

Australians at War Film Archive

John Turner (JC) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 18th August 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/698>

Tape 1

00:39 **OK John. If we could just start with where you were born.**

Well I was born at Wyong in New South Wales but the family, we were.... Dad had a sheep property up out from Cunnamulla

01:00 in Queensland and as I was no. 10 and 2 of the children that died in infantry, the first child was bornmother and father were married in 1897

01:30 and Dad had been up in the Territory and he'd been jackerooing and he got to know Sidney Kidman and Kidman took to him and thought he was a pretty good sort of a stockman, a bushman and Dad stayed up there and he took a lease on a

02:00 property called Caraweena and it was, at that stage it was round about 600 square miles, that was the initial size of Caraweena and there was the Caraweena homestead and as the years rolled on, their first child was

02:30 was born, little Ellen and mother had had a really rough time and she, the child only lived for 4 days. They buried it on, on the station and Dad said it was a terrible thing for him to do, to make such a little coffin

03:00 and their first born. The second born was my sister Eva and she was born in 19.. no, 1899 and she, she survived. She lived til 93 and the next

03:30 child was Rim, Rimington and he was born about 18 months after Eva and he was quite well and ... Mother used to have a lady that would come up and there was no doctors,

04:00 more like all midwives and the midwives used to come up and stay and help until the children were well on the way and the nearest neighbour was 60 miles away at the next station but they used to

04:30 communicate mostly by runners, native boys and ride on a horse or whatever or sometimes on camels and there was a message came over from their neighbour that there children were very ill and mother was pretty...

05:00 she wasn't a nurse but she was pretty handy with anyone with sickness or anything like that she'd, she had medicines that she used to have and they asked would she come over and treat the children. So, she took Rim with her. She left Eva back at the station and Mum's sister

05:30 oh, aunty she was for us, she was up and she was looking after Eva. So, that was alright. Everything went alright and the children that she went over to treat were, they were recovering but Rim got the, the virus or whatever

06:00 it was and he went into a convulsion and died. Dad got a message and he, of course he went over and he bought the little body back and had to make a coffin and bury it. They both had

06:30 hard, hard lives. The property, no one other than Eva and then the next one was Jean and then Glory and then my brother called, he was called Charles after

07:00 his uncle and his uncle was known as Chum so, my brother got Chum as a, as a nickname. But then there was Marion, she was the next one and then there was

07:30 Fred. He was born and he had a problem, he didn't have a roof in his mouth and he couldn't talk properly and there was a member of a family, Dr Sheeney, and he treated him and they operated on him and he wasn't too bad I believe and then,

08:00 he got infantile paralysis. Mother, they said she worked on him every day and he got along all right but

he had a bit of a limp and he got a sickness, by this time they were out at Cunnamulla, they had...

- 08:30 after Rim had died, Mother didn't want to be there anymore and it was a, oh a terrible place really. There is a photo of me there standing at the ruins of their Caraweena homestead. We went there in...
- 09:00 since we've been up in Queensland and found the place, found the graves, and there was - we found another grave and it was an adult and mother and father were friends with people that were at Nappamerri Station which is quite famous.
- 09:30 It was on the, the Cooper Basin - was on a beautiful place where there was a big hole of water and they never had any problem but, they went over to show off Eva to this family that was there and on the way back, in the horse and buggy, that
- 10:00 was around about, that was around about 70 miles or more. They were 60 miles from Innamincka and they found an old fellow on the side of the road and he was dehydrated and so, Dad used to always carry a
- 10:30 flask of whisky and, and in his story he used to say, "I wasted ½ a whisky with him, ½ a bottle of whisky with him." He said, "He came around a bit, we put him in the back of the buggy and headed for home." But by the time they got home he had died. Now he had no identification
- 11:00 on him and he was, had a bit of a swag but, Dad said, "Well what am I going to do now?" And he thought oh well, it was night time and they got a couple of fresh horses and rode into, into Innamincka to see the police. So he
- 11:30 got there in the early hours of the morning or it was sun up, he went and saw the Sergeant and he said, he told him what happened and he said, "He's got no identification, what'll I do with him?" And the ol' sergeant looked around and he said, "Hey Fred," he said, "it's pretty bloody hot I think you could go back and bury him." And that's what he did and that was the other grave that we found.
- 12:00 We found the 2 little one's graves and there was Rim's grave. Dad had built a fence around it and he'd stacked stones up around it. Now that would have been in about 19... 1902
- 12:30 and there was 3 of the posts there and the wire was still in the bit of a fence.

John, can I just pause

103 they had sold, they had, he sold his cattle and at that stage, the property was 2000 square miles. They'd got more and mother said she didn't

- 13:00 want to stay there, so they - they came down to South Australia to Corn where Dad bought a pub. The worse thing he ever did. Someone would come in and want a beer and he'd give em a beer and then he'd give em some money out of the till and ... you know, he was too good hearted. That
- 13:30 lasted, it was at Corn and, we were there just a few years ago and I said ooh, my father was licensee here at one time. They looked it up in the book and she said, "Oh yeah, Frederick Albert Turner, yeah." So you know I thought it was a bit of a record. But all the information that I got, I wrote to the
- 14:00 department in South Australia and they sent me a heap of maps of where the properties where and all the rest of it. Dad went back up the Territory and he then, he'd sold all his stock to Kidman and he went back up to the Territory and Kidman said would you go across
- 14:30 to Queensland for us and, there was problems with a couple of properties over there and that's how he came, we came to Queensland and it was out from Cunnamulla. Murumurra was the name of the property and he straightened out the properties, the problems and Kidman was, decided to cut
- 15:00 up these properties and Dad said that he'd bought the property. Mother said Kidman gave it to him. And there was a, I don't know how many, it was around about 800 acres or something like that and ..

John, what was life like, what was life like growing up in Cunnamulla in those first...

Mm?

What was life like growing up in Cunnamulla in those first...

- 15:30 **few years?**

Ah, well, um

To you? I mean...

I was born at Wyong. Mother went down to Wyong because the, the housewife, the wife

midwife...

ah, that had been looking after all the births, all the other children, she - she wanted me because there was only one

16:00 boy and five women, five women, five sisters so Freddy had died and I said to Eva not long before she died, I said I think I was a mistake and Mum was 41 when I was born and she said "oh no, you were, you were to replace Freddy." I said well it would have been stiff luck

16:30 if I had been a girl, wouldn't it? But anyway, the property at Cunnamulla was between Cunnamulla and St George. They called it Moralana which was where Dad was born in 1868 and Moralana,

17:00 and it had an artesian bore on it. The water was hot, you know it'd come out into a dam and then there was bore drains out from that and a sister next to me, she's still alive she's up in Toowoomba, she is 3 years older than me but we were kids together and oh well we used to have

17:30 fun up around the dam and the bore and all this sort of thing. We used to get, they used to get a visit from a minister every 3 or 4 months or something like that and the minister was coming out and I think it must have been, it wasn't confirmation it was, we were going to be christened, us the two kids and I said

18:00 to Chum, I said, "What's this Christening business?" And he said, "Oh gee, it's pretty serious." And I said "oh, what do you mean?" And he said "well, you know what we do when we catch the lambs?" He said, "Well that's it." So we shot through and we

18:30 had a hiding place up near the dam and we stayed there and it was getting late. We hadn't had any dinner or lunch or anything like that so when darkness started to come we thought, oh we'd better go in we'd better go home. There was foxes and

19:00 and dingoes making weird noises so we went home and we needn't have worried about the Parson because Dad had put a tributary off a bore drain into the house and he'd used slabs of timber for a base and

19:30 slabs up the side and one a bit lower there and another one a bit higher and that, the water, the hot water ran through and that was the bathroom. The ol' parson got in there and he stayed there all, nearly all day. He was a good ol' bloke. He treated me well later but anyway that was the things and ... oh, there was ducks and

20:00 sister and I used to have to gather a couple or 3 or 4 ducks and put them in the shed at night so the foxes wouldn't get 'em and one night there was a, we were doing this and there was a storm and I was frightened of thunder, oh god and it was thundering and I picked up a stone, one of the old drakes ran away and I thought

20:30 you silly ol' so and so. I was only about 4 or 5 I think and I through a stone and I hit him and knocked him over so we went back and we said ooh, he's dead. Oh well, we chucked him behind the bush and next day they said "where's the, where's the drake? What happened to the drake? He wasn't there and the foxes didn't get him because

21:00 they would've damaged the others" and, we ended up telling them the truth and I got a hell of a hiding because it wasn't that killing the drake, it was trying to tell a lie. So, the time had come that there was 7 women and Mum, that's 8

21:30 and there was Chum and I and Dad thought well, the girls went to Boarding School, Chum went to Boarding School at Southport and so Dad thought we would have to get somewhere where it was more civilised and

22:00 he bought vacant land at, near Toogoolawah in Queensland and it was around about 300 acres and we had crown land that we could use and that's where I put in, where I started school. I started school at Mount Beppo and that was about 6 or 8 miles from where we were. We used to have to ride a little

22:30 pony across there and I started off going with my eldest, with my sister next to me and double-bank. She'd, we always had arguments and we still have 'em. And, then they, they put a one teacher school about

23:00 oh, a mile and a ½ from where we lived and called it Coombardie's school. One teacher. The teacher used to board with us and that was where I stayed until Form 6 and then, they said well all the other family have been educated, what about

23:30 John? And Charlie spoke up and he said, "Well I had Southport, send him to Southport." So mother and ol' Jim Hall again, scouted around and got second hand clothes in and this was in, it would have been about '32 or '33 I think it would have been and ok, I was, I thought this was beaut. I was

24:00 going to Southport. So I went to Southport. At the end of the first form, ah the first term there was a message came from home that they, things were very low. We had, it was a dairy farm and we used to grow lucerne and make lucerne hay and chaff and

24:30 sell it and we were milking around about 60 head of cows, all whyan. So Dad said, and my brother Chum was gone droving and he and mother and I think Eva was still there - they were running the farm, so he said, "You've

- 25:00 "got to come home and work on the farm for us." So that was that. That... I was really looking forward to a good education at Southport Boys School, a churchy school it was and anyway... I thought "oh well." Eventually
- 25:30 they sold the farm and they bought a block of flats in Redcliffe. Oh, they sold the farm to my brother-in-law. He was married to my sister, Glory and he was a World War I
- 26:00 soldier. He enlisted - put his age up to enlist and he was in the 1st Division and he was in Gallipoli. Ah, he got an MC, or he got a commission on the field which was an honour and he got an MC [Military Cross] and he was mentioned in
- 26:30 despatches but he was my idol. I thought he was tremendous. He was a, he was a beaut bloke. His brother - I wouldn't give anything for him. I didn't even go to his funeral. But their name was, they were the Somersets and the Somerset band? That was named after ol' Henry.
- 27:00 He, he was, he was the, Caboomba was their home. It's still, run by the government now and, but Rollo and my brother Chum - they had the farm between them, they, and
- 27:30 between them they bought the flats for Mum and Dad. So what's nipper got to do? "Oh well, you can stop there, you'll be right. We'll pay you." I, I went... I didn't want em.... After coming back from ah, school at Southport, I did one trip on, with him, on
- 28:00 a droving trip and all I was doing - I was the cook, I was washer-up and I'd do their washing and... "oh, this is no good!" so when we got back they said I could stay on the farm and they'd pay me 10 bob a week or something like that. Ah, I don't, I don't remember getting the 10 bob a week but
- 28:30 I had, oh they gave me a pony and it was brumbies from where they, at Mount, Mount Stanley station, and they gave me one of these that they broke in and they said, "Oh, he's alright," and he was a beautiful lit'l pony and I thought that oh well and I used to show him
- 29:00 at the Tregora Wariness shows and things and.... There was an old dear that used to own the buck jump show and the side shows and anyone could go and, if you stayed on a horse for 2 minutes or something like that, you got a pound or something. Anyway, they bought one on for the
- 29:30 teenagers, a donkey and Jazz says, "Go on nipper, you go and you can ride that donkey, God struth, go on" and you had a surcingle on him and you can hang onto that and if you stayed on for a minute, you got 10 bob and that was the first 10 bob I ever earned I think. Anyway, that was that and,
- 30:00 I went back to the farm but... I used to have to round the cows up in the morning, for milking, and I'd take Nimrod to round them up and it was pretty hot and I let him go in amongst the cows when we got 'em in the yard and there was, one cow was on heat and the old bull was
- 30:30 there and he was a Jersey and he had bloomin' big horns, they should've dehorned him a long time ago, and Nimrod must have gone up to him and went to turn him away and he, he attacked him and he killed him, he ripped his innards out so I said well, I'm not staying 'ere anymore. I'm going to Redcliffe to Mum and Dad.
- 31:00 I went to Redcliffe and I was trying to get a job. I wanted to be a mechanic and couldn't get a job and by the time I got to Brisbane to answer any adds, there'd be a queue about a mile long. Everybody was unemployed. Anyway, I met up with a lad that had a sailing boat and I used to go sailing with Ray Smith
- 31:30 and he used to, he was an apprentice to his uncle and he used to have to work on Saturday mornings. I'd go and give him a hand so, we'd get away on the Saturday afternoon and go sailing. His uncle came up to me one day and he said, "Hey John. Would you like to be an apprentice?" And I said, "Yes, when do I start?" He said "Well,
- 32:00 you can start on Monday if you like." And I said, "yeah, OK," and he said 3 months on probation and I was getting 15 bob a week and, he said "if you are satisfied with me in 3 months and I'm satisfied with you," he said "we'll sign up the papers
- 32:30 and we'll backdate 'em to the 3 months," which he did, and I served my apprenticeship and finished in September 1939. Prior to that I'd joined the militia. There was a section at Redcliffe. I think there was about 20 or 30 of us and
- 33:00 I said to Alec, I said, "Alec, I'm gonna join the second AIF [Australian Imperial Force] when they start recruiting." He said, "Yeah, alright," he said, "no problems," he said, "but ya sure you want to go?" And I said, "yeah." Now Ray had finished his apprenticeship, he was about a year ahead of
- 33:30 me and I said what about it Ray and he said "no" he said "I want to stick around for a while and I'll join the navy," and... Anyway, there was another fellow in the militia and he was a primary school teacher at Humpy Ponds school, Roy Devantia. Anyway, Roy and I were pretty good
- 34:00 mates and when war was declared, we went over to Moreton Island to set up a camp for, for the

artillery fellows and we were there for about 3 weeks. We came back from that and I went straight down to, we went straight down to Water Street in Brisbane and put our names down and

- 34:30 they said, "Oh we'll give you a couple of weeks to tidy up anything," and so, we got pretty low numbers. My number was 285. QX285. Roy was 415. The Education
- 35:00 Department caught up with him and pulled him out and he said "well, I'll resign, that's all." And they said, "Oh no, no, no. We'll give you 2 months to think it over and then you come back and see us." So, we were parted. We had both volunteered for a machine gun battalion which they were calling for volunteers. This was at
- 35:30 Redbank in Queensland. Three weeks intensive training carrying these guns and we'd walk, or march to Ipswich and turn around and march back and all this and we were really fit. We thought we were anyway and, they put us on parade one morning and they said, "Righto,"
- 36:00 and counted some of us off and, "You take four steps that way," and counted some off the other end, "you take four steps that way." "OK, you're in transport." The ones in the middle were in the 2/9th Battalion. The ones on the other end were engineers. It didn't matter what professions you had. We had anything from bankers, timber cutters,
- 36:30 taxi drivers, anyone like that. Oh! It was a good mixture. As I'd had a bit of army experience, they made me a corporal. I thought "Oh, I don't know about it." But I took the couple of stripes and got a little bit more pay. Then there were
- 37:00 65 of us. We were to go down to Melbourne or to, yeah Mel... or,
- Puckapunyal?**
- Puckapunyal was the camp and we were to go down there and join the 6th of Army Service Corps and Petrol Company so, it
- 37:30 was a mixture. There was Western Australians. There was South Aussies, bulk of 'em Victorians because we were attached to the 17th Brigade which was the 2/5th, 2/6th and 2/7th Battalions, the 2/8th Engineers and a Petrol Company,
- 38:00 Ammunition Company and Supply Company from ASC [Army Service Corps]. We were Petrol Company and we went down early December and we were getting the camp, the camp had just been built and we were working on that and
- 38:30 then Christmas came and Christmas leave. They were giving week leave. So the Victorians went out first, of course, and they had their week's leave. The South Australians, they went next and the West Aussies and the Queenslanders. Well, you had to go everywhere by train. No airplanes,
- 39:00 and some of them, there was 3 of our fellows, were from Blackall and that's way out in Queensland. Others were from Cairns and Rockhampton and they'd get there and they'd have one day at home so, we pulled into South Brisbane station and I said to the fellows, I said "look fellas, lets
- 39:30 all take one, another week. We'll take another week, AWOL [absent without leave]. They won't be able to put us all in the boob." So, that we did and I said "meet us back here a week later and we'll get transport back to Bri, ah to Pucka." We got back to Pucka and...

Tape 2

- 00:30 **So John, you were telling us about taking an extra week?**

Mmm.

Before you went back to Puckapunyal, so what happened when you and the guys returned?

Well, I had a little bit of trouble at Brisbane, they have RTOs [Rail Transport Officer] - they are the fellows that look after transporting troops, see they... and anyway I said "well,

- 01:00 we've all got to go back together," but I said, "we've taken time," because these fellows couldn't get home, they had one day at home and that wouldn't be very good because it was Christmas time so, he said "oh, we'll fix it, we'll fix it even if we've got to put another carriage on." Anyway we got back

- 01:30 to Seymour and we had to change trains at, where were we? In Melbourne?

In Queensland.

In Queensland. We changed trains at Sydney and then back to Albury and we weren't far from Seymour then. And we changed

- 02:00 trains again there because of a different gauge and oh, when we got to Seymour I contacted the camp and they sent trucks in to pick us up and they said, "Well, what's the meaning of this?" And I explained it to the colonel, I didn't like him, he...
- 02:30 he was a terrible bloke really but anyway, he said, "Well alright," he said, "I suppose you did the right thing but we can't have that in the services," and he said, "I'm afraid that you're now back to the ranks private colonel." "Ok, thank you sir."
- 03:00 Anyway that was that but I wasn't a bad soldier, I never shirked anything but I thought, I always thought that it should be fair but anyway, I... Phyl never knew what to put on my letters whether it was corporal, lance corporal or sergeant or....
- 03:30 But anyway, I wasn't very interested in information. I thought there was enough chiefs but there wasn't many Indians and I stuck around for well the war really, but anyway we had extensive training at Puckapunyal
- 04:00 And...
- Excuse me John, can you tell us exactly where Puckapunyal is?**
- It's about 6 miles from Seymour. D'you know where Seymour is? D'you know where Albury is? Well, Seymour's, Seymour's 60 miles from Brisbane, ah from Melbourne,
- Melbourne.**
- and about the same from Albury
- 04:30 it's a, it was the big army centre during the First World War and they, it's a, it's a, Puckapunyal, well we went there and....
- Did they use, excuse me, did they use the same training grounds as in World War I?**
- We, yeah, but we had more,
- 05:00 more because we had more tanks - oh not tanks, we had Bren gun carriers, they... and of course trucks and things like that, we had, it was pretty good training and we used to go out on bivouacs and be 1 battalion of the enemy and one would be our side.
- 05:30 and they still have that. They give you an armband and I didn't have any more problems and the next thing was in January there was some selected. They just took them 1,
- 06:00 2, 3, 4 or whatever for an advanced party and they had to go up to Sydney and they embarked in Sydney and they went over as advanced party for the 6th Division.
- Now that would have been in 1940?**
- That was in 1940.
- Well, just before we get back into the, going into the 40's, can I take you back a little bit and ask you where**
- 06:30 **were you when war broke it?**
- Redcliffe.
- You were in Redcliffe at your parents?**
- Mm. I had a room. My room, I built it downstairs and it was, the flats were all up a step anyway but yeah I was there and,
- 07:00 when I went to join the AIF, second AIF, I asked Alec Smith who was my boss. He was a tremendous bloke and he, I don't know, he took a liking to me I suppose and the last job that I did, worked on, was
- 07:30 he built a picture theatre at Margate and that's at Redcliffe, or a suburb of Redcliffe and... I'm not sure, what floor of the picture theatre. You know, your boards are that side and you go right across and you've got to put 2 nails in every one, oh god, I thought different to
- 08:00 building a house. Anyway it finished and ...
- So excuse me John but you were pretty good with yours hand then?**
- Oh yeah, I didn't mind the, I enjoyed carpentry and I did most of the picture frames for bit fills and that little table back there, I built that but
- 08:30 **Sorry John but your apprenticeship when you finished that in 1939, what was that called - what were you then?**
- I was then a qualified carpenter or joiner they used to call us in those days because we used to have to

make the windows as well, you know in a joinery. So we had - apprentices in those days did everything, you know you'd cut a roof and

09:00 put the frame, the roof frame up but now they just give a plan into someone that does roofs and they just make all the frames up and they bring the frames and stick 'em in. We used to have to make steps and that, I don't think there's many people now that can make steps, but anyway I was a qualified carpenter.

09:30 Qualified carpenter.

So what made you join the AIF rather than the navy?

Because I'd been in the army, the militia, we were in the 9th 48th Battalion but we were only a section which was about 30 and would be perhaps at Sandgate. There might have been a brigade there might have been 2 sections

10:00 and the whole lot was within an area out at Sandgate and out at Brisbane, Redcliffe and Scarborough. I think there was a group at Scarborough but that's and ... I thought the army was alright

10:30 I joined it first as we were gonna get, we'll get pay and then we used to have a camp a fortnight a year and you would get the army pay and Alec used to pay me as well so you know, I was rich. I was getting about 3 or 4 quid a week

Were you

11:00 **saving?**

Oh yeah, I was buying a push-bike.

Do you think Glory's husband Henry had something to do with you joining the Militia?

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, Glory's Rollo he was such a... we used to go over to Caboomba on foot to church on Sunday, the Caboomba church

11:30 and we'd go to church and then after church we'd go down to Caboomba, that's where Glory and Rollo lived in the old homestead and they'd say "come on, we're not having dinner here today. We're going down to the river to have a picnic" and, we got the cricket bat and the cricket set and we'd have a game of cricket and we'd have swimming sports and oh, it was,

12:00 he was really good. He was tremendous and... I can remember during the depression, you'd have to, Mum would have to buy groceries about 30 shillings worth of groceries and that'd have

12:30 to last us oh, you know, 3 weeks or a month so, because we had a few sheep and we'd kill the sheep now and again and there were good neighbours, they'd shear it and then they'd kill a calf or poddy or something and we'd share it. But that's how we used to have meat always and we used to

13:00 grow a few vegies. The farms was on the banks of the Brisbane River so we had water but...

So John, why, why did you call Henry "Rollo"?

No, he was... His mother and father couldn't work out on what to call him so, what did they call him? Charlie,

13:30 Henry, Rollo, William Somerset and they were, oh they didn't call him Plantaginan but all the others were Plantaginan. His brother was Herod Plantaginan, oh he was a shocker anyway...

Did he talk to you about

14:00 **what happened in Gallipoli?**

Yeah, yeah, he joined up from Esq and there was a family of Anderson's at Esq and Garth Anderson was about the same age as me but Rollo and there was Jim, there were 3 Anderson

14:30 bys and Rollo joined up together. They all joined up at Esq and they were in the Light Horse and yeah, they went, their first action was Gallipoli and I can remember one story that he told us. He and Rod Anderson were sitting in the trenches

15:00 and it was raining like mad and there was mud everywhere and Rollo said, "Hey Rod, I wonder what the Turks are doin'?" And he said, "Hey, what's say we go over and have a look?" So, the two of 'em went over and of course the Turks were doing the same. They were sitting in the trenches and

15:30 its raining like the very devil and they said, "Hey, why don't we take a few of them prisoners?" And they had their rifles, I suppose, with them and anyway they ended up with 50, 60 or 70 prisoners. Brought them back

16:00 and the commanding officer put him on charge because he, he did something without command from headquarters. I think Rollo was a lieutenant at that stage. He'd been promoted, he got a lieutenant in

the field. If you get a lieutenant in the field, it's an honour and

- 16:30 he later got the MC but anyway... They had some wonderful things, after Gallipoli, he was wounded 3 times, stayed on duty for 2 of them and 1 was serious and they took him back to England then they,
- 17:00 they went to the Western Front and they were on the Western Front. He was, he used to tell us stories about the Gerries and but, yeah I think that influenced me. My brother joined the air force.
- 17:30 He used to fly and he was 11 years older than me so he put his age back because you had to be below 30, be 28 or 27 or something like that so he put his age back and he joined as a, just an ordinary AC3 [Air Craftsman] or something they used to call em, didn't they?
- 18:00 Aircraft something or so, he joined in 1940 and it was March. I skipped there about, to join up. I was only 20 and you had to be 21 or you had to get your parent's consent
- 18:30 so I went to Mum and I said, "Mum, would you sign this for me?" She said "What's up?." I said "I'm joining the army, the 2nd AIF." She said, "No you're not." I said, "Oh, come on," and no, so oh well, the next one I had a go at Dad. Old Dad used to like a
- 19:00 rum and I said to him one day, one afternoon, I said, "Hey Dad, what's say we go down the pub and have a rum?" "Ooh gee that's good son. Yeah, OK. OK. I'll have a couple of rums," and I said, "Hey what about signing so that I can join the second AIF?" He said, "Ooh,
- 19:30 what'll Mum say?" I said, "Ooh, she'll be a bit upset for a while but she'll settle down." So I said, "If you don't sign, I'll put my age up," and they didn't, they weren't taking our birth certificates or anything but "Muggins," they said, "how old are you?" And I said "20."
- 20:00 And of course I didn't think about signing up and they said, "Well, here, get your parents to sign these," see, so Dad signed 'em I took 'em, took it back.

Did he sign them in the pub?

Yeah, I think he did. I think he had to get a pen. Oh, he was a good ol' fellow. He was as tough as nails.

Oh John, we'll have to stop

- 20:30 **for a second. Continue what happened when your mum found out your dad signed the papers?**

I don't know. I wasn't there. But, yeah she did some funny things. I had a pretty good, we used to have to supply our own tools and I

- 21:00 had a pretty good kit of tools and I had some nice clothes and of course, they were all, we were all in uniform. Gordon was another brother-in-law, he was in the First World War and he was Eva's husband
- 21:30 and he was about my size so he copped nearly all my clothes and Herod Somerset was a hateful fellow but anyway he was married to Jean, one other sister.

- 22:00 **So let me get this right? Rollo's brother was also married to another of your sisters.**

Yeah. So there are Somerset's everywhere now. I wiped the lot of them but anyway, he came and he said could I borrow some of John's tools and

- 22:30 oh, yeah, yeah because there was no-one to use them, Dad wasn't a very, he wasn't a, he was a, he wasn't a carpenter that's for sure but if he had someone to tell him what to do he'd be alright but anyway that's what happened to the tools so and then again, when I was in Greece

- 23:00 I was missing for about 6 weeks I suppose and when I got back to, did get back to the unit they said "oh, you've been reported missing" and, but Mum would have got the message because she was my next of kin. She never told

- 23:30 anyone, she never told anyone. I don't know why. Whether she knew that I'd make it but she never, I don't think she ever told Dad. So, anyway, the bad penny turned up but she was a very tough woman. She was only a small

- 24:00 woman.

She couldn't stand another loss probably?

No, well I don't think so and she used to write to me regular and people used to write regular but...

John was there any rivalry at the base of training, with the South Australians, the Tassies,

No,

The

no,

24:30 **Victorians?**

no. One of my best mates was a South Australian and he came from Kangaroo Island and we had fellows from Western Australia. This would all go on tape wouldn't it, what I'm saying now. Yeah, I better not say it.

25:00 **Tell us. These are all your stories that...**

We were coming back from overseas and we, we were just out from Fremantle and of course the Western Australians were getting leave when they got there. They would have got shore leave and they'd come back and join the unit later. Eddie

25:30 Piper, he was a little bloke, he was a boxer, a light weight boxer, he was the unit's light weight boxer and we used to have, they used to have boxing contacts between units and battalions and Eddie comes in and he, we were having lunch and he said, "Ya heard the latest

26:00 news?" "No." "Oh, its only a rumour." He said, "Well, it's a rumour but I think it will eventuate," he said, "there's going to be a big naval action." "Where?" "In Subiaco when I get home tonight." But that's the sort of thing.

26:30 We had some funny things but it will come up later?

So let me ask you John, now you were just about ready in January 1940 to leave to go overseas?

Yeah, we left on the 15 April, 1940. We were, our Unit was very fortunate that we

27:00 landed on the P&O [Peninsula and Oriental Steam Navigation Company] liner, [SS] Strathaird, and she'd never been a troop ship and it was all cabins and bunks and bars and souvenir shops and you know, all this sort of thing anyway, we were on the Strathaird.

27:30 Some of them were on old ships with coal. They were pumping coal into them making, the [MV] Ettrick was one. We had a pretty big convoy. The [HMS] Ramilles was the battleship. She was the main one in and there was about 3 or 4 destroyers in the

28:00 convoy and we sailed out of Melbourne on the 15th.

Can I ask you, did your family come to say goodbye?

No-one was allowed on the wharves at all. No families.

That's unusual?

Yeah, it was. Phyl and her family, the night before, they

28:30 went to where they could see the trains coming in. Thought they might see us all on the train. But no, they couldn't.

I wonder why they had that rule?

I don't know. I think they were panicking with, that the spies, they were thinking you know, you never had a talk

29:00 in the pubs and things like that if you were talking in the pubs they'd, they'd reckon that... the military police - I never like 'em. But they'd be hanging around and they'd say, "Hey, right O, shhh! The enemy's listening" see, but anyway that's what happened.

Now, you said Chum was 11

29:30 **years older than you, how much older was Rollo?**

Oh Rollo was, he was a lot older. He was born in 1885. He was an old...

So do you think it was his camaraderie stories that made you go into the army?

30:00 No, I, I just, I didn't mind the army and Roy Devantia was like me, he wanted to be in the army anyway, he didn't give a damn what happened and I've got stories about Roy and he was a,

30:30 he was a gentleman. He was only a little bloke, he wasn't as big as me.

This is the school teacher?

Yeah, he was a school teacher at Humpy Ponds. That was his first, first school.

And was he in the 2nd AIF with you?

Mmm! He went in on the same day but there was a, he was 415 - I was 285 but that, there were queues

and

31:00 I was in one and he was in another or something like that and

Where you alongside Ray during the war?

Mmm?

Were you working alongside Ray during the war?

No, no because in early 1940 we were 6th Division and 6th Division, there was a division

31:30 in those days in '39 where there was 4 battalions to a brigade and 4 brigades to a division so, and we always as they did in the First World War, they had 2 ranks and then

32:00 you numbered off and you formed fours. Two step back that way and two, some, the front, the front rank stepped forward and that way and then you were in fours. Everything was in fours. So, in early 1940 the powers that be brought 'em down to three. We formed,

32:30 when we formed rank, we formed three ranks 1, 2, 3. There was 3 battalions to a brigade, 3 brigades to a division so we lost one brigade and the brigade that we lost was the 18th Brigade and that was the one that Roy was in, it was the 2/9th Battalion and they went there

33:00 and there was, we had the 16th Brigade which was New South Wales. The 17th Brigade was mostly Victorians and South Australians. 17th Brigade was a bit of a mixture but, and then there was the 19th Brigade. Why the hell they didn't leave 18

33:30 there and let 19th go and the 19th Brigade was the 2/11th, 2/4th and the 2/8th Battalions so they came off the battalions that were dropped off and, so that was our 6th Divvie of the 19th, 17th and 16th and

34:00 that was, it was sad that I didn't see Roy and he was a tremendous soldier.

Was he the same age as you John?

Yeah. Mmm. He was the same age. His family lived up at Gympie somewhere I think and he used to board during the week with us and I said well I had my room downstairs

34:30 at the flats and we put, put a bed in there for Roy.

What kind of mischief did you get up to?

Oh, not much. Oh, we used to do a lot of sailing. We used to sail across to Moreton Island and then we'd sail down to the mouth of the Brisbane River and then get the, and sail across

35:00 to Moreton Island. We used to reckon we were going to go pig shooting. There's wild pigs over there.

Did you get any?

No. We made camp and went looking for the pigs and when we came back the pigs had visited our camp and that was the sort of thing Mum and Dad used to worry about us sailing across from Moreton Bay to Redcliffe but oh we did all right.

Whose boat was

35:30 **it?**

Well Ray had a boat and there was a fellow, Whiten, I can't think of his Christian name at the moment, he was a milkman he had a boat and I had a boat and well, we used to do things like that and then we used to...

36:00 there was oyster beds at Bribie out from Bribie Island and we used to go, sail around to the, near the point of Bribie and nip across and we'd be, perhaps one boat only might go out and we'd leave one fellow

36:30 on the boat with a light, a lamp, and we'd go out with bags and fill them up with, because there's a fairly high tide. There's, the tide there is pretty big and we'd get it at low tide and you're alright. The one that's on the, in the boat, when we'd whistle or yell out or something or

37:00 he'd put a light up, put a lamp up and we'd see where the boat was, and I think it was Smithy. We'd left him in there and the blighter went to sleep. The water was coming up and up and up but things like that well, that was the fun, that was, we had fun.

Do you think your mother was suspicious that you came home with a bag

37:30 **of Oysters?**

We used to share enough around. She'd say, "Where did you get the oysters?" Oh so and so works for the oyster factory or oyster beds. We used to do things like that but that was our fun in those days. This

bloke White, he

38:00 learnt to fly and he used to fly the Moths and he used to fly and we'd be out sailing and he'd be coming in like this and ooh...I went up with him a few times and he'd fly us underneath the electric wires and ooh...but anyway, I think he joined, I'm

38:30 petty sure that he joined the air force.

I was going to ask you, after you joined the militia and you knew that you were going to get a posting if you were concerned that you wouldn't see many women but I was thinking may be you were running away because you had eight women at home?

It was great, great to get away from 'em. Oh dear,

39:00 of course they said, "You're the baby, you're the baby, you're my baby." Oh God! And this sister of mine Nell, oh God. Oh, she was the, made herself a bit of a snob. She married an air force,

39:30 permanent air force early in the war. In March 1940 I think she married. He was a nice bloke. I was very sorry for him that he got to Squadron Leader he was in Singapore and he had, he got out but he had a pretty rough time. He died

40:00 oh, about 20 years ago now and she's got one son oh, but the son's alright but my sister...

Tape 3

00:30 **John, I wanted to ask you about I guess marching through the streets on Australia Day 1940 and I guess meeting up with Phyllis for the first time, could you tell us about that?**

Yeah well, the advance party went in in January and we thought well we won't be long

01:00 before we go and of course it was April but in 1940 OK we'll go back to January 1940 and the 17th Brigade did a march through Melbourne. We came down by train

01:30 to Spencer Street and around to the, oh what was it called? It used to be the parliament house before they built it and we, it's a big oh, in Russell Street, eh? No, anyway

02:00 it held the whole brigade and we were, we camped there. We slept there. Eh? And, there was entertainment, we were entertained of course and next morning, we got up and then they gave us a feed and

02:30 there's a march. We're having a march through Melbourne and we had to be spick and span and you know everything was just right. And I thought away we go. Now I think they said that that was the biggest crowd

03:00 on the streets that Melbourne had ever seen and all the businesses shut down for the period of the march and we started around about oh 10 o'clock I think or something like that and we finished around about 3 o'clock or thereabouts and the crowd was

03:30 so dense. We were marching in 3's. I was on the left hand side of our lot and there was the one in the middle and the one on the, and the crowd would come in close to see us and touch us and give us things and they were giving us handkerchiefs

04:00 with an address on them. Some of them were giving us cards, I think they were business cards and some were just writing on bits of paper and giving us... I'd put my hand out and I'd get one and put it in my pocket, put it in my jacket pocket and so

04:30 on and so on and so on and that was, it was Australia Day 1940 and we were around about Lonsdale Street wasn't it? and, I put my hand out and there was one and I didn't even look at it and I just popped it in, popped it in. Anyway, when we get

05:00 to Spencer Street they bung us on the train and they give us a pie or something like that and choooo, so that no-one would be shooting through although I think some of the Victorians did but anyway, we get back up to Paka and we were in our huts, the big tin huts, long huts and we got straw palliasses and blankets and things

05:30 and we were all talking about them and someone said "anyone got any spare addresses?" I said "Ooh yeah, ooh yeah addresses I got some and got 'em out and I'm starting to go through 'em and oh yeah, yeah, yeah you can have this one and I came to one and I thought oh, that's pretty clear writing and, Clarke, I said I can spell the name and I said

06:00 "oh well, I'll keep that one," and then I gave some out, gave them all out and they were all very grateful.

I said to one of the Victorians who was, he and I were the youngest in the Unit and he was, he was a year younger than me, Frank Barton. We

- 06:30 still communicate and, excuse me, I said - of course I didn't know Melbourne much at all because we had a couple of leaves and I had only had one leave I think up to that stage and anyway, I said to Frank, "Hey where's East Malvern?" He said, "Ooh yeah," he said, "that's out Caulfield."
- 07:00 He said, "What's the address?" I said, "Burke Road." "Oh yeah." He said, "That's, that's a pretty classy section John." "Oh is it?" I said, "Oh well, I've got an address here for 16 Burke Road. I'll write to her." There she is and I've got a few,
- 07:30 a couple of photos in one of the albums there of... Phyl wrote back and said they were coming up on the weekend. We had to meet them down at the gate because they couldn't come in unless they were with us so, all the secrets ...
- 08:00 there was you and Jess and Nancy and who was the other one? Gwen. Yeah. They were, one of our fellows in our unit had, he had Gwen's address I think and, Don someone from 2/6th
- 08:30 Battalion had Nancy's so we came up, they came up and Phyl gave me the number of their car and what it was and anyway they, we were to meet them around about 11 o'clock or something like that I think
- 09:00 it was and we were walking down and I can't think of his name now but, the one in our unit. Eh? Glen? Glen Madsen. Yeah, that's right. Glen said, "Ooh, that dark one she'll do me." I said, "Keep your eyes off the blonde." She had a blondy
- 09:30 plait over the top anyway, we go down and we went to introduce ourselves and we went through, took them through the camp and Phyl's brother said when they were coming up and he said, "Oh take 'em something to eat." And Dad said, "Oh alright, I'll go and kill a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK ." So they
- 10:00 bought this roast WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK up and they gave it to me and I said oh yeah, well we can't stop and eat it in here now and I took it back and left it on my bunk and we walked around didn't we? And we split off and
- 10:30 there was a big gum tree and it was pretty hot, so we went and sat down under there and got to know one and other. I got invited to come down the next leave. And I did, I went down the next leave. I think I saw Phyl about 4 or 5 times before I sailed and that was in April
- 11:00 and she wrote regular and the letters were, got through pretty well in the Middle East and we didn't get any, any letters in Greece because the
- 11:30 we were only there for 6 weeks. I think it was 6 weeks that the axe before the... we'd been pulled off or whatever... so I didn't get many letters, any letters there at all but I was late getting back to the Unit
- 12:00 and when I got back there was letters, about that high and I'd skip one now and again and then I'd go back. But that's what happened there. But our first actions was in Libya and it was the first victory for the allies.
- 12:30 We, they thought the Pommies were, were in action before us but they were very slow and they don't think for themselves. I hope you're not a Pom.

Tell me but tell me what you mean? What did you see?

Oh well,

- 13:00 the privates don't think for themselves, they let the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] think for them. We did a, soon after we got into, got to Palestine, there was some of us selected to go to the school and I was one of them and there
- 13:30 sarg' major was stalking up and down like a rooster and yelling out and we're all there with our rifles and everything and they said "stand easy" and we'd stand easy and put our, put your rifle out like that and then he screams out.
- 14:00 You see I think there was about 10 of us and you can look along the line and you'd see 10 rifles still stuck out. We hadn't a clue what he said. He said, "Attention." "Don't you understand English, you colonials?" But, oh we didn't do so crash hot at that
- 14:30 school. But, the actions for Bardia and prior to the, when we were in Palestine and when the Italians came in they used to fly over and drop a few eggs and we were carting petrol and we were making
- 15:00 petrol dumps around the camp at, and the petrol in those days was in 4 gallon square tins, you know, 4 gallon tins and they'd and, we used to have to stack 'em up, I think we'd stack 3 up in the back of the truck and you'd have about that much free space on top. Anyway,
- 15:30 things moved along and they raided Haifa, that was up in, that's in Israel and that was up the Coast and

they blew up some petrol storage up there and we had to go up and get as much as we

16:00 could and bring it back down to Palestine. Then, there's movement and we are going across to Egypt. So, I was reading up a bit about it till I got there. It was 120 miles in our convoy and we, we

16:30 had a, its its, you go through the desert all the way till you get to the Suez Canal and then they pushed us across. There was no crossing in those days and then we moved to a camp called 'Hell' and it was about 10 miles from Cairo and about 10

17:00 miles or so from the pyramids and there was a train we used to get in, go in on leave there and oh, it was, oh yes and then you'd get leave and you'd get home about 12 o'clock or something like that.

17:30 But, I got to, well there, some of our fellows we got to know the Palestine policemen. They were in Jerusalem and around that area. We were close to Gaza and we used to go down to the Gaza beach and swim and things like that

18:00 and got to know these cops a bit and we used to go to the village, Arab villages and you know, it was on a peace effort and got to know a few of these fellows and when we were moving to Egypt, one of them gave us his address and he said "come and see us when, if you get to Cairo."

18:30 So, "OK, we'll come and see you." So, we went, got leave and went to Cairo and looked up these cops and he said, "Oh alright, you'd better take Australia off your lapel and leave your hats at home, leave your hats here and" he said "we'll take you through the low parts of Cairo." Oh

19:00 God! Of course they can grow through, the police and of course we, they had kaki shorts and shirts and we looked like we were police.

So what did you see?

They go through and they took us down oh, I can't remember the street's name but anyhow it's the Brothel street and the things that

19:30 were there. There... Arabs do... shocking! The women are behind bars and there are stinkin' ol' Arabs coming along and they've got a walking stick or something and they stick it in 'em saying "..... turn around." Phew. We, couldn't get out of there quick enough

20:00 really. Oh, it was shocking. But, oh

Was it just the way that they were being treated or, or whether

Oh, it's just the way the Arabs live. They, better ones who are better, the better ones are the ones that are on the move all the time and they've got a few

20:30 Goats, a few sheep and they might have a couple of donkeys and they've got tents and... They weren't so bad, they weren't very clean but they weren't so bad but the Arabs, ooh, they're blood thirsty people they are really, they'll, they'd kill people and

21:00 rip their, down here, their, and they're just the same as they are now, really. I don't have any time for Arabs at all. When in an incident that happened in Palestine, Barbara was our camp and they, Arabs came in with a camel with oranges that they'd

21:30 probably pinched from the Jews, on both sides of the camel, sitting down and they were selling 'em to us see and of course our blokes, one of the blokes said, "I think I know what to say to a camel." I said, "Yeah, its ipchee! and he gets up." And they said, "Alright, you ipchee and

22:00 we'll go around. We'll cut the bottom out of the bags." Oranges everywhere! All ways. They went off but things like that. A little bit dishonest I suppose. The poor beggars, they had to make a living.

Did any of the Australians get any, into any trouble over there

No.

that you saw?

No, they weren't supposed to

22:30 be there anyway. The Arabs weren't supposed to be in our village, in our, our camp.

John, can you tell us what, I guess your, your day-to-day duties were in transport?

In transport well we were known as Petrol Company and until, and that was till the Libyan campaign. After

23:00 the Libyan campaign we were 2/2nd Transport Company and you did anything, whatever and even as Petrol Company, we in the first Libyan campaign we had to, we had to do as Petrol Company but prior to that

- 23:30 we had 3-ton trucks we'd taken from Australia and the Italians had big Lancias and Fiat's, diesel trucks and they were beautiful vehicles, ooh beautiful vehicles and the Durham Light Infantry were on a front fighting the Italians
- 24:00 and of course the Ike's were running pretty fast and they were leaving their trucks so our fellows decided the powers that be, that we should have some of these heavy trucks for heavy transport for long distance. They're diesels and they scouted around the workshops
- 24:30 and got diesel fellows that understood diesels and there was a lance corporal, he was a Scot, he was in charge and I spoke to Al, the team commander, I said, "What about these blokes that are going up, chasing trucks?" He said, "Yeah, why?" I said, "Well
- 25:00 ah, would my truck be available?" He said, "You wanna go?" He said, "You'll be attached the Durham Light Infantry." And I said, "Yeah, well I don't care." I said, "I'll probably understand the Arabs better than I'll understand the Poms." But anyway... look
- 25:30 there was 2 trucks went and we formed a, a camp sought of, behind the main line of the, that the British were fighting. This was early, no it wasn't, it was in 1941 of course, it was just short of Christmas. We were up there for about
- 26:00 10 days I think so it would have been about the middle of December so we went up and we'd take some of these engineers out and they'd understand the trucks because of the diesel. The diesel wasn't very much in Australia but there was, there was some anyway
- 26:30 we, oh we got about 10 or 12 trucks and they were tremendous really. We took 'em back and they'd go over and make sure that there was, everything was working. So, we were getting near the end and because there's a lot of Italians,
- 27:00 dead Italians lying around in among these trucks, 2 of our blokes had blown up with booby-traps - they'd booby-trapped the truck before and abandoned it. There was a big Fiat, ooh she was a beautiful looking truck and I said, "Ooh well lets go and get that one." They said, "OK." And we were walking up to it and
- 27:30 if there's anyone there they usually come out with their hands up or a white flag or something but we were walking along and we didn't get very far, about as far as from here to the, oh a bit further than across the street and all of a sudden we were under fire. And, "Oh hey, what's goin' on here?" They said, "And there's one underneath and one in the cabin."
- 28:00 And they said, "Go on, you are lance corporal." And I said, "Alright, I'll have a shot at the bloke in the cabin." And someone had a shot at the bloke underneath and they reckon it was me that shot the fellow in the cabin and I reckon he was the most unluckiest Italian in the war cause I, I'm not a
- 28:30 good shot. I, on the rifle range I think my highest score was 53 out of 75 but anyway, we got, we advanced up to it very smartly then and that was very sad! It was! He was, I don't know how much older than me he wouldn't be, but he wouldn't be very old
- 29:00 but he had photos of his family up on some of his truck. He was still warm when I was pulling him out of the truck and they grabbed the bloke from underneath and pulled him out and we hopped in and she started. Beautiful truck! Beautiful truck to drive! Fifteen, I
- 29:30 think we got 15 trucks altogether and we used them right through the whole campaign. Oh, we didn't drive them we had our own trucks but some of the engineers were on there but anyway that was that and we had Christmas dinner with the
- 30:00 Tommies that, we had salmon and I think we got a touch of Rum or something like that, oh they were pretty good, they were, we got to know 'em a bit and we were only there for 10 days. We got back and I was hoping that I'd get back in time to
- 30:30 take the troops into Bardia and we did. We got back just in time and we took some of the 2/5th Battalion in and we dropped them off about 3 o'clock in the morning and they went straight into action. Ah, casualties were fairly light.
- 31:00 We lost a few but, I think we lost 12 - killed, a few wounded.

Were you ferrying them back?

Mmm?

Were you picking up the wounded?

Ah, no the ambulance were doing that. We were bringing back if we went up and we had

- 31:30 petrol or whatever and we'd have a, we'd be given a map reference and the Artillery, the Bren gun carriers from the battalions and the battalion had trucks too, their trucks have our reference number

- 32:00 and we'd stack this petrol up and the first, we were, first one we went out on oh there was a terrific dust storm that went on 2 days and you have your own rations, bully beef and biscuits and you might get some stew in a tin
- 32:30 and we had a primus. You made sure that you took plenty of water with you and well, when the dust storm's on we couldn't get the bloody primus to work because it was, so my mate was with me, Youngie, and I said well, we've got to
- 33:00 have us something hot and of course, there was canvas down the sides of the cover in the truck and there's about that much room and we had the full load and I said, "What's say we put our blankets on top of the petrol can, cans
- 33:30 and our ground sheets and our great coats on top." And I said, "And we'll take the primus up there and cook us a hot meal." And of course if there had been any leakage shwww! She would have gone but there wasn't any leakage and I,
- 34:00 I remember I've got it down there somewhere, I crushed some biscuits with our tin hats. You know, crunch 'em and make 'em as fine as you possibly can, put a, put a can of bully beef, put it in a - we had a sought of a kettle, not a kettle a
- 34:30 saucepan. We put it in that and heat it up and oh, that was beaut but after the dust storm, we were swarmed with fellows coming in for petrol and it wasn't long, ol' blondie would have come out with a message, "How's supplies?" And we'd say, "Out." And we'd say,
- 35:00 well, if your supplies are out there's not much good you sitting here you silly so and so and we'd go back and someone else would come out. The next lot that came out they dug a, it was sand, but they dug a bit of a bunker where they could protect themselves a bit but
- 35:30 we went far behind the lines. You could hear rifle fire and hear bombs going off and things like that. We never got any attacks because they... but I think what happened, they made a bunker and the planes were going the, Stuka no, the Italian planes they were flying over and they'd
- 36:00 see the tracks coming out and, "What the hell is going on there?" And they bombed one and there was three killed and five wounded. Three of our blokes were killed and the wounded were from the Battalions that were getting petrol. Of course, the truck got blown up too.
- 36:30 That was a bit lucky I think. We were lucky there but

So you were, you were lucky to avoid that one?

Mmm?

You were lucky to avoid that one?

Yeah.

Was the, the action that you saw stealing the trucks from the Italians or grabbing the trucks, was that the

37:00 **first time you came under fire?**

Yeah. That was the first time we came under fire and they reckon we were the first Australians to be fired on because the battalions hadn't been in at that stage and we were the, but we never made a claim on it. I was sad about that poor Italian you know, it shouldn't happen.

Did, did you know, I mean how close did you have, did you get?

Mmm?

37:30 **How, how close did you have to get to the truck to fire on the cab?**

Well, we pulled him out we had to pull him out and we just leave him with it there and if their burial parties come out and bury 'em but there was a lot of them that weren't buried for a long time and shocking! But got back to the battalion

38:00 and we took them in and they advanced on the Italians at, it was getting well, it was winter really and it was damn cold, especially in the desert and they issued us with yellow no, leather jackets

38:30 fleecy-lined and there were no sleeves in them. We had them, the Infantry had them. They had their grey coats, most of them had their grey coats on when they went into action and they put these yellow jackets, these leather jackets on over the top and the Italians thought that they were bullet-proof, bullet-proof. Oh

39:00 dear, the poor ol' Ities. But, if we went up with troops and there was Italians that'd come back, there were streams of 'em. We took over a 1000, a 100,000 true, prisoners. There was a New Zealand division and us and the Durham Light Infantry

- 39:30 and there was some artillery of course but they reckoned it would take us 2 days ah 2 weeks to take Bardia. We took it in 2½ days.
- That's pretty good going.**
- Eh?
- That's pretty good going?**
- Yeah, pretty good going. The next one was Tobruk and it took us some, it took 'em about oh, 10 days I
- 40:00 think to take Tobruk and when we got there, the ships in the bay were still burning and there were some of them their masks were sticking out of the water and there was the, there was some of the 2/6th Battalion we'd taken in and there was a
- 40:30 park in the middle of the town at Tobruk and the flag pole and the Italian flag was up and they said, "Pull that bloody flag down." They pulled it down. "Where's that Australian flag?" "We haven't got one!" So one of the 2/6th blokes said, "Here, put me ruddy hat up." He was there with his... and
- 41:00 we came past there and that hat was still up there. It was there all day so anyway, I don't know...

Tape 4

- 00:30 We were transporting troops, all supplies, all petrol or ammunition and it didn't matter they knew that it was better to have generally, the transport and that, they didn't, they let us carry the name of the 60th
- 01:00 Petrol Company until after the campaign and we just kept going. We didn't have a terrible lot of casualties but there was a few wounded but like old Durhams a couple of them were
- 01:30 knocked off and a couple of them were wounded because they were always up near the front delivering messages or whatever
- John, can I ask you, before you landed at Tobruk what were your impressions of the Middle East in so far as the smells and the sights because you're a country boy from?**
- Yeah,
- 02:00 oh it, once we got up past Tobruk and Derna was the next town on, these are all on the coast and, there was you know, different soil there was red soil and not so much sand and a little bit of short
- 02:30 growth and yeah, it was better but in the desert the dust storms are shocking really because it gets in your ears. They issued us with driving goggles oh and our eyes were getting gummed up and water wasn't very plentiful.
- 03:00 We used to have to get our water, we used to have to look after ourselves for water.
- Did you have ear muffs?**
- No, we never had ear muffs, no. That's why I'm deaf.
- Anyway I am sorry I interrupted you. You had told us this story about the Aussie who stuck his hat at the top of the pole**
- Yeah.
- when you guys landed at Tobruk. What happened after that day?**
- Oh,
- 03:30 there wasn't many Ike's left there. They were taken prisoners and any of our trucks that were going back to Mersa Matruh or somewhere like that where there's big supply dumps, you take a load of Ities back
- How was that, were they nice to you?**
- Oh yeah, I had one on
- 04:00 our truck and he was my batman. I can't remember his name though now but anyway he'd do the washing. I had shorts. We used to have shorts and shirts on, that's all. If we could find water we'd say, "Here are, here's the washing."
- But what do you mean, he was your batsman?**
- 04:30 Oh well, he was a prisoner but no one knew who he was or anything like that so that didn't matter, it

wasn't legal.

Did the Italians know how to play cricket?

Eh? No, never had time for that. We, after that was Derna, Derna, but I think it took a little

05:00 longer for there because there was a fairly big lot of Italians and a lot of artillery there and, anyway we, they soon took Derna and the next one was Tikah, it was only a little place it was a bit short of Benghazi. Benghazi was our target

05:30 but we shouldn't have stopped at Benghazi, we should have gone on and I don't know why General Wavell stopped us there. Bob Menzies came and inspected us at Tikah

06:00 and thanked us. We had advanced in 3 months, we had advanced 500 miles and we had taken approximately 100,000 prisoners and the number of vehicles and motor bikes and little

06:30 Fiat cars and their artillery pieces. There were stacks of them. They had pretty good uniforms and I got a revolver at one of the, if we went through a camp we might stop for a while and scrounge a little bit and I got a stack of photos there and

07:00 I got a Beretta revolver and I thought there's a week's leave in that one that's for sure because when you get back to base, excuse the expression but we call them "shiny bums." They, "Have you got a revolver. Have you got a sword or something?" You know, you sell it to 'em.

Why do you call them 'shiny bums'?

Because they

07:30 sit in an office.

Why do you think you shouldn't have moved on?

Well, we should have moved on up to a place called Tripoli it's up where Glovart... the bloke in Libya...

08:00 Gaddafi?

Yeah, where he is. We should have been up to there and the Germans came in there and they had a, they came in that way. We didn't strike any Gerries in the desert we only fought the Italians. There was no Germans there but when we got to Benghazi and after Bob Menzies had been and seen us and all this

08:30 sort of thing the powers that be and it was Churchill that demanded an Australian division to help the Greeks and an experienced division. Well of course the only experienced division was the 6th Divi, so the 7th Divi came and took over

09:00 from us or it was a part of the 7th Divvy, it was the 21st Battalion [actually Brigade] and the 18th, 21st yeah and it was the 18th Brigade really. There was the 2/9th Division and the 2/9th Battalion. They took over from us but I didn't, never saw Roy again. Not there.

09:30 Of course they had the Germans and of course the Germans had heaps of equipment and tanks and I hardly ever saw one of our tanks but we were withdrawn. We left all our equipment there. Took our rifles and

10:00 any personal stuff and our kit bags back to Alexandria and Wavell addressed us as he was general in charge of the army at that time, our army. He praised us for about 5 minutes and then he said, "The biggest

10:30 lot of scoundrels, thieves we've ever come across." And he ended up saying, "I'm sure your forefathers would be proud of you." But we got a couple of days leave and on to a ship and over to Greece.

Did you sell your Beretta?

11:00 No, I'd put it in my kit bag. The kit bags were to come over with us or after, but they never did. They were put in storage in Egypt because they knew that we couldn't, it was known that history has it that Germany

11:30 wasn't in action actual on a, on a front that was pushed like they would take Hungary, Yugoslavia and these places and they were down to Yugoslavia and the next one was Greece see, and they could have drawn on 20 divisions. We had our division

12:00 6th Division. We had a New Zealand division. A brigade of British and two Greek divisions. Now the Greek divisions were supposedly and to,

12:30 when our boys went into action up the Yugoslav border, we took 'em up there and some of us were transporting troops, some of us were transporting supplies, petrol and ammunition and we were wondering why they were making dumps on the

- 13:00 way up. But when on the way back we knew why the dumps were there because they knew that we had no chance. We'd been reinforced we were up to full strength. We were 600 when we went into Greece. Some of those reinforcements had been in the Middle East for three weeks that's all.
- 13:30 **What did you know about Greece before you left?**
- Oh, we had a bit of a lecture about 'em, about Greece and we said that the war would be entirely different. It's cold, snow, it's mountainous and it's very, the roads are very narrow and,
- 14:00 driving is a lot harder and you've got to be very, very careful otherwise you go over the side of the mountains so and I remember one of the fellows on the ship, I think he was one of the crew. He said, "You lucky blighters going to Greece." He said, "Beautiful women
- 14:30 and ugly men."
- Did you find that to be true?**
- Oh yeah, the women were pretty good looking really but they were workers. The women were working on the roads, bearing loads but anyway we were there and Greece was not at war with Germany.
- 15:00 They had been at war with the Italians and the powers that be in Greece, the Greek government, weren't very, the government themselves weren't very pleased that we were coming because a common saying, it will draw
- 15:30 the crowds, it draws the Germans. And the Germans wanted to get Greece so they could slip across to Egypt and down the Suez Canal see, but the Greek people were very good. They were tremendous really I notice what goes on. They put themselves, their families at
- 16:00 risk for us.
- So where did you land in Greece, John?**
- We landed at Piraeus that's the harbour for Athens. It's about 7 or 8 miles from Athens and we disembarked there and got our trucks and we were on, on the way and we were up
- 16:30 through Athens and we were camped on the north of Athens and then the battalions were coming in quickly too. Everything had to be done quickly because time was running out. I think it, officially, the Greeks capitulated around about the 12th
- 17:00 of April, I think it was April. Yeah, April and we'd only been there a couple of weeks but going up the Greek people were waving to us and giving us flowers and gifts and all this sort of thing. We would pull up at a, camp at a or bivouac
- 17:30 at a village somewhere on the way. One day, one night it was, we got to this village about 5 o'clock and it was still daylight and we camped there and I said to Youngie, "Come on, let's go into the village and we'll get a good feed." "Yeah OK." And away we go and we find
- 18:00 a village and find a restaurant or café and go in and have a beaut feed and a couple of drinks and talk to the, a lot of sign language to the Greeks. We didn't know Greek language of course and oh we were alright and then we came out of the café and I thought geese it's dark. "Hey which way do we go?"
- 18:30 Youngie says, "Oh I'm damned if I know." He was a public servant and you know how they are. He used to bite his fingernails down till they would be bleeding and he'd be driving and he'd say to me, "Now if you see me biting my fingernails - hit me." "Yeah alright." And we'd be driving along and I'd give him a whack in the ear and he'd say "what'd you do that for?"
- 19:00 I'd say, "Stop biting your nails!" But anyway we were mates but anyway we looked around and we saw a camp, an army camp. We could see the camp in there. We saw some lights so we went in, went there and we went into this and we knocked on the door and someone came out and opened it and it was an officers' mess.
- 19:30 We said, "Australian." "Oh, come on in, come on in, come on in." So we went in and oh, I don't know what they gave us to drink but oh, we had drinks and we said, "We gotta go. Camp. Army. Back."
- 20:00 "Oh yeah, no worries, no worries." I don't remember a thing. We got back to camp and Youngie was awful crook the next morning but I drove the first lot. Oh dear. We,
- 20:30 the rail had, from Athens or was Larissa and that's where we were heading and from then we carted troops from Larissa up to the Greek-Yugoslav border and
- 21:00 those poor blighters, it was, it had been snow and it had been sleet. The ground was cold and slippery. It was the 2/8th Battalion and the 2/4th Battalion and that we took up and
- 21:30 they were from the 19th Brigade so the orders were get in, dig in and wait, and that's, and there was a little village called Vevi and that was where they were, at Vevi

- 22:00 and that's where they anticipated that the German's would be coming through. We hot footed it out as quickly as we could because we didn't know whether they'd advance at night or they'd wait till morning. They had to wait for the Gerries to come. There was an anti-tank regiment
- 22:30 up there too and they got up by their own transport and the ol' colonel, the colonel of that regiment, they would all, the whole lot of the anti-tank regiment, the whole lot were taken prisoners. They
- 23:00 never fired a shot and the colonel was a prisoner and he was prisoner till the war in Europe finished. We used to have to, a couple of years ago, we used to go down to Canungra, and they'd have a senior officers
- 23:30 school there from the present army and we'd be the guinea pigs that would be sitting there and they'd be questioning us and asking us questions and what have you and this ol' colonel was there and he used to, he was sure that he would get caught once but he wasn't the poor ol' bloke, he was really dodderly. He must have had a terrible time
- 24:00 as a prisoner thinking that he's gonna get the bullet and or what they call a bowler hat but anyway, they made a good account of themselves when they did come through. One of my friends was a corporal in there and he died
- 24:30 last, last year? Snow died? Yeah. No, this year, this year. He was out on point and there was a section of Greeks on the left and another section of Greeks on the right but when they went to
- 25:00 find 'em - SHEWWWW! They'd gone. Because that was really when they capitulated and the Government did business with the Germans but our fellows fought on well. We had to go up 2 or 3 days, I think it might have been 3 days later to bring them
- 25:30 out and to get up to Vevi where they were, we had to go over a river and there was one bridge however and we went over that and we took, I think we had about 20 trucks when we took them in first. We required about 12 trucks to get the poor blighters out.
- 26:00 The engineers had the bridge ready to blow and our orders were that the bridge would blow at 11:30 hours. It was half past 11. We were headed for the bridge at about 11 o'clock and I thought oh well plenty of time.
- 26:30 Now we had, they had slip lights on our trucks and 1 truck in 5 has his slip lights on. The truck behind him has got to follow his tail light which is in underneath the tray so it is just the 1 truck in 5 so,
- 27:00 we've come in and they, the engineers spotted the lights and they thought it was the Gerries coming and so they blew the bridge and we got, I think we got 4 trucks over but the rest of 'em were taken prisoner or blown up.
- 27:30 **Did anybody run out and say "bloody idiots"?**
- They get, well they got scared. They do. They get scared and you don't blame them really. But, ol' Snow he got, he got left and he walked down to the river with his rifle,
- 28:00 there are several of them with their rifle they'd put 'em in the water ...

Tape 5

- 00:30 **OK. John you were just telling me about your action in Greece, being the last, being the last time that the Australians fought together.**
- Yeah
- as an Anzac Brigade?**
- Yeah well, that was, we'd
- OK. Sorry John, you were telling us about the Anzac tradition and**
- 01:00 Yeah, well that was the reason why. Because the 6th Divi and, and the New Zealanders were the main part of the army. It was what, it was different in the desert because I think there was three divisions of New Zealanders and
- 01:30 we had, when the 7th and the 9th Division got into it in there, we had 3 divisions there and the British had a very large tank division and then when the El Alamein came into it, when the Scottish general took over. "What was his name?" But anyway, there was,
- 02:00 they had tanks and... We never had many tanks at all and I can remember we took a wrong turn once

and we looked down on, on the German tank divisions and there was hundreds of the damn things and we didn't have any really.

02:30 We had Bren gun carriers and they were open and you've got a Bren gun. You may as well have a pop-gun.

How many of you were on, how many of you were on that wrong turn?

On that?

When you just said you took a wrong turn, how many of you were there?

Well there was only us, two of us, Youngie and I and the drivers, we were going back to get another load of petrol or ammo or one of

03:00 those and we took this wrong turn and we looked down onto a, in a valley and there's all the Gerry tanks but

Did they spot you?

No, we never gave 'em any time. I'm glad the old truck went well but it was a very

03:30 frustrating campaign, especially being transport. You can't get a shot at anyone and you're just a target and they, the German Air Force was Stukas and they have a couple of bombs on each, oh I think they have 4,

04:00 4 bombs on it, 2 on each wing - each side and they had screamers and when they, in action they'd turn the screamers on and it frightens hell out of you, really. It's ... and they would come in that low you could see

04:30 the pilots and what they'd come, and this is in daytime they'd come down, so there's a road and the roads on, in daylight are jammed up with people in old cars and pushing barrows and

05:00 families heading south and we were trying to get through with supplies or petrol or ammunition whatever. The ammunition was very important for the artillery and there was the 2/8th I think if I remember, the 2/8th Regiment Artillery

05:30 there 25 pounders. In 24 hours they fired 6500 rounds. They said the barrels of the guns were almost red hot and of course they needed ammunition and we had to give it to 'em and that was a hell of a job and you could get frustrated with the traffic, with the Greeks that are trying

06:00 to save their lives. The women with children and, they'd come down the road. They'd drop their bombs and then they'd do a circle and they'd go back up and if you were getting shelter, you'd get in the gutters and they'd come back up the gutters and ... all the time, then they'd come down

06:30 the other side. Then they'd go back and you'd have about 15, 20 minutes free and there'd be, they'd get refuelled and rearmed and bang! It's on again! They had, we had no hope. We had no attack that we could get at them. Our only protection was we had

07:00 two utes, just ordinary utes, like they are today, one was, and we had Bren gun on a stand similar to these and things and they'd have sand bags at the bottom, on the feet to keep them in position and we had 2 of them to the whole ASC.

07:30 Both of them, both the gunners were killed, very easily because if they got somewhere near them, they'd just drop an egg there or give them a bit of strafing. Whereas if you were in an Infantry you were firing at someone that's firing at you

08:00 but, and they're going over like a bat out of hell. Anyway we, we survived.

What could you do John to avoid the Stukas that were strafing you, or...?

Well, one would be driving the other one would be spotting and the

08:30 truck that we had in Greece, the spotter, he'd lie out on, there's a little running board and then there's a mudguard and then there's the bonnet and you'd lie out on, between the mudguard and the bonnet and lie back and say "right, stop!" or you know "It's on again" and you'd just stop and run like blazers and

09:00 get in to some sort of depression if you could find it but... What we were doing mostly in the last couple of weeks of the campaigns, there'd be a front line formed say it would be the 5th, the 2/5th Battalion, they'd have the front line. Righto, we'd

09:30 go up at night time and pick these boys up and then we'd go as fast as we could at night, and of course there's no air attacks at night and that's good, and we'd go through the next line of defence. It would probably be the 2/6th Battalion or the 2/7th

10:00 or one of 'em and we'd go through them and these boys would go to the furthest back and we could look

back up the mountains and we could see the Gerries coming with their trucks, and their trucks and lights full on. No, there was nothing to worry about! and, that was, that used to worry me more than anything that you,

- 10:30 we were as tired as anything. We were just, no sleep. We only, used to try and get 2 hours drive and 2 hours sleep but, in the truck, but we never had much of that. Then when we'd drop off the troops we'd have a rendezvous and every morning
- 11:00 our platoon commander, Stan Meyers, he was a tremendous Officer, he used to tell us everything that he knew and he'd say "well, right, now if you can't get to this spot, you go to this one" and we were coming down the coast and we were supposed to go to Volos, that's where they were taking, the 2/7th Battalion
- 11:30 got taken off there and we was to go down to that area and drop this load of troops off and get half way and, someone there, they mostly were army police and they didn't do a bad
- 12:00 job but they were, they were a terrible lot of fellows those blokes. They couldn't get recruits for 'em. They'd make 'em a sergeant. They'd come around and say, "Oh yeah, you wanna be an NCO?" "What's on?" "Oh, if you join our force." "What's your force?" "Military police." No thanks, no thanks. No, no one would go
- 12:30 but anyway they did a fair job there because they warned us that Volos had fallen, the Germans were there. There was another place on the coast just up a bit from there and we were to go there then. That was cut off so, well next one was down to Athens and
- 13:00 that was near the finish but prior to that we were just out of Larissa, heading down and a road came and as usual, they do everything under a system the Gerries, really.
- 13:30 every time they'd come down the middle of the road, drop boom, boom, boom etc and go down that way and go up and come down this way and do the same and someone, oh the road started and there was Youngie and myself from our truck and we had mixed army on. We had some Australians, New Zealanders
- 14:00 Yugoslavs and some British and some air force blokes and we just said, "Righto, take cover wherever you can get it." And, we high-tailed it down to the, to a bit of a creek, and there's a bank. Oh, there's a bit of water running and we were sitting there and all of a sudden someone opened up with a
- 14:30 Bren gun, just on top of the bank back from us a bit and he must have gone pretty close to the, to the Stuka and we heard him he banked very quickly, turned around and he went across that way and came around back again and he dropped two bombs. I think it was two. There was a hell of an explosion
- 15:00 anyway. Just behind us and they went down, the ground was pretty soft, they went down a fair way and exploded and there was Stan Meyers now but, Youngie was there, I was there and Bert, Bert Griffiths was
- 15:30 there and then Stan Meyers. Stan's at that end, I'm here and Bert's there. So, the bomb's exploded and poor old Bert was just about cut in half. Shrapnel came through the bank and Youngie called out to me "ooh, something's bitten me in the bum" and I said
- 16:00 "give us a look, quick, quick, quick come on!" And dropped his dacks and it's just as if you'd got a butcher's knife and cut a big slab off his bottom and he had shrapnel up his back and he was in a pretty bad way so Stan Meyers, he was our Lieutenant, he
- 16:30 attended to Bert and he said, "It's no good, we can't do anything for him. He's gone." And we, well I went up to, there was a regimental aid [post] they call 'em, regimental aid place run by the ambulance and I went up and got a stretcher and
- 17:00 we put poor old Bert on it and... Youngie hung on and we walked him up with us and Stan stayed there and he said "I'll make all arrangements for Bert."
- 17:30 And he said, "I'll get his private tickets and private photographs and anything he has and also get in touch with his family." And of course you have meat tickets, one's a red one and one's a black one and you bury the black one I think it is if I remember right, and you
- 18:00 take the red one back to divisional headquarters and tell them all about it. But that was the hardest day. And you can't do much. You can only look after yourself and do what you're supposed to be doing so, but one other time
- 18:30 before this, I just skipped it, we were carting the battalions back and Stan said to us, "Well, we'll rendezvous at this place at 7 o'clock." And it was round about 3 o'clock when we unloaded and we hadn't had any sleep for at least 36 hours and we were
- 19:00 really exhausted and it was very hard to drive so I said to Youngie, "Hey, what about we pull off the road." And it was dark of course and we thought we were under trees or something but we weren't.

We'd have a snooze for a while. It's only about ½ hours run to get to where

- 19:30 we were... So, we did. Hopped into the back of the truck, took our boots off and laid down and went to sleep. The next thing we hear is a machine gun and it's a Stuka. He'd spotted us at daylight by this time. He spotted us on his
- 20:00 banking around and getting ready to really turn it on to us and I said to Youngie, "God, come on, quick!" And we hopped out of the back of the truck and ran like hell on this pebbly stuff on the ground and it was as cold as charity of course and we ran, I reckon we made the 3 mile... Oh dear, we got out of
- 20:30 his, probably, I don't know whether he didn't see us or he was concentrating on the truck and so, when he shot through we said well come on we better go back and I think it took us 10 minutes to walk back. The old feet were that frozen cold and on the
- 21:00 pebbles and oh anyway we put our, got back, put our boots on and we had a look at the truck. He'd smashed the, shot out the windscreen, he'd, there was a few bullet holes through where the, where we'd sit and bullet holes in the back but he never, the petrol tank was well down on the one side and
- 21:30 he never got anywhere near that so, so I said, "Well I hope she starts otherwise we're on guard duties." And sure enough she started so... he'd put a few holes, he must have dived in as he get from the windscreen and get where we'd be sitting he'd,
- 22:00 He'd put 'em through sort of the top of the bonnet but there was no damage done to the engine. Even the radiator was alright so, we hop footed it down there and when we got there I thought Stan was going to kiss us. "Oh God," he said, "where have you blokes been?" "Oh we,
- 22:30 we felt that we needed a rest." And I said and Gerry found us. "Oh God," he said, "I thought you had been killed, that's for sure." But it wasn't long after that, it was the next day that Bert was killed and Youngie was wounded and the same day,
- 23:00 they said, he said to me after, he said "You shoot through and..." he said, "I'll see you later, I'll catch up with you." And about 20 minutes after that raid, there was another raid on and I don't know what personnel I had on but I didn't chase around and tell 'em, I just yelled out, "Come on
- 23:30 anyone, come in. Come on I don't want to leave you behind." I don't know whether I did leave people behind but oh well, it didn't matter much and so the next raid was on and I pulled up and said, "OK take cover." And I got well as far away from the road as I could and there was a little
- 24:00 bit of an impression in the ground and I was hugging mother earth and I looked over to where the road is and I see a staff car or a station wagon it was. That's alright. And there was, fellows got out of it and I thought God, they haven't had much troubles. They looked like as if they'd just got out of the dry cleaners
- 24:30 and they came over and there was a major and ol' Tom Blamey and I think there might have been a captain and ol' Tom said to me, they came later and flattened out and he said, "How are you soldier?" And I said, "Well, if it's
- 25:00 all the same to you, sir, I'm s... frightened." He said, "Well, don't be ashamed. We should never have been here cause bloomin' Churchill had organised us." And he said, "We shouldn't have been here." And I said, "Well, I just lost my 2 best mates." And I said,
- 25:30 "It's pretty hard." And he, I think he put his hand on my head and he said, "Good luck anyway," he said, "I hope you get out." I should have been awake enough and said, "Hey, you haven't got a spare seat in your plane, have you?" He, he was a good bloke. You could talk to him. Anyway, better than our major. We
- 26:00 never saw him, I never saw him once in Greece. He got a bolus hat. Yeah.

Now, did Blamey recognise you from your training days? Cause he was...

Who was this?

Ah, Tom Blamey. He was a partner of yours?

Well, I don't think so but we used to have swimming sports at Gaza and I was a pretty good

- 26:30 swimmer and I used to represent in the team and I think we came second or something and we all went past and ol' Tom gave us some certificate or something, I don't know what it was. I never get, never. I remember the... and but, he said, "Who are, who are you?" I think I was
- 27:00 Lance Jack and I said, "Oh Turner, QX 285." "Oh," he said, "How did you get that number?" I said, "I went in early." Because nearly all those numbers were reserved for officers but anyway it didn't matter, worry me but
- 27:30 Stan Meyers contacted me later and said, "Do you still want to drive or do you want to go down to headquarters or something like that?" And I said, "No." I said, "I'll stick it out." And we did the, I

- 28:00 think I did an ammunition run the next day after that and oh, there was quite a few trucks and we had one fellow in our unit, we used to call him Grizzler, Grizzler McCulloch, and
- 28:30 you know, you'd be in a, there'd be 6 of us in a tent and we'd be all talking about what we did before the war and all these sort of things and Grizzler comes up and, "Oh what were you Grizzler?" He said, "I was a taxi driver in Brisbane." "Oh, what were you before that?" "Oh," he said, "I was a jackaroo." "How long were you jackarooing?" "Oh
- 29:00 about 10 years." "Oh, you must be pretty old." And one of the blokes that's got a pencil and pad and his wallet in town and he's got 10 years, "Oh," he said, "we'll make that 40." Grizzler finishes and he said, "God, how did you get into the army?" And he said, "I thought I'd do my bit." And
- 29:30 someone says, "Well according to this, you're 102." So, he was, Grizzler was to stay and Bill Trap, he was a villain. He used to always have something. He always, he and Campy, camp they were, the 2 of them and
- 30:00 they were to pick up ammunition, that's right and they had, they got ammunition on but some how or other they found some beer and of course the beer got priority and they couldn't resist it and they had a couple of bottles and of course on the roads, it's pretty terrible. You've got to keep your wits around you. Whew! They went over the side. The New Zealanders came along with a tow
- 30:30 truck and pulled them up anyway old Campy wanted to put his hands up and, "I want to go as a prisoner of war." Anyway this day, we pulled up for something to eat, and said, "What have you got Trappy?" "Oh, I got a clean skin." That's a can with nothing on it. Righto, open it up. No one's got a tin opener, a bayonet does the
- 31:00 job so I opened it up and we would have a few mouthfuls out of it and pass it on to the next one and it comes to ol' Grizzler and he says "that bloody things that you keep and... why do they send sliced peaches to eat 'em with a bayonet. But we had a bit of a laugh though we didn't get much to laugh about but,
- 31:30 **John, I've heard a number of fellows tell me about how they had to open their tins with bayonets but?**
- Yeah. Bang. Choong. Bang. You make it, cuts across the top. Yeah. Whatever it is you eat it because it was, tucker was pretty slow because I think the Greeks helped themselves to a lot of those things whereas the ammunition and petrol
- 32:00 always seemed to be plenty of that. We almost ran out of petrol once and we put the troops off and went and got a load of petrol or a fair bit of petrol and so that we'd get to Piraeus, it was. We got there and Stan said to us "well, this is it boys,
- 32:30 the Gerries will be here within ½ an hour and we'll be prisoners of war. He said, "You can walk away if you want to and if you get to a friendly Greek, it's up to you but otherwise that's it." Anyway a few of us were there and thinking "oh, yeah!" "Gee" I said, "I don't want to be a POW [prisoner of war]."
- 33:00 And there was Doug Abbott's lot came up from the Piraeus Harbour and he said there's a ship taking on passengers. He said, "They're taking anyone. You don't have to do anything, just go down there and get in, get on board." So there was 25 of us hot footed
- 33:30 it down to the wharf and we got on, got there and got on and they served us a watery sort of a stew from the ship and there was New Zealanders and a mixture again. Some Greeks, some Greek soldiers
- 34:00 with their wives and families and, it was pretty well loaded. It was then about, oh it must have been about half past five I should think and I went up, I got my stew and the fellow next to me was Stewy Thurman,
- 34:30 excuse me, I'll have a drink. And, I said to Stewy, "Come on, let's go right up the bow," right up to the very point of the ship so we did that and we got up there and, we'd taken off - we were moving before this and
- 35:00 I suppose we'd been going for about half hour and the sun was setting and sure enough, three Stukas came over out of the sun and straight along, straight along the ship from the front to the back and they dropped their bombs and
- 35:30 within oh, it must have been about 5 minutes, it seemed to be about 2 minutes, she was over on an angle about like that and what they think happened - one of the bombs must have gone done the funnel and blown a plank off underneath and of course the water just went in and she flooded inside. Well, that's what
- 36:00 we suspected.

What did you feel standing there?

Eh?

What did you feel standing on the bow, of the explosion and all that?

Yeah, well we had no lifejackets or anything like that. I said to Stewy, "Come on she's gonna sink. Jump over we'll go, jump over and we'll swim." And I had a little haversack. I

- 36:30 took that with me but that's all and I jumped over and god I thought I was never going to hit that water. You looked down and it looked a long way anyway I hit the water and I screamed out to Stewy, "Come on, come on." And by that time the boat was nearly over on its side
- 37:00 and you got to get away from them if, otherwise they'll suck you down so I swam as fast as I could and then I found I had my boots on of course and I thought, "oh well, I'll take them off." And I floated for a while and took my boots off and I got a tootsy-foot and I thought oh well I'll have to take them with me so I tied the laces together and swung
- 37:30 them around my neck and then I surveyed the situation and I thought well, I could see a light and I thought well, it was just dark and I thought oh well I'll swing to the side and I'd swing for a while and then I'd float and swing... I think I was in the water for about an hour and then I looked and I
- 38:00 thought gee that light's getting very close. Oh, we must be closer than I thought, to the shore and I went a bit longer and I took some deep breaths and I realised it was a boat and they were picking up survivors and there was a Greek fishing village nearby and they saw what had happened
- 38:30 and they came out. There were several boats, were out. Anyway they dragged me on board and we, they took us into shore and I don't know how many we had on the boat, we had New Zealanders again and there were some of our Infantry fellows and there was three of
- 39:00 us at that stage. There was Doug Alderton, Bertie Brindle and myself and when we got ashore and we bumped into another one of our fellows, Bruce Merry and he was, he again was only a little bloke, he
- 39:30 was a... but he was a damn nice fellow. Anyway, that was 4 of us and Doug said, "Well, we don't need to be a big party, we need to be a, a party that we can handle." And he said, "Well I think 4 is the limit." So, yeah ok, we got the Greeks with sign language
- 40:00 that we wanted to get to our ordnance depot which was north of Athens and it was, that means we had about 7 or 8 mile to go and yeah, they got us there and it was about 3 o'clock in the morning by the time we got there and we got in and someone found the torches or torches and things at the Ordnance depot. Some found,
- 40:30 someone found where the uniforms were and so we got dry uniforms and dry clothes on and I thought I'm gonna scrounge around and find where the socks are. So I put socks in, you know they're pretty big pockets and socks in them and others were looking for tucker and
- 41:00 anyway, we got under way, we were disorientated you know, we couldn't think properly, I think we'd been through a fair bit and Doug said, "Well, we've got to get away, we've got to get away from here." And I'd put, taken my jacket, wet jacket off before I went in
- 41:30 and I put my pay book and Phyl's photo and some money there with my jacket, left them there and I said now I know where that is. When I came out, hell I couldn't find the damn thing so I had no pay book anyway away we went

John, I'll just

Tape 6

- 00:33 **John, I wanted to ask you where Phyllis was in all of this, while you were in Greece and now you've just jumped off the boat and you're now in a pack with three other men but?**

Well, there was four of us and we just didn't know what to do. I'm not repeating myself, am I?

No.

- 01:00 and the result was that we wandered into some Germans so they put us behind barbed wire and they never did a thing. They didn't interrogate us or they should have asked what ranks we had and anything like that and they didn't. They just banged us behind barbed wire

- 01:30 and we had a

Sorry John, can we hear about that. What happened? You, you left the base which is north of Athens with the three men and then, then what happened?

Well we got to the ordnance depot and got our clothes and got clothes and I got socks and some got bits

of food and I couldn't find my old jacket with Phyl's

- 02:00 photo and my pay book and all that and my money in it so I had no identification to give the Gerries anyway. So, they put us behind the wire and we knew that there was a panic on and, because there were Germans running around here, there and everywhere and everyone was ya, ya,
- 02:30 ya, yaing, shouting and going on. I thought oh well, let the silly blighters do what they all... and what happened then, the next morning a train pulled in with cattle trucks and they were carrying, had been carrying pigs or
- 03:00 donkeys, they were filthy. The timber sides were the sliding door and a curved iron roof. They bunged us in those and what the panic was, that the 2/7th Battalion they got out pretty early and they were, they had,
- 03:30 had very severe casualties and they were on the airfield in Crete and they had ammunition and they had guns and anyway, the Germans decided that they had these parachuters and they had gliders and they
- 04:00 and they had gliders and they'd tie gliders behind a motor plane and when they got over the airstrip they'd let her go and they'd glide down and they were a lot safer perhaps than in the parachutes. But the 2/7th Battalion
- 04:30 killed possibly 7,000 Germans and that, that was the last time that the German Army used parachutes or gliders so, that was the panic. And of course they had to get us out, all the prisoners that they could probably jam into this train. "Get 'em out of the place, get 'em out
- 05:00 of here. We've got enough trouble without them." And, that was it. Well we had some New Zealanders in our carriage and they cleaned all the muck away from the wall of the truck or carriage or whatever you'd like to call it
- 05:30 and, one of them had a army Issue knife and they have a sticker, a screwdriver, a little bit of a saw and things like that. Oh, and plus a big blade. So he reckoned that, the New Zealander said, "Well, if we dig around the head of the bolt that's holding these planks in and they're pretty rotten from all the poo that's been up
- 06:00 against them, I reckon we'd get it off." So, alright. He's doing that and we're all pulling the rubbish away from it and the guard's, they had a guard and they were only kids - they were around about 16. One in every second carriage and if the train stopped, they'd come and check you, things like that. Well, if they stopped everybody just behaved
- 06:30 and lent back against the wall. Anyway they got one plank off and they just laid it down so that if they came in then they'd put it back up again. Then we got the second plank off and that and they had an opening about that much and they said, "Alright, who wants to go?" And we knew that the train would be going slow
- 07:00 going up the mountains and it was very mountainy country. We knew that because we'd been up and down them, not in the trains but with the trucks and the road was just adjacent so Doug Alderton said, "Are you coming?" I said, "Yep, I'll be in it."
- 07:30 And he said to Bruce, "Are you coming Bruce?" "Yeah." And Bertie Brindle, "Yeah." So the four of us and, squeezed through and rolled down and before we went he said, "Well, we'll wait till we get together and then we'll go and we'll go quick." And he said, "First place
- 08:00 place we come to at daylight," he said, "We'll go to and see if they're friendly." He said, "I'll go up and see if they're friendly. You other blokes take cover." And we had no weapons other anything. Nothing. This we did and we got away from the road and the railway line and all that as quickly as possible.

08:30 **Whereabouts were you?**

We were, I suppose by the time we'd have been about 40 or 50 mile, 40 mile about from, from Athens. We were well in the mountains. Mm, that's what I was thinking it would be that, approximately that, could be.

Did you happen to know where the train was going?

Yeah, we knew it would be going to Larissa

- 09:00 because that's the end of the line and what they do from there, they take them through up to Salonika and that, then they can get through up to, into Europe. They were well into Europe then, see. They'd take, there's no, I'm pretty certain - well we never used it because, I don't think there was any lines

- 09:30 past Larissa, no train lines because there was ammunition trains and petrol trains there at Larissa and they were bombing them when we were there, see.

How did you first get captured by the Germans with the other three fellows?

Yeah, we all got captured together.

What happened, were you in the dark and can you tell us what happened?

No, it,

10:00 it was daylight because we'd got out of the ordnance depot and it was daylight so, it was about 3 o'clock when we went in there and it was daylight and we were wandering around, thinking that the Germans weren't there or anywhere near but we wandered into the Germans. We wandered into the friendly

10:30 Greeks anyway, when we got, that was the first, that's how they took us down and put us down under wire and the next day they put us on this train.

Sorry, so what happened when you jumped out off the train?

Well then we found one another and Doug said, "Well let's get away as far as we can from here because we don't want to be near the road, we don't want to be near the train

11:00 because if they do discover this." But I guess that they pushed the planks back in and made it look like it hadn't been disturbed. I don't know. I've never seen any of the fellows that were in that train. I didn't know any of 'em, really.

Why did you want to escape so much? So you could go home and see your girl?

11:30 **I wanted to go home. I said, "I'm gonna go home and get married." Bruce Wherry, I don't know whether his family was busted up or not but he didn't want to go home, he didn't care what happened, but anyway he and I we used to talk during the daytime.**

12:00 **Oh well, when, the first thing Doug Alderton said he'd go up and see if this family, it was the first house we came to, it was open country and it looked like a farm and he went down and he told us to take cover and we did likewise.**

12:30 **And, then he gave us a wave to come in and they were friendly so we were lucky again. They had a map that they'd torn out of a paper and they showed us where we should go so, "we mustn't go on the main roads. We've got to go**

13:00 **well away from the main roads and they knew where the Germans were and they, they fed us and then we moved, we moved at night. One of them came with us and I don't know how far we went that, that night and**

13:30 **they took us to another safe place and so it went and some would go and take us to another safe place and we missed, we never saw any Germans. We were, and we were hoofing it. We were getting terribly hungry, terribly skinny. If we'd find anything we'd,**

14:00 **if we had an old billy or something, anything like that we'd think, "I wonder if we can eat these?" And they had snails and they were big snails they were about that big and I remember we had just about a bucketful of little, a bucket about that high, well I don't know who - I think Bruce must have found that.**

14:30 **Anyway we filled that with these snails and we took it into the Greeks and they thought that was tremendous. They cooked 'em and we had 'em. We'd eat anything.**

John, what did the snails taste like?

Mm?

What did they taste like?

Pretty good. Yeah.

15:00 They, how they got 'em out of the shell, blowed if I know but they thought it was pretty good and they have a very heavy dark bread and it was very filling. It was tucker. Oh, we, they always had wine, always had wine. But, they'd given

15:30 us a feed before we left that house and... they were pretty well organised. They really were and it just shows that there was a lot of Greek people, were, you know towards what we were doing to try and help them. They all knew "Australia. Australia." You know,

16:00 and yes they were all very good people.

Have you kept in touch with anyone from Greece?

Oh, no we had, when we started in business we employed a Greek boy, didn't we? They'd migrated out here from Cairo

16:30 I think or somewhere like that. But we went back to Greece in 1967, Phyl and I and our two daughters but I couldn't find places, you know. It was so different. I can, in Athens there was a restaurant where we used to

- 17:00 go, we went to once I think and I was sure I knew where it was. I couldn't find it so we never, never kept up with any... of course that would have been 25 years later. But anyway, we ended up with a family over on the other, the right side of Greece near
- 17:30 Kalamata. We couldn't go to Kalamata because the Germans were occupying that but we were up the coast a bit from there, on a beach and we had to be there at 1 o'clock (0100 hours) and they were picking up, the navy was picking up between 1 o'clock and 3 o'clock.
- 18:00 We were there of course and they came in, in their long boats. They row them. They don't have any, no motors or anything. They had to be very quiet and, anyway they came in. I think I might have been the first bloke in the boat
- 18:30 and I said to Bruce, "Come on, quick hop in, in here." And he said, "No John," he said, "I think I'll stay." And I said, "Yeah, that little girl back there's a big draw isn't she?" "Oh, she's very nice." But he said, "These poor blighters they need, they need help, they need help and
- 19:00 he survived. He was captured and imprisoned and escaped. I think he had two escapes, three altogether and I saw him two or three times after the war and he had some fantastic stories to tell.
- 19:30 He learnt the language a little bit because they were talking to him and he was quite, he was quite a sensible sort of a fellow. He was a junior auctioneer and a stock & stations agent up in the Gippsland in Victoria and he was
- 20:00 a pretty brainy little bloke but I don't think he's alive at the moment. We went to a reunion about 3 years ago. Went down specially and there was quite a few of our fellows there of course and I said, "Has anyone heard anything about Bruce Hurley?" And they said,
- 20:30 "Oh, the Greek consul was looking for him, and that was the last we heard of it." But whether he went back to Greece or whether he died, he just dropped out.

So he did come back to Australia at some point?

Oh, he came back to Australia. Phyl's sister was a radiologist at

- 21:00 Heidelberg Hospital and after the prisoners from Europe came back, she was x-raying the ex-prisoners of war and she said, "One of your fellows came through today." She said, "He'd been knocked about something terrible." But she said, "He'll survive." And
- 21:30 it was Bruce Hurley.

What about the other two men?

Ah, I don't know what's happened to Bertie Brindle. He wasn't a very popular fellow but, he was alright. He was a sergeant and he was one of those that could be pretty bouncy but

- 22:00 he never came to any, wherever he was, he never ever came to any reunions. I saw Doug Alderton once I think in Melbourne at a reunion and then they told me that he had moved to Western Australia and we were over in Perth and they said he had a Pub
- 22:30 but I couldn't find him. I looked through the phone books and definitely couldn't find him but ... Yeah, Bertie Brindle, yeah right, up in New Guinea there was myself, Ray Baker he was a corporal, I
- 23:00 was a lance corporal and Bertie Brindle was still the sergeant, we were called back to base at Wau it was, for interviews and it was for to go to OTS Officers Training College at Portsea in Victoria and there was a colonel and
- 23:30 two majors I think quizzing this and they weren't from our units or anything they were, and they said, "Well you go down there and you spend..." - I think it was 6 months, probably 6 months, no it couldn't have been 6 months it must have been 3 months because
- 24:00 no, because they went down - oh I said to them after the interview, I said, "Where do we go if we get a commission?" And he said, "Oh, wherever you're needed." I said, "Could we get needed back in our own unit?" And he said, "No." And I said, "Well, if it's OK." I said
- 24:30 I'm not, not a candidate because I said, I don't want to leave these fellows. Some of them, there's not many of us original fellows left. We even, the reos [reinforcements] that we had, we were good mates and I said, "I'd been with 'em since '39. I think I'll stick it out." So, I didn't go but Roy, Ray Barker, Barker? Yeah,
- 25:00 from Rosebud. He came back up, up into New Guinea with the 3rd Division as an infantry officer and he survived.

John, can I just take you back to - when you got into the boat in Greece,

Mm.

where did you go? Where did the boat go?

The one that was sunk?

25:30 **No. The one after, the Greeks, the underground - the Greek underground people took you down to the shore?**

Oh yes, we had to go across the Corinth Gulf to get into part of Greece and the part goes down the bottom, down the, right down the bottom and Kalamata is down there and we had to go across the Corinth

26:00 Bay. There is a Corinth Canal and we could have, if we could have got across the bridge, there's a bridge across the Canal, if we could have got across the bridge we wouldn't have had to walk all that way but you couldn't get across the bridge because it was in German hands and there's only one bridge on the whole and the Corinth Canal is a, not like these

26:30 Suez or those that can take two ships at a time. There's just enough room for a ship to go through and there's steep banks each side and that runs out into Corinth Bay, Gulf that's what they call it yeah, and that's where we had to go across. We had to go across there and

27:00 we didn't have any money to pay 'em but I think one of the Greek's might have paid up to 'em.

Did you actually row?

No, we didn't row we were too bloody weak.

And what happened when you got to the other side?

Well, when we got to the other side that's where we met up with this, the last family, where

27:30 there was a nice little 18 year old girl and Bruce made it up with her. I think he, I don't know whether he married her or not. I never asked him, I don't think. Yes, and when we were, got in the boat to go out to get aboard the, it was a destroyer it was the, Her Majesty's

28:00 ship, [HMS] Defender, and they'd drop a rope ladder, not a rope ladder it was a rope, big ropey thing that 4 or 5 could get up at the same time, climb up the sides and that's... and when we got up there and, I must have looked pretty done-in and a Scottish crewman said to me,

28:30 "Ere lad, would you like a rum?" And gave me a double strength rum and oh, it was beautiful!

How did they know to come and get you?

Well, there was, wasn't only us there was 70 taken onboard and there was well, I suppose

29:00 a lot of them they all said well, "If you want to wander away and try and make your way out." Some of them went up through Turkey and got out but, that was a long hike. That would have been a long hike but...

So you swam out to the boat and then climbed up?

Climbed up and they took off

29:30 very smartly before, before dawn and headed for Alexandria.

You wonder how it all linked up? The Greeks got you to the family, the family got you to the destroyer?

Mm.

What? And you wonder how everyone was talking to each other and how everyone knew everything?

They must have had the line organised. We weren't the first that they'd taken

30:00 through that's for sure because there was a lot of 6th Divi blokes that were in the 70 and they, that's the way they would have come, I'm sure but... they were going to take us direct to Alexandria, the destroyer, but

30:30 there was a troop ship that had loaded before and it was the [MV] City of London and there was another one the [MV] Ettrick I think that's its name. They were in convoy more or less, there's two of 'em with Australians

31:00 and the Ettrick was sunk and it was amazing. They didn't, oh they lost one man on the whole ship. All the others got across and onto the City of London and of course it was packed full

31:30 and another 70 didn't make much difference. But we got to Alexandria. They put us on a train and, of course to Palestine and we got, we've got to our headquarters and that's where they told me that I was reported missing and then they interviewed us.

- 32:00 How many got on the [SS Nea] Hellas? Who were they? Well, there was 25 of us. I think we got around to naming them all, between us you know. So there was 21 that we lost there. We lost 94 – killed in action, that's
- 32:30 killed on the, on the roads and I think there was 100 and something wounded and then there was about 100 taken prisoner so were, we'd lost over 300. We'd lost over half of our unit with prisoners of war but the wounded fellows
- 33:00 got back to Palestine, they survived I think most of them survived. When I got back there well they quizzed me. I was as sick as a dog. I didn't know what was wrong. I reported to sick bay and they put me into hospital and I had yellow jaundice.

What did you have done?

Yellow jaundice.

How did you get that?

From

- 33:30 what we were eating I think. You know, we'd just eat anything and it's, you go yellow and it attacks your liver so, I was in hospital for 3 weeks and that's where I saw Roy Devantia. He'd been in Tobruk and he'd been wounded and he was, and I saw Youngie and Youngie and I,

- 34:00 I said, "When are you getting out?" And he said, "Oh, I don't know. I think I'd be going out in a week's time." I said, "Well, I'll bludge with you in here for a week and what's say we get as much money as we can out of our pay and go have a week's leave." And he said, "Where are we going to get leave here?" And I said, "What are you talking about getting leave?" I said,

- 34:30 "We'll go AWOL." So that's what we did.

You didn't learn from those early days then?

No. Well, we hadn't had any leave so,

When you were demoted from lieutenant to private?

I was a temporary sergeant at that stage, when we got back to our unit we had to front the colonel and

- 35:00 he said, "Oh, what do I do with you fellows?" And he said, "You're record is tremendous but you can't go AWOL. I said, "Well, we hadn't had any leave sir." He said, "You would have got it in time." And I said, "I believe we're going to Syria?" "Oh," he said, "there's a, we could leave you behind here."

- 35:30 Because if they were ferrying trucks across from Egypt port side we were ferrying trucks up to Syria. The Syrian campaign had really finished. There was a little bit of skirmish going on with the French but,

Where?

we never saw any action there really. Not...

- 36:00 **Sorry John, where did you go with Youngie?**

Then? Well we were in Syria

No, when you were in the hospital and you decided to go AWOL?

Oh we went into Tel Aviv.

Oh, Tel Aviv?

Mm. Oh yeah.

What was that like?

Oh lovely. I can still taste the steak and kidney pies that we used to go and get at lunchtime.

- 36:30 but that's where we went – we got to Tel Aviv. We went before we got, left Palestine and we had, you could get leave for Jerusalem and we spent some nice leave there and you know, catching up with all the Religious stuff.

And did you write letters back home to Phyl?

Oh yeah. Hell,

- 37:00 yeah.

To tell her that you were alright and your mother, did you write to your mother and tell her I'm not missing, I'm alright?

Eh? Mm. When I got one of her letters and she said she was joining the army, I thought oh god, not again. Oh, no way! But then we, well you know how we met?

37:30 **Yes. So you'd been writing in that time?**

Yes, we used to write regularly.

Had you decided yet you were going to ask Phyl, when you got back to Australia, to marry you?

Yep. Yeah I had decided but I didn't tell her.

Had, did you manage to buy rings? Did you have enough money to buy a ring?

Yeah.

So, you saved all your money up?

Well, I had it. If I didn't I would have borrowed

38:00 from Youngie or someone. Eh? No, I didn't borrow it from Dad. We borrowed from Dad when we bought our first house.

So what happens after your week in Tel Aviv?

Oh well, we were in the group that were ferrying the trucks up from Egypt to Syria up to Damascus. We were camped just out of Damascus

38:30 and what we were doing there, we were transporting "darkies" from Africa to repair the roads and things like that and the fellows that were in the 7th Division mostly that

39:00 were in the Syrian campaign, they were fighting the Foreign Legion and that's where what's-his-name got his VC. He was Governor of New South Wales. I've got his book in there [Sir Roden Cutler, VC].

39:30 **You keep going from the frying pan to the fire, from the frying pan to the fire?**

But then we had a couple of weeks leave and off up to New Guinea.

Just before we get to New Guinea, you went, you managed to go straight from Tel Aviv up to Syria, so if you hadn't, if you hadn't taken that week - you wouldn't have?

40:00 No, well we saw Stan Meyers our lieutenant, well he was a captain then. They gave him a lot of pip and he said, "Well, come on fellows." He said, "You're, we're going up to Syria." And he just said, "We're going up to Syria." And I thought oh gosh, we don't want to miss out on that and we went to, you go to a staging camp from hospital, you go to the

40:30 staging camp and then, that staging camp to your unit and that's where they deal with you then.

We'll just stop there John...

Tape 7

00:31 **OK?**

OK. We arrived back in Australia on 7th August, 1942 and of course the Vics got leave, the South Australians, the Westies had got their leave, the Queenslanders were still last and I went to the Officer that was in charge and I said "when am I gonna get some leave?" And he said, "You'll get it

01:00 when the Vics come back." And I said, "Yes, I know that story. I've got a, a fiancé in Melbourne and we want to get married. And, he said, "Ooh, we'll have to do something about that." And this was Thursday. He said, "I'll give you leave from today." He said, "You've,

01:30 you've got Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday." He said, "You've got to be back at 1159 hours on Monday." That's a minute before 12 o'clock. That's always been in the army anyway, so I rang Phyl and told her that I was coming down and she met me at, at

02:00 Spencer Street station and that's the first time I'd seen her in just about 2 and, 2 ¾ years. She looked pretty good. We caught a train out to Caulfield and we were walking up from Caulfield Station up to Burke Road and it wasn't far and I

02:30 said, "Hey darlin', why don't we get married?" And she said, "When?" And I said, "Well, what's wrong with Saturday?" She said, "That's, it's Thursday today, mm. Friday, Saturday. Ooh!" She said, "Well, if we can." So we, we arrived at home and

03:00 I said to Mrs, I said to Mrs Clarke, I said, "Mrs Clarke, Phyl and I would like to get married and we'd like your blessing." "Oh goodness," she said, "goodness, oh, you'd better go out and see Dad." Oh dear, so Dad's been down the backyard and

03:30 he's a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK y man and he was collecting the eggs and he's coming back up the yard and I said good day to him and I said, "Mr Clarke, Phyl and I would like to get married." "Oh goodness," he said, "when, when, when John, when, when?" I said, "Saturday." And he said, "What's today?" And I said, "Thursday."

04:00 He said, I said, "We'd like your blessing." And he said, "Yes, you've got that but I don't know if we'll get you married on Saturday." And the Church of England in Toorak and they were, they had, Phyl's sister saw an ad in the paper that they were marrying Service Personnel without

04:30 waiting for 3 weeks or whatever. So, we went down and saw him on Thursday night and we saw him again on Friday night and he said, "Alright, we'll see you at church at 3 o'clock on Saturday." So that was fixed. Well, I didn't have a, I had a fair bit of cash. I don't know where I got it from. I probably,

05:00 I probably, I probably played two-up or something and I must have had a win anyway, we had to buy a wedding ring. We had to book somewhere to have our honeymoon and, so I had enough money to pay 'em all anyway

05:30 and Dad said, "Well, I'll arrange the wedding breakfast for you." And he arranged a wedding breakfast for us in Collins Street, what was the name of it? It was a big restaurant and God, I remember thinking gosh, I've got to get up

06:00 and make a speech. I think I've done the wrong thing. But anyway, we got over it and he organised one of his friends in Melbourne that he had, it was the jeweller, and he opened his shop and he was a... They were closed in Melbourne

06:30 on Saturday's. There was, so we got the ring and the, Dad then... petrol was pretty scarce and, so he went out by tram to a pastry cook he knew in Prestons, or somewhere wasn't it? And,

07:00 got a wedding cake. Carried it back in all iced and everything and so, the marriage was on and of course Phyl was in the army and they were, there was an old digger from the First World War was in charge mostly, wasn't he?

07:30 Ol' Mack and I remember during those, my sister - the one that's in Toowoomba now, she was there and her husband, I don't know where Max was, I think he was, yeah he was in the air force and anyway, I went out to see her and

08:00 then I came out from seeing her and I thought, "where the hell am I?" So I rang Phyl and I said, "Now I'm in St Kilda Road and I'm at the corner of such and such street, how do I get back into you?" And she said to Ol' Mack, "John's out at

08:30 so-n-so." And he said, "Tell him to sit there and keep quiet." And he said, "I'll send a vehicle out for him." Oh, that was that and I got back and anyway everything was going alright. And we went to the, then we had the wedding and it went off without any hitches. There was no-one to say that they should stop this marriage. It

09:00 wasn't a shotgun marriage. Anyway, that was good and, but when we came out of the church all the staff were lined up but...

09:30 we, we went down to the tourist bureau and we booked, at a boarding house in Upwey and we caught, we had to catch a train for Ferntree Gully and then we got a taxi to Upwey and we

10:00 were booked in for it. We paid at the Tourist Bureau and everything and we go up there. Oh, we're going on the way down and Phyl said, "Hey, we haven't got a wedding photo." And we looked around and, oh it was in Collins Street wasn't it. The Wentworth was the café or the restaurant and we went in and this fellow said, "Oh yeah,

10:30 I'll take your photo." and that's it, and then we tore off down to the station and got the train, got a taxi and we get to the boarding house, both in uniform and the madam there, at the, she was a funny old dear

11:00 and she said, "Hello Mr Turner, and how are you?" I said, "Oh, pretty good." And she said, "How are you Mrs Stern?" And Phyl's looking around, "Who the hell's she talking to?" You should have seen the expression that we got. I, I caught her and I said, "Well, I've got a marriage

11:30 certificate here if you'd like to see it." So, we had Saturday night, Sunday. Did we go and play golf or something on Sunday? Yeah. And then we went back on Monday and

12:00 then a week after that, we got 2 weeks, I think we got 2 weeks leave and we came up to Queensland by train. Yeah, it was a. No, no that. Oh, yes it was. Yes it was and of course in those days and I think you've still got to do it, if you're going from Sydney to Brisbane

- 12:30 and if you go from Melbourne to Sydney you can go up to Sydney alright without changing trains but you've got to change trains and you've got to spend a day in Sydney to get a train up to Brisbane so, we had a day in Sydney and so we booked into a Hotel because we never had much sleep in the train,
- 13:00 coming up in the troop train and, we went in, we ordered the evening meal and we went into the restaurant ordered the meal and said, "Well, could you be pretty quick with that because we've got to catch the train?" And the waitress said, "Oh, everybody does, says that." I said,
- 13:30 "Well this is fair dinkum." And anyway, we got our baggage and I don't think we ate all our dinner and I paid for it of course and we hot footed it up the, you go up a bit of a ramp there to get into the station from the hotel and oh god, here's the train and the guard's just put his flag up
- 14:00 and he sees us running down with bags dragging, Phyl keeping up with us. And he says, "Where are you going?" And we said, "On your train." And he said, "For God's sake, get in here." And we got in his guard van and that was it. We, he took us up, he gave us an apartment on our own, didn't he? Yeah, he was a good bloke and we had 2 weeks up here
- 14:30 with our family and we were in Brisbane and we were in, what's the street where they got you your engagement ring? In, ah, they just closed it the other day and
- 15:00 we used to knock about, I used to knock about with him and oh, anyway, I knew him and eh? No. They, he's the biggest Jeweller in yeah...
- 15:30 anyway, I went in and made myself known and he remembered me. We used to, he used to come down to Redcliffe for holidays and a friend of a friend of ours was John Playstead and Bob Brown and he gave us a big discount on
- 16:00 our, on our room. She's still got it. We've had it cleaned a couple of times but... then I had to buy her one, oh for the 50 year one and she didn't get one for the 60, did you? I just gave you a kiss and a cuddle. 60 years you know, you get it. Ah but,
- 16:30 we've had a pretty good life and ...

How soon did you head up to New Guinea after that?

Mmm?

How soon did you head up to New Guinea after that?

Pretty soon. We got re-equipped. We got some trucks and prior to seeing Phyl on the 4 days leave, I,

- 17:00 they gave me a job and then they gave me 6 drivers and we went down in a truck, to pick up trucks at Melbourne at the wharf and picked up the trucks and signed for 'em and I said to the fellows, "OK, you head off. I'll catch you up later." And so it was around about 5 o'clock then, and
- 17:30 I'm heading out Dandenong way, out Dandy [Dandenong] Road and I'm going to call into Burke Road and a bloomin' MP pulled me up and he said, "Where are you going soldier?" I said, "Oh, I'm going up to Seymour or Puckapunyal." "Oh," he said, "you're goin' the wrong way." I said, "Oh God am I?"
- 18:00 I said, "I'm a Queenslander and I thought I was on the right road." He said, "Well, just pull over there," he said, "and I'll get you a convoy and turn 'em around." The buggers all followed me but I never got a chance to go in and see mother even, did I? Oh dear, but anyway it was then we got re-equipped and we picked
- 18:30 up more equipment. We went up by train with the vehicles on the train and the artillery was with us too and we ended up at Brisbane and there were some of our 17th Brigade were up in New Guinea, they'd gone up to
- 19:00 Milne Bay where there was an encounter with the Japs and they were short of petrol, they were short of ammunition and we got to Brisbane and the wharfies were on strike. They wouldn't, wouldn't handle the,
- 19:30 the live ammunition and they wouldn't put petrol on deck. It was in 40 gallon drums, 44 gallon drums so we had to take the wharfies jobs. Some of us were put on guard and they said "if there's any wharfies come and start to cause trouble,
- 20:00 shoot 'em in the legs" and we had Tommy guns and I think there was 2 or 3 shots fired over the top and never saw a wharfie for all the time we were loading the ships. We loaded the ships and they were off up to New Guinea and we were camped at Ascot,
- 20:30 Ascot race course. We struck camp a few days later and got on trains, went up to Townsville by train and onto the ship, I think it was the [HMAS] Duntroon the ship that we got on.

Was there, John was there a

21:00 **I was just wondering if there was much talk amongst the troops about the wharfies strike and what you all felt about that considering**

Yeah!

you were fighting for Australia?

We were pretty hostile because our fellows were fighting and they needed the stuff and that's why they... but the wharfies, oh, they came back later of course but oh, they were a terrible lot there!

21:30 The Melbourne wharfies were shocking! Oh, no, the Brisbane wharfies were shocking! Shocking fellows! All of the fellows there... I, I've been in Rotary, oh I was asked to join Rotary in Mornington in Victoria and I was in Rotary for 40,

22:00 45 years. I resigned a couple of years ago so I'm an honorary member now and one of the fellows nominated a fellow to come in and I didn't know him at all, the new bloke that was coming in and every now and again you get a turn at our club, our Rotary

22:30 Club to, and someone suggested that I, I give them an account of when I went up to New Guinea and of course I brought this in about the wharfies and this bloke was a wharfie but he was alright he said, he's still in the club but anyway, we sailed in, we,

23:00 we got onboard in the evening and she pulled out and anchored out a bit from Townsville and I wonder why, but from around about 10 o'clock we didn't have to wonder much because the Japs were coming over about that time every night and bombing the wharf so they pulled out and

23:30 we pulled back in the next morning and put in more supplies and away we went. New Guinea here we come!

What did you think of it when you got there?

Eh?

What did you think of New Guinea when you first set eyes on it?

I wasn't very impressed. It rained, it rained, it's mud and there's no roads. We could, we had very little

24:00 transport for the trucks, mostly from the, the wharf to a depot and that's, that was it and anyway, that was, that was the first time that the Japs had retreated since Pearl Harbour, at Milne Bay. That was before Kokoda.

24:30 Kokoda followed about a month later and the 18th Brigade was the main one in that, there was the 18th Brigade and the 21st Brigade, 21st Battalion, 18th Battalion, 18th Brigade and the 2/9th Battalion and the 21st Battalion were there and they were the main ones.

25:00 Anyway, Roy Devantia, who the 17th Brigade was coming in with, the 2/5th Battalion and Petrol Company was coming in accompanying them. So, we pulled into Milne Bay. The wharf at Milne Bay, you could pull up... it's like it is in Tasmania.

25:30 You could pull right out to the, it's deep water all the way and there's a boat that the Japs had copped there and it had been blown and it was over on its side. We tied up to this boat or ship, we had to walk out over the top of it. I thought "oh hell"

26:00 you know, over the, it's just lying on its side like that.

So you'd actually walk over that ship to get to the wharf?

To get to the, to the ground, yeah! Anyway, we didn't have much to do there but Roy Devantia came out and he located me and he came out and we had a yarn and I said, "Hey, what's that up on your shoulder?" "Oh

26:30 John," he said, "they, we lost a few officers and they ran short and they plonked them on to me." I said, "What on the field?" And he said, "Yeah." And I said, "You must have done something." And he said, "Oh yeah but," he said, "they'll never get me."

What did he mean by that?

Eh?

What did he mean by that?

Oh, he reckoned they'd never shoot him. They'd never catch him. You know, because he'd been wounded

27:00 and you know, he'd seen, he'd seen a lot of action and I talked to a few of the fellows in his company, he was in Don Company and they said, "Ooh, he's in for a Military Cross." They said, "He wiped out two Jap machine guns that was holding

- 27:30 up the whole advance." And he'd do things like that. He'd grab a machine gun and tear into it but anyway I said to him later, I said, "What's happening now Roy?" He said, "Oh well, I'll be going around to Buna." That's around the other coast
- 28:00 and they, that's where they met up with the Yanks. The Yanks were there as well but the Japs were well dug in and they, they did it everywhere in New Guinea. Where there was palm trees, they'd cut the palm trees down and stack 'em up and they'd have holes through so they were protected and of course, the palm trees are pretty hard. You've
- 28:30 got to get something pretty big to come through it. Anyway, he was going around there, he said, "We'll clean the little yellow so-and-so's up." And I heard that he was killed 2 days after he arrived and I could never find out how he was killed and 50 years after
- 29:00 the war there was a track back, we went up to Cairns cause that's where most of them were taking off and I saw some 2/9th blokes and I went in and I said, "Any of you fellows originals from the 2/9th?" "Oh yeah, I am." Some bloke came up. I said, "Did you know Roy Devantia?" I said,
- 29:30 "He was in Don Company." He said, "Yeah." I said, "How was he killed?" He said, "Bloody sniper got him. He wouldn't have known what hit him." And I'm pretty certain, yeah because I looked it up in Canberra, they've got a wall with all the, those that passed on and he had an MC [Military Cross] after his name. He would have never
- 30:00 known it but he was, he should have survived. So all the others. Anyway, we were there for oh, it was December. We, yeah we had Christmas there then we went, they put us on a ship and took us around to Moresby and they gave us
- 30:30 injections and we thought oh oh, where are we going now and you get a tetanus injection before you go into action and they said, "I think we're going to Wau." I said, "Where's that?" And they said, "Oh that's inland." So, we were to go in, we were to go down to the airport
- 31:00 at 5 o'clock or something like, stupid hour like that in the morning and of course we, well you do as you're told and we went down there and at 5 o'clock the lot had gone. They'd flown in. DC-3s they were. Yank pilots. Anyway, they,
- 31:30 DC-3s were coming back and they had little ways where they could fly ah, park the plane in case of a raid and they did that and we were walking around having a look at this DC3 and I said to the Yank, "You got any power on this thing? You know, what about if the fighters have a go at you?"
- 32:00 And he said, "Yeah sure thing, I've got a 45 stuck on my side of my leg." Anyway, we walked around and we saw a couple of holes in the fuselage and said, "What happened there?" He said, "Where are you blokes supposed to be going?" And we said, "To Wau." "Oh God," he said, "I hope we make it." I said, "Why? How did you get those?" He said, "The mortars from the
- 32:30 Japs is landing on the strip and a bit of that went through the fuselage." And he said, "There's a few snipers there too!" "Oh thank you very much." So eventually we took off and we went over and, Wau is in a valley and the airplanes
- 33:00 land up hill, take off down hill and if there's a bit of a fog it hangs and some of the fighters come in, P-38s they were a good plane. We used to love 'em because you could always tell them, they were friendly because they had twin fuselage. They'd come in and they'd buzz the area and
- 33:30 break the fog up if they could and we landed. Anyway, we landed and a 2/5th Battalion bloke in front of me he hopped out and he fell over and I thought, "oh, poor bugger, and when I got out and a few of the others got out and there was a bit of a hold up. He'd been shot by a sniper. We picked him up and shoved him back
- 34:00 in the plane and he went back to Moresby, I suppose he lived, but that's how close if they were and that's where we started. We started and, it was in a paper in June, July that I get from Veteran Affairs.

Was there any, was there anything John there that you,

- 34:30 **that was done about sniper or?**

Mm?

Was there any return fire to, or did anybody try and find where the sniper was?

Oh yeah, they tried to find 'em. They were right up the top of the palm tree or something and ooh, they've got food up there and water and they, they were very well camouflaged but they were cleaned up. Yes, they were cleaned up before we left off there

- 35:00 so, it was the longest campaign of continual action in the Second World War. We were there for 8 months and we were going from Wau to Salamaua. Well, you go across, across New Guinea and then around to Sali and we had kai-trains

- 35:30 we used to call them, that's the carrying - for the carriers and of course no trucks, there was no vehicle, a couple of, we had a couple of old utes that were there from before the war and we got them going and we were making ammunition dumps and things like that around the Wau area and then we
- 36:00 were either going with the kai-trains, some of them were going up with the, the locals and making dropping strips where they could drop cargo and we were still, it never, you never talked about how many miles it was. You'd always
- 36:30 say "Oh well, yeah that's a 2 day walk or 3 day walk," or something like this. This, I was, my first assignment was up from Wau. There was a place, it was a gold mine it was called Black Cat and we could, we were up pretty high and we'd look
- 37:00 down over Wau and there was a group there, they, commando's really and it was 2/3rd Independent Company they called themselves and the whole organisation or the whole campaign was the 17th Brigade and
- 37:30 these Independent Company's and we were all known as Kanga Force and that was the Kanga Force. Anyway, I went up there and you had to check every, all ammunition like all the mills, woms and things like that and make sure that they were safe and there were no duds and all this
- 38:00 sort of thing and then you issue 'em out to the troops that are going out on patrol and they know that they can, the bombs are right. There was a terrible lot of duds. You have 3 seconds
- 38:30 and 7 seconds. If you release the spring, you've either got 3 seconds or 7 seconds before the bomb will explode and you'd have to take all these out and make sure they weren't damaged or were wet or wouldn't fire and I used to have to do that and
- 39:00 I had a couple of fellows come and help me.

How would you know for sure if it was a dud or not?

Well if it was dented or they're like a little cartridge. If they're dented or they're moist - choo, throw 'em away and there was a Lieutenant there, Hancock he was. He was one of those that knew everything.

- 39:30 He won the war, that was their first action up there. He reckoned he'd won the war but his boss was Colonel Wharf, that's right Wharfie and he was a wild boy, he was a real wildie and he used to say "righto you bastards, you gonna get me a VC"
- 40:00 and they said "what's the problem with him?" A Yank had shot through with his wife and he was going to get a VC instead of having a life but if, if a Jap was shot with a sword, he'd put it in stock and he said, "Righto, we'll share it. You know, we'll sell it..." He was a good bloke.
- 40:30 Anyway, this Hancock bloke came over to me and he said, "Righto," he said, "I want so many hand grenades." And he said, "You've got plenty." And I said, "Yeah, half of 'em don't work." And he said, "Oh, that's only your thinking." And all this sort of thing and I said, "Well, I'm sorry but you'll get what I give you." Oh, we had a hell of a tow going and I rang my chief and told him
- 41:00 and he said, "Don't give 'em to him, don't give him duds. Don't give 'em unless you're satisfied." So this went on and on and on and he said, "You ought to come out on a patrol." I said, "I wouldn't bloody well go with you anyways." And I went out with Wharfie and he was alright. But I wouldn't like to go too many times.
- 41:30 I wasn't going to get him a VC.

Just hold that...

Tape 8

- 00:32 **I was just going to ask you in New Guinea, there's some kind of myth about the Gold Mine in New Guinea?**
- Yeah, well
- Do you know anything about that?**
- there's Black Cat mine, that was the one up from Wau and then Bulolo that's where the alluvial gold was, in the Bulolo River and Wau's there and Bulolo's another 20 miles up
- 01:00 and there was big machinery at Bulolo where they used to, alluvial gold and, there was a lot of gold on the machines and, alluvial gold, and a lot of them that were up in New Guinea were
- 01:30 going up there if they had spare time and getting some of this gold and they were having trouble to get

it out of course but, I believe there was a lot of it went on and we went up, of course Bill when his, first job was with the department of agriculture and he was up in New Guinea as a

- 02:00 nutritional man and even then, we went up there then and this machinery was still there but I don't know how much gold was in it, I didn't worry about it but yeah, that's where the gold was and... New Guinea, they have a lot of earthquakes and the natives call them guru,
- 02:30 gurus and I was ordered to set up a staging area and I was on my own, on my own and I had 3 native boys and if there was anybody going through or if there was carrying wounded back, they'd want to stop. Well, they could
- 03:00 stop at this staging spot. It was about oh, a fair way from the front and we'd look after 'em what we could and then they, the natives could start off next day but the terrain is so bad that they couldn't carry stretcher cases at night. It was too dangerous!
- 03:30 But the 3 boys that I had, they were good. One used to do the cooking and he came back, he said, "Master, come along with me fella. You want 'em shower?" And I said, "Yeah, I want 'em shower!" And he says,
- 04:00 "You come, you come, come." And I come and there was water coming out of the bank as it rains nearly every afternoon and the water coming out of the bank and I put my hand on it and it was warm and he said "master, I make a new shower. I make 'em water come hot" and he'd got a bamboo
- 04:30 and knocked all the centres out of 'em. The bamboo was about that big and he'd knocked these centres out of 'em. Stick 'em in through the mud. Hammer 'em in through the mud and then put a, and... out the water comes and you get underneath. He had it up so I could, had room to stand underneath and I had hot showers. I could have stayed there for the rest of the war but eventually they caught up with me and put me
- 05:00 out. We went, I wasn't very far from a small dropping strip where they used to come and drop and I'd send, they'd be some carriers come in and I'd send them out. Anyway Donny Rose, yeah Donny Rose was in our Unit and his
- 05:30 brother was, he was alike that fellow in England that had 10 legs. He was called 10 leg Rose and he used to fly over and they were on oh, I've forgotten what they called these planes but they were very light and they were very fast and
- 06:00 they were strafers and if he was flying over Donny'd say, "Here's Tinny coming." And he'd get out and waves a flag or sheets or anything and Tinny would drop some loaves of bread or something like that but this time instead of dropping loaves of bread, they thought it was the Japs because
- 06:30 the Japs would do things like that. To make out that they were Australians, see. Anyway, Tinny and his mob opened up on us and Trappy, Bill Trapp, he was one of the ones clearing the strip. You know, looking after the strip and the natives that he had there and
- 07:00 he ran like hell and he couldn't find anywhere to hide. I don't know whether you know what, there's a toilet they call the long drop. They dig a big hole and they got a few planks over the top so Trappy found that and he's hanging down there and here he is
- 07:30 but it's a long way down and we went over and we said, "Who's gonna stand on his fingers?" But, we pulled him up. But, it was, it was pretty rugged, very rugged and malaria was bad.

Just on that point John, what about the scrub typhus? How many did, how many men did that affect?

- 08:00 It affected a lot. A lot of us, yeah.

Now you got it?

I got it.

But you survived?

I survived but it took me 6 months just about. I had scrub typhus, I had hook worm and I had malaria. I had 26, 26 attacks of malaria.

- 08:30 I had pneumonia but anyway I survived but, a couple of times they thought they'd lost me but there was a lot of 'em that got it. You get it out of the jungle. It's a virus that gets into your body and it attacks all the main arteries, all your lungs, your kidneys, your heart.

Can you tell me any of the symptoms?

Well you just haven't got

- 09:00 any energy and you feel terrible. You fell, you've got shocking headaches, backaches and you don't feel like anything and you're forcing yourself but, I got moved to Nasau Bay where they met up with the

English... with the Yanks and my boss saw me and he said, "God

09:30 John, what's wrong with you?" And I said, "I don't know but I don't feel very well." He said, "You look like death warmed up. I'll get you on a barge and send you around to Milne Bay. There's a field hospital there." He said, "They'll fix you up." Did that and next day they put me, I don't remember much about then. They put me on a plane and I ended up at Rocky

10:00 Creek where the field hospitals were, the 2/2nd Field Hospital and I was there on and off for 6 months and that really finished me. There was another campaign after, I'd have been... and I missed out and it's the only one that I missed in the whole war.

10:30 But it was, it was very hard because you, you had to hoof it everywhere. There was no transport.

Do you think that was, New Guinea was the hardest part of the war for you?

I think it was. Yeah, I think it was. It wasn't, so

11:00 stressful. If we were on kai-trains, that's the, we'd have about 60 or 70, anything up to 100 carriers. We'd have 2 of us, one in the front and one at the back and 2 New Guinea policemen in the middle somewhere and that's how it would be and

11:30 the stragglers, the Japs used to ambush a kai-line and if they ambushed a kai-line it'd be the back end.

What is a kai-line?

Carriers carrying kai, that's tucker. Carrying tucker or ammunition or whatever and

12:00 it, it was, we lost quite a few but we lost more with sickness than with wounds but the Yanks when they came in it was a different war. A different war. We had one mountain gun, we had two mountain guns really at this time

12:30 and they used to pull 'em to pieces and the carriers, one would carry half a barrel, another one would carry a barrel, another one would carry a wheel and that's how it was and we used to get the ammunition to them. Then when they put them together, the barrels - they bolt 'em together, they screw 'em together and one of the

13:00 guns they forgot to screw together and they fired the smoke shell to see how the guns go, and the barrel went too. They dropped a barrel to us but it was so heavy and the ground was so soft, it went down I don't know, it must have got down through to China I think. We never, ever got it but there's,

13:30 at Mount Tambo where we, there was a big action there and it was very heavy jungle or yeah, heavy jungle and it was on top of a mountain. The Japs were well dug in, they had tunnels and all sorts of things there and, they opened up their big artillery and fair

14:00 dinkum, you'd think you'd ploughed the paddock. There was hardly a tree standing and there was Japs, a few Japs there but they were cuckoo, they'd been blown about.

Did you come across any Japanese prisoners?

Yeah, they took a prisoner and he'd been wounded. He'd been wounded around the stomach and they wanted to

14:30 get him back to headquarters, to see if they could get anything out of him. So they, the natives don't like 'em. They, you know, they, "Oh, him he yellow bastard master." And, so I had 8 carriers, there's 2 at the back, 2 at the front and a separate team. It wasn't very far to get

15:00 down to headquarters but anyway, we were going through and some of the 6th Battalion fellows came over and one of them came over and said "oh, that's, we had him trussed up - we had his legs tied, we had his hands tied behind his head like this and we had a big bamboo behind his legs and he was tied on to this blanket that was, and it had a big

15:30 long bamboo each side and the boys had plenty of room at the back. Anyway, the bloke come over and he said, "Oh, give the poor blighter a smoke." And he bent over and he said, "Smoke? smoke?" And this Jap spat at him, spat at him in his face and he said, "You so-and-so I'll kill you." And I said, "No, you don't. You've gotta kill me first."

16:00 And we got him to headquarters and when you want 'em to put something down you say "lain ly" and they run words into one another, lain ly, see and, "Oh yeah, lain ly" two at the back walked backwards, two at the front walked out and bang down he came, so

16:30 I went in and checked him into, to headquarters and got away as quickly as possible. I don't know if they ever got anything out of him. Wouldn't think so but towards the next campaign, Aitape they took a lot of prisoners, a lot of prisoners. There was just not in there system at all to surrender.

17:00 They were terrible, oh they were terribly cruel and they were cruel - their officers were cruel to their, their men, really. Their Officers always had swords and we were on a no pipper observation point and

we could see their Japanese

- 17:30 on parade in one of the valleys that we were looking down on. It was, how we came to be there, that's where a Coast watcher was and he was there when we took petrol up so he could charge his batteries and go with his little motor because you couldn't
- 18:00 drop petrol. We used to have to carry that up and they'd be walking along and they'd draw their sword and they'd hit the, hit the troop with the flat of the sword, not the blade, the flat of the sword across the face or across the belly or they're inhuman they are. I hate 'em. I still hate 'em.

18:30 But

Did you witness any first hand cruelty of the Japanese besides that to the atrocities to the Japanese?

Not to any of us, no but fellows that were prisoners to them, they were ill-treated. The

- 19:00 apprentice that, Ray Smith that was apprentice with me, he was captured. His ship was sunk and then they were put onto a ship that was going to Japan and the Yanks sank them and he was prisoner and he was on the railway and I've met fellows that were there with him and they said he was a tough little
- 19:30 bloke and he should have lived but he got cholera and died but oh, some of the things that they did to 'em. They'd bury them up to about here and leave them there all day in the sun and all that sort of thing and if you survived you were a really good soldier, see. But it's wrong...

You spent 8 months in New Guinea

20:00 **all up?**

I was in New Guinea for 15 months I think all together but there was 8 months on the one campaign and they, when I got well enough they gave me 3 weeks leave and I went down to Melbourne

- 20:30 and we had our 3 weeks together and they put me on the train to come back and join the Unit before they got away and they pulled me off the train at Albury and I'd passed out and I was in hospital for a couple of weeks and then they sent me down to Melbourne and that was the start of the finish for me because they,
- 21:00 downgraded me medically and then I was to a, sidekick of Phyl's company that's, he was secretary to the boss and they put me there as a driver and I just couldn't stand the guys. I couldn't stand them.

21:30 **John, what happened working with AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] when you got back to Australia?**

Working with?

Phyllis and AWAS?

Phyllis?

Yes

No, I didn't work with her, it was her, it was, she was in the AWAS.

Oh, yes, I thought you said when you came back to Australia when you were recuperating you were helping Phyl out a bit.

- 22:00 No, I was, they put me as a driver with the depot of the Engineers and I call them all "shiny bums" anyway and there was a sergeant major there and he used to say, "John, will you pick me up at 5 o'clock in the morning." Or 7 o'clock or whatever, it was usually a pretty early hour
- 22:30 and I used to drop him off at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon and I thought he lived there but it was someone else's wife that was away in the services fighting the war and there was a lot of that sort of thing going on and I thought, this is not my life. I don't want to finish up with
- 23:00 this, so I went on sick parade and it was a private doctor that used to come and he said, "Yes, and what's wrong with you." And I said, "Well doctor if it's alright, I could tell you some stories." He said, "Well I might get some from you." And he said, "Alright, what do you want?" And I said, "Well, you can make me A grade
- 23:30 and I can go back and join my unit or you can make me medical unfit." That was out of the army. He said, "I think you might get out of the army." And he asked me a bit about my history and what had happened and what, what caused me to be downgraded to B
- 24:00 grade and he said, "I think you've done your bit, you can, I'll send you out to Heidelberg." And when I was, when I was sick with the scrub typhus, one doctor one day came out and he said,
- 24:30 "John, you've got a heart the size of a bullock." And I said, "Oh, is that good?" And he said, "No!" You

know the old fountain pens, he drew it on my chest and he put that in my history and years later, when we'd been in business and we'd been working like a slave, a doctor said to me,

25:00 "That heart of yours is not good." And he said, "You should get that on your army." And I said, "Oh, they gave me a pension when I got discharged and one day they called me in at half past ten and I saw a doctor at half past 4 in the afternoon." I lost a days work, a days pay. I was working as a field officer

25:30 and he said, "Oh," he said, "well how are you?" And I said, "Never bloody better in my life." So that was the finish of my pension of course. And, the local GP [General (medical) Practitioner] in Victoria said, "Well, alright, you should get a pension." He said, "Sign this." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Never mind.

26:00 You just sign it, I'll fill it out." And I think they gave me about oh, 80% disability pension and then he said, "Right, you've got to get another 20% to get 100." And I said, "Well, what about my ears?" And

26:30 he sent me to get my ears tested and they said it was from explosive damage and that put me at 100% and he said, "Right, now I'm going to put you in for a TPI[totally and permanently incapacitated]." And I got that. He got that for me too, but he was a good bloke.

How's your heart now?

No good. It stopped. It did, in December.

27:00 We went down to Melbourne to a funeral of Phyl's sister and after 5 days we headed out to Tullamarine. Got on an airplane. He taxied out onto the runway ready to take off, waiting for his call and I felt terrible. I said to Phyl, "I don't feel well." And she

27:30 said, "Sit down." And I'd bought a paper and I thought I'd sit down and try and read the paper. I blinked and I looked around and everything was blurry and I sat down and I went out to it and the Hostie saw me and she said I was as white as a sheet, she said, this was later on. She got medics, I don't know where she got 'em from, I don't,

28:00 I didn't care because I was out to it. They laid me out on the floor. Eh? Oh did she? I was out and I had no pulse and my heart had stopped beating. So, they laid me out and they worked on me, on my chest and they got me a pulse again and then

28:30 they took me into hospital and I was in intensive care for about 4 or 5 days and then they put me, I've got a pacemaker in there now, just there now. It seems to be working.

You're a survivor!

Yeah, I'm glad he didn't take off though. We wouldn't have had any medical, I would have been a goner, I reckon.

How was it

29:00 **trying to fit back into society after being in the war for 6 years?**

Oh, not too bad. We, Bill, Phyl's father gave me a job and he started me off at the bottom and said, "Work up." And I got up and I was their field officer. I used to go around and advise people. I did a couple of schools and

29:30 **What were you doing as a field officer?**

Well, stock feed people. Go and see 'em - what they needed and that's and Bill's carried it on of course but he's got a lot more knowledge than Dad.

Did you miss the army?

No, I missed some of the fellows because

30:00 it's something you've been through that you've said things and you've talked to... things about your life and they do the same and you just miss the mateship. Going into

30:30 strangers, you find it a bit hard at times and that's the part that I miss and I think that little poem there,

Yes, why don't you

It's a

Would you, would you like to read that for us, please?

I would if, that's it, is it?

No, please.

You've got time?

Yes, absolutely. Yes please read it for us?

Oh, I've gotta, gotta put my glasses on.

- 31:00 Before I start, the language is just about like most of the Australian troops talk. "I've travelled down some lonely roads, both crooked tracks and straight and I'd 'ave learned
- 31:30 life's noble creed summed up in one word, mate. I think back across the years, a thing I do of late and this would stick between me ears, you've gotta 'ave a mate. Me mind goes back to '43 to slave and hate
- 32:00 with bamboo for a plate and a bamboo paradise for bugs at night in bed. You slip and slither through the mud and curse your rotten fate and then you 'ear a quiet word "don't drop your bundle mate." And though it's all so long ago, the truth I 'ave to state,
- 32:30 a man don't know what lonely means till he's lost a mate. If there's a life that follows this and there's a golden gate, the welcome I want is 'ere is, just have, good on ye mate. And as you all live special dates like Anzac Day always
- 33:00 answer why, we're thinking of our mates. And when I've left the driver's seat and handed in me plate, I'll tell ol' Peter at the gate I've come to join me mates." So, I think that, but I don't want to join 'em yet.

Are you listening?

- 33:30 **Well, you know I was going to ask you, did you ever keep up with Bert's family? Did you ever meet any of them?**

No, no, we were going to, we had been over to Adelaide and we were out from Kangaroo Island but when we did go over to Greece

- 34:00 I went around the cemetery. It's just before Athens, between Athens and Piraeus and I found a lot of the boys graves. Where you can go to and you can turn up the book and find what number it is and all the rest of it and I found Griff's grave and oh
- 34:30 what age were we then? We were about 48 or something like that and I stood before his grave and I thought it's terrible. There he is 21 years old and I'm 48 so you know, I'm lucky. I think I'm lucky. I've got a good wife.

- 35:00 **Somebody up there likes you.**

Yeah, I was never very religious. Mum was and she used to force me to go to Church and this was at Redcliffe and of course, I went to church and then they started a youth group where you could play table tennis and things like this and

- 35:30 get on and the old parson came up to me one day and he said, "John, I'd like you to come over and be an alter boy." I said, "What?" I said, "You put those frilly things on, no way!" I didn't go anymore but poor old Mum was upset .

Have you got any words of advice for young Australians in the

- 36:00 **Defence Force these days?**

No, I've given 'em all to my grandson. Keep your head down and don't try to win a VC but do your duty and have your fun but have your fun when it's, don't, don't run in any,

- 36:30 away from any actions or anything like that. Do what you are expected to do and I think that's about it because Australia needs them and I think it was proved in the last action at
- 37:00 Iraq that the Australians, they achieved a hell of a lot and they never lost a man. Not a man! And that was tremendous. They are well trained, they are conscious of their training and I said to Ross, he's half way
- 37:30 through his 8 weeks school. I said, "how are you going?" He said, "I haven't failed a thing yet, Grandpa." He said, "I'm halfway and it's starting to get easier as we go." I think he'll get through and I said to him, "Well, you've got 2 years to
- 38:00 go to Duntroon." And I said, "Go to Duntroon, don't be like me and shirk it." And I said, "Circumstances were a bit different." He's got a good connection down there. When he was up in Darwin, the brigadier
- 38:30 selected him for his driver and he was his driver for 12 months and he used to take his wife and him to functions and then go and pick 'em up and all this sort of thing and he often went and had a meal with them and you know. Anyway, one day, oh it was round about 9 o'clock
- 39:00 and the phone rang at home and I answered it and it was Ross. I said, "What are you doing ringing up at this time of the day?" And he said, "Oh, I'm in the office." And I said, "Oh yeah, what, are you sneaking a call in?" "Oh sort of Grandpa." And the brigadier came in and he said, "Ross, are you speaking to Grandpa?"

39:30 He said, "Yes." Well he said, "Give him my regards." So, he's not a brigadier anymore, he's a major general. He's stationed at Canberra and he said, "Ross, if ever you want to get in touch." So he shouldn't. Not only that,

40:00 it's not cheating really, but...

That's a nice gesture

Because, he, they pick their drivers because they often talk to others, high ranking officers, and they don't want it spread and Ross, when he was asked to be his driver,

40:30 he said, "Grandpa, I'm going to see this brigadier tomorrow." And I said, "What for?" "To tell him that I don't want to be his driver." And I said, "You can't do that." But he, he did, he said to him, "I don't want to be your driver sir, I'm sorry." And he said, "Ross, you will be my driver and that's it." And I thought that's good.

You must be very proud of him.

Yeah,

41:00 yeah,

Alright

He's a good kid

INTERVIEW ENDS