

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Joseph Jopling - Transcript of interview

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### Tape 1

00:25 **It's a pleasure to be here today.**

Nice to see you.

**Now, we'd like you just to give us an overall view of your whole life. So starting perhaps from your parents, touching on your war experience and out the other side too. You've got as much time as you like.**

Right.

**So?**

All right, well quite easy. I was born in, 24th August in 1920. My father's name was Alfred Jopling and my Mum's name was Victoria Kerr and they

01:00 got married and I was the third son in the marriage. I had two older brothers, one was Alfred and one was Bert and they were studious types. I wasn't too much a studious type. I went to school, played in all the soccer and football and all that teams until I was 12, 13, and then 1930 came, just before 1930 I went to my first big event, the Melbourne Cup, and

01:30 I saw Phar Lap run with my Mum and Dad, and that was brilliant, you know, I really enjoyed that but I got to

**Was that the year that Phar Lap won?**

That was the year Phar Lap won, yes, 1929.

**That's a pretty big event.**

It was great, and so then the next year I started to get a little bit ambitious because there were scouts around our way and they were pretty, doing all lots of community work and things like that, so I thought that's what I wouldn't mind getting into, and so my father always said to me, you know,

02:00 always remember that if anybody's in distress try and help them if you can, and that was really what he thought me you know, so that's apparently where I got this community thing from. But anyway First Albert Park Scouts were just around the corner from me and so I went to the First Albert Park Scouts, joined them, and first of all I was like a cub in them and then I got up to being a scout. Did all the badges, a lot of them, and got various badges and that and became a you know,

02:30 a higher scout. I didn't stay with them to go to be a rover because the Japanese looked like attacking Australia in 1936 and this was when 1932 I think I joined, something like that, and the Depression was on. Well you know what the Depression was like. I don't know if you ever, it was terrible. I had two brothers that were brilliant but they couldn't work. I had my father that was just into another job from what he had and they made

03:00 him a steel dresser and he worked at Rewalt's Foundry in Richmond which later on became a foundry that made tanks and various parts for tanks for us overseas. So I went from the militia when I was 16, I said to my Dad, well look Dad, the Japs [Japanese] look like coming in the war, I think I'll join the militia [Citizens' Military Force] because I've got a few friends that are in it. He says, "Oh you're too young for it." I says, "No, we're not going away, we're just going to be a militia and do camps and things like that and I'll

03:30 be with all my mates." "All right," he says, "I won't hold you back, you go."

**So you were about 15 or 16 at this stage?**

16.

**16?**

24th of August my birthday, he said, "OK, now you're 16, OK, you can join." So I went and joined down at Batman Avenue in what was called a 4th Field Company of the 3rd Division and we were engineers and so that's where my engineering started. The reason I went into the engineers I think is because with the Scouts they taught me ropes and knotting and

04:00 a little bit of bridging and all tree climbing and various things, everything that engineers do, you know. Not, later on I found out it was different altogether, so I went there in 1936 and we did a few camps and so forth and that and I was up, in 1939 I was at Trawool doing a camp just near Seymour and war was declared on 3rd of September 1939, so I went up to my captain, or actually

04:30 it was Major Brownbell. I went up to Major Brownbell and I said, "I think I'd like to transfer to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] sir," and he said, "Why?" And I says, "Because my mates are in it," and he said, "You're a bit and you haven't got much weight on you," 'cause I was very thin. I wasn't tall or anything, so he said, "You may fail the exams." I said, "Well give me the chance and I'll try." So I put my name down on the list in September and, October,

05:00 I said to him, "Has nothing come back yet? I haven't heard anything about that transfer of mine," and he said, can't make out why that is. Anyway he investigated it and it went on to November and he came back and he says, "Well you can't do anything now, the army's gone on leave, in the barracks, all the LHQ [Land Headquarters], you know that," all the records and that.

**You're 19 at this stage, aren't you?**

I was 19 in August, yes. Yeah, so the

05:30 delay and everything was made because I should've been in most probably in October or November but because of that they put in a delayed file and so I didn't go in until after Christmas so I was really in 1940 I joined, but I went out to the showgrounds and they put me in the 2/8th Battalion to do training at the showgrounds at Melbourne and I was there for about four days and our OC [Officer Commanding] or CRE [Chief Royal Engineer] from up in Puckapunyal,

06:00 Chief Engineer in the Royal Engineers, Chief Royal Engineer, he came down and he went, oh, he blew the tops, he just put a call over the air and he said, attention all personnel, attention all personnel, I want the following to report to me at headquarters immediately and I mean immediately. First name was mine, "Sapper [engineer] Jopling." Oh, I nearly fell over. Four others followed me so with that

06:30 we went up to his headquarters and he said, "Who gave you permission to come into the army in the 2/8th Battalion?" I said, "Well sir, when I went to Captain Paddy to do my medicals and that, that's where I got transferred into the infantry." He said, "Well you're not in the infantry now, now get your gear and you're going to Puckapunyal straight away." So they whipped me up to Puckapunyal straight away so I was there for maybe 10 days, something like that, and next thing I knew

07:00 they were getting ready to embark to go overseas so I went on the first convoy of Victorians to the Middle East.

**So he wanted you up at Puckapunyal because the rest of them had done three months training up there, but you hadn't done that, is that right?**

Yeah, because I'd done militia training he said to me, "You've had three years in the militia, do you think we're going to waste your time in the infantry?" That was what he said to me so he took me up there. Well when I went into camp they were big strapping fellows, you know, and I was a little thin, I thought.

**What height were you then?**

07:30 5 foot 7 [inches].

**5 foot 7, and what was the minimum height?**

It should've been 5 foot 9, 5 foot 10. So Captain Paddy, I shouldn't name his name, should I?

**You're right. I think you might...**

He said, "I think I can work things out for you quite easily," so he just put his hand on the top of my head like that and he says, "You just make it at 5 foot 9 and a half." I said, "Thank you very much," so I stood on the scales, and he said, "Phew, we better try and help that along too," so

08:00 he just stood on the scales a little bit and I went up. We got to the weight that was necessary to get in, he said, you just make it, OK, good luck to you, and so that was it. So that was it, I ended up through him, got tested, went into the 2/8th Battalion at the showgrounds six days, up to Puckapunyal about 10 days, and on the boat going overseas. So

**What date did you leave?**

14th of April 1940.

**And what's your role here,**

08:30 **an engineer with the 2/8th Battalion?**

No, not in the 2/8th, in the 2/2nd Field Company then. When he took me to Puckapunyal I went to the 2/2nd Field Company in the 6th Division in the 17th Brigade. It might be all Chinese but that's what it was. So anyway we all took off and went down to the wharf and it was all supposed to be 'hush-hush', secret you know, but we had so many people waving us as we went through when we got to the wharf it was full, you know, and I luckily saw my

- 09:00 aunty from Port Melbourne there, Mrs Cain, and she saw me at the window and she says, "Oh no Joe, not you," and I says, "Yes, tell Mum I've gone will you?" And she said, "I will, I'll do that." So I went down and we all lined up on the wharf and the generals came down and had a little talk and wished us the best of luck, so we got on our boat with the 2/2nd Field Ambulance and who else? Another unit I think, and anyway, 2/5th
- 09:30 Battalion, that's right. I shouldn't forget them because they were our mainstay. We, the 2/5th and us went into campaigns together. That was the infantry. So we took off on the HMV Etric, Etric was the name of our boat that took off in a four-man convoy with a few escort naval ships, you know. So we went down to Rosebud and we parked for the afternoon there, you know, more or less until about
- 10:00 5.00 or 6.00 o'clock at night, went through the heads and you wouldn't read it, we ran into the back of the Strathaird. So that was all right except that all the crockery was broken. Well it didn't worry us until we got overseas and they docked us out of our pay for it. We were only getting five bob a day, so anyway that was that, so we went to Colombo on the way after about five or six days. In the meantime we had
- 10:30 the crossing the equator ceremony, you know...

**Yeah.**

Which is very good, yeah, very good that. We had all the nurses and everything, they all joined in, it was really a social event, you know.

**Did you have to do anything special?**

No, no. My uncle that was in the First World War said to me, before I went he said to me, now don't you volunteer for anything, he said, "If you do," he said, "you'll be sorry." So I said, "Oh yes." So anyway I

- 11:00 got on the boat and I had an old First World War digger [soldier] with me and his name was Johnson, he's dead now poor old chap, but he had a hare lip, you know, so he said, "You stick with me Joe and everything will be all right, no worries see?" And I said, "Yes, yes, righto," well he got me into more trouble than I ever knew when I was overseas, but he was a nice old chap. So anyway he said, "I've got a good job, I can get you a good job if you want one."
- 11:30 I says, "All right." So I ended up polishing all the brass for the captain and his door and all the rails and everything like that, and that took up a quarter of the day, and by so doing I didn't do any exercises on the boat, but of course I thought that was doing no exercise, but our officer said, "You must do exercises so you'll have to do your own exercising and it's up to you because if you're not fit you'll get sent home again." So I did all the exercise and did everything it should be, you know. So I went to Colombo
- 12:00 and we got off and had day's leave, beautiful, and we went to the races and the Aussie jockeys were in there on the horses so we went down to the jockeys and we had a little talk to them and of course they put us on to a few winners and of course the amazing part about it was that the last race, he said "That this is a dead cert [certainty], right?" I said, "Yes." "Right," he said. So the race comes on and the horses go off and away they go, you know, our friend's right out in front by about six lengths,
- 12:30 and a fellow beside me he'd bought a carpet snake and a carpet snake wheels across my face, you know, and I looked at it like that and nearly missed what happened because our horse just got to the line, dropped dead on the line. So there was a dead cert. Now how did they know that? They pumped it full of dope most probably.
- Did it get over the line?**
- Yes, went over the line and we all left there with nice little bags of money. Not big bags, we only bet in little shillings and that you know, but then we came back to the boat
- 13:00 and of course all the fellows, the exciting ones I suppose later on when we went and got together, they'd picked up monkeys and snakes and everything to bring on the boat. Well of course you're not allowed to so they had to strip, took them all off and they all threw them in a big box they had there. So that was Colombo for us. We left there and then we headed for the Suez Canal and we were just outside the Suez Canal when we got a scare from an Italian submarine which the Italians had just come into the war at that stage up in Eritrea and
- 13:30 that, and right on the coast near Suez they had one of their stations there, but anyway the navy dropped a few little sticks on them and we didn't see the sub [submarine] and we didn't know whether it got sunk or anything so we went up the Med [Mediterranean], into the Med and we stayed, we got right up to the Med. We did go to Port Said, we stopped in 'Bitter Waters' [Great Bitter Lake] I think they called it, and then we got off and of course we go the favourite old Aussie sausages and mash, you know,
- 14:00 for our meal, and that was good anyway. We all filled up on that and then they said, "Right, you're all

embarking now, you're in training now for Palestine." So we got on the train and away we went, (UNCLEAR) these 'dog carriages' we called them, but they were cattle trains, you know, where they put the cattle and lock them in. Well we were in those and they stunk you know. Anyway we had just on seven hours I think going to camp, and we got to camp at this Beit Jirja where we went to in Palestine.

14:30 It was a nice camp, dusty and hot as anything you know, and then our tents were all up for us. The British had been there but they'd just left and they went over to Egypt I think, so we got Beit Jirja and then we stayed there, did a lot of training and then the people were getting restless so we decided we'd have a race meeting, so we had a race meeting at Berbera, another place that was there, and being engineers we had to make a sort of a racecourse for them so we

15:00 went to Sarafand where all our equipment was and we got galvanised piping and various other things and anyway we made this circular thing, all the real horses, we went to the Arab Muktahs and we said, "Want to enter one of your horses in our race?" So they entered their horses in the race and bang, we had our race meeting. Turned out brilliant and beautiful. We had our jockeys ourselves that were in it, but I didn't win anything on that one. I don't know, our jockeys didn't do too good that day. But we had

15:30 that, then we had to go around to various places doing things and one of the places we went to was up to Haifa and at Haifa there was the Qishon River and we had to do bridging, training bridging and that up on there. So we did that and then came back and then we got sent over to Egypt, and we got over there just before Christmas. We arrived over there in Palestine in June something, and just before Christmas we went to

16:00 Egypt and my sub-section I was in, I was made a transport driver by the way when we arrived in Palestine because they said, "You're small enough, you can sit behind the cabin or wheel and you can drive." A big bloke, we want him outside lifting things you know, so, and I also had a driver, a spare driver in case anything happened to me, he took over, but he was a massive big bloke, massive he was. Anyway he was good because he lifted

16:30 all the goods into the trailer, into the truck for me when I need them, you know, and I just drove. So we go over the Suez Canal and up to outside of Cairo, yeah, Cairo, yeah, and we met with the New Zealand forces that were on the Nile River and that there so we mixed in with them and had a fairly good time. We were actually camped near the pyramids, that's right, at Mina. Mina? Yeah.

#### **El Mina camp?**

Yeah, and

17:00 we viewed the pyramids and we viewed this and that but we were sort of anxious to get up a bit further to see what was happening, so this section I was in, my sergeant was detailed a job to make water, there's no water in the desert. We had terrible time with water, and Sidi Baranni was just about to come up so the British and Indians were there and so we had to put a water line to them over there on six or seven miles most probably it was. It was a

17:30 fairly big long thing, and that's where we first got our dive bombing, not dive bombings, our bombings from the Italians but they must've had crook gauges, you know, because they dropped them about 200 yards from us. We, no worries at all with the Italians. So anyway,

#### **What are you making the pipeline out of?**

Galvanised piping. Strange that because we put it in as a 2 inch piping and years later it turned out to be a 12 foot piping. They

18:00 put big pipes through before Rommel [Erwin Rommel, German general] came down to Tobruk and that, but unbeknown to him what he got from us as far as the valves went was no use whatsoever because the valves weren't where we put them on, they were somewhere else, only we knew where they were. So we went there to Sidi Baranni and the British and the Egyptians, British and the Indians, 5th Indian Division, they soon fixed the Italians up there so we went up Mount

18:30 Saloom and up through the pass there, past all the old castles and everything that were up there and up to the outskirts of Bardia just before Christmas, just after, yeah, just before Christmas it was 'cause we were up in Bardia on the outskirts, on the barbed wire at Bardia to have Christmas Day there, and on the 3rd of January then we had our attack on Bardia and so my mate and I, we were the two transport drivers from headquarters with 5 Platoon

19:00 was the platoon I was with and we had the job of putting two sort of, a bridge in two sections across the tank trap, right. The tank trap should've been 6 feet wide where the officers the day before on New South Wales section of the job over there, New South Wales had the left flank, we had the centre flank and Victoria and the rest of Australia had their right flank, and so we went through on a third,

19:30 the two of us with our trucks, got on, backed it up to the barbed wire and the artillery opened up a massive bomb, our artillery opened up over our heads to give us cover, and whoosh, never heard anything like it. I shook a bit but I soon got over that I think, and anyway we, on rollers we came up and dropped our things into the thing but it was only half as far, we had to do two more lots of it because it was only 12 feet where we were and these were only 6 foot things. Might've been a bit bigger

- 20:00 but that's how I remember it, 6 foot or 12. So we had to get into it then and with picks and shovels and pat all the dirt down and everything and while we were doing this another part of our unit went in and blew all the barbed wire up with Bangalore torpedoes, which is really only a two inch piece of pipe loaded with gelignite stretched in between the barbed wire and then connected to a fuse with a detonator on it and when you press the plunger down the detonator gets pushed into, gets a strike hits into the fuse,
- 20:30 other part and bang, away she goes, blows a great big 12 or 15 foot gap in the wire, you know. So that was the second part of the engineer's job and while that was going on also they had to then go in and look over the mines, all the mine placements. So when you're doing mines you have a little party that goes through. The first part go in and they sort of look around and we didn't have mine detectors, we just had bayonets like. I didn't do it, but they did. I was in
- 21:00 on the other part and they went in just with their bayonets. When they hit a bit of steel they just put a little white disc on it, didn't do any more and away they went to the next then. They just bring them up after about a minute or a second they worked out what, after the minute or about five minutes, they worked out what the pattern was, where they were. Some they could go straight down the middle, some they could put in a triangle, some they could go three across. So they worked out the pattern and when they did that it was a matter of just going and following the other and putting a white, others come behind them, took the cap and the cap for mines themselves
- 21:30 were about 3 foot long and about 6, 7 inches high and 6 and 7 inches square like, and the top come off them just the same as when you sent people gladiolis in a big container, you know, and so what happens, when you stood on the top of that, took about 180 pound to bust them and when you stood on the top of that, there was a knife edge right through it and in the thing itself on the bottom part was a, gelignite was up this end, and there
- 22:00 was a hole, gelignite was up this end and on the edge of the hole, there was a hole where you could put a de-lousing pin through. We used to have to carry pins with us and put a pin through it, and when you did that as soon as they stepped on the top and cut the bar, the copper wire that was in there holding the striker pin back, the pin went forward and then normally it would go in and hit a detonator and the detonator would explode the gelignite and away she'd go, but when we got the pin in it that wouldn't happen, so the second people that come through
- 22:30 placed a pin in there, ripped the lid off and left it and they went on, and then the next party that came put their hand in and pulled all the workings out put it beside it and left it there like that. So that's how we cleaned the minefield. We could do 100 yards in about three quarters of an hour. It was good.

**Did you lose any blokes doing that?**

We didn't actually lose any there but as you imagine as soon as we got through the barbed wire and all that, the Italians opened up with their artillery

- 23:00 and it came right over. First of all the first loads that they dropped landed over where we were, where the trucks were putting us in there, but fortunately it loaded on our left hand flank, not where we were, and it killed my corporal and oh it was terrible. I can't tell you on the air because I think his people might be there. But anyway, he died and died a terrible death and we buried, he got buried at the barbed wire there. I don't know whether he was ever
- 23:30 shifted or not, but then they lowered their range and they put them then into where the minefields were and a few of our blokes got hit, but at the same time they opened with mortars and machine guns and everything. I wasn't in this party, but that's what this party were in, and we lost quite a few there.

**We'll probably come back and talk about this and all that a bit more afterwards.**

Yeah. Anyway, that lasted three four 5th, to the 5th and then Bardia was taken. Yeah, so they went in that way, we went in this way and the 8th, the

- 24:00 19th Brigade went that way. So 16, 17 and 19, we all converged on the 5th we took Bardia and then we had a rest for a little while, then they shot us up to Tobruk and so, yeah, we went up to Tobruk but there again we didn't need the whole lot of the mob to go in. We only just had 2/1st I think did the engineering jobs on that. We were in reserve for them and that didn't take long,
- 24:30 only a couple of days and that was taken and so we rested a little bit from there and everybody got souvenirs and things like that and a couple of foolish ones wouldn't listen to us because we told everybody at a battle that they were not to pick anything up, that booby traps were in everything over there and we were the only ones that could help them, you know. So if you wanted souvenirs tell us what you want and we'll get it for you but please don't do it yourself, so a few of them did,
- 25:00 dead you know. So anyway we moved from there then and we went on to Derna and Derna was a very quick one. The 19th Brigade did that one I think, and they did that one, and then we went on again a bit further, later, that was a few days, two days or something. We were in water then though, that was, we got a bit of rain then. It was beaut because we could get a drink of fresh water. Water to us
- 25:30 was, we had to get a cart which I actually fell for being the water joey, I had to drive back to Marsa Matruh, bring the water up. Nobody was allowed to touch it but the cook and the officer who had to

supervise. Everybody lined up with their water bottles, we filled all their water bottles and they got a top on them and they got a security thing on them and they were not to touch those on any account until nightfall when they had to give them to the cookhouse. So that's how, so we had various ways of getting water and that and

- 26:00 even to cooking up saltwater and, not too good for shaving though I'll tell you. So anyway we went to Derna and from Derna then we went on to, we were lucky again, we were with the 9th Brigade, 19th Brigade then and we got to a beautiful place called Tokrah. There were little things in between but we went to Tokrah and well Giovanni Berta was one that was in between, and it was a beautiful little place, it had a great big monastery and
- 26:30 so we, after the mass was over we went up to the priest there and said, do you mind if we just have a look around your altar and that for things? Because just like in Iraq, and we found it later in Damascus, that there was a big cavity behind the altar with a bit on it, you know, and down below was all the arms. So we just had to make sure that wasn't there. So then we came back and got to our camp and the sergeant
- 27:00 said to me, "Joe, now, you're the scrounger," 'cause I drove everywhere see and I was a scrounger. So they said, "Can you get some eggs and milk and things, bread for us and that?" I said, "Yeah, no worries." So I went to the Italians with my mate, this big mate, and we got the eggs and the milks and the breads and all the things we had to get. Anyway there was a big hay barn, you know, a barn with all the hay in it, and I says to him, you know that if anyone was hiding that's where they'd be in there, do you reckon? And he said, "Come on Joe, don't worry about that."
- 27:30 So anyway we jabbed it a few times and talked, we said, "We'll give it a few jabs with the bayonets and see what happens." The next thing the straw was all over the place and out come the Italians that they said, you know, surrender, with a white flag. They all had big white handkerchiefs tucked in them. When they wanted they just waved that white flag, they must've given them all those to wave. So away we went from there then, got back and went to place called Barti. Well then we went from the desert then into
- 28:00 pasture land. It was beautiful it was, and it was right down in a valley and the road had been blown so our engineers had to repair that bridge at the roads that were there. Meanwhile our officer went in through the background, through the grazing area and back and we found another track at the back down and we got in to Barti, and there again the officer said to me, "Well OK Joe, see what you can find as far as eggs and bread and that for when the troops come in." So we went in and saw
- 28:30 all them and they welcomed us with open arms the Italians. They came from Italy you see, to do farming and all that thing and Mussolini put them in the army and they didn't want to go in the army. They didn't want to fight, but the Black Shirts [Italian Fascists] that were there, oh they were devils, cows. They would come right up, hands up in the air, and when you got near them they'd pull a pin out of a grenade and you know, straight away somebody shot them and you know, that was it, but they were the worst of them, and so then we
- 29:00 went to this beautiful place called Tokrah and there's a funny little story with this. Won't take long. When we were at Tobruk there were a lot of ducks, they're little ducks you know and so we had an Irishman there and he picked a little duck and he called it one of his family, you know, and he used to cuddle, take it to bed, he did everything with it, you know. And so at the same time our I officer he disobeyed
- 29:30 rules, he ran off the road where he shouldn't have ran off, you know, we told him not to run off the roads 'cause mines would be planted anywhere so he ran off and up went the front of his truck and of course he couldn't move, so he sent a Provo [Provosts - Military Police], a Provo came past and he said, "When you go to up to Benghazi could you get someone to come back and pick me up?" "All right," but we weren't at Benghazi. My section, not my section, the section I was in, we went on to Ajdabiya down in the Gulf of Sirte and we were waiting for instructions from
- 30:00 60th headquarters that were down there whether we'd stay there, go back or whether we're going forward or not and eventually of course Churchill [Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom] gave the order that we've got to come back so we had to come back, but we had to come back anyway. So on the way there we passed through Benghazi at night, it was pretty, well we got there about half past 6.00, 7.00 o'clock and we walked down the street and asked people if we could get a meal or some food or anything, we were starving,
- 30:30 and he says, yeah, he says, "Go down the officers down there," they're all in this big hotel, the Hotel Benghazi. So we said, "All right," so when we walked in it was all generals and everything, you know, and we were dishevelled old soldiers, you know, with an officer that was nearly as bad as us. Anyway we get in there and as we got in he looked at the building he went, oh, don't you spend any more than this and that, you know. We said, "OK, she'll be right, we won't, but we're hungry," and big 'Snagger' Williams my mate,
- 31:00 he was very hungry, you know, so he told us we could have about £10 between us. Well it ended up over about £70 we drank and the beer was Stavagunza and oh it was a beautiful German beer it was, and on top of that of course we had all the other delicacies and that, but when the speeches come the officer said, I think we better go now, you know. So we took off and we had to go up to catch up where his unit

was, the 60th down at Ajdabiya. So went through into the night then. Well we got so far, within

- 31:30 about 10 kilometres I suppose of Ajdabiya, but we didn't know where we were going, there was water on that side, desert that side and roads like this so we pulled into this old place and it was, you know, barns and all in there so we parked the car. We saw all other cars in there but didn't take any notice 'cause it was dark, so we found a spot, parked in there, walked in through the door and hopped in the straw and went to sleep. The next morning at 6.00 o'clock, brr, you know, machine guns and all going outside the door, and we think God, what's this? We wake up and we look around and they're all
- 32:00 Italians we were sleeping with. So we go outside and the Armed, the 5th, 7th Armed Division of the British Army, well they were really the top notches in the desert. They went around and scouted and they made sure that none of those outside units could get anywhere near us. They kept that at bay and made them keep going in retreat. So they were really good to us. But anyway they were the ones that got this poor old 'Wire Whiskers' Bergonzoli, the Italian general,
- 32:30 and he got a shock I think when they came in in their jeeps. You might've seen a picture a long time ago where these jeeps used to run around the desert and run into airports and blow up planes and everything. That's what they did, and so anyway we get up and all these Italians, we look at them and they look at us and we all go outside and old Bergonzoli's got his hands up for surrender, you know, so they captured him and took him away. The Italians didn't worry about us, we shook hands with a few and we got in our truck and drove the extra 10 Ks [kilometres] down to Ajdabiya
- 33:00 and got down there, saw our OC and everything down there.

#### **How did you stumble into the Italian lines?**

Well we didn't know. We were told that they were about 3 kilometres down the road but when we got the 3 kilometres, the 6th Division, we asked how much, where was the 6th Division and that was an easy question. But we forgot the British had a 6th Division so we went 3 kilometres and it was a British 6th Division. They said, they're about 15 kilometres further down, 'cause they were just past, they were just

- 33:30 past Benghazi, but ours was right down on the Gulf of Sirte which, when you're right down, it goes around up to Tripoli, yeah. So that's how we did it. So anyway we went to our headquarters and dropped this 1st officer off there and we said, "Well we're off now, ta ta," and we left him there and he said, "Thanks very much," and we said, "That's all right." So away we went. So getting back to the duck story, they come to Benghazi, back to Benghazi and it's been captured and all under
- 34:00 sort of martial law and everything and our blokes are patrolling, and anyway old Snagger who was an old villain you know, and he had a master key and whenever we wanted anything the master key came in handy, you know, especially with me, you know, I was 'the scrounger' they called me. So we go to Benghazi and he says, "Look, we might find a place that's got a few beers around here," and I said, "We're not worrying about that," and he said, "Oh it's all right for you," so we went down the road and we this, something like cantina or something it was.
- 34:30 He said, "That'll do us," so he puts the key in the door and it opened and, oh, he said, "A goldmine, look, gin, whisky, brandy, everything" on the shelf, you know, and then cases on the floor. Oh, he said, "Come on Joe, we'll load some of this in." So we loaded whisky and brandy and gin and wine and all sorts of things and beer into it. So we come back from Benghazi back to Tokrah then where our unit was stationed, and it was a lovely place right on the seaside, you know, right up with a castle like and you're looking right down on the water on the rocks and that
- 35:00 just as though you're in Italy, you know, and so when we go in the gate we hear this commotion going on see, and not all the 2/11th Battalion went to Benghazi, this particular section was left there, about 20 blokes or something like that, and they were hungry and they saw this duck going around so they grabbed it you know, and they were going to ring its neck, so Paddy raced out and he said, "Hey, don't kill it, that's my pet, that's my pet," you know, and we got there just in the right time, you know, so Snagger bowled up to the 11th Battalion bloke and they were big too, they
- 35:30 were a big battalion the 2/11th, they were massive blokes and he said, "Excuse me, what are you doing with that duck?" He said, "That's Paddy's pet." "We're hungry, we haven't eaten for quite a while," and he says, "I bet you're dry too," and they said, "Yes we are." "Have you had any beer lately?" "No." "Give Paddy back his duck and we'll give you some beer." So he got his duck back, we went back to the end of the truck, unloaded beer to him and said, "Your officer will most likely go off crook at you for taking this, so" we said, "Better take a case of whisky back for him," so he got a case
- 36:00 of whisky out of it and the duck was saved, and that was that story. So then we evacuated from there. Churchill told us we had to go so we came back, had to hand a lot of our equipment over to the 9th Div [Division]. It was no good, it was worn out you know, our Bren gun carriers, the tracks were held with chewing gum I think. Anyway the 9th Div got it, I felt sorry for them and we came back to Marsa Matruh to a place called Cleopatra's Pool which is where Cleopatra apparently used to go like and ride, what's the bloke
- 36:30 with the big whiskers, Crow Ghoster, you know, similar to that. It was a beautiful swimming area there anyway and so we went out fishing. We found a boat and went out fishing and we were greedy. We got

too many fish, you know, and we were lighting a fuse, throwing it over and dive over and grab the fish and bring, and the wind changed and we put a big fuse in then and it went over and blew a hole in the bottom of our boat. We lost all our fish and had to swim ashore. So anyway,

- 37:00 then headquarters came to us there and they brought all the decorations to you, you know, and we had about seven, about three mentioned in despatches and a couple of military medals and a few other things and that, MCs [Military Crosses] and so forth, so they gave, they just came in, threw them all on the counter and said, now sort those out amongst yourselves. Well then our head officer had to sort of sort out who got them so that was that. From then on we were taken to Alexandria then, taken to the wharf and ready for Greece, but they gave us a night's leave, you know, in there.
- 37:30 So we went into town and had a night's leave and of course the bus, our car, truck took off without us and left us there so we had to pay a bloke a few dinars to take us back out to the wharf so we got on the boat next morning. It's amazing, it wasn't until we were in Greece that our officer told us that the German Embassy or whatever it was there, they were there like taking stats of everything that went on our boats, everything, and so when a few, when we got out one day, out into the, on the way to Greece,
- 38:00 Port Piraeus, we got bombed you know, but they only went for these couple of ships. We had six or seven ships in it I think and one was the Devis that they hit and it had all explosives and everything on it and I think there were parts for aeroplanes and something else on another boat, it wasn't the Singhalese Prince, another boat it was and it got sunk too. Then they didn't worry us too much but they did come back and try and strafe us on
- 38:30 that but we had all our Bren guns set up and well we didn't notice that the bullets were coming but when we looked afterwards, I had an old Lewis gun, you know poop, poop, poop, poop, and when we looked around in the deck when they'd gone all the deck was all chopped up where the bullets had hit. We didn't feel any, and so that was all right and we were just going into Port Piraeus and the navy come streaming with a jee jee jee, and there was an Italian submarine there. Italian
- 39:00 or German? I don't know, it was a submarine anyway. I think it was Italian and there was a message came across to hold fire until we fixed this up, and he chased this sub and voom, voom, voom and they signalled that everything was all right and we went into Port Piraeus then, and...

**We'll take a quick break there and change tapes.**

## Tape 2

- 00:16 **OK Joe, you're just landing at Athens.**  
Port Piraeus.  
**Port Piraeus.**  
Yeah, right? So we went into Port Piraeus and we had our transport and all there on our boat anyway, but
- 00:30 our main body didn't come over with us at that time, but the shipping was pretty scarce and so only infantry and so forth came across, so anyway, I forget the name of the boat we were on now, but we were on one, and when we arrived in Port Piraeus Harbour we were all allocated a colour and so they nominated so many trucks, or actually sub-sections it was, about five or six trucks
- 01:00 in one section, might've been four and they said you follow all the red signs on the post, the next one you follow all the blue, you follow all the pink, you follow all the green and all that. So we had a corporal with us and he wasn't brilliant but he was all right, but he took the wrong turn and we ended up at the Prince's Palace. That's where we ended up in Athens. It wasn't very far away but it wasn't where we were going and it was starting to get
- 01:30 a bit dark and so we went up and the Evzones [Greek Palace Guards] were there with the boomp boomp boomp of their steps, you know, so we went up to the Evzones and tried to tell them that we were lost but they didn't understand what we were saying.  
**This is the Greek Palace Guards?**  
Yes, Greek Palace Guard, Evzones.  
**With the pom-poms on their feet and their traditional uniforms?**  
Yeah, we went back, Dulcie and I went back in 1985 or '88, something like that, and she was taken with the way the marched.  
**Just give us a**
- 02:00 **quick description of one of them.**  
Of how they marched?

### **Well what were they wearing?**

Well they were wearing their shoes, all coloured shoes, I think they might've been coloured red and creamy socks and a big pom-pom on the side and then they're tucked in here and they're up here with their bloomer pants like and then their uniform, and wear the rifle on it and then the hat with a thing over the side here with a pom-pom on it, and that's about all I remember of them. Anyway we weren't making much sense and all of a sudden a big tall fellow came out

02:30 from the doorway up there and he said, can I help you? I nearly dropped dead, you know, it was the Prince what's his name, whoever he was, Prince Henry or something.

### **Prince Philip's father?**

Yeah. No, he's one of the, not him.

### **Who was it?**

No. It was a young prince, a really young prince, he's only about 30. Michael.

### **Michael.**

Yeah, Michael. He said, "Can I help you?" We said, "Oh yes, look we're lost," and he said, "Are you from the troop ship just came in?" We said, "Yes."

03:00 He said, "OK, and you don't know where you're going?" We said, "No, we're on a red sticker and we've lost it." We've got taken off the track somewhere. He said, "Well it's too dark for you now to go around the coastline and have a look for it." He said, I know where you're going, but" he said, "It's too hard for you to get to," He said, "Just go behind here to the Olympic Stadium," this big Olympic Stadium, you know, the ones they had the Olympics in. He said, "Just go around that, at the back you'll find a great big paddock," which is used as a

03:30 racecourse sort of, and he said, "Camp in there for the night and see how you go." So we said, "All right." So we went around there, found the spot, it was good and we looked over the road and there was a café, and so late at night, you know, we bowled over the road and pushed the door open and people went, ah. The Greeks looked at us with amazement, they thought we were going to shoot them or something. Anyway I said, look, I said, all we're after is some food, you know, food. So

04:00 we didn't know Greek and they didn't know Australian. Anyway the fellow who was there he came out and the poor old cow, his shoes, there was nothing in them, there was a bit, his toe sticking out here, worn right out and everything and that and his wife was, oh they were both shabby, you know, but I understood later on that they didn't have any food and nobody was giving them food and they had to get where they could, you know, and this was when we found out that the Gestapo [German Secret Police] had put 5th column in there because when we left Alexandria they were

04:30 marking all the things off. They transferred that to whoever it was that the bombers came and bombed those particular ships and when we got into there they were there again, different ones over there marking which boats came in and where they were and all that sort apparently. So we went out to this camp and that night they dropped a bomb on the one that had all explosives. Oh did it make a mess. It blew Port Piraeus nearly away. Didn't kill many people I don't think but it ruined a lot of boats that were beside it, you know.

05:00 So we camped in this place and we went over to this café and said to the lady about it, and she said, you (UNCLEAR). I couldn't understand what, I said, eggas, eggas, do you know what eggas? Chook, WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK , WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK , WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK , WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK . I get you, and the old boy came out see and he said, (UNCLEAR), and I said, yeah (UNCLEAR). So we were getting a big one of those whatever it was. So I looked at him and I said, "No good." He said, "No, no good, no money," something

05:30 to that effect, so I said, "She'll be right." I went out to the truck, I went out to him and I put my hand like that, so mine's 9 inches see, I went 9 and 12, yeah, all right, he'll take a size 8 or 9. Went out to the truck and brought in army boots for him and he looked, his eyes went like this and he shook like anything and I said, "They're yours, for you." He took his other ones off, oh beauty. Anyway they fed us like kings that night, and so we had to go early in the morning so we gave

06:00 them, we got a little bit of Greek money that we'd picked up somewhere in Alexandria before we left I think, we were going to be smart alics, you know. We weren't as smart as one of our blokes at Tobruk, he robbed a bank there and he had thousands and thousands. Oh God, and we went to Greece he just put it into the Italian bank that was running over there, sent all the money home to his mother. Another story later on, and so we took off and we get to this beautiful coastal resort just like Surfer's

06:30 Paradise and that. You know, it was magnificent it was, and it was a place where at that moment the Greeks were fighting the Italians up in Albania and all their wounded were coming back and that, and it was snow and sleet and rain, oh it was cold as hell up there. And anyway they brought them back to down here and had a hospital there for them, so we moved to this camp at Daphne and it was good and we were able to go swimming and everything because our main body wasn't there. They were

07:00 coming on about the 10th. We got there on the 2nd or something and they've come on the 10th, but in

the meantime we had to take our trucks in to Athens and we went into a place and they just had big arms that came out with spray, you know spray gun things, and they just moved them. They were all set more or less and when you drove your truck through one arm came down like that, the other arm went out like this, another went like that and they camouflaged the truck in about five minutes and just drove out green and brown and that for in

- 07:30 the mountains up there, and so that was good. We thought we were going to be there for hours so we had a good day having a look around, in Athens having a look around and so anyway we got back and I said, I'm going down to the hospital to see how the blokes were down there. So I went in the hospital and oh yes, the cases I saw there made you sick, gee, so I didn't spend much time there, but we were camped right near and old farmer that was
- 08:00 there. He was a nice old bloke and he had a nice daughter, you know, and she said, I help anytime, you know. So they'd do anything for you the Greeks, but at the same time we didn't know then if they were 5th columnists or not. Later on we didn't trust any of them, but we put, that's not the right thing because a lot of them were good, you know, but a lot of them weren't either. And so we had up to the 10th I think it was and then
- 08:30 our officer, our head officer came, 'Kanga' Wilson, Major Wilson, he was the head director of Australian Paper Mills and he went back to it after the war like as a chief director, and he said, "Right fellas, we're right, the trucks are all done, we're all ready, first thing in the morning we're off." Said, righto. So we took off for up the northern front then and we said, "Where are we going sir?" He said, "I don't know." We knew he knew but he
- 09:00 didn't tell us, so we got a fair way up and the mountains were just like this, you know, and down this way and that, and it got dark and that, so he said, all right, well we only drive by a tail light now. So we only had little tail lights on the back of our cars so we had to keep right up close and watch that tail light, and the one in front had little pilot light in the front down on the ground and he was our leader and we just followed these around the mountainside. Oh gee, when we came back I said, "Oh, how'd we drive over these?" And so we got up to a
- 09:30 place called Kalambaka which now is called Meteora which is where the monks are up in the mountains, up in the top of them. They climb these, well they used to have a little winch that came down and put a little cage, you stood in the cage and then they winched you up and you swung out like this up 2,000 feet to go up. When we went back this time afterwards we went up and I said to them, the monk up there, "You still got the cage down below?" And he said, "No, look," and he pushed the button
- 10:00 and whoosh up came this bloomin' thing and he pushed the button, whoosh down it went and it was beautiful. So we had, a road was built right up to it then. We used to go up by donkey see, so, or this cage, so we went up and when we were going up I was sitting on this side of the truck and we were going up and way down there was about 2,000 feet down there, you know, and I, when we got up the top I said to the driver, I could've sworn your outside tyres were over the road. He said, "They were but don't tell the others, will you?"
- 10:30 **Now we'll probably want to cover the Greek campaign...**
- Yes.
- In a bit more detail, so we won't go into too much. I know a lot happened in Greece.**
- Yeah.
- You were forced to withdraw, you blokes, and a few experiences of your own too. Let's take it now from withdrawing from Greece.**
- You don't want to know anything about in fighting and that, no?
- We'll do that in a lot more detail.**
- Yeah. Well when the withdrawal of Greece came
- 11:00 the engineers, their motto is "build and destroy," but also "first in, last out," so when we go in and take up mines and do bridges and all that, but when it comes to retreating we're the rear guard and we retreat to make sure everybody comes before we blow bridges and roads, so this applied. Now we had three companies there, the 2/1st, 2/2nd and 2/8th, and there was Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Albania so we all had one, and the first ones to come back,
- 11:30 the Germans came through at a place called Vevi Pass which is on the Yugoslav side of Bulgaria. Bulgaria is up here but we didn't go to Bulgaria, they stopped at Mount Olympus and up here like this, and Vevi is here and Florina is there and Yugoslav is there, so Vevi's here, but that was a big battle from all these. And there was all the New South Wales, New Zealand regiments there. Victorian 19th Brigade went up to Yugoslavia and the 6th, 17th Brigade
- 12:00 went up to the Albania area from Kalamata up to Grevena and that area there, and so engineers are part of the 6th Division, they don't belong to anybody. Whoever needs them gets them, you know, so we had to go up to the, the river up near Vevi and blow a bridge for them, that was the 16th. Their other 16th engineers were busy doing other jobs, so then we did that, came back, we lost

- 12:30 a man there. Never had anything like that happen before. We blew the bridge and a bit of steel girder flew through the air 200 yards and embedded in there, killed him. So we came back and the next thing we had, we had to go up to the Albania, to Grevena out the Albanian front. There was an engineer, 2 engineers out there and they were really nice blokes they were, and there was a tunnel had to be blown and quite close to
- 13:00 this tunnel there was an engineer depot with explosives and all that sort of stuff in it. Sir John Holland do the bridges all around Melbourne and all that and everywhere, Holland Construction Company, well John's his son and Sir John was my officer and so he had to go out and review that this bridge was, you know, what they would do with it, so he spoke to the British colonel
- 13:30 that was there and he said, "OK, well we'll go down the engineers' depot, we'll load up all we can of explosives works and put them in there and see what we can do with it." So he went down there, got all the explosives, put them in, blew the, and when he saw later on this officer back in Alexandria he asked him what happened to the hill that was up at Grevena, he said, "Oh my goodness," he said, "It blew up all right, the tunnel went, the train went and half the mountain went." So that was there, then the next one we had we had to come back,
- 14:00 get some barbed wire and everything for the 19th Brigade, 2/11th Battalion and we had to go up and take it up to them at Elasonna where General Blamey [Thomas Blamey, Australian general] had his headquarters at Elasonna which was back from Florina coming back down to Greece, got the barbed wire for there, no sooner we dropped into the camp to deliver it and he said, "What are you doing here?" And we said, "Delivering the barbed wire you ordered." He said, "I ordered that two days ago," he said, "See what's over there coming down that mountain?" And Grevena was up here and then it went down in a low valley and then way
- 14:30 up in a great big one over there. There's all the German tanks coming down the thing, it was you know four hours away most probably from him, but he said, "It's no good to us now, either throw it off or take it back with you." So we said, "We'll take it back, no use throwing it off here," so we took it back and then we got lost, couldn't find our company then, they'd all moved. So we were in 'Walter Wellies', you know the Walter Wellies? Big things they used to pull on, the woollen things, oh freezing it was, I'll tell you.
- 15:00 Your hands were just numb, and anyway I stunk and my mate stunk and I said, "I'm gonna have a wash, blow this." So we get to the river and it felt beautiful and cold and that, you know, so he said, "We've got no towels." I said, "I have," so I whipped these Walter Wellies off, froze me it did, and I come out, used those to dry myself and then threw them away. And yeah, that was just a little story, and then I came back and then we were lost and anyway we asked a Provo, we said,
- 15:30 you know, and we were told not to take information off anybody because at that time the Germans, what they were doing were taking our uniforms, wearing them and if they put, we had colours that had red underneath them, first ones were black over red, the next ones were blue over red, the next was white over red and the next was purple, the next was, brown, yeah, 2/11th that's another one, yeah, and so if they
- 16:00 knocked one off with the red and black, black and red they would go to a white and red and no one knew him and that's how they did, and then the Germans had their code with the help of the Greeks and all that of the places where they were taken prisoner, and that's where we lost a lot of prisoners, when they had about 20, 30 in a bunch they'd grab them, put them in a park and finish, they were prisoners and they had no uniforms, they had just scabby old clothes the Germans gave them. So we came back and we struck
- 16:30 two Provos and all the transport, not only mine, 50, 60 of us there were and we were all coming back. A lot of them had troops in them and a lot didn't. These two Provos pulled us up and said, "In there, we've got to wait for fresh orders now, we're not moving until we get fresh orders." So they just looked like ordinary 6th Divvies [Division] or Provos, you know, so we moved in and turned out they were Germans and so we were prisoners of war from half past 5.00 or 6.00 o'clock at night to about 11.00 at night. Didn't worry
- 17:00 me 'cause I hadn't slept for 10 days and I was snoring away like a beaut when he woke me, and he said, "Come on, start your engine up, we're going now," and I says, "I thought we were going to stay here?" And he says, "No, we're not staying here, they was two Germans that put us in the camp, they're dead now though," and one bloke went out from the ASC [Army Service Corps], and nature called him so he went out and heard them talking German. He came back and he says to the officer, "They're Germans those blokes," and the officer said, "Can't be." He said, "You come out and listen." They went out, the officer said, "Which one
- 17:30 do you want?" He said, "I'll have that and you have that," and they went, sliced their throats and left them and we came out, and that's a good story too.

#### **Did that happen a lot?**

Yeah, quite a lot, and they didn't want to kill us really. They wanted us to work for them wherever they wanted to work, you know, and I can say my experience, I was in about 30 to 40 dive-bombing raids, machine-gunning, everything,

18:00 and I didn't get hit with a bullet and yet they were coming straight at me and I could hear all the noise and I could feel the things hit me, you know, but I didn't get touched, no bullets hit me. I reckon they were using blanks and they were just scaring us, you know, and didn't show for years and years but now when we think of it we start shaking and that. So yeah, but that's what happened and so they captured thousands of our blokes and that there and the poor old 16th Brigade that was up there, they lost a hell of a lot.

18:30 Well then we waited, we had specific orders, times that the others had to be by, and they were told that they had to be at that spot by that time so as we could blow that bridge or blow that road or whatever it was, you know, and if they weren't there we gave them quarter of an hour. It all depends how close the Germans were, we didn't want them to get within 100 yards of us, and if they weren't back by that time well it was just unfortunate because all the others were back and we didn't want the Germans coming across the river

19:00 so we blew bridges and that. We did it once too often for this mob and then we had to make another bridge for them to come across so we had a donkey one side and we had a truck the other side and we found an old barge. It was just, you could put 15 or 20 blokes on it, I don't know, it wasn't a very useable barge, it was just a bit of floating debris. So we tied the donkey on that side, the truck this side, 20 blokes on it and heaving across and the donkey would pull the truck back that way, 20 more, back this way and over

19:30 and so they got across the river, and so we saved them actually.

**With the, just back being the prisoner of war episode, if your blokes hadn't discovered that the two Provos were Germans what do you think might've happened?**

We would've gone in another hour or so because, well the Germans were coming down pretty fast from up

20:00 Bulgaria, up past Mount Olympus down there.

**So those guys were just trying to stall you so that...**

Yeah.

**They'd then turn you in?**

Yeah, we used to give them, you know like we're good hearted, and we had petrol tins, we had boxes with petrol in it, the trucks would get two or three boxes of petrol, boxes with petrol in to do our trips and that with, and where the Greeks used to say, you give the drum, you know. So we gave them the drum and we used to get dive-bombed every morning, the first pop you know, and we didn't wake up to it, and then one

20:30 day one of the blokes saw this shining stuff up on the mountain and they used to get the tins and they'd go right around the mountain with the tins like that, and we were in the middle, and the dive-bombers used to just come over and shoom in the middle of us, and if we went to do a job going back towards Albania way or up to towards Yugoslavia way, they'd have old donkeys with or mules with, or I don't know what they were in the front, and they'd tip the trucks over with all the heavy metal and that and we couldn't get through. Oh they were cows, they were, but

21:00 I say not all of them are like that, a lot of them were very nice people.

**OK, well as I said, we'll come back and look at the Greek campaign in a bit more detail. You got out of Greece?**

Yeah, well see, we were, then we had to go back through Lamea which was a lovely town, which was called the straight section, then to Thermopylae and that was one of the hectic parts where the dive-bombers gave us hell, you know. Luckily we went

21:30 to the left and the ones that went to the right were all killed, hundreds of them, and then we went up Mount Olympus, Mount Thermopylae and that's where way way back they had a big battle with,

**The Persians.**

In the Roman days, the Persians, yeah. When we went over there in '89 they told us about Thermopylae and I thought I'll show Dulcie where we were, you know, 'cause you just go up like this, you know, and up the top and they went around that way and here's this Persian thing and I said, who wanted to see that? So anyway we get up the top of that

22:00 anyway, and we only had two mountain pieces left, they were old, not 25 pounders, they were a bit lighter ones they were, but they were accurate you know, and so right on the top of Mount Thermopylae as you come right up there was a big valley there which we called the Straight Six and that where all our men killed, not ours but the infantry, and there was a bridge over the other Fidores, Satorias, or Tasouris or something and we'd blown it but the Germans,

22:30 you know, they could build, they could, they just drove tanks up and pushed a button and a bridge went straight across the river and motor cyclists went across and that was it. In three minutes they'd get

across. We blew this one, I'll tell you about in a minute, so we were up there and they had these two guns right on the top and they opened sight, you know, instead of ranging it up with a sight feeder here looking and seeing what they were, they just left it so they could look straight down the barrel where they were going and then they just pushed it in, oh and they demoralised

- 23:00 the German there you know, and so they sent for the dive-bombers to come and get them but they camouflaged so well these guns, that they couldn't find them. So a reccy [reconnaissance] plane came over, it would've been 8.00 o'clock one night I guess, it was dark, and they opened fire on him, and the minute they opened fire they had it on their map where they were and they just pinpointed it like that the next morning, killed nearly all of them. Now we were told as soon as
- 23:30 we got on the top wasn't going any further, this is where you're going to fight to the finish and if you got out good luck, every man for himself, you know that sort of thing, and we were there for a couple of days and then we were told OK, you're not staying there, you're going, and so we had to go and just over and down the other side there was the Brailos Pass Bridge, Brailos Pass was just up from Thermopylae, the other side was the Brailos Pass Bridge. Anyway we had to blow that so we blew that and then we had to go and do a tunnel with a train in it a bit further on
- 24:00 so the 2/1st machine-gunners were allotted an area where they could watch what happened when that bridge was renewed by the Germans, and they just drove up with a tank and they just went joonk, and the bridge went straight across and the motor cyclist went up and they all came up. As they came around the corner the 2/1st said, good afternoon, straight over and down, killed them all. So that's the story they told us anyway when we met them up again later. So then our unit, one
- 24:30 of the parts of the unit went to this tunnel and blew it up with a train in it, and the funny part about it was when the war ended, when they got taken prisoners in Crete all the others that got taken, a few of ours got taken, one of them decided to get off at Mount Olympus when they called for volunteers to help the wounded, because blokes were laying all on stretchers all the way along on the bottom and not enough orderlies to look after them, so this Johnny Holden, he was a sergeant, he died the other day too, he got off the truck and went to help
- 25:00 them. So how he got out I don't know, but he went to Crete and we didn't, and he started building a compound and that for them over there and when they came back, the train, we'd blown the railway tunnel and all the train so they couldn't go by train up to the top of northern Greece where they were going to, so they had to hitchhike it, you know, in little trucks and walk and all sorts of things and they said, those blasted engineers, if we only, and he was in amongst it.

25:30 Yeah, so from then we

**So you didn't go to Crete. Where did you go, where were you taken after Greece?**

Well from there after doing that Brailos Pass we got taken down Corinth Canal, over the Corinth Canal into Peloponnesus and went through the Peloponnesus and it was night time then and all the Greeks down there belted all our windscreen in and belted daylight and cursed us and abused us and everything, you know, cowards, running, why don't

- 26:00 you stay? Anyway we went on further then we saw another Provo, right, but we had the instance with the other one back there, so the sergeant in charge of the transport and that, Don Hr he was, he walked up and he unloosened his revolver like right here and he went up and this, they all talked perfect English, that was their trouble see, and he said, "Where you going?" And he said, "We know the route, we're going down here," and he said, "You're going
- 26:30 to Kalamata [Kalambaka], but you don't go that way, you go this way." "No," he says, "It's down this way." The Provo says, "Look, I know this back to front, it's down that way," and he said, "Danke ['Thanks' in German]," and the German said, "Danke," and he went, plonked him, down he went, "Thanks." And so we just went on and we put all our trucks undercover down below there. We weren't allowed to destroy them then because we might use them again and we slept in a drain. Normally
- 27:00 it'd be flooded with water, but we all had to sleep in there, and we all had turns for about an hour waking one another to see, a little light that just went, and that was it. And this fellow was on about half past 10.00 at night, he gave us a shake and he said, "Right, all on your feet," and we went to the officer and the officer says, "Right, all drivers over and fix their trucks up now," so we drained all the oil, switched the engine on, punctured all the tires with the bayonets and left them,
- 27:30 and then we came back in the joint, and it was a sad sight then because we went to the wharf and the HMS Hero was there waiting to pick us up and the poor old Jewish people had come over as our labour party on various things, they weren't allowed to get on the boats. They put the machine-guns in front of them every time they moved and pushed them right back against the wall, and they ought to taken prisoner, you know, that was the sad part. But we went on the Hero and we were right down, the Plimsoll line come up and with water nearly coming over our edge
- 28:00 and we left about 11.00 o'clock. A bit after 11.00 we were out about 100 yards or so and the paratroops started dropping on the bridge, on the wharf where we were at Kalamata, Kalambaka, and we had to go out to a boat. We got on the Dilwarra and we had to climb up the nets you know. Well imagine after we had no energy, we were as tired as anything and we had all our, we had to carry all our rifles and everything and we got up the top. Anyway poor old infantry as they came up, we were

- 28:30 helping them up, and they were dead on their feet they were, and they just laid down like that, you know, and we said, we've been instructed to mount the guns anywhere around on the decks and everything like that, so we got their guns and we told them like if you want it back a bloke up here or somebody just here, they got yours and the other infantry part that were on were further on than the last infantry up the front. I struck it for one of theirs right on the front of it, you know. Anyway
- 29:00 they came and gave us a bit of 'Larry Dooley' the next morning, but it wasn't too bad, navy shook them off, and we were within more or less nearly in sight of Crete when, they have beautiful red suns like that over there as you know, you know, oh magnificent, we were going right into it and I was right on the end of it, you know and I was blinking and blurring and that and I thought I saw this spec coming, you know, and it got a bit bigger and bigger and anyway I says to my mate, "I think there's a plane coming in there, can you hear it?" And we couldn't
- 29:30 hear it. He says, "No," and I said, "I better alert everybody," I said, "Righto, bandit coming over through the sun." About three minutes time we could see him then, he was coming on. Well we had the infantry rifles, Bren guns like, and they all had tracer bullets in them because when you have a tracer you fire one shot and you know where it's gone and you just pull the trigger and every one goes the same direction, whereas with the other you fire you don't know if the bullets gone there or there or where, so I had tracers in mine and so did the others,
- 30:00 and as soon as he came down he came within 100 yards of us and I gave him the works. I could see them going right in his stomach, you know, belly. Nothing happened and then he flew around that way and then he came back this way, but as he did he started pouring smoke, but the others had been pounding into him too so I don't know who got him, and he went over the top of us and he dropped two bombs just as he approached and I could see them coming down and I thought, oh holy mackerel, and the old captain just steered the boat like that and they landed beside
- 30:30 us, whoosh, sprung our plates and that, we went up in the air like that and just came down and then just went over like that, you know, so we went to Alexandria drinking tea or anything we had like that see, we weren't standing straight up.

**So the boat was on a...**

Instead of being like that it was like that, and they said, "We can't take you to Crete now because you'll be a target for the planes when they come over if you go there." So the plane went on, dropped two more bombs beside the next boat, the Costa Rica and they didn't hit it, but they landed

- 31:00 right beside it, sprung its plates that bad that it just started sinking, you know, and they had all battalions and medical men and all sorts were that on there and the Heroine, we had British 8 class destroyers, the Heroine, the Hero and Hercules and all those there, but we came off on the Hero but the Heroine was the one that came back and got all these on it and only one bloke got killed on it and he just mis-timed, you know, because the waves were rough and the boats were going up like that and down 6, 8 feet high
- 31:30 and they yelled, jump, and instead of that he delayed a minute and he jumped the next time and the boat came up squashed him, you know. So he was the only one that was killed on that one, and the City of London the other one, it didn't get affected at all but it came to Athens with us, it came to Alexandria with us and then of course the Crete business started and they'd all, gee they gave Larry Dooley. The Germans were pouring troops across on rafts and little motor boats and all sorts of things, but the
- 32:00 navy just went straight through and rammed them, you know, straight through them, sunk them all. They brought the aircraft in over Olympi and Suda Bay and all those places over in Crete. This is what my mates have told me.

**Well we'll just concentrate on you at the moment.**

Yeah.

**You're taken back to Alexandria?**

Yeah.

**And from Alexandria?**

Alexandria then they checked us in our name our number and any qualifications that we had or anything to make sure

- 32:30 that it was us and then that went on a list that went back to Australia, rescued, you know, and then they sent us to Palestine again back to our old training ground, and Blamey was there and Blamey said, well fellows, thanks for the mighty job you did. See, we had a lot of battalions with us, a lot of other battalions were, they all got taken prisoner or were killed, and we had about a third of our 20,000 blokes there, and he said, I'm going home to Australia and I'll get you reinforcements and he came home
- 33:00 to Australia and he was unable to get any reinforcements because of the fact that Curtin [John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia] said, look, the Japs are going to attack us here and we haven't got enough here now as it is, and Blamey was a really, I always found him a really nice bloke, you know, and he said

OK, we'll get another way of doing it. So he came back, apologised to us and said, look fellows, I'm sorry, but we can't get anybody from Australia, but don't fret, I'll get some, so he went down to base and all the fellows that were in base were fit,

33:30 good, like accountants and post office and all these blokes with good arms, good legs and everything. He just said, "You're out, you're in the army now, go and get a uniform and go up and join what battalion you're put in," and all the fellows in hospital with arms off, legs off, eyes out, wounds, bad wounds and that, they all got transferred to do the jobs in the base parts, so we picked up about 2,000 or something from that and so we, it was a little bit better, but the 7th Division went up to

34:00 Syria so we were only reserve for them up there, but do you want to know that now?

**No. Let's bring you back to Australia.**

So we were in Syria and then the ones who were up there beat the Vichy French and we all went up to the Foreign Legion Barracks and had a celebration and that, and then we were told we were coming back again so we came back and got taken back to Suez, and

34:30 we went out for about an hour and then they brought us back again and took us off, dunno for what reason but I think it was because the Japanese had 70 or more subs in the sea there, you know, around

**In the ocean?**

Yeah, in the ocean, and the navy didn't have enough to sort of look after us. Anyway we got a boat that had a, it was a chitral and it was a proper things

35:00 for submarines and we went out with that one anyway. And so we went to Colombo. We were going to Burma, that's what Churchill wanted us to go to, we were going to Burma so he said, and when we got to Colombo our officer came down and he says, "Well, you're all going home to Australia now," and we said, "Oh, you beauty, why can't we go to Burma?" You know, and he says, "Because Curtin told Churchill to get his own troops, he's done enough damage to you already." I don't know if that should go on, but anyway

35:30 so we came home to Australia, but not all of us came home to Australia. They split us three ways and the 17th Brigade went to Colombo, the 16th Brigade went to Kokoda Trail and we went to Darwin, and we had, after the 19th of February '42 we got there about June and we were there till must've been the end of the year anyway, into the next year I think, and then we got called back and sent to the Atherton Tablelands to do

36:00 training, jungle training, and oh jeez, they gave us all sorts of junk to eat. We didn't know what it was and they asked us what it tasted like, and it nearly all tasted like fish or chicken and when they told us afterwards, ooh, you know. So anyway we did our training and that and then the Kokoda boys came back. They had the big (UNCLEAR) and the Colombo ones had their ones, and if it hadn't have been for an American air force fellow that broke all the

36:30 code and sacrificed himself the Japanese fleet would've taken Colombo and then they would've come down here too, but he got a message through and the bombers and the fleet came out and wrecked that convoy of the Japs that were up there so that saved that for the day. So we went to Darwin and we had about 43 of the 60 raids over the period we were there, and we arrived at Katherine and when we got to Katherine they changed all our tactics all together because we had to

37:00 refurbish the hospital that was there, 2/1st hospital and I had to build parts of a new part for it also. So as we, one platoon were doing that another platoon was doing something else, building a bridge, and another platoon was doing something else. I think they built an abattoirs there as a matter of fact, and a bridge and we did the hospital and things like that and then we were shifted up to Adelaide River. We got to Adelaide River and we were told that

37:30 all the men that were here had to be taken back to, 'cause they ran in terror from Darwin. Air force, navy and army couldn't come who was gonna be boss, as I read it anyway, and said, you've got to take these back now and you can make them your labour force if you want them. So our officer was there. He was made in charge of all work for looking after the defence of Darwin, everything that was in

38:00 there, nobody did it without his authority. So we went back there and all the jobs we got of all kinds under the sun. Well first of all we had to build trenches and everything for machine-guns pits and mortars and all that sort of, and to take the troops in when air-raids come and all that. So that was one of the first things we did. We had to make places for the anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns to go on to, so we built concrete and bases for them, anti-aircraft guns. We had to do road work,

38:30 bridges and all sorts of things there, and anyway, we had 40 odd raids and one particular job we had to go to, we had to go out to the west coast to where later on they put a radar station, and when you're in Darwin and the monsoons and that come, you're hit with about 16, 17, 18 inches of rain and it just floods everything and, you know, and this particular one we went out to and we had to build,

39:00 and the Darwin River was flooding and it was going, so we had to put a bridge over it so as we could get out to this western part of the sea, out the bay out the western side of Darwin. So we went through all this road, we were up to here in water most of the time, but we were building 6 or 10 or 12 feet lengths of, cutting trees down and making that into timber and then putting it in, as we went along similar to

bridges we kept going, you know, so we put a

- 39:30 corduroy road right out to there, big thick timber that would take trucks and that. So we got out to there and we build this bridge and then we had to hold that then, and this particular night we were there they, a message came to us, "You've got to be on alert tonight," because everyday we'd heard paratroops were gonna be dropped, you know, and they said, "Well tonight's the night they're gonna be landing," because afterwards we found out the Japs had landed a force out where this radar station
- 40:00 was going before it went there, and they reconnoitered the place and that and they reckon that's where they were going to land, from intelligence, you know. So we were out there, the only peanuts out there. Anyway we had areas of about 50 yards or each more, we had, I was 50 yards, my mate was 50 and another one was 50 and we had little bits of string to our finger, if we saw anything we pulled and he felt it and he just stopped and then if it was bad we pulled it twice and then he'd come back, and then he'd do the same,
- 40:30 we'd all come back. So this particular time the string goes, I pull the string and it goes up to this other bloke and the next minute, what it was I'd heard thump, thump, thump, thump, just like parachutes landing, you know, oh gee, you know, and they only sounded about 100 yards away. So I pulled it twice and they all came up to me and I said, "Listen to this, what do you reckon?" And they said, "Yep, she's on." So our sergeant was in the tent and he had a big one around his toe, big toe, a wider one, so they pulled that and he raced out to us
- 41:00 and he said, "What's the matter?" And we said, "Listen to that," and he said, "Oh God," back to there and got all the machine-guns and mortars out and everything and they're waiting for them to come through and it's dark as anything it is, and we come back together like, we all go behind trees and that, we load up everything we've got, and then we hear this thump thump coming closer and closer and closer and closer, said, oh gee, I said, "Well thanks mate, we've had a good time, haven't we?" He said, "Yes, we have," and the next minute a kangaroo goes, all these
- 41:30 kangaroos went past us, and oh.

## Tape 3

00:23 **All right, well let's, you've spent a lot of time in Darwin, and then was it to the Atherton Tablelands?**

Yes.

00:30 **For retraining?**

Yes.

**And then from Atherton Tablelands you're up to New Guinea to Wewak?**

Yes, Aitape.

**Aitape.**

Aitape.

**Tell us about, take us through your New Guinea campaign.**

Yeah, well we went on a Dutch boat I think, Bonteeko it might've been, something like that, anyway, and we went through and around Port Moresby and up through to Buna, Sunda, Gorari, Sanananda and up to Aitape where we got off

01:00 and it was a beautiful plantation there of coconuts, you know and that, and we went in to relieve an American division that was there holding 350,000 Japs, I think it was 350, and they had them at bay out there and they were right along the coast to Wewak and all that, and also from Wewak side down the other side they were retreating back that way coming back that way so they were going to have a big set up there, you know, and there were two big islands just off from,

01:30 but on the way to Wewak, Muschu and Kyushu, I think it was, no that's, Kyushu doesn't seem right,

**That's in Japan.**

But Muschu is one of them anyway. And when we sent commandoes in there and only one got out, the others all got killed, and he brought information back, and they had all the Singapore badges and colour patches and all that, so they must've come from Singapore when they finished and went to the island of Muschu,

02:00 but they had beautiful islands off New Guinea. One was up off Aitape where we went and it was a full plantation, a full island of, gee, what's those big yellow things? Paw paws.

**Paw paws.**

Yeah, and we made ourselves sick on those, but the naval craft of the Americans, their landing craft, used to come in their and this was where we were sent out the night before, the day before and we

02:30 were making our first landing down at Daguair halfway towards Wewak. This was well into the campaign, you know. So going back to Aitape, we had a little bit of run down with the Americans on what was what and that and then we sort of started on our advance more or less, so we put a bridge across a little river that was there and some of the 2/4th Battalion went across it and it was undulating ground where they went in

03:00 and the Japanese let them get across over about the third or so hill and then they upped them, let them go with machine-gun fire, you know, and anyway, then they'd stop and the 2/4th went forward and we lost our two-up spinner that was in there, the 2/4th, a big bloke he was, that was where he first saw brutality, yeah. And they killed him and then they strung him up and you know, cut him to pieces, and from

03:30 then on the 2/4th said to everybody, "No prisoners taken, you right? They all get killed and we don't care who they are, kill them." So that's what happened all the way through New Guinea with our blokes, and hardly any prisoners were taken. They didn't take our blokes prisoners. We built roads and then we had to build bridges but we had, not only bridges we built first of all a temporary bridge, which is a kapok assault bridge

04:00 with things about as big as those two cushions there with the hooks on each end and you push that one into the water with a fellow sitting on the end with a machine-gun and the two little ropes out up stream and down stream ropes on it, so he was the guiding things, you know.

**So we're talking something about 5 feet wide?**

No, the length of that. No, that's the length of them, 6 foot more or less.

**6 Foot.**

Yes. Say 6 foot yeah, and they had a hook this way and a male on that way and a female one this way,

04:30 you know sort of, so we put one in the water with the bloke on the front and the two ropes back to the places on the land, and the next minute we hooked another one in their and pushed it so it was like that. That's how they worked, like that and 60 feet we'd do in about 11 minutes, and if it was (UNCLEAR) away we'd say, "Downstream" and downstream would pull it and the boat'd come straight, the kapok assaults they call them, and the other one would let it go until they got across and then the machine-gunner got over the other side, and then

05:00 at the same time they were doing that we were unfolding boat, pontoon boats for them to get in to take across so we, that would be then pushed aside, we'd take it back and dismantle it and then we'd put these pontoon boats in which was a similar thing, but they had on the decks of them, they had a thing across here and all you did was you hooked this in, pushed it out, hooked it in, pushed it out, hooked it in, and the same again upstream and down and they went across, but we put more men in that so the section or platoon of men could go across on the pontoons then, right across.

05:30 When that was finished we put a more permanent one in, a more, you know, better one with little rails across the top, but they had to go on left foot right foot. First one that went on, if he went on his left foot the next bloke had to go right so it was going like that all the way across. If two got on it they'd roll.

**How did you learn to use these things?**

We got engineer training.

**Training.**

Yeah, and then the last one, we didn't do the last one, some of them we did, but we didn't do them all, and the last one we had what we called a 2 2 Field Park

06:00 Company in there and they were heavy equipment and they had pile drivers and bulldozers and all sorts of things, and one

**Did you have to make up some things for yourself?**

Yes, everything was made up sort of thing. A lot of things weren't there. With us, we didn't have to do the real permanent bridges, so the semi-permanent bridges was OK, we could do that and it was a matter of pulling trees down with adzes and that, making cuts so as another bridge went, another pont went in to it, we could do that, but when it got to the big bridges,

06:30 you know the big pylons about this big and that. This is where the Field Company came, Field Park Company came in and then they, we just dug into, and the one thing that we did was we had to cut the water off from the river so as we could, you know, do holes and everything for these to go down in then, and oh did we have some beautiful prawns, they were great big prawns about this big, but they had crocodiles in them they didn't tell us about, the stinkers. All this thing in Darwin was exactly the same, they didn't tell us

07:00 there was crocodiles where we were shooting duck and things like that, they didn't tell us, but they told us the main part actually but not the little parts that worried us. And so then the big bridges were put in and all our big transport could come across them, you know.

### **How do you divert the river?**

Well when you divert the river you've got to go up there and you've got to put in a 'bully', a bulk head. So you cut trees down again and put stocks in this side,

- 07:30 push the logs across, stock it, logs across that side and it trickles through, but it doesn't flow through, but normally when we went across the bridges at those times they weren't in flood. A couple of times they were in flood but then you're in trouble if they're in flood because you can't put a bridge in. Christ, it'd just wipe it away, so when we had these semi-assault bridges we called them and the semi-permanent they were, if a flood came like 16 inches of rain it was
- 08:00 5 foot high of water coming down, you know and they just went, wiped them away straight out to sea. Well we had to go then and make another for it, a heavier one and using steel, so it was a steel one a bit up from the semi, just under the permanent one and light trucks and trailers could go through, but not heavy things, and so the bigger heavy ones were (UNCLEAR) by the other company. This particular part we went to was further up,
- 08:30 was a burial ground. We had a cemetery where we had to dig a lot of graves there and plant a lot of bodies. The Danmap River was about, a good over 60, 80 feet wide, was a massive river and a very strong flowing current and that in it, and I used to, we had to, if you wanted to go across and see the pictures, the pictures was on one side of the river and we were on the other side and we had to swim across with your ground sheet with all your clothes in it
- 09:00 and when you got to the other side you'd put your clothes on and go to the pictures and the same thing back. This night we heard it was gonna flood and I went up the Salvation Army, this Colonel Davis that was there I got friendly with him earlier and then we were real good friends towards the end, and I said to him, "You should shift for me you know, you're gonna go through." I said, "Those second machine-gunners if that river can't stand it'll go straight through them" which it did, and he said, "God's got me, he'll look after me," and I said, "You blokes have a lot of faith," and he said, "I've got faith." I said, "All right," so you wouldn't credit it,
- 09:30 the river came down like that and it just, when it got near him it diverted like that and that and here he was left like you, up in the island and it was racing past him, you know. When I came back down two days later and I saw him I said, "By gee, I think I'll join your club." Yeah, we had (UNCLEAR) but then the brutality went on, it was terrible from then on and the Japanese just didn't show any mercy and we didn't either.
- 10:00 I didn't go into much of the battles. I was (UNCLEAR) with driving, I most probably went past where they were laying 'doggo' in the jungle and that, except for one night. We'd had a hard day building a bridge and we were real tired but it was a beautiful moonlight night and I wrote a song about it while I was there on this particular night and when we went to go back into our room we were lucky it wasn't blown up because they blew our water tank up just as we were getting off the beach to go back up into our room.
- 10:30 They put stuff around and the water tank went over and they had grenades all around their beds. They were going to blow the whole lot up but we didn't get it. Another was at Christmas time. It doesn't pay to be a hero, you know, and at Christmas time I was on guard duty on the beach and it was dark as anything it was and you had the jungle and 20 feet of sand down to the beach, you know. I'd go along here, we'd go along there and my mate came back to me and he said...oh, we were told not to shoot until you see the whites of their eyes, you
- 11:00 see, and we come together at this point and he said, "Did you see all those Japs in the scrub back there?" I said, "No, I didn't go that far." He says, "Come, we'll go back and fly them." So we come back, he says, "I've got a Tommy gun [Thompson submachine gun], you go behind me and cover me," so he went in. When he comes to these all these bloomin' look like little Japs eyes staring, bloody these flies went all over, these fire flies, you know, everywhere they did. I said, "You idiot." So anyway I said, "You're not going to go with me again." So
- 11:30 anyway he copped it for the Christmas time guard, and we had a whole tin shed built at the back down from where this water tank fell and I came down, I says to him, "I reckon somebody's in our shed down there" and he says, "You reckon?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well let them have it, we don't want it," and I said, "But you know, we should do something." He said, "No, no use being a hero, let them have it." So they pinched all our Christmas stuff and when the next morning come the officer said, "Were you on guard last night?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Didn't you hear anything?" I said, "No,
- 12:00 was there something going wrong?" He said, "All our Christmas stuff's been stolen." I said, "Whoever got it deserved it most probably." He said, "That's no way to talk." So we went further on and on then and it got a bit harder without, one of our platoon's had to then go with the 2/4th Battalion because they had unexploded mines and bombs and all that our blokes had to de-louse before they could go through,
- 12:30 and they had to cut their way through the jungle. The Japs were a wake-up to that you see, and it was impenetrable, you know, you couldn't see. You'd just cut here and then if you were lucky you didn't see

a face in front of you, but there were spiders there. I'm not kidding, when you cut the thing there was a big cross like that there like that and this little dot in the middle, and as soon as you faced it, it just went like that, and the legs went out here and the body came that big. It scared the daylight out of me the first time I saw one, but anyway we just swacked

- 13:00 it down with our (UNCLEAR) you know, just pushed it down and walked through and we were right. They put swinging mines in there, the Japs, and when you cut this thing the mine would swing, you know, and after it got a little bit of momentum, it had acids in them that ate through this copper wire again and it struck, once it broke and the striker pin went forward and went into the detonator and exploded, and a lot of the blokes were, just took all this off from here and left the bottom part of them. So our blokes had to go through and make sure that that was all right too.
- 13:30 And then another place my mate, I thought he was gonna do, Harry New, I think he's got his name in there. He was a sergeant and they were following up the 2/4th when the 2/4th got deviated and they went forward another couple of hundred yards and they found five or six Japs having a swim on the beach, and a little hut on the side there. So Harry waited till they all got together.
- 14:00 So he said to his blokes, "One of you go around the back and one down here stay, and we'll go forward." So he yelled out to them, hey, and they all looked around like that and as he did he opened up with a Bren gun and killed them all, you know, except one, he ran away. So they thought the bloke at the back would catch him, but he didn't catch him, and for some reason he came back, he went into the hut, lifted the board on the floor like you see in the pictures, went down underneath and pulled the board down. Anyway they came back in the room and I don't know what he did, but apparently they heard noise under there and they lifted
- 14:30 the board up and when he stuck his head up, bang, they shot him and they pulled all the others in, and this is the worst part of it. I said to him, "You shouldn't have done that," and they pulled them all in and, is this going on tape?

**Yeah. These sorts of things are important I think.**

Yeah, and when they dragged all the bodies back inside they set fire to the hut and burnt them all, you know, and I said, "You took their discs [identification tags] and that, didn't you?" And he said, "No, we didn't bother." I said, "Look, that's the first thing you've got to do with a dead

- 15:00 body, you take them off them and report it back." I said, "There's people in Japan most probably looking for those people there and they've got no record of them being killed or died or missing or anything."

**And what did your mate say to that?**

He said, "At that time we didn't think of it." So we went on then and we went further on and on and on and gradually when we first went there, what I didn't tell you about is, they split us all up and one brigade went over the hills in the Torricelli [Mountains] and the other brigades, two brigades went along the coast, so the 17th

- 15:30 went over there, which was the Victorians and the New South Wales and rest of Australia come this way. When we got down near Wewak they joined just about at 'Weary Eye' village, near Weary Eye village anyway, and that's where Ted, he won a VC [Victoria Cross] and he led the Anzac March this week, yeah I'll think of him after, but he got a VC for it anyway there, and we were building a big road through it, so again like in Darwin, to get to it we had to go through swamp and we had to make a
- 16:00 corduroy road there so we could take our jeeps and things through to build this road, and that's where we ended up at Wewak, and that's where the fighting ended and we were told it was gonna end. It was only Mount Shivarangu at the back there and the night that they, the 10th it was I think, and they said the war's over now practically. And that night the HMAS Swan lit up its fleet with
- 16:30 lights and everything, beautiful it looked and then the Japs opened up with their .105s from up in the mountain and God, they blasted all along the beachfront, you know, and we had all the artillery guns with us, hell of a lot of them, so the artillery officer said, "Righto, every bit of round blow into them," so you could here these, God blimey, it blew Mount Shivarangu just about away and I think about 4,000 Japs there, I think there was only about 10
- 17:00 that survived it all, and the others went around, they captured them and then they captured the general what was there, Tasaki and Hitachi, and they got for the war crimes, you know. But I had one occurrence on, I was the wireless operator and I used to go out in the scrub, and oh dear I didn't like it out there one bit. Anyway I didn't do guard duty so I used to be on the wireless and first thing in the morning LHQ from Melbourne would ring Townsville and then they'd ring me, you know, and I'd
- 17:30 pass the messages on. So I had to go up to the, this big road that we were building to the office, I was up there so it was near lunch time so I said to the cook, "Give us some food, I'll take it up to them." So I put it in and when I got up there I sat with my back to the jungle, you know, and they were all, and all of a sudden I saw the blokes look at me like that, and I said, "What?" And they pointed and there's a big Jap got his hand over on my shoulder, you know. I looked and nearly dropped dead. I turned around and I said, "Yeah?" And then four others came out and they
- 18:00 pointed to their tongue, they were hungry, you know. So this Harry New comes into it again, he was the sergeant there, right? And he said, "Give them some food," we had plenty of food there so they all sat

down and just shoved it in like this, you know, and you wouldn't believe three of them died there on the spot, yeah, and the other two we took down to headquarters for, you know, for examination. What do they do? Interpret them. No, something like that anyway. And

18:30 first time I'd ever seen a container, was a wooden container, it was full, big 12 foot by 8 foot and 8 foot, 6 foot high, no windows or anything in it and they locked the two of them in it that night and they were dead next morning so they didn't get any information from them anyway.

**Starvation, was it?**

They just died of no air, no oxygen.

**In the crate.**

It was hot.

**What about the other three?**

The other three just died because they hadn't had food and when you eat fast like that it blocks

19:00 everything up and takes the pressure off everything and you can't breath, they just died. That's what we were told if we were in trouble. So they taught us you know, as I said earlier, we did know what we ate but afterwards they said, "If you see these eat them, if you see that eat them, don't starve." And our blokes I know, my mate was in Singapore and he was from the 2/29th Battalion and the Japs came down and they came down

19:30 as trees. The first camouflage that they saw of them, and he said to his mate, "Those trees weren't there the last time I looked out there," and his mate said, "You're going woozo, you're bomb happy," you know, and anyway a little bit later he said, "Look, they're shifting again, there you are, can't you see them?" And he says, "No, you're seeing illusions," they look like this, and then he nudged him and said, "Look, look!" And all the trees were moving, and so they opened fire and then the Japs came, the ones that were behind them rushed through, came in

20:00 and killed everybody, bayoneted them and all that and he was laying there and the bayonet came down, he grabbed the bayonet, pulled the Jap down, garrotted him and then stabbed him with the bayonet but because he grabbed the bayonet it cut him right through both hands there and his hands were like that after the war, but not only that, they shrunk to that size there and they were like that, just little pebbles there they were, but anyway he escaped and he got down into the Chinese lines that were there and

20:30 they said, "Monsoon come, hurry up," so they had wire or fencing that went through where the river was and they said go in there and out that way and in there and out that way and lock yourself in to it, you know, and you'll be right. So he did as much as he could and these were all tied up with bandages and everything but they must've hurt him a hell of a lot. Anyway the monsoon went past and then they rescued him and somehow they got him to Colombo, and then we came home and I went around to see his mother and I said,

21:00 she told me the story, and I said, "How's he going?" And she said, "He's coming home soon, should be any time now. They sent me a telegram to say he's wounded and the next time go to Caulfield Hospital, so I'm just waiting for a message from him." And I went out and saw him and saw what it was, and in that two months or whatever it was, all this had shrunk up to about that size and he had little fingers out here and that and they were all bent over like that. But he was lucky.

21:30 **Yeah.**

Yeah.

**Now at the end of the war you're north coast of New Guinea.**

Yes, up near Wewak.

**And how did you get home from there?**

Well the war, on the 15th the war was definitely over and Tasaki and Hitachi were taken prisoner and then they nominated that that was right. So what happened was as you joined and went away you got points

22:00 for days that you were in, so I was up, well they wanted about 60 I think to go, and I was about 65 or something like that, but the officer that was a sergeant when we were at Darwin, I played two-up there and I threw 13 heads and I won so much money you wouldn't read about it, and I took it off everybody including the Allied Works Council and so they all said, lend us some money. I said, I don't

22:30 lend money, my Dad told me never to lend money. I said, all the money's in the centre there, what you want take, but give me an IOU ['I owe you'] for it, and they did it honestly, and I got nearly all the money back except one, and he was made a lieutenant in New Guinea and I kept going to him all the time and saying to him, don't forget you owe me that \$200, £200 and he says, "She'll be right, she'll be right." So I when it came to this 68 he was in headquarters and they picked the 60 that were going and he said, oh, a little

- 23:00 bit before that, I was the wireless operator and I got a message the day the war ended to say my Dad was seriously ill and not expected to live, from the HQ [Headquarters] to Townsville to me straight away and it said 'advise Sapper Jopling, father seriously ill, not expected to live, further tomorrow', and so I went to the OC and he was talking to this fellow and the other fellow said, "Can't you put him in the 60 and take someone out of it from there? Give them a sergeant or
- 23:30 something like that and keep him here." So that's what happened, they promoted a few blokes, took them off and I got in their place, and I went home on the first boat which was a dirty old tramp ship with rats about that big underneath. We were right down underneath. So the next morning I got another call from there and it said, 'advise Sapper Jopling, mother passed away this morning'. I thought, oh no, so straight away I gee'd, what we called gee'd back, you know da da da, straight back, 'query message', you know,
- 24:00 and within a few minutes it came back, 'apology, father not mother'. So from winning the two-up school and having that money owed to me I got on the first boat to come home, but if I'd waited for the second one I would've come home on an aircraft carrier, a dirty old tramp ship. And not only that when we come passed on Brisbane way coming home down to Townsville we hit the coral, and I was down below and you could hear it go, oh gee.
- 24:30 I brought a pair of Jap glasses home where you look in here and you see up here, you know. I've still got them down in the shed there. I'll find them, I'll bring them in Monday and show you. They got in the heat, when our blokes went through they had flamethrowers, you know, and they cooked a bit on the heat, the lenses went bonkers. So I pulled it apart, thought I'd fixed it but it skewiff again. I haven't seen them used for about 20 years. I took them to the races one day and you could see the jockeys right down, bring them right up close and you could hear
- 25:00 them saying, "This is my race, mate, you know, don't do that." You could nearly see them saying that, you know.

#### **Surely the jockeys don't do that?**

Yeah. No, they don't. I tell you about that Ceylon one, the jockeys don't do that, no. Back this, back that and this one's a dead cert.

#### **Well homecoming must've been a bit bitter sweet for you then?**

Well I had my brother. When we came back from Greece he was in the Tobruk show with the 14th, 2/14th Battalion and

- 25:30 he was the older but I claimed him, and they said, "OK, he can come back," so they brought him back from there to me, from Palestine. So I said to him, "Well look, this is the clue, when you come in they'll ask you what trade you're in. Tell them any trade you like and they'll give you money for that." He said, "All right," so when he went in they said, "Do you do any trades?" He said, "Oh yeah, I can do any trade, brick laying, all that," and they said, "Oh good, we're looking for somebody to make a few ovens for the cookhouse, for the bakery."
- 26:00 He came back to me and he said, "What did you do to me? He says, I've got to build a bakery now," and I said, "That's all right, I've got my mate here who knows all about them." So I introduced him to a mate and they were firm friends from then on and the fellow sat him down at night and he said to him, "Righto, this is what you do. You start off doing this, that, that and if they ask you how many bricks, that's how many bricks go there and that," and he told him the whole lot see. So when he went out to this unit to build it, the fellow said, "Have you built these before?" He said, "Oh yeah, we've built rough ones, not good ones, but rough ones." He said, "I want a good one here," and he said, "Oh well, all right, well first we've got
- 26:30 to get the bricks," so he took, he said, "How long do you want it?" This and that, the bloke said, "Oh he knows what he's doing," and walked away, you know. So with that Mattie, the one that he was talking to, had visited him out at this place when he had to come out in other transport, and he said, "How did you go?" And he said, "Well I'm up to building the damn thing now." He said, "I told him everything and he's quite happy." He said, "All right, well these are the traps you want to watch for," and he told him the traps to watch for, so he didn't do those and the ovens turned out beautiful and you used to get beautiful bread from it.
- 27:00 So he was made a baker, oven builder, you know.

#### **Two nights' apprenticeship.**

Yeah, two nights, that's more or less, yeah.

#### **And what about you?**

I was a silversmith, see. Hollowsmith I was with in the silverware trade, and I was apprenticed and I (UNCLEAR) the apprentice to go away and the old chap who was my boss was a First World War digger and he didn't hold me back and he said, "You come home and when you come home your job's still there." I said, "Good, thanks." So I went away and

- 27:30 they were looking for an assistant plumber and I said, "Well I was a silversmith," and he said, "We'll put you down as a tinsmith then," and I said, "All right." He said, "You get more money for it," so they put

me down as a tinsmith, and of course the plumber that was there said, Can you do anything, you know, make anything with your tinsmith?" I said, "What do you want?" And he said, "The cookhouse wants all the instruments," you know, pots and pans and dishes and cups and everything. I said, "Gee." He said, "Don't worry, I'll show you how to make them." So he showed me

28:00 how to make them. Between us we made a beautiful set for the cookhouse, and when officers used to come down, we made an officers' mess and all too, and when the officers come they said, "Jeez, where did you get these?" And they said, "Joe makes them down here." He said, "He couldn't make a set for us, could he?" So I was in business again, but if you don't try you can't succeed.

### **What did you do with all the money from the two-up game?**

I sent it home to my Mum and Dad because the Depression was still hitting them and my two brothers,

28:30 one went out to work as a milkman down in, he was the one that come overseas though, but he did, he went down to Gippsland and he was milking cows for a year or so and then he joined the 2/14th and came over. My other brother was a metallurgist with Rewalt's and 'cause they, steel was at premium and they didn't need a metallurgist. They'd take anything they wanted and if he went off crook at him they'd want to sack him, you know. So he became on the (UNCLEAR) too, but he worked for the

29:00 Council for \$10 a week doing up the parklands down in Albert Park, and I sent it home to my Mum and Dad. They had plenty of use for it. I didn't need it. Was a windfall though, wasn't it? Yeah.

### **When you finally made it home then, your father had just passed away?**

He'd been buried by then, yeah, (UNCLEAR) no good. We got taken to one of the camps outside of Sydney. During the war when I

29:30 came down from the Tablelands to do a wireless school at Marconi and I passed the tents and that with it, because in the scouts I learnt ropes, knotting, morse code and all this sort of thing, so I passed the test easy, and I met Dulcie one day down there, the officer that was at our school, on the Saturday he said to me, "Would you like to come to a turn out on tonight?" I said, "Where to?" He said,

30:00 "The Bondi School of Arts." He says, "Beaut, you'll pick up a partner easy there." I said, "Yeah, all right," so I went to the Bondi School of Arts and first of all we had a few bottles of beer that we went to take in and they said, you can't bring that in here. Oh, we said, "God, how are we going to get a drink?" They said, "There's plenty on the tables," so they put one bottle of beer between about 50. So the toilets were outside so we got, put them up in the pull the chain thing, we put them up in there and nobody could work the chains. They were complaining.

30:30 But anyway as we drained that one we went out and got another one, brought it in. So anyway I met her and my mate met another one and he sort of married her and I went to New Guinea anyway, but this when he came back, both of us, and I went to New Guinea and I said, well thanks for, you know, having a few nights and that. We had a good time while we were there. She said, "Yes and you look after yourself and if you come back give us a ring," and I said, "I'll be back, don't you worry." She said, "I hope so," and so anyway we wrote to one another while I

31:00 was away, when I could, wasn't very often. Then I came back and I got to this camp and I thought I'll ring her up and see how she's going because she worked with people that did pharmaceutical things and that and doctors' instruments and all that thing. So I rang her up and I said, "Good afternoon, is that Dulcie?" And she said, "Yes, who's speaking?" And I said, "Joe." She said, "Joe, Joe who?" I said, "Don't tell me you know another Joe." She said, "But who are you?" I says,

31:30 "I'm that Joe that did the wireless school," and she said, "Oh my goodness, what are you doing, where are you?" And I said, "I'm at this camp," and she said, "Oh, and you survived?" And I said, yeah, and she said, "Oh, what are you doing now?" And I said, "I'm going to get some leave now, would you like to go out for dinner tonight?" And she said, "I'd love to." I said, "All right, where will we go?" I said, "You pick the place," so she said, "All right." I said, "Where will I meet you?" Righto, I'll meet you down on the corner opposite the Hyde Park and that. Yeah, right. So I meet her

32:00 down there and away we go. Go to Cahill's, a beautiful place down there, and I always remember she was always mad for this cake with caramel on it, you know, and I just said to her yesterday, gee, it's a long while since I came back, and I remember going to Cahill's with you and having that cake with caramel on it. Gee, she said, "You've got a good memory." So anyway we, we sort of were there for two days I think, one night anyway, that night. I had to get back by 10.00 o'clock so

32:30 we just dawdled around out the city and her friend that was there said, come home to our place and have some coffee after, so I went home and had it and when I had to catch the train I just nearly missed it anyway, got back to the camp and then they asked you to go back to the Tablelands and a little while later they taught us paratroop training, you know, but not in planes, on the ground with squares and everything, and we used to line up and the sergeant used to blow a red thing, a red torch, right, fasten all

33:00 your, we'd grab imaginary gear, fasten it on, tighten everything up, check your parachutes. We'd check the parachutes, see everything was all right. Right, in line now, one two three four five and I'll give you, when you go, he said, I'll put the green light on and I'll go one two three four five and you jump, no

standing still, jump. Righto, so we got to the door where it was all marked with chalk on the ground, one two, out we go and go around the back and into the queue again and did this for about four months because we were going to be the airborne part, you know.

- 33:30 And when it got going to New Guinea it ended up as the seaborne part. But anyway that's the truth, that's what they do in the army, they have a little bit of mucking around to make it interesting, and so I came home and I said to Mum, "I met a girl in Sydney when I was there doing the wireless school and I think I'll marry her." She said, "You sure?" And I says, yeah. "What's she do?" I said, "She's a farmer's daughter from up at Cowra way." "Oh, she'll be all right." I said, "She's a
- 34:00 lovely girl." Yeah, righto. So I met her again and we went to Cahill's and I said, "Would you like to come down the jeweller shop and see what we can see in the way of rings?" Ooh yeah, so we went down, got engaged and that was that, got married and then she came down here, didn't know anybody, and of course I was in the militia after the war then. Sir John Holland said to me, "Can you come back in the militia and get it going again? We gonna form it again." I didn't know it was to be for the National Service, but I was
- 34:30 there from '48 to '50, so I got, he said, you know all the engineer units around, you're the one I want for it. I said, righto. I've got a letter in there from him, so I did my two years and then one of the, our major that was there, he was my, he was a corporal, he went away with us as a corporal but he didn't fit in sort of and he wanted to get a transfer so he went to a pay corps. Well he ended up after the war as our major down at the engineers'
- 35:00 depot in the 8th Field Squadron, and I did my two years and he called me into the office and he said, you're due for getting out of the militia in a couple of days and that, and I said, "Yeah, that's right." He said, I don't want you to go to, and I says, "Well my wife's going to have a baby and I am going." He said, "Open that drawer and pull out that envelope that's in there," so I said, "What's in there?" He says, "Go on, have a look." So I open it and pulled it out and it's got
- 35:30 commission, officer's commission, you know, and I says, put it back, "I don't want that." He says, "Why don't you want it?" I said, "If I could get it in the engineers I would, but" I said, "I can't get it because I haven't got an engineering degree," and I said, "Where were you going to send me, the infantry?" He said, yeah, and he said, but it's good, and I says, "No, I don't want to go there." I said, "I told my wife I'm getting out, I'm getting out." Anyway he said, "Look, you fool, look at all your mates.
- 36:00 How many of them now are majors that come back with you and that?" And I said, yeah, there's a few of them and that. He said, "Well you could be that too in a few weeks." He says, "You only go to Puckapunyal as a lieutenant, couple of days and they make you a captain," and he said, "You go to a school which is already rigged, you come back a week later a major," and he says, "What we're sending you up for is to be the lieutenant colonel for the Puckapunyal Camp, the adjutant," and I said, "What a fairy tale, it's beautiful, sounds good."
- 36:30 He said, "It's fair dinkum." I says, "Well I don't want it." And so anyway I didn't take it, so I told him that when I rang not Bridie, I didn't ring you in Orange, did I?

**No.**

No. I told him that story similar to that, and he said, that'll do me, give us that, we'll have that on the thing. So John Holland wrote a letter for me I was going to get off him on Anzac Day but he posted it to me and in there it says about that, you know, he would've like to have had me as one of his lieutenants.

- 37:00 **Do you have any regrets about that?**

I did have a couple but not many. When I went for a disability pension about seven years later I went into a very nice fellow who was in there, a brigadier, and he said, name? And I said, "Jopling," and he said, "Oh yes, I know Jopling, now where did I know Jopling from? Yeah, you were at Puckapunyal, weren't you?" And I said, yes, 1939, '40. No, after the war you went up. I says, no, I said, "You might be thinking of the one that Bill Frame

- 37:30 organised," and he says, "Yeah, Bill Frame did come into it." I said, no, I said, "He wanted to send me up there to become adjutant eventually" and he said, "That's correct, but" he said, "That wasn't the end of it," and I said, "Wasn't it?" And he said, "No, do you like that colour up there?" That's what you would've been when you went to Vietnam. And I said, "It's lucky I didn't take it on 'cause I wouldn't have gone there." So all our blokes that came back they did this to them, they made them, you know, higher ranks,

- 38:00 which was good. Yeah, so

**So instead of going to become adjutant at Puckapunyal, what did you do then, Dulcie's pregnant and you've got to have a job?**

Yeah, well I, when I was young I was 13 while I was just going to the scouts and that during the Depression and that, 1933, I went in to get a

- 38:30 job in a hairdressing saloon. I was at school and I didn't like school, so I gave it away and I went in there and I became a sweeper of the floor and graduated up to lathering up the fellows for shaves and giving them nice creams on their faces after they'd been shaved and combing their hairs and then

fleeing them for their money as they went out, and he said, "All right, OK, you've done a good job there now, we'll give you another little bout

39:00 now. We're going to have a big, people coming into the Tivoli there, (UNCLEAR) big production, and they'll all be over here and they'll want shoeshines. You can be the shoeshine boy here now." I said, "I don't know how to shine shoes." He says, "God blimey, in the army you had to keep your shoes shined, didn't you?" And I said, yeah, but that was different, and 35 minutes later I said, "All right, give it a go if you want to," so he bought a little shoe horse that they put their feet on, sit down, put it on, and then Danny Dusec come in there. Oh gee, and he had cowboy

39:30 boots on up to here and they were stars, all sorts, red, green, blue, yellow. I looked at them and I said, "You better take them off and leave them here," and he said, "No, I want them done now boy." So I said to my boss, "Have a look at this what you've done. How am I going to fix this?" He says, "Go out and buy all the stuff." So I went out and buy all these little brushes and a (UNCLEAR) and put it on them, (UNCLEAR) that colour, on to the other colour and when I was finished Danny said, "By Joe, that's the best shoeshine I've had for ages, guy." He said, "I'll be back here again." I thought oh

40:00 no. So anyway, I did that for quite a while and he said, "We only got a pound a week," that's all I got, a pound a week was good you know. I used to give it my Mum and so she bought a few things with it and that and she used to go down to the old jumble sales and buy shirts and things for me and that, so anyway, it was a pretty bad poor time and I felt sorry for them anyway, but they tried to look after the three of us, but they didn't have a hope,

40:30 you know, but she used to, she used to go and buy stuff and she knew she couldn't pay for it but she'd take another loan out to pay for that, and then she had to pay for that and another loan to pay for that. Oh gee.

**Well we'll probably talk a bit more about—**

## Tape 4

00:27 **OK Joe, you didn't talk about that actually on Friday.**

Didn't I?

**No. I'd like to come back to that. Tell us about the circumstances.**

Well the early action at Bardia was over and our troops were advancing right up and the corporal came up to me and said, well we've got to move up to the next section Joe, can you drive out there? So I followed the tank truck around for a mile, mile and a half or so up towards where I told you the 19th Brigade was about to tack in that way

01:00 and he got within 20 yards or 50 yards I'd say, and he said, "I get off here Joe, you can turn around now and go back," so he jumped off and I went a distance of 20 feet or something and all of a sudden bang, it was just an enormous noise, blew the front off my car and I had my tin helmet on, my head went through the windscreen, my knees went under the dashboard and for a minute I was

01:30 dazed but I felt if I had arms and legs and everything and I was quite happy, but I was dizzy, you know, whirling around, and so I got out the truck and as I got out the truck I sort of, you know, really was dizzy and I was 100 per cent good, but this fellow that jumped off way back there he come running up and also our unit which was lifting mines where I'd

02:00 done this blowing up business, they said, how are you feeling Joe? And I said, "What happened?" And he said, "You ran over a land mine and blew the front off your truck." I said, "Oh gosh," and he said, Go on, get down in the tank trap and we'll see how you are," so I got down in the tank trap and he said, "How are you feeling?" And I said, "Abit dizzy and a bit nervous," and he said, "What happened?" And I said, "All I know is there was an explosion and my head went through

02:30 the windscreen and my knees went under the dashboard," and I said, I" felt whether I had any injuries or not," and he said, "Well you look to me as though you're OK." I said, "Yeah, except for a little bit of stiffness in my neck and my back and in the knees," I said, "I'm OK," and he said, "All right, well if you're right you can come up with us and help us pull up the mines," so I went through with them for a little while, and he said, "OK, that'll do you Joe, you can rest now, we're covered the main part of it" so I went back and

03:00 the Italians in the desert what they did, I was thinking this is what would happen in now when they were in Iraq, but in the desert the Italians went underground and built real concrete places underground where they could sleep and have machine-guns and camouflage and all this, and they had a square in the top of the ground, it was all concrete underneath with beds and everything, they made it comfortable, and on the top of the ground they had these big square, most probably 2 foot by 2 foot

03:30 holes with stairs going down about 8 feet down into the thing. So I saw one of these and I thought, gee, I wonder what this is? But knowing they said, "Well don't lift anything and don't touch anything"

because it could be a booby trap so gently, but before I did that I just went a little bit further forward and what happened with the poor old Italians, they wanted anybody they could get in the army and this poor little kid, he must've only been about 16 and he was hit right in the forehead and of course

- 04:00 once you get in the forehead it all comes out the back and that, and he was on a machine-gun like that and his head was just laying on it and I felt so sorry for him, but there's not much you can do. Our blokes were most probably in the same boat, but the Italians just didn't give them anything. They brought them over here to do agriculture and all that and they forced them into the army, so that was that. So anyway, getting to this trap, I went down the stairs and it was a beautiful comfortable bed and everything down there, and I looked around
- 04:30 down there, there were lots of things down there but as the sergeant said, "Don't touch anything, if there's anything there we'll come down and have a look." I said, "All right." So I came up and I said, I just found a dugout down there that's not a dugout, it's a great big concrete compound and it had a little passage going through to another place, and he said, I'll come and have a look at it, so he went and had a look at it. He said, "Just put the lid on it and leave it, we can't muck around carrying souvenirs with us," so we moved forward, so with that then
- 05:00 that section of it was over and it was about three hours, 2 hours I suppose then we went back to our main body, went to the front of where our headquarters were, and so I didn't see any more action or anything that day, and then three days went by from the 3rd to the 5th, and Bardia was taken so we came back, came back to our camp where we were camped back behind
- 05:30 everything and that. I went into the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and I says to the RAP chap, "Will you have a look at my neck and my spine and my legs? By jeez I'm stiff." He had a look and he said, "What happened?" And I told him. He said, "I'll give you a few aspros, you'll be right." They would've been all right but now later on as I came to claim it, he wouldn't put it on records and so I didn't have a record of it, and so I kept going back the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] for, well right up to 1993. In '93 I
- 06:00 met a fellow from Legacy and I had a talk to him and he said, "Joe, you might be in luck" 'cause we've got two people who've just been sent out from, what do you put the, they were sacked more or less because of the fact that they were 85 years old, and one was a wing commander in the air force, a medical man, and the other was a psychiatrist. Anyway I got, ring him up, they said he lives in Brighton, so I went to Brighton
- 06:30 and saw this Dr Beech or Mr Beech, a nice chap he was, and he says to me, "So you had a bit of trouble in the army, did you?" And I said, yes, and he said, "Why didn't the DVA fix it?" And I said, "Well apparently it didn't get to the records, the fellow I reported it to, he gave me aspros and that was it." He said, "Gee, well look, I had cases similar to yours in the air force" with the pilots crashing and that, you know, so he said, "I'll give it a once over and see what we can do," so I've
- 07:00 never seen a doctor with so many instruments. It's like you've got here, they had instruments of all kinds. Anyway he took a big (UNCLEAR) of everything on my body and that, up my neck and down my spine and legs and arms and everything, and he said, "You're in a bad way, do you know that?" And I says, "Well I know I'm in a bad way but it's bloomin' very annoying that I can't do things I want to do." And he said, "Do you have much pain with it?" And I says, yes, and he says, "Well that's logical." Said, "Anyway look, what are you on now?" And I said, "I'm on 60 per cent."
- 07:30 "60 per cent?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "OK, you'll be right when we get a report back from DVA, so a week or so later I got a report back to 100 per cent and then got a gold card, you know. He said, "I'm not happy with that though Joe, you should be getting more." So he said, I'll send you to my friend, the psychiatrist, and see how you go with him." So he sent me to the psychiatrist down in Richmond and I went to him and I didn't know the psychiatrists did
- 08:00 this, but they do apparently. I was out in there and I was doing this and doing that, twitching here and doing this, and you know, doing things like that, and when I came in he said, "How are you going Joe? Joe Jopling, do you mind if I call you Joe?" I said, "No no, that's all right sir," and I sat down and he said, he had a big long table with junk on it everywhere. I suppose that's part of the job too, and he said, "Could you give me that pen please?" And I said, "Yes certainly, no worries," so I reached over to get it like that and he said, "Holy mackerel,
- 08:30 do you shake like that all the time?" I said, "Not as bad but sometimes I do, and other times I'm real bad," and he said, "OK, righto," so he asked me all questions and just like you are, he said and in rapid succession, "What's your name?" And I told him. "Where do you live?" I told him. "What was your number?" I told him. He said, this, this, this, that, and he said, before he started he said, "If there's anything I ask you and you don't know, just say I
- 09:00 just can't remember or I don't know." I said, right, so I did that right through. When I finished he said, "You know, you're in a bad way," and I said, "That's what Dr Beech said to me," Mr Beech, and he said, "You are, I'm telling you," he says, "You've got post-traumatic [post-traumatic stress disorder]," and I says, "God, is that what it is?" And he said, yes, and I said, "How bad is that?" He said, "It's bad because you don't know when it's coming on," and he said, "Little things upset you." I found that out since then, you know, but I had found it out also in between where I'd had times
- 09:30 when I'd been going somewhere and I said, "I just can't go there, I don't feel like it," you know, but I

didn't put it up to that what it was, the sole reason being that in the army all they said to you, they didn't know about this, they just said you're 'bomb happy' or you're 'troppo' or you're so forth, you know, shell shocked. I went, no, but anyway it all worked out good and he said, "OK, so you're on 100 per cent now," and I said, yes. He said, "Right, I'll get the report back

10:00 and see what we can do for you," so they made me an EDA [Extreme Disablement Adjustment], which gives me 150 per cent, but earlier before I retired at 65, I could have got a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pension], he said, but he said, "You can't get it now because there's a rule that went through Canberra that if you don't apply by the time you 65 you can't get TPI. I think that's a stupid rule, but that's how it is" and so now I'm an EDA and I get 150

10:30 and really it's just good, you know, it covers the lot and my wife gets a lot of compensation with me, so, and if I die through war injuries she gets the war pension, so I'm quite happy with what it is now, you know.

#### **And have they been able to help with your post-traumatic stress disorder, Joe?**

I go to the doctor once a fortnight, every three weeks, but not for that, for other things too, you know, and he keeps me in good stead, you know, but I am still

11:00 trying to get some treatment for my spine and my neck which, my spine up in the back behind, in the top of the vertebrae up the top is all crumbling and it's pushing on a nerve in there. As they explained to me it's like a triangle, that nerve on your neck is a triangle and either comes to this shoulder or this shoulder, and it's because this nerve up top doesn't get any fluid around it to protect it from any pressure that comes on there, so at the

11:30 moment and over the last three or four years I suppose this thing presses on there. I've had X-rays on it and it clearly shows that it is pressing on there. It presses on there, comes down to my left shoulder, from the left shoulder you've got a nerve here on the top, one at the elbow, one here on the wrist and one there, and I've been to the neurosurgeon with my carpal tunnel, that one there, and he said, "I can do that for you Joe,

12:00 but it's not necessary because," he said, "You'll have eight weeks at least of pain and it's not going to do you any good." So I said, all right, OK, and he said, "OK, go back to your doctor and explain to him what I told you." So I did and I've had other tests and everything so about six eight weeks ago I went into the '39ers meeting in the city and I was feeling all right and it was a warm day

12:30 and I was dressed up, possibly overdressed and I came home on the train from the city to Hampton. I got to North Brighton and I was talking to a fellow there and I said, "By gee, it's warm, isn't it? I don't feel, you know, I'm clammy," and he said, "Yeah, it's pretty sticky." So then I got to Middle Brighton and I started undoing my tie like that, you know, and we got to Middle Brighton and I said to him, one station, thank

13:00 goodness for that, and he said, "Are you all right?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm OK," and with that apparently I got my bag that was here and got my walking stick that was here and don't remember any more until I hit Sandringham Station and blacked out. So a porter, or the station man came out to me on the train, shook me, and I said, (UNCLEAR), and he said, "Are you all right?" And I said, "Yes, I'm good." He says, "You don't look it." He says, "Where are you going to?" And I said, "Hampton," and he said, "Well that was the last station."

13:30 He said, "You're at Sandringham now." I said, "Oh gosh, well I'll sit on the train and go back." He said, "Well I'll come back with you." I said, "I think I'm all right." He said, "I'll come back with you anyway." So he came back. I got off at the station and I had my car parked there. So he said, "How are you getting home?" I said, "I've got my car parked there." He said, "Oh yeah, all right, OK, you'll be all right though?" I said, yes. So I got in the car and drove home and I had an appointment the next day with my physio [physiotherapist], because I'd been going to her

14:00 for a while, five, six, seven years most probably, and she eased the pain quite good you know when she did all this. I was quite happy with it so it wasn't giving me any trouble except for an occasional pinch here and stiffness in the back and that, and especially when you sit down, these are not the best these ones for sitting in when you lean back a bit, you know. This is a good one because you can get your back in a good position and that. But anyway she kept it in good stead for me but

14:30 this day I went to her and I said, you know, "I had a bad day yesterday," and she said, "How did you?" And I said, "I was on the train..." and I explained it all to her. She said, "You better go to your doctor now straight away after here," so she rang him up and said, "I'm sending Joe down to you, he had a blackout on the train." Righto. So he then said, "Righto, down the room at the hospital for you and get a brain scan," well joking like, and I said, "There's nothing up there, they won't see anything anyway." He said, "Go down and have the scan."

15:00 So I had the scan and they found that I had a stroke and he said, "Fortunately the stroke that you've had is a little black patch there," and he showed it to me on a thing. He said, "If that had been a different colour to that, you know, I would've been very worried," but he said, "Now that's black it means that it's finished, you're not going to have any more of them," he said.

**That's good.**

So he changed all my medicines and this is what happens all the time, I get my medicines changed, you know.

**Change medicines, yeah.**

Pills, yeah, so

15:30 **(UNCLEAR) a bit.**

Yeah, so I'm still suffering from, you know, the effect of that blow up job at Bardia.

**Yeah, the landmine.**

And I go to a specialist now down at Linika Hospital, Maureen Miller, she's a lovely lady and she's given me, the first day I went there she went all over me and my arms and neck and everything and then said, "OK, well what we'll do, we'll give a cortisone injection and see how

16:00 that goes in your shoulder," and she said, "I believe that the neck isn't your trouble, but it's the shoulder." So she banged this cortisone in and I went back and saw her again about three weeks later and she said, "How did that cortisone go?" I said, "That was terrific for about three days, magnificent, but then it worked off," and she said, OK, so she said to come back in another two, 21st of May anyway.

**Can you just take a pause for a moment there Joe?**

16:30 **OK great, OK excellent. You obviously had a pretty rough time.**

I wouldn't say a rough time, just that I had to be careful. I couldn't lift things and I'm not supposed to reach up in the air, extend the arm, you know, but the physio that I went to, Denise Boyd, down in Hampton, she was brilliant, you know, and she knew right from A to B, you know, A to Z, and she was very good.

**That's good.**

I had, you can say I had

17:00 a rough time. There's lot of things I had to give away. I gave my golf away which I would've like to have stayed on that but I couldn't swing, and I couldn't do work around the house or anything. I've got luckily two beautiful daughters and two beautiful sons and they come down and do a lot of the work for me. I used to try and do the lawn mowing and that but they used to abuse me for doing it, and said, "You're mad." Anyway I eventually got a fellow to come and do my lawn for me now.

**Goodo.**

Gives me time a little time to fiddle around

17:30 in the back yard just pulling little bits out, planting here and there.

**And after, I mean you were obviously blown up by the landmine and that left you with a lot of injuries and you saw a lot of things that were very difficult...**

That's right.

**Stressful, when do you think was your most fearful time during the war?**

The most fearful time I think, there were quite a few, but I think the most time was when we were in Greece.

18:00 Greece was just a catastrophe, every way you know. As I said earlier to you when the planes came I believe the Germans wanted us as prisoners, this is only my opinion, I don't know, I know the ones that were up in the frontline and that, further up, even though I used to go and get supplies to give to our engineers to, in that area where they were too. See when you're in engineers

18:30 you go to anywhere that they put you in. So you might go to one brigade, the other brigade or the other brigade, which meant up to Mount Olympus, up to Florina and Ellassona or over to Grevena up on the Albanian front. So there was a lot of that but every time I, as I said, these planes came at me I reckon I could feel the bullets hitting me but nothing was happening, and I believe they used dum-dums and they were scaring us, but the bombs were fair dinkum that they dropped because one

19:00 lifted my truck and took me across the road a bit, but that might've been different with the fellows up in the front line and I know it was because they suffered enormous things with the cold and the front and the snow and the rain and sleet and they were told to discard all their blankets and everything so they used to have to dig holes and throw their great coats over them while the other blokes went on guard and they were like this on guard shivering, you know, so they must've have had a terrible time up there, and they did I know. Then

19:30 when we came back, I'll tell you one little incident that was funny in that. Grevena, around about Grevena in the Albanian Way was where an engineer dump was and I had to keep going there to get supplies and bring it up, so this day there was a fair dinkum raid and the Germans dropped bombs

everywhere and so my mate Dougie Davis and myself we shot into this RE [Royal Engineers'] camp, dived into, didn't dive

20:00 into, but got into a trench, slip trench that they had, and they blasted the place, well gee, deafening it was, but they didn't hit our trench where we were, so when we finished Dougie said, "How you going Joe?" And I said, "By gee, that was a beauty, wasn't it?" You know, I didn't think they bombed like that, and the planes were just dropping them everywhere and they were very inaccurate. They didn't hit what they wanted to hit anyway. If they'd hit the explosive well we would've gone ta ta and been up with Peter now, but anyway,

20:30 so we finished and he said, "You know, we're pretty lucky." I said, "How are you?" And he said, "I'm all right," and I said, "Why are we lucky?" He said, "Have a look what you're sitting on," so I had a look underneath and it's got TNT dynamite boxes.

**Not the best place.**

No, so that's that, and then the other part was we had to go and get some barbed wire for the battalion that was up on Elassona. Got the barbed wire and when we got there he said, "We don't want that now, it's too late," and I said, "I'm sorry but we had an air-raid there and couldn't get away,"

21:00 and he said, "Well it's no good, throw it out, have a look over there," and coming from Florina down the mountain pass were all these tanks one behind the other, and he said, "They'll be here in 20 minutes so you better get out of the place," so we got out, but that was that, so getting further on to retreating without talking all the other stuff that was in there we then became rear guards more or less. We had to make sure we were given a time that people were gonna come and we had to be there for a bridge to let them across, and when the time elapsed

21:30 we gave it another 10 minutes or so and then blew the bridge, all this so

**So if they didn't get across in that last 10 minutes they couldn't get out.**

No.

**What, go on Joe.**

I told you about them. I didn't actually see it, but they told me that they troops up there, the ones that were taken prisoner, they took their uniforms off and the Germans dressed us and then it was the fifth column going there anyway, right through Greece which was terrible, and then so that

22:00 operated and we came back and got towards Mount Olympus, Mount Thermopylae and we were taken prisoner then, you know, because

**Yeah, you told us about that.**

I told you all about that.

**Yeah, that's right. What was the name of the ship that finally took you off?**

The Dilwarra, SS Dilwarra.

**Dilwarra?**

Yeah.

**And you mentioned that down at the dock when you were getting on that ship there were people trying to get on and they were holding them back. Can you tell us a bit more about that, what happened there?**

Yes, well I explained that we were

22:30 there at night and then we got, we had somebody on the guard all the time. They had to see the signal, it was only a flash of light and that was it and so we all got woken up, told to destroy our trucks by switching the engines, which I told you all about, and then we moved down to the wharf.

**Is this at Piraeus, Port Piraeus?**

No, not at Port Piraeus, this is at Kalamata.

**Kalamata, right.**

Kalamata, yeah.

**In the harbour there?**

There's no harbour, it's, I've got photos of it in there.

**All right.**

And I've got a photo of

23:00 it in there. So the Palestinians that used to be helping us with labour and that, for doing things and that,

they were very good and that, and it was very disheartening because the navy wouldn't let them on the ships.

**Where did they come from then originally?**

They came from Palestine.

**But what were they doing helping you in**

Well they were part of the Greek force from the Jewish part, you know. Jews helped out a bit.

**They were helping you in**

23:30 **Greece?**

They were helping to do little jobs.

**They were...**

We didn't, actually we didn't have them ourselves, but other people used them, you know.

**The Greeks?**

Yeah.

**Greek army, they were attached to the Greek army, were they?**

Yeah.

**And they wouldn't**

They weren't attached to the Greek army but they were assigned there to do, they volunteered to do that job if they could to help, so the Germans didn't come through Turkey down into Syria and down into Palestine because that was what the whole plan was. They were going to come around there and down

24:00 and Palestine would've been gone, then they would've had the Red Sea, then they, and Rommel was gonna come through the Western Desert and they were gonna link up and then they were gonna come down, and then the Japs came in the war and Singapore and so they had it all worked, you know, but it didn't work out their way.

**So the, our sailors were keeping them back, were they?**

Well the, the soldiers had to get first preference apparently with the navy, and they were very very strict. We had one officer there, he just said, come on fellas, line up,

24:30 line up and make sure you're right, and one sailor came up and he said, "Listen sir, if you want to get in, jump in anywhere you are, but you'll be left them with them," the Palestinians. But we just took off and then we heard afterwards some fellows that had been left behind went to Crete and somehow or other they got out on little boats and everything because there were no ships to take them out. We were about the last boat to leave there and they told us that as soon as we got out a little way the

25:00 paratroops hand landed and they took all the ones prisoner, all the Palestinians prisoner.

**So you just got out in time?**

Oh yeah. Well we went out on the HMS Hero which is a boat of the British navy, they're all H class destroyers, the Heroine the Hero and the other ones, Hoskin, Harper and some, and we had to go up the rope ladder then up to the thing, you know, and oh we were tired. We hadn't slept for ages, 10 days or something. Anyway we got up there but when we saw the infantry come,

25:30 we were one of the first ones to get out, the engineers up on top, and then the infantry come and the other ones. They sort of all converged in and just came in and straight onto the boat, you know.

**And what was the mood of that boat once you took off from Greece?**

The mood was everybody was tired and they all went to sleep, and the officers went downstairs and they had little quarters downstairs and weren't too many officers, and we were stayed up top and then the night

26:00 passed and then the next day came and the infantry, you couldn't have waked them if you hit them with a sledge hammer, but we did wake them and said, "Look we'll take your Bren guns and let you have a sleep." So we put Bren guns all around the boat and some of them took, they said, "No, this is mine," because the army told you never let your gun out of your sight, your rifle, like Bren gun, out of your sight, that's your security. So a lot of them didn't want to so they came around and did that too, so we had about maybe 50, 60 Bren guns

26:30 all around the boat and things went all right until we got bombed the first time, and that was all right. They buzzed off and next time they come it was a big Greek sun, you know, orange, red, brilliant, you know and you couldn't see anything. I was on the floor, the deck of it and I seen this little black speck

and I said to one of the fellers further down, "I think there's a plane coming here," and he said, "You're seeing things looking into the sun." Eventually it was a plane, it came over and gave us a run over and a bit of machine-gun

27:00 fire and then it went over to the right, over to the, his right and then it came in straight across the line of three ships, one, two, three ships. We were that one over there, dropped a bomb and I thought it was gonna hit the deck, or it would've hit me anyway, and the captain steered the ship just to the left and it went beside it, blew up our plates and we rolled, not rolled over but we went to about a 45, no, a little big less, 30 degree angle, you know, so

27:30 we were taken to Crete then. But we were better than the next boat, the Costa Rica, it got hit, not, didn't hit it, they dropped bombs beside it and the bombs sprung the plates and she just started to sink straight away. So they lined all the soldiers afterwards, we heard this too, they lined all the soldiers up on board and the H class destroyers again, Heroine and a few others went to their rescue got all the soldiers off except one was bad, he missed the jump of the water because the water rough, you know, going

28:00 up and down like that, and the boat goes up and you jump and then it goes, and you come up, you jump and so the lot of them would jump and make that decision, then the next ones would go, he missed and anyway, squashed him. So that was the only casualty they had there and then we were escorted by the navy then to Alexandria.

**So after you were in, how long were you in Alexandria?**

It was only a matter of having our stats [statistics] taken, your name, your number

28:30 and your unit and so forth and that, if you were wounded or you weren't wounded. I think we left the next day, went back to Palestine then, re-grouped in Palestine, you know, and because we're casualties of death and prisoner of war and all that, we were only about a third of our unit, 60 was our, only a third of a 60th.

**And that was all that was left?**

So then...

**You mentioned the other day that there was a bank robbery?**

29:00 In Tobruk.

**That was in Tobruk.**

Yeah.

**Tell us about that 'cause you just mentioned that in passing. I'm fascinated by this.**

Well in Tobruk we were sort of reserve engineers in Tobruk even though we, I didn't see much 'cause I was a driver. I hadn't taken a different classification at this stage, but I was a driver, so when they told me to go I just went were they told me to go, you know, and as I mentioned earlier I was just, they told me, you're the scrounger, I learnt that I was the scrounger

29:30 and that meant I had to, if they wanted firewood for the cookhouse I'd go and get firewood, if they wanted this I'd go and get that, so that was it, and we had a few old times. I told you I think about the time we got the liquor from the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute], didn't I, down where

**Yeah, yeah.**

Two trucks came down and we conned the bloke into giving us all the liquor. Yeah. Yeah, so where was I up to on that one?

**You were talking about the bank robbery.**

Oh, the bank robbery.

**Yeah.**

30:00 So when Tobruk was taken and that some of the other blokes that were in the truck business they were destined to go into Tobruk, it wasn't a very big place, but they went into it and one of them saw the bank there, you know, so he, and another one went in the church, and the one in the bank when he went in there was nobody in there, and he said, this is good, so he just filled his bag that he had in the truck with all the money, put it on the truck. Said, that'll do me, so he came home

30:30 **This is an Australian soldier?**

One of our fellows, and he distributed a few notes around for souvenirs and that, you know, and the other fellow went into the church and he saw the gold things on the altar and he said, they'll do me, and he grabbed them and I ended up with them here.

**In this house?**

When the fellow died his wife said to me, "Take these out, I've had bad luck ever since we've had them," and I said, "God, what did he take them for," you know. So anyway I had them and I took them up

31:00 to the priest up here about 15 years ago and I said, have a look at these, and he says, "They're gold," and I said, "Yeah, they're quite good aren't they?" He said, "Where did you get them?" I said, "I didn't get them." I said, "One of our fellows knocked them off from Tobruk," and I said, "When I go and see the widows to try and help them if I can" in this community work I was doing, "They said, OK, well you can have them, take them if you want them." I said, "I don't want them but if you want to get rid of them..." She said, "We've had no luck since we've had them."

31:30 Righto. So I took them home and I thought, I'm getting rid of them, I don't want that happening to me. So I took them up to the priest up here and he sent them back to Libya.

**He sent them back?**

He sent them back through the church in the city, St Patrick's?

**So did you remember which church it was that they'd taken them from?**

I didn't actually see the church.

**Right.**

No, it was, I didn't see that one, but I did see one a bit further on. They were beautiful churches they had, the one that we saw, Bachi, or Giovanni Berta it was, yeah, Giovanni

32:00 Berta, gee it was a magnificent cathedral, and that's where we went in to see if there were any ammunition behind the altar because we'd found those in Damascus.

**That was a favourite spot, was it?**

Yeah, well nobody, churches usually got left, you know. It's the same as over here in Iran, see they didn't want to blow that church up because it was the faith of the people. If they'd lost their faith in the church well it was finished, you know, they would've rioted,

32:30 at which they did anyway.

**And what did the bloke do with the money from the bank?**

Well, what happened then as I said, we went through then to Benghazi and then Churchill said, that's it, come back, and so we came back and we got sent to Greece, and of course as I explained there were Germans on the wharf taking stats on our things as (UNCLEAR). When we, next day were bombed by aircraft they took the boats that they'd marked with this and that on it and bombed, sunk them and machine-gunned other ones around,

33:00 but we were all right. We didn't, I was again on the forward deck, you know, with an old bloomin' Lewis gun, a pop pop pop pop, you know, instead of one that goes prrt prrt prrt, this one pop pop pop, and it was awkward but everybody yelled out, "Are you all right?" "Yes, I'm all right," and then when it was finished I looked around and there were all these chips out of the deck where the bullets must've hit, but I didn't feel any or see any. They didn't look like they were coming my

33:30 way. So we got in and then the sub, they sunk the sub just as we were going in and we went into Piraeus and the next night they blew up a boat that was in there with all our explosives in and made a hell of a mess of Port Piraeus. I think you've got that in there too. Then we went out to camp but we had to wait for our unit to come, then when the unit came we were dispatched up to our place which, not Kalamata, that's down that end, we went to Kalambaka, the one up the top which is now Meteora.

34:00 **And the money from the bank robbery?**

Oh, the money from the bank.

**Yeah.**

Yeah, when we got there, this particular chap he went on leave and he didn't come back from leave, and he went to the bank, and the Italian bank was open in Athens, yeah, so he went in the Italian bank and cashed it all, got all his money for it, sent it home to his mother and father. So he had a good time in Alex and while we were up there he was in,

34:30 not in Alex, sorry, in Athens, and so he was reported desertion and they would've really fixed him up for that, you know, but somehow or other he learnt we were coming back and he got some transport to where he met with us and he had another soldier with him, but it wasn't a soldier, it was his girlfriend that he'd met in Athens. Yeah, and they got on the boat and came back with us

35:00 and he took her to Palestine with him. He took her back to Egypt with him anyway and I don't know what happened then.

**And what, she was dressed up as a soldier?**

Dressed up in a soldier's uniform, yeah.

### **No one noticed?**

Oh, there were lots of things that happened in the army that were very thing. So anyway he came home after the war, just to finish that story, and he had all this money and his Mum had put it the bank and got a bit of interest I suppose on it, or whatever she did, and so the army sold all their stores

35:30 after the war, you know, and he went out to Newmarket I think it was, or somewhere there or the old Haymarket I think it was in the city, and he bought all the D9 tractors and then he had to get them carted down to Gippsland where he lived and so he took on the job clearing properties for grazing and, you know, vegetation and planting and all that.

### **Right, moving trees, taking trees down?**

Yeah, all that, cleaning. So he was a brainy bloke up here you see and he,

36:00 soon as he cleared the land and that, he didn't want the D9s, no good to him then. He didn't want to cart it back because he had plenty back in his place back there, so he'd say to them, now look, this would be handy for you to have this D9 on your property, would you like to buy it? Of course they'd buy it and he'd sell it at an exorbitant price to them and so he sold all of them. As he did the land he sold all that to them, so he did well out of the war, didn't he?

### **He did really well out of the war.**

He did very well.

### **He did.**

Never mind. He must've been cursed too

36:30 because he died not very long afterwards.

### **That's no good. Now I want to go back to New Guinea actually and talk a bit about New Guinea because I understand that you saw some pretty extraordinary things while you were in New Guinea.**

Oh yeah.

### **You saw, I seem to remember you saying you were involved in a burial party in New Guinea.**

Yes, well the engineers had, see we were

37:00 the burial party at Bardia too.

### **Were you?**

That's where I was telling you about the, sprinkling the holy water on him and jumping up and he's, my God, he's alive. Yeah, so we, that was part of our job and it wasn't a very nice job, especially in New Guinea because of the mutilations and that.

### **What sort of mutilations were they?**

Well lots of people, like it started with Newton most probably, air force bloke, this is before our time, but it happened where we landed in New Guinea at a place called Aitape and he got beheaded, you

37:30 know. Well this was their favourite thing, because the Japanese, well that's what they said they believed in anyway, if you died a heroes death you were, you know, honour, an honoured death. So that's why in Singapore and all that all those people that were bared and so forth and that, worse in Singapore than that up here. They were stable and they won the war in Singapore so they could do what they liked, but they didn't win the war up there. We had a lot coming through the Torricelli Mountains

38:00 driving them down. We were going along the beach driving them up so it was (UNCLEAR) like that all the time, until we met at the end and they were all there and it was massive. Tasaki and Hitachi, their two generals, after cannibalising themselves, they used to eat themselves, it's terrible. Yeah, so we were in the burial party and I, we had a medical unit near us that was actually doing operations up there on people and that and

38:30 it was, we used to have level a piece of ground and put just a little oily type of thing in it and then we made a roller out of an old tree and thing and used it as roller and made it nice and flat and then they came in and that was their operating theatre, and so when people when injured or that that they came back and it was only just around more or less, from down here at the Bluff Road to me away from me, and

39:00 so I got friendly with them up there, the people that were there, and I used to go and watch the operations. I don't know why but it was just a fascination, so I went and saw operations and I saw one where he'd been hit with a bullet through there and it had just taken his membrane, or the membrane over his brain out, but his brain was popping out through there like that, you know, and big tall 6 foot 3 bloke he was. So anyway he had his operation but,

39:30 and the doctor had all the young boys that were learning to be doctors, and they were sort of orderlies

more or less, but they had, I don't know if they'd been commissioned or not then but they were going to be doctors anyway, and he explained it over three hours, and if you went to these two and three hour you had to stand perfectly still and not move because every time you moved dust would come up. So they did the operation and it was very good it was, but next day he died, that one,

40:00 so we had to bury him, and another chap got a machine-gun burst right through the middle and he was serious, you know, and that was a massive operation. They sort of had to open him up to take everything and fix up holes in him and all that and he survived, and it was a massive operation that. So there were plenty of other operations I went to but as far as the burial part the infantry used to tell, come back to our office and tell them where so and so was and so

40:30 we'd go out and bring him in. Sometimes they'd only be either a head, or you know, so we had a big grave and old Padre Metherin was a wonderful old fellow he was, he was the padre of the 60th, and so we dug this grave and we went, the fellows went out to get the bodies of the ones that were injured, wounded or dead and they brought them back and I says to him, I've dug a

41:00 6 foot hole for you and I've only got a head there now. He said, "That's all right, that's his grave." And I says, "But we could've dug a little one for him." He says, "Joe, you don't dig little ones, you dig the exact one that he's gotta go in."

**That's probably a good moment to change the tape.**

## Tape 5

00:14 **OK Joe, so you had to dig a grave.**

So the first, yeah we dig this series of graves. They told us, you know, they'd be eight or ten coming in so we'd dig eight or ten graves. This particular one he was, gee,

00:30 must've been 6 foot 4, 6 5 something, he was too big for the trench anyway, too big for what we dug, and I suppose I was the clown in the army you might say, so this padre and I were pretty good mates and he said, "Joe, you'll have to make that a bit bigger, he's too big for it." And I said, "Well the easy way of it," and he said, "What do you mean?" I says, "Well lop the two legs off" and, oh he said, "Don't do that, gee don't do that." I said

01:00 I was only joking. But they'll think I'm a dill when they read all this. So anyway this all happened just over the Danmap River, was a pretty solid place there and that's the Danmap River I was telling you about that overflowed and whoosh, come down, washed our bridge away so we had to swim across with our thing and where the Salvation Army chap wouldn't move and then everything was right. So that corresponds with that, and I told you about there, just past there was

01:30 me up in these other places and the mountains came right down to the sea so when the tide was out you'd go right around but when the tide was in you couldn't, and I was on my wireless and further up towards the other, another half mile or mile up they said, "1,000 Japs 100 yards away," you know, so I told the officer that this was what was happening, so he said, "OK, we'll be ready for it", so he mounted everybody up with their machine-guns and everything waiting for the Japs to come

02:00 around, and anyway the bloke got back and nothing happened, and I said, "I gee'd a message back to you," said 'gee' to please explain, is that correct? That's what it means to save all time, and he said, "Most apologies, 100 Japs 1,000 yards away." So we didn't that. But that was when I saw my first Jap, really saw the first Jap, and it was the next day I think it was, and

02:30 in this particular area where they were they were the big Korean boys and oh boy, I'll tell you were they big, and they had heads that big you know and they were fierce. Anyway he was coming back in a jeep all tied down, they bound his arms, his legs, his body and everything and tied him back and I thought he was gonna break through it, you know, and he looked at us as he came through and the fellow in the jeep said, "Don't get too much to him, he'll spit at you," you know, so he went past, was sort of dark but we had a torch and shone on him

03:00 and we thought, gee, if they're like this, you know, I'm a little bloke and he's a great big bloke.

**And you said earlier that they were eating themselves.**

Yeah. Well see, when they couldn't get supplies to them, you can imagine anybody

**This is the Japanese, yeah?**

Japanese, yeah, when they couldn't get supplies they had to find other ways and maybe, there were two islands just off New Guinea where we were from Aitape to Wewak there were two islands

03:30 Muschu and another one, I should know it but I just forget it, and I lot of the people that were in Singapore were there, and they had a big mounting gun there which they used to open up every now and then, just a bit on that bit of coast and bit on this bit and a bit that, you know, and the navy went by all the time trying to subdue it but they didn't, and they might've been the instigators of what was

happening with these over here because in Singapore they were brutal, you know, at Kokoda the same again.

04:00 Kokoda was terrible. We didn't go there but one of our brigades did and so they had no supplies, no lines of supply. They were beaten in the air and beaten on the sea and the soldiers were just depreciating. They were getting, instead of being strong and big they were, not that they went that low because they were fierce fighters I'll tell you, and it got right to the stage where too many people were getting

04:30 in the same spot and they couldn't get food enough for the little ones or this, so that's why I think cannibalism started with them and they started having lots apparently to see who went that day and who went the next day and things like that.

**So (UNCLEAR)**

But it wasn't nice to be taken prisoner by a Jap, I'll tell you that, they just did terrible things.

**So they ate each other?**

That Japanese did.

**When they had been killed in battle or they**

No, no, no. You read about the air force

05:00 and other ones like that, the naval men that get sunk and that and they're floating for days and days. There was a book I read, it might've been fictional, but I don't think it was, it was pretty right and they drew straws for who would be the next one the next day, and they were on a boat, you know.

**Did you see any evidence of cannibalism?**

I didn't see any evidence, but I spoke to many people about it but when we dig the graves you saw a bit of it then,

05:30 you know.

**In what respect? What did you see?**

Well when the bodies came in, you know, a little bit but not much.

**So the bodies of Australian soldiers?**

Yeah, our blokes, you know, they were, yeah, Australian soldiers.

**Had been**

Well see, I told you when I first landed at Aitape that the 2/4th Battalion were there and right in front of battalion they pinned them down because they've got snipers in the trees and everything, and the ones that

06:00 just popped up every now and then, they saw them wound this fellow, take him and then string him up and then they just cut him, you know, and that, ooh that infuriated them and they just tore through irrespective if they were gonna get killed or not. Dunno what happened over that but we shifted.

**So that must've been very traumatic to see.**

Oh, it would've been, yeah. Well then, of course, I was telling you that from then on it was no prisoners.

06:30 So nobody took prisoners, their side or our side. But we did take a few and as I said, when we were up on the big road and just before Ted Kenner won his, he might've won the VC by this time I think, and after this Jap come out they tapped me on the back of the neck and then the three others come, well two of them died, overeating, they just choked I think, and the other two we took down and they were, first container I

07:00 ever seen and they died of no air, you know, there was no

**Did they put them in there deliberately?**

Well it was the nearest thing.

**Did they know?**

When you've got a thing that you can use they put them in there, but you know, they should've had some sort of ventilation. That was the first container I'd seen, possibly brought something over on a boat and they've left it there so they used it, utilised. That's, when we were in there utilisation was the main thing. You utilised, what you didn't

07:30 have you made.

**Now, you were also when you left New Guinea,**

Yeah.

**you, tell me about the circumstances how you came to leave New Guinea?**

Well the circumstances was going back to the days we were at Darwin, I played two-up there and I won, I spun 13 heads and cleaned the school out,

08:00 so then they said, lend us this and lend us that. Well my Dad said never lend money to anybody because you'd lose a friend as quick as anything by asking him for the money back, so I said to the fellows, look, and one of ours I said, you can be in charge of it, anybody wants any money let them put an IOU in for that money and take the money they want, which happened. Well then I was on the wireless in New Guinea

08:30 and it wasn't a brilliant job out in the scrub, but anyway I was on that and I got a message this later afternoon to say my Dad was serious ill, not expected to live and I thought, oh God, you know, so I went to the officer and told him, and he said, all right, well, see what happens, because they told me they'd ring again next morning from LHQ, Land Head Quarters in St Kilda Road through to Townsville to me. So the next morning a message came through that

09:00 my mother had passed away. So again I gee'd back the message to Townsville to them and then it came back to me again, their apology, 'father died, not mother'. So the officer said, "Righto Joe, we'll count how many points you've got." So all your service, the days you've been in the army and that, they mount up and it's just like batsmen that make 100s and they go to the top of the list, well I was just part of outside the first lot that was to go away,

09:30 go back to Melbourne or Australia and this fellow became an officer that borrowed some money from me. He was the only one that hadn't paid my \$200 back.

**\$200 or £200?**

£200, yeah, £200 back, sorry, yeah. 'Cause I had a hell of a lot of money, there was a pile about that big 'cause I had the Allied Work Council there and they used to bet big, you know, but anyway that was that, and so I went up and I

10:00 said to him, "Well you're right now." I said, "No," I said to him, "You must be right now," 'cause I didn't know then where I was gonna be on the boat in far as numbers of high total points and I said, "You'll be right now, you won't have to pay me, I'm most probably going home now," and he says, "No, I'll pay you, you'll be right." So anyway he was in the orderly room when they were calling it out and he heard that I was down six, and he says to the OC,

10:30 "Can you put him up a bit further?" So they shot me up there and I come on the first little tramp ship that we came back on, I think it was the Bonteeko or something like that, and God, the rats they were big, and we were right down below, you know, bloody big rats running over us, and we got to the, going around the peak up in Queensland to come down to Townsville and the old captain must've been asleep because we run into the coral and oh, right along

11:00 the side of the boat, but anyway we got home all right and then that's when we came down to Sydney. We trained then down at Sydney, no, we got off the boat at Sydney, that's right, yeah, we got off the boat at Sydney and we went out to this training camp or barracks or whatever it was around there, around Sydney way, so I thought well I'll ring up Dulcie and see the girl that I met when I was doing my wireless school in Sydney

11:30 and see if she's still around. So I rang her up and that's how the other things happened, I ended up getting married.

**Did you say yesterday that you wrote a song about the moonlight in New Guinea?**

Yeah, I wrote a song about it but I haven't got it here now. Actually I took it down to Anzac Hostel on Commemoration Day, their day was the day before Anzac Day, and I had the songs and she said to me, can you do some sort of,

12:00 see I used to, I somehow or other told her that during the war I was in our unit concert party and we sang and things like that just to keep the troops, they booed us and threw anything they could at us but that was all part of the job you know, so, this bit of paper was there and I said, that's a song I wrote in New Guinea but I never ever got anybody to put any words to it, and she said, "Read it out as poetry," so I read it out as poetry for them on this day but sang all the other songs.

12:30 And it was just that I was sitting there and gazing at the New Guinea moon and I started to croon away, you know and things like that, and I thought well I'm going to be home soon and all the words were moon, croon, soon and gonna be home soon and it went on like that you know, it's good, good (UNCLEAR) verse, I liked it but I never ever put words to it, but I couldn't tell you the words of it now. It's down on the paper down there.

**And what about, what other songs did you sing at the concert**

13:00 **parties in New Guinea?**

Well she said can you give us like a build up to make, see what we do, I'm in the Day Centre, helping the

Day Centre down there and there's the nursing part on the other side which is a hostel. We've got 41 beds and two double rooms, there's two beds in it and a doorway in the front but a doorway between them, so we've got those two. So I'm in the Day Centre and those people come across, this particular day because it was

13:30 not Anzac Day but the day before, I had to go to Anzac Day the next day, she said to me, can you help us out and make a little concert, because I'd helped her out on Christmas and we went up to the Bentley RSL and we all sang Christmas carols up there and she was impressed in that, you know, so she said, "Can you help us out?" "Yeah, we'll do that," so we did that and we got a little choir together that was good so I said, "Well, look I'll do it like this," I said, "I'll give you a song" and that'll be when we joined

14:00 up and got our uniform. All right, and I said then, Gracie Fields had a wonderful song, Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me, that was Little Slouch Hat, you know, the first one, Brown Slouch Hat With The Side Turned Up.

**I don't know that one? What's that one?**

Do you want me to sing it?

**Yeah, go on.**

All right.

**Let's hear that.**

\n[Verse follows]\nWell, just a brown slouch hat with the side turned up and it means

14:30 the world to me,\n

It's the symbol of a nation and it stands for liberty,\n Our soldiers they wear it, how proudly they bear it, for all the world to see,\n Just a brown slouch hat with the side turned up heading straight for victory.\n

So that was that one.

**Good on you, that's beautiful.**

So the next one was, Gracie Fields sang it, and when we got on the boat to go away we had the

15:00 record playing and the band playing on the wharf,

\n[Verse follows]\n Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye,\n cheerio, here I go on my way,\n Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye\n With a cheer not a tear, make it gay,\n Give me a smile I can keep all the while\n In my heart while I'm away,\n Till we meet once again you and I\n Wish me luck as

15:30 you wave me goodbye.\n

**Beautiful.**

So then we went overseas and the boat trip was, I didn't put anything (UNCLEAR) then we landed in Palestine and I said, you struck our British allies, and I said, we had a very, very tough sergeant major and I said, I got a song, maybe this'll do for it, and by this time she's like you, she's saying, "Oh this is good." So,

16:00 and so I said, we'll have this one next. So it's:

\n[Verse follows]\n Kiss me goodnight sergeant major, tuck me in my little wooden bed.\n We all love you sergeant major especially when you holler, show a leg,\n And don't forget to wake me in the morning,\n Bring me 'round a nice hot cup of tea,\n Cor blimey, kiss me goodnight sergeant major, sergeant major be a mother to

16:30 me.\n

And she said, "Oh this is going good, we're going to have a terrific day this day." So that went on like that, then I said, "Well I'll put a bundle on together now," and I said we went through Egypt and Libya and Greece and the other ones that were in Crete, through Syria and all the others, back to Darwin and up to New Guinea, and so I said, "This is a good song, and she said, "All right, away you

17:00 go." So I said,

\n[Verse follows]\nWe're swingin' along the road to victory, swingin' along the road to victory,\n I'm telling you now, you'll agree with me, we're in this fight for the sake of liberty,\n Swingin' along the road to victory, never a job too tough for you and me,\n So here's to the army, the lads in navy blue, salute to the air force and the nurses too,\n Now for Australia shout 'Cooee',\n

17:30 We're swingin' along the road to victory.\n

So we got through that one then we came back and I didn't do one at Darwin, I wrote that one at New Guinea but I never got words to it and so we came home and when we was home, what was the one when we had when we were home now? Can't remember it, it was something with 'happy' anyway. Yeah, 'When you're happy',

18:00 When you're happy, when you're smiling, the whole world smiles with you, Keep... no, that's not it is it? Keep on smiling, keep on smiling 'cause that's the thing to do... No, I forget that one, but that's it anyway. So we had that one.

**Well you did very well, good on you Joe.**

And yeah, so the people when we came home, you know, they were really thrilled to see us and my Mum and Dad, I had a little dog and the dog you know, dogs are marvellous

18:30 you know. I had a little Chihuahua till a few years ago and when Dulcie used to go to her meetings and that it used to be here with me in this little box and it heard her before, when she started her car up about a quarter of a mile up the street there and heard that engine come down here, straight to the door, she'd be there like this, you know. And I had a dog like that was the same, and my Mum, I sent a telegram to say that I'd be home shortly, so anyway this Lassie [Border Collie dog] that I had as soon as

19:00 the taxi was on the way and she said, "I knew you were coming, Lass was at the door." Sally, I'm sorry, this was Sally, "Sally was at the door," so dogs have got an inbuilt system haven't they?

**They sure have. Now Joe, a couple of years ago you were Anzac of the Year.**

Yes.

**Tell us about that. How did that come about?**

Well when the war ended our 2/2 Field Company formed an association and we decided that we needed

19:30 people on the committee so I went on the committee as a committee member but Sir John Holland and people like Sir John Wilson and that who were my officers were decorated, they decided they'd be the President so another one, John Holland, he died a fortnight ago. He was Treasurer or something, Secretary I think he was, and then we had other ones and they, gradually all of us went up the rank.

20:00 We didn't give, stay in the job for long so we went up but it got to the stage where the President, I was President and the Secretary found the job too much so he couldn't do that and the treasurer decided he found it too much so either you get somebody which we couldn't get or it collapsed, so I said, oh well, my daughter's handy so she'll help me, so I took on President, Secretary and Treasurer and it went all right for many years but because I was

20:30 doing community work in between, going around the hospitals visiting our unit there were ill, going to see their widows to see if I could help them anyway I could, and it turned out I used to do the eulogy at the services then. I used to make the thing and talk about how we were, met and so forth in the army and highlighted it to all the people that came in, and after a while they died so rapidly that the PTS [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]

21:00 took over from me, you know, and I used to shake like anything, so I went down to the doctor and I told him, and he said, "Well you're a fool, aren't you?" He says, "You're not worrying about yourself, you're worrying about everybody else, give it away." So I gave it away and another chap took over from me then, but that was only about four or five years ago, four years ago about. So I had a long service in it and visiting the hospitals and hostels and Day Centres and I used to go this funny, this place that now is the Day Centre at Brighton

21:30 I used to go there in my car and pick people up to take them out to Heidelberg Hospital and that and then wait for them to bring, but later on cars from the government did that for them so I didn't have to do that, and so I was recommended by our unit for that with Sir John Holland more or less pushing for it too, and this day we went into the Governor Gobbo and his lovely wife 'Phyl' [Phyllis] and we had a wonderful

22:00 day and there's a big book there somewhere, over the back there with all the photos in, and it's really good but,

**Let's pause. That we talked to, they're just, they're very simple questions just to sort of give a big picture of the war and I'd like to ask you first, when you went to war what did you pack?**

What did

22:30 I pack? You mean

**Yeah, what did you take with you?**

Civil clothes or what?

**Well did you take anything with you, what were your personal items that you took with you to the war?**

Yeah, well personal items we took, I had this experience before, see I was in the militia before the war and when I joined I went to the first camp and I hadn't had my uniform given to me so I went in my beautiful suit and you can imagine like it was Depression days and my Dad had wasted a lot of money buying a suit

23:00 and I ruined at the camp when I was there, but when I took personal things on this one they give you a list of things to take which is shaving brush, shoe polish, handkerchiefs, singlets, all things like that you know, but uniform, boots, socks, hat, all that they supplied to you.

**And were you able to take anything else like mementos or photos?**

We were allowed to take, they didn't like you having cameras, but

23:30 of course everybody took a camera, they hid them, you know.

**Where did they hide them? Where did they hide the camera?**

Well our favourite spot Palestine, we used to dig a trench under the bed and board it up and then put sand and that back on it and we used to hide our stuff under there. Especially after Bardia and that when we all got pistols and, pistols and razors and all things. The officers wanted them but they couldn't get them 'cause we had them, and they used to have these raids all the time but they didn't know

24:00 they were under there. Yeah, that's about all but they got away with it, they put them in their kit bags and things like that and we all got the drum from the orderly room if they had, were gonna have a quick operation. They'd line us all up and then they went through all our gear on the bed. We had to line all the gear on the bed and they went through it all so we had to find a place for it, so that's what we used to do in Palestine. And after when we went to Greece all the blokes relied on me

24:30 and my truck, so the seat used to come down at the back of me and had a big cavity at the back of there so I had pistols and I cameras and I had photos and I had everything under the sun in there, cut throat razors which were beautiful, you know. At this stage I was with a hairdresser in the city at the Victoria Palace and I was learning hairdressing, so when I saw these Italian razors, they beautiful ones, you know, and they were still in grease and paper and,

25:00 I sent one to him, I sent more than one to him, I sent three to him, I sent a broad one and a narrow, and he thought they were the world, and I also sent him a book from the Garden of Gethsemane, a bible, you know.

**So you were able to do a bit of sightseeing were you, when you were there?**

Oh there was plenty of sightseeing, yeah.

**Did you, well tell me some of the places you went to see?**

Well we arrived at Kantara, we went to Colombo first and I told you about the races and the dead cert

25:30 and we went to Colombo and at Colombo, not Colombo sorry, went through Aden and then up the Red Sea and then got off at Kantara, and we had to get off onto pontoons off the boat and as you walk across them they go down in the water sort of, so we went up there and they put on a beaut feed of sausages and mash for us, that was morning tea or around lunch time about, and then we got on what we call dog boxes. Cattle had been taken out of them

26:00 just recently, might've been that day and all stink, terrible they were, but anyway we had about a four hour trip up to our camp in Palestine, a place called Beit Jirja, and at Beit Jirja we were there for quite a long time, but we did get a lot of leave, and leave was either you could go to the Dead Sea or you could go to the Garden of Gethsemane, sorry that was Jerusalem. They were only allowed to Tel Aviv for the first time and we used to go to Tel Aviv and you could go down

26:30 to the beach if you wanted to and they had deck chairs all along there like you see in the Riviera and you could sit in there and sunbake in those, you know, or you could swim. We had an army canteen right on the beach where you could go and have a drink and it was quite good, and they had nightclubs there. Usually they'd let us stay in the city till about 8.00 o'clock and then the buses would wait for us out the front but if you didn't get on the bus you were AWOL [AWL - Absent Without Leave] so you had to pay the penalty for it, not getting back.

27:00 So, yeah, so we toured lots of places and Tel Aviv had lots of, well I wasn't up with all these gadgets that they had there but they were quite nice, but Jerusalem was a lot better because it had ancient history, you know, through the bible and all that. We went to this Holy Sepulchre and all that, that was a magnificent place that, and any, in the middle of the Holy Sepulchre there was a great big round thing with what they call

27:30 tabernacles in the church, you know, with a, they put the holy grails and that, and you can have Arabs here and Egyptians there and Greeks here and you know all around and then, I don't know where the Lord was buried, but I went to about seven or eight places I think where he was buried and I'm not too sure which one was the right one, but it was all for money, you know, they took you, these guides.

28:00 But we walked up the, all those, calvary, what do they call it, the steps? Way up there, we walked up there so where he carried the cross where he was crucified, went up there, then we went around to the (UNCLEAR), beautiful golden mosque that they call it now the Golden Mosque [Dome of the Rock] I think, and that was a beautiful place, and we went into Jerusalem in the Jerusalem, the main hotel that was there we had a section of it for the army and

28:30 we could stay there, you know, overnight so you get an overnight pass and stay there and it was good. Well they had a bit of a nightclub there where you could go to the nightclub. So that was a good place and then we came back from there and we went up to a place called Castina which is up near Haifa on the Syrian border, up that way, and the British Army ran that up there. They had a barracks and all that up there, and on the top of a hill

29:00 at Mount Carmel there was a monastery and at the monastery they had the best wine in Palestine, you know.

**So did you have a drop of wine?**

So I didn't drink much, I didn't drink much but I was driving see, and so I take the mob up there, you just go up the hill like this to the monastery and you look out, oh beautiful, all over see the Mediterranean and that and all over Haifa you can see, so I took them up there one day and that was it, and when I went in the army I met a, I might've told

29:30 you this, I went with a fellow, Johnson, and he was nuff nuffy, nu nu nu nu, you know, stick with me Joe, we'll give you, I'll tell you all about the places over here. So I stayed with him, I got in more trouble than Ned Kelly with him. So this particular day anyway we go into Haifa to buy some fruit and that and the stall holders in there, there's most probably 20, 25 of them and they have a great big long bench like this with all their goods on it and one entrance down that end and they all get in,

30:00 go behind and how they get out I don't know, but that's how it is. So we go to buy watermelons see, and he has a look at the watermelon and he's going like this and he grabs the bottom one and he said, "This one'll do us," and as he did they all fell, you know. The bloke went for his knife in here to have him and we off. We ran around the first corner and the first thing we see a step going up in the air like that, got up the top of the steps and oh, so I met a pom and we went to the barracks with them in there for a while until it cooled down.

30:30 But yes, so little incidents like that.

**You had a good time?**

Yeah, just about. Well you, after you had, you know, about two or three weeks of exercises which you know, four 50 mile, 50 kilometre, it was kilometres over there, 50 K marches and they where you out and hot as hell over there, yeah, so, then we did bridging on the Qishon River that was there and we did all sorts of building. We had

31:00 the kapok assault bridge was just like little things I told you like that, just clip on one each end, it's got a male and female and you clip them, just push them in the water and they just go straight across and the machine go on the front and that's that, then we'd have the next one which is a little pontoon, and we'd have little pontoons where they crush like that, just like this thing here, and you just open it out and it's a pontoon, you get in there, same again, put a machine-gun and that, first one across, the others have got planks across them just like that, like that, you plonk a

31:30 thing in there. It locks in the male, push it out, the next one, push it out, push it out like that, and the next

**Can I ask you about the kapok assault bridge?**

Yeah.

**So does that consist of, are they like, when they say kapok is that the same stuff that's in mattresses?**

Mmm.

**And so are they like a little mattress?**

No, they're heavy, hard like these. They've got an outside waterproof coating on the outside and they're jammed in tight so it's hard as that.

**Right.**

Harder than

32:00 that.

**So there's kapok inside them?**

Yeah.

**And that's why they float?**

That's the buoyancy, yeah.

**Right.**

Buoyancy.

**And so you hook all those together?**

Yeah.

**And that'll take the weight of a man will it?**

Yes.

**Walking across, and the machine-gun goes on the front?**

Well those ones there on a, say a small river, yes, you wouldn't use too many of them on a small, and they run across those, that's all right, but normally with that one, that is for the assault the first time.

32:30 They put one machine-gun and a few soldiers behind him on those ones and they don't run or anything, they just sit there and we slide them straight across, but having up and down stream guide rope you can guide it straight where you want it. You just push it in the water and away it goes and it's there in no time.

**Did the army give you good training on the engineering side Joe?**

Yes, but I'd had engineering training in the militia before the war similar to this. We'd been up to Seymour and bridged the rivers and we'd

33:00 done all this sort of thing. We'd done explosives, all that sort of, barbed wiring,

**Right.**

hand to hand battle, bayonet drill, all that, we done all that.

**So you were all ready. 'Cause in civilian life before the war you didn't have anything to do with engineering, did you?**

Yeah.

**You didn't work in engineering at all?**

No, well I did eventually but.

**When you came back or?**

No. Not when I came, I worked in an engineering firm but when I came back

33:30 I went back to hairdressing. No sorry, I was a silversmith when I went away, that's right, a hollowsmith in a silverware place and when I went away I still had a couple of years, I had 18 months to serve for my apprenticeship which my boss said to me, we'll hold it for you until you come, 'cause I know you'll come back, so I went there and finished that off. Then we got this house down here and then I shifted from down South Melbourne or Albert Park and we stayed here and it was too hard to go, I went in there for quite a while

34:00 to, but then I had to give that away so I went over to Freighter Trailers over on Warrigal Road over there. The officer who was in charge of transport over there was my sergeant in the army and he knew I'd driven all sorts of things and that, so I didn't know semi-trailers were so hard to drive as when I got over there. God blimey, I was used to big ones that you could do anything you like with but when you get a little one and you try and back it just goes like that on you, you know. So I had a bad day

34:30 the first day. I had to go into the fish market and then to the railways and down to the wharf and they were the three worst places. I came into the wharf about that far away, you know, and fellows wouldn't let me unload or load me because they said, "They'd fall down that gap," and I looked at it and I said, "You couldn't fall down there," and they said, "Our thing says that it's gotta be there." So I had to go out again and in the queue again and wasted about an hour and a half getting back to the wharf again.

**So the engineers responsible for building**

35:00 **the bridges and explosives?**

Yeah, see our motto is facimus et frangimus [Latin] and that means 'build and destroy'.

**Build and destroy.**

Yeah. So that's what we built and then we destroyed. So in an advance we built and in a retreat we destroyed.

**And you put down barbed wire you said?**

Yeah, we have.

**Is there a technique for that is there?**

Yes, you can have various types of barbed wire. You can have just a straight line of barbed wire

35:30 or you can have concertina wire where you buy it, you get it in big reels like that, like this, you know,

you unfold and you just take it to a job, push it out like that and it's that wide and that, but then of course, there's always getting over these things so they used to have a big piece of canvas and when they wanted to go over them the (UNCLEAR) used to throw that canvas and the first bloke would jump on there and lay

36:00 there and he was the human man and then they'd all walk over him, but then we got explosives and that, so got galvanised piping, 2 inch gal, 3 inch galvanised piping or whatever it was, loaded it with explosives back to a, and put it right through the barbed wire. Wed it through the barbed wire like that, just pushed 'cause the barbed wire moves easy and just get a straight line and then we blew a 6 to 8, 10, 12 foot gap in it, whatever we wanted.

**Just blew it up?**

Just went,

36:30 just blew a great big gap and we went through and, I didn't go through but the others went through and they picked up the mines and that and at the same time they have a mining party which as I said, the first lot go through and they're prodders and when they prod they leave a little white disc where that mine is. If that's a mine they just leave it there and if this one's another mine they put a white there so they know that mines are set like that, and after you've done about 20 yards, 15 yards they're all the same sort of thing, you know, so all you do then is you just walk a straight line, dig the next

37:00 the next one up, put a white one there, but later on the Italians woke up to us so they put one two three then, put one in the middle, and then again they put them on an angle, one here, one there and one here like an arrow. So you've got a prodder that goes through, marks, you've got the next bloke who's a lifter or a securer. He's got a pin and a little bit of wire and there's a hole here like that and he just puts it through there. Doesn't matter if you stand on it and break anything that won't go off then because that pin's stopping the striker coming

37:30 to the big explosive that's at the end here. They took about 180 pound to set them off and when he's put the pin through he takes the top off it. He lifts it very gently of course because of booby traps, they used, later on they put booby traps and caught quite a few unawares, so he takes that and lays it beside. The next bloke comes along and he rips everything out of there and lays it to the side. By this time they're 50 yards in front you know, so this is going on all the time. When that's done

38:00 two tapes are put down then like that and then the infantry come in and run straight through.

**That's probably a good moment to take a break.**

## Tape 6

00:10 **OK Joe, I'd like you to go over a couple of things you were talking about the other day.**

Yeah.

**I want to take you back to your trip over. You're on the first convoy, aren't you?**

First Victorian convoy, the Etric,

00:30 14th of April.

**And you're steaming across the Indian Ocean and you get to Colombo. Can you tell us a bit more about Colombo? This is the first time you'd been overseas I imagine?**

Yes.

**What was it like to see a new place? Can you remember the sorts of things which...**

The first thing we saw was coming into Colombo they've got a great big tea sign up there, you know, Colombo Tea the world's best, or something to that effect, you know. We pulled into the wharf

01:00 and of course the dhows came out. I haven't got them now but I used to have elephants and all up in there but one of my daughters, her husband's keen on that type of thing so they're all up at his place and he used to buy the elephants and that off me. You could get them in, a big elephants, they're the little ones there you see, but you get those six times as high as those, they're not from over there those ones, but you get them six and they're in black ivory type of thing, you know. So I got quite a few of those and sent them home, we were allowed to send them home

01:30 when we went to Palestine so we were allowed to send them but they might take six months to get home but that was that, and we then went to a place on the way to the barracks where we went, we went to a British military barracks first and on the way there we stopped at Victoria Gardens and beautiful gardens, lovely, I've got a photo in there I think of it, and beautiful gardens with this Queen Victoria, no it wasn't Queen Victoria, it was a statue, massive

02:00 big thing anyway and it was beautiful gardens and that, and then we went to our barracks and we got in

the barracks and that, and the, we went on our first bus ride and of course like over in Norfolk Island the cows have right of way over there because they're holy, they're like cows and that, and so we were amazed at them that they were walking down the street with a fellow with a little whip and a thing type of, and we went from there to,

02:30 this particular day we went to the races, that's right, and I told you all about the races and that. Next day they took us up to Golface which was further up into the mountain, into the coastline, around the coastline and that and that was where all the officers went to these magnificent rest homes and chalets and all that are up there, so it was only afternoon and we sort of came back from there then and another day we went to some other trip.

03:00 I forget where it was we went to, I should've but I don't know where it was. It was on a train anyway and the trains that were there were like our old Melbourne trains where, the carriages used to be, you could sit in here and stand up and talk to your mate in the next carriage there in the same, do you remember those?

### **The old red rattlers?**

Yeah.

### **Yeah.**

Like those but they didn't have the racks or anything up the top, they just had these things.

### **Compartments.**

Yeah, and if you wanted to talk to your mate you'd say, where's

03:30 Pete? You know, and they'd say, he's down, are you in there Pete? Yeah, and he'd stand up and talk to you over the top of this thing, and so anyway we were in that and we got Indians and all were in with us, the Singhalese they were all with us and that, and we had one fellow and he was a ratbag he was. He was in the concert party and that's where he was, he acted naturally and they all thought he was brilliant, and he had legs, they were about that big I suppose. How he got in the army I don't know, but anyway we were in shorts and he's in

04:00 there and someone must've been pointing to his, or doing something to his legs that were there 'cause the Indians were sitting on this side and five of us were, or four of us this side and all of a sudden he just let out you know, and the Indians went, and they jumped the carriage and everything, we had the compartment to ourself. So you could go on elephant rides there if you wanted to know and there was a story about this I read. I get a book from

04:30 the '39ers and I get other books that I read and this particular book was an elephant and he was coming down the street or something heading for this soldier and the soldier gave it a wack with a stick and of course it snorted its head and away it went. Now he was in a march somewhere later on, British this was, he was in a march somewhere later on and they had this, it was in India that's right, where we had the march, and he was stationed back to India, or sent to India

05:00 and the elephant was in the march and he saw this bloke in the crowd and he left the march and went over and got him in his trunk and threw him on the ground and that's the old saying, an elephant never forgets, you know. That was the story, an elephant never forgets. Anyway we went through all of that and then we only had, we went to the race meeting as I told you with the jockeys down below and they did the right thing for us, told us about the horses and the dead cert and all that, and the fellows with the

05:30 carpet snakes and you'd just be looking at a race and you'd go like that and, oh, carpet snake looking you in the eye, and we left there and then we got back to the boat and of course they were selling monkeys and all sorts of little geetoos, geezoes or whatever they are and, gazebos, what are those little lizards? They're up in Darwin anyway, stacks of them up there.

### **Gecko.**

Geckoes, yeah. And they like light and they go on the light and sit

06:00 on that and just go to sleep, there are hundreds of them, and so they took all those off them and put them in the thing and then we left Colombo. Then we did the crossing of the equator, you know, with that thing like that. Well it's Rafferty's Rules that is, you know. 'King Neptune' was a 2/5th Battalion sergeant major and 'Old Dark' was a terrific bloke he was, with his sergeant major, and all the battalions

06:30 even though the officers were good officers they looked up to this fellow as their god more or less, you know. He was a massive big bloke. He look like he might've been a Kiwi [New Zealander], I don't know but he had a lot of dark blood in him and when we went over they made him King Neptune and so of all the characters you could see this bloke was the, he could anything. He could be a comedian, a song, dance, anything you like he'd do and he was really really liked by all the people that were there, so he was the boss of

07:00 the crossing of the equator, so when you cross it, 'cause the navy are all around us making sure that

nothing is going to do any damage to us, and so everybody goes there. You can go dressed in your uniform or you can dress as you like, but it's much better to go dressed as you like because they throw you in the pool anyway. I've got photos in there, so anyway the nurses were there too and they were all dressed nicely, you know, and he said, "I see people up there laughing

- 07:30 at us, about time they were thrown in, up there," and he pointed to the nurses. They grabbed them and straight in in this big pool on the deck. So it was good, that was the crossing of it and then we had Anzac Day on the way over and we left on the 14th see, and it was 25th Anzac Day. This particular day the navy lined up in one big line and the ships all went straight down and they all stood on deck and saluted us as we went through. It was a good ceremony and then we got to Aden, and
- 08:00 just before we took off of course the Italians were in the war with the Germans, and off Aden is an Italian settlement, a big land that is part of theirs and so when we were just about to go into the Suez Canal apparently a sub was seen or appeared or on the sound system or whatever they had, and they had to go out and fix that up and so we went into the Red Sea up through Suez
- 08:30 and into the Red Sea and we stopped at, there's two lakes up there, Lake Bitters 1 and 2 [Little and Great Bitter Lakes]. One is a smaller, one's a bigger one. So the orders were not to break ranks, to stay on the thing and that, but the fellow said, go, the perspiration was pouring off, you know it was hot all the way over there, stinking hot night time and everything, and we had to sleep up on the decks or anywhere you could. Well I was on duty one night on guard there and the nurses had the top
- 09:00 section of it and the officers had the next section and we had the down section or up on the deck, so when we finished meals down below you had to clear all that off and people slept on the tables or on the floor or that, and if they didn't want to sleep there because our air conditioner was just that canvas big bag that brought air down, pumped, pushed it around there, so we slept up top anyway. This night I was on guard and a fellow came and he said, "Can I go and see my sister?" And of course the nurses are sisters
- 09:30 you know, and I said, "No, nobody's allowed up there." He said, "Look I haven't seen her since we got on the boat" and that, and he said, "Everybody's asleep," it's about 1.00 o'clock in the morning or something, you know, and he goes up and it turns out his sister was one of the nurses, a nurse but not, a sister nurse, but not his sister, and when the guard changed it took him all his time to get down again because the other one said, "How did you get up there?" And he said, "The one that was on guard let me up there." He said, "We'll have him," so I got roused over [chastised]
- 10:00 for that. That was another part that was queer too. When we arrived in the Bitter Lakes anyway, a lot of the blokes, I said, blow this, because we were only in shorts and little shirts you know. Over the side they went, you know, and had a swim there, well they all got reprimanded for that because they said, you know, "There could've been crocodiles or anything there to eat you." So they got, and we landed and we had our sausages at Kantara then we got on this stinking train
- 10:30 that took us up to Beit Jirja so that was the trip over.

**And when you get to Egypt you're at, you do some training at?**

Palestine.

**Palestine, yeah.**

Yeah, we did

**And then you come back to Cairo?**

We weren't at Cairo first. We got off at Kantara and then went into Palestine, about

**And then after Palestine though, you come back to Cairo to Mina camp, is that right?**

Yeah.

**Near the pyramids?**

Yeah, that's the first time we'd been there. We went across the Suez Canal

- 11:00 and we didn't go up to Port Said, we went straight across through East Milea and then over to Egypt, a place called Amorea and that was our job building a water tower and a tank, built a big tank on top of the water tower which with Alexandria close by we could buy the, or Cairo close by we could buy the equipment and put it in, yeah, so.

**You mentioned that you had a mate who'd been in the**

- 11:30 **first war?**

Oh yeah, nuff nuff, Johnno, yeah. (UNCLEAR).

**Yeah, that's right the guy with the hare lip. Had he been through that way before? Was he with the first, had he been to Gallipoli do you know, or had he just been to France?**

No, I don't think he'd been to Gallipoli, he went to France, went to France.

**Were there any blokes in your mob who'd been to Mina camp before in the first war?**

There would've been but not in my engineers. They would've been in other

12:00 headquarters and things that were made officers and that, they might've been through it all, you know, because they were sort of elderly. I think Blamey was in France or that, wasn't he? Yeah, and most of the more said was the 9th Division. A few of the others were there, yeah, I think they were but we were, engineers were by ourselves, we weren't with the infantry and maybe they give us a little bit of privileges, you know. I don't know, that was about six mile, five mile out of Cairo right near the palace.

12:30 As a matter of fact the palace there, King Farouk and Queen Farida, I went for a walk one day beside the sphinx, pyramids and that right down this walk and saw this girl in there and had a talk to her and it turned out to be the Princess, and so I come back and told everybody but they said, you're mad. They all reckoned I wandered, and amazing they said, "Look we don't want you going into any of the tombs or anything, you'll see them there but if you go down it's bad luck to go into

13:00 the tombs," and they told them all about Tutankhamun, you know, and they said, if, when you go on leave in Cairo go in to the museum that's in there because there's wonderful examples in there and it's all about Tutankhamun in there, and it was a great place and they went right through human life and everything. It's a magnificent big place right near the Cairo Station, and one particular part there

13:30 it was, the little mice and of course they showed you little sand vipers in big tanks with all sand and that in there. So they throw two or three mice in there and the mice run around and around and around so you know they're disturbed when they're like that 'cause mice don't usually run like that, and all of a sudden you see the sand go like that and see a viper come out, down. It was not the best to see I suppose but it was interesting to see it, you know,

14:00 and then there were lots of other interesting things that were in there and that, and then we came out and what happened then? I think the Provos were pretty strict and that there, and of course they, you know, there was one part they didn't want anybody to go down in. You'd know all about that.

**Yeah, I was going to say then in the first war the Australians had a bit of a reputation when they were in Cairo?**

Well I can tell you one sign that was there at the, right at the start of this street that

14:30 was right down, they called it the Wadi Burkah anyway which is, and right at the thing they had Tiger Lil, great big thing there, you know, Tiger Lil, I was good enough for your old man, I'm good enough for you. So there you are.

**And I suppose some of your blokes checked that out?**

The infantry for sure, yeah, 'cause they always had a harder

15:00 job than us. We always said, "We wouldn't be in the infantry," and they said, "We wouldn't be in your mob, the engineers, you get killed all the time in there." I said, "What about you blokes?" "Oh, we're right. " So there was this friendly comradeship amongst us all (UNCLEAR). Our battalion, we went across with the 2/5th Battalion on our Etric, and of course we were Victorian engineers, so we sort of were detailed to them a lot of the time and so we looked after them

15:30 and they looked after us and they had a major, or he was a colonel I think he was, Cook, a great old bloke he was, they loved him. He was in the militia before the war and he went away with them and that, and when we were going into Bardia they had a big parade the 2/5th because they were only from here to Bluff Road down there away from us, and this big parade right, so we went down and old Cook he was there and he started the parade and all of a sudden

16:00 they came out and they said, "Well sir, you won't be in this campaign, you're being relieved," and he just looked at them and the tears run down his eyes and all the blokes in the ranks he looked at them and you could see the tears coming down. It was a very emotional state, you know, that happened so they put another chap in charge. So I don't know whether he was even in the First World War but he could've been.

**Did you, you said you walked around the sphinx and places like that. Did you climb the pyramids too?**

I went up a couple of steps

16:30 but it looked pretty high from where I was. A lot of our blokes did and they went up and of course it was 2, they were 2 foot, you know, and it was hard and they sort of came on an angle like that, you know, so I don't think anybody ever got to the top but they had photographs taken of them about 30 feet up, you know.

**Was there much of a sense that you were following in the footsteps of your fathers?**

Yeah, it was mentioned all the time to us, you know. Yeah,

17:00 and before Bardia, that's one of the things they said, you know, Gallipoli, you're now, you know, yeah, it

was at Bardia. You're now following in the footsteps of them and in Greece again when the New Zealanders, like the New Zealanders in the Western Desert with us also, but we weren't together then, they were separate, they went their way and we went ours, but when they were up in Mount Olympus and that they were together fighting and so they made them the Anzacs again there, 2nd Anzacs and

17:30 so that was that, but all the Australians most probably would've been killed if it hadn't been for the New Zealanders because up there when they did a, Germans were pouring down through Bulgaria way and through Yugoslavia way near Vevi I think it was. We didn't have any artillery or anything else, it was all gone, we only had a couple of things anyway and the dive-bombers fixed them, so anyway these Maoris put on their Haka [traditional Maori war dance] and when the Germans were coming down they did

18:00 their war dance and it stopped the Germans, the Germans just stopped apparently and they looked and then they, 'wharr', and they fixed bayonets and ran. Well the Germans threw everything away and went for their lives. So I think that was the turning point maybe up there. They knew that they could really scare them, but the trouble was with, in all of them the Germans spoke beautiful English and that, you know, in New Guinea the Japanese couldn't pronounce a R,

18:30 it was a W, you know, and so when the Japanese wanted to put on one of their harries they used to yell out, "Are you there Woger, Woger, are you there Woger?" "I'm wounded." You know, as soon as they did they gave them the works. They couldn't say W's, they all said R, no, couldn't say R, they'd say W's, but in the other one over there they used to talk plain English and they weren't quiet but apparently

19:00 I didn't, I wasn't up with the 16th, 18th, 19th Brigade when they were up in Yugoslavia but they were up in the mountains and the mountains were like that, you know, and the snow and sleet and they must've found it terrible because when I was delivering stuff just back a bit at Ellassona it was freezing cold and so forth, but they used to sing and everything. Of course the Aussies thought they was, you know, Australians and that up there and they and they relaxed

19:30 a little bit and when they relaxed the Germans come through did their damage and took all the uniforms what I was told, and they took all the uniforms and dressed themselves up in it and scattered among all the other battalions. So that's only hearsay what I heard from them but I know that later on when I got taken prisoner the fellows that took me over to British Red Caps [British military police], but they were Germans, you know we were only in there for a little short time, but that's apparently what happened up there too on a big way.

20:00 **Now, you met a number of the top brass, or you were there a number of times when people, you know, some of the big chiefs were around. You were talking about a speech that Blamey gave.**

Yeah.

**I'm just curious, when there are a few thousand of you presumably, how**

20:30 **do you all hear what he's got to say?**

They have microphones there, they had one from there. This was at Palestine, like you were

**Yeah, yeah.**

Talking about when he said that, they have the standard one they talk to you, you know, the concert party had them anyway and that, and he told them he was coming back to Australia to get reinforcements for us because there was only a third of us there more or less, and when he came back to Australia of course he couldn't do any good because Curtin said to him, we'd like to give them to you, but we

21:00 need them here for ourselves because we're going to get attacked by the Japanese soon. They were pouring down through the other places, you know, 'cause we

**You met Blamey another time too, you were telling us about**

Yeah, we were down on the beach at Jaffa, not Jaffa, Tel Aviv at our Army Club, you know we had a place off the beach where I was saying we could go and have drinks or that, and he walked in with all his brass, all his belt, webbing, not webbing, you know, the bandoliers, gee,

21:30 what do they call them now? Anyway they have a strap across here and one up here and their revolvers and all, so when he walked in with that and his hat on more than anything, he had to shout to the bar. That's the one.

**Why is that, does he have to**

Well that's the rule that you're not allowed to take your hat into the bar. Even now in the RSLs you're not allowed to wear a hat in the RSL. If you go in the door of the RSL they'll say take your hat off or shout.

**Well that's handy then if the general does it.**

So

22:00 yeah, oh yeah, so he had a strap, he had about \$60 I think there, it was around, I forget, about 60 I think, and yes, a real nice, we got along well with him, you know.

**And you met him again in New Guinea too?**

Yes, I'd met him in New Guinea too. See we used to catch fish, you know, and I told you the fish story didn't I? No? Well we used, when we boarded up a river and that and got prawns and that,

**Yeah, yeah.**

OK, so this day we were

22:30 there, this was not Blamey this one, we were there and we were cooking the prawns back off from the Danmap River, was it, yeah I think I said Denmap, back up a bit anyway, and the smell was coming out onto the road, you know, and this officer went past, what was his name? I know their names, it's pretty hard to remember everybody. Anyway, he stopped and he said, "That's a good smell there, what are they?" And they said, "We're cooking some prawns." "Where did you get those?" We said, "When we bolted off the river up there we got the prawns

23:00 up there." They were big ones, you know, 'cause like when you get in Queensland the big ones up in the Gulf, they're nice ones. So we said, "Do you like them?" He said, "I love them," and we said, you know, "Have a sit down and have go with us." "Righto." So Stevens it was, Brigadier Stevens, so he sat down, no, it's general, yeah, so he sat down and he said, "By gee, they're beautiful aren't they?" He says, "What's the rest you've got cooking in there?" And he says, "Oh we caught a couple of fish the other day," and he says, "Yeah, I've been meaning to talk to you about that,"

23:30 and we said, "They're easy to catch." He says, "I know they are, the way you do it." Said, "What do you mean?" And he says, "You throwing the hand grenades, we've got men up the front there looking for those hand grenades, they're supplied to them." We said, "Oh yeah." So anyway he said, "What kind of fish have you got?" We said, "Trevally," and he said, "Oh beautiful, isn't it?" And we said, "Would you like some?" He said, "I'd love it." So we took him down a slab of it and we had to cut them up, a big fish like that and he said that was beautiful,

24:00 and so he went up to the front which is a mile away further like, and I think he was going up to the Advance Resting Station up there. Anyway he came back afterwards and stopped at our camp and said, "Now remember what I said, no more grenades." We says, "Righto, OK, sorry sir." "And I'll be back in a couple of days, will you have any more fish?" And we said, yeah. So he went back to there and told Blamey and all them see, and anyway that was what happened. They all came through and when he came

24:30 the next time he said, "Oh gee, he said, I've put my foot in it now." We said, "Why?" He said, "I went back and told them I had this beautiful fish from you and everybody wants it now." We said, "Tell us how many you want." So we gave him about four or five, six, something like that, to take back, great big trevally. And Blamey came through this day and he was on the same, but we didn't have any fish for him that day that he went to go on this bridge, and somehow or other he tipped over.

**Somehow or other? Now come on, tell us the story?**

Well I told you it before but

25:00 I think I might've elaborated, or didn't elaborate enough, but I said we put him in the river, but I don't think that was really correct. I think it was between the fellows that were on the thing, he got out of step and maybe they were trying to correct him, but anyway there's an upstream and a downstream and when they pulled the rope he went in the river. It wasn't very deep but (UNCLEAR) on short pants and everything like that, anyway so.

**So what did the general say when he...**

Said, "I should've had more

25:30 brains, I knew you blokes would do something to me."

**You also, you met Churchill too.**

Yeah.

**Tell us about that?**

We were up around Tobruk way I think it was, yeah, around about Tobruk. It might've been Derna, might've been Bardia. No, it wasn't Bardia, but mainly Tobruk I think it was, yeah. So anyway we didn't have much to do in Tobruk, we were reserves in Tobruk,

26:00 so the 2/1st and the 2/8th went through there and they did all the heavy work and that and we did cleaning up and various things like that. We were camped a fair bit back in anything you could get, dig yourself a hole and fill it in with anything you could get around the sides, and just in case they dropped bombs or anything you had a sort of a weapon pit between, you had to go in twos, and Blamey came

26:30 one day and as far as Wavell [General Archibald Wavell], our other bloke, he was brilliant because he used to come up and just sit down, "Good day boys, how are you going?" You know, so when Churchill

came he said, "Anybody got my chair?" And they said, "Chairs? We don't use chairs, this is our chair here mate, you'd better squat down there." So he wasn't too happy with that.

**And did he sit down or did he stand up?**

They ended up getting, one of the officers got him something to sit on and that, but

27:00 yeah, we didn't get on too well with him but he was good, he did everything he was supposed to do I suppose. You can talk about all the things I s'pose but he was a top bloke in the army and everything so he knew more than we knew, but we might've been agitators, yeah. The other speech that was made was when we were at Bachi and the Prime Minister came over there.

27:30 He made his speech and everything and we got on with the job and went up and the others went on to Benghazi and we just followed them up. If there were mines and anything there they'd just a big sign up, mines, you know and they'd we just go and take, they'd take so many mines out, the ones that were there, but when you're on the move you keep moving. You can't much around with that, as long as you've got a spot. So we had Italian, a little, we got a little Italian bulldozer types

28:00 of things and eventually, they had chains in the middle, in the front of them and instead of going into a minefield and doing it that way, taking the top, we loaded them works up, they had these chains that they call flaylers and they used to go out in the front. There'd be about four of them and they'd go blom blom blom blom brr, and they'd only blow up that part and the truck was back here, you know. So that was a good thing, but they've got, then mine detectors came in.

28:30 If we had mine detectors it would've be nice, really easy, you know 'cause you just go prt prt prt prt bang bang, put it on like that, white cards on the top. But we didn't have those, it was all, and at night time when our officers used to go up to reconnoitre, the officers did all the reconnoitring. We weren't allowed to do that, it was an officer's job, they went out and they had trip wires. I got a can of it down the back there I think. It's only a very thin, like that, like that, and it's

29:00 in a coil and when you pull it it comes out like a tape and you just go from one to the other but you can't see it in the dark and if you hit that, just a loose touch like that, bomba. So we had trip wires so they had to feel there way around everywhere they went at night time and they'd get as close as, nearly as close as that wall apparently they was telling us, and heard all the Italians talking and everything like that and then they'd have a look to see if they could see any machine gun positions in there, and then they'd

29:30 come back with a full report, and when they did that they gave them a Military Cross each which they deserved I guess. I wouldn't like to gone out and do it. And so that was the first time they went in, that was Bardia, and then the other places they went in, the Italians booby trapped them from then on you know. They had this wire here which is OK, you couldn't touch it, you just stepped over it and you left a little disc there where you came in so as you could come back over it, and that's what officers

30:00 tell me. My mate, Sir John Holland, he went out on one of them and they had all these things similar to that, but they put booby traps under then and when you went out to just de-louse one thing, and if you shifted anywhere the booby trap underneath would spring up, boom, gone, and then when we did go to Tripoli when we went right through Benghazi and up towards Tripoli, the Germans came in and they put teller mines in, which teller mine is a round thing like that

30:30 and it goes down in the ground like that and it's got three prongs sitting up in the air like that, and when you put on those it depresses it and springs up in the air then goes off, kills everyone within about 20 yards. They were good, terrific. We didn't have (UNCLEAR), the New Zealanders went. They stayed there and also the British Army, they went up and they found those, but we were taken back and sent to Greece then.

31:00 We could've, I reckon we could've easy taken Tripoli 'cause we had all the army captured, there was no one there. But anyway he thought better and sent us to Greece and promised us the world and we got nothing.

**Now it's about this time that you get the nickname of the Scrounger. Is that right?**

Yeah. I got that, yeah, when we first went to Egypt. We went to a beautiful little place

31:30 out in the desert, yeah, and it was a Japanese, all done like you see on the willow pattern plates, you know willow pattern plates? It was just like that, little bridges and little tea house and all like that, beautiful. That's where I had our fortunes told. I told you that, didn't I?

**I don't remember the fortune.**

Well there's a lady there and she said, "You want your fortune told for 50 mil?" You know, that was about five bob [shillings] or something like that. Yeah, no worries. So three of us and one of them was in the 2/7th Battalion

32:00 and the two of us were in the engineers, my mate, two of us joined up together and so we had ours told. So he was the first one and was a big strong boy, Musica, and Ron Musica, and anyway he bloomin' got his fortune told and she told him this and that and that and this and that and she said, "I don't like what I see here," and she said, "I don't think you're going to take in much of the action."

32:30 So anyway he laughed and, oh yeah, all right. So it came to me, no, it came to Neil was here and I was the last one, and she said, "You are going good, good, she said, but all of a sudden it blacks out on me. She said, "Something's going to happen to youS, and he said, "Gee, what about? What's going to happen?" She says, "Can't tell you but you're going home, you're going to be sent home," and it came to me and she had a big smile on her face when she

33:00 finished. She said, "You're all right, you're going to see everything and go home, but you're not going to be wounded or anything." So she didn't see that. Oh, it was after that when I, after when I'd been wounded so I went right through and came home. Neil, a bomb exploded beside the, and the pressure came through and interrupted all his stomach and he had to have stomach opened up and all the, everything inside straightened out again. It was all twisted, you know, they sent him home. This one here was

33:30 sent in Cairo, the 2/7th, our unit had to go out and build pill boxes and everything just as a practise building them, you know, and it turned out that when the Germans were coming down it saved Cairo, saved Cairo from being taken that these pill boxes our blokes used to stop some of them anyway, and he was on a Bren gun, on a truck with a Bren gun mounted in it and it wasn't connected properly and the Bren gun dropped off and took

34:00 knee cap off, you know, and so he had to stay back at Heliopolis which he reckoned was great. He said the best life he ever had. So he didn't see any action. This one saw action at Bardia and then he went home and I saw the lot and come home. So you've gotta take

### **She got it right?**

Yeah, she was right.

### **But also that you were made the scrounger for the unit to try and get things.**

Yeah, well see I was a

34:40 transporter and well I sort of seemed to be in everything, you know, and Sir John Wilson, he was Managing Director of Australian Paper Mills and he was our OC and he said, "Righto Joe, when you go out on some of these jobs just look for wood or things like that and bring them in," you know. I said, "All right." So I used to go and get all these things and sometimes it was after a battle and sometimes it was before the battle closer up to the lines than where the others were,

35:00 or if we shifted mobs through there and they'd left. So anyway came this day and I saw this big drum, big barrel, you know, a hog's head, but it was down the bottom of the hill and I thought, oh jeez. I went down anyway and it was full. I thought, oh God, how am I going to get that on the truck? So (UNCLEAR), so I got the old lever business, you know, and levered it half way up the sand hill, backed my truck around here and then opened the back door, opened the tailboard down, pulled the thing,

35:30 rolled down, boom straight in. Beauty, I said.

### **What did that have in it? Some wine or some beer?**

Well it had cognac in it it turns out, but it didn't matter, they'd drink anything. And the cognac was actually for the medical section because when an Italian was wounded they put cognac on all his wounds, you know. It was disinfectant type of thing put on the wounds. So I took it back to camp and anyway the fellows got stuck into and one bloke tried to shoot the moon

36:00 and I was in a hell of a lot of trouble then. He said, "When I send you out to scrounge I mean to bring it back and let me see it." So anyway another time I was told to go down and see if we could get some supplies from Cairo, from Alexandria, and I go down and I said to the fellow there, "Has my truck come in yet?" There's three of us in a convoy, but I said,

36:30 I didn't have any rank but I was the driver and the other two were in utes and that. I said, "Has our bloke from the engineers come down yet to get our supplies?" And he says, "Which engineers?" And I told him and he says, "No, nobody here." Oh, I said, "That's great isn't it?" So I went over to the other two and I said, "Better put on a bit of a glim face" (UNCLEAR) like. So I said, "I'll tell him another story." So I went over and I said, "Look we can't wait more than about half an hour, in half an hour will you let us go in and load

37:00 up and then our officer will be down with his utility and that and sign for it?" Oh yeah, he said, "Go in and take what you want." He said, "Here's a bit of paper, put down what you take." So we saw it and if it was whisky we put it down as another one of beer and that, and so we had this big thing, about that big and it was heavy as anything and we couldn't find the name on it, so I put distilled water, a case of distilled water and I took it home, up back. Anyway we waited there for another half hour and I said to him, look, I said,

37:30 and I had a watch given to me before I went away and I said, "Look we'll have to go." I said, "Can I sign anything?" And he said, yeah. So I signed the things and as we used to sign before, Burke and Wills, when two of us signed. They never ever found Burke and Wills. I don't know what I signed on this one but I scribbled a name on it and I said, "OK, she's apples, are you right?" I didn't tell him our unit anyway. I told him another unit was what it was, so we took off and away we came back and when we

come into Kanga

38:00 Wilson, Kanga, when he marched he went boom, boom like this see so we called him Kanga. He was all right, he took it as a joke and I get back and he says, "What did you get?" And I said, "We got tons of stuff here," and he said, "How did you get it?" And I said, "We signed somebody's name for it and got away with it." It was a NAAFI, not our army camp, it was a NAAFI. Gee, he said, "You get away with the world you blokes." So I said, he said, "What have you got?" And I said, "Well I've got a case of whisky here." "That'll do me."

38:30 Took the beer down to the others and this other big case it's got rum in it. Oh gee, what a, and I'd already been roused for the other cognac I got them. Anyway when they smelt the rum, oh, you know, they're into it, well some of them just about choked because it's burning hot you know.

**Navy cut rum?**

Yeah, and in the hot desert, anyway they had to get the RAP bloke to bloomin' give them soothing stuff to stop the burning in their throat.

39:00 One bloke he was out for two days and that cognac one, we were lucky there too because a big one and when it got down the bottom this bloke went in to try and get it out and he fell in it and he couldn't get out and he was nearly asphyxiated because of it. So he said to me, "No more of that Joe, are you right?" I said, "All right." So everything was good then until we went up to Benghazi and my mate went into the place with the skeleton key and loaded the truck up again with it, but that time it was beneficial to us

39:30 because my mate Paddy Gollier had his duck and 2/11th Battalion had his duck and were going to screw it's neck and, so we saved him by giving them some whisky and a beer out the truck.

**All right, well that's a good place to change another tape.**

## Tape 7

00:13 **Now Joe, I'd like to take you back to Darwin.**

Yes.

**I'd like you to talk about some of the things you did there, some of the training and also engineering works you did for the vets [veterans] of Darwin.**

Yes, well when

00:30 we first went to Darwin, of course you can be up in Darwin at the front line but you've also got to prepare behind the front line for all the things, and when you're going to have a mass of troops going there like Darwin was empty, and when they're supplying troops up the front you've got to make sure you've got those supplies for them there. So we built a place at Katherine and that was an abattoir and all the big

01:00 beef that was up there we slaughtered, we had (UNCLEAR).

**Can I just ask what part of the war did you get to Darwin?**

Well they bombed Darwin on 19th of February 1942 and at that stage we were either at Colombo on the way home.

01:30 We were going to Burma, but as I said our Prime Minister he wouldn't agree with Churchill and decided to use his own troops, and we were coming home so we were second convoy. First convoy that went, went to Java and got taken prisoners, and we were second one and we were told, someone got a message out and our captain deviated and went over to Durban in South Africa and parked over there for a while, and the navy came with us and they

02:00 supported us so no subs could get it, but at that time apparently tons of Japanese subs in the ocean up there, and then we left Durban and came home and then we went through the Bight and back to, went through (UNCLEAR). We saw massive waves you know, I've never seen waves like it before and I was right on the back of the ship doing some little jobs that were there and I went up in the air and the next minute I went,

02:30 God strike, but anyway we come back to Fremantle, yeah, I think it was Fremantle and we went up to Mount Lofty and had our gathering again, (UNCLEAR) all the people boarded us out so we had to get them back together again and they were all boarded, come back, they gave us a bit of leave.

**Is this in Adelaide?**

Adelaide, yeah, in Mount Lofty Hills, yeah. Yeah, it was Port Adelaide we come in, not Fremantle, sorry, yeah and

03:00 so we came home then on leave, we got leave and then we came home in March so it would've been April or May we went, April, May, think it was May, might've been June we went to Darwin.

**How did you get to Darwin?**

Transport, we had our new equipment given to us, new gear and new equipment, transport and everything and we drove up and it was a hell of a drive. We went through bull dust, there was no roads, you know, we went through bull dust and it was matter of one person

03:30 in the front just staying in the tracks and we all followed him and our sumps put a big hole right in the middle of it where our sump was, you know, so yeah, we get to Katherine and

**How long did it take to drive from Adelaide?**

From Adelaide up there I'd say it would've been three or four days because we stopped at various places. Do you want to know in particular?

**That's OK.**

Yeah, so we stopped in various

04:00 places and we got there and, I'm just seeing whether it was Katherine we were at. I think it was Adelaide River we were at. Yeah, it was Adelaide River because all the people that come back from Darwin were there, so we had to then go to Katherine and build a, there was already a hospital but it was only a makeshift hospital sort of. We had to modernise it and improve what

04:30 was there. We also built an abattoirs there and we built a bridge over the river that was there, then that was our job finished there, and there was a railway station that had to be upgraded and an airport that had to be upgraded a bit, but the Americans had done a fair bit of work on it so I don't think we did too much work on those. Then we went up to Adelaide River, back to Adelaide River and we were told,

05:00 all these people that are there take them back to Darwin, they can be your labour gang. So we took them all back to Darwin and our OC

**Are these Aboriginals?**

No, these are all Australian Army and navy and air force.

**Sorry.**

In Darwin when the bombs dropped there was panic and the navy said they were in charge, the army said they were in charge and the airforce said they were in charge, and the air force suffered terrific casualties and terrible plane losses and

05:30 the army suffered a fair bit of losses too because they were camped near Darwin, and the navy of course suffered terrific losses with the bombing of the ships in the harbour. The Americans were with them too, and one hospital ship was hit there, but anyway that was, so there was panic up there and some reason or other someone got the word that it was take off leave at Darwin, so they all one catapult, you know, to all of them and they all took off with any trucks or anything they could get and they went as far as they could get, well Adelaide River

06:00 is where they stopped, and then our OC, Kanga Wilson, General Major Colonel Wilson, he said, well all right, we'll be here for about four or five days, so we got a two-up school going there and we did various little jobs around the place and that, and then we off, and we went up and as we went through the Strauss Airfield was part of the roadway and that's the first airfield and the planes used to

06:30 come down and all the traffic was stopped about half a mile back from where they were landing. Bluey Truscott was there and he got killed a bit further out, and so we went through there and then through all the other places and that. We got to a creek, I'll think of it soon. Anyway we got to this creek and we had to build another bit of an abattoirs out there so they could sort of have an in between station for the

07:00 big station that was back there and we shifted from there then and we went up practically to Darwin. Yeah, we did get to Darwin. We stopped at Batchelor I think for a little while and found out that the airport had to be, airstrip had to be enlarged and that, then we went to Darwin anyway. When we got to Darwin we were split up into our three sections and given areas to do. Some areas had anti-aircraft positions to be put in

07:30 in concrete and the anti-aircraft guns fixed on those instead of on the ground bouncing away every time they fired a shot. We had to take Fanny Bay Gaol and pull all the iron off that and make weapon pits all around Darwin for you know, a type of thing like that or maybe back this way, and they were where the infantry and anybody got in to maybe fire rifles, and if planes went by they sort of laid down and hoped it didn't land one in there, and they busted the oil tanks

08:00 up there, they were burning. The navy had the ships burning in the harbour and the hospital had been damaged a bit so we had to do a bit of work on there, and that was about what we had there, was just maintenance. No, we had to go out one road out to the west coast and we had to, the Darwin River flooded and it flooded all the area and there was, at this time there was danger that they were going to send German, the Japanese

08:30 paratroops down. They didn't want them to land on those

**I think you told us about this.**

Yeah.

**With the kangaroo.**

Yeah, that's right, yeah. So we built...

**Did you see any of the bombing while you were there?**

Yeah, we had, bombing was from here to Bluff to here, over the road, everywhere but if you're down in a hole you're right, you know.

**What did you have to, was there air-raid sirens and...**

Yeah.

**Did you have to go into shelters?**

Air-raid sirens, yeah, yeah. But usually the aircraft were up fighting them first before the bombers came in, and they

09:00 prepared, a lot of them were, they did at night time, you know, but we had the islands out with their speakers on there, just tapped, I don't know what they did, either just said da da da da like that or something like that and then the siren was sounded and everybody hit the cover, but I had a lot of those, 46 about we were in out of about 60.

**The bombing raids?**

Mmm, and they were all directed, not, after the 19th of February Darwin was, you know, pretty

09:30 desolate and lots of places were blown away and all this. The aerodrome was finished and, but there's another aerodrome there which that had planes all over it, ruined it, finished, had to clear them away. So we had to do a lot of roadwork and a lot of training on pontoon work. We used to go out and of course the tide goes out, goes out a mile. When it goes it just goes swoosh and where it's all big waves here it's dry sand, you know, it's wet sand and stuff, so when you take

10:00 your pontoons out and that, doing a job like that, you have to know the tides and everything so you do your pontoon work out there which is a lot of rescue work type of thing on the pontoons, and then bring the pontoons back before the tide comes in because when it comes in, when it goes out the ships that are anchored on the wharves and that there are high and dry, no water under them. They've got to be battened, you know, tied down, and then they hit, which they call Lovers' Lane there where, this is

10:30 when they bombed and I don't know how many got killed there but it was under estimated and there were more killed than they claimed. The post office they knew how many were killed there and knew how many were killed down in the area around Darwin and they knew some, in the hospital and things like that and over at the airport they knew they were killed. There were stories that all the Indonesians and all those people that came across Pearl and luggers and that,

11:00 you know, they all jumped off cliffs and killed themselves. I'm not too sure what happened then but I heard that they let them go out to see, but I don't know if that's true or not. So there were a lot of casualties and that there and there's a beautiful memorial down the Adelaide River, the Adelaide River cemetery. It's well worthwhile seeing, it's beautiful. They've got all the people in the post office all together in it. We got one bloke in there but he wasn't killed. We didn't have any

11:30 casualties at Darwin. We had a lot with shell shock and things but none of that, and one of our fellows got left behind and he was going over to, he missed the boats we went on. He went on the Queen Mary and that type of one, the Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary, Aquitania and all those, but he got drunk and he climbed the mast and fell off and he killed himself and they buried him at sea, but we got a monument for him up in Darwin on that Adelaide River thing there, Smith.

12:00 Smith his name.

**Was that an accident or do you think that he did it deliberately?**

No, he wouldn't have done it deliberate. They used to get into it too much, you'd see this happen, you'd pull blokes back from the sides of ships, you'd find it on there. They had nothing else to do, either play two-up or more or less heads and tails or dice, you know, because you'd roll, the coins would roll and go over but with the dice you just a put a little board around from that end to here and throw the dice and heads

12:30 are right, beauty. Tails are right.

**What was morale like in Darwin with your unit?**

Our morale as far as we were concerned, and we tried to pass it on to others was high, very good, yeah,

no worries. We were made to run or made to take cover when the bombers come over but when nobody fired or anything we were told not to disclose your position otherwise they did, they'd have all on you and they got bombs to blow you away.

13:00 So we just took it as it came. Night time was a bit dangerous, you know. I was walking down back from the hospital one night, I don't know if this should go on tape, but it's not bad. I was coming back and Darwin's cess pit with all the effluent in it, you know, and this bomber came straight down the road and I thought he was gonna have a go at me, was semi moonlight, so I dived in this patch and I was right into the tank, oh, nobody wanted to know me for a week.

13:30 I didn't dive in, but I jumped (UNCLEAR) oh stink, gee. Yeah, get out of it Joe, out, down, I was banished, yeah.

**You obviously got rid of the smell by the time it came for your famous two-up game then?**

Yes, yes.

**Lead us through this game. I mean a lot of people my age, I've never seen a game of two-up, so**

To tell you the truth, that wasn't at Darwin, that was down at Adelaide River.

**OK. Well paint us a picture of that**

14:00 **because a lot of people don't know what a game of two-up is.**

They don't know what two-up is? Well two-up is you get two pennies and you put them on a kip, I've got one in there with lots of pennies, and so you toss them so as they toss in the air and come down. Now you've got the choice of betting heads or tails. Sometimes they have three pennies, I think we had two pennies, no, we had three pennies. Always three pennies on the kip, that's right, because you get the alternative, two heads and one tail

14:30 or two tails and one head, yeah, that's right, so anyway the fellow that I used to go, he was our comedian also in our concert party and little parties between ourselves, wasn't a concert party, just to keep the troops happy, and he was our magician and he was fantastic and when we were in Palestine he had the time of his life. The officers used to take him out everywhere and they'd billet him. Jeez, he was living the queen's life, king's life.

15:00 So anyway he was our two-up boy, Corker his name was and he was a wonderful fellow, big boy and anyway he said to me, "Joe, get your tightest pants on tonight and put the belt on it, tighten it up, wear a big shirt so as we can pile the money down it." I says, "Oh yeah, you're pretty lucky are you?" He said, "We will tonight." So he went down and he tossed the coins and everything and I was

**Who's there? Who's playing at the school?**

Anybody that wanted to play in it could play.

15:30 All army blokes or anybody that was there, civilians or Allied Works Council which I was telling you about. They're the ones that built the road to Darwin sort of and that. So anyway he, I was stuffing it down there, all the money he'd won and then he thought he'd won enough so the Allied Works they would bet big see, so he gave it away then. He said, "That'll do me for the night." So I said, "Well take all your money home." He said, "No, we'll sit and watch the game." I said, "Well I want to have a spin," and he said, "All right, have a spin," so I had a spin and 13

16:00 heads, and I took all their money and it was all lying on the ground like that, and they said, "Can we borrow it?" And I said, "My Dad told me never to lend money to anybody. You can take it, use it yourself, but I'm not fighting, that's my money, I'm not playing against myself," and so

**What, you know, that's a lot of heads to win in a row.**

Yeah.

**Did you think, are you betting it all each round to think if I win more, or if I lose it?**

Well that's what happens.

**It doesn't matter or what?**

Yeah, if you pay for \$2 well you spin for \$2

16:30 so you get \$4, so you can take \$2 and leave your \$2 or leave the 4, so you spin again and \$4 goes to 8, 8 goes to 16, 16 goes to 32 and da da da da da dum and up, and so by the time you've done 13, well you know, it multiplies. So I forget who I was spinning for that night. I think it might've been a \$5, 5 quid. No, it would've been more than that for 5 quid [pounds], no it must've been a 2 quid one. Anyway so I had all this money

17:00 down here which made me out looking like that and I had all my own money on the floor. So he came home and I threw all his money, just took my thing out and dropped all his money on the bed and he was

counting it all up, you know. He said, "We both had a good night tonight, I thought we'd be lucky." Poor old Allied Works Council they'd done probably two months pay. But they kept you together and the old saying is you know, they'd put a little not around, two-up school on at 6.00 or 7.00 o'clock after the meal, you know, and then the

17:30 familiar voice would say, "Who wants to be in? Who wants to spin?" "Two bob in a head to see him go," or "\$2 in the head to see him go," you know, and this is a favourite call and they'd all be around and someone would say, yes, righto, so you had to pick a partner. Like you might say, I say, "I want 5 quid on heads," and you'd say, "I'll back you for 5 quid tails." So you and I had the money, you have yours down there and I have mine here and if I lost I kicked it across to you and if I won I took yours.

18:00 So sometimes they'd go for maybe three games and then they'd say, I've had enough, and get out so you find another partner. Yeah, it's an interesting game actually. Nice when you win, it's just like going to the pokies. We went down Sandy a while ago, Dulcie and I, usually we go down and have a coffee in the afternoon there, you know, and she likes sitting on the beach and watching the water and that because she was bred in the country up in Cowra, and her Mum when she came down here she said, "Oh you're lucky, you've got this beautiful beach

18:30 and that down here to see, I'd love to have a place like this." So I think it stuck on her mind, so we go down there quite a bit anyway, have a meal there at night sometimes, a celebration. We had our 65th the other day, I think, yeah, so went down and had a beautiful steak down there. Yeah, so you get these you see.

**Now one of the other things in Darwin, you said all the lads got a lot of pets.**

Yeah, well I was one of the lads that had the pet. I had a little kangaroo

19:00 which I shot her mother and I got the little cow, I didn't know it was her mother but I, they look fierce things when they're out in front of you and they smell you as you're coming so you've got to go, if the wind's blowing this way you can't come this way to them, you've got to go around this way because they've got terrific smelling things, you know, and so anyway they all bolted away and I had a shot and killed this one and the poor old joey was in there. So it was only a little thing and I grew it until it was about that big or about that big it was, and it used to sit up

19:30 and beg to me and I used to get it drunk on a little boot polish tin of beer of a night time. I also had a chameleon and they're brilliant little things. He used to sleep on my pillow of a night time or my greatcoat which was my pillow and he'd change to khaki you know, and I'd give him some of that but he'd go green on khaki or when he'd go on the white he'd go blue or something like that, and their eyes go all around the world like this, you know. Have you ever seen them? Oh, they're fantastic, they look at you this way or that way or up in the air.

20:00 So anyway I left him too, I let him go, but this little joey when we left I could see the tears coming out of his eyes. I was starting to nearly cry myself to leave him 'cause they won't accept them once they're like that, the other kangaroos won't accept them, they've got to battle for themselves.

**Now after, you did other training at the Atherton Tablelands too.**

Yes.

**Is that right?**

Yeah.

**Now one of the things you were talking about was they gave you things**

20:30 **to eat, experimental things.**

Now did they, yes, yeah.

**Describe some of those.**

Well they told us that we would eventually end up in New Guinea or one of the islands. It all depended how things were going, and so the catering corps were together with the people that, like these pharmaceutical things, they test all foods and everything like that to see if any nutritional value and then they go up to the army catering mob and that and they

21:00 say, this is what we want you to put on because if this is what they're going to strike in New Guinea we want them to try it now. And so they had this big table and all the plates, lovely, beautiful food on it, you know, so we took what we wanted to but everything that we took had a number on the plate. We had number 3 or number 7 or number 9 or 12 or that and had a bit of it. I said, best meal I've ever had, you know. So anyway afterwards he said, "OK, hand all your things in." So we handed

21:30 them in with our name on it and that, and he said, "OK now, how many of you guessed what I'm going to tell you is right?" He says, "Now what did you all say for that one there?" And nearly all of us said, beautiful chicken. OK, he said, "Lovely snake wasn't it?" And so he got another one and it was only small little tit bits like of it and I said to him, "Mate that's terrific that fish isn't it?" And he said, "Yeah, great."

- 22:00 So we ate quite a bit of that, so he came to that one and he said, "How many of you had that?" So we put our hands up and he said, "And what did you reckon it was?" And so we all said, "Fish." He said, "Well that was a mud frog." He said, "You got the left side of it because on one side it's chicken and the other side it's fish taste." God I said, yeah. So he came along and they had this stuff mixed up, you know, and it was beautiful. I'd eaten that
- 22:30 too and I says to him, "Mate, gee it's hard to find out what this was but it's like oatmeal or something like that that they've mixed up." Anyway when we had it he said, "How many got this one?" And we put our hand up. "Yeah, what did you think it was?" I kept quiet and he said, "None of you know what it was," and he said, "Did you think it was custard or oatmeal or porridge or something like that?" And we said, "Yes." He said, "Well that's what you're going to eat on the trees up there,
- 23:00 it's a red, a great big red fruit and the Indians love it over there and they spit the red juice out all over you."

**Beetle nut?**

Yeah, beetle nut, yeah, that stuff. I said, oh gee, and he said, "Yeah, that's all right," so they gave us some soup and I had the soup and everything and they said, "What did you think of that?" And I said, "I couldn't put a taste to it." He says, "Well once you get used to it up in New Guinea it'll be all right." I said, what is it? He said, "We stripped a tree of leaves up there and we cooked a soup with that."

- 23:30 He said, "They're leaves all over the place those trees up there." Oh gee, so this is what had happened all the way through, so when we got to New Guinea I don't think we even ate a bit of that, not a bit of it I don't think. We had a canteen that went up with us there, you know, and it was good. But not with us, it was back at base headquarters with Blamey and his mob. Yes, but it was things that if you, like poor ones that were up in Singapore, my mate was there, I think I might've told you about
- 24:00 him and he was, he said to his mate, you know, "Those trees are moving" and they said, "No, you're seeing noises" and he says, "No, they're getting closer every time I look," and he says, "You're seeing noises." Anyway eventually he said, look there they are on the move now, and by this time they were on the other side of the river right closer over this little river that was there and then they were closer, and then they made their banzai charge you know. He said, "I told you they were bloody Japs or something in there." Anyway they were dressed in
- 24:30 tree, went in trees and they had a bit out and they moved forward in the trees, and they were terrific at camouflage, fantastic they were. And anyway they come over, they stabbed everybody and he grabbed this bloke's bayonet and pulled him down and killed him, and but it severed all his, all his things in his finger here and that hand all withered up here and he's only got just little stumps here hanging out here now like I'm just here. It's all withered.

**Yeah, you told us. But the stuff about the food,**

- 25:00 **did you ever think, did you ever worry about that food that you'd been given?**

No, never ever worried about it but I did up there when they said, "Righto, fall out for breakfast," and we all fell out for breakfast and they gave us a pill. They said, "That'll be right, that's steak and eggs." No that was lunchtime, steak and eggs. They gave us the other one and they said it was eggs on toast or bacon and eggs or some damn thing, just a little pill like that, you know. So we used to have to line up like that and they'd give us an Atebrin pill in that

- 25:30 hand and he'd say, "Righto, suck it, and you'd put it your mouth." "Righto, swallow it, and, you're right," and he'd move to the next bloke and then he'd say, "Righto, there's your breakfast," and you'd look at it, "Holy mackerel, what's that?" "That's bacon and eggs." "What?" Yeah, so that's why we had to catch fish and that ourselves to increase our diet. Fish were good for you, yeah, so that was another part of the scrounging deal see.

**Of course.**

- 26:00 Anybody knew they, they knew the engineers, if there was anything going we'd have it, then they'd, officer would say, "Righto Joe, what have we got now?" And I'd say, "No, no more for me." I thought he was going to send me out in the scrub and then one way we did go out there like maniacs, you know, and you cut your way through the trees and that, and we were in Jap territory, this is stupid it was. I didn't, I don't know why we ever did it, but I must've been a ratbag, and we cut our way through it and over there
- 26:30 they've got everything's big, everything's big you know, so the spiders, we see them here like that, you know they've got a body about that big, here that big, but it's only that big when it's in the (UNCLEAR) just like that, and all of a sudden it goes and that comes out and all their arms go out like that. So I cut this tree (UNCLEAR) strike, and anyway one of these fellows that came out with us he said, I read about them, they don't hurt you. I said, well you go through, I'm going back this way.
- 27:00 So I went there, he went through and he went a bit further and let out a hell of a scream and I thought he got a Jap at him, you know, but he'd been bitten on the nose with a wasp and his nose come out nice and red, and then we went on a bit further and we didn't find any Japs but we got lost. Went across the river and when we came back the 11th Battalion they said, "Did you see any crocs [crocodiles] in it?" I said, "No." He said, "It's full of crocs that river." Oh beauty.

**Now we're getting near the end of the taping. There's a few things that we**

27:30 **ask everyone just to sort of get, you know,**

Yeah.

**Get everyone's response to a few set questions. So I'm just going to throw a few at you and you can...**

Yeah.

**See what you have to say. One of the things that interest us is that after the war you got married after the war, you had your kids, did you talk to your family much about your experiences?**

Not very much. That was left for Anzac Day and you had to talk about it.

28:00 As I say nobody that I know of doesn't talk about it. You have to talk about it because it's bottled up inside you there and when you talk to people it relieves you, but we had Anzac Days and we had committee meetings and things where we did talk to one another and unlash ourselves, see, so it wasn't necessary, but if anybody asked a question I was always willing to answer.

**You were quite involved with the 2/2nd...**

Yeah.

**Field Association**

28:30 **after the war, weren't you?**

Field Association, yeah.

**So you were a member of the RSL?**

Yes, that's a 50-year of the RSL I just got the other day.

**And how often would you go to the club? I'm thinking, think say the 1950s you know.**

Yeah well, first of all I was born down in South Melbourne, Albert Park they say, but South Melbourne it was anyway, and I

29:00 became a member of the South Melbourne RSL straight after the war. I used to go over there twice a week and maybe a Saturday, and they had dances Saturday night so you could go Saturday night dance, which we did, you know, and one instance there they had a fancy, well yes, we used to do that so when they had their committee meeting they were all old diggers there, you know real old like us now and so they were looking for a

29:30 committee and it was suggested that some of the Second World War should be on the committee but they protested strongly to it, you know, but we just said then, I got elected on it and I said, well we don't want to take your job away, we're only here to assist you with any work or that that you require instead of you running around doing it because you're elderly people now, and at the same time one of my mates he had a home brew going and beer was short

30:00 to get and I says like, "We can supply you with beer, as much beer as you like because we've been makes it." Oh, he said, "That'll be good," so I said, "You're in charge but when we have the meeting we want one in front of them" so we said, "We don't want to run the meetings, you're the runner, we'll just be here with you and you organise as you have before and we'll do anything you want." So they said, "Well can you organise a fancy dress ball?" Yeah, we can do that for you, because they're, their wives were elderly too and they didn't want to do this running around,

30:30 but we wanted to do a bit of gaiety in the place, 'cause the, just like in Greece or those places the men go here and the women go there, so when they went to the RSLs the men went down to drink and the women sat up there eating sandwiches and talking to one another and that was their night out. Now that's not a night out for anybody. So we livened it up when we had this fancy dress ball when I went as Carmen Miranda to tell you the truth, yeah and I had pineapples and all this stuff on my head and that but I couldn't

31:00 get a dance 'cause you know, women wouldn't dance with me. I had to dance with my mates. So we had another one there and he was a naval boy and he dressed as a butcher and these were, we had cards, you know, you could buy and that, and we spent a fair bit of our card money on making a success of this night, so he bought sausages and steak and all this sort of thing on them, and when we went past the judge he said, "Is there anything I can do for you?" And he said, "If they were alive," he said, "If they were

31:30 a good," he said, "I'd like some of that steak," and he said, "Here, you can have it," hit him right in the face with it. That made a big laugh go, they all laughed, they reckoned it was great. His wife she said, "I'll put a bit of a kick into the party, I'll go as 'mine chicka they fit'." Do you know the old ad for 'mine chicka they fit'? A white shirt and that's all. So she put a white shirt on and then of course they used to

have underpants

32:00 and things like that which says, 'come on Melbourne', or, 'go on the Saints' [football teams], or anything like that, you know, so she came passed and she blacked her face and everything up and the judge said, "You don't look like a black fellow and you got anything under that shirt?" And she says, "Do the black fellows have it under the shirt?" Yes, she said, "Well so do I, 'come on South Melbourne'," and people screamed their heads off. They wanted more and more of these after we had this first one, but anyway I went off crook and I said, "I can't get a dance

32:30 because I'm Carmen Miranda," and I didn't have a dance. Yes, I did, we, afterwards, no I didn't get a dance that night, so we had another night but it was a different kind of night and as you imagine when the women are into their 80s and that they're all broad 'cause I don't know why, they used to eat too much or what it was, but so they had their barn dances and all that on and I was only 76 when I came back with malaria from New Guinea, so as I got a partner she lifted me off the

33:00 floor and away she went with me and when she finished she'd drop me and she'd say, "Thank you for that," and I'd say, "That's all right, no worries." This happened all the way through the dances. I didn't get a dance on the floor. Yeah, so that was a really good time so I used to go there quite a bit to that one, and then I came down, shifted down here in '45, '45 yeah, '45, '48 and I went to Hampton and I went to Hampton to see a mare

33:30 and I was going to play in their cricket side because their secretary worked over at Freighters where I worked and when I went there there was a general there, he was their president and he said, "We're full here," and I said, "I beg your pardon, you can't be full," I said, "It's only just a little while after the war's ended," and he said, "I said we're full, you saying I'm a liar?" And I said, "That's all right, I'm not worried about it. If you say you're full I'm off." So I didn't play in their cricket team and when I went back to work the secretary said, "Oh he's bloomin' pig-

34:00 headed stinker that bloke." He said, "Go back and I'll fix it." I said, no, I wouldn't go there again, so I went to Hyatt and at Hyatt there was a wonderful mob there and there was a very elderly old bloke, old Pop Moody, and he was a First World War digger and when I came in he said, where are you living? And I said, up here in Linika Road and he said, you could've gone to Hampton, that's your closest, and I says, I went there but they didn't want me so I'm coming to here, and he said, oh come in here, yeah, you're welcome. So it's a beautiful RSL,

34:30 now still. So I went in there and I thought I'll go and have a beer and he said, "The bar's over there," so I went over and I said, "I'll have a pot thanks," and he says, "No, we don't serve singles." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "We want you to mix in here, so if you come to the bar by yourself you have to get two glasses" and I said, "Well I'll have two pots," and he said, "No, that's not it," he says, "No, you stay there a minute," and he says, "Five minutes you'll know half the mob in this place," so he called this,

35:00 what's his name was Costello too and he called him, not the Minister bloke, he called him over, Joe, and I was Joe, and he said, "Here's a new member Joe," and he said, "Yeah, what's your name?" I said, "Joe Jopling." He said, "Oh, I'm Joe Costello," and I said, "How are you going, all right?" He said, 'Come and sit over at our table," so I went over and in five minutes I knew 12 people, you know, and I said, "This is a good idea isn't it? It saves a bloke coming down here to sort of drink by himself," and he said, "Yeah, and we don't drink much by the way. If you want to drink,"

35:30 he said, "You just put your money in the centre and then we go over and get the drinks and you pay for your own all the time, there's no shouting [buying drinks for others]," and I said, "That's a good idea too," and so then I joined that one and I was there for many years and then they all died off and that and new people come in and I didn't really like the way they were running it then and so I went to Bentley and it's brilliant over there. This is the best RSL I've ever been in.

I just went over the other day and got that off them but because I'd been in the others

36:00 I got over 50 years see, but that's a 50 year one there.

**So that camaraderie has obviously been very important to you...**

Yeah, well

**In the years after the war?**

my Dad see I told you way back, he said, "It's better to give than to receive," and he said, "It's also better to make friends than make enemies," and he said, "If you keep a smile on your face all your life," he says, "You'll have friends all your life," and all the things he told me, little things you know,

36:30 I sort of absorbed and I kept it up and I still use it. When I went down the Anzac Hostel the first day I was there I gave them a little speech and I said, how are you fellows today? And I says my name and I told them my name and what I'd done and I says, I believe you don't talk much about the army or that here now, so can you all tell me just a little bit, like you are, a little bit about yourselves. So some of them (UNCLEAR), I couldn't understand them and I said, that was good, thanks, and I went and didn't criticise any of them

37:00 and when it was finished I said, "I think you and I are going to get on all right together," and one bloke says, "It's very nice of you to come down Joe, everybody, never had this before," and I says, "Well while I'm here," I said, "What I want you to do is," I said, "When I first come in," I said, "I want a smile on your face and say, good morning Joe, how are you? Not Mr Jopling, Joe, and with a smile," and they said, "All right," so I go there now and they say, hello Joe, how you going mate?

37:30 And they're fantastic. I do a lot of things for them down there, which I shouldn't I suppose but, yeah, comradeship that's wonderful.

**Well I think we've probably covered most of what, is there anything that you want to say finally, chance to**

Well I reckon that what you're doing is wonderful. I've had lots and lots of books the DVA put out regularly and I still go to schools if

38:00 they want me although I did refuse the Wesley College the other day, two weeks ago. They wanted me to go there the day I was going to do the singing down at the Anzac Hostel and I apologised, but I went down and saw her, it turned out she was a Greek girl and so when I went there, I left here at half past 4.00 to see her at 5.00 o'clock. I thought I always like to be early, got there early and she came about 10 past 5.00 just down off Bay Road, down

38:30 Brighton, and I saw her car pull up and I sort of looked over and I thought, gee, you know, she could be a Greek girl but she looked very nice looking and so anyway I got out the car and as I did she undid the (UNCLEAR) and waved to me and I said, Atta, her name is which I think is Athenicia for short, I think Athenicia, Katerina and all those names, and I said, "You're Atta?" And she said, "Yes, you Joe?" I said, yes, so I went over, shook her hand, and she had a little girl in there about

39:00 9 I suppose, Christine, that's another Greek name, Christy, you know. Anyway she said, "You're early," and I says, "I've only been here five minutes," and she said, "Good, come in." God, I went in, you should've seen the house, beautiful, great big house, and I walked in and it was like a swimming, like a dance hall in there, you know, everything was beautiful, Greek, you know. Anyway I was there for about five minutes I reckon and she

39:30 said to Christine, "There's the phone, will you answer it?" And so Christine went up and said, oh, it's the other daughter, Darva, Yarva or Darva, she's on the phone Mum, wants to pick you up from school. Now I'd only been there five minutes and she said, "Joe, will you look after Christine while I go down to the school, college and pick my daughter up?" I said, "Yeah, how long will you be?" 'cause I told Dulcie when I left I'd only be about half an hour, it's after 5.00, said I'd be home about quarter past 5.

40:00 I didn't get home until about 6.00, you know, and I was getting the tea from Red Rooster, but anyway she came back and came in and she said, how did you go with Christine? And I said, "She's wonderful." I says, "You don't want to lose her do you? I'll take her home with me," and she said, "No, you're not getting her," and she said to Chris, "How did you go?" "Oh, he's terrific, he's been reading me stories in a book and everything like that." So the other girl came in then, she's the taller one and she said, "This is Darva" or Jarva or whatever her name was and she said,

40:30 "Pleased to meet you Joe," and she said, "Mum's pretty disappointed that you can't come to Wesley," and I said, "Well I can't go in every place everywhere." I said, "I'm at the Sandy Hostel," at the Brighton Hostel and I promised them I'd have Anzac Day there, so she said, "Oh well, all right, never mind," so with that I said, "Well look, I'll have to scoot." I said, "It's getting on to about 5.00" or 6.00 o'clock, 5.00 o'clock or whatever it was and I said, "I'll have to go through, I've got to get the tea yet."

41:00 So she kept me an hour, for about another quarter of an hour and then she nudged Christine, and Christine took off because I'd been talking to her a couple of times before see, and Christine came back with a big box of chocolates for me. I said, "I don't take anything for helping people out." She said, "Well you've got to take these," and I says, "I don't like chocolate anyway," and she says, "How do you know they're chocolates?" I says, "Well they rattle like chocolates and they're boxed like chocolate," done up, done up beautifully it was, and she said, "No, you take them home to your wife," because she's spoken to Dulcie a couple

41:30 of times on the phone, "She'll like them." I said, no, I said, you know, "I don't want to start a precedent." She said, "Well Christine will be disappointed if you don't," and I said, "Will you be disappointed?" She said, "Yes I will." I said, "Well I'll take them." So I brought them home and they were Belgian chocolates.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**