, and I'm Gordon or somebody then you would go and say we've got a bloke from the Durham Light Infantry called Gordon and pick him up that way or one of the Pommy regiments," but not very often that happened.

With Heliopolis, did you check out what it was like there on leave?

Yes we got into Cairo from Heliopolis there was a tram ran into town

14:30 but not very often but when we did we had plenty of fun we had some good times, we had a couple of the boys that used to like to go down to the Burqa. I went down a couple of times my eyes popped out and they bugged out of my head well and truly. It was something to see especially for me it was an adventure. Three thousand men and only two thousand

15:00 girls or something like that, and they used to queue up and take their turn and you would see blokes out the front working out amongst their mates they had enough for three girls and five blokes and they would have to toss and work out who was going in and who would miss the boat and there would be fights. And if there were Aussies around there would be a game of two-up it was, you know, a real servicemen's area, and then there'd be all the little Gypo [Egyptian]

15:30 kids trying to sell anything they could you know, 'Baksheesh, George?' they used to say to us they wanted something you know give em something free, baksheesh, George. But it was fun period I suppose because you got some experience from living out of it all. And I used to look sometimes and they would go out on leave and these blokes would be out in the desert and they'd be you know, different altogether as soon as they got in off leave, it was just strange their reactions

16:00 but I guess the conditions we were under and if a blokes that way inclined and I suppose being younger, and I hadn't got that way in life like now I suppose the similar age for me, I would have had to be twelve to have missed all the experiences the way it's going with young people nowadays but you know, twenty and twenty one, that was just run of the mill for most of us.

What bugged your eyes out the most with the Burqa?

16:30 I suppose the girls there standing around, some of them were well dressed and they would have two hair clips in their hair and a pair of sandals on. You know it used to be better than watching camels for me it was exciting but yes it was strange you know. But

17:00 it was, you used to get all the lectures on all these sorts of things you know. They'd say righto I'm going over on the Queen Elizabeth and this officer got up and said, "Oh this morning's lecture is on VD." And some bloke yelled out, "Yes, how to do it and not get it by one who did it and got it," and that sort of thing went on and you used to see the Salvation Army people down there looking after blokes and and giving a helping hand when they were needed.

17:30 And they would walk in where there was trouble and blokes fighting and drunk and everything and they would stand back for a little while, and some of them were elderly men, and they would go in and just would take somebody and shoulder around somebody and nobody would touch them and those blokes would walk in and you would think, "Gosh there is going to be trouble here." Not with the Salvos and they would take a bloke away and look after him what they did I suppose they took him round to the

18:00 to the Salvos' hostel in Cairo and look after em and mother them up.

What did they tell you about VD?

Oh well you know troops could get it easily and padres and generals got it off toilet seats that was about all we learned you know, that was about the extent of it. We didn't have any of our blokes in trouble

18:30 with it but two or three could have, they sort of diced with death a few times I think. We didn't really get that much leave in Cairo. I went down there twice but I think we were only about five times in Cairo. We were lucky in one way we met an Austrian man called Fritz Spitzer who was working for British Overseas Airways

19:00 in Cairo when the war started, so he was seconded to them, and so that when we went down a couple of times servicing our aeroplanes Fritz Spitzer happened to be one of the blokes from BOAC that was in the contract to help us work on our planes and service them, so that we didn't have to take a lot of blokes off the desert

19:30 we could take one or two of the technical guys, and they would supply their own technical staff. So he invited us home to his place in Cairo and I only went twice but his wife Bertha and then they had the little boys, and Peter was only a little bloke, he was only three or four and some of the blokes after the war

20:00 some of the men contacted the Spitzers when they came to Melbourne to live, and rekindled the friendship. So when I was chasing up a lot of our guys I undertook to organise some reunions and in 1985 and I got about nineteen of us together and we went to the Melbourne RSL Club and got talking and up came the Spitzers' name.

20:30 Two of the chaps from Melbourne had kept in contact and used to send Christmas cards to the Spitzers so that was all right and I got a couple of addresses which I never took advantage of. And I did get word from these two men in Melbourne that these two Spitzers, Bertha and Fritz, had died, so recently I am starting to clean up a lot of my stuff and give photos and what have you away to the family and I have sent some stuff to widows of their husbands in the Middle East

21:00 and what have you. And the Spitzers came up four photos of Peter and the other one when they were small with us there in Cairo and he is into his sixties by now, he's sixty three. So I sent the envelope away and it came back so then I had to chase through all the Spitzers in the telephone book and I went through them in Melbourne and there were about

21:30 eleven of them and the very last one was a relation and I got onto Peter who is now in Sydney, and I rang him and he said, "I go to Perth now and again," he said, "just leave it and I will come and see you." So there was a telephone call from BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary] in Perth, Mr Spitzer one of the directors was in Perth and Peter came out and had afternoon tea with us a

22:00 couple of months ago and I delivered the photos personally, and that was a very nice event you know to tie off those loose ends for me you know.

That's a wonderful story. Now I know that you spent two Christmases and you must have spent an Anzac Day out there in the desert, what did you do to celebrate?

We had on one occasion we were pretty well on our

22:30 own but there was an English squadron, I was going to say 24, but they were South African, but there was an English squadron I think it might have been number 20 that had some Australian pilots with it and we just got together our group and there was a padre in the area and one of our clerks organised him and we just had a simple

23:00 service. And the next one in '42 we didn't care we were just on the run and somebody said, "It's Anzac Day today," and "Yeah so what?" You know, let's keep running and we just kept going but Anzac Day is something that I haven't done and before I go I would really like to do Gallipoli you know.

23:30 But I don't know now whether it's not being overdone I wonder, I don't think it is, I think anything to keep our nationality is pretty important, and to see young people showing the interest I feel really pleased about that. I think it is marvellous so whether I will ever get there now or not. Most likely won't.

Oh we've been talking to Julian [Interviewer] and they were saying there were a lot of young people

24:00 **there and it was a really wonderful experience?**

Yes, I've got a couple of younger family members like second cousins that have been over there and a couple of Edwina's great nephews, they've been to two or three of them, and say it's really terrific but I wouldn't like to go without Edwina, we have done everything else together. But I just think that might be a bit too much now. Get her a bottle of cheap

24:30 plonk and take it and see how she goes.

You know when get called out to a location where you are going to pick up patients, how do you actually receive that information?

That comes in, our blokes were on radio watches and they would have a radio watch, and get that information. Sometimes all the units on the aerodromes, and it doesn't matter how long you were there,

25:00 were all hooked up with a field telephone system that was just wire that nobody cared about it was just laying around from wherever the main controlling area was, and we'd either get that message then through the drome controller to say that we had to be at a certain point in the desert, our aircraft had to be there in the morning, or else on the morning we would get a stand-by note to say that

25:30 you know we had to ready say from five in the morning whatever time, which meant that that would have been close to the blokes going into action and we might have gone up we wouldn't been close, we might be six miles away and just camp for the night and then they would just say that we had to be at a certain point there'd just be a point of navigation and just pick it up on the charts, we had to be at a certain point and just get a grid point

26:00 be there. There was not a lot of time wasted in flying high, they would generally fly at a hundred feet a hundred and fifty feet over the ground so it was take off and just fly and land again only a matter of a few miles then turn around and always chop the motors so that there was no dust or anything. And then start 'em up again as soon as we had the blokes on board and take off. Sometimes if there was any doubt about any of the cases, the orderlies would fly both ways.

26:30 fly to wherever they were dropped and back again and that would pretty well be the routine but it was quite efficient and well run and I always thought that the pilots we had were good pilots. Some of the younger blokes that came in towards the end of the session were chaps that had had problems. One young guy had been shot down as a Hurricane pilot

27:00 and wanted to keep flying, I don't think they thought that he should, but he was accepted and came into our unit and flew and he was a good pilot. Then two other guys that had done a tour I think each, they were both from Queensland, they came in and were good pilots.

27:30 The man that was eventually CO for a while and was an original pilot a chap by the name of Ron Duffield continued commercial flying after the war he finished up as the captain and main check pilot with Qantas, a senior job, and he is still alive and lives up in Queensland, to my knowledge he is still alive. So some of the old and bold are still going.

28:00 **Were there any safety things that you would have to look out for when you were living in the desert for so long?**

No not really. You got used to not scrounging around dead bodies, leave that to the Poles because they used to sort of booby trapped them you know if you were looking for souvenirs you had to be careful.

28:30 Early on it was all right to just get bank notes and coins and I finished up with a letter and I have only just recently found it. It wasn't on a body but was in an area where the Germans had moved out in a hurry and there was this partly written letter with not a lot of information on it to a girl but I have never ever had it deciphered, I could have done it quite easily because the girl married

29:00 to the man at the back's a German and I had thought recently when I came across it again that I should find out a bit more about it, and maybe send it to the Red Cross because Geneva do everything still when these sorts of things turn up. It might be a bit late in the business but it might still just get to the right people somehow or other but yes they used to, you used to see originally the old type fountain

29:30 pens. You would find them lying around old camp sites and they wouldn't be much, but they didn't need much. I mean if you blew a bloke's finger off it was often more trouble to the man who had his finger chopped off and his group than it was if you killed him. I mean because you only had to plant him if he was killed but if he lost a finger he had to go away and he mightn't have been able to use his rifle again and have to find another job for him, and he was out of action and getting paid, and all these things

30:00 you didn't really have to be too brutal with em you know, thermos flasks, they used to carry a lot of thermos flasks, we never ever had anything like that and the Italian water bottles were fairly big aluminium ones with a flannel sort of cover on them to keep the cool and everything. And they were better than ours somehow I think because

30:30 maybe the volume in them was the big thing because we sort of had a covering over ours as well, they were blue enamel. But the Italian ones were the best ones but they would leave those just lying around anywhere and as you went to pick them up they would have a booby trap under them that would only just go off and maybe badly injure your feet or and the bottom of your legs and see these again that was as much as they wanted because then you needed a first aid bloke, you needed a vehicle to cart him around

31:00 you needed a bed in hospital so it was a lot of trouble just to be wounded by this easily made booby traps. We were always a bit wary of them, but earlier on you could just fossick around without much trouble but the Poles used to do a lot of the burying, the Polish work parties, and they were getting caught early but they soon got into the point where they could just sort of

31:30 lasso a body and tug it around a bit and if he didn't go off then they could take it away you know. It was just anything to cause a bit of trouble and it was generally quite effective and once you woke up to it and everybody became aware, then it was OK.

There must have been a few injuries to the Poles?

Yes I think they did, but they made a lot of money too, they would empty out all those pockets, and they'd have all the bits and pieces

32:00 If you could pick up Pole burying parties you could always get a lot of good bargains, it was like a boot

sale on a Sunday morning you would get onto the Poles it was great.

What sort of stuff would you buy?

Well buttons, cap badges, good boots, their boots weren't bad but their great coats, the Jerry great coats were the best, they were good fitting and light and long. We had fancy

32:30 nice blue overcoat but it was sort of a dress coat, but it used to thicken up with the dust and the dirt and very hard to wash and try and keep clean. If you got near the water, which was very rare, the shot was to go swimming in your overcoat and wash it, and then you could bring it back and clean it up and get all the dust and grime and that out of it, but they looked terrible once it got dirty but the Jerry's was sort of the right colour, a tanny colour, not a tanny colour but a

33:00 a browny colour I suppose you would say, but really nice in winter. Right through December and January particularly it used to be really good, and then the Poms had a leather vest without sleeves, the Transport group easy working with their driving and everything but tucked in and it was wool-lined on the inside and leather on the outside, but they were good to get and then flying boots if you could get some flying boots they were

33:30 fur lined but our own issue ones to our air force blokes were about like the RAF, and the RAAF, they were about as good as you could get but they were hard to get onto. I did have a pair that I bought off a pilot. He was an air gunner and he'd been re-mustered and he was going down to Kenya to learn how to fly so he was going from air gunner to pilot and for some unknown reason he had a couple of spare pairs of boots and all I had was a couple of English

34:00 army cap badges, and I got the boots for some cap badges and I got back out to the desert and oh that was the bargain of the week you know so I was pretty right for a while comfortable feet.

So with this trade from dead bodies, wouldn't it like, as far as taking their coats and things like that, weren't they sort of like – ?

Yeah but they weren't going to use them

34:30 **I'm just thinking it would be smelly?**

Yeah if they had been there a few days and it was hot, in the hot period, but they didn't lay around that long. they were generally buried pretty quickly within a couple of days so. We were at a spot where somebody said there was a nice soak, with some good water, every now and again you would find these little areas where there would be a little bit of a seepage, a soak, there'd be water that I suppose

35:00 the Bedouins would know all about like our aboriginals do with the little springs out in the back blocks, and it was fresh water and we thought oh we were made just go and get a drink of water, and anyway somebody said, "This water isn't really that good, it's tasty – " So went back up and up the little bit of the hill and thereon the other side two Jerries had been buried, and it was the seepage from their bodies into the water that was making the taste. But strangely

35:30 we, and none of us – and I suppose there were twelve of us there and we always thought about it after – none of us got the runs, so I don't know whether we'd reached immunity because you always had the runs you know. But none of us got the runs out of that crook water but of course we just boiled the it from then on for the few days we were there, just boiled it, and then it was nice.

Was a nice change to actually have some water. With some of the pilots

36:00 **and some of the people who would get shot down and lost what sort of a ceremony would you have for people who would have died?**

Well there wasn't much, they were a special group pilots, they seemed to, they would talk about these occurrences in terms that sometimes I would feel would be offensive to outsiders listening in but it was just

36:30 something they built up over time within them selves about themselves that you know, you could go through training with a bloke and when you were training and learning to fly and having all your problems, and coming in and when you were first going solo and kangarooing up and down the runway, even doing your first solo and living and then going through all your

37:00 training and getting your wings and flying on missions, there would be bonds built up that were be particularly strong. Just like any front line troops do they were just the same the aircrew people, and the you'd lose them and you could imagine a crew of, maybe eight in an aircraft, and you lose five or six of them in one effort and you've just gotta get five or six newies tomorrow, you tend to become blasé

37:30 you have to adopt a certain attitude to living to keep going, and people had all sorts of approaches to this. They would just take it quietly and live within themselves; or others would just sort of joke about it but become quite unpopular because of their attitude but people had to approach it all in different ways and it was sometimes very difficult I would think for men to do this. I used to

38:00 often wonder thinking that this could possibly have been in front of me I at least had the advantage. Whilst we weren't a fighter unit we had a CO from a fighter unit for a while flying our aeroplanes and

he'd just done a tour of operations and it was to give him a spell just not flying in action. His name was Jack Bartel, he had won a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] for being a top pilot

38:30 and some of his pilots from the units that he had flown with would come over and visit him and they would get there talking and it used to be interesting just to more or less eavesdrop. Because just being ground staff, you weren't really invited into that circle of people and their various attitudes to you know, "Poor old Jack bought it yesterday," and very nonchalant about the whole thing. But you knew that 'poor old Jack bought it yesterday' wasn't what they really meant,

39:00 they were upset but they weren't prepared to do anything about it. They had to keep a grip of themselves, because they were leaders a lot of these guys and you had to be able to set the pace it was a tough life for people, it was really tough. And yet normal men became such heroes but you never knew you would meet those same blokes now

39:30 and they just tell you I was with the 9th Division, I was in A Company 16th Battalion, absolute champion heroes and you would wonder what he did in the war. You know, and we'll never know.

We will if we get to them

Yes let's hope you do because it would be nice to hear there would be some real people with great stories to tell.

40:00 Some of the men that, as I mentioned earlier when I went into the Cameron Highlanders, there were men like Frank Sublet and Minty Myles and Lex Lamb, these were just young well to do men about town, well educated and working in maybe the higher echelons around the city, but they'd only be in their mid twenties if that

40:30 when the war started, yet finished up commanding officers of the battalions and not only battalion commanders but heroes as well you know top soldiers, but meet them later on on civvy street [civilian life], I doubt that you'd have any idea of what they'd achieved in their act of service life.

What was the most courageous thing that you actually eye witnessed?

41:00 Well a Wellington bomber came in on a strip we were just camped at a Wellington Bomber came in and was sick as it approached, we used to call them Wimpys they were twin engine bombers, and it came in and it was unusual we didn't see a lot of Whimpys up and down the desert, and it came in and as it did, it must have had under cart trouble because it skidded

41:30 along the runway and burst into flames, and you could hear a couple of the blokes, there was a lot of noise, there were rounds going off, and the flames had taken over the aircraft pretty quickly and the petrol, it must have had enough fuel in it even from it's flight, spread back through the aircraft and it caught, and there was, you could see a member of the crew trying to come back.

Tape 8

00:32 It was just seen that there was a crewman running down amongst all the flames and he looked to be alight himself and you could just hear what was definitely a noise coming from him, in amongst all the noise and you could not possibly get near the aircraft of course being out in the position we were in

01:00 there were no airport ambulances or fire brigades or anything. And a man ran out with a rifle and ran right up to the aeroplane and ran along the side of it and shot the man and killed him. It seems a funny thing but to me to have done that he saved that man the last agony for the last few seconds of his life I thought was absolutely terrific and

01:30 the few of us that saw it talk about it now and still agree that it was one of the greatest things we saw because that man made a terrible decision. And he was just one of us, just a guy from around so whilst it might be peculiar he didn't win a Victoria Cross but it was a hard thing to do I should think. So that was the story.

How important was mateship to your survival in the desert?

Oh,

02:00 you know it was everything. You would be working on a plane and somebody would come up and say, "I'm on the plane I've got a trip into Cairo that I've made the trip, have you got any money?" And you would say, "Yes in the bottom on the kit bag," and normally we all kept it there, in the bottom of yer kit bag. The bloke, off he would go to Cairo and in another week or so we might get a pay we only got a pay every now and again, there was nowhere to spend it but

02:30 you might want stamps or something and the bloke would say oh there's the five Gypo quid I borrowed off you and you know you could have even forgotten about it and that sort of went on amongst the lot of us those sort of things. We had a couple of blokes that got Dear John letters [letters informing relationship is over] and everybody was down in the dumps for a couple of days you know. It just

seemed to affect the lot of us that these blokes had got Dear Johns,

03:00 you know, 'You've had it, mate, I've got somebody else'.

Usually a Yank wasn't it?

One of these guys, one the girls had met a Yank and the other one had met the bloke's cousin. So he had gone around taking news around that he had heard from this guy and what he was doing and what he was doing in the Middle East. They clicked and off they went and that was it. But with

03:30 both of them they both agreed that it was lucky in the finish, they both met nice women when they got home and the two of them rocked up to the reunions and a few of us said that one of them seemed happier than everybody else you know. He'd really done well for himself and that was good.

What other kinds of things would mates do for each other?

Well often just being there but when you were poorly that was the big thing.

04:00 You had spells where it happened, once you got a bit of dysentery and then a couple of raids and you got a bit down physically, it was pretty hard to sort of get back. So you might be having to get up and doing something, so between the other guys they would say, "Well look I'll be doing such and such you just stay there," and a bloke would bring you in and make you a cup of tea or

04:30 warm your bully beef up instead of just having it cold out of a tin, and scrape the fat off it, or if they had a tin of soup left from a parcel, that the bloke might have been keeping, you know he was going to have that soup on a special day for himself, he would warm that up and give you the tin of soup. Just little things that didn't need to be very much, but often of a morning it was, you'd had a bit of a bad night air raid wise and

05:00 everybody would just sort of get back and have a bit of sleep before you had to get up and do something. And you would get up and start to look around you'd think, "Now how's the water?" "Oh I will leave the wash till tonight," but you'd get up and all be dopey and somebody would walk up one of the blokes and just say, "How ya doing this morning," and put his arm around you and that's all you needed just to, well somebody is looking after me and caring you know. But that would often make all the difference to think well it's

05:30 worthwhile because there's somebody there, you know it might be old Crewby or one of the other blokes, and it was just something that happened. When we get together now we just slot back into life as if they had been there always and it might have been years. I'm the one that looks after them all. I am the youngest and they reckon that I will be the one that switches off the light because there are only six of us left. I never say you will 'cause I'm lousy

06:00 and I'm hoping that I will be you know. But it's just something that you couldn't buy and just glad that you have got.

How are you looked upon as being the youngest?

Oh pretty good. I had a little bit of an advantage on a lot of them because of the fact that I had been in cadets and everything so I knew a lot of the routines and the drills and all this and I got some fairly good promotion and I took some exams out in the desert.

06:30 We went over to another squadron and took some exams two or three of us and I was a sergeant a bit ahead of my time in comparison to age but I was also they made me president. We formed a little mess committee. When the Comfort Fund people came out we would buy biscuits and

07:00 writing paper that sort of thing, then we would buy it back, and then we had money over twelve months, we had built up enough money to get some beer for Christmas and that was sort of being the mess president. It wasn't any big thing, it was really piddly, and you would buy pencils for blokes to write letters with. You might buy pencils and you'd get them in Cairo and you would get them for

07:30 two for a penny equivalent, and we would sell them for a penny each now it didn't seem much but blokes never worried about their pencils, everybody was always looking for a pencil and a bit of paper to write a letter, and soap. You know get some good soap, if you could get a bit of Palmolive soap or a bit of Burford soap and you would make a few bob on that and then now and again we would get some beer, we didn't get a lot of beer but when you get some beer, blokes would pay an extra shilling for a bottle of beer

08:00 the drinkers. So we were able to build up a bit of a kitty for Christmas and so I was always looked upon as a bit of a smartie I suppose and because they used to father me as far as drinking and that goes. So you know I got on pretty well with them and then when I got going in '85 I got around and found them all and got these few reunions, we had a few reunions, we had four or five reunions up at Albury and I got

08:30 the wives and widows and everybody together. It took a fair bit of doing but I think they all appreciated that. And then of course when you have done that and get all together and you are all in really good spirits it most likely enhances what went before you know. So Edwina sometimes says, "You are lucky they think you are smart." You know but it was good to me to have

09:00 those blokes as friends being one of the youngsters and it's a friendship that maintained and grown all these years so it's good.

Did you ever notice somebody perhaps suffering the doldrums more or worse than anybody else?

Yeah there were one or two blokes, that Julian really shouldn't have been there, you just can't do this to people and expect everybody to be able to adapt and settle into theses conditions

09:30 and you would hear some blokes sometimes say something about a guy, that I suppose if you were on the outside looking in, it could be thought to be true. But I used to regret these blokes saying it resent it, and then get them to one side and tell them that I didn't think it was right. Now I was only a little bloke compared to some of them but I just used to think that by saying what I thought was right

10:00 without any malice, I used to expect those blokes to do something about it because everybody, there would be blokes that would be just get to the point. We would all be in the same boat with something as I said earlier, say we would have tinea and we couldn't do anything about it, we didn't have water we didn't have enough stuff but we knew it was going to come, you would just have to put up with it. But some blokes would get that miserable and I know for a fact that

10:30 on a couple of occasions a couple of blokes would have been quite easy to commit suicide. So these guys had to be mothered you had other guys saying, "What the hell are you doing looking after them, or worrying about them, what about me," you know. You could see their point of view, but we were all in the same boat and you were only going to get better yourself by helping the other blokes. If you could manage it yourself without help

11:00 you had to give that then on to somebody else. It was generally most blokes' idea, I wasn't out on my own on that attitude, this was what made good strong units. You see we always performed when we were wanted, we never ever let anyone down. Sometimes we would think afterwards how in the hell have we done that because we'd have blokes that couldn't get out of bed with the runs and we didn't have enough spare parts getting fuel would be a bit of a problem for a few days and

11:30 and yet we would manage it all. We had a little Ute we did once, we did thirty trips in the day and it was only eleven miles and five miles of it used to take us an hour to get through this boggy sand stuff. We let the tyres down, we'd take bits of wire and timber that we'd made up sort of runners but you would only be running it the length of the ute but you'd have to do these things just to keep things going because you had all these blokes lying out there on stretchers waiting for you to do something so

12:00 **What kept you going?**

I don't know just I guess we were going to win the war I guess that was it.

And I guess you weren't going to let those guys down on the stretchers?

No with bad luck it could be you and you would want somebody to do the same and look after you so you know that was it. And most blokes, it didn't matter what walk of life they came from, most of them had those attitudes.

12:30 I often think that the blokes that didn't just dropped out quietly anyway, some went troppo and some blokes I think that the commanding group the officers used to recognise that it wasn't fair to some blokes, but in big armies you can't be sort of running around mothering too many people. When you were a small unit like that we got pretty personal one and other and with our officers and everything,

13:00 even at what we considered what was full strength when we had a couple of extra aeroplanes and pilots and the cook for a little while we were only forty people. So normally we started off with twenty eight so you only grew up to forty people and generally we were only running around at about thirty two or thirty three people so it was just a really well knit little group.

What kind of instances were there of guys getting a little troppo?

13:30 **An interest in them did you say? Oh incidents? Well they'd just lose control of what they were supposed to be doing you know. Or they'd get, on one occasion all the bolts on a head of a motor were left loose and now what was going to be achieved by doing that except the aircraft being in trouble?**

14:00 **Iit wasn't going to hurt anybody that was going to affect this bloke, give him any benefit. It was only going to hurt people that were his friends and part of our group. So you know actually he was one of the first that when they posted blokes home we all thought it was the best thing, he kept face and didn't finish up in the clink, which he should have done, because he hadn't been medically certified**

14:30 **or anything but he just wasn't in good condition and he came home pretty early in the piece. But taken all in all it was an experience that was nice to have gone through and I say nice just because we knew we were achieving what we were there for**

15:00 **To get badly wounded men into good care as quickly as we could and we generally achieved**

that.

Could I ask you, Bill, with some of the fellers who perhaps weren't coping, what was your reaction or the men's overall reaction to those guys when they discover that they were doing things like leaving bolts undone on the head of the motor?

Well you found that they were under more scrutiny all the time.

15:30 but that was about all that you could really do. The only other alternative was them being disciplined And you had to consider if they were disciplined what would happen to them they would most likely have gone back off the desert to a disciplinary board in Cairo that would consist of people who had no idea of the conditions these en were sort of living

16:00 and working under and wouldn't have got really treated the way that they should have been. Because in war-time there isn't the time for this sort of thing I mean you just can't start and take and the science I guess you'd say wasn't there that psychiatric know-how all this knowledge wasn't there to be applied to these sort of people they either did their job, or

16:30 normally they were just dead beats in the eyes of the hierarchy in the services. If you were an infantry man you were there to stand up and shoot the enemy and be shot yourself, and there was no thinking in other directions, oh this could have happened or that happened. If you didn't do it, that was it, that was what you were there for, you were getting five bob a day to do that. So in our conditions we were

17:00 were pretty well the same we were being paid to keep aircraft flying, so they could fly and save badly injured soldiers, and that was all there was to it but in a couple of cases I know that amongst themselves the

I think we were just coming to a close with guys that weren't coping very well in the circumstances and how they were being disciplined?

17:30 Yes I think that two or three of our blokes when they came back appeared finish up sort of drunks, to my way of thinking. When we all got together one bloke turned up well dressed and everything but he had maintained a good friendship with some of the other guys from Melbourne and

18:00 hadn't performed too well throughout his life you know become more or less quite a drinker now whether he may have had those inclinations when he joined up I don't know, but they sort of didn't get the chance to become drinkers just being in the desert because the opportunity to get beer wasn't there all the time. It be sort of a feast or a famine we would get an

18:30 occasion where we could organise a case of beer to come up from down in Cairo, but that was pretty rare, or a Pommy canteen group would come through with trucks and sell units cases of beer. Well then our blokes would sort of have a bit of a get together get a couple of cases but that would be knocked off that night so they'd be having a really great time all night

19:00 but then they might have to wait another row of four five or six weeks before that happened again. So it wasn't as if there was a two bottle a day ration or anything, that didn't exist. Then when they got it they normally had to drink it because there was no way to keep it cold and they used to do all sorts of mystic things. They used to dig a hole and put it down there with a bit of damp rag around it if they could or put it in the bottom of the wash up tin all day or –

19:30 I don't think any of them worked, and they just said well hot beer was beer anyway you know and used to drink it regardless.

How important was humour in getting you guys through difficult times?

Yes pretty important. We had a couple of blokes were really funny guys, and you needed a sense of humour. Two or three really serious blokes had a bit of a battle

20:00 life was fairly serious for them all the time and they were both lucky they both came home fairly early in the first lot that came home after El Alamein. But it was tough going for blokes who didn't really see too much fun in life, because you could make plenty of fun there was always something to cause a bit of

20:30 mirth if you looked for it. But there were two guys in particular that come to my mind for me now that weren't really humorous at all even when we got together the guys said to me how the hell so and so got this far without becoming a funeral director he didn't know, which was an apt statement because you could imagine him as a funeral director he would have been a good one not much fun in life at all

21:00 **What were some of the more funny instances that you remember?**

Well one of the good funny ones was I had been engaged on the 18th February in '41 before we went away and Jack Richards a bloke from Adelaide with a lot of money and Jack's family were the Leyland Motor Company. They used to be Richards Motor Body works in Adelaide,

21:30 a very well-to-do family, and when Holden came in, they were in opposition with Holden, with Leyland motorcars and whatever I'm not a good car man. But they umm, just body work and body builders making trays and that sort of thing they went into the motor industry. Well Jack and Peggy were married on the 18th February in 1941 as well. In '43 when things were quiet

22:00 and well on their way and we knew we were going to come home on the 18th February we got together and had a mock rehearsal of our engagement and our wedding, but it turned out me getting married to Edwina. Bill Slater one of the blokes was the parson for the day and bluey being married already was the bridesmaid and one of the other blokes

22:30 I was marrying, he was Edwina, and we had the parson there and everything. Oh it was really well organised, we had bouquets and it was a great night, somebody had bought or got on to a lot of big jars of candy and they'd paid one and threepence Australian for each one of these and you could put a shovel in it and it would burn the bottom off the shovel you know.

23:00 I think we had four of them and somebody said we will never drink all this, some of the drinkers. Anyway it was all consumed through the night, but it was just a good night and some bloke went outside he wasn't feeling too well and for some reason tried to jump on the tent to frighten us, and of course the tent came down so then they pulled the next blokes' tent down, why should that be standing,

23:30 and generally a real dumb night but just a chance to blow off and let a bit of steam off you know so itt was good and that was the last sort of get-together we had.

Did you kiss the bride?

Yeah too right. I think we kissed everybody. We didn't miss out that night it was a good night blokes sang songs they didn't know how to sing and I sang one there we used to, I still sing to the kids,

24:00 because it has a bit of a finish on it and we never encouraged too much swearing in the house, but it had a little bit of smut at the end of it which is not good at all but

Can you give us a rendition, we look for that kind of thing on the archive?

Well I can't sing but it goes, "There was a little man and he had a little horse he put a saddle on a threw his leg across singing hey die doodle bob aloo, doodle bob a doo eidlelay, and he rode and he rode and he came to a brook

24:30 and he saw a fisherman fishing with a hook, singing hey die doodle bob aloo, doodle bob a doo eidlelay, fisherman fisherman I love thee and a little cod fish have you caught for me, singing hey die doodle bob aloo, doodle bob a doo eidlelay, he took the cod fish home to put it in the pot but he never had a pot so it put it in the poe, singing hey die doodle bob aloo, doodle bob a doo eidlelay, in the middle of the night when he got up to widdle

25:00 ,the dirty little cod fish nibbled at his diddle, singing hey die doodle bob aloo, doodle bob a doo eidlelay." So there it was. So now much to a lot of people's amazement an sometimes disgust when we have a family do I always sing that song and our little grand kids and our great grand kids they think it's a great opportunity to get rude. Sing the diddle song

25:30 Granddad. So there you go.

Was there a lot of sing songs had?

No but we used to get concerts out now and again, the English troops were great on having concert trips come to them, and you would get concerts but we never had any in our area. Normally just an aerodrome with maybe a hundred a hundred and fifty

26:00 or two hundred blokes on it wasn't really enough. They would get an area where they could get a full battalion you know, they'd get eight or nine thousand blokes and it had to be pretty carefully arranged to get them at the right time of night. So generally it would be about an hour before sunset and it would go just after sunset, where they wouldn't have to have lights on the stage or anything

26:30 and you would go to those but you would often have to walk a long way but we would to a concert. Ten miles to walk sometimes and it would two and a half three hours to walk there and you would have to come home, but it'd be worth it to see the concert, it was well worth it and there would be top artists. They would all be well known English artists like the bloke who was Asky, was he Asky?

27:00 Edwina always has to tell me who they are but, I can't remember them, but when we were in London some of them were still on the stage in London years later and well-known artists but they have all gradually died. Edwina will say afterwards you'll know who they were.

27:30 We went one night to a concert and we had walked and walked it wasn't very far it was about six miles if I can remember and we had gone about four miles and some bloke met us from the aerodrome, but he was on a motor bike and he said, "You're wasting your time, they have just strafed the concert." So we were lucky we would have got there for nothing and been in the strafing. But they must have got wind of it that there was a group and shot a couple of planes over

28:00 just to do a run through it so the concert was off so we were lucky we missed that one.

That's a bit rough. Did you ever get down to the beach?

Had a few swims but we were swimming one day and there was a French scientist, a woman called

Madam Curie, she discovered mercury or did something Madam Curie, I forget what she discovered but she was famous but her daughter

28:30 was a French war correspondent, and some of the Poms came down and said a group of the Free French were camped just up the beach about a mile away and they said, "You ought to get up the beach that French woman is up with the officers." And we couldn't get up the sand hills quick enough a mob of peeping toms to have a look over the sand hills and there was some French nurses, and some officers

29:00 I don't know just from memory, I always tell the story that there were about twenty of them, they were all there in the nude, which to us that was great you know. They were all having a swim, it was an area and we were about there for a week, so we were able to swim each day and it was right through into December so it was cold and we were as clean as we ever were, it was really good.

The salt water must have been good for your tinea?

Oh gosh tinea and

29:30 everything loved it and after a week we were nearly all right again you know. The Poms came along twice in the desert with mobile showers but you had to be lucky to be in the first hundred or so while the water was still pretty clean because they only put it through some, not even a proper desalination unit it was only some sort of filter that took off the hair, took out most of the scabs and all the rubbishy stuff, but if you weren't in the first hundred or so we used to give the showers away

30:00 but normally pretty luck because a couple of the blokes went in for a shower early and they said, "Oh you had better give that away," you know "the water's not as good as we were making ourselves," and we were keeping our water pretty clean around the camp. But the English blokes were able to do without washing more than we were, they weren't into the habit I'm sure of washing as we were daily like in our daily life.

30:30 And all our blokes and everybody liked to have a wash, but you would normally stand in a petrol tin, they were only about ten inches by ten inches so you could really only get a foot diagonally on them and then just had a bit of a rag for a flannel and try and just wash yourself off not use too much soap because that took a lot of dirt off your body and dirtied the water more you were better

31:00 off just to have water and take just pure dirt and that would sediment by the morning and you could tip the top water off and, took a bit of handling you know, water, just a pint a day at times, but even when you were getting a gallon, it wasn't a lot of water, a gallon of water, it takes a lot handling because we were wanting three cups of tea a day and then a lot of us, I used to try and shave everyday

31:30 There were quite a few of us who used to try and shave everyday, you see, being a unit like that you were only as disciplined in those areas as your officers wanted, so we were out in the desert solid without coming off for that seventeen months, and we only had two parades in seventeen months. One to get us organised that Monty was coming to see us and the second time was about getting into

32:00 Tripoli for the big victory parade you know for the 8th Army victory parade.

Well I guess I had better ask you what Anzac Day means to you now?

32:30 Well to me it's a very important day. I think nationally there are a lot of facts and figures that aren't generally known about Gallipoli itself and whilst people realise there are a lot of Australian people think that it was only brought about by the fact that

33:00 Australians and New Zealanders landed on Gallipoli on Anzac Day. But it's a little bit different and I'm not belittling our blokes at all, because my father and some uncles were there and you know I have always been a little one for heroics as far as that goes, and proud of the fact that they were there and I think that it should be, Anzac Day should be an Australian affair.

33:30 But the French lost ten thousand people and Britain lost a lot more than all of us put together, we lost eight thousand Australia and the Kiwis lost two thousand. But it wasn't just the fact that we lost those blokes I feel it was the way that we did it, the sort of just the bravery that was shown by our troops in doing it and

34:00 it was the same right along the whole line, all those nationals did the same. But we were men, our blokes and the Kiwis were given tasks that were extremely difficult and they carried them out to the best of their ability but always with some sort of laconic attitude and it was an attitude to me that was endearing. Now that might be

34:30 sort of a strange statement but I mean to realise just what they did do it my way of thinking is just amazing and I doubt that they would have any forces of any nation in the world re-enact that now I don't think that would happen, there would be just a refusal to do it, because it is the way that we live and our attitudes are different, but we are an isolated nation and travelling around the world you realise

35:00 just how isolated we are, and for our blokes to be able to perform that way was good and we become a better nation because of it. And now we recognise this through our young people I think it all goes well

as our continuity as a nation, otherwise if we haven't got these strengths to keep us tied together the nation will fall apart, it will just become a different nation altogether

35:30 People will just go their own way. But now that we are becoming a national group this is all we need in the country. But we have to somewhere, we've been through a period where we just didn't seem to go anywhere and our young people of course, they're the nations of today and tomorrow and they are showing that interest in carrying on the whole thoughts that we need to be carried along and the memories, and I think

36:00 Anzac Day has become our national day and should stay there.

Do you march on Anzac Day?

No. I marched once in Adelaide, but I never march on Anzac Day and I don't have any real reason except that I've got nobody who I can march with, I am a bit lonely. I can go in and be welcome in any air force unit because I was an air man and I could go in and march under the air force banner. The association has miscellaneous

36:30 squadrons, and they've got odds and sods and these sorts of groups where people flew or airmen worked for other groups but you know there were only two of us from Western Australia and Stan Holt has been dead for a long time but he wasn't that way inclined, anyway he wasn't interested, and so I have never gone in and marched. When I

37:00 did march in Adelaide it was with the, we went over for a reunion with the group of men from Adelaide and the group of us from Perth that had all done our flying training together in 1944, '45, but I went into, I was in Anzac Day marches when I was a young bloke, used to go and march with my Dad, my brother on one side and me on the other, and you know, we were ready to take em on anywhere

What do you think of young people marching today?

Good. I think so. There is a bit of a thought that, "No it's for the oldies,

37:30 they should march," but I think if you asked most of the old people you couldn't have a better day than to have your kids and grandkids there with you on Anzac Day I think it would be really great and it should be encouraged. I think quite a few of my kids would March we'd take up two or three lines on our own, that would be nice and I would only have to say that I am only going to march if I get some support,

38:00 I think I would most likely have my 21 great grandchildren and grandchildren with me the lot of them they'd all like to do it, so

What are your hopes for the Anzac tradition in the future?

Well there were thoughts some years ago I can remember an article in the listening post the local RSL paper where there was some worry on the part of the committee

38:30 about the Anzac Day parade fading but in recent years, and lot of thanks are due to the efforts they've made through sub-branches and sub-branch leaders generally throughout the state and I feel that our young people are coming to the fore in greater numbers, and this means that they're being encouraged by parents who were most likely that busy raising those same kids that Anzac Day went by,

39:00 so the period that we've undergone without Anzac Day being popular, I think that everybody has now reached the point where Anzac Day has become important to all of us, and it'll keep going and I'll be proud and pleased to see it keep going.

What advice do you have for future generations of Australians should we encounter another war?

Gosh I really don't know it's

39:30 I wouldn't say I'm a pacifist, but I've lived in the wrong time to really feel that I have a right to say too much now, because whilst I would most likely say more to my own family, it's very difficult to know what to say to guide people nowadays, terrorism has brought a new slant on things, and

40:00 whilst I'm critical of some things that we are doing now, I still think that we might have to fight in future years, that there will be conflicts brought about by cultural differences, and it' going to be difficult to maintain a pure, multicultural nation. I think that maybe Asian people are quite content to stay Asian people, and

40:30 Muslims I think are content to stay Muslims, and we've gradually slid away from the fact thinking that we are now all English, people don't realise what European, south eastern European countries, Italy, the Greeks all the Macedonians, Serbs, all those people they've brought a culture here that we should really integrate, and I think that's where our strength is, so now, that's the wise words from a sage from

41:00 the local toilet.

Thanks very much, Bill, it's been a pleasure.

Thanks for having me.

INTERVIEW ENDS