# Australians at War Film Archive

## Kenneth Hall (Ken) - Transcript of interview

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## Tape 1

00:38 **Okay, Ken so**

My name is Kenneth John Hall. I was born in Tamworth New South Wales on the 4th of November 1921. My parents were country people from Manila district of New South Wales so I had most of my cousins were also from that district.

01:00 I was educated in Armidale at the Armidale Demonstration School and for three years at Armidale High School then for two years at the Umbell School. The only GPS [Greater Public Schools] school in country New South Wales. The Umbell School had a Cadet Corps and that's where I had my first military training in the space of two years in 1937 and '38.

01:30 Late in 1938 I left school to join the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney at Inverell which was about one hundred and twenty kilometres to the northwest of Armidale and New England. I was there for fifteen months and after I'd been there only for three months there was a new unit of the Citizen Military Forces formed

02:00 and a new battalion called 35th Battalion CMF [Citizen Military Forces] which I joined and attended non-commissioned officer classes in the evenings and weekends. So by the time war broke out I was a corporal and by October 1939 I was a sergeant in an infantry battalion. On the 1st of January 1940 I went into camp

02:30 and was in uniform then for the next six years and eight months. In May 1940 when France fell the 7th Division of the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] was formed and I joined the 2/13th Battalion of the 20th Infantry Brigade and was to serve them for five years

03:00 Because I had sergeant's rank when I joined the AIF I kept that rank and so I was really commanding men when I was still only eighteen years of age. I had my 19th birthday on the great liner the Queen Mary

03:30 as it entered Bombay Harbour where we had a two week spell before going on to the Middle East. We arrived in the Middle East in November it would be 1940 and went into training in Palestine. Now the real fighting in the Western Desert really

04:00 started in December of 1940 but by 1941 the Australian 6th Division of British forces had captured the whole of Cyrenaicand down past Benghazi. My brigade too was moved to the Western Desert at the end of February 1941 and when the 6th Division

04:30 was sent off to Greece to fight the Germans there we moved through Cyrenaicand the fortress of Tobruk right past Benghazi and down to a place called Agedabia which was a bigger Italian air base. Now we'd only been fighting against the Italians up to that time but the German Afrika Korps came to

05:00 North Africa early in March 1941 and the whole ball game changed very dramatically. They were actually had a vanguard of the Luftwaffe with mainly twin engine bombers and some other Messerschmitt fighters so our first contact with the Germans was through their

05:30 airforce and they were very good at strafing and bombing and we underwent some of those attacks. So the first casualties our battalion suffered were in a bombing of that nature when were in a convoy and we lost a very fine officer who came from Inverell and whom I knew very well and his driver. They were the first two killed in the battalion in the Western Desert.

06:00 When Rommel's forces started to push the allies back we took place in what was termed the "Tobruk Derby" or "Benghazi Handicap". And that was an organised retreat or withdrawal over five days from the Benghazi area right back into the fortress of Tobruk because the

06:30 fortress of Tobruk had been built by the Italians from the during the 1930's and had a perimeter fence of something like thirty kilometres long with barbed wire. A lot of it had a deep anti-tank ditch. There

were one or two places where that hadn't been completed but it was the only place where an organised defence

07:00 could have been mounted in North Africand it not only saved the 9th Division but I think it saved the saved Egypt and the Suez Canal because the siege at Tobruk tied up seven hostile Divisions that otherwise could have been put into attacking over the Egyptian frontier and heading for the Canal. So the siege at Tobruk

07:30 was a terribly important thing in British military history and of course in Australian military history. The other strange thing about it parallels my father's experience as a Gallipoli veteran that the siege of Tobruk was exactly two days longer than what Gallipoli took place but we also had horrible conditions of heat and dust in the summer and intense cold in the

08:00 the colder months so we had a strange combination of fighting in bitter cold as well as fighting in a terrible heat and dust.

**Ken that's perhaps we can come back to the conditions a bit later on. If I can get you to move on to what happened after Tobruk**

Yes, well after Tobruk

08:30 I should mention here too that the Australian 9th Division was relieved except for one battalion in October of 1941 and Polish brigades and a British 50th Division came in and did that relief. Now the 2/13th Battalion was left behind on the basis there that the British navy destroyers that were doing the movement of troops they had some terrible losses through German bombing at sea

09:00 and it was said there wasn't enough shipping space to take out this last Battalion so they were left there for what turned out to be another two months and it was strange there that the forces from Egypt tried to link up with the Tobruk garrison but were being threatened all the time by the German Afrika Korps who prevented

09:30 the link up and the 2/13th Battalion was called in to do a night bayonet attack to restore the link with the 8th Army coming up from Egypt. They did this in fine style against three times their strength and in the face of a very determined bayonet attack the Germans withdraw in a lot of disorder for a start and

10:00 the cry went up "the Australians are back, the Australians are back" and this apparently caused General Rommel to rethink things and so it was a very effective last battle action by the Australians in Tobruk which we have a battle honour for that.

**So what happened next?**

Yes, the troops were taken back to Palestine.

10:30 All the divisions had come out by sea except the 2/13th Battalion. They were the only battalion to come out of Tobruk by road and got back about the 20th of December 1941 to Palestine into a well-prepared camp and they had a wonderful Christmas which they had certainly earned. It was, let's see, the second

11:00 of their four Christmases overseas during the war.

**And so what happened after Palestine?**

Yes, in Palestine in January of 1942 all the other Australian divisions were withdrawn to come back to Australia to fight against the Japanese but the Australian 9th Division was left there was apparently by special

11:30 request of the British Government.

**Would you like a drink?**

I think I would actually.

**Is that better?**

Yes. Yes the 9th Division was left in the Middle East by I believe direct

12:00 request of Churchill who considered them to be extremely valuable front line troops and he said they were needed as a special reserve so we had six months in Syria most of them up near the Turkish border but doing training exercises in the meantime but enjoying the well the fleshpots of Syria there because there was towns and good food and cafés

12:30 and plenty of leave so that was a very good interlude for the troops. When the Germans were attacking in June 1942 and were running over all the opposition and looked like getting possibly getting to the Canal zone 9th Division was rushed down in a great

13:00 hurry from Northern Syria into the desert and took part in a series of night attacks on the vital coastal sector where all the crack German troops were. Now the interesting thing that was there the Australian attacks were done without any tank support under cover of darkness because were considered to be the

best night fighting troops in the whole of the Middle East because of our

13:30 experiences in Tobruk with night patrolling and all the other activities so they rolled back the German lines for five miles and took thousands and thousands of prisoners. It stopped the Afrika Korps dead and in a way I think it was the saving of Egypt at that time. It gave the vital breathing space then for

14:00 the new General Montgomery under General Field Marshall or later Field Marshall Alexander to build up the forces in the Middle East while the Australians held the vital coastal sector at what was the Alamein sector and the battle of Alamein of course is very famous in military history and

14:30 it was nearly the end of the 9th Division because were used as shock troops for doing these night attacks time after time taking heavy losses but driving the Germans back and inflicting very heavy losses on them. The pressure from the Australian division got so much that the Germans gave way and went into retreat or withdrawal and an organised withdrawal and that was one of the high points

15:00 of our I'll say our battle honours too to have taken part in such a decisive battle.

**So what happened after Alamein?**

Yes, after Alamein the remnants of our troops were taken back to Palestine to be reinforced and 'cause there'd been lots of reinforcements had come into Australia come from Australiand rebuilt the battalions

15:30 up to full strength again and at the end of January 1943 we embarked for Australia to come back home and to take part in the later campaign later campaigns against the Japanese.

**How long were you home for?**

Yes, we got home as I say at the end of February but

16:00 let's see after only six weeks leave were moved to North Queensland where we underwent amphibious training in cooperation with the American US Navy to train for assault landings by seagainst the Japanese in the islands and the first operation we undertook then

16:30 was the an operation landing by sea to take the port of Lae while the 7th Division was dropped by what do you call it transport aircraft in the Ramu Valley and they came down overland while we came along the coast. The 7th Division got there just before us 'cause I think they had the easier bit of it

17:00 because the coastal rivers in New Guineare very fast flowing and they formed very big obstacles. In fact one battalion lost over a hundred men who tried to cross and holding each other's hands all the way but the hand holds broke and they lost about twenty-eight soldiers drowned which is a terrible loss at the time but it wasn't a very hard

17:30 fight to take Lae. The real problem happened shortly afterwards in the 22nd of September 1943. 20th Brigade which my battalion was a part of did an assault landing at Finschhafen and that was an opposed landing but we'd been well trained and it only took a few hours to overcome the

18:00 Japanese opposition and the Japanese fled inland that led to succeeding operations to take a Japanese fortress on one of the high peaks about twenty or thirty miles inland called Sattleberg and that's where Lieutenant Diver

18:30 Derek won a VC [Victoria Cross]. It was terrible fighting in all those times and there were a lot of bayonet attacks and the initial Japanese were the big marines but they couldn’t stand up to determined bayonet charges. We found that early on so we just kept on rolling them back. We did suffer a lot of casualties. One of our problems of course too

19:00 was the food supply wasn't the best so early on were on you know literally fighting on iron rations but with the 20th Brigade it had these two wonderful desert campaigns behind them weren't going to be stopped and carried it right through. Later on about six weeks later the Japanese brought in more divisions overland

19:30 tried to recapture Sattleberg. In fact cut the road leading up to Sattleberg and one of our battalions the 2/17th Battalion was entirely cut off. Now our 2/13th Battalion were brought up from the coast up the Sattleberg Road and I had the lead platoon and we struck the Japanese road block all around 2/17th Battalion so

20:00 we had casualties there in the initial fighting but it became blockage for the best part of six weeks and we had to bring up other brigades into the areand then with very determined bayonet charges the 2/17th Battalion were relieved and they had done a magnificent job in holding off the Japs when they were

20:30 entirely surrounded except for one steep gully and that's where they brought up their rations and it was strange that the Japanese allowed that leakage but allowed 2/17th to survive and everybody to fight another day but it was a very brutal war that jungle warfare because very often you didn't see the enemy until you were right on top of them and which meant the

21:00 you had to take quick decisive action which the troops had to move in on what was literally a bayonet charge supported by the submachine guns because at that stage we had two of the new Australian Owen guns platoon and there were some of the Thompson submachine guns still amongst the troops too

21:30 but our men were extremely determined and there was no way that the Japs were ever going to beat us. It was just one of those fierce determination things and 9th Division had to stay unbeatable as far as were concerned.

**So what happened next to the 9th Division?**

Yes, after after Sattleberg and the Japs withdrew up the Human, Huon

22:00 Peninsula there were sort of small rearguard actions taking place but basically they were sick, they were beaten and they lost in every engagement but there were remnants of them got out and I believe a few of them got back to Japan but as I say it was a it's a brutal sort of war but

22:30 were fighting for our country which was not that far away and that gives you the greatest incentive out not to allow the Japs to get anywhere near Australia.

**So what happened next?**

Yes. After that campaign was concluded we came back to Australiand were given leave and then moved back to the Atherton Tablelands in North Queensland for more training and which included

23:00 of course amphibious training but because MacArthur's General MacArthur's whole aim was to head for Japan, knock over all the islands as quickly as possible but the only thing he didn't tell us that he wanted it to be a totally American

23:30 victory and that Australian troops would not be permitted to take part in the fight for the Philippines. Only Australian Navy and some Airforce units took part in that.

**So where did you go to next after your training in the Tablelands?**

Yes, North Queensland. Yes, early in 1945 there was two hundred Australian officers received a call to go on transfer to the British Army

24:00 in Burmand myself and another fellow officer, Lieutenant Ralph Mason, joined that group and so we finally came back to Sydney and had about a week's leave and then went on a British aircraft carrier to Trincomalee and Ceylon and then

24:30 by a troop ship to Burma where we joined where I joined the 9th Battalion of the border regiment which was an English battalion in an Indian brigade of the 17th Indian Division. We had a battalion of Ghurkha regiment, the 1/10th Ghurkhas, and a battalion of Pakistanis the

25:00 6th, 7th Balook, who came from West Pakistan. So I was soon in Burma taking over a platoon of British soldiers and went straight into action. Because of the monsoon there that most of the low-lying rice fields areas and

25:30 lower Burma were flooded, only the roads which are built up and there's also the rice fields are bordered by built up foot tracks. It's like a whole patchwork and that meant that if you weren't on the road you had to walk on these very narrow paths. The villages were all built up

26:00 that sort of happened. They were like mounds with, you know, twenty or thirty houses and all built of bamboo and thatch and so the troops you know tended to, the Japs and ourselves, tended to occupy that high ground in the village areas with the patrols taking place whenever you could

26:30 and were just sort of hoping that the whole thing'd be over soon.

**And how long were you there for in Burma?**

I was in Burma for something like fifteen months and part of that was after the war when we had quite a big job there getting trying to get the British presence accepted back in Burma

27:00 but the Burmese didn't want the British back so there were, what do you call it, a lot of guerrilla fighting. These bands of people who'd been fighting as irregulars on armed and armed by the British and often led British officers and NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] they got rid of their British influence and tried to

27:30 take over the whole country and they did that by moving into villages and shooting the local police and theadman. Anything that had a stamp of British authority so we had operations there to try and catch these people who were called dacoits but in fact they were a highly organised irregular force and

28:00 this also meant a lot of night operations so were very busy and life wasn't wasn't terribly easy.

**And that that was all happening after the war?**

After the war, yes. This was after the so-called peace. The other problem in Burma there that the

Japanese forces didn't surrender at the same time as anywhere else. In fact they stayed on for another month with a being very hostile but finally

28:30 they accepted the surrender and it was strange. Once the surrender had been accepted by them they became very docile and they were put onto working parties to rebuild roads and bridges and the civilian infrastructure and because they were getting Indian army rations suddenly they were extremely well fed and were finding

29:00 with the Japanese under our battalion command that they weren't able to eat all the food they were given because they were used to doing it tough. They could literally live on the smell of an oil rag and you know a handful of rice'd do them for some time. That was quite a lesson but the point was once they accepted the surrender no more problems. That was it was very good.

**So when did you actually leave Burma**

29:30 **and come back to Australia?**

Yes. I'll just have to think there now. Yes, I got back I left Burma in July 1946 and didn't get back here 'til August. It took a couple of weeks to go down the ships to go down through Malayand then finally to get a ship back to well I came into Brisbane and I

30:00 with a group of two hundred they weren't only Australians but there were some British people and even families that intended to settle in Australiand they came out on this Dutch ship, landed at Brisbane and came back to Sydney by train where I received my discharge in August 1946.

**And what did you do after your discharge?**

Yes, well I

30:30 had been working in the Commercial Bank out near Sydney prior to the war and had kept that link throughout the war so I went back to the bank for a period of fifteen months and served in a couple of suburban branches in Sydney but of course the pay was lousy because I you know as long as the bank was concerned I only had had about seven years service and the pay rates were pretty crook

31:00 at that time and so I was living on my deferred pay and the large amount of money I'd been able to save from my officers' pay in the British army but I got married in April 1947 and as I say I went back to the bank there for about twelve months then I got out of that and went into private industry and eventually ended up in the timber

31:30 industry by 1948 and I stayed with that for the rest of my working life but I was very interested in timber engineering and sort of gradually got into the marketing of timber engineering products and I was considered a marketing expert at the time,

32:00 the Sydney Opera House was being built and so I joined the company then that was making the laminated brush box flooring and the laminated wall panels for the Opera House the Sydney Opera House and I stayed with them for a number of years. I found that a tremendously rewarding challenge because it was

32:30 a hell of a challenge because the techniques weren't well known out here in Australia. In fact the glue was so special that it was made in Germany and had to be brought out to the factory at Dungog in New South Wales where all these panels were made up. So I had a very challenging time working with the principal architects of the

33:00 Opera House and used to accompany them up to the plant at Dungog when they'd do inspections and also went to the Opera House two or three times a week to watch progress there. To me it was a wonderfully satisfying part of my working career and I still get a thrill when I go to the Opera House which I do occasionally. I might mention my wife was a great music lover

33:30 and concert goer and she had tickets to all the best concerts and things like that and I was able to take her over on inspections while the Opera House was being built. For her it was a great thrill to see it in that stage and then to be going often twice a week and sometimes three or four times a week she'd go there. She felt a very personal link with the Opera House

34:00 for that reason.

**And I believe you also had some children?**

Yes. Yes, we had three children and they also ended up going to the Umbell School in Armidale as boarders. Much against their will but my wife had been had gone to school at the New England Girls' School and she thought that was the only fit schooling for

34:30 children. But they all got over that so whether they think it's a bad experience or not they certainly had it but they have had friends for life from that but it also toughened them up. They also had the chance to pick up with their country cousins because they had cousins up in the Tamworth and Glen Innes areas and so they had contact with my father and mother and

35:00 my father was a great horsemand horse breeder so he feels that he taught them to ride and have a love of horses so they had a good mixture of city and country in their upbringing.

**Well Ken, you've done a very good job of doing your life arc there. Thank you for that.**

Yes.

**So what we might do now is go back to the beginning and just go over a few few things in detail**

Yeah, okay

35:30 **if that's all right with you.**

Yep.

**Okay? So, can you tell me a bit about your parents?**

Yes. My parents came from a country background. My father was descended from early pioneers who came out in 1802. The first Presbyterian settlers who came out on the Coromandel and the country background of course went right back from those times

36:00 because the Hall family were pioneers in the Hunter Valley and at one time were the largest landowners in well that settled part of Eastern Australias they had something like a million and a quarter acres of spread over I think it was about twenty one different properties from the Hunter Valley right up into southern Queensland

36:30 so there was that very strong country background. My mother was of what do you call it Presbyterian Northern Irish parents who came out in 1848 as migrants and my grandfather, that's my mother's father, never smoked or drank in his life

37:00 but he was great trading in stock and picking up land he built up very large land holdings in the Manila district stretching out as far as Boggabri and had a large family and they had a wonderful young life because most of the girls were sent to the best

37:30 schools in Sydney and the boys as well so it was one of those things of you know wealthy pastoral background on my mother's side and I suppose it goes through in your own character building as to 'cause my parents had what do you call it very high principles. They were good

38:00 God-fearing people churchgoers and very keen to see their children get a good education and a good start in life. But because we always had ponies and later on the big the big riding horses, the hacks, we always had and lived on a little property just in the outskirts of town there's always a hell of a lot of chores

38:30 to do. Now for my part that also included keeping up the wood supply to the kitchen stove and they were the little blocks that had to be split into small billets but there's also a big log fire inside which meant that times my father would get a load of wood which came in like long tree trunks and they had to be cut into the sizes to fit into the

39:00 lounge room fire so I found that was good muscle-building exercise when you get a cross cut saw and also splitting wood. Those other chores of course give you a sense of responsibility and in fact for some years we also had a cow and calf which had to be the cow had to be milked twice a day and the milk separated and all

39:30 that type of thing and I had an extremely busy childhood and youth and apart from playing an awful lot of sport at school 'cause I took part in swimming, athletics and football and played tennis, I was extremely active.

**Ken, we just might leave it there because we've actually run out of tape.**

Yes.

**So we'll go into that soon.**

# Tape 2

00:32 **Ken so how many brothers and sisters did you have?**

Yes, I had three brothers and one sister. I was the second eldest. My brother was fifteen months older than me. He was also in the 9th Division in the Anti-tank Regiment so we fought alongside each other through Tobruk and also at Alamein but he didn't go to New Guinea.

01:00 **And what memories do you have of the Depression?**

Yes, well because my family were relatively well off I personally didn't suffer but I was well aware of the

children at the primary school because some of those kids their parents couldn't afford shoes and socks

01:30 and these kids were coming along barefooted and very often their clothing too wasn't the best you know, poorly patched if patched and all and in the winter time too they were quite inadequately clothed for the New England climate and at that time of course there was that horrible thing called the Dole

02:00 which was twelve and six a week and also rations given out to people who couldn’t afford to buy food and this meant that there was about thirty per cent of the population who didn't have work, were living in terrible conditions and of course some of them were living in quite inadequate premises

02:30 in cottages with hardly a stick of furniture and you know threadbare blankets and things like that. I never forgot that because you could see a lot of those kids were suffering and the welfare arrangements were not able to cope with it so that was a very bitter lesson.

**Ken, you mentioned that your father was a World War I veteran.**

Yes.

03:00 **What did you know about World War I?**

Yes, my father joined the first Light Horse regiment when it was formed in August 1914 and went to GallipolIn I think he arrived about the 27th of May at about six weeks after the landing because the infantry were doing it tough and they brought in the Light Horse division to reinforce them

03:30 so he never actually fought as a Light Horseman with horses. He fought as an infantryman in the trenches in Gallipoli and he was evacuated at one stage for two weeks with a bad dose of flu but brought back in so he was there for most of the campaign but then when they got back to Egypt early in 1916

04:00 he accepted a transfer to the 4th Division Field Artillery and by June 1916 they were in France and he fought in all the battles then right up to let's see the battles right up to October 1917 where he was badly wounded

04:30 and he'd just been made a Lieutenant just before that so he was hospitalised as an officer and his wounds were a deep chest wound which meant he was unfit for further active service and by March 1918 he arrived back in Australiand in June 1918 he married my mother.

**So**

05:00 **was your father's wartime experience something that he talked about with you?**

Yes, he was very proud of it and he wasn't keen for us to go into the armed forces 'cause he knew the horrors of it but the fact that I'd enlisted under age well he forgave me for that and just said “You make sure you look after yourself” but underneath it he was

05:30 very proud that myself and my brother had joined up.

**And what do you recall about your schooling?**

Yes, well because I went to a demonstration primary school we had the very best teachers available and because the teachers' college in Armidale used to

06:00 send students down to observe these classes which meant that that they needed the best teachers and I think I was very lucky. I was always in “A” classes and did very well in the primary school but when I went to high school I had a couple of years where I didn't try very hard but then by the time I got through my Intermediate and not with a terribly good pass suddenly the penny

06:30 dropped and I found the study terribly interesting. I had done languages, French and Latin, but being in the “A” classes of course you get very good tuition but at the Armidale school of course the other thing there was joining the Cadet Corps which gave me that classic military training. Now at the Armidale school of course we played an awful lot of sport and

07:00 there was a much tougher discipline than what you get in the state schools so in a way that was a very good thing for preparing me for the Army too and for later civilian life.

**So what would you do what would you do at your cadet training?**

Oh, basically it was rifle drill and in those days it was the old form fours and all that sort of

07:30 thing and marching around fixing bayonets and doing all the rifle drill and doing occasional firing at the at the rifle ranges which we found quite thrilling but it was also a step to manhood, we all thought, something special and I think everybody sort of realised that another war with Germany

08:00 was inevitable and were sort of preparing ourselves for that. Most boys did but there were a few that remained pacifist and you know they're entitled to have their opinions so I don't hold it against them.

**And what sport did you play?**

Yes, well I've in the winter I played rugby football. I never got into the first grade because I wasn't that passionate about it

08:30 and but also they used to have what they call house teams because they had different houses in the GPS schools and so there was inter-house football as well as inter-house cricket and we did quite a bit of swimming too so I was very active in that side of it. In fact, I hardly got any

09:00 time for myself.

**And so was your high school a boarding school?**

Well the high school did have a boarding hostel attached to it but where my parents lived in Armidale was only a matter of about a kilometre away from the high school so it was an easy stroll down. To get to the Armidale School the other end of town we had to use pushbikes and

09:30 **And sorry, were you about to say something?**

And also a school on Saturday morning and then having to go to church on on Sundays being a strict Presbyterian family I was very highly occupied.

**So what happened after you left school?**

Yes, when I left school unfortunately before I got my Leaving

10:00 Certificate 'cause the banks used to said they preferred to take most boys for country branches at that stage and they would give them the bank training which they felt lined them up for a very rewarding career. It was very tough working in banks in those pre-war days and as I say there was long hours and also

10:30 very tough discipline but that was good, you know, I could take it.

**So what kind of discipline would there be in the bank?**

Oh well the thing is you had to account for every well virtually every penny and if the at the end of the day the teller was out by sixpence or nine pence nine pennies in his change

11:00 everybody had to stay back 'til it was found which meant checking all the transactions all the paper transactions during the day and recounting all the cash. So that was a very rigid thing, you know, that was the bank rules and they had to be obeyed. In other words, you know, you had to there's no getting out of anything.

**And I believe at one point your bank manager actually**

11:30 **fired you?**

Oh, he said, oh after I'd only been there for three months he said "Oh, you're you're not much good to us. I'll have to get rid of you." But my father came over and interceded on my behalf and then he turned round and said "Oh, I'll give you another go." Obviously I became satisfactory because I'd completed fifteen months service before I joined the army

12:00 for World War II.

**Was that upsetting for you to be**

It was because well you have your own self esteem and suddenly to have it cut away from you quite brutally without much explanation it was quite a kick in the pants but it was also a very toughening discipline and I'm in a way I'm thankful for it because it meant I had to sharpen up my act in every

12:30 respect and learn to fit into a very hard commercial scenario.

**So can you recall when World War II actually broke out?**

Oh yes, yes, yes. It was actually it was if I remember it was a weekend and we got the news came over

13:00 the radio that Bob Menzies had declared war on Germany following Neville Chamberlain and England also I'd being by that time I was a corporal in the CMF and all sorts of weird ideas started to flood my brain that suddenly I'd be taken away to go and fight for my country right

13:30 away and of course this didn't happen. It took quite some time for Australia to organise its armed forces. In fact they only raised one division in January of 1940 and of course that obviously wouldn't prove enough. It was only the fall of France in May 1940 that suddenly the warning bells were ringing terribly loudly and Australia had to form more

14:00 divisions.

**Can you recall what Menzies actually said in that radio announcement?**

Oh yes, that it was his I think the words were his “melancholy duty to to advise that Australia was now

at war with Germany".

**And what how did what was your initial reaction to that?**

Oh well, there's something of horror in one

14:30 respect but also suddenly there's all these adventures that open up for me. I'd be able to go overseas as an Australian soldier and to fight the Germans.

**So did you join the CMF while you were still at the bank?**

Oh yes, yes.

**Can you describe tell us why you enlisted in the CMF?**

Yes, because I'd had two years of cadet training

15:00 and I wanted to play my part in the defence of Australia even though I was underage, like other fellows you put down the wrong age on the enlistment form and in fact I've still got a copy of that. You didn't think you were committing wrong though technically you were.

**What would have happened if they'd found**

15:30 **out that you actually were under age?**

Oh, I don't think not much would have happened. The fact that I was doing the job I think meant more thanything else. It's the sort of thing that if you were performing, you know, let sleeping dogs lie or let active dogs keep on which it was. But this was a great thing in my life because it gave me another interest and in a country town there's not much

16:00 to do on the weekends apart from you know play the odd game of tennis and go to church and so Saturday afternoons was always a very big training afternoon for the CMF and joining the NCOs classes we used to go across to Glen Innes from Inverell to join up with the 33rd Battalion cadres to improve our knowledge so I was very keen but

16:30 because I was a big strapping fellow and very keen nobody seemed to worry about my age.

**And where did you actually enlist for the CMF?**

Ah, yes, at inverell and strangely enough the enlistment office was straight across the road from my bank and

**And what did the enlistment process involve?**

Oh, it meant

17:00 having a medical examination, a very cursory one and then filling out the enlistment form and of course falsifying my age.

**And tell us more about the Saturday afternoon training that you did.**

Well it was basically drill training 'cause because the whole idea of course

17:30 with soldiers you've got to get them to obey orders without question and so the discipline thing means that you've got to have this squad drill where the orders are being roared out all the time and you're responding and you respond sort of automatically to the given commands but then it also had weapon training not only with the rifle but in those days with the old

18:00 light automatic machine gun called a Lewis gun which was very unreliable and

**What was unreliable about the Lewis gun?**

Well they were prone to stoppages so part of the training there was you had to learn how to keep the gun firing to clear all the stoppages and strangely enough the main tool to do this was a .303

18:30 round with the sharp pointy end had certain functions on the gun there and on the magazines.

**Okay and so when did you actually enlist to go away enlist for the war, yeah**

Yes, well I had a sort of

19:00 intermediate enlistment there from the CMF. I joined what they called the Australian Military Forces instructors for the reinforcements of the 2nd AIF and I had two or three months there of very hard training in firstly at Liverpool and then at the Ingleburn camp prior to the formation of the 7th Division

19:30 and this was what they call the "bull ring" where the instructors specialise in certainstructional subjects and the squads of recruits are passed around the "bull ring" from instructor to instructor so finally they end up after six weeks with a fairly good sort of elementary training.

**So you were one of those instructors?**

Yes I was a Sergeant Instructor.

**And what did you instruct?**

Well, there's

20:00 not only the all the basic drills but also rifle training and field craft. Where you're out in the bush and they're taught how to move properly and how to take cover and, well how to survive.

**We'll come back to more of that that training the instruction that you did but I'm just wondering. You mentioned that your father was very proud of**

20:30 **you joining the Army. I'm just wondering about what your mother actually felt.**

What I felt?

**What your mother felt**

Oh, what my mother felt

**about you enlisting in the army**

Well I think she was proud too although also very concerned and because they were wonderful parents I had and this was what do you call it something that all

21:00 soldiers need. To know that their parents are backing them and that you've got parental love back there at home.

**I'm just also wondering if there was if you had a girlfriend at this time and what she might have thought of all this?**

Well, unfortunately with all this happening and being so busy I didn't have time to have a proper friendship

21:30 with any young lady. I used to get invited out to parties and things like that but my main energies were focused on not only the arduous workload in the bank but also in furthering my military knowledge and to also try and get some rank in the Army and that was a very big workload but I also went to church on Sundays so I had a very

22:00 full what do you call it full timetable.

**You were a busy man**

Ah yes, in fact it was difficult to to get time off to get to the pictures.

**So going back to the instructing that you used to do**

Yes.

**You talked a bit about was it field craft that you taught?**

Well no, the big thing being a platoon sergeant

22:30 you had to do a lot of drill and then they get to a certain proficiency there then the field craft develops because by that time they'll instinctively obey orders and do as they're told and 'cause you've got to have that otherwise your field craft's no good.

**And where was all this instructing taking place?**

Yes. Initially it was at Rutherford camp

23:00 just near Maitland but I was only there for let's see for one month in 1939 and then for another month in 1940 before I went to went to Ingleburn and I was actually in uniform from the 1st of January 1940 right up 'til you know August 1946. Never out of it.

**So tell us a bit more about**

23:30 **Ingleburn**

Yes, well Ingleburn was set up and the 6th Division was formed in let's see yes September/October 1939. It was hastily built and they were wooden huts out in what was very open grassland. There were very few trees around and

24:00 as a camp because you were living in huts and not tents it was okay and they had big mess halls so you were well fed but the training areas were accessible and you know especially for field training but there was a hell of a lot of parade ground drilling and weapons training that had to be done anyway and for NCOs and officers of course there was extra

24:30 lessons there too that you had to attend.

**What were some of those lessons?**

Well that was the getting into tactics and also the care of the men and well the 101 things that you've got to do as a platoon sergeant and as platoon commander.

**Did you learn bayonet training at Ingleburn?**

Well bayonet training figured very

25:00 strongly in the Australian army because they found that was a real winner in World War I and it was as they always say in the army psyche, that was an essential of infantry training. You became very proficient in that.

**What was the training that you did to learn the proper bayoneting techniques?**

Well, that was

25:30 that you had to prevail as an attacking force or if you were in defence that you had to be able to defend yourself properly. Now the Australian bayonet was longer than the any of the Italian or German bayonets, which gave us a big advantage and the Enfield .303 rifle was also a very big and very strong you know armament

26:00 personal armament.

**And so would you in a training situation charge at at practice**

Yes, they used to have straw dummies. Straw-filled dummies and

**So can you can you just walk me through like a typical day's training you know with the bayonet. What would take place?**

Well, you've got to warm them up beforehand so

26:30 there's a process of all the rifle drills and about five or ten minutes of that and then get into the actual bayonet training itself and that was training to be totally aggressive at all times but you also learnt the defensive strokes, in other words how to deflect

27:00 the rifle and bayonet of an opponent.

**Okay**

And to disarm the enemy.

**And did you do any unarmed combat training?**

Not a great deal at that stage of the war. That came in very strongly later on.

**Okay. So how long were you at Ingleburn for?**

Yes,

27:30 with the AIF I was there let's see yes until roughly six months and then they started a new camp at Bathurst and my battalion led the march across the Blue Mountains. It took about five or six days and at nights were billeted

28:00 sometimes in homes, sometimes in boarding houses and places like that, sometimes the odd night under canvas.

**So when did you get was it from Ingleburn that you got news that you were going to be travelling overseas?**

No, we got that Bathurst and

**And what were you doing at Bathurst?**

Well, that was

28:30 because that was had been what do you call it farming and station country. A lot of grassland around where were. It was chosen for that areand the hills so there was a lot of field exercises and doing mock attacks against hills and things like that. In fact our favourite target was a large hill

29:00 called Sheepshed Hill because sheep at night always get on top of a hill because it's warmer. They never never camp down where it's cold in the valleys and so there's all this sheep shit was littering the top of the hill and that was a favourite target for the infantry. The hill not the

**Not the shit.**

Yes.

**Excuse me. So how long were you**

29:30 **at Bathurst for?**

Let's see. Yes, from August up 'til the 20th, 19th of October and

**And it was from there that you left?**

Yes. 19th of October we entrained went by train down to Pyrmont, got into some of the little Sydney ferry boats which had been commandeered and taken out to the Queen Mary and a

30:00 great thrill to step onto this great liner and actually our battalion ended up on “B” deck which was first class passenger accommodation and might have been a two berth cabin, two beds, they put in six bunks in two lots of three and that was all done here in Sydney using Oregon timbers and the

30:30 conversion was done here in Sydney.

**And were you an officer at this point?**

No, I was a sergeant and now the sergeants also ate in the first class dining room but the menu we got was only half the size of the one the officers got.

**What was what was a typical menu?**

Oh, I've got copies of them somewhere but they're no there's like a first class menu you'd get in the best of hotels

31:00 and terrific food and waited on by stewards and had your own allocated seat for the two weeks of the voyage so were you know treated like royalty in effect.

**So before you actually went off on the Queen Mary, what was your send-off like?**

Well the send-off was actually a march through the town of Bathurst and

31:30 and that was pretty special there because being AIF troops and just about to embark for overseas were given a special privilege of marching through the city of Bathurst with fixed bayonets and that's a very rare privilege in any city and

**Why was that?**

And so we felt very proud of doing that.

**Why is that rare? I haven't heard of that before?**

Well, that's

32:00 normally you know in peace time troops are not supposed to be marching through you know Australian townships with fixed bayonets.

**Okay. So you're obviously before you left you know on the Queen Mary to go to the Middle East you were obviously a very well trained soldier at this point**

Yes.

**Did**

32:30 **you feel prepared for what you were about to encounter?**

Oh yes, yes were very fit by this time and let's say the range of training there included a lot of night training as well as the daytime field training but the it was a very vigorous regime that we followed so were very fit by the time we got on the ship.

**Could I just ask what the difference is between daytime and night-time**

33:00 **training is?**

Well, there's a big difference because you've got to develop your night vision of course for night-time training but the other thing is for non-commissioned officers and officers you've got to be able to keep control and it imposes a much harder discipline on you. You've got to perform harder and better.

**Okay. So you're on the**

33:30 **Queen Mary and you're setting off on this incredible journey. What was the mood like on the ship?**

Oh, very euphoric and the fact that we had good accommodation was okay except I landed the duty of being a sergeant on the ship's picket and that became very arduous for a start because it was eight hours on and eight hours off and

34:00 you really can't stand up to that very long without getting dreadfully tired.

**Sorry, you were the Picket?**

Well, what they call “the picket” is the like a squad of men who are posted at the sensitive parts of the ship which could be sabotaged or in other words have got to be kept secure at all times and such as the battalion

34:30 orderly room or their office and the brigade orderly room and so forth and the senior officers' quarters and so on. There were lookouts outside too as well as machine gun crews for anti-aircraft purposes.

**So you were required to be eight hours on eight hours off?**

Yes, I was on the eight hours on and eight hours off patrolling the corridors of this huge ship.

**That must have been a bit exhausting**

35:00 It got it got exhausting and then they had to change the routine to have a twelve hour break.

**So at this point were you starting to develop some good mates?**

Some good?

**Some good mates. Some good friendships?**

Oh yes

**With the fellow soldiers?**

Well you develop that right from the start and a bit of it is it becomes a peer group and my peer group were fellow sergeants and warrant officers and

35:30 it's a Sergeant is one of the most important ranks in the army because you have direct control of the troops twenty-four hours a day where officers'd they'd only come on to do their particular duty and I'm talking about you know the fixed camp areas and things like that but the sergeants carried a huge disciplinary burden. And it also meant as a young sergeant there for

36:00 very often minor infringements I was having to hand out what do you call it but issue the put these fellows on to charge sheets. What they called Army Section 40 conduct prejudicial to military discipline.

**So you were you were quite young for your rank to have the rank of Sergeant weren't you?**

Oh yes, but I'd accepted the job and I was doing it and getting the right response

36:30 from the troops. They looked up to me, they did as they were told and they respected me and that was what it's all about.

**So what route did the Queen Mary take to the Middle East?**

Oh she went via the south of Australia down on that route. It was too big to get into Fremantle

37:00 so it had to anchor off Fremantle with the Aquitaniand then it went across the Indian Ocean let's see, just got to get all this together. Yes we

37:30 went across the Indian Ocean to Bombay and we disembarked at Bombay on my 19th birthday, which was quite a thrill.

**So that was your first city out of Australia?**

Yes and then went up by train up to high country where the British cantonment of Poona was situated but they formed a new camp and were the first troops into that terrible camp called Deolali which was

38:00 a very rough camp because it was made of thatched huts and it wasn't comfortable at all and were all

**How long how long were you there for?**

Oh, only for a week and then came down, re-embarked on a smaller ship which took us up to up the Suez Canal where we got off at Kantarand the railway then ran across

38:30 from Egypt. It ran across the desert into Palestine.

**Just just before we go to Palestine, tell me what your first impression of Bombay was?**

Oh well, it was one of horror and of awe as well because it's a magnificent city but while you've got a terrific

39:00 mix there of very very rich and also very very poor and of course the troops were warned not to go into the bad areas but of course once the fellas got off the ship and that's the first places they went. To see what they're not supposed to see which you know Australians like to do.

39:30 Weren't impressed and then went back and found the good restaurants and the nice areas of Bombay, which is a beautiful city.

**'Cause I've I heard that I believe that a lot of Australian soldiers you know would have visited say some of the brothels in the Bombay area.**

Oh well, they visited the street but it looked so appalling that I don't think anybody

40:00 would have used those services. It was what do you call it a sudden education as to how terrible things are on these on the subcontinent, particularly India, and the terrible conditions people live under and apart from that the smells were absolutely overwhelming.

**We've come**

40:30 **to the end of the tape Ken, so we'll just take a quick we'll take a quick break**

# Tape 3

00:35 **Ken taking us from Bombay to the Middle East. Could you describe the route the ship took from Bombay to the Middle East?**

Yes, yes. We came down from Deolali by train and embarked on a Dutch ship which was very comfortable and it took another two weeks actually go get up to

01:00 Suez and Kantara. Why it took so long I don't know but it was a very large convoy and had a lot of slow freighters in it. That's probably what made it so slow but the troop ship we got on was a Dutch passenger liner of about fifteen thousand tonnes and that was very

01:30 comfortable. In fact being a sergeant there you had use of the one of the first class saloons and very good drinks and waiter service and quite good meals.

**So from there did you move through the Suez Canal?**

Yes, well actually this ship went right up the Suez Canal and we disembarked

02:00 at Kantara on the on the Palestine side, not the even though both sides were Egypt but the railway came right down alongside the coast from Palestine right down the canal so we embarked in got into of all things

02:30 you might term it freight cars or goods vans you know goods. They were labelled on the outside “8 Horses or 40 Men” and they were the same as what they had in France. But that wasn't too bad because travelling across the desert the boys threw all the doors open on both sides you got a good breeze in and with

03:00 soldiers there you've got your packs and you lay them down you've got something to lean against and were in that stage of learning to sleep anywhere at any time.

**At this stage were you told where you were going?**

Oh, we knew where were going and that was to Palestine then and camps were already prepared for us. Because the British army already had a big presence there and there was elements of the 6th Australian Division there were doing what they call the

03:30 “mothering in”. When a new formation comes into an area they're normally got any troops that are already there prepare the camp and make them welcome so that whatever hour of the day or night you come in that you're you've got an allocated tent or sleeping quarters and that meals will be prepared at the appropriate times.

**So what was the name of this particular camp**

04:00 **that you arrived in?**

It was called “Kilo 89”. It's only about five kilometres from Gaza City. But Gaza City was out of bounds to all troops except officers and duty troops because I think at that stage even then that they feared that too much contact with the local Arab civilians wouldn't be good and they were quite right.

04:30 **Probably memories of World War I.**

Yes, that's right.

**How many men were in this camp?**

Oh well the brigade camped there and that would be you know probably three thousand. Three and a half thousand in that area.

**And what did you do while you were staged at this camp?**

Oh in the camp. Well, there's normal camp duties there which are to keep the camp secure and to keep

everything running but it was

05:00 a mixture then of parade ground training and then field training because the areas we had to operate in were basically open fields and quite undulating country and beautiful black soil if I remember rightly. We could sort of grow anything. Here and there's areas which were orange and citrus orchards

05:30 which was a big thing in that part of the area. It also meant at that time of the year there's a very large supply of fresh oranges and grapefruit.

**Now what form did the field training take?**

Oh the field training was apart from the route marching also operating in open country

06:00 and you'd like dancing in open order. That's the troops all spread out to minimise the risk of casualties from opposing fire and they'd pick little hills or mounds to be objectives and you'd do approach marches to try and sneak up on that that areand then always

06:30 end up with a sort of a simulated bayonet charge at the end of it.

**Were you accompanied by any tank or other armoured vehicles?**

No, not at that stage. We did have what they call Bren gun carriers in the battalion. There's only about eight of them and they didn't really know anything about tank warfare or tank tactics at that stage so they just

07:00 carried on their normal reconnaissance task.

**Were there any memorable instructors?**

Yes, because in our Battalion we'd we'd had men who'd became officers early on who'd been in the Australian Instructional Corp, the famous AIC. And they were a very highly trained body of men that worked extremely hard and very effectively in 1939

07:30 being attached two of them to each militia battalion or regiment and they were basically training the officers and the NCOs instruction and overseeing the that the instruction was done to the highest of standards. In fact they were a wonderful group those fellows.

**Are there any particular names that stand out?**

Oh well, I remember one called Bob Ross and

08:00 another one was Charlie Johnson and they were not only very patient but extremely knowledgeable and but terrific in imparting discipline to you know basically civilians and training them to a very high standard. Bob Ross actually ended up as one of the first officers captured by the Afrika Korps when went into action so

08:30 he only had a very short short time in action. A matter of only a couple of hours.

**He went into captivity.**

And then went into captivity in Germany, yes.

**Now there was a name that cropped up in the research, Lieutenant Colonel [F.A.] “Bull” Burrows.**

Oh yes, yes.

**At what stage did you encounter him?**

Yes, I got to know him because he was the CO of the 36th Battalion CMF and they were part of the 8th Brigade of which my 35th Battalion of

09:00 Inverell belonged to so that he was in the same camps as I was in November 1940 and from January 1941 but when I transferred over to the reinforcement training depot, Burrows was the commander and so I had this long association with him but he was a very fine soldier and I had the highest

09:30 regard for him.

**You mentioned route marching. What was the purpose of so much route marching?**

Well it's not only to get from A to B but it's a wonderful discipline for the troops because it teaches them how to move in an organised body over long distances at calculated speeds and under full command.

**Was the training realistic when**

10:00 **you ultimately encountered battle? Was the was the training appropriate to everything that you ended up doing?**

Yes, yes. As a matter of fact some of the chaps remarked on that after the first day in battle that they

were very glad they'd have tough training. They could see what it was all about now.

**How was the general mood in the camps?**

Oh, it was very high morale because we knew we'd be going over

10:30 seas and the whole purpose was to get ourselves as fit and as ready for battle as we possibly could so there's a terrific sense of purpose and what you get too in these units is well an esprit de corps. That's a a great faith in your own unit and its officers and its men. You have to trust each other and you only build that up by building the esprit de

11:00 corps.

**From where were you obtaining information about the war as it was progressing at that stage?**

Oh well there's the radio of course. A lot came over that and also daily newspapers and there was a news sheet that was circulated.

**So that kept you up to up to speed with what was happening in Europe?**

Oh yes, pretty up to date, yes. Oh well, I suppose the radio was the main thing and in fact the

11:30 part of the fundraising for the Battalion Comforts Fund too one of the first thing they bought was radios for each company and

**Now you mentioned that the local town or the nearest large town was was off limits. Were you having much interaction with the locals?**

You're talking about in Palestine, yes?

**In Palestine itself.**

In Palestine. Well what happens there of course. Were on a main road going

12:00 up the coast of Palestine and that was being used by locals all the time and not only guys riding on donkeys and their wife wives behind them carrying heavy loads while the guy rode like a prince, which our fellas didn't like, but the a lot of the labourers around the camp were Arabs and they were doing all the dirty jobs and like emptying the latrines

12:30 things and you know sweeping and things like that.

**What was their attitude to the Allies and to the Australians particularly?**

Oh, well also the washerwomen too where'd you get your washing done, they were all Arabs and not women particularly but the men used to collect the washing and mark it and so forth and wash and iron. Well, there was never a full

13:00 trust I don't think of the Arab population because they were so poor that anything they could pinch they could do so. Now, we had an occasion there where the whole Battalion went out to do rifle range exercises over three days and nights and only left a token force in the in the camp but what happened the

13:30 a bunch of Arabs came in with camels one night and the camels of course are quite silent and they took all the tent sides from the big ten man tents we had and the tent sides used to get rolled back during the day to air the place but they were made indiand very good doubled cotton lined cotton and because the civilians you know had no

14:00 little access to materials for dresses and clothing that was first class for the Arab you know the thieves.

**So you saw a few walking tents after that?**

Oh yes, well it we had what we called "roving pickets". Fellows with rifles and bayonets going around but the nights were virtually pitch black when there was no moon and these people were absolutely silent you know,

14:30 pinching the things from under the noses of the of the guards.

**Can you take us through the steps that that led from this particular camp to your first going into action?**

Yes, the when it time to go to Egypt to go into the Western Desert went by train

15:00 which is the while all the vehicles went by road convoy separately across the desert but the bulk of the troops went in they were what do you call it virtually goods vans, you know, these as I say which had a sliding door on each side and opened up to about

15:30 a two two metre opening so it was good for the troops because they could get in and lay down their bedrolls and their packs and sort of find a place to to travel comfortably but you also got plenty of fresh

air through the through the thing. It wasn't that long. It was only a matter of you know half a day's travelling.

**To to get into Egypt?**

To get into

16:00 in from Egypt into Palestine. Yes, the only thing of course we arrived about three o'clock in the morning and

**What happened when you arrived at three o'clock?**

Oh, well once you and then it wasn't any fun staggering in the dark even though were led by guards to a tented camp it took a little bit of sorting out to get people into just to get enough men into each tent where they promptly lay down and slept 'til daylight,

16:30 and then a proper sorting out next day.

**Whereabouts was this camp located?**

Oh, the camp was called “Kilo 89” which was only a matter of about five kilometres from Gaza itself. Gaza City. But

**Right. I'm I'm what I suppose what I'm after here is to take us from Kilo 89 to your going into action which took you to Egypt, didn't it?**

17:00 Yes, well what we did again then was in that case we got the trains again and the goods vans if you like to back to Egypt and to Kantarand we crossed then and crossed the Canal

17:30 on on barges and then got into a train which took us to the Western Desert and at that time the railway line only went as far as Mersa Matruh so we got to Mersa Matruh in a dust storm and of all things and got out and went to what they called the Egyptian barracks. Now the only problem there was of course

18:00 the buildings were built of cement blocks but they hadn't put the roofs on so it was you know spitting with rain and quite cold and there were in these buildings without roofs so our first night was very uncomfortable.

**Must have been like living in a maze.**

Oh well, you know, by that time were getting used to getting knocked around a bit.

**For how long**

Toughening up.

**For how long did the for how long did the dust storm last?**

18:30 **Oh well, it lasted a couple of days but were there also for a couple of days while waiting for the convoy to assemble, which was a truck convoy, and to to take us into into Libya.**

**So was it a ferocious storm?**

Oh, well it was very unpleasant because visibility's not good when there's a dust storm on and it's also very unpleasant because you've got the dust coming into your nose

19:00 and your mouth and all through your clothes and things like that so it wasn't a very good start.

**So you waited the couple of days. The storm obviously abated. What happened then?**

Oh we got into road transport which were big three-tonne trucks and they take about eighteen or twenty men to a truck and you're in with your bedrolls and things like that so it was fairly comfortable travelling in the backs were left open the

19:30 the back blind was was pulled up but the big stops every two hours for people to get out and stretch their legs and have a leak and that type of thing and the odd stop for meals although I think it was probably hard rations then bully beef and biscuits. A tin of bully beef per man per day.

**Was it a constant temperature?**

Oh, it was pretty cold because were wearing the what do you call the

20:00 winter uniforms and great coats. That was theavy overcoat and those that had them were wearing scarves and at that time there was the people back home used to knit a scarf thing that used to come over the whole head and come down right over to the shoulders and only leave the mouth and nose exposed and the eyes and

20:30 they were very good. I'm just trying to think of the name of those

**A balaclava.**

Like a balaclava, yes, yes and but they were a necessity.

**Could you describe for us, because a lot of people won't know this, what bully beef looks like and tastes like?**

Well, actually you can buy it in the supermarkets and I think it's under various labels including the South American

21:00 the frey bentos. It had a variety of you know the people who packed it. The Australian bully beef was the best but we often got stuff from Argentina, which was quite good too. The worst bully beef of the lot was actually the Italian stuff which later on of course we had plenty of that around Tobruk. But that was a last resort.

**What was wrong with it?**

Well, it didn't taste

21:30 very good. It wasn't to our taste and

**It was probably drowned in garlic.**

Well, I suppose you know it didn't have much of a taste at all.

**Right.**

It was quite quite limp, if you like, as far as taste is concerned.

**So where and when did you first see action?**

Yes, our first action actually was

22:00 an attack by Germans planes on the convoy. It was after we somewhere near after we'd left Tobruk and near Derna, which is a little Italian port, and they were German Dornier aircraft twin engine bombers and three of these just flew up and

22:30 down the convoy just machine gunning. Some drivers were able to get off the road but in places the roads were built up so it wasn't easy to get trucks off the road. The drill there was if you came under air attack even though the vehicles were separated by distance for safety reasons was to drive the truck off the road and as far as they could go you know 100 metres if they could and for the troops to get out and disperse

23:00 but things happened so quickly of course. The bombs were dropped and they'd come back machine gunning and it was all over in minutes so it was always a it was a big shock actually and then to find that one of the most popular officers in the battalion was one of those killed 'cause he stood up trying to make sure that his troops were you know being dispersed safely and

23:30 and he and his driver were both killed.

**How much protection was there on the trucks themselves?**

Well, there was none at all.

**These were open trucks were they?**

Well, they were open trucks but they had a big canvas canopy over the back. Well you needed that against rain of course and when they were carrying stores to protect the stores.

**So on this particular occasion approximately how many were killed?**

How many?

**On this, on this first occasion do you know what the number of casualties were?**

24:00 **Oh yes, we had one officer killed and one and his driver was killed and I think there were about half a dozen wounded. The Padre had a staff car and that was shot up and went up in flames so he lost all his stuff but you know other than that we came out of it very pretty well casualty free.**

**What what was the impact of that**

24:30 **on the morale of the men?**

Well, the we knew we'd we'd been in action. We'd been under attack but it wasn't so bad after all and we knew you had to be alert all the time and as long as you took the right precautions you could minimise casualties.

**Did anyone try to fire back?**

There were a few yes, and just firing back, a couple with Bren guns and a couple with rifles.

25:00 But we did have a what they call the anti-aircraft platoon and they had special tripods and for you know to be able to set their Bren guns up to fire at aircraft. They went into action too, but they didn't do any good.

**So the convoy continued onward**

Hm?

**The convoy obviously continued on at this point.**

Oh, yes, yes, yes. No it was what you expect and you carry on as normal

25:30 straight after.

**How soon after that did you reach your reach your first objective?**

Oh yes, I think we had another overnight stop because went down south of Benghazi to a place called Azadabeer or Aza Dabia [?], which was a big Italian airfield and airbase and also a little town which had a mixture of Arabs and Italians in it and it was a very pretty little place

26:00 and very very good buildings too. Well I took over as the platoon commander. I took over from the platoon of the 2/17th Battalion which also included a chap who won the first Australian VC of the war and Jack Edmondson was a corporal in that platoon we took over from so

26:30 I would have met Jack Edmondson very briefly at that stage.

**What were your impressions of Jack Edmondson?**

Oh well he's a big rangy bloke and he was a native of Liverpool and of course belonged to a sister battalion of ours at in the same brigade but no he was an exceptionally good soldier as his deeds proved.

**Could you describe for us what his deeds were that won him the VC?**

Yes,

27:00 oh well the when the Germans attacked Post R-33 on the perimeter of Tobruk there was a lot of Germans all around and in fact there was far more Germans than what there were Australians in there and they looked like overcoming the post but

27:30 Edmondson rallied to rallied together half a dozen of the fellas with a rifle and bayonet and they charged the main body of Germans and killed quite a few and until Edmondson was killed and drove them off.

**You just said Edmondson was killed?**

Edmondson was killed, yes.

**He was killed, right. So that was a posthumous VC.**

So he organised the charge and led the charge it was one of those marvellous spontaneous actions

28:00 that made a hell of a difference.

**So you had an overnight stay. You continued on and where where was it that you next saw action?**

Yes, well once the Germans came into the Tripoli-Taniand then moved into

28:30 moving back up towards Benghazi that were withdrawn to a large escarpment about 20 kilometres west of Benghazi and overlooking the large Italian airforce base of called Beninand that was a target for the Germans of course because it had a first class runway

29:00 and had hangars and all the rest of it being a so they could use it. But on this big escarpment there's only one road going up, a very narrow road, and there was a minefield going right across that and sort of supposed to be protecting anti-tank ditch as well but the problem there was the minefield was the Egyptian-made mines which

29:30 were a very poor quality. They also were laid too close together and when the first German shells came down and hit in the minefield it set off the whole minefield. They all detonated one after the other spontaneously so we lost our minefield and it meant that the German tanks and armoured cars were able to get through.

30:00 Now there's about only about five hundred troops of our battalion on that escarpment and we fought back and all during the after one afternoon and then when darkness came transport was brought up at the rear to enable us to withdraw. But

30:30 were almost drawn into what would have been a futile bayonet charge against the Germans by one of our second in command. Because nobody really knew what was going on. Your first time in battle and

darkness comes down and you know where the enemy are because we'd already lost one company of troops had been over run and there was a machine gun and

31:00 Tommy gunfire and rifle fire coming from from them all the time. Were hitting back but the situation was untenable. We couldn't have stayed there without the whole battalion being lost so the order to withdraw came and eventually moved back to to where these big diesel trucks were and then set off on what they call the “Benghazi

31:30 Derby” or the “Tobruk Handicap” which was a series of rearguard actions over the next five days 'til we got back to the fortress of Tobruk.

**So this action that you've just described was your first sustained exposure to to to battle action?**

Yes.

**Do you remember your own personal responses as you were in the midst of all of this?**

Oh yes. We felt quite confident that we'd be able to take on the enemy and beat them but that was

32:00 largely through ignorance because they were a extremely well-armed force and they had plenty of backup and we had none at that stage so it would have been a a very brave but very futile action.

**Was it also a matter of better German strategy at this point?**

**Was it a matter of better forward planning and strategy by the Germans?**

Oh well these troops were the

32:30 pick of the German army and a lot of the officers and men had already been in action and leading up to the fall of France in 1940. They were picked troops and not only that but they were superbly trained, superbly armed.

**You've mentioned a a proposed but thankfully abandoned bayonet charge which would have been futile. How how close did it come to your being ordered to**

33:00 **take part in this bayonet charge?**

Well were lined up with fixed bayonets and were just about to move when the order came - “we must withdraw” and thank God it was called off.

**Did you realise at the time it was futile?**

No we didn't because we didn't know enough about battle at that stage. We had the great thought you know you'd go in and you'd clean up all these Germans and

33:30 there was no thought of what was behind them and the whole of the Afrika Korps and

**How soon before you learnt these essential lessons?**

**You said you we knew so little about battle at this stage**

Yes, because we'd only been under rare attack. We hadn't had any face to face contact with the German army at that stage.

**So what were some of the most important lessons that you learnt?**

Well the first one is the old thing that

34:00 reconnaissance is seldom wasted. In other words, find out what's in front of you and react accordingly. You can't take on something that's an impossible task.

**It's better to hold back and**

Yes.

**wait wait for the correct opportunity?**

Yes, well in that case it was very wise to keep on withdrawing and then to get back to fight on a battleground of your own choosing where there's very strong

34:30 fixed defences already in place. That was the obvious answer of course.

**How how long before you learnt those lessons?**

Well, you gradually you learn a little bit every day as you see it the whole scenario unfolding and you realise your own limitations but you also realise your dependency on your own troops and

35:00 on those within your own division.

**Following this withdrawal how long was there before you saw action again?**

Well straight after we got back into Tobruk and occupied the front post. A large German patrol came up against our company and they were fought off by just a handful of men firing rapid fire with

35:30 just rifles, not even a machinegun, and dispersed this German party who were German assault pioneers and they had Bangalore torpedoes, those very long explosive charges which are are meant to blow open a gap in a barb wire, and other explosives you know to to wreck our posts.

**So you say a handful of men. Could you talk about actual numbers**

36:00 **of Australians and actual numbers of Germans?**

Oh well that that particular one I'd say it was two of my men and who were very good riflemen and the Germans it could have been thirty or forty of them but they made a mistake in staying all bunched up and the fact that this chap was a superb rifleman at of rapid fire

36:30 fooled them and what do you call it intimidated them.

**Could you describe what actually what your defensive position was at this stage? In other words, was it part of the fortress of Tobruk that you**

Yes, yes. They had these concrete posts and I say concrete posts. There was anti-tank ditch was which was built

37:00 of concrete that had the steep side facing outwards but it was in a circle and the Italians had actually covered them with boards so that you could walk over them one man could and but a tank would crash through. But there was a barb wire a large barb wire fence about three metres thick around the posts.

37:30 There were sort of hidden pathways to get in and out of course but the posts themselves consisted of a deep underground chamber which could take about twenty, twenty five men but then there was the exposed concrete trenches above and two open machine gun pits again made of concrete but they were set up of course

38:00 to handle Italian armaments not British.

**People have referred every now and again to “the salient” at Tobruk. What actually was the salient?**

Yes, now the salient was an area on the perimeter. It happened to be at the highest point where there's which is actually two hundred and nine metres above

38:30 sea level and it's like a steep conical hill and the front line went right over it and concrete posts as well as the barb wire but the Germans put an attack in to capture that high point because it would have given them full observation over the whole of the Tobruk fortress.

39:00 Now after very heavy fighting they eventually took that and but to contain them 'round there we had to dig new trenches and put up new new barb wire and put in a new front line area in a semi-circle around this high point. Now this was always

39:30 manned by German troops never by Italians and they were some of those ended up as being paratroopers who'd been brought in from Crete and Greece so they were the tough nuts. Now the point was there that we had to dig our own trenches in bare desert and put up wire but

40:00 in many places you couldn't go down very deep at all so that you were only down you know a matter of if you could down a metre you were lucky. It was only often only half a metre and so you relied on the you know the rock and the dirt you could throw up in front of you as well. But the problem being under observation there meant that you couldn't move around in daylight and this posed a lot of problems because

40:30 particularly in the hot summer days you were boiling out there so every effort was made there to use ground sheets and utilise the captive Italian two-man tents which are very good and manage to get enough sticks and things to be able to put up virtually a sun shield over half of your weapon pit.

41:00 **That's great Ken. We've run out of tape at this point so**

# Tape 4

00:33 I s'pose I should mention that were real diggers because that's all we seemed to do round Tobruk was dig. Dig and dig everywhere.

**How often were you digging?**

Oh well, well a lot of the time because there's always renovation work had to be done on the the fences which meant more digging, more filling of sandbags and it just seemed to go on forever. Improving the

defences and

01:00 we got very good with a pick and shovel.

**How often were you using the pick and shovel?**

Oh well, put it this way, probably two days out of three.

**Now during the break a moment ago you were you were mentioning a very unfortunate accident in which a number of men were killed. Can you just tell us that story for the sake of the recording?**

01:30 Yes, 9th Division were relieved from Tobruk by the 50th British Division and a Polish brigade by around about the 20th of October 1941 but very sadly the three British destroyers which were

02:00 meant to bring 2/13th Battalion back to Egypt were attacked by German bombers I think two were sunk and one was badly damaged and had to return to Alexandria so 2/13th Battalion could not embark on the designated night and it was found impossible by the higher commands to allocate any other shipping to bring out

02:30 2/13th Battalion so it was left in Tobruk and became attached to the Polish brigade for for rations and general welfare. Now when the big offensive took place to break out of Tobruk in November, towards the end of November, the Germans fought back very hard and

03:00 they broke the link between the 8th Army coming from Egypt and the troops breaking out from Tobruk. This was a very serious matter that that would affect the relief of Tobruk. The only reinforcements left in Tobruk was the 2/13th Battalion and it was decided to commit them into battle and so they were

03:30 taken up to the front line areand the CO Lieutenant Colonel Burrows spoke to the Company Commanders and arranged that a bayonet attack would be launched during the eve- during the early evening and when full darkness came down to try and restore the situation in favour of the British.

04:00 Now that meant that the very tired and worn out 2/13th Battalion was again committed to major battle action but they were very experienced soldiers and they saw it as their duty and they very cheerfully lined up to carry out this attack. This meant that under cover of darkness

04:30 in the early evening troops had to be moved to a forming up area which was still within German artillery fire range but hopefully could not be seen by the Germans in the front line. Now unfortunately Number 10 Platoon of B Company were moving up to their designated start line area

05:00 in three files which meant that the three sections each of about eight or nine men were a matter of three metres apart. Now one of the British artillery guns fired a faulty round which was a loose copper driving band at the base of the shell. This split

05:30 and it had the effect of slowing down the speed of the shell and causing it to what do you call it gyrate wildly in the air but also made a very loud buzzing noise and the first thing our chaps knew was when this shell that should have gone safely overhead came buzzing in right behind them and exploded

06:00 right at the end of the platoon and the explosion force was all forward and it meant that out of the twenty eight men, twenty one were to die then or to die of wounds very soon afterwards leaving only that seven men able to carry on. It was a terrible blow there after all these months of

06:30 action there to be wiped out by one of your own shells right at the end of it and something I've carried all my life.

**Did you know any of those men?**

Oh yes, I knew all those men very well indeed. They were all great comrades and some of them I'd joined up with in May 1940 right from that time. Others were

07:00 more recent reinforcements but they were all valuable Australians.

**How did that loss affect you at the time?**

Well I was back in Palestine I got got terribly sad and I must admit that I got drunk that night.

**And was there any particular ceremony or service held for these men at that time?**

07:30 Oh, only at the graveside and it would have been by with our own Padre, and Padre Francis.

**Were you able to talk to any of the relatives of those men when you came back to Australia?**

I have since, yes since I came back and not too many of them unfortunately.

**And**

08:00 **when can you give us a sense of year or month that this actually happened, this particular**

**incident that you've just talked about in the overall scheme of things when exactly was it that this occurred? This was after the the major siege of Tobruk?**

Ah no, actually the siege of Tobruk hadn't been broken. This was in what they call the “Breakout” operation by the 50th British Division aided by the Polish brigade but the

08:30 Germans fought back so hard that the connecting link with the 8th Army from Egypt was broken and there were no reserve troops of any sort available other than the 2/13th Battalion which would be about 700 men at that time.

**Now looking at the, you've mentioned the term "fort of Tobruk". Can you describe for us what the fort of Tobruk actually was?**

Yes, the fortress of Tobruk

09:00 well first of all you've got to visualise a port like in a way like one of the arms of Sydney Harbour because it was an indentation of the sea the Mediterranean Sea came right into this very protected and very safe big harbour except it wasn't safe from aerial bombing

09:30 so there was walls there and there was a township and but all the action was taking place on the front lines well outside the town because the perimeter at that stage was 'round about forty kilometres long of fortified concrete posts with barbed wire and so forth and anti-tank ditch 'round most of it.

10:00 **How important was mateship to get you through the bad experiences?**

Beg your

**How how important was mateship to get you through the bad experiences?**

Well mateship was everything. You couldn't operate without that wonderful Australian infantry mateship because it was everybody supported each other and you had terrific loyalty to each other and loyalty to your company and to your

10:30 Battalion. It was like a huge family thing and a terrific dedication.

**And how important was humour as part of all of this as well?**

Well that was another thing that you couldn't do without it and you had your natural humorists in the in each section

11:00 but this helped the spirit of camaraderie and I can't get away from that family relationship because that's what it was and you had trust in each other and you knew that you everybody had to pull their weight.

**So what sorts of things, when you talk to your mates what sorts of things would you talk to your mates about?**

Oh these days about how

11:30 they are personally, their health and their family and, well, generally life around them.

**Back there in the context of World War II and let's look at the period in and around Tobruk what sorts of things would you discuss with your mates?**

Well the big thing was your people back home and that was always very close to the top of your thoughts

12:00 but your own duties were the foremost thing in your in your daily lives and what had to be done and how you'd fit in to make sure that all those things were done properly and otherwise weren't going to win anything.

**So when you were thinking about the people back home what sorts of things were you thinking about?**

Oh, that Australia was still safe because it was only right at the end that Japan came into the war

12:30 and there was a threat that hadn't fully developed at that time but the other thing were very conscious too of the German submarines operating in the various seas even fairly close to Australia.

**Were you worried about Australia's security?**

Oh yes, yes were and we wanted it to stay safe and that's why the navy was always so important.

13:00 **Did you ever feel frustrated that you were so far away from Australia?**

No, because we felt that were doing a very essential job and that that army couldn't do without us. That were very much part of it.

**And let's talk about your own particular mates. I mean, who would you say was was your best**

**mate within your own immediate group?**

Oh, it's fairly hard to say there because it was a close

13:30 comradeship in each of the platoons but being the platoon sergeant there I had responsibilities and that gave me something else in a way it was an added sort of self-discipline that I knew I had to perform well all the time and keep on performing.

**Did did you have any did you have several friends among your among your own immediate**

Well were all great friends in the whole platoon and as a matter of

14:00 relying on each other, having faith in each other and a deep sense of mateship.

**Were there say two or three that were probably bet better mates for you than than the others?**

Oh yes, some as a matter of personal communication some men communicate better than others and

**Can you talk about some of the men that you best communicated with?**

Oh yes, the not only private soldiers but I relied on the

14:30 the corporals because apart from the platoon commander and the platoon sergeant there was three corporals, a corporal heading every section of roughly ten men and you had to keep a good relationship with all those chaps. But also on the higher thing there's the company quartermaster sergeant was very important as he was the guy that kept us fed and supplied with all the necessities of life and

15:00 brought up the mail 'cause the mail from Australia was something very special.

**Yes. How often were you receiving that mail?**

Well, a bit depended on when the ships came in from Australia sometimes you'd you'd go a week or up to a fortnight without any mail at all and not always the mail you wanted would be in the particular batch so you might wait a month before you'd get the letter that really mattered.

**Was there much**

15:30 **censorship of your mail?**

Oh yes, the censorship was necessary and it was carried out by the platoon officers.

**What sort of things would they censor out?**

Oh well they had to cut out any reference to where you were in that particular battle areand any references to casualties or and morale particularly if there was any thought that there was any low morale

16:00 you'd never mention anything like that though I must say morale amongst our troops was always very high.

**Just returning to the to the concept of mateship did you discuss the shell tragedy with your with your mates?**

Yes I did with they came back to Palestine and well we all had went through a lot of misery.

16:30 They were sadly missed.

**Do you remember the kinds of things that you discussed with them?**

Oh well just they missed a particular fella because they all had a place in that platoon. It was their family and there was always outstanding funny characters and other guys that

17:00 that couldn't help you know sort of mothering us and keeping a good eye on on other ones but there's a terrific feelness of operating as one entity and I suppose a family feeling there but the absolute dedication to each other was very very strong and that ran through to what do you call the esprit de corps or the spirit of the whole

17:30 battalion.

**So that that included the men that you lost in that shell accident does it?**

Oh yes, yes, yes, yes.

**Now you mentioned serving with your brother. Can you tell us a bit more about your brother?**

Yes, my brother was attached to Brigade Headquarters in first of all what they call the anti-tank company and because of the what do you call it armoured warfare

18:00 introduced and developed strongly by the Germans in World War II every brigade started off having

anti-camp anti-tank company I think in that case they'd have they would have had about twelve anti-tank guns but because the British very efficient British two-pounder weapons were in very short supply our anti-tank company were initially supplied with Italian captured

18:30 weapons 47 millimetre ones very poor traverse and not terribly good guns so they had perhaps you know for the first six months with very poor weaponry.

**Just getting back to your brother. What was his name?**

Dick Hall. Richard and he was fifteen months older than I was so we grew up just one class apart and

19:00 often played in the same football teams and swimming teams and well being much the same age of course were very close.

**Was he geographically located close to you in the Middle East?**

Well yes, because he was in the same brigade for a start and then at the end of Tobruk when they formed into the into the anti-

19:30 tank regiment taken on there I'd see him intermittently that's when his particular what do you call it troop of anti-tank gunners were posted near the battalion. We'd always seek each other out whenever we got the opportunity to have a chat and you know keep family news.

**Did he tell you much about his experiences in the Middle East?**

Yes, he was nearly captured

20:00 early on because with a truckload of his mates too they were cut off by the Germans near Derna in Cyrenaicand it took a week for them to dodge the Germans and finally get back into into Tobruk so he's very luck to have made it.

**Looking at the**

20:30 **at the team spirit, the espirit de corps, among you and the role of humour once again, what sort of jokes did you play on each other?**

Oh I don't know whether it was jokes exactly. It was 'cause you had to be supportive all the time and but there was always you know one or two fellows in every section that would be a great yarn teller and a lot of it would be fiction of course but

21:00 they were essential there because they kept that that sense of humour going.

**What sort of what sort of yarns would they spin?**

Well, a lot of see most of the guys were country fellas and we had them from all over New South Wales and a particularly strong lot from the Riverinand they had a terrific fund of life experiences to draw back on and you know what was happening in their shearing sheds and on the stations and farms and in the

21:30 towns and you'd get the lot and even their stories of their love lives and misspent youth and things like that. It was what do you call it a great insight into human nature but they all had a common purpose of course. Once they were in the front lines and that was to beat the enemy.

**Just getting back to**

22:00 **this time when the Germans broke in and I think they took fourteen posts didn't they?**

Yes, yes they did. Yes that was in the Easter 1941 battles and they made a very strong attack with using tanks and flamethrowers and most artillery as well as the dive bombers.

**And what was your activity during this time?**

Well,

22:30 were on a sector of one of the three main roads leading out of Tobruk. The one that went south was the old Italian aerodrome of El Adem and the Germans were using those main routes to bring up their tanks and armoured cars and lorried infantry and very foolishly of course they were forming up in massed ranks in these areas

23:00 so it was not only our artillery got amongst them but our patrols got out close to them and inflicted heavy casualties on them.

**I mean the fighting must have been very intense at this stage?**

It was, oh well actually while these Easter battles were going on for the best part of a week. It was twenty-four hours a day of heavy shelling, bombing, night was all lit up with flares and the and the explosions. It was

23:30 you know really a hell on earth and they tried very hard to break through but they suffered such terrible

casualties that they just had to be pulled back.

**When you say “a hell on earth” can you can you be a bit more specific about in what way it was “a hell on earth”?**

Yes, well of course when you're under sustained shellfire

24:00 you've got a terrible noise thing. Not only the whistle of the shells but the explosions and there's never a moment's peace and the other thing they backed it up too with tanks firing directly on the front line post and some of the tanks had 75 millimetre guns as well as 47 millimetre which all pack quite a punch and usually two machine

24:30 guns and their machine gun the German machine guns had a very rapid rate of fire and that itself was a very intimidating thing and the Germans used that you know as an intimidation weapon to try and make us give in just by the sheer noise and but our fellows were made of sterner stuff than that.

**Nevertheless, the stress levels must have been fairly high?**

Oh yes, they were fairly high but we

25:00 became very determined. They weren't going to take Tobruk, not while were there and this was the you know a terrific spirit that everybody had that you do everything to stop them.

**And did you ever see any men who became shell-shocked or battle-stressed through this?**

Oh yes, yes.

**What were some of the symptoms that you saw?**

Oh well the thing is they stopped communicating for a start

25:30 and they get very jumpy and it happens fairly suddenly and

**What would be the first telltale signs?**

Well a fella not talking to his mates. But you know he's starting to get disturbed and he's losing the contact with his mates and in other words he's losing his efficiency and it didn't happen to many of them

26:00 thank goodness but you generally found they were fellas that didn't get on well with their mates anyway are the ones that are most effected.

**So they were more the loners?**

Yes, that is yes. That describes it very aptly.

**And what would happen to these people?**

Well the thing is they'd be sent back to the Regimental Aid Post assessed by the doctor and then sent to the hospital

26:30 back in Tobruk but very often they'd be a bit worse off there because the hospitals were getting bombed every day anyway so it was “out of the frying pan into the fire” sort of thing.

**And did they usually come back to the front line?**

No, once they get assessed like that there's not much hope for them.

**What about long term effect on these men? I mean how were they after the war for instance?**

27:00 Yes, one can only hope there that they could settle back into civilian life. I'm led to believe that a lot of them never never did. That they were what do you call it “bomb happy” for the rest of their lives and they find it very difficult to hold down a responsible job.

**Was there any rotation of positions during this conflict?**

Well, the rotation was all important because

27:30 it was wasn't any good for troops to be held more than two weeks in the front line positions so your normal rotation period was after fourteen days in the front line and then seven days in the reserve position and then sometimes when the brigades got rotated around you'd go back to a deeper reserve which was very relaxing.

**Now I believe there was an incident where a German soldier**

28:00 **wandered into your lines?**

Yes, this happened in the salient where there's no barbed wire put up and the positions are only less than one hundred metres apart. Now this fellow had a whole dixie of German stew somehow he got on the wrong track and headed in the wrong direction and wandered into one of our sections who picked him up gratefully but

28:30 the German stew was sausage stew and not to our taste. Anyway it shortened the war for that particular German. He was lucky.

**What was your view of German soldiers generally?**

That they were highly efficient and they were very tough and very aggressive because we had the pick of the German army there was the Afrika Korps was specially selected and

29:00 they played the game very hard all the time.

**So you had a fair amount of respect for them even at that time?**

Oh, yes because we didn't have any evidence of any atrocities or real treatment of our troops by the German particularly the German front line troops. Later on we heard that some of the chaps were knocked around by Italian guards

29:30 bullied and hit with rifle butts and things like that, and slapped but the Germans never did anything like that.

**And what was your view of Field Marshall Rommel?**

Well I had the greatest respect for him. No doubt about it he was he was a top general and the thing was he always seemed to be right on top of everything all the time

30:00 except when he hit Tobruk and couldn't get in so were very proud that we'd kept them off but on the other hand he was a very very tough opponent but also a very fair one.

**So we're describing the siege of Tobruk. For how long did that continue?**

Oh, oh I think it was two hundred and forty two days. It was something like two days longer than

30:30 Gallipoli and so it was the longest siege in British military history.

**And you were there for that entire time?**

No actually, I was I'd left just before the end of October when advance parties were selected to go back to Palestine by warship

31:00 to prepare the camps for when the troops came out.

**So during your**

That saved my life I think.

**It saved your life.**

Yes.

**What do you think would have happened?**

Well, if I'd been with this platoon that was hit right at the rear by the shell I would have been at the rear of the platoon and would most certainly have been a casualty, whether killed or wounded one can only well I wouldn't care to guess.

31:30 **You mentioned the optimism and the determination of the Australians during the siege of Tobruk. Did that did that optimism continue throughout the time that you were there?**

Oh yes, yes, yes it never let up actually. We always had a great belief were going to win.

**And could you describe the physical conditions. The day to day physical conditions while you were in Tobruk?**

Yes. Well the big problem of course was

32:00 lack of water. Were given a litre of water per day for drinking purposes and there was another litre allocated to the company kitchens way back in the back behind the lines to help in the preparation of the hot meal that got brought up every evening and that was necessary for hygiene purposes also but a litre of water per day for drinking and washing

32:30 is quite insufficient. It was only after the first six weeks when we got back in reserve positions that 44 gallon drums of contaminated water was brought up. Now the water was contaminated by dieseline and things like that so you couldn't drink it but you could wash clothes in it, which meant you virtually got for you know to wash your clothes

33:00 every man only got the equivalent to you know about three or four litres of unfit for drinking water to wash your clothes after six weeks and so your clothes were pretty stinking.

**What about the weather while you were there?**

Oh well the, initially April had very cold nights but quite hot days and then mid summer of course the

day theat of the mid day was unbearable and

33:30 with the long twilight it meant that daylight went on 'til about nine thirty at night but then daylight started again about four thirty to five o'clock so you didn't get much night.

**Which also meant you didn't get much sleep?**

Well you'd try and doze during the day and the whole trick was to rig up ground sheets across the

34:00 across the top of a weapon pit using whatever you know sticks or excuses for them just to keep the sun off you.

**Now what sort of food were you eating while you were there?**

Oh well at that stage there was two things. There was bully beef. Now I'll say for the good old bully beef you could eat that always. And the second one was

34:30 called a meat and vegetable ration which was English made and that had a few chunks of meat but haricot beans and you know chunks of potato and carrot and stuff like that. Well it kept us alive, put it like that.

**And how was your state of health at this time?**

Oh well I'm what they call a “TPI”, Totally and Permanently Incapacitated. It's mainly a

35:00 lung thing because of the I'd say all the desert dust Inhaled in those two desert campaigns and it and it ruined my stomach. I've only got half a stomach left that's been partly removed and I still have to take the what do you call it the puffer medications and the associated medications.

**At the time was there any sign of**

35:30 **of any of these symptoms?**

Oh yes, we all suffered to some extent but being young you sort of threw it off but the damage was being done and I think the fact that you were ingesting so much dust all the time it didn't do the gut and stomach any good.

**How were the locals coping with something like this?**

Oh well, the of course the Arabs lived in tents

36:00 and they'd lived for centuries like that so they were fully adapted but the other thing of course, the dust was largely a problem generated by military trucks and you see the any truck around Tobruk inside the perimeter would start off as just a vehicle truck but because the continuing use it gradually

36:30 became up to about 150 millimetres or 200 millimetres of powdery dust and the tracks spread out to up to 100 metres wide and of course any wind, which was quite frequent would, whip up this dust and there were blinding dust storms on many a days but anybody

37:00 around about you're ingesting this all the time. You just couldn't get away from it and sleeping in slit trenches under the ground it was blowing in on you all the time.

**Were you wounded at all?**

No, I was I was very fortunate I never had a wound and just a few grenade fragments just in the thigh that they were picked out and I stayed on duty.

**What happened when you received the grenade fragments?**

**What was the action that led you to receiving those?**

37:30 Oh yes, that was on one of the patrols and the got too close to the Germans and they threw grenades and I copped a bit.

**Was it enough**

I was walking wounded and stayed on duty.

**Was it enough to put you into any kind of shock at all?**

Oh no, no. Were pretty tough then. The other problem we had was the desert sores. That any slight scratch you'd get like ulcers ulceration. They'd appear on the fingers

38:00 and the backs of the hand on the knees. Any of the exposed areas and there was a treatment called Acriflavine which is a yellow ointment or you know a painted on sort of thing but that was never totally effective because you weren't getting any fresh fruit and vegetables. Not 'til we got out of Tobruk did that clear up and everybody suffered a bit from it.

**And was it painful to remove the grenade fragments?**

38:30 Oh no, no, they a few stayed in and sort of worked their way out later but no, the RA- the stretcher-bearer fella had what do you call it the little tweezers and squeeze things out. They did a great job those stretcher-bearers that. They more or less kept everybody as healthy as they could.

**Did you have Regimental Medical Officers never far away?**

39:00 Oh, yes we had a very good doctor in Tobruk and well he had had his own dressing station with usually they were underground and they'd have stretchers and panniers of medical supplies though they were always insufficient. But there were good hospitals back in Tobruk itself

39:30 even though they'd get bombed and things those doctors did a fantastic jobs. The nursing sisters were taken out very shortly after the siege because it was considered too dangerous for them.

**Ken, we're at the end of another tape so we'll cut it there.**

Yes.

# Tape 5

00:30 **Ken can you talk about how you established your authority and a sense of discipline within your platoon?**

Yes, because I'd had very sound training before the 7th Division was formed and our 2/13th Battalion came into existence, I had built up a personal sense of

01:00 fitness to lead men even though I was still only eighteen years of age. But a lot of that had come from my family background and by the example my father had set his own sons as to how you should conduct yourself not only in public but with your fellow citizens.

**What were some of the principles that he emphasised?**

01:30 Yes, oh well I'd say the first one is your own personal integrity. Whatever you said you meant and you never told falsehoods but the other thing it was physically and mentally demanding so that the it was a big challenge particularly for an eighteen year old

02:00 young man at that time because in the 2nd AIF of course you got men recruited from all levels of life and a lot of these fellows had been brought up the hard way particularly through the depression years. Others had had professional training and professional experience and everybody was trying

02:30 to assert their own position in the whole framework. Now in a rifle company of an infantry battalion of course you had a lot of very strong characters and a lot of men of tremendous life experience so it was a huge challenge to an eighteen year old like myself. I think partly through ignorance but also through my

03:00 very strong family and schooling background and my little bit of commercial banking experience that I was probably well prepared for that role and didn't even have second thoughts about it. I had a duty to do and I just hopped in and did that duty.

**So were there any particular ways in which you were able to assert your authority over these men?**

03:30 Oh yes, anybody who sort of giving cheek and throwing aspersions at me at course I had to respond very quickly to that to assert my authority as the in this case the platoon sergeant and in the what do you call it the pecking order if you like in a rifle company

04:00 and it was a very tough environment. Now there was a challenge actually to my authority in a way when they had these boxing contests which was meant to stimulate the troops in personal fitness but also to develop the men themselves into doing their best to be competitive as soldiers. So when this round of

04:30 activities came on of course there was a call “Come on Sarge, you've got to come and have a go” so what they did is picked out a fellow of roughly the same build, same weight but he happened to be a matter of five years older so was physically a bit more mature than I was. But I had had boxing lessons from my father and

05:00 also experience of boxing in the Boy Scouts and at the school I went to so I wasn't exactly a novice but I found it you know a pretty tough contest and after and quite bruising. In fact both of us just said to each other afterwards “Well I feel pretty sore” and this was so, but

05:30 it did well it sort of stamped my authority on that platoon because the word got around that “none of you should ever mess with Ken Hall”. He can hurt you and that was a very good thing.

**Did you win this contest?**

Well it was the contest was called a draw which I thought was very fair on the part of the referee.

**You mentioned a sense of fostering competition**

06:00 **between the men so that on the one hand you had training and you had exercises which emphasised teamwork and on the other hand you had a sense of competitiveness being fostered. Could you could you reconcile the two?**

Yes, well look these men were being prepared for war as front line soldiers so you had to develop not only fitness but also well a sense of them being able

06:30 to retain their initiative, particularly as Australian diggers, and to be proud of what they were doing and competitive sport actually is one way of helping this along.

**Was there a sense of competition or competitiveness in the front line?**

Not in the front line because the thing was you had clear instructions about what your duty was and

07:00 a very strict obedience to sensible orders was very much part of that.

**What about during rest periods and R&R in the Middle East for instance? Was there a sense of even kind of jokey blokey competitiveness there?**

Yes there was, but the overall sense of discipline was still there. But it became what you call

07:30 esprit de corps, that was loyalty not only to your own platoon but to your company and particularly to your battalion or regiment and that was fostered very heavily and very wisely.

**Now could we talk about events between the end of your involvement in the siege of Tobruk and your coming back to Australia?**

Yes, yes the siege of Tobruk

08:00 actually ended in 'round about the 20th of December 1941. All the rest of 9th Division were back in Palestine or already settled in to camps and the 2/13th Battalion was the only fighting unit to come out of Tobruk by road. All the rest had been withdrawn by sea so there was a great sense of pride in the in our

08:30 Battalion at the fact they felt the job had been finished and finished extremely well. But of course when they got back to Palestine into the camp everything was terribly wet because that was the wet season in Palestine. The camp area was terribly muddy but all the chaps were interested in was some good food, plenty of relaxation

09:00 and a very good beer issue because stocks of beer had been built up awaiting their return so in a way it wasn't a letting down of discipline but they were given three or four days of absolutely total relaxation to settle back into a camp environment without undue disciplinary restraints.

09:30 But being trained soldiers of course they didn't overstep the mark.

**How long were you in camp before you embarked back to Australia?**

Well at that time, that was the end of 1941. But early in 1942 we took on garrison duties in Syria when the other Australian divisions were withdrawn to

10:00 Australia to fight against the Japanese but it was a special request from Mr Churchill that the 9th Division remain the Middle East. He felt that he needed their services certainly for another campaign. So we had six months of training in Syria. Part of it was up on the garrison duties along the Turkish border

10:30 and that meant the company was dispersed over quite wide areas and we also had about a month in camp in the being billeted in the old Turkish barracks in Aleppo which gave the chaps a bit of a sort of a big Middle East city leave opportunities.

11:00 **Could you describe what Aleppo was like? Was it a very old city?**

Well, Aleppo was one of the major cities in Northern Syria being an inland city but a very old established one going back thousands of years so there was a great sense of history around there, which we appreciated very much but on the other hand there was also plenty of cafés and

11:30 you know a chance for relaxed living and contact with a civilian population which the men appreciated very much. Unfortunately there was always a sort of a little bit of hostility from certain sections of the Syrian population. Actually it even carries through to the present time that

12:00 they're a very difficult people to for any government to control let alone for any occupying troops to mix with but of course they're ancient civilisation.

**Can you be a little bit more specific about what sort of people they were?**

Well, they were very proud people for a start with their tremendous background but it was their city and

12:30 of course when there's occupying troops there's I think the men of these places have a desire to protect their women and children even though with Australian troops there that they're generally well very friendly towards civilian populations and usually very well accepted but you only need you know a sort of a hostility from two to three per cent

13:00 of the population to cause friction.

**Were there any particular incidents you can recall?**

Oh, yes the when I say particular incidents you could feel hostility from particular groups of men and there was an occasion there too that because of the blackouts at night,

13:30 when the troops had left cafés and to come back to the camp sometimes they were attacked by knife-wielding gangs and there were a few unpleasant incidents like that. In fact one of the chaps in our company got knifed in the hand on one occasion but there were fisticuffs and

14:00 minor brawls were quite common.

**Were there any views expressed among the Syrians about Australians in relation to Syrian women?**

Oh I think there's a natural antipathy if you like with occupying forces. Some sections of the population of course are quite friendly but it only needs as I say five per cent hostility to cause friction and well

14:30 nasty incidents.

**So how much interaction was there between Australian troops and local women?**

Well, a lot of it was controlled of course by the differences in religion and well let's face it, in all of these places they were licensed brothels which were open to troops and I can say

15:00 for the record there that some of these were classified as officers only, sergeants and above and the others were open to all troops, but the Australian army like any other occupying army too, you always had a number of men that needed such services or felt they had a need of such services who. I'd put it down to you know

15:30 maybe only about twenty per cent of our fellows would use those sort of services. Strangely enough some of the people who used it most were married men of course who knew about sex where a lot of our young fellows were actually quite ignorant on sexual matters. So much so that on the voyage home from the Middle East our medical

16:00 officer carried out a number of lectures to inform young men about sex and how the precautions they should take when they were having sex.

**You mentioned that the brothels were there was a bit of a division between the brothels between officers and other ranks.**

Yes.

**Why was that?**

Well the

16:30 this all stemmed from the British army where there was a distinct line between officers and other ranks and it was even more so, and you'd find this right throughout India, and all places where the British army operated as a regular army, there's the officer class was always kept separate, then there was warrant officers and sergeants and then there was other ranks which from corporals

17:00 and privates.

**So for these distinctions between men would there be different classes and standards in the brothels?**

Well yes, the of course the officers only were generally high class establishments and very good premises where the other ones of course they were monitored by medical officers for the control of you know VD [Venereal Disease] and

17:30 well other sorts of diseases so there were regular inspections.

**There were regular inspections of all classes of brothels?**

All these premises, yes, and this was for thealth and safety of the troops. I mean let's face it, that where there's a large body of troops you're always to have they're going to have sexual needs and those local populations, well even in Sydney, you know there's those establishments exist

18:00 and they've always existed.

**Did any of the men become emotionally attached to any of the women? Any of the local**

**women?**

Well, yes I suppose there were some did and they were the more frequent users of the those services.

**And did was the Australian army in any way apart from the regular medical inspections did they control any of the brothels?**

18:30 **Did they move in and say "We're going to set up some kind of administration to run these correctly"?**

Well not that I know of directly but it was a matter of liaison I think between the local military commanders in allowing these places to operate.

**Yeah, go on.**

**Inevitably there must have been contact between Australian soldiers and British soldiers and other allied soldiers and local women**

19:00 **in local cafés and restaurants and so forth.**

Um.

**Would that have been the case? You mentioned going to cafés and bars and so forth. I mean there must have been a percentage of**

Yes, but generally the women who had the “glad eyes” as the saying goes were women of that ladies of the night if you like. In other words prostitution was their business.

**So if you just went out on a bit of R&R to a local café or restaurant what sort of things would be happening there? Would there be you know dances,**

19:30 **would there be**

Oh yes, there were what they call hostesses in a lot of these places but then there's of course the normal civilian population there too the. Some of these and things during the day there'd be women and children amongst the people using those cafés but I'd say with the Australian army there that our men had a very high regard for local

20:00 civilian populations and treated them extremely well and with I'd say with certainly with due respect. It wasn't a problem.

**Was going to such a city and seeing the variety of things that you saw eye opening for you personally?**

Well it was an education and certainly an eye opener but the other

20:30 thing we all learnt tolerance and because these people are you know foreigners as far as we're concerned and of a different culture and I think the Australian soldier generally had a great respect for civilian populations of other countries.

**In what main ways would it have been eye opening for you personally?**

Well, we didn't see these sorts of things in our own

21:00 own communities back here in Australia. It was a quite a different way of life.

**When you say sorts of things what do you mean?**

Well I suppose in big cities like Sydney there's always these pockets where these things exist but in country towns such as I'd come from those things were hidden.

**When you say these things can?**

Well I'm talking about I suppose in most towns there's always a

21:30 few ladies of the night or people that women who prostitute themselves but generally this is only known by their few clients where the bulk of the population are sort of not really aware that this is happening.

**Looking generally at the experience in Syria, did you have during the R&R periods did the soldiers have much of a chance to look around at the countryside**

22:00 **historic ruins or anything like that?**

Oh yes, yes, in fact our men were great sightseers and they loved doing that and taking photographs and the other big thing was to get away from army food to be able to patronise the cafés and restaurants and the nightclubs too of course, depending on what your pay level was and what you could afford.

**Now you've mentioned garrison duty and the places you went. What more specifically did garrison**

22:30 **duty involve in these places?**

Well the garrison duty meant that troops would occupy an areand the duties were to keep the military security of that areat a high level all the time. Now in Syria of course the it had a border with Turkey so there had to be

23:00 a military presence at all points on the border where roads crossed into Syriand usually you found there were little towns or villages at those points. I don't remember any road going into Syria into Turkey that didn't have a township or a village on it.

**Were there any incidents or flare-ups in the time that your particular unit was doing garrison duty?**

23:30 Oh yes, the occasional incidents. Now not all of these communities of course were friendly to the allied forces and the old thing a lot of these local men of course were jealous of their women folk and quite rightly so, I mean you'd expect that in Australian communities as well so they were only reacting to what they perceived as a threat to their

24:00 their own communities.

**So it was more protecting members of the community thany kind of expressed views on politics?**

Yes, I'd say on my recollections it wasn't a great sense of hostility all the time. It was just sort of pockets here and there. Generally the Australian

24:30 soldiers are well accepted by civilian populations in Middle East countries.

**So for how many months were you in Syria?**

From January 1942 up 'til about mid June 1942 when the 9th Division was called back to the Western Desert as the Germans started to approach came over the border from Libyand got into Egyptian territory and were heading for the

25:00 Canal. In fact they'd got forty miles away from Alexandria so the threat was hugely real.

**But it was around this time that you were sent back to Australia wasn't it, or did you see further action in the Middle East?**

Oh no, no, in we didn't leave back for Australia until the end of February 19- it would be 1943. In fact it was a blessing there that the Australian 9th Division were left in the Middle East because

25:30 the Germans got to as I say got to within forty miles of Alexandriand the Australian division was recalled very very hurriedly from Syria. The New Zealand division had gone ahead of us but they weren't enough of them to stem the terrific German offensive and

26:00 it took the Australian division to be thrown in and to make a series of night bayonet charges against the Germans and bayonet charges under cover of night which were unsupported by tanks because our General Moore said didn't believe that the tanks could operate effectively

26:30 at night with infantry and this actually was a fantastic morale booster for the Australians because the Germans got quite unnerved by Australian infantry suddenly coming out of the darkness and descending on them with in bayonet charges and drove them back something like five miles over five nights. It was a terrific

27:00 thing that actually stopped the German Afrika Korps offensive in its tracks.

**Were you involved in any of those bayonet charges yourself?**

Well our brigade was the last one into action so with the initial ones weren't weren't engaged in those. Those were the other two brigades who did a fantastic job.

**So when you went into action were you wielding a bayonet yourself?**

Well, not 'til later on at the big battle of Alamein that. There were

27:30 fighting patrols and things went out but not whole units engaged in bayonet charges.

**So when you went to Alexandria what were yourself doing?**

Um, yes.

**You've given us a general description of the Australian troops were doing back in Alexandria but I'd like to sort of place you into the action somewhere as to what you were doing at this time?**

Oh well yes, when we came down from Syria that a lot of the troops came by road, some came by rail and

28:00 were thrown into the front line which was only forty miles west of Alexandria. Now the other two brigades of course had got in ahead of my 20th Brigade and stabilised the whole front in a remarkable series of night bayonet charges and they took thousands and thousands of German prisoners, something like ten thousand Germans,

28:30 and they were the spearhead of the Afrika Korps of course they're what do you call it the some of the best infantry of the Afrika Korps were taken prisoners like that.

**Why was there such an emphasis on bayonet charging as opposed to bullets?**

Um, yes

**What is the advantage of a bayonet charge compared to?**

Well, it's a very decisive act on a battlefield because you're not only take the

29:00 the ground but you also intimidate the enemy and we found that the Germans and the Italians just wouldn't stand up to bayonet charges. We found that in our in the fighting in Tobruk and it's not exactly the last card in the pack but for a commander there to you know throw his troops into bayonet charges it's a it takes what do you call it strong leadership qualities

29:30 but as I say it was always a decisive move.

**That's interesting. What why does it require such strong leadership qualities?**

Well not all troops take to going into bayonet charges. It's something the Australian army trained for very hard and were very good at and it was part of our Australian psyche because the AIF in World War I became very good at it

30:00 and as I say it was part of our military heritage if you like.

**Yes, but you've also just said that not all troops took to bayonet charges. What why was this?**

Well, I suppose actually it's one of those things you're getting back to national characteristics. Now some

30:30 armies of course rely on very heavy artillery fire and bombing preparation beforehand everything to be on the other front line to be obliterated before they move in but the essence of warfare really is to throw the other people off the particular ground you want to take and it becomes a very personal and

31:00 well it's also an act which you the troops need to be well trained for as well as psychologically prepared to carry out.

**But you've, just to return to this point, you've said that there was a certain degree of hesitancy among the troops and this required a strong sense of leadership. What was that hesitancy based on?**

Oh 'cause you know you're going out

31:30 to physically kill the opposing infantry people. Now let's face it, we understood after being on the battlefields for only a short time that the other people were human beings too and that when you're going into a bayonet charge that you're going to physically kill people with your rifle and bayonet and that has a big psychological impact

32:00 and you need a high degree of training to carry out those tasks effectively but the other thing I'll say about it that what we found there that the Germans and Italians wilted very quickly under an onslaught of bayonet charges. Now we had a very different experience of course in New Guinea where the Japanese'd stand fight and

32:30 to effectively take the ground you had to kill everybody that was in front of you. The Germans and Italians sensibly put up their hands and so there were vast numbers of prisoners in these battles.

**Could you for the sake of the uninitiated talk us through or walk us through what was involved in a bayonet charge?**

Yes, it's one of the ultimate acts on a battlefield that

33:00 when all else fails that you go in with a bayonet and it becomes a very physical thing as well as a personal thing. You know you're going to be man to man against the enemy. You're going to meet the man face to face and you're going to see some of them act bravely, some of them act in great fear, which is a normal response, because nobody likes to

33:30 be wounded or killed in such circumstances. So it was always welcome to us when they'd get up and run because you were taking the ground anyway.

**If you were actually involved in a bayonet charge what could you do? Could you just pardon me for a moment. I've got a blockage. That's better. If we can look at what was actually involved**

34:00 **once you'd set out. I mean were you running all the time, did you have your bayonet in a certain position? Could you sort of talk us through what was involved in literally doing a bayonet charge?**

Yes, well it was a very physical thing and of course with your all your battle gear you were carrying something like well as far as kilograms are concerned, up to thirty kilograms of equipment and in some cases more you know with your weapon, your rifle or light machine gun or Tommy gun and

34:30 ammunition and all the rations you had to carry in your pack. So you were pretty heavily laden because you knew once you get onto the objective and you've taken the ground that you've got to stay there you've got to hold it and so you've got to be able to feed yourself as well as to fight off any counterattacks. So it's a pretty tough call for infantry to do a bayonet charge.

35:00 **Once you arrived in Alexandria, what were your own duties? What did you do? I mean you've mentioned that later you were involved in a bayonet charge, but what did you do initially when you arrived in Alexandria?**

Oh, well arriving in Alexandriactually was only a transit point on the way to the desert and so really were only just passing through it. It's only later on I had only half a day's leave

35:30 in Alexandriand I was on the way to the officers' school so actually I didn't have much to do with Alexandriat all.

**So you arrived after the after the various bayonet charges had happened and the place had been secured?**

Yes, yes.

**So what was what was the next action that you saw in the Western Desert?**

We're talking now about the Alamein campaign?

**Yes, we're talking about the Alamein campaign.**

Yes, yes well

36:00 the two other brigades of the division had had taken a lot of territory. They'd driven the Germans back for five miles and they'd actually taken higher ground because right alongside the beaches on the Mediterranean coast there's like a range of hills which ran parallel to the coast and on the inland side of that was the

36:30 the tarmac road that led to Mersa Matruh and just inland of that again was the railway that had been built by the British and finished at Mersa Matruh. Now they are all key communication links so they had to be held.

**And they had to be held and so what was the involvement of your**

Well, the other thing there was what's called the Katara Depression which was about forty

37:00 miles inland from the Mediterranean coast and the Katara Depression was salt marshes which you know sort of like bottomless with mud and salty water but they were quite impassable to any traffic road traffic at all any tanks or anything like that so that

37:30 formed a natural barrier and it gave a front line of you know forty miles long which could be fortified. In fact the British had actually built fortification lines there at least six months before the Alamein campaign occurred. I mean this was normal military practice to have these reserve lines back towards the main cities and

38:00 communication centres like the Suez Canal.

**So was your platoon involved in the in the holding of the Katara Depression?**

No, I only went down there one day when there was a the Germans were making what do you call it a tactical move moving troops to try and come 'round the find a way

38:30 around to the British defences and hoping to break through right at where the Katara Depression joined the defensive lines but that was successfully held. I actually went down there for a couple of days and just steaming around the desert in trucks and taking up defensive positions but we didn't have any engagements.

**Were you involved in other holding operations nearby?**

39:00 No, only back on the coast. No, the coast with the communications and railway line and the road and of course the sea that was the vital sector and it needed the best troops to hold it and that's why the Australiand New Zealand divisions were sent in there. Because the 8th Army had they'd been badly beaten and thrown out of Tobruk and thrown out of Libyand

39:30 there was a terrible situation there of three lines of traffic on the one road. Now there was nose to tail

traffic of two lanes, there was the beaten British armies and their allies heading back towards the Canal zone 'cause they'd been beaten in battle and the third line trying to get up was the 9th Australian Division trying to get up to the front line to

40:00 stabilise the thing and to get into action and stop the Germans. It was a weird sort of situation.

**Ken, we're going to have to change tapes. I just**

Yes.

# Tape 6

00:32 **Ken, moving now onto the defence of Alamein itself, could you could you describe what the 9th Division's involvement was and specifically what your involvement was in this defence?**

Yes, well we're talking about events in June 1942 when the Afrika Korps defeated the South African divisions in Tobruk and Libya

01:00 and took many thousands of them prisoners. In fact, you know probably over forty thousand prisoners. It was an immense victory for Rommel and of course he moved on to the frontier where there was well-built defences but they found their way 'round there and they were on a victory roll so

01:30 that's only a matter of a couple of days and they knocked those over and then they were into Egyptian territory and they just kept on rolling. Now there's a place called Mersa Matruh, which is a very important port in Egyptian territory and had a township and also huge barrack areas but the New Zealand division was called

02:00 down from Syriahead of the 9th Division in June 1942 and they fought very heavy engagements around Mersa Matruh but they were bang outflanked on the desert side and were forced to withdraw back towards the Alamein sector. But the Alamein line was roughly forty miles long with the Mediterranean Seat one end and the Katara Depression

02:30 which was impassable salt marshes at the at the other end forty miles away. Now that meant that the British generals Alexander and Montgomery when they took over the line there that they only had a relatively short line to defend and this actually enabled the Afrika

03:00 Korps to be stopped. But the British 8th Army were taking a bad beating and they had to be in reinforced and first of all the New Zealand division which was a fantastic fighting division they were brought from the north of Syria for a start and followed about a week or so later by the 9th Australian Division. The New Zealanders did their best to stabilise

03:30 the line but there wasn't enough of them and it took the 9th Division to come in to finish off the job of stopping the Afrika Korps from getting into the Canal zone.

**Was Alamein itself the crucial the crucial line? I mean was that the point?**

Oh yes, yes.

**It was?**

I mean that was the last real defence that could possibly be held and the British had been fortifying

04:00 it you know probably over a period of eighteen months so there were lots of barb wire defences and there's minefields and already there so it was defensible.

**What else was Alamein? I've got no clear picture of what Alamein itself actually was.**

Well Alamein itself was only a tiny Arab village of mud buildings and a little railway

04:30 station which was nothing more than like a whistlestop platform and I think the requisite signals boxes and poles.

**So why was Alamein itself so crucial in the holding of the Germans?**

Yes, well it happened to be a name of an areand the fact that the it was called

05:00 what did they call it a fortified or defended locality so there were fixed defences had already been prepared there so it was a natural defensive line and fortunately that was the line that could be occupied and defended successfully against the German Afrika Korps' onslaught.

**So could you talk about your and your unit's involvement in the defence of Alamein?**

05:30 Yes, when we came down from Syria were moved into the first of all as a reserve brigade. The other two Australian brigades had carried out a series of night bayonet charges without tank support and in some cases without artillery support. They just suddenly came out of the darkness in the early hours of the

morning onto the

06:00 onto the German lines, frightened the life out of them and took lots of prisoners 'cause the Germans were very sensible about that that if they felt they were going to be overwhelmed rather than fight to the death they put up their hands and the Italians the same thing so there's thou were thousands of prisoners taken, excuse me, and of course all their defended localities were overrun.

06:30 Not only that but the we took actually got right back to what they call the gun lines where the artillery positions were and they were overrun by the Australian infantry so not only taking prisoners of their front line troops but also their forward artillery lines and

07:00 even this was done against counterattacks with German tanks but by that time the Australian forces had just enough anti-tank guns and very determined gunners so that the German counterattacks by tanks were suffering very heavy losses and being beaten back. My elder brother was an

07:30 anti-tank gunner and he has written in his memoirs too about a particular day where they'd knocked out seven German tanks and in some cases the knocking out of the tanks meant the little two-pounder guns they had was only able to knock off the caterpillar tracks

**From tanks?**

From one side of the tank

08:00 not always the killing hit inside because the armour was very thick on the front and on the turret. But at one stage his a number of the anti-tank troops were being overrun by German tanks and they had to abandon their guns and what they did was take out the breach rocks and bury them in a place they knew

08:30 close to the gun positions and then to withdraw with the infantry. Now counterattacks of course soon afterwards meant the gun positions were retaken, recaptured and they got their guns into action again.

**So could you take us through when yourself first saw action in Alamein?**

Yes, at Alamein

09:00 being the reserve brigade our battalion wasn't involved in those the July bayonet charges but were moved straight after that into front line positions where we had to carry out a lot offensive patrolling and observation of the German lines. Now the patrolling was particularly arduous because right on the coastal sector there were

09:30 salt a lot of salt marshes and things like that and they were directly in front of the raised hillsides that were occupying with our positions and the German defensive posts were you know within five hundred metres which is very close in desert warfare but they were

10:00 also subject to heavy artillery fire and by that time the Germans had developed the air berthed fire which was using anti-aircraft guns, the famous 88 millimetre German gun, and they've got very big they could get the shells to burst directly above the infantry positions.

10:30 They were also capable of knocking out tanks at quite some quite long range but they were the most feared gun in the German army.

**What**

And the point was of course they were very high velocity. The shell would arrive and burst above you before you'd hear the sound of the gun going off. With normal field artillery the muzzle velocity is fairly low compared to anti-aircraft guns or anti-tank artillery

11:00 so you get warning about the shell coming.

**So once the shell burst above you, what happened then?**

Oh well, you just hoped you didn't suffer casualties and the problem was there that all our weapon pits had to have an overhead cover of sandbags for about half of the weapon pit to be to give you effective cover against that. Now

11:30 they supplied us with steel fence pickets as well as some boards to sort of cover part of your trenches or your weapon pits.

**So you've given us a very good big picture description of what was happening when we arrived there.**

Yes.

**Could we could we put you into the into the picture?**

Yes, well at that stage

12:00 I was the company sergeant major and I was responsible for the all the ammunition that was being used by the company and that was also the rifle and the machine gun ammunition as well as the grenades and there were certain anti-tank projectiles too that were armed with.

12:30 Now the battalion also had eight two-pounder anti-tank guns on its establishment so they were always placed right up near the front line with the forward troops. Now back behind them were theavier anti-tank guns, six-pounders, of the anti-tank regiment which my elder brother belonged to so they were directly

13:00 behind the front lines.

**So how close to the front line were yourself at this point?**

Oh well they could be you know within a hundred metres of the front line.

**Yourself could be within a hundred metres of the front line?**

Well, yes with my the company headquarters were very often you know right alongside the front line. It might only be a matter of twenty or thirty metres to the actual front line posts and

**So you've talked about your duties in relation to supply.**

13:30 **What did this involve you on what did this involve you in on a day to day basis?**

Oh, yes in making sure there was adequate supplies of ammunition on hand all the time because some some days the what do you call it the ammunition expenditure was quite heavy. Now because of patrol activity and the other thing were putting out defensive patrols all the time and very often they'd have what we call fire fights when

14:00 the Germans would fire on them and they'd fire back to be able to extricate themselves and get back to our lines.

**What sort of weapons were being used?**

Oh well it was the rifle and bayonet of course was the basic infantry weapon and then light machine guns and we also had a bit further back the support of the Vickers guns called medium machine guns and then

14:30 of course there's all the different artillery ones, anti-tank and field artillery.

**Did you ever have cause to take part in a bayonet charge yourself?**

Oh yes, yes, yes and well it's a very exciting experience. I'd say the thing about it you because you're given a definite task to do you don't really have much time

15:00 to dwell on the dangers of it because you've got to focus your whole attention on covering the ground to get to the enemy and the other thing is when you've driven the enemy off the ground is to be able to hold the ground which means that you've got to take charge of those well the weapon

15:30 pits that they've been driven out of. In fact you're fighting the other way.

**You say it was an exciting thing to do. I mean, clearly you didn't share the reservations of some of the other men?**

Oh well, there's a natural fear for your own safety but of course to the disciplined well-trained infantry soldier that's only a secondary consideration. Your first thing is the task in

16:00 hand the other thing is the supporting your mates. But one rule was you never let your mates down and that's a basic infantry say rule. Actually you live by that. It's like a holy order sort of thing.

**A holy order?**

Well, to let your mates down is the worst thing an infantry soldier can do

16:30 so that it's you know really high up in your mental and physical world. It

**How many men were involved in a bayonet charge?**

Oh well it depends on the troops available. Usually it was done by companies. Very rarely would it be done by just one platoon because you wouldn't have enough men anyway. You've got to have enough

17:00 men to be able to take the objective and there were the occasions of course it was done on a battalion scale and of course on the big Alamein battles on a whole brigade scale at a time.

**When was the first time you went into a bayonet charge?**

Oh it was let's see, it'd be in April 1941 and were all lined up for a bayonet charge

17:30 against the Germans just not far from Benghazi and all ready to go and then it got called off at that right at the last minute by the major second in command of the battalion. So were all mentally and

physically prepared and it was only a matter of you know maybe a minute between being fully committed and not being committed.

18:00 **So after that when was the first time you actually**

Well then back in Tobruk there were occasions there where there's in the salient sectors there that I don't suppose it's so much as a bayonet charge as moving up on the enemy and digging in under fire right under their noses and under machine gun and shell fire

18:30 and which is a very tricky exercise particularly when the fact that the Germans used flares very freely and the flares they used were a very bright white and lit up the whole you know landscape around you. The trick was once the you could see where the flare was going up in the air and

19:00 was to hit the ground or stand absolutely still once the flare went off 'cause any movement of course would give you away.

**So on this occasion you had you were carrying bayonets? So, so I'm just trying to get a sense of when was the first time you actually came to use a bayonet.**

Oh yes oh no it was in the salient in Tobruk when we drove the Germans out of posts as were doing they termed

19:30 line straightening in the salient to stabilise well the salient was an incursion of the Germans into our territory and it had to be contained which meant you had to dominate them dominate them by fire power for a start and then you had to put in erect your own barb wire defences in front of you and plus getting engineers

20:00 and helping them to lay minefields. Because the whole thing then was there's always a threat from attack by tanks and the minefields were a part of that strategy all the time. You had to have them.

**You spoke**

But they were also anti-personnel as well anti-tank mines.

**You spoke about a sense of excitement before going on a bayonet charge.**

Yes.

**Afterwards how did you feel?**

Oh well afterwards a great sense of elation that

20:30 it had been successful and you'd taken the ground and taken prisoners but then the hard work started of consolidating and making the position properly defensible. But it takes a hell of a lot out of you because it's a it's a big mental effort as well as a physical effort.

**Did you ever dwell on the lives**

21:00 **taken?**

Well it's it was a very personal thing. The first thing was the loss of your mates who were killed or wounded. You felt that very personally. But the other thing we all had a sense there that things weren't right when you were having to kill the enemy because you were taking human life and that's against all the Christian principles I've been brought up

21:30 with.

**For how long after such a battle would you dwell on it?**

Oh well really the first twenty-four hours is the hardest and but being front line soldiers you become very adaptable so you adapt to your circumstances and the other thing is the your sense of duty as well as the sense of survival, not only of yourself but of your

22:00 fellow soldiers. It's very much a team thing and as I say that esprit de corps which is developed within the front line battalions it was something we all needed very much and it was very sustaining for us to have that.

**When it came to German prisoners taken, what was the attitude of those prisoners?**

Oh well it was very some of them

22:30 actually were in tears, absolutely shocked. Others seemed to be resigned to it but you could see they had a terrific sense of loss and of shame at being captured.

**So back to Alamein, for how long were you in Alamein?**

Oh were there from let's see early July

23:00 and for the battalion itself right up to the I think it was the 4th of November when the battalion left the

front line areas after the battle had moved on. It was a great sense of euphoria of course when the battle's successful and that you were actually taken out of the battle. You know your job is done.

**You referred to being**

23:30 **responsible for stores and supplies there. Did you actually see any front line action yourself in Alamein?**

Oh yes, well of course when the company's committed to the front line you're part of that front line action and you're also on the receiving end of the Germans' fire against you particularly machine gun and artillery fire.

**Do you have any specific memories of your involvement in that front**

24:00 **line action?**

Oh well it's a sort of total involvement twenty-four hours a day and you're on the alert all the time. You're on duty and you're doing your best. You're taking your own part in leading up to the success of your own battalion.

**So for how long were you in the front line in Alamein?**

Well the actual front line we'd alternative two weeks in the front line

24:30 and two weeks out in reserve which is immediately back behind the front line. So if there was any if the Germans were trying to break through and reserves were needed you could be called right back up to the front line again and to take part in counterattacks.

**So to look at the sequence between your time in Alamein and your return to Australia could you take us through a few steps**

25:00 **on that?**

Oh yes, well I left the Alamein battle area to go back to not to Egypt but to Palestine where the officers' training unit had been relocated from the Canal zone and this was near Haifa in beautifully prepared permanent camps and with all facilities it was great experience. The officers' training

25:30 course took four months and you were given not only all degrees of infantry training but lots of lectures on the co-operative roles of the other arms like artillery, engineers and so forth. It was a very deep experience and not only educationally but the fact that the cadet

26:00 officers were drawn from all units of the British army and New Zealanders and one lone South African so. I think there was only two Australians in the platoon group of thirty-odd that I trained with. We had British officers and British drill sergeants and sergeant majors who. The drill people were all drawn from a brigade

26:30 of guards so the that drill training was of the highest British army standards and you really knew you were alive when you were on those parade grounds.

**Did you have entirely British army instructors?**

There were a couple of Australian officers in the on the staff but in the main they were British army and invariably they were all very battle-experienced people but the

27:00 the big memory I have actually is the severity of the drill regime at the because the standards of the brigade of guards are the highest in the in the world.

**Do you think the drill regime needed to be quite so severe?**

It was essential there because it gave us what showed us what the very highest standard was

27:30 and what was expected of us and it meant you had to lift your game or you failed and I was very successful at it so I passed and got my commission. I'd already had six weeks of going through what they call company sergeant major's course which was the

28:00 in December 1941. I took a whole month and they had British army drill instructors there but the other instructional staff were mainly Australian but that was a very tough course and I ended up with one of the two distinguished passes out of that course so I felt I was doing quite well.

**Were you promoted as a result of the course?**

Oh yes, I'd been acting company sergeant major at different times and so I was promoted to

28:30 warrant officer second class, in other words a company sergeant major status. The regimental sergeant major, there was only one in each battalion, he was warrant officer first class, but I was quite happy with that rank because you have an immense amount of power and you're right next to the senior officers in the battalion as far as the executive use of powers

29:00 concerned.

**Can you be more specific about what kind of power it was?**

Oh yes, because company sergeant major was responsible for the discipline of say one hundred and thirty men, twenty-four hours a day seven days a week and under him were three platoon sergeants who were responsible for the discipline of the individual platoons but

29:30 it was a very powerful position in the battalion because there were only five company sergeant majors and the only one above him in the that hierarchy was the regimental sergeant major and then there was the main executive officers of the battalion like the company commanders. The lieutenants were you know considered only small fry. It was a very powerful post to have in the battalion.

30:00 **So after officers' school and after your promotion what happened then?**

Ah yes well, we didn't quite actually finish the course because the our division was recalled to Australia. I still had about three weeks to go of this officers' training course but were given our commissions immediately. We arrived back at the battalion so I put up my two officer's lieutenant's

30:30 pips and came back to Australias an officer on the Aquitania.

**And how was the journey aboard the Aquitania?**

Oh, it was very good because the officers of course ate in the first class dining room and you were billeted in cabins so it was a very comfortable trip indeed but it took a whole month oh wait a minute yes February end of February all of

31:00 March, it took a month to get back to Australia because you know the times you were waiting for the convoys to be assembled and all that sort of thing and the convoy escorts and it was a very large convoy that came back to Australia but

**And what can you remember of your return home?**

Oh well what a great thrill it was particularly to be sailing into Sydney Heads again.

31:30 The first landfall of course was Fremantle and then you came around the south of Australiand the Bight and the ships carrying the Victorian troops left us to go into Melbourne and then and then the rest of the convoy came back up the east coast up to Sydney and it was very special coming in theads in the old Aquitaniand actually coming into Woolloomooloo

32:00 so with the Queen Mary were taken out in ferries to get onto that because they she was too big to berth at Circular Quay or any of the other quays and so we came into Woolloomooloo and they had big fleets of buses and we came down the gangway with all our equipment and got on the buses and were taken out to Wallgrove camp and had six weeks' leave

32:30 because were two and a half years in the Middle East which is a great thing to get back to families and things like that.

**So what did you do in that six weeks?**

Well actually the first two weeks I actually had in Sydney because I was a newly commissioned officer and I hadn't had time to have my uniform made up in the Middle East and I'd brought the Barathea cloth which is the special uniform

33:00 cloth but this was British Barathea of a very superior quality and so I had to get a uniform made up by Gowings who used to were authorised to make officers' uniforms. David Jones used to do the same but they did a very good job with my uniform at Gowings and I've still got it there so

**So did you head**

33:30 **home after that?**

So yes, so I had two weeks in Sydney and of course you're meeting up with a lot of your old mates. The Hotel Australia then was and the long bar was a great meeting place in the middle of the day and I think the Carlton Hotel across the road was another place where our battalion fellows used to meet and the thing was you had

34:00 a lot of accumulated funds of course in the pay book so you had money to spend and a lot of chaps had been married and others had girlfriends and there was a great social life on that that time. I stayed at the Metropole Hotel for most of that and that's where a lot of the officers stayed and then finally I went back to

34:30 Armidale where my where my parents lived and spent the rest of the leave with them.

**Did you meet any women at this time? Did you have any girlfriends?**

Oh well, well there's always lots of girls on tap you know and you're going out to nightclubs and having lunches and things like that. There's always plenty of female company. I mean that's the way it was at

that time and 'cause a lot of fellows

35:00 got married as soon as they came back and others had fiancées and of course there were the other unfortunate chaps whose wives had left them during the war, taken up with Americans and some marriages disintegrated for other reasons so it was sort of a happy time in one respect but there's also lots of sadnesses about it and you know tragic. The only thing is I tried to

35:30 meet families of men my men who'd been killed in action and that was a very sad duty too but terribly busy of course as you can imagine. It wasn't all you know the merry life.

**What sort of things would you say to these families when you visited them?**

Oh, well express your sorrow at their loss and

36:00 also the important thing was to tell them what a wonderful chap their loved one had been what a great comrade and what a good soldier he'd been. They all needed that of course that reassurance. It was a sort of surrogate contact if you like but a

36:30 very necessary contact. It was not only sympathy they needed but they wanted to hear what his mates thought of the chap. That was very important for them and they would have had letters and things like that over the years from these from their loved one

37:00 but the contact from somebody who knew them personally at that time was important. It also dragged a lot out of you. You can imagine that yourself. Well it's a sacrificial thing war and you've got to take the good with the bad haven't you but

**Would you keep contact with a number of these relatives**

37:30 **over the years?**

I suppose about half a dozen. Others I could only write to and but I was to strike that even more again too after the New Guinea battles and. It becomes a duty for a young officer there and a very sad duty indeed. Not only writing the letters but that personal contact is

38:00 does take a lot out of you emotionally but that's the nature of you know serving in an infantry battalion a front line battalion.

**Did that feeling continue for some time after the war do you think?**

Oh yes well the other thing is of course we have a very strong battalion association which was actually formed during the war by people who had been sent back because of wounds

38:30 and sickness and things like that and that was actually formed in Australia in 1942 quite separate to the existence of the battalion and its operational areas because we had a number of people that what do you call it invalided out of the army through wounds and sickness and

39:00 it was it was known too from the First World War associations too that it was very important to build up these ex-service or regimental associations. Now that was backed up of course by the support of wives groups formed early in the war and that soon was expanded to include

39:30 widows of deceased servicemen which. The old 13th Battalion of World War I they had a very strong association and they sort of started this off and kept an eye on it. In fact a fellow called Len Pascoe who's a hotel owner, owned the Ship Inn for example at Circular Quay, he was a great supporter of the battalion

40:00 association and the wives and widows groups and they supplied comforts that you know parcels and being sent to the troops.

**Ken, we're out of tape again so we'll have to do another changeover.**

Yes.

# Tape 7

00:33 **Okay so Ken, you were just talking before with Graham about your time in Sydney after you'd come back from the Middle East and you were you mentioned some talk about some men who had their wives had gone off with some of the American soldiers and that there were a few broken marriages. Can you talk a bit about what things that you heard from your men about that situation?**

01:00 Well it was a shattering experience for these fellows because there were the years there where they'd had normal correspondence with their wives and but it was the huge entry of Americans here into Australia which turned Australia upside down, particularly the big cities like Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane where the impact was felt. But the other problem of course was

01:30 the Americans had such a huge rate of pay compared to the very poor rates paid to the Australians but the British were even worse off. Where our soldiers were getting basically five shillings a day the Austra- the English equivalent was a shilling a day and for example as a sergeant I was paid ten shillings a day and as a warrant officer I think something like twelve and six or thirteen shillings a day and as an officer you're getting

02:00 eighteen shillings a day.

**Just in regards to the American soldiers running off with your mates' wives.**

Yes.

**Did that happen to any of your mates?**

Oh yes, it happened to a number of chaps in the battalion and

**Can you recall what they went through?**

Well it was a terrible thing for them because it shattered their expe- expectations of a happy married life back here in Australiand

02:30 there were some cases where they had children and that was even more shattering. But the you have to look at it the American army of course was not only well paid but they had very attractive uniforms and as well as the what do you call it you might even term it the American way of life and the Hollywood images of the American way of life

03:00 which we'd picked up through the picture shows and things like that gave us a perhaps a what do you call it a sunshine view of the Americans as being all powerful and these poor girls of course couldn't resist these fellas with lovely uniforms and tonnes of money and wonderful American accents and the other thing

03:30 their normal manners were sort of out of this world that they treated women as something special on the outside that was on the surface but of course underneath it all some of these guys were two-timers and not to be trusted. Now there were some very good ones in fact a lady friend I have now had an American serviceman father and

04:00 who came and settled in Australiafter the war so I can understand all sides of it but in war time of course there's tremendous pressures and Australia wasn't immune from it after the Japanese came into the war and you got this huge influx of American servicemen into Australia.

**What was your attitude towards the American**

04:30 **soldiers?**

Well, I'll put it simply and broadly that any American south of Brisbane including Brisbane were suspect as womanisers and you know upsetting our normal Australian way of life. A lot of it was because they were getting paid more than twice as much as the

05:00 Australian servicemen but the other thing the Hollywood image of the American was quite overwhelming and could not be resisted by many Australian girls. Let's face it, these guys had fantastic manners and they were great spenders and it was like bringing a bit of Hollywood into Australiand suddenly these girls' lives were transformed. It was

05:30 great for them.

**Now you were just talking before your new uniform your new officer's uniform that you got made at Gowings.**

Made in yes at Gowings yes.

**Yeah. Did you find that you were treated differently by women with your new officer's uniform?**

Oh well, sort of basically officers didn't have much problem in that respect with women because you had an attractive uniform and

**We'll have to stop sorry.**

06:00 **Sorry about that.**

**So Ken you were just talking about your new uniform that you had?**

Yes. No it was beautifully made and with the very best Barathea material and well I certainly looked the part. I felt well dressed and I was well dressed and so I felt I could compete except money-wise

06:30 with the Americans except at that stage of course I was a single mand I ended up after the six weeks leave in Sydney and I think we had about a month before went up to North Queensland but you're being

getting invitations to parties and things like that by many young women and so I went off to North

07:00 Queensland I was writing letters to I think it was seven girls who were writing to me.

**Seven girls?**

It seems incredible yes, but I mean that was the way it happened in war time and the girls wanted to have contact with the people in the services.

**So you weren't as bad as the Americans I hope?**

Oh no no well no I was a well brought up man from a Presbyterian background and so

07:30 the rules of conduct for me were you know strictly laid down.

**Was there was there**

I didn't know much about sex anyway at that stage so I was a pretty safe sort of bet.

**Was there a special girl that you had?**

Well there ended up a special one that and strangely enough she was just finishing her secondary schooling at the time. But where a lot of these other girls found it hard to write even one page of a letter

08:00 this young lady used to write six, seven and eight pages at a time and sort of spelling out her what do you call it her expectations and dreams about life and all the rest of it. Her father was actually a war correspondent. He was attached to the Dutch government and been in the East Indies

08:30 and had to get out just ahead of the Japanese so but he had divorced from her mother during the war so and she was sent off to a country boarding school from the city so she had a lot of traumas in her life and it sort of put me in the way of feeling like the white knight that's saving this poor damsel in distress and I used to write

09:00 good long letters too. In fact we've got a lot of these letters in one of our family trunks we've got. I think Harry's got possession of them now.

**Was that girl that you wrote the letters to your future wife?**

She was the one I married yes, yes.

**And what was her name?**

Joan Daniell. D-a-n-i-e double l. It was one of those funny things. She 'cause she went to the

09:30 sister school of the one I went to in Armidale and a lot of the boys there of course had sisters at this school too and they were at the top end of the social scale in New England so I suppose it was a sort of prestigious sort of thing too to have that contact but then of course I never lost the common touch because I'd had several years at the Armidale High School before

10:00 I went to this GPS school and so I had a foot in both camps if you like and had a very democratic attitude. The other thing because of the job my father had as the AMP life insurance representative of the whole of New England I often used to travel with him and stay overnight in little country towns and so

10:30 I and you know travelling through the country and I always had what you might call a very down to earth attitude about people that to me people were very worthwhile. It didn't matter what their social strata was that I took them as I found them.

**Now tell me Ken, after your six weeks leave I believe you went**

11:00 **up to Queensland for jungle training?**

Yes, yes we had a rather a strange journey. It took a whole week in the trains to get from Sydney up to Cairns and that there was at least one or two nights I think in Brisbane in the big transit camps because well you had to change from the New South Wales system broad gauge system onto the narrow gauge

11:30 Queensland railways and that was a horrible trip because while they provided food and things like that certain railway stations on the way up a lot of those Queensland trains had no toilets on them and so you can imagine that stopping somewhere out in the in the bush to relieve themselves fellas'd you know they'd you know they'd throw the doors open and hop on both sides

12:00 of the line into the bush to relieve themselves and it's a way of travelling which of course you can't do these days but that was sheer necessity and these troop trains are going up and down every week you know from Sydney right through up to Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands where were our training areas were located. That was a strategic thing. We had to have

12:30 reserves of troops fairly close to the islands and Cairns was a major port, a shipping port, and it was

only well roughly you know within forty-eight hours travel of New Guinea.

**So tell me about the jungle training that you undertook up there?**

Yes, well the other thing of course on the Atherton Tablelands there's vast areas of rainforest which

13:00 we found the jungle there was much denser and worse than what we ever struck in New Guinea and the other hazard there was what they call the “Wait-a-While” or “Lawyer vine”. Now they were like vines which developed trunks

13:30 like cane and actually in fact some of the cane there they used to make walking sticks but these Lawyer vines could you know be up to the individuals up to a hundred metres long and they used to festoon themselves through the trees but they also had tendrils which had there's like you can imagine a tendril there with a lot of fish hooks on it

14:00 and like a hook every inch and which meant that one of these things could have a hundred hooks on it and this was a great hazard when you were doing your jungle training through the scrub there. If you came up against these hooks coming over the path they'd catch in the clothing and the equipment and in fact one of my friends had one that ripped across his eye and he lost his eye because of it but you know

14:30 injuries like that so the Lawyer vine or Wait-a-While was a terrible hazard. In fact I didn't strike anything so bad in New Guinea.

**Did you get injured during the training?**

Oh no, no not at that stage and being a young well-trained officer too that I took a place as an instructor in the special jungle training courses

15:00 for the troops and this was stimulating was simulating jungle track and they had all sorts of hazards in it including rifles which could be and machine guns which could be fired by remote cord control and of course they were placed so they wouldn't hit anybody but and

15:30 and also other places where grenades had to be thrown with particular obstacles you'd meet but it was to sharpen up the troops to cope with fighting along jungle tracks and under battle conditions. In other words, to be fired on suddenly and having to cope with it and so they had to throw grenades at different points and they had to sort of charge

16:00 with bayonets at others where they had not only dummies in places but the dummies'd be lying flat and then you'd have springs that you'd throw them up and suddenly these guys would be confronted with like a simulated enemy and they had to go in with their bayonet and or fire shots and all that type of thing. It was excellent training but very intensive.

16:30 It had very good results because with the jungle fighting there of course you've always got the unexpected and with the jungle tracks of course there's a limit to the number of people you can put to fight or rush the enemy and so that was a very interesting exercise.

**Did you find later on when you were in New Guinea that your training prepared you well**

17:00 **for what you were about to encounter?**

Oh yes, it was absolutely essential and the other thing it builds up your own personal confidence and leadership and of course it's being a platoon leader or platoon officer or even sergeant and the corporals there that you know were it's a twenty-four hour a day unit discipline and where

17:30 all your senses have got to be on full alert or ready to be brought into full alert just you know in that fraction of a blink of an eye sort of thing. No, mentally this is very big stress and it's only relieved actually

18:00 if you can get your troops to a high standard of training and instant obedience to orders and I worked very hard at this and I was I think I was very successful because I had I had perhaps some of the best results of any platoon in the whole battalion with the battle actions we fought. There was only one terrible one when we against overwhelming Japanese

18:30 forces where we lost a number of men and but again our the opposition was sort of quite overwhelming though strangely enough we put so much pressure on the Japs that they withdrew overnight and this was the final attack on the port of Finschhafen and we the bayonet charges had gone in but

19:00 effectively but we had a preponderance of something like three to one of Japanese against the Australians on the ground and which meant you had to be extremely forceful in all the operations but we also took high casualties and it was very brutal fighting and our losses were

19:30 were very heavy but it was the previous experience in the Middle East that had built in that determination and a higher degree of training of our troops that you knew what to do and you went in and did it.

**Ken, we might go to Finschhafen a bit later on**

Yes.

**When we'll go into more detail then, but can you tell**

20:00 **me 'cause you arrived in Lae didn't you? That was the first**

Yes, the Lae landings were the first one, yes.

**So can you describe first of all could you describe your trip from to Lae?**

Yes, the 9th Division actually had its training in amphibious warfare on

20:30 on the beaches north of Cairns and we'd come down from the Atherton Tablelands camps to do that. This was carried out with the American navy. They had old World War I destroyers which had been specially converted to carry a company of troops and they had instead of lifeboats they

21:00 they had special davits which had landing craft with the fronts of them had special ramps which would drop once they hit the beaches so that the troops could you know rush out on the beaches and attack the enemy. They took roughly twenty-two men in each of these little

21:30 landing craft on these Auxiliary Personnel Destroyers, APDs. They'd carry four of these and this meant that roughly it took a whole rifle company of Australian fighting men. That was very intensive training and of course we did the landings north of Lae for a start

22:00 and then the very important one was at Finschhafen where the Japanese actually opposed the landings and were landing under machine gun fire.

**So with Lae you weren't actually under attack?**

**With Lae with the Lae amphibious landing**

Yes.

**You weren't under attack at that point or had Lae been taken?**

No, because we landed well north of Lae and there were very few Japanese in the area. In fact it was with great

22:30 difficulty that we found them and it was a bit unfortunate there because there were a lot of inland rivers came down I think there's something like six inland rivers and they came from the mountains and the water flowed at a greatly accelerated rate so that the any infantry trying to wade across there we had to hold

23:00 hands form a human chain and to get across these fast flowing rivers and anybody that fell over of course. There was one battalion lost something like a hundred men drowned in one of those river crossings which was a very wide river and a Western Australian battalion. It was a terrible tragedy there and the

23:30 problem is with your you know you've probably got something like thirty or forty kilograms of equipment and things like that and that's strapped on and if you lose your footing in those things it's very hard to regain your feet again.

**Did you have any close calls with your battalion?**

Oh, were lucky. I think we only lost two or three men drowned in river crossings but as I say this one battalion lost over a hundred.

24:00 **And were you present**

The 2/28th Battalion.

**Were you present when**

No, we came along shortly afterwards and it was a terrific blow to the morale of everybody in the division you know just to lose men like that and the only way to counter that was to have the crossings further up the river where there's the river was a bit narrower because they tended to

24:30 widen out as they came near the sea but you couldn't help that because of the mountains back behind and there was a very wet area so it was raining every day and there was always an immense swelling of water that had to come down these waterways so that was a hazard we didn't need.

**So what action did you actually see in Lae?**

In Lae itself.

25:00 Well by the time we got to Lae the 7th Division had already taken the town. It was wrecked because of

bombing by the Americand Australian airforces and the Japs hadn't done anything to keep the place as a viable town. In fact they let everything

25:30 run down and all they were worried about was building the fortifications to you know stave off any attacks from the allied armies. There a big reason for it of course was the Ramu Valley was right alongside it which allowed airfields to be built but in Lae itself the

26:00 main airfield there actually was right on the edge of the bay so the planes could take off straight over the water but the American bombing and strafing and by Australian airforce too was extremely effective and you know it knocked out a hell of a lot of well virtually it knocked out the Japanese airforce.

**So what was what was your battalion's purpose in Lae?**

Well

26:30 were part of the 9th Division and the whole thing was to capture Lae and get the port facilities going as a base for further landings north and for the recapture of New Guinea and for the Americans there was another purpose there to be the springboard to re-take the Philippines. I mean that was General MacArthur's stated objective

27:00 and which overall the defeat of the Japanese army and navy was something that had to be done on the way.

**So what was your what were your specific duties to carry out in Lae?**

Oh well it was to it was to well it was to defeat the Japanese forces, drive them out of the area for a start but to enable

27:30 the Port of Lae to be operating to support future operations and

**So what would what would a typical day in Lae be for you?**

Well we never actually had any occupation of in Lae itself. Were always kept out 'cause straight after Lae fell we had to make preparations for the landings at Finschhafen.

28:00 See the landings for Lae took the initial landings were on the 4th of September and the landings for Finschhafen were the 22nd so were very busy you know in the operations leading up to the fall of Lae and then straight after doing another amphibious landing at north of Finschhafen at the Scarlet famous Scarlet Beach and again

28:30 2/13th Battalion and 2/17th Battalion of the same brigade were the supplying the initial assault waves of troops the first onto the beaches.

**At Finsch- at Finschhafen?**

Yes.

**Yeah. So**

We did have an opposed landing at Finschhafen.

**So we'll move on to Finschhafen now. Did you did you expect**

29:00 **the battle that was going to take place?**

Oh yes, yes. See the American airforce had carried out a lot of photo reconnaissance work and so there was not only air photos available but the actual maps we got were called photo maps and they were they had a map making units in Port Moresby and this was where the main airfields were for the reconnaissance planes and they were actually

29:30 the twin engine Lightning planes which carried three cameras, one in the nose and one each side and so they got mosaic photographs and these things would be produced within twenty-four hours, these photo maps and not only would the photos be laid out and a map made but they'd be superimposed with the tracks and the Japanese

30:00 positions and so that you know had tremendous information from these. They supplemented the normal military maps so were well prepared you know to carry out offensive operations in that respect.

**Can you describe the landing at Scarlet Beach?**

Yes, of course the landings took place in darkness just before dawn

30:30 and the Auxiliary Personnel Destroyers I was on had these four landing barges which could be dropped in the water while the boat was still proceeding under engine power and they had cargo nets

31:00 which were put over the sides on both sides for the troops to scramble down in these boats while they were still attached to the davits but still in the water and moving along with the destroyer. Once the troops were aboard they released the landing nets and the boats had got their engine going and they

went away from the destroyer on both sides and then went to what they called a marshalling area which is

31:30 all a predetermined pland lined up in a in a number of waves up to six waves, like there's a first wave, second wave and third wave and the initial assault troops were in the first and second wave and then the back up troops and supplies and vehicles were in the later waves and then you had the big landing ships which were full of vehicles and

32:00 you know tanks and things like that. Very highly organised and the Americans had the resources to do this and all on this huge scale which took a lot of coordination. The only problem we had when were landing at Finschhafen was it was you know for a landing there it was a fairly long beach. It was supposed to be

32:30 you know probably a kilometre long but the problem was the with the navigation when the landing craft were all set heading for the shores somehow they veered to one side and ended up half of the landing craft came up against coral reefs and we landed on

33:00 coral reefs and then there's bush and headlands in behind instead of landing on the beach and this is where my company landed and this was very poor navigation on the part of the Americans. Well they you know hadn't been in the war very long and they were still very much on a landing curve and were able to supply all this tremendous amount of equipment and aircraft and ships but they were still on that learning

33:30 curve of learning how to handle it all so it was a very nasty opposed landing at Finschhafen and we did suffer casualties too from well-placed Japanese posts but it took some hours to achieve supremacy over and knock out the Japanese posts along theadlands and on the in behind the

34:00 beach but of course we suffered a lot of unnecessary casualties.

**Ken, can you can you walk me through step by step what actually took place from landing on the coral beach.**

Yes, yes.

**Can you just can you like go through what you were actually involved in?**

Yes, well the as soon as we realised where were and some of the jungle was too thick to go through and were forced to use the

34:30 existing native paths but I suppose in a way fortunately there weren't many machine gun Jap machine gun nests along this particular headland we didn't strike opposition until we'd got to got on to the coastal track and that was

35:00 there was a creek crossing over what they call Siki Creek and unfortunately there was some Japanese who were operating as snipers and one of our company officers got shot there and killed and I think all told we lost about twenty men to those snipers from the mainly from another

35:30 company from a D Company and I was B Company but of course they were quickly overrun but they did a lot of damage in only a matter of five minutes and it was very sad there. Later on that afternoon there or late in the towards dusk there just to see this row of bodies there with these poor fellows who had been shot by these people.

36:00 See once you take your initial objectives then it's what they call “consolidating” that you establish a new front line or perimeter around to defend the area that you've just taken and you can't do any operations in the jungle at night so everything shuts down completely at night and but you've got to post sentries you've got

36:30 you keep going through the night. This business of Japs sneaking up with knives and things like that it sort of rarely happened in my experience though there was a very nasty episode later on just about you know six weeks later when the Japanese started

37:00 defensive operations from inland they sent armed parties down to attack the beach area which had all the supplies of stores and also had small casualty clearing stations. In other words, the hospital area. Now the Japs got in there and they killed all the wounded in that hospital area there that

37:30 in the hospital tents. I mean these sorts of things you try and protect yourself against but no amongst the Jap troops there was some a whole brigade of their top class Japanese marines who were sort of actually navy troops and they were the pick of the Ger- the pick of the Japanese forces

38:00 and they fought very hard but the Japanese army themselves we didn't find them a great hazard but the Jap marines were you know tough nuts to crack but as I say our troops were well-trained and very offensive-minded and they just got on with the job and kept knocking over these Japanese. The Japs lost there

38:30 because they had this philosophy that it's honourable to die in battle so later on they started to learn the things of strategic retreats and to be able to maintain the strength of their forces. It was a stupid

thing there this just to

39:00 keep fighting when they could have withdrawn safely and just to lose men you know just to die needlessly. In fact it was very bad tactics because they lost far too many troops that way but it meant were successful.

**Ken, just going back to those heavy losses that you experienced with the landing at Finschhafen.**

Yes.

**What was that**

39:30 **like?**

Oh well, it's pretty hard to take. Well, just to give an example of our company there that after six weeks of operations there that we'd started with five officers and one hundred and thirty men and we ended up after six weeks with two officers and twenty nine men and now sickness took a heavy toll with malaria and other

40:00 tropical things and the climate of course is very debilitating for Europeans but the battle casualties were very high in that as well and there was the problem that General MacArthur's staff in Melbourne had decided that only one Australian brigade could you know take that Finschhafen area. According to their estimates

40:30 there was only three hundred Japs there. In fact there were eight thousand we attacked with something like two thousand one hundred troops so you know it was the fault of one imbalance.

**Ken where's going to have to**

Which meant that it was pretty

**Ken, we're going to have to stop there actually 'cause we've just run out of tape but**

# Tape 8

00:05 **The numbers that were involved at Finschhafen.**

Yes.

**Can you**

Yes, yes. Well the see a lot of these initial strategic plans were drawn up in Melbourne and the Americans relied on air photographs and air observation in making their assessments.

00:30 Very foolishly they didn't take any notice of the Australian reconnaissance groups who were on the ground and these men had landed secretly from barges at night and gone into the jungle and were observing Japanese movements for weeks beforehand. Now this was very unfortunate there because these reports were very accurate

01:00 but they were disregarded by MacArthur's planners in Melbourne who thought they knew everything and so consequently there was too few troops and too few resources put into that Finschhafen operation and there was the other problem that very soon arose. The Japanese were bringing reinforcements in very large numbers overland into the Finschhafen area

01:30 so were very heavily outnumbered right from the very start which againdicates the very high calibre of our troops that we kept on operating and eventually you know had our great victory. But they had to as I say bring in the whole of 9th Division very quickly when it was realised there that the initial intelligence reports were all just so badly out.

02:00 **What was your personal attitude towards MacArthur?**

Oh well look, in many ways I admire the man but I think that he should not have interfered in what were purely tactical decisions on the actual battlefields. That should have been left to the our own general and our own brigadiers

02:30 and battalion commanders on the spot.

**So was there after Finschhafen was there a lot of was there a bit of resentment towards MacArthur ignoring the intelligence?**

Oh well we knew we'd been dudded but on the other hand you couldn't get over the fact that that man had tremendous resources at his fingertips and

03:00 I think in a way too we became very dependent on the huge amount of supplies and backup of men and resources that the Americans were able to put into the this Australian theatre. We could not have won the war without that help. It was absolutely imperative.

03:30 It put us into what do you call it second you know very much a secondary role because they had the dominance because of this great amount of you know supplies and men and equipment and the naval and airforces which we could never have to match.

04:00 **So Ken for you personally what were the challenges you know for you in terms of leadership compared to leading your troops through the desert. What were what were the challenges for you in a jungle?**

Well yes, the big thing was isolation but the smallest tactical unit was the rifle platoon which

04:30 is one officer and a sergeant, three corporals and about twenty-seven men. Now and you'd have a stretcher-bearer and you had to be capable of operating alone away from your battalion, in other words in isolation, very often in areas of great danger and

05:00 particularly once you've established face to face contact with the enemy, who are the Japanese. Now because we'd had extremely good training I think we had great faith in each other and in our parent structure which was the battalion and you knew that if you got into trouble it'd only be a matter of hours before

05:30 you'd have full backup available to you partly because of you know distance but we did have pretty rudimentary wireless communications. We did have walkie-talkies, the American patent walkie-talkies early on, but they soon became useless because of the high humidity and temperatures which affected them badly.

06:00 So you got to be reliant very much on field telephone communication which meant the signallers had to lay out actual telephone wire between your even when you were on the move they'd have these rolls of wire and you could communicate back to your company headquarters as I often did on these patrols. You know there could be

06:30 up to well you know up to a mile or more too 'cause it was very thin wire and you'd have a couple of signals going these blessed things. The field radios we had there didn't stand up well to those conditions either. The walkie-talkies soon

07:00 proved quite useless and but so the field telephone was a major means of communication. Even going out on patrols you're trailing these wires out after you and 'cause it was vital to have that contact back to your company headquarters and eventually back to the battalion headquarters. 'Cause you can't operate long in absolute isolation. You've got to have this backup and that's how

07:30 infantry battalions work. It's team work all the way and there was the added thing too if you take casualties you've got to get them back for treatment and so as a platoon commander you had huge responsibilities and you know for thirty-odd men under your command apart from the tactical considerations was very

08:00 much the human considerations you had to think of all the time.

**Did many of your any of your men suffer from battle stress?**

Oh yes, there's always a few because operating in those tropical conditions there's always some men that are are weaker than others and particularly in under those

08:30 tropic conditions and so you things like malaria and just plain exhaustion affected some because some of these guys were carrying pretty heavy loads and this took its stress on it as well as the mental capacity of each individual.

**What did can you describe what you actually saw in terms of battle stress in your men?**

Oh well,

09:00 fortunately I had well-trained men and it wasn't a major thing in my platoon. It's just the guys got terribly exhausted and couldn't carry on or you know if they got an attack of malaria they had to be evacuated straight away but there's other things like dysentery because the food wasn't that good and you were dependent on

09:30 water from streams and while you had tablets to decontaminate the water but that put a nasty taste in your water bottle and the guys were very good at being able to make a billy of tea very quickly. In fact they seemed to be able to get the thing on the boil within about two and a half minutes and that was a lot of know-how. They found they had the old four gallon

10:00 tins with the square you know what used to be called the old kerosene tin thing. These were adapted during the war to carry different sorts of rations and the trick was to cut out a thing about that deep which meant everybody put a bit in from their water bottle when you stopped and being a big area like that it heated up very quickly so you'd have a cup of tea in about two minutes and

10:30 so the guys learnt to look after themselves very well in that respect. The other thing you'd always try and save little bits of extra rations and if you got food parcels from home with things like condensed milk and you'd you'd always share amongst each other and the odd time you'd get the big fruitcake which'd come up in sealed tins and with a cloth thing cover around it and where the address would be written on by

11:00 the mothers and wives and

**Did Joan send you any fruitcakes?**

Yes, well every section had its own little tucker box which was usually one of the a metal ammunition container and it would have in there their tea and sugar and jam and any other little extras that they could manage to scrounge here and there and

11:30 this was vital you know for the morale of the troops to have little things like that especially things that came in parcels from home. You used to get little handouts from the Australian comforts funds and things like razorblades and toothpaste and things like that but there was never much to eat amongst those things.

**How important was you to receive communications**

12:00 **from your family and Joan?**

Oh well it was terribly important and it was always a big thing to get the mail from home and see at times you'd go for a week or ten days without any delivery of mail and so it was very special when the mail came up and this would be brought up with the you know the day's rations for the next day and usually in the you know late

12:30 in the afternoon so it was well there was another problem of course. There was literally no issue of toilet paper and at times and it's a natural body function that's got to be looked after and very sadly at times I had to use letters from Australia there to for that that purpose which nobody liked doing but you've got no other option.

13:00 I mean that's it.

**I take it**

You can't use leaves and it's a bit hard on the system.

**I take it you never told your family that you'd used their letters to**

Oh well, my girlfriend got greatly offended when I did tell her that I'd had to use some of her letters for that purpose but

**Recycling**

I mean that was a fact of life.

**Yeah.**

'Cause everything you owned had to be carried in this little pack on the back and

13:30 actually being the platoon commander I used a pack which was about that big that high and that wide instead of the haversack which was only about that thing because I had a lot of extra things to carry as a platoon commander. Well I had maps and I always tried to keep well a spare shirt and

14:00 underwear and spare socks too so that it's important there to take very good care of your feet in particular so that couple of extra pair of socks were always you know well to me they were necessities and apart from your toilet gear and

**Ken can you talk me through the events that led you to being led to you being awarded the**

14:30 **Military Cross?**

Yes, yes I'm just trying to think back on that because I was actually commended a couple of times for it but 'cause I had a strong leadership role and were on the offensive all the time so that you were always pushing the Japs and no, the

15:00 final one was for the was the last the final attack which captured Finschhafen and the particular operations there was were had mountain ranges surrounding Finschhafen, the little township and the port and the wharves and coconut plantation on the bottom and

15:30 there was mission buildings there but the final attack was to be bayonet charges there to clear all the Japs out. To kill them or to drive them right out of it and it was in an old Lutheran mission area and village called Kakakog and

16:00 the Japs had actually built tunnels into the sides of the hills and they had weapon pits all over the place

so it was very strongly defended and just get my thoughts together on this.

16:30 With my platoon had actually come down into that areas the lead platoon to prepare the way for the battalion advance and my role was to take over an area which had been designated as a start line for the battalion attack but moving towards that area we got fired on by the Japanese and suddenly found ourselves

17:00 under very heavy fire and had to dig in and to be firing back at the Japanese and then the rest of the company came up and the other two platoons were lined up in a in a creek bed which was about two metres deep on the edge of the coconut plantation where the Japanese positions were and

17:30 they put in a terrific bayonet charge and I saw this from one side on the hill there. It's one of the greatest spectacles I saw during the war is these there must have been about fifty or sixty of our fellas with fixed bayonets and suddenly they jumped up out of the creek bed and rushed through this open ground with the coconut trees all above them and it was all over

18:00 within five minutes. They got in amongst the Japs and killed the lot though and they fought back hard but the point was with the bayonet charges you've got to drive it home very quickly and they did this and there were when I say they killed all the Japs they could but there were a number that got up and rand

18:30 saved themselves to fight another day but the myth of the Japanese soldier fighting to the death was you know exploded all around Finschhafen. We found that they wouldn't stand fight when you put the pressure on them. They'd get up and run

**So what did**

Which is very good for our troops you know. Once you'd broken that myth it gave you a big advantage. You know you're going to win and keep on winning.

**How did the**

19:00 **How did the Japanese bayonets compare to the Australian bayonets?**

Oh, well they were roughly the same length and but they had two sizes of rifle. One was a short rifle and one was a long rifle. The long Japanese rifle with a bayonet on was a very formidable weapon but I wouldn't say the same for the short one. But the other problem was physically they were much smaller than our men and

19:30 inferior except the that the regiment of Japanese marines and they were big fellas the size of Harry and you know big six footers and as big as any of our big big Australians because they were the elite troops of the whole of the Japanese navy and we had a whole brigade of them there which you know was about three thousand of them. They tended to fight hard

20:00 initially but once we started to get on top of them we found that they'd run the same as the other Japs and so you know having got on top of them we stayed on top of them but it's a very brutal form of warfare when you when you're in that you know face to face combat situation but as I say our troops were very experienced and

20:30 we also knew were going to win and we had very good leadership which and though the supply backup let us down at times we just had to prevail.

**So what was your what was your general opinion of the Japanese as an enemy compared to say the Germans?**

Well, the Japanese tended to be very hard fighters

21:00 but man to man they were just no match for the Australian troops and as I say not only that's why we won but on the other hand they were very poorly supplied and this was to their disadvantage but their will to fight was very strong. You can't get over that but the thing is no army can face a succession of defeats and

21:30 they'll always find it very hard to fight back and we inflicted these defeats on them early on and we got the advantage and we kept the advantage.

**Did you take any Japanese POWs?**

Well, there's only one that I remember and he was wounded and it was very pitiful there that

22:00 we found it very hard even to get this fellow to take a sip of water because they'd been indoctrinated into well fearing Australian troops I think was one thing but also wrongly indoctrinated that they were the superior troops

22:30 so they took the defeats very badly.

**Where did you take this Japanese POW?**

Well he was handed over to the Regimental Aid Post the stretcher-bearers and he would have been

passed on to a field hospital and evacuated back to Lae.

**'Cause I heard that I have heard that**

23:00 **from other Australian soldiers that there was a reluctance to take prisoners.**

Yes, yes, oh I mean that happened in our battalion too. This was unfortunate because you tended to go for the kill all the time. I'm being very blunt about it now. In fact “the only good Jap was a dead Jap” was the well the general

23:30 philosophy but because they initially fought back so hard we tended to do that. Make sure that they were dead and always went in very hard against them and had no compunction about killing them and in latter years as a practising Christian of course I'm horrified at you know

24:00 that attitude but on the other hand we may not have survived if we hadn't gone in hard like that. I mean that's the bald facts of the matter. Kill or be killed.

**Did you struggle with that with your Christian faith at the time?**

No I didn't at the time because my whole army training had been that you're in there to do a job, to defeat the enemy and the Japs were

24:30 considered a particularly obnoxious type of enemy and there was no compunction about killing them.

**And yet you became good friends with a Japanese officer in Burma?**

Yes, stationed in Burma, yes.

**Could you tell me that story?**

Yes, well I suppose I was I went over to Burma on transfer to the British army with a group who numbered two hundred. That was all the

25:00 Australian army was prepared to release and in the main they were men who'd had experience on the battlefields fighting against the Japanese so they were considered to be seasoned officers and that was the idea of it, to reinforce the officers on the in the British army and on the battlefields in Burma.

25:30 Now fortunately the just as I joined this battalion that was around the time it was leading up to the atom bomb being ready for dropping on Japan so I joined 9th Battalion of the border regiment which was a British battalion in the

26:00 63rd Brigade of the 17th Indian Division. We had a battalion called the 1/10th Ghurkhas in the brigade and a battalion of Pakistanis the 6th, 7th Balook regiment were in this brigade and the brigade headquarters had a mixture of a white brigadier and some Indian staff officers and now the British army in Burma

26:30 always had a full complement of road transport so that meant there was eighty-odd trucks in the battalion which greatly helped with supply and all the rest of it so it was like a you know fully mechanised army. Very different to the way we operated in New Guinea where the battalion had four jeeps and trailers as its total transport which made life very difficult at times.

27:00 Well, so that soon after getting over to India I was went by ship to Burma and joined this battalion in the in the front line. Now were in

27:30 an area there which of southern Burma at that time which had a lot of rice growing areas. In other words the what they call the paddy fields and the monsoon was still on and that's the time when there's six months of where it rains every day and you can only move on roads or built up tracks.

28:00 Everything else is flooded. The villages tended to be on it's like little mounds or hills of their own and all the huts sort of gathered together and so you'd have these villages dotted throughout the landscape and if there was a road going near them or through them that was okay otherwise you were on these little paddy bunds or little raised tracks on the mounds

28:30 each side of the paddy fields which wasn't good from a tactical point of view because that meant that the troops had to be in single file and they form a very easy target for artillery or machine gun fire or rifle fire. Fortunately the end of the war came very soon after I joined that so. See after the conquest of Burma the next

29:00 big British operation was to be the reconquest of Malaya and Singapore so I would have been in for a very torrid time if you know the war had carried on and may not have survived.

**So the war ended**

Yes.

**And was that when you met the Japanese officer?**

Yes. So once the hostilities were over arrangements were made there to well first of all you had to

29:30 feed the Japanese army because their supply lines had been cut and they were robbing the local people of the all the rice and other supplies so the civilian populations were starving and a lot of the Jap units were near starvation and so it was one hell of a big relief operation that had to be carried out straight after the surrender and

30:00 so my 63 Indian Brigade were allocated to an area which included a couple of towns and mini villages and the whole thing was to re-establish law and order and to get supplies flowing to these village people. There was a special organisation there you know related to

30:30 you know the present sort of United Nations sort of relief operations and this had been set up by the British of course and came in to operation as each area of Burma was liberated and the civilian populations had to be looked after again. So the immediate effect actually of the end of the war was that

31:00 our brigade were put on to half rations and the other half of the rations had to be passed on to the Japanese the captured Japanese just to keep them alive and while the big effort went on with the civilian supply authorities to feed the civilian population.

**Was there a**

Who were very often in a bad way.

**Was there a reluctance to share your rations with the Japanese?**

Oh

31:30 no, the British are funny people. They've very magnanimous in victory as well as in defeat and no, it became a purpose in life you know to get everybody fed properly and we felt a great responsibility for the Japs. We wanted to get the finish get a finish to the killing. We'd all had enough of that and the killing had to stop.

32:00 **Tell me about your Japanese friend that you made.**

Yes, well the thing is we had this whole regiment of Japanese. There must have been about eight hundred of them and they were billeted on a river bank area and they were an engineer regiment so had a lot of technical skills amongst them and but they had to build accommodation and unfortunately they got stuck

32:30 into the big bamboo clumps around the town. Now every Burmese town and village has their own clumps of bamboo which are almost sacred because it's a very ubiquitous material. They use it for so many things apart from their building their housing and so we got very vociferous complaints there from the

33:00 local Burmese and their huge clumps of bamboos were being cut down by the Japs to build their surrendered personnel accommodation. So we had challenges all around you know trying to get the civilian population stabilised as well as having to look after the Japs and keep them contained so it was a funny thing they welcomed the end of the war just as much as

33:30 the British troops did because they'd had enough of it and the Japanese military discipline was terribly hard because officers and even down to sergeants had power of life and death over the individual Japanese soldier. That's something unheard of you know in the British and Australian armies and they wanted to get their freedom back too the

34:00 ordinary Japanese soldiers. Now we had no trouble with our lot of Japanese. They were put on the roads and other infrastructures around the district to try and repair a lot of the war damage but we suddenly found there that they were being fed on the Indian army rations scale which was twice the volume of that what the Japanese

34:30 army scale was so within two weeks we found that this huge piles of cooked food that was just being thrown away in the Japanese camp because they just weren't used to that amount of food and that had to be rectified of course because it was a terrible waste. But in our area we didn't have any any problems where some of the Indian regiments apparently had a lot of trouble with

35:00 the Japs and sort of revolting against them and that type of thing and I suppose I was fortunate with this Captain Marimo who spoke excellent English and later on he joined after the war he joined Japan Airlines and had a fine career there and served eight years in England some years in the USA.

35:30 and I'm just trying to think it'd be I think it would be probably the 1960s that I had contact again with him through the British War Office and a rather a strange letter saying that almost condescendingly that ”oh a Japanese officer wants to have contact with you. Do you consent to

36:00 us passing on your name and address?” And I knew straight away who it was and I was only too happy to do that and so we established these links by letter 'cause he wrote and spoke excellent English and later on it led to some wonderful liaison between Japanese and my family and my wife and I had a

number of

36:30 trips to Japan. Marimo met us and escorted us whenever he could and then passed us on to other Japanese families so that we had fabulous stays in Japan. In fact Marimo gave us history lessons on Japanese history and he was that sort of guy and so knew all about old Japan as well as the modern Japan

37:00 and we received great hospitality so it had a sort of unexpected you know well very good human relationships developed and well I still send Christmas letters and things off to a couple of Japanese families and when they came out here of course we

37:30 well Marimo and his brother stayed at our house in Cremorne Point and we've had contact with other Japanese families too out here in Australia. Well my feelings on it the war's the war and when it's over you get on with the peace and make the peace successful and I think that philosophy is the right one and

**Were there many of your fellow mates who found it difficult**

38:00 **to understand your relationship?**

Oh yes, yes, there's most of them do. There seems to be an inbuilt hatred of well the Japanese military system but a lot of them sort of put that on to the Japanese people. Except the ones who joined the occupation forces after the war and a number of our men

38:30 did that because our colonel, Colonel George Callwin, he commanded one of the battalions in BCOF - the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces and so he spent several years in Japan but the ones that served in Japan of course have the right perspective. They understand it. But fellows who'd never been to Japan who'd only served up in the islands against them a lot of those fellows have deep prejudice still

39:00 and still the thought that the only good Japanese is a dead one.

**Can you understand that attitude?**

Well, I see it as being very unenlightened and the fact that they have they've made no effort to understand actually what happened to Japan especially in the 1930s when the military took over Japan and pushed the

39:30 Emperor and all the wonderful old Japanese ways pushed all that into the background and made it secondary. It was Japanese militarism as the villain not the people and I still hold that very strong views about that. In fact I found them they have a wonderful culture underneath it all and well like you know most societies they have their good and their bad

40:00 and there's a lot of good things that have come out of Japan.

**We're at the end of another tape.**

Oh well.

# Tape 9

00:32 **Ken you've told us about events leading up to your actually getting the Military Cross. Can you tell us about the events that specifically led to your being awarded the Military Cross?**

Yes, the I'll tell you about the 2/17th Battalion being cut off and we had to re-establish the link with them. If you can imagine the

01:00 in New Guinea what they call the Sattleberg Road that leads up from the coast at Finschhafen right up to the old Lutheran mission on top of the highest mountain peak in the area and there's this winding road had been built by the Lutheran missionaries over many years.

01:30 It was a like a village up there too with a church and a lot of residences and not just a holy place but there's native villages alongside who supplied the workforce for the mission but they all supplied they were also the congregation for the missionaries who were a vital force there in that area

02:00 from the point of view of the health and also the education of the native peoples. In fact they were wonderful these German Lutheran people. Strangely enough there's a link back to the Afrika Korps. One of my German Afrika Korps friends had an uncle who was a missionary up there with the Lutherans and for very many years and when he retired he

02:30 retired to Toowoomba and died. It's strange how that link with the Afrian Korps officer occurred.

**Well you've given us quite a quite a good image of Sattleberg itself but to get back to the specific event which led to your being awarded the MC?**

Yes, well Sattleberg was considered very much

03:00 a valuable strategic area and because inland tracks that led to other strategic areas in New Guinea came into Sattleberg and these tracks actually went further north on the inland side away from the coast into the north of New Guinea. So it was considered necessary

03:30 that Sattleberg be captured and occupied and but there were considerable Japanese forces in that area too. I'm just trying to think offhand there that's there'd probably be a couple of Japanese brigades in the whole area, which is quite a formidable thing.

04:00 Now half way up the Sattleberg Road there was a missionary village and church and considered very important where a lot of tracks came in from the coast. Now after the

04:30 Australians had captured Sattleberg initially the Japanese counterattacked and they put a roadblock across the Sattleberg Road about half way up and some eight kilometres from the coast. Now 20th Brigade were given the task of clearing the Sattleberg Road and my platoon was the vanguard of 2/13th Battalion and to go up and

05:00 try and break the break their roadblock. It sounds very strange that because of the very steep terrain that we literally had to march in with two files, one on each side of the road, and the third section a bit further back and had to move fairly as fast as we could

05:30 'til we got up near where the Japanese and the real problem was we didn't know exactly where the Japanese were and so when our I had two scouts out in front, a forward scout and a backup chap, and they just turned one bend in the road with the jungle on high on one side and low on the other and this poor chap was just shot dead from

06:00 concealed Japanese positions. Well in that case we knew we'd arrived but just in front of the Japanese positions had been some bomb blasts dropped from American liberator bombers when they were trying to bomb Japanese positions and it had actually blown big clearings in the jungle

06:30 and the Japanese had actually dug foxholes in this blasted area where the all the foliage had been blown away and they were very clever there because they concealed their positions very well so the first thing there was I lost my forward scout shot dead by from a Japan a concealed Japanese position and

07:00 so I dispersed my platoon into the jungle, which wasn't terribly dense on the high side of the road, and then we advanced very gingerly 'til we came up to the bomb clearing and found the Japanese already dug in and they were firing back on us. I had no

07:30 option there but to get my own troops to dig in because the point was to contact the enemy and to hold them until we got reinforcements up and a proper attack could be launched. It's and of course were sort of digging in again under fire and it wasn't a very pleasant situation. You get these bull- bullets cracking around you and

08:00 the leaves falling off the trees as and bark flying off the shrubs and the trees alongside but this was the nature of those infantry operations. We had to get ourselves dug in and hold them there. Now of course that situation stabilised and it was to be two weeks before the roadblock was finally

08:30 broken but after three or four days that I was given another task and that was to move around to a flank but down a jungle-clad valley and up the other side onto another spur that also came back onto this

09:00 Japanese-defended area. Now we had to go a long way around and get other tracks to get up onto that spur and were moving back up towards the Japanese position were fired on and one of my corporals who was put himself as leading scout

09:30 and was one of the originals of the battalion and a great soldier had been through Tobruk and Alamein he got shot through the throat and killed and another one of our soldiers was also shot and killed so I spread out my platoon on the in the jungle on both sides of the track and had to make a quick assessment of the situation

10:00 and we found that there's well a whole squad of Japanese so quick action was called for and I got the fellas to fix their bayonets and we also had those Owen guns, the big firing submachine guns, so on a given signal all the fellas rushed forward and we

10:30 ended up killing nineteen Japanese and a number of others ran away, but we lost a number of men killed and several wounded but that actually re-established the link with the 2/17th Battalion so it actually we carried out our task and very effectively.

11:00 But the whole thing in these sorts of things, it's got to be quick action or you get a stalemate.

**Did the Japanese make any attempt to retaliate at all?**

Oh yes, they were firing back and you know we had as I say I lost a couple of fellows killed and several wounded but the speed of the attack was what carried us through and they lost a lot of course apart from the several

11:30 that ran away but as I say we killed nineteen of them.

**What was your feeling afterwards?**

Well, of great relief that we'd made contact again with the and saved the platoon which had been cut off and then very very soon after established contact with the 2/17th Battalion but you know you're faced with these decisions and this was remote from the main body of the

12:00 of the battalion so you're on your own you've got to use your own initiative and you can be in deep trouble if things go wrong.

**It must have been quite confronting to face up to the loss of these key men as well?**

Oh yes, well we all I still feel it to this day and as particularly two of them there were veterans of at the start of the very platoon and right through the jung- the desert campaigns

12:30 and it seemed very cruel that they got killed at that time but see that's warfare unfortunately and as a front line infantry officer of course you've got to play hard and fast to achieve your objectives otherwise you're not in the race.

**Looking once more at Burma**

13:00 **could you tell me a little more about how you had to work with Captain Marimo?**

Ah yes, well the it was one of those strange things. Not long after I went there that I joined the battalion football team, rugby union team, to play football against a navy side and

13:30 in Rangoon and unfortunately I got a broken ankle and badly twisted knee with a foul tackle and so the hospitals at that time was just straight after the war had finished and there's all the liberated prisoners of war coming out of Malaya and you know areas of

14:00 southern Burma where they'd been in captivity, that's like Australia and British prisoners, and so I was considered not worthy of any hospital treatment other than getting a plaster cast put on my leg so I was given a job attached to the intelligence officer as a supernumerary

14:30 officer in the battalion headquarters and so I was hobbling around with this big cast on my leg and a steel stirrup underneath to keep the foot off the ground because it was still the monsoon season and everything was very damp underfoot. Now that provided the opportunity to meet and deal with the surrendered Japanese people

15:00 and so I found this very personable Japanese officer who spoke excellent English and having had that long time in the army on different battlefields and things I didn't have any prejudices. Well I felt I'd you know I'd long since got rid of all those things and I was concentrating on the task at hand which was to get on with

15:30 making the peace because all the fighting was done. A lot of the other officers in the battalion they had contempt for the Japanese and didn't want anything to do with them and I felt that was the wrong attitude because after all the fighting has gone, it's all finished you've got to get on and make the peace and I think I had the right attitude but Captain Marimo was the ideal conduit for

16:00 a very good relationship with the surrendered Japanese people and it ended up we used to have very long chats because I was interested in Japan and particularly Japanese history and this guy was very well-educated and he wanted to get on with the peace too and we just put the war behind us and just got on with doing the immediate

16:30 job as to get all the work done to rehabilitate the area were in and to make the whole thing work, the surrender terms work. Now we found out of course these were Japanese a Japanese engineer regiment full of very skilled artisans and but they were terrific workers and they'd do two and three times the amount of work in a

17:00 day that any Australian or British person would do and they did it cheerfully but they were also highly skilled and so in no time you know all around the camp area was very cleaned up and we'd got them onto the local roads and things like that and they became very useful and

**Did the fact that a number of your fellow Australian soldiers were prejudiced make it difficult for you to kind of negotiate a bit of an emotional minefield here?**

Ah well actually this was British

17:30 army, they were all British. Well it didn't worry me because I'd been an officer long enough and I'd had enough you know battlefield experience and everything like that to concentrate on what I felt to be the main task and that was to establish the peace. Forget the rest, that was all over and done with and I think mentally too

18:00 I'd had enough of the fighting and the killing and I wanted that out of the way. All I wanted to do was look forward to get on with the peace and Marimo felt the same and in fact part of his service in Burma

had been, because he had an excellent command of English, was to large groups of young teachers and teacher trainees

18:30 in of Burmese people as to for him to teach them Japanese and to prepare for a Japanese military government so he'd spent a long time doing that. This man to my mind had a very good character and was a very good human being and that's what I was looking at.

19:00 The other consideration, being a beastly Japanese, it no longer occurred to me 'cause I felt I was you know had a very practical attitude and you can't keep on hating you know there'd been enough of that and enough damage had been done by people hating but the whole thing was get on with the peace and make that work.

**Was there a long delay in your returning to Australia after the war?**

19:30 Ah yes because I didn't leave Burma 'til late in July 1946 so let's see the monsoon was back on again and I'd had enough of this you know rain and rain and rain and the clouds are hanging down over you, you never see the sun, so I wasn't a big bronzed Anzac anymore. Everybody was sallow

20:00 and still taking Atebrins and the anti-malarial things. There's a great relief there to go back to Rangoon and then get on a ship and go down to Singapore and eventually come back to Australia on a Dutch ship which was very comfortable and it also had very good supplies of beer and food on board

20:30 so that sort of fattened me up. It was bringing back two hundred ex-military and people and some with their wives and families who'd decided they want to come out to Australia but there's only a couple of Australian officers like myself. All the rest were British people and we had a very good trip back to Brisbane.

**Could you**

21:00 **describe your homecoming?**

**Could**

Ah yes. Well we disembarked on this ship I think it was called the Bloemfontein Brisbane of all places and so eventually with the other passengers were put on a train at Brisbane and came down to Sydney and there's rather a

21:30 peculiar unpleasant situation there that occurred on the train. There I was in British army uniform and with you know lots of ribbons and there's a couple of I think nineteen year old very green Australian soldiers on the train there and they tried to big note themselves calling me a “Pommie bastard” and you know

22:00 "What do you think you're coming out here for you Pommie bastard" and that I must admit I saw red and I gave these fellas a terrible telling off and they slunk away with their tails between their legs because they were just rotten little no hopers and I think they were AWL [Absent Without Leave] anyway. They were probably deserters from our own army but there's a bit of a nasty taste

22:30 in an otherwise wonderful homecoming and were taken down back to Sydney and then through the discharge procedures at Sydney Showground and then I was given two months paid leave, which I took before I went back to service in the Commercial Banking company. I felt I'd earned it and the other thing of course after all that service in the tropics I was very run down

23:00 and underweight and you know sort of very yellow in the face and things like that and it's a tremendous emotional hurdle you've got to jump over and suddenly leaving an army which had been your family for you know six years and eight months and to get back into civilian life and suddenly you're

23:30 thrown back into becoming virtually a junior clerk in a big bank again, literally a nobody, and that's the way the bank treated them because they handled it all very poorly and a lot of the ex-service people felt that and of course many of them ended up like I did of leaving of the bank's service and just you know you wouldn't put up with that well

24:00 misplaced paternalism. The bank was everything you know, it was the greatest service in Australia, this was the way they looked at it and to be treated like a junior clerk again, I just couldn't stomach it.

**Did the amount of tension and probably stress almost certainly stress that you'd been through in the war did that ever come back to you later on?**

24:30 Oh yes, yes, I you get bad per- periods and you know even well not exactly bad nightmares but you get a lot of disturbed sleep and periods where you've got too much introspection, which is not good for you. Thinking about the wonderful people you'd served with but you also think back on some of the terrible events you went through and

25:00 it's all out of this world stuff and it takes a long time to adjust fully back into civilian life and this makes you know some of the times in my early married life my young wife just couldn't understand it and where I'd appear to be moody but you do get periods of depression and where you get these terrible

25:30 flashbacks and because when you look back on the service I had there you know the world was turned on its head and the whole world had been exploding and I was very lucky to be alive you know, there's no there's no doubt about that.

**How important for you in readjusting to civilian life have the veterans' associations been?**

Oh yes, the battalion association

26:00 was the catalyst for keeping my sanity with the old friendships there and it was a very necessary link that you had to keep up. I mean I just couldn't thrust it aside like some people think they could but then I'd had very long service and you know tremendous associations with some

26:30 wonderful comrades and I could never toss those onto the scrap heap, as much as my wife wanted me to try and forget everything you never can forget it, it's part of your whole being, those experiences.

**Well Ken, we're going to finish up in a moment but was there anything else that you wanted to mention as part of this interview before we do finish up?**

Well I think I've covered it well too except

27:00 to say that the postwar activities with the battalion association have been tremendously sustaining for me because that comradeship kept on and it was enhanced by contact with the families of the men I served with which became much deeper with the formation of the wives and widows groups in our battalion association and we've you know had several functions

27:30 every year where they'd have a whole day of picnics and the families together as well as you know luncheons and even dinners. The battalion officers too had a sort of a separate officers' group where you'd have officers' dinners a couple of times a year where the officers and their wives'd go to the to Barrack Street to the it used to be

28:00 the big officers' club there. That subsequently closed down but we still kept on with the officers' dinners until only about two years ago because there was so few people left now that we just rely on the whole association events.

**Ken, on behalf of Rebecca and myself, thank you very much for**

28:30 **an exemplary interview.**

Well, I suppose the only other thing is did I mention that I was editor of the battalion association magazine for twenty-five years and that kept me in touch with the men of the old battalion and their families because this magazine was the conduit of information not only about you know the old war events but also what was happening in civilian life to the men and their families and

29:00 I'd taken it over from another chap who'd started the magazine. He died in 1961 and I took over the magazine and but I felt there was something lacking there because there wasn't a section for the wives and the widows so Instituted that and all of a sudden the magazine increased in size and

29:30 'cause the girls came in very strongly and they'd been so supportive over the years and to my mind they deserved their place in the in the magazine and it's carried on ever since and that particular section is has been very good for strengthening the whole association and the girls feel that they're all part of it very much and it was you know a brilliant concept from my point of view which has paid off handsomely.

30:00 Made a lot of people very very happy indeed and I suppose that's all what's it all about when making the peace work for all of us.

**Thank you very much Ken.**

Yes.

**Thanks again.**