

Australians at War Film Archive

Cyril Real (Syd) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **Describe for me where you were born and where you grew up.**

Well, I was born at Rockhampton in East Street in 1917. My mother come from Barcaldine. My father,

01:00 he come from Charters Towers. When I was the age of - I'll have to guess this one - maybe four, five year old we come down to East Brisbane, over near Woolloongabba, what they call Woolloongabba at the present time. We were there for a little while. And from there we come to Ashgrove.

01:30 And from there I started school. Walked to Kelvin Grove school, which was a fair walk. I was about six year old. And there I went from there right up until I finished school Kelvin Grove Boys' School which is now the Kelvin Grove High School. From there I

02:00 well, I finished school and then got a job. In those days there was Depression days, and you had to stay at school, because your parents couldn't afford to keep you without employment. But you stayed then until you got a job, and more often than not, the parents used to skate around and get jobs. Well, when I was about 15,

02:30 14, 15, I think I got a job as a painter. Worst job I ever took in my life. He had me painting, crawling under the house, tarring stumps of houses in summer. And I didn't like this and I walked off the job. I don't even know if I got my last pay. But after that jobs were so hard.

03:00 My uncle was foreman of a printing place and he said to my mother - my mother's sister was married to him - he said, "Well, I think there's a job going for a message boy at where I am, if you'd like to take that on." So a job's a job irrespective. So I took a job. There was no vacancy for apprenticeships at all

03:30 so I ended up then melting metal for the linotypes and scrubbing forms with caustic soda and sweeping floors. I done this for two years, and I thought, "Well, I'll wait and persevere and maybe a vacancy will come up." Well, by the time I was 17, which is normal - not normal - because an apprenticeship come up and then which my indentures now show

04:00 was five years. I was what - 22 when I finished. From there I enlisted, but prior to that I joined the militia, those days when I was about 16. And you never got paid those days in the militia, till you was I think 18, because you were a cadet. And when you reached

04:30 18, well you come on strength and pay a fantastic sum of about your train fare, your bus fare, plus a couple of bob every three months. But it all mounted up to a few bob. So that's up to, my abbreviation of that life. Well, in that time, too, when I was 12 year old - I forgot about that - I used to belong to the Kelvin Grove scouts.

05:00 I was always a great one for outside life. I liked the outside, and I suppose when you come to think back all of my life, we used to go bush and camp out bush even - God bless, if my mother was here today she'd tell you - with my brother and I, we'd go out and he'd catch snakes, and I'd trap birds. We'd stay overnight in the bush.

05:30 Swim in the nuddy [nude] in the creek and think it was great. We had a good life, but it didn't cost us money. We slept under bridges, to stay away. But outside of that it was good clean fun. And I suppose I've been an active person and outdoor life has been my life. I feel even to this day, and

06:00 I often say to my wife today, I don't think I should have lived in the city, I should have gone country. I feel that activity; I feel that I'm better fitted there. But outside of that I suppose there's lots of other things I've done. One thing I could say if you wanted it on record, there's one thing we did in our family. When I

06:30 come home from school I had to saw one block of wood every day. My father would never let us chop the wood because it was too dangerous for kids. So we sawed a block of wood and he used to chop it. And we used to take it upstairs, put it alongside the fire, it was all wood fires. I even remember to this day,

my mother used to say, and we'd done it a couple of times and if ever we were talking to the old ladies, when

07:00 they're making a sponge cake, "Don't drop wood alongside the stove. It'll flatten the cake." So - which we did unfortunately. I got roused on. We got hidings. Very much so. If we wanted a bath we boiled it in the copper. We had a tin bath. Washing, boiling, the women in those days, the - you'd boil the cloth down there, you'd boil it in a copper.

07:30 I don't know if you've seen coppers these days, but we had some mishaps. My uncle, my mother and father looked after my sister, my grandfather and my uncle besides keeping four kids. I humped corned beef every Saturday morning around to my auntie's place, whose husband was on the Depression and only worked

08:00 a day and a half a week. And my father was a very good man that way. He never had much. But what little he did have he shared. Anyhow...

Can you tell me about when you enlisted and your training and when you went overseas.

In the army? Right, I joined

08:30 17 Ambulance. My father being in the army - he was in the 9/49th Battalion and he fought in the Somme, but the Somme was a great battle. He was what they call a runner. A runner in those days, in the days before they got telephones, but you might have seen old movies where

09:00 they dispatch riders and runners. Well, he was one of those. It was a very dangerous job. But he always said - he knew I was that way inclined. And he suggested, "Well, why don't you join the 17th Ambulance?" They were down Counter Street, Brisbane there, Victoria Barracks. So I joined there and I joined when I was 16. I didn't get paid, because

09:30 you have to be 18. You had cadets, I did that. And when I was 18, well then I was in the militia. Well, with the militia there, you sort of went one night a week - I forget now what night it was - and you done weekend bivouacs. And also on your holidays you went away with the army there. We were horse drawn. In my photographs you might notice we had

10:00 leggings. Horse and breeches. We had horses. And everything was drawn by horses, and it's hard to visualise an ambulance, when the ambulance was drawn by horses. That was a fact. But we used to go, get a loan of the horses weekends sometimes. They used to have the remount section at Enoggera. And we used to go for rides on Sunday afternoons and Saturdays. And we thought that was terrific.

10:30 Big semi-Clydesdales they were. But that was all right. We used to run from Enoggera to Mt. Coot-tha and things like that. And that was joining the army and of course when the war broke out, bang, that was it. We were called up full time then, and I was with the 17th Ambulance for three months before the war. And we were stationed at Enoggera then. And from there we were dispatched all over

11:00 the place. Like running RAPs [Regimental Aid Posts] to different units and all that sort of thing. Till such time that they asked me would I like to sign up with the Forestry Unit. But, and they wanted to go to France, and that was 1939. And I said "No," I said, "I like to wait for me mates." We wanted to go together. And so I just marked time then and I said, "No." Well they

11:30 went to the Forestry Unit and later on - I'll mention about that but then we joined the 2/2nd CCS [Casualty Clearing Station], which is a Queensland unit. A lot of the doctors who were in the 17th Ambulance, personnel and them, become part of the nucleus of the 2/2nd CCS. Plus a few people from Ipswich. So that's basically up to my early in the militia days right

12:00 up to the war.

Tell me about when you left Australia as part of the army.

I can, yes. How far can I go in this? Can I go as far as I want?

Absolutely. Keep going.

Well, I joined the 2nd CCS. Naturally we had to go to Fraser's Paddock and get all the inoculations,

12:30 the blood testing and all that sort of business. But we were sworn in at Kelvin Grove Barracks. That's where we were actually sworn in. And from then you had all your tests and different things. And then you went to Fraser's Paddock where you had your x-rays and all, and then from there you had to go to Redbank. Now, Redbank was the big training camp. I don't know whether you're aware of it, but Redbank had thousands

13:00 of soldiers. And this is where we started to form. Now in the - while I was in the militia I held the rank of corporal. But they - when you enlisted you relinquished that and you go in as a private. From there I was with them in training and it wasn't long before I was reinstated to corporal.

13:30 Well, from there we covered a lot of fields. Just to enlighten you a little bit, medical wise we all were trained personnel. You must realise this, and this is why they wanted us. But in our unit we had to be -

- being a mobile unit – it was a thing you’d say, “Right, we’re off today
- 14:00 with operation tonight.” That means to say that we had our own trucks. I think there was only about 120 personnel. And it wasn’t a matter – because you had rank, you didn’t work, you worked just as hard as if – you didn’t only give orders, you worked too. So away we’d go and we’d have to put up tents, full hospital, like for wards, for accommodation
- 14:30 for staff and all that. And then you’d have to pull them down again and go again the next day. So you had to be a very highly trained, and remember, everything we had we carried on our backs. As far as equipment goes, that was carried in trucks. Generators, we had our own generator, we had a chappie in charge of the generator. We had our own carpenter.
- 15:00 We had an engineer. We had truck drivers. So therefore we were self-contained. It wasn’t big. There as only one or two. And away we went. Well in that period I went in as, I suppose I had no ties, only my family, we...
- 15:30 **If we can go through where you arrived in the Middle East and major campaigns.**
- Well now we were at Enoggera and then we got our embarkation order. We went to
- 16:00 the Exhibition Grounds in Brisbane. Now that was – we – they never kept us idle. You must remember they kept us busy all the time. Even though they run a temporary clearing station at the Exhibition Grounds, they used it. They couldn’t afford for the people to become stale. They had to keep them active. But then we had to go. And we went over to South Brisbane station in a train to go to Sydney.
- 16:30 I remember this day. They wouldn’t tell my brother I was going, because my brother’d get on the train with me. He would do that, because he and I were very, very close. Just diverting back, just to elaborate on that little bit, back in my school days when he was four year old when he went to school, he used to walk out of his class and come into my class with me. But I just diverted
- 17:00 because that’s how close we were. If we went to school and we had fights, we fought like hell with one another. My mother used the broom many a time on both of us, belting into us. But if anybody ever touched either of us, God help them. We’d just forget about it and we were into them. But anyhow, I just mention that because they knew this and they were frightened to tell him,
- 17:30 because he would jump on that train with me. I had to emphasise that little point. We got to Sydney, and on the Orcades, I think it was. I went on the Orcades. We went down the bottom of Tasmania and the Great Australian Bight. And believe me, I’ve been in rough weather, but
- 18:00 I was so sick and so did everybody. It was so rough. We went down into the Roaring Forties; we went from there right across and ended up at Fremantle, which we’d formed into a convoy outside Fremantle. And then we went to Colombo. From Colombo we went to Port Said, and from Port Said we were stationed at
- 18:30 Q89, and that was our staging camp.
- Keep on going.**
- We were trained there, but you must realise, in this period, I was promoted to sergeant. And also that I was on the administration side. And this meant that you had to be
- 19:00 able to lay out the tents. When we put up a tent or something like that, it wasn’t a matter of putting it up. We’d have to put them up in such a way that we’d join them all together in what we’d call brigade them together. Join them and all that. So we had to lay them out. This is part of my job. And we had this personnel to do it. It would be marked on the ground. Bang. Up it’d go. The faster you put them up they were in operation while you were putting them up. Now from there hygiene
- 19:30 was a big section too. These were things – you might smile at this one – during our stay in Palestine, we were camped there, one of the things we had to watch, we had problems with the Bedouins, that’s the Arabs, the nomads. If you weren’t careful they’d rip all the walls off your tent,
- 20:00 you wouldn’t even know. The Australians had blankets better than the other forces, and including America and England – they were wool. Australia being a wool country, all our blankets were wool. And what they wanted, they wanted our blankets. Because out of those blankets they could make dresses, they could make trousers, they could make shirts. And this is what they were trying to pinch. Rifles and things you had to be very careful,
- 20:30 they had to be bolted, because they’d pinch them. Many a time I’ve taken a party and gone over to the village and you had no chance of finding them. Some of the smart alecs – the women used to come to the well and draw water – and some of the smart alecs tried to grab the women. This is not our unit, but they did this, some of them.
- 21:00 And you mightn’t believe this. If the Arabs caught them, they’d castrate them. You mightn’t believe that, that’s a fact. I mean that’s not on record, but they did. But outside of that, getting back to the hygiene, the ground was so hard that you couldn’t dig, you couldn’t do anything. But everything was done by fairness and things like that.

- 21:30 My wife asks me to this day, and she still rubs it in, at that time the sisters were - we had half a dozen sisters on strength. They had joined us. Now the problem is how do you dispose of faeces when the ground is so hard you couldn't have trenches? So the only way was by furnace and we got to the way with plenty of oil
- 22:00 a few drops of oil and agitate it with water on a hotplate to create a furnace. Basically we used to do it with hot... But then come the part when they said, "It's all right for men. What about the women?" Well that was the day that I didn't know what to do, so in the end I got a couple of kerosene tins and devices, so one went one way, one went the other way, and we solved the women's problem. And it wasn't long after that they promoted me to staff sergeant. Whether it was that or not I don't know.
- 22:30 But anyhow, we got over all that problem. Then we had to go up to Tobruk. This is early in the piece. They'd pushed the Italians back and we went up, I think it was to the Cape Rock. Now the Cape Rock was only a little ship, and I've never been sicker. I was sick down to Tasmania, but boy, I thought I was going to die
- 23:00 here. It was a ship with a stern up in the air and bridge and the midships in the bow. And all you saw of that ship as you were going along, was three points sticking out of the water. All the rest was underwater. They had ack-ack [anti aircraft] guns aboard and the gun crew, they were all sick because it was so rough. We lost some gear overboard. But eventually we got to Tobruk. Now in Tobruk it wasn't so bad then because
- 23:30 they were all being pushed back. And so things weren't too bad really. The only thing that you had to watch is that the Italians used to have the high level bombers, so high up in the sky, and they used to drop booby traps of a daytime. Now booby traps can be fountain pens, can be
- 24:00 thermos flasks, can be any little thing. Wouldn't be there today, but they'd drop at night and when you go round, and they'd be explosives and many a person got injured that way. I went down to the wharf one day, and they strafed and I thought "Oh gee, I'll have to learn how to get out of this one." So when I used to see these big Italian diesel trucks
- 24:30 which they captured down there, and I thought, "I can get underneath there and they won't hurt me." Well I did and I thought I was all right, until one day I see them and what they did to one, they just blew it to smithereens. So no more I got underneath the diesel trucks. I was there for a while and then we started going up to Benghazi, to Barce where
- 25:00 we were stationed up near Benghazi. And at that time Rommel was given the job. Well he went down - I forget the name of the swamps down south of the coastline and he got around there. Well if you saw the war maps you can see where they used to leap over and leap over and leap over. It was a race between him and us.
- 25:30 well, before we moved, the CO [Commanding Officer] come along and he said to all us, "All married persons go." They were to evacuate. The rest were to be rear guard. And then at the last minute he decided that no, all go. Now that was what they call the Benghazi Derby.
- 26:00 That means to say you left everything, took nothing at all, just yourself, hopped in what vehicles you got and the escarpment, you raced along. It was just a whole army, going for their lives, trying to beat them. And if you broke down they got pushed over the side. You kept going and going and going. We got back to Tobruk with nothing at all. We dug
- 26:30 in the ground. I ended up... before we went up on that push we were operating... we operated what they called the Docks, that's right on the harbour, and I was stationed at Fort Palestrina, which was on the escarpment just behind the front line.
- 27:00 We were split in two units, heavy and light. So you can just imagine, with 120 people split in half, there's not many of us. And I was out with what they call the heavy section, and then there was the light section. Weary Dunlop was in the harbour and this was where he was trying to form these other units. I was with the Transport Administration Headquarters. So from there we -
- 27:30 I might be a bit conflicting here - I'm trying to get the passage, because we went up to Benghazi, that's right, and then we came back in the [UNCLEAR]. That's right. And we got back to Tobruk. Now that's where we stayed. Now I can get back. The problem was water was a necessity and there was a
- 28:00 distillery in Tobruk and they distilled salt water. Now the target was the distillery. Get the water - they got no water. And that was one of the biggest things. We had no air force - it was all gone, and we were issued a half a gallon of water a day. Now we - out of that half a gallon, the cook had to have so much to cook the meal.
- 28:30 That means to say that you didn't bathe. If somebody shaved at all, you'd say, Don't throw your water out, we'll use it." You'd grab what you could. But we all survived. It was rough. You slept out in the open. I mean I slept in one part. If they'd have hit, I mean, I didn't care a damn in the end - you just had to forget it. And if you got hit that was the end of it.
- 29:00 The thing is, there is certain things you got to put up with. There was a hospital ship come in there and

they just blew it to hell. Makes no difference. There was a hospital there. They just bombarded it. And all we were doing, we were all living in trenches, we lost nothing and to have nothing to run, we used to hop in a truck and go out and race up to the hospital

- 29:30 to give them a hand to put the tents up again and that's where I've seen people in plaster run. I'm the best jumper outerer of a truck you've ever seen at 30 mile an hour. And I wasn't the only one. But there's one point I always said, your body is only nine inches high. To hit you lying on the ground, you had to be dead unlucky. But if they strafe you, you got no chance.
- 30:00 So then we lived in these trenches. And one part that I laugh to this day because our clothes, we couldn't wash our clothes. I was camped from here to the other side of the building here, from the Mediterranean. I couldn't go back any further, because there was no where to go.
- 30:30 And I saw all this water washing up against the rocks and I thought, "Gee, if you could agitate the water, I could throw my clothes in and then come down with a rope and let it bash all night." But as I found out next morning, I had the greatest oily pair of clothes that you ever seen, forgetting that outside, not far away, there was a naval battle going on, and of course, the oil in the water was washing ashore. I learnt my lesson there. So that's the only thing. But I laughed
- 31:00 from this day. Wasn't it funny? One of the other things was we used to have bad sandstorms. Very bad. I mean I often hear them saying, "Sandstorms in the gulf..." I'm thinking, "I know those because it would rain mud." We'd get the sandstorms off the Sahara Desert, and it'd rain like hell on the coast, which actually turns into mud.
- 31:30 And they used to fly over to pick us up on mess parade, for bombing purposes. So you must realise if you've got a dixie in one hand and a bit of tea in another, and you look up in the sky like this and they come over, if you ever try to run with a mug of water and a dixie, bloody hell, you throw the lot and go for your life. Dive into the slit trench
- 32:00 and go back and hope to Christ they didn't blow up the cookhouse. Which did happen. But it's all out in the open. There's no shelter. I mean you just had to put up with that. And then eventually we were told we were going to be evacuated. And from there, we went to
- 32:30 Port Said. And then we were mucked around. We lost our gear; they had to get more gear. They had nothing. We had nothing. We only had what we stood up in. Had no clothes. In the desert, you mightn't realise, it's as hot as hell in the daytime and it's freezing at night. So you had your greatcoat and you slept
- 33:00 in what you wore all day. Then we were at Port Said. I was to go to the troopship and I think it was three hours before I was due to go, the colonel in charge got a toothache and Jock Clark, who was a captain, he was the dentist.
- 33:30 So he said, "You go and look after the transport and the gear." Like the trucks. They had the engineers and the carpenters and all those sorts of things. And the trucks. So I went there in charge of that. He went with the troopship. End of story. From now we go to a different place.

Keep on going.

Oh gee, I hope I've done right, I've backtracked.

- 34:00 Well, we went... there was a night at Malta in the Mediterranean. The one sent out to us, we went in from Port Said, was the Cape Ross. It was only a little one. Don't forget there was only 20 of us on it plus our gear and the ship's crew. So that gives you an idea how big - I think it was only about 800 tons.
- 34:30 And boy, was it slow. It was so slow. No escort. And away we went. We ended up at Cochin. Now Cochin's on the east side of India. And boy was there a lot of ships; you've got no idea how many ships. We were about five ships off the wharf and each ship was alongside one another. In other words, you had to go right across, but we weren't allowed ashore.
- 35:00 And we were going to Sumatra. But that's when we heard that all our unit had been captured. So we had to wait there and some of the ships'd go out and they'd send them back in again. The Japs [Japanese] are outside waiting for us. So eventually away we went, all on our lonesome. Whether we were too slow, or inconspicuous or so bloody small a boat it wasn't worth wasting a torpedo on us.
- 35:30 So we ended up in Adelaide. Now, when we got to Adelaide, they called us a mob of drunken louts. And they said they felt ashamed by the way they carried on. And I think it was Auchinleck? - I forget now who was the chap in charge -
- 36:00 one of the big shots, he got stuck into the public and he said, "The boys that you're condemning, I'm proud of. It's only for them you wouldn't be where you are now." He said, "I hope they get blind drunk." And he said, "I'd join them." Oh now, he was mad. They were in a hell of a mess. So they used to go along when you landed in Adelaide - oh, on the way out there was one bloke, for some reason or other he got on the
- 36:30 DTs [delirium tremens]. Where he got the grog from I don't know. And you'll find out in life if ever

people get hostile your name is always prominent in their mind, you might be their best friend. "What's your name!" And he turned on me for no reason at all. And we were only slung in hammocks and he fired .303 bullets in amongst the hammocks and never hit a person. He was locked up in the guardhouse for

- 37:00 the rest of the trip. I better not mention names. We got to Adelaide and Dr. Parkes, who used to live up Red Hill, he was the officer with us. He was running the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and he used to say "Abandon ship!" I said, "Christ, Wolfie," I said, "we're parked at the bloody wharf!" He must have been on the grog too.
- 37:30 Oh, but that was funny. "Abandon ship!" when we were already tied up. So away we went. So now you must remember we landed in Adelaide with 20 men, plus a lot of other troops were shot there. Adelaide didn't even know we were coming. And they went around to the houses and they say, "Who lives in this house?" and there'd be a husband and wife and, "Is there any daughters?" "Yes." "Okay. There's only you and the husband?" "Yes." "Right, we'll take your
- 38:00 room." If a daughter was there, no dice. They wouldn't touch a house that had a daughter. And they would commandeer the rooms. "Now," he said, "we will pay you, but the staff must give you a hand to wash up," and all this sort of business. You'll have to do that. And then they formed us in, paraded in the street. Oh, we didn't mind it there.
- 38:30 They used to have a lot of wine cellars, Adelaide had a lot of wine. We'd go and buy these demijohns of wine. And - but eventually we built up with South Australians. I was a senior NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] staff sergeant in those days. As I said, I got promoted in the Middle East, and I, we had to recruit and things like that.
- 39:00 And train and train and train. And then eventually we went to Tenterfield. All this time I'd met a girl when I was in Enoggera and we'd corresponded. And when we got to Adelaide, we trained and eventually we went to Tenterfield. Now Tenterfield
- 39:30 is a cold place. Very cold. We were formed up and started to train and it was all organising and things like this. And we had the - it was a big job, a big job for me because we had raw people who were reinforcements. New officers. But eventually we got it organised and
- 40:00 it was during these periods at Tenterfield that sort of new life had started. My mother came down. It was a sad time, too. We didn't know, my mother come down and met me in Tenterfield and she said did I want to do something with her?
- 40:30 And I said, "What's that, Mum?" "I'd like to sit in the gutter and have a pie." I said, "Would you?" She said, "Yeah." So we went downtown, we bought a pie and sat in the gutter in the middle of Tenterfield and had a pie. She went home, unbeknown, my brother had been killed in Milne Bay. We didn't know, but she did.

Tape 2

- 00:38 **So we were talking about your time in Tenterfield.**
- Now my mother went home then. And it was a shock, but it was and it wasn't. Because I knew my brother. He was a wild boy. And he was a good boy. And he got killed at a listening post at Milne Bay.
- 01:00 That's right out in front of everybody. You were there between the enemy and your troops. And from you, you sent back what the enemy was doing. And of course, if they know this, they'll hit you with everything. Now, getting back to Tenterfield, that's where - Jean was the girl, Jean Kemp her name was. And she came down and during this period we got
- 01:30 engaged. Because this is a couple of years afterwards we're talking about now. And we worked it out we'd get married in October, I think it was. So that was a few months away. So we were there and training and training and training and then we
- 02:00 heard that we were going to move. And she come down and we thought, "Oh." So we decided to get married in Tenterfield. So the padre, padre McLeod and a couple of others, they, we had a wedding ceremony there. She was a nurse in the
- 02:30 Greenslopes Hospital. And she was married in her uniform and I was married in my uniform. Now that was seven o'clock at night. By four o'clock in the morning they'd come and got me. And that was the last I saw of her. They sent me away. She went back
- 03:00 home. She went back to her unit. And then we were sent up to Port Moresby then. And that was when the Japanese were coming down the Owen Stanley Range. We were up there and then we asked how far we had to go inland and they said about 30 mile. Well you should have seen the harbour
- 03:30 at Port Moresby. They were throwing stuff over because we had to carry everything. And the only thing

we took was the things we must take. This was personnel things. And we went to Koitake. Now Koitake was a rubber plantation at the beginning of the Kokoda Trail. We were stationed there for a long time. And they used to come back off the

- 04:00 Kokoda Trail to us and from us we used to send them back. It was pretty good. Well, good as far as you could call it good. You have to make your own fun. But we did. One thing you had to do, you had to make sure that when you put your boots on of a morning you had to make sure there was no spiders and snakes in it. Also that when you got into your blankets of a night time, you never left your bed made, you folded them up at night, because
- 04:30 snakes like warmth too and they'll get into the blankets. Another thing, it used to rain a lot about three o'clock every afternoon. We'd think that was lovely. That was shower time for us. Out we'd get in the mudd and have a good shower out in the rain. That was terrific.
- 05:00 We operated then as we should operate. But then the push was on. They started to push the Japanese back on the other side between Buna and Gona. So it was on again. So down to Port Moresby to fly over to Buna and Gona, and while we're down there ready to board the plane, they sent a message and the padre come up to me and said we got a message for you. And he told me that Jean had died of meningitis. So that wasn't so good. They said,
- 05:30 "I think you better go back on compassionate leave to sort out things." So they flew me back home. I think I had about 10 days, to sort things out. I'd rather not talk about that. That was hard. Then eventually I went to Buna and Gona
- 06:00 up to Finschhafen, and from there we operated and then... eventually we come back to the Tablelands [Atherton Tablelands] again, to form a big invasion army which they were going to invade Borneo
- 06:30 at that time. But we didn't know. So during this time there was special training then because they had us swimming in water with packs on and all this sort of thing. And training us all the time. And I remember one episode, there was a cricket match up in Tolga or Mareeba or somewhere... And they said, "Those who want to go to the cricket match, fall out." So they said, "Righto, fall in and away you go." They route marched us 15
- 07:00 miles. Only I think to get everybody out. You saw the cricket match but you had to walk home again. So 15 mile there, 15 back. But we didn't mind. It was - they classified that as training. We been in Gona and Finschhafen, back to the tablelands and training, training, training, till one day the CO called me and Bernie
- 07:30 Schwabe was a staff sergeant also. But we had formed these advanced medical units by then. We're all medical units and they used to go half a dozen, away they'd go and the main camp was where we were. See I was with the main all the time. And then from here I was made the warrant officer, the Regimental Sergeant Major. In other words that is the highest you can go outside a commissioned officer. You can take the place of an officer
- 08:00 and there you are responsible. You're not allowed to sleep with the troops; you've got to sleep in a tent of your own. You have a batman. A batman is a man who looks after you, looks after your clothes, looks after everything. You get a mess allowance. And you wear, you are armed, you're an armed personnel then. You're not a [UNCLEAR], you are administration.
- 08:30 You are responsible for parading people on charges. You're in charge of drawing up charges against personnel. You can - you're supposed to know ARMOs [AMR&O - Australian Military Regulations and Orders]... which is the Army Medical Regulations... Australian Military Routine Orders, which is all charges come under that. And when you fall in parade,
- 09:00 you were in charge of the whole lot, the whole caboose, which you fall out the side. And if an officer has done something wrong, you go up to him slowly and say, "Sorry sir, you cannot do that." You are power supreme. I'm not saying I'm like this, but it's a big job, it's a - you can say yay and nah to anybody going on leave. You're only answerable to the CO and adjutant.
- 09:30 It's a lonely life. You don't fraternise; you can't fraternise. You are - it's true. I don't know whether you've seen movies of sergeant majors and things. I think they call them master sergeants in the American Army I think. But anyhow, away we went into - where am I? Yeah we formed up and away we went
- 10:00 to Morotai. Now we went through, I've been all through the China Strait, all through there, all through the islands. And up to Morotai. Now from Morotai we'd reassemble and entered the biggest sea invasion they had in the South Pacific. Now you wouldn't believe it, I couldn't describe it. We were in what we call H plus 1. That means one hour
- 10:30 after the initial - that's how close we are. H plus 1 is one hour after the initial landing. Well, if you seen the bombardment that was going on, it wasn't funny at all. And you can be bloody lucky, I tell you. So eventually we went in. And the Dyaks - the Dyaks are the natives
- 11:00 in Borneo - what our blokes were doing, they were pushing them into the jungle. Now the Dyaks used to love this, because they have the poison darts. They were chasing the Japanese and of course the Dyaks -

this would be - I reckon we know this was going on. And they used to hit them with the poison darts. Well, one thing they had to be careful too, our blokes, is they used to sleep in hammocks with mosquito nets.

11:30 And what was the problem is they could get and they could spin the hammock and you'd get all tangled up in it. Well they can just kill you in there if they wanted to. One day they released some Indian prisoners and they came with us and they stayed with us. And then they got some Japanese and they made them as a work party. And I think the worst thing we ever did

12:00 was put the Indian prisoners in charge of the Japanese prisoners. We had to take them off or they would have killed them. They just belted them, because it was reverse before and that wasn't no good. I mean that was happening in our camp. They had to do that. Then they took them away. In fact they were so grateful, the Indians, they put on a dinner for us; I've never forgotten.

12:30 Where they got the stuff from I don't know. And one invited me to India after the war. But I said, "No dice." I saw what it was like when I called in to Cochin. Dirty streets, betel nut, dirty-looking mob they are. It's a filthy place, India. A filthy place. So from there we sort of things were going, until one day they paraded us and the war was more or less over now. And they paraded us and asked me

13:00 whether I'd like to go into the Occupational Force and then I said, "No thank you, I'm too tired." And then they sent me home. Now the war's over, but there's more. What do you want me to do now?

Keep on going.

Well, I don't have to tell you - I have to be careful here - it wasn't very nice for me there. I was coming home to something

13:30 which wasn't there. All my plans, all my hopes had gone in vain. Finished. My mother didn't even understand me. I done the wrong thing. I started work too soon. I don't think I should have done that. I didn't give myself a chance.

14:00 Oh gee, I don't know, I mean I worried my mother. She just didn't understand me. I mean I used to sit out the front and just sit there. I can't explain it. I mean I can even feel it today. I didn't know. I was lost. Absolutely lost. Anyhow, I used to go over

14:30 to Jean's mother's place. Of course, they weren't happy. You can understand that. And the... . This is what I didn't want to happen. I'll be right in a minute. Sorry.

That's perfectly fine.

15:00 **That's all right we don't have to do this now.**

No, I'll be right. I'll be all right. It happens, every time I get to this. But I know, I'm not asking to - but anyhow I used to go over there one day, and Molly, that's Jean's eldest sister, said to me one day, she said, "Would you like to come to Cremorne with me?"

15:30 She said, "A girlfriend of mine is coming." I said, "Oh yeah." Well, what happened then I met Mary. That was Mary that I met. And oh gee, I mean I just didn't know what to do. And I - and what I did do, in fact I went out a few times with Mary and I went over to see Jean's mother and father, and I had a good talk to them.

16:00 I was like that, and I told them, you know, I said well, "What'll I do?" And they advised me, "Look, you've got your life to lead. you've got to find what you're looking for." And they knew what I was looking for. See, my ambition was to get married and have a family, have my own home. And it was knocked from underneath me. Well,

16:30 eventually I got engaged to Mary. With the money I'd saved, as I'd pointed out, gave me something solid underneath me. And even she'll admit today, she won't say anything unless I say it, we got married.

17:00 Jean's family were quite happy about it. I mean nothing was done underhanded to anybody. It's a very hard thing to do this after what we went through. The medals of Jean's was given to me, and I

17:30 had - my mother had them, that's right for a while, because I was away. And I got them. And then we built this house. We had enough money. I had £250, which was a lot of money those days. And we bought this big piece of ground. And when we got married we couldn't find anywhere to

18:00 stay. Anyhow we ended up in Red Hill with a room and kitchen. That was it. And we stayed there for a couple of years. In the interim, we managed to get a builder, but the day he put all our stuff on the ground he dropped dead. So therefore we couldn't go ahead with the building because it was part of the estate. And that was two years wait then. So we laid up there and during that period

18:30 Gail, my daughter, was born. And she was there with us. And I remember one day Mary said to me, "Do you think you could ever get more money than what you're getting?" At that time I was on big money, I was on six pound eleven. Which wasn't very much. It cost you... 25 shillings a week for the place. There was a communal bath and everybody used the bath, there was only one bath

- 19:00 in the whole building. But anyhow, eventually we went out to near Fraser's Paddock and we built this house eventually. So right, we're in the house and I was working then. During that period, 1951, I had my own business,
- 19:30 I started my own business. But unfortunately it was the only thing I ever knew outside the army. I hated printing from the day I ever used it, because [UNCLEAR] I didn't know. So I was running that for about five years. And we had one bad setback in that. We bought a machine that come from East Germany, a communist country.
- 20:00 It was supposed to be good, but it was no good at all. And we were practically out of production for three months. And just about bankrupted us. And that's when Mary decides to get a job and she went to the Courier-Mail printing service, eventually to become a copy whole reader for a printing service. I - we continued to work.
- 20:30 I continued to work with various places... I won't mention them all, different printing places, until such time as I retired. And then Mary retired with me, and from there we ended up selling the house and coming down here. So I'll leave it at that for a while. I'm sorry about the other.

That's all right.

- 21:00 I feel that my life has been a lot different to a lot of others. But I've been through bad times, I've been through good times, I've been through a Depression which was hard. I've been lucky. I should not have been here. But I've been lucky.
- 21:30 I've missed being a prisoner of war twice, I missed being shot at by a sniper once. And I survived a trip across the ocean all on my own once and didn't get... So I'll leave it at that... It's pretty hard I tell you... I'll just sit and get my bearings,
- 22:00 I'm shaking a little bit...

I want to go right back to the beginning and ask you a bit more about your childhood in the Depression. Do you have any memories of your time in Rockhampton?

Yes, the only thing I can just slightly recollect, there was another

- 22:30 chap - there's only one thing ever I can never work out - he was getting in and I had a mug one day and he had no pants on, and I used to hit him on his bum with this mug and it used to make a funny noise. Like a clonk, clonk, clonk... And that's the only thing I remember there. The only thing I can say about there - and I don't remember it - but my mother told me, my grandmother died saving me in a house fire.
- 23:00 She was burnt to death. That's a good one, isn't it?

What was the story there?

Well she had a petrol iron and it exploded. They used to have a boarding house. Anyhow she was burnt to death in the boarding house saving me. But I can't answer that one because I didn't know it.

How old were you at the time?

I'd only be about a couple of years old. 18 months old.

- 23:30 **And can you tell me about your brothers and sisters?**

My brother is - how do I put it - he would be the greatest mate that a brother could have. This is on tape, isn't it? I got to be careful. Well, I know that he was a great ladies' man, and he was a very attractive boy.

- 24:00 And he was a bit of a lady killer. I remember one day he got VD [venereal disease]. And he got that girl, put her on the tram, and carted her down to the clinic, down to Brisbane, and reported her. So I tell you what,
- 24:30 but anyhow, he was fixed up. That's what he was like. But in our life we used to go out in the bush, camp out. When I say camp, no tent, we used to live under trees and things. My mother. We used to tell her where we used to go. But she didn't mind, you know. And my father,

- 25:00 we'd have to get wood for the fire, and we'd have to go out and help him cut down trees and cut them up into logs and I used to have to cut one block. My brother was three years younger than me at the time; I think he helped me sometimes. And we used to trap birds. Go out and trap these lorikeets. We used to have a cage in our backyard catching those. And we used

- 25:30 to build cages and my father used to say, "Leave it, oh listen, I'll do it." And we always used to start something, but never finish it because we used to make a hash of it. But he used to make it good. And then we'd go to school and we'd make snares and we used to say to Mum, "Now, when they get in the traps will you take them out." And my Mum would have to climb up a fence, and go in with gloves on and get the birds out of the traps. And she used to do that. And Merv and I - fortunately at this time we

had a car -

- 26:00 and she used to take Merv and I and the traps out into the bush to catch birds. And then one day he caught a snake, a big carpet snake - on pushbikes, we had pushbikes - and just wrapped it around the handlebars and drove home with it like that. And he brought it home -
- 26:30 well, he brought the first one home dead, that was right. And somebody said, "Why did you bring it home? Why didn't you take it to the exhibition? You could have sold it to the snake bloke." He said, "I'll get one next week." So away he went next week. But now we had a house - all the houses were up on posts - at Bardonia there, and the laundry went under the house. And he had this snake - we used to have a little birdcage made out of a kerosene case,
- 27:00 and he had the snake in there because he was going to take it to the exhibition and sell it. And we had the bikes leaning against the posts like that - my mother was over there washing. And one day they left the door open and here's this snake. It got out, went along all the bikes, and reaching out to try and grab it, and my mother, because she yelled out. Anyway, they came and killed it. But another time he - we were going to school and he brings home
- 27:30 a tortoise, in the lucerne paddock which we'd go through. And it'd lay eggs all the time. He'd do that, you know. Or he'd go along where the snake, and pull the snakes - he had no fear. But he had a girl, and when he got killed I went around and took his photo. And I'm pleased he's never
- 28:00 never got onto to her, because she wasn't worth two bob. She was already married to some other bloke. She's in bed with his kids now. I knew of her before. But outside of that he - oh no - I used to do a lot of dancing, I used to dance four nights a week, I used to do a lot of ballroom dancing. I used to belong to Matt Lamington's Dancing Studio. You'd be surprised. Music, I like music.
- 28:30 That's why you see there's tapes on music here, there's everything. And that's what I miss with this leg, I can no more do that. That's what makes it hard. With Merv, oh yeah, we used to buy - my mother bought a scooter in town. Now, when I say - this is Depression years - it was one
- 29:00 scooter between three of us. That was our present. It was in Finney's and it had oh, some ridiculous figure on it and she thought, "Well I'll buy that." She said, "I'm sorry, it's the wrong price." She stood over them and said, "No, you've got that thing." And she stood over them and made them pay her. Anyway, she brought it home. Now I had another brother and a sister too. Now, the other brother was
- 29:30 six years younger than me and he was a little fella. We used to call him 'the mascot'. Poor old Alan. And we'd get up at Red Hill police station and go down - Wilcox hill, that big hill that goes right down to the bottom - we'd get on the station there, and what was it - no, I was the brakes man. Alan would sit on the board, my brother would be the steerer, and three of us
- 30:00 would go down that hill. And that's how we used to do it. And then we used to make go-carts. A go-cart is a box with a plank with four wheels and you'd sit there with a rope. Now we used to make these and we'd go down hills and a lot of them weren't even bitumen those days. And we'd say, "Righto Alan,
- 30:30 your turn." And he'd fall over. And we'd say, "Don't you cry, you're a mascot." He wasn't allowed to cry if he got hurt. And that's how he was. No, Alan was a different bloke altogether. God bless his soul, he committed suicide about two years ago. But that's not in the story. And Guy Fawkes night, which you don't have now, we go around
- 31:00 chop down trees and let them die on somebody's vacant allotment next to houses, put tyres on it to make it burn well. And we used to have Guy Fawkes night. And they won't let you do it now. And then we'd, like these palms like you see down here, falling off, we used to call them sleighs, and we used to sit in them and slide down grass hills. This is how we were. We were very
- 31:30 close together.
- And your sister?**
- My sister - well, no. My sister - I got to be careful about how I say all this. She was more of a home girl. She never got out like we did. My other brother, he didn't either.
- 32:00 He was a good dancer too. He belonged to Sandy Robinson's Dancing Studio. And he met a girl - the only girl he ever met was the girl he married. She was a nice girl, but she died, and that broke him up. Not long ago, a couple of years ago. So he was an outsider in his younger days when we used to get him in as the mascot.
- 32:30 But it was mostly my brother and I. And then while I was away, he joined the 2nd 12th Battalion 18th Brigade. And that's how he come over. And I met him in the Middle East. We got blind drunk together. And that's his photo there with my mother, from Palestine. And he was saying on the back, "Excuse my bleary eyes, Mum. I was out with Syd last night."
- 33:00 And I met him in Adelaide. But that's the last I saw of him, he got killed after that. So that's that part.

The Depression must have been really tough, making things work.

It was worse than what it is now. The Depression years was - if you were

33:30 a single man they gave you a half day a week. If you were married, you got a full day a week. For each child you got a half a day a week. And you never got enough. I mean, oh gee, no. I used to take a piece of corned beef. I remember carrying it in newspaper. By the time I got there I ended up with a piece of raw meat in my hand. When I say walk, I used to have to walk from here to Burleigh with it, to take it

34:00 around to them. Because the others were all living at home with us.

Do you have any memories of your mum making things work under hard circumstances?

Yes, I do. I'm a rare person, I can tell you this. My mother couldn't - we couldn't buy furniture.

34:30 They used to have kerosene cases one time. They were tins of kerosene which were two to a case. Now if you get one that side, one that side, and put one that way, it gives you a set in bookcase in your bedroom. That's what you had. That was our furniture. We couldn't afford to buy any and you know what she did? She went to the Polytech, my mother. Now the Polytech is like your...

35:00 Tech [Technical School]. Something similar to that. To learn carpentry. And they got her to a stage where she built a glass sideboard for her home. She went to learn it to build so she could build.

35:30 The garage we had for the car, it was made out of pine boards and bales of paper. You couldn't afford anything like that. But oh, she would - we would live on maize meal. Now maize meal is good - the lorikeets used to love maize meal. That was crushed corn. But that was

36:00 ours too. We had crushed corn. But it was good. We used to have bread and milk, just bread and milk. We didn't mind. Couldn't afford it. Bread and dripping was good. I remember coming home. And we used to have rolled oats. Used to soak the rolled oats of a night time and we'd have them for breakfast. But we used to call it 'floaties' I think it was.

36:30 She'd never throw out anything that was left over. There was an ice chest, and we used to come home from school and get the porridge that was left over, and it was cold and it used to float in milk. And we used to eat this when we come home. You know, we didn't have much. I tell you,

37:00 my mother was a real goer. As Mary always says, 'You take after your mother.' And my daughter takes after me. Very stubborn and very determined to get where they want to go. And I'll be honest, it's only through this, I would say, that I am where I am today. And it's only through my mother she is that I am where I am today. My father was a very good man. He was a very

37:30 good man. He was a great helper. He helped a lot. When he was in the RSL [Returned and Services League]. He was secretary, and also what they called 'the stress', and he used to go around and make sure people had an adequate enough - you know, they could go to a doctor, or they had enough food, things like that. He used to look after them. Or go around asking people for things.

Did he ever tell you about his time in the First World War?

38:00 No. He was very proud of us. I can tell you that. And I think inwardly he thought it was our duty. He was a duty man himself. He was strict, he used to belt us, give us a hiding, till one day when he was using the razor strop,

38:30 the buckle slipped out of his hand and cut my brother's leg. And he never give us a hiding after that day. That broke him. Oh not cruel, he wasn't cruel. Oh boy, if you stepped out of - and one thing about it, when we sat down to dinner time you couldn't speak. You only spoke when you were spoken to. And if we interfered we'd get a backhand. You understand why. Now there was four kids

39:00 all sitting down at the table, and he'd come home. I'll never forget the day - he used to love gardening - and we used to have a high house, and we used to get out on the verandah see if pop's coming home. And I wanted to do a wee. And I was doing it through the railings and, unbeknown to me, here he is down at the tap watering his garden. And I weed all over him. Boy, I really got a hiding then. I was only a little kid, you know.

39:30 Oh, these are only incidents now, I suppose. But he never spoke a lot in the army. When the war broke out, he joined the VDC [Voluntary Defence Corps]. He still, he had a captain, he was a captain then. They have the Voluntary Defence Corps. Like old 'Dad's Army'.

40:00 And they were used here to take over from troops who went away. They were the ones who more or less done guard duty around the central buildings and home front sort of thing, which they would be used in the case of home front. They were ex-trained soldiers and things like that.

Tape 3

00:40 **Well move on to talking about your work, your first apprenticeship, tell us about that.**

Oh yeah. The - before I start, there's one thing about my father I'd like to tail off with - one

- 01:00 of the cruel things about it all was I had a cousin who approached my father one day and my father was pretty well - knew the right people at times, you know, for certain things. And he said - Osti was his name - he said, "Could you see about getting me out of the army call up?" Well, I tell you what,
- 01:30 if you saw what my people did then. My brother had been killed, I was away, and I've no need to tell you what he told him. My father was pro army. And he told him in no business and that's what used to, my father. Anybody who'd condemn anything like that, or ask, he'd really get stuck into them. Which I didn't blame him for doing.
- 02:00 He should never have asked him to do a thing like that. I just had to give him that credit, because he deserved it. To that day, I never forgave that bloke for asking him to do that. He wouldn't do it. He never got out of it.
- Tell us about this work.**
- The work? Well, as far as
- 02:30 work goes, as I've pointed out, work in whole - I'll talk general on this - my mother comes into the forefront of this again. My mother was the instigator of all her family getting work. Now, this is a different story. She was determined that her family were going to get a job. They - my uncle
- 03:00 who was a foreman there - she approached them to see if there was a vacancy. There was no vacancy, but they would do, if he was prepared to do messages and clean type with caustic soda and melt metal for the linotypes, till such time as there was a vacancy. Well, I did this. Dirty, my nails were all brown and burnt and I used to get up at
- 03:30 five o'clock, four or five o'clock in the morning, and pushbike into Brisbane to light the gas under the... to melt the metal ready for the tradesmen to come in. Until eventually a vacancy occurred and I was two years - 17 now - and most of your apprentices were 15. Well that makes no difference. I still had to work for
- 04:00 apprenticeship wages. I didn't get any rise. I was on a first year apprenticeship wage. Which I said was 14 and six [£14/6/-]. And then I was apprenticed. I topped the college the first year, but I remember I got one of these bags, Gladstone bags I think they called them, that was the prize. I didn't mind that, because I needed something to
- 04:30 carry my lunch and things in. I went down, I went to the tech college, and I worked there and worked till midnight some nights, for sixpence an hour. Racing up to Adelaide Street to catch the last tram. I had no option. I mean a job's a job. And one thing I would
- 05:00 say to everybody today, never work for relations, because they're the hardest bosses of all. Especially family, because you'd like to call him everything, but you can't. And he used to get me to stay at work and work, and I'm going to be honest, he had a girlfriend there, and he used to say, "Oh, don't tell your auntie
- 05:30 about this." He'd make me stay there and then he'd go possum shooting at night time and he'd say, "Oh you come too." But he sort of semi blackmailed me. And it was no good, but I couldn't do anything about it. But I kept going and kept going and then I bought a pushbike
- 06:00 to push to work. I cost me five shillings a week and I was only getting 15 and six [£15/6/-], and I gave the rest to my mother. I - we didn't get many rises. As I say I never earnt enough money to keep myself. I mean it all went to my mother. But then, during the process, I know I hate it, but I couldn't do a thing about it,
- 06:30 and eventually I got through it all and the army came. And that made a different life to me. But I must elaborate on this part of it, is I had my other brother, the one that got killed, he was working and he used to work in the butcher's shop and he'd get up at 3 o'clock in the morning
- 07:00 push a bike in there to work in a butcher's shop. He - my mother got hold of that one - he eventually give that away, and then eventually he was a plasterer, which he was going to start his own business when the war finished him off. My sister was a tailoress, my mother got that one too. She scrounged around and she got someone to take her on.
- 07:30 And then there was my smaller brother. He was a joiner for Storey's. She got that one too, because she used to go round looking for places, and got that one. So my mother was one to go around until she found a job for her kids. She did. And then besides looking after her own family. So that's how I spent printing. I mean
- 08:00 you had to watch, you couldn't - inspectors used to come around at night time and look through the windows to make sure they, you weren't using scrap labour as they called it. And there was a lot of that on. I mean in those Depression days, and that's part of it.
- 08:30 You didn't have much, but what you had you sort of shared it and you survived. But they were so good,

my people, that I don't think we would have got where we are today, only for them. And it's through them that our jobs that we had, we stuck it out ourselves, I myself could have walked off any time. But it's only through them.

09:00 There's not a hell of a lot I can elaborate on my job. After the war, I worked for Lamson Paragon and I decided to start on my own, and I remember the foreman saying to me, "Syd," he said, "I don't blame you, you know more than I do." But that machine today that I used to operate, it's down on the corner Caxton Street

09:30 and Walker Street, down in the Valley [Fortitude Valley] there. There's a café there now, and in this café is a machine, one of the machines I used to operate. But from there I went and started on my own, but I tell you there, bit of a misfortune there, I give it away in the end, it was too hard. Too hard and people didn't pay for your work and it was - you couldn't survive on that.

10:00 That's about all I can say on that.

That's good. That's good. Tell us about the scouts too.

I liked the scouts and I still do to this day. And a funny thing about it, it was only just after the war, I was going through some of my knickknacks, and I still had my badges and things I never thought I had. And we used to use these great big blanket safety pins, and I think we still had one somewhere.

10:30 Yes, I belonged to Kelvin Grove, and we used to do craft work, you know, leatherwork, thong work, and go out and do bivouacs, learn to cook and make things out of the bush, you know, make sticks. Oh, everything to do with bush you made, like a walking stick or cups, and I remember these

11:00 big things on the sides of trunks of trees. They used to cut those off and gouge them out and that used to become a ladle or that sort of stuff. But mostly it's badges for different events, like it could be first aid, could be craft work or it could be leatherwork, or things like that. But I never went much further than the ordinary scouts. And from there I was about 12 year old

11:30 and by about 14 I give it away and about 15, 16 I joined the cadet army. And then I went from there.

Tell us about that.

I was never one to sort of - I was never one for stillness, I was one for life all the time. I think I would have done very good in the country. Because I was a great one for improvisation,

12:00 I could improvise. And I used to improvise a lot in my job in the army as well. And that was part of it. You sort of - if you haven't got it, well make it. If you haven't got it, do something about it. I mean you couldn't say, "Oh, I can't do this." There's no such thing as can't. And that's my belief today. There's no such thing as you can't do it. You can do it. But it's only determination to do this and sit down and think. Even today,

12:30 I am like this. I mean I - my boat downstairs, I think, "Gee, how can I do this?" And I go to bed, I lie in bed and sometimes in the night it'll come to me like that. Many a time I've worked out all my problems lying in bed.

So tell us about joining the cadet army and what that was like.

Well the cadets is what I was doing, but as I say, you didn't get paid

13:00 for it, but you done the jobs, basically learning first aid, and a bit about stretcher bearing and you'd go along to lectures. Doctors giving you lectures. And about resuscitation. The primary, fundamental first aid and resuscitation work.

What did you learn at that time? What kind of things would you learn?

All right, well you'd learn -

13:30 how will I put it - you take hospitals where it was all men. You had to be able to read a chart. You had to read blood pressures, you had to read pulses. All these sort of things, you had to know all this. And also you had to know how to

14:00 bandage a wound, how to treat a wound. All this, the whole thing basically what the ambulance here today is doing, you'd have to learn in the army. But then from there, you sort of specialised. Now you wouldn't believe this; some of them even the anaesthetists, they gave anaesthetics. But not by the doctor.. I'm talking when they went forward

14:30 lines. Where there was nothing. I never come into that. My calling was greater in hygiene, which was a big thing. I went to a gas school. That's a lecture in structure in gas. That's a big subject on its own. Treatment of gas patients.

15:00 The remedies and precautions to take so you're not gassed. Like where you live, about gas masks, the drill of gas masks. All that business. You would have to - that's why I said you get away from the nursing side. That was the basic, and then you started to branch out

15:30 into things, and then hygiene. But I was not in charge. You must realise I was not in charge of anything. I was - see I was a sergeant, I was going up in rank. I was - now this is what they were doing to me, you know, I was being trained for this and then trained for that till eventually I ended up the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major], the whole lot. And from that you

16:00 had to be a master of many, not master of one. I think it was good training and you had to - like I got called up before the CO, and he said, "How come that there's nobody being paraded before me?"

16:30 I mean, it's all very well to say you parade people, but there's always sometimes you have to be a diplomat or something. You got to - you can't be a bastard altogether. You must see bloody reason. There could be a reason. But if it's that hard to find, well, that's a different kettle of fish altogether. So basically, from my

17:00 cadetship, I used the basics of first aid, the fundamentals of first aid, the treatment of patients, and accidents, up to where I sort of branched out further, and went into the sort of general running and administration.

Now tell us, why you were

17:30 **attracted to the field ambulance.**

Well, I would say my father was a great one in this. I didn't want to go into hospital work. I didn't want to do that at all. But he said, you know, with his experience, and his witnessing what goes on, and he didn't want to see his son go through slaughter. And I feel that

18:00 is what it was all about. He gave me the option, he didn't say I had to do it. But he said, "If I was you, I'd join one of the field ambulance." But this was, but I didn't regret him for that after that. I mean but it still didn't make any difference. Our blokes got knocked over just the bloody same, don't you worry about that. I can tell you many of them did. It was just

18:30 the way it was, I think myself it was the best thing I did, because it basically is - on administration I was suited. And also, improvisation, which is a big factor. Which I was gifted with to a certain degree.

Tell us about the conditions in this early training in Red Cliff

19:00 **and Enoggera. What was it like?**

Those days it was a bit of fun. You know, we called it fun. They used to call us 'The Chocolate Soldiers' one time, but it wasn't so Chocolate Soldiers afterwards. Yes, we'd have a sort of rifle club

19:30 in amongst it. Even though we were a non-combatant unit, we belonged to a civilian rifle club. Now we did that to diversify, but also to be able to look after ourselves. But that had nothing to do with the army. Run by the army, but we used to go on the rifle range and it was a civilian club condoned by the army, put it that way.

20:00 And we used to go out there, we'd go out to the rifle range and the only trophy I ever won at that time was a little cup on the rifle range. But outside of that, yes, we used to go get the horses and go for weekend rides or day rides on the weekend. They used to have a lot of social life, they used to run a dance of a Friday night.

20:30 More or less like... you know those pictures in India where you used to see all the officers dancing with all - ever seen those pictures, in the Indian Army, they used to have the balls and the dances - similar to that. We used to have our own, the women come along and the wives would come along and they'd have the dance and the band there and things like that. They had a real social life there. But this is pre-war

21:00 we're talking about. Of course, they'd participate in all parades and things like that. Not only that - there's another thing - they went for more like the glamour uniforms too, you know. I used to have a uniform, a royal blue with all shiny brass buttons down here with a cap on, with a red band on it. Looked like something. But they did that as a drawcard I think.

21:30 But outside of that there wasn't much else I think, only that it was a lot of friendship developed from that and that is why I think a lot of them hung around to form into this unit we did.

What were the leggings you'd wear?

Leggings, riding boots, we used to wear leggings which were wrapped around to ride horses.

22:00 And we had riding britches. Otherwise if you didn't have that, or you'd rub all the hair on your leg, all the hairs on your legs would tie up in knots and chafe on you. Oh yeah.

So you had horsedrawn vehicles.

That's all vehicles. That's the limbers. Now the limber is like two big boxes on a pair of wheels with a shaft in the middle

22:30 with another box in the front with a shaft in the front with two horses. And they sat on the box to drive. And the ambulances were a horsedrawn ambulance, like a canvas sort of a thing drawn by horses. But

they were never, ever used in the Second World War. They were used in the Rear Mount Section where all the horses were out at Enoggera, that's where the Rear Mount Section was.

23:00 **So what memory do you have of when you heard war had broken out?**

I think we knew it was going to come, because why I did was because I was in the army before the war started and we were more or less knew this was coming. They used to say, "Right, we're going to have a weekend bivouac." And there were certain things they went about training just a little bit different, you know. And

23:30 then, like when the war broke out and went bang, they called us in, bang, it was on. See the rules of the reserves, as they call them now, you get called up. But with us, you didn't get called up, unless in the event of war, and then you are called up.

So when you were set to go overseas to go to war. Tell us about that.

24:00 Say that again.

Tell us about when you first had your call up that you were off to...

Well, actually that's not hard, because first of all, as I said, they asked me to, when I enlisted, I enlisted but hadn't gone into a unit. I enlisted for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]; my number is 967 to be honest with you.

24:30 So it's a pretty early one. So from there we were asked what would we like and they offered this Forestry Unit to me in 1939. I said no. But anyhow they went and I didn't. So I then was more or less asked what I could do and they said there's a unit getting formed, and

25:00 from there they sent me to Redbank, where over time others kept coming and kept coming. And from there they drew personnel to form a unit. And then one of the things they did teach us at Redbank - you must remember that we done a lot of walking in this, and you had to be

25:30 trained. And they used to have, out on the road, they had long lines drawn on the road and that was 120 paces to the minute. That was one of our, had to learn to do. They trained us. And the reason for that was, it was equivalent to about three miles and hour. You had to learn that. So if you could do 120 paces to the minute within an hour, allowing you 50 minutes I think it was

26:00 50 minutes you could do three miles. And that was how long it would take you to go anywhere. This is what they call the basic training. And then comes the pack drill, carrying packs, fitting packs, weight, how to - there was no glamour. None of it. Your bedding -

26:30 of course your bedding was no such thing as good bedding. I slept on boards, I slept on anything, but the thing is the palatial stuff was gone. I mean then you had to custom yourself to live with what you had and sleep with what you had. Certain places there we had palliasses, which was hessian bags with straw in. You can put the groundsheet on

27:00 the ground, put that on. The thing is, another part was boards. Three boards, blanket on it, sleep on the boards. It was a bit hard, but all this to get you accustomed to this type of living. Food, you were sort of, you were on a different type of ration altogether. I was nine stone six when I was in the army, which was a good weight. And this is one of the things that they

27:30 I think when the dieticians worked all this out, this is part of the basic thing. Sport was a big thing in the army. It's all to do with conditioning, and I think - see the basic part of the initial training in the army was conditioning, acclimatisation.

And how did you feel about leaving your printing apprenticeship?

I would

28:00 say, if it hadn't have been a war, I think I'd have shot through. That's putting in a nutshell. Because I would not have continued on. I do say, and I say it again, even to this day, I wished I'd have gone bush. When I say bush, now don't get me wrong, my son has got 135 acres and he's got

28:30 sixty-odd acres up there still. My wife and I are the best at barbed wire fences putting up and post hole diggers. We had 12 Hereford cattle up there and we used to breed Hereford cattle. You wouldn't believe that. Us! He's still got the property but he's got it leased out to somebody else at the moment. So I think I would have more or less, I don't say, but something

29:00 to live off the land. I honestly do think I'd eventually, because I've never, ever lost that inward feeling.

You mentioned the Forestry Unit. What was that?

The Forestry Unit was a crowd that used to deal with timber - oh gee, what were they? I never knew much about them.

29:30 But I know they were going to France where all the forests were. And they were to work cutting down timber and building bridges and all that sort of - mainly bridge building and stuff like that. But I don't

know too much about that. It wasn't my kettle of fish anyhow. But it didn't last long because when they went over there they sent

30:00 them to England, from there they call it the 61st Brigade, and they eventually would end up called 18th Brigade which was the 9th, 10th and 12th Battalion. A lot of them were in the Forestry Unit in England.

So you had this training preparing for leaving for war. Tell us about

30:30 **joining your old militia unit and going off to war.**

Well, the - joining the militia unit, basically I joined it knowing one day I would have to go. And I was prepared to do that. And my parents knew that too. And they were quite okay. In fact, very proud people.

31:00 And my mother, when my brother was killed, she wore a special badge and she wore it for years. So therefore they never begrudged what we were doing there, because I suppose you call it patriotic. But I knew that

31:30 eventually this would happen, and I think as the years went on, you'd hear the rumbling of it, you know. And it goes back into the Depression years. If you say that Hitler was getting Germany out of the Depression, if he'd have stuck to that, there wouldn't have been a war. But he went the other way and went. And of course, when the rumble started, well then things started to move. And

32:00 then the, as I say, the training then, it wasn't long after that they gave away this horse drawn idea of vehicles and leggings. That went by the board, and we basically get back to giggle suits as we used to call them, and things like that. As a matter of fact, I wish I had some - my sister has some of this stuff of mine.

Giggle suit?

That's what you call them. Giggle suits.

What are they?

Well,

32:30 they were sort of - if you saw them you'd laugh. They were just like loose fitting khaki jacket with a crumpled old hat. I mean if you see them, ask any bloke that's been in the army, "What's a giggle suit?" he'll tell you what it is. And you look bloody awful in them. Looks like to me as if you were a bloody clown. But all in khaki. But there was nothing dress about it. You didn't wear them out, they were mostly working clothes

33:00 which you paraded in and you mucked around and then when you - you only had one suit what you wore. The uniform you had was everything. We weren't lucky like the Americans. And if you wanted to press your clothes you put them under your mattress and laid on it all night, and next morning you'd get a crease in it. But that's over in the desert, you didn't wear shorts and things like that. It was a different thing up in the islands,

33:30 you wore shorts.

Tell us about leaving Australia.

Leaving.

Tell us some of the further training you had with first aid and hygiene.

Yeah. See another thing - you're talking about hygiene?

Yeah.

34:00 Hygiene, now hygiene - chlorination too, water, purifying water, testing water to see if it's fit enough to drink. Also like anything pertaining to disease, like flies.

34:30 Flies carrying disease. Mosquitos. Sorry, not mosquitoes. They had what they called a Malaria Unit. That was a separate body. I had nothing to do with that. That's a separate body altogether. But the others, like I said, flies. Anything to do with fly contamination, any sort of disease-bearing things or areas. Lack of drainage.

35:00 Pollution. General things like that, which covers a pretty big field. I mean don't forget this is broken up with - and another thing too - dispersing of water. Just a minute, little thing where they used to have a herringbone system, where they'd run down there and they'd like fork out everywhere. So the water would disperse and evaporate over what they call a herringbone system. This is only just one little thing.

35:30 But generally that's basically what it was all about. Hygiene covers a big district.

How well were you being trained, do you think, in Australia before you left?

I would say, yes, Australia would be trained one of the best in the world. Not because I'm Australian. They were self-reliant. And one of the things that has been known - I'm not going to be prejudiced here, but it is true - we were better soldiers than what Americans were.

- 36:00 Now in Gona and Buna, they took in a half a day what the Americans couldn't take in two weeks. Now there's another point too. It is found that when the enemy thought that they could do away with the Officer in Charge, they would get the key man. That's not so. In the Australian Army it was renowned, even goes back
- 36:30 to the First World War, the faster you knock over somebody else there's another bloke ready to step up in his place. Each one was trained and motivated in such a way that they could take charge themselves. They didn't have to be told what to do, they could do it. And that applied right through and even my job. Even though I was a Senior NCO, I didn't always have to tell them. Just say, "Want this done." They knew what to do.
- 37:00 And even the other day, they even mentioned something like this about the Australian has something the other countries don't have. And that applies to everything. They are more reliable, and they're more motivated, and I think this is why - as Monash said in the First World War -
- 37:30 "Give me a division of Australians, I'll fight the world." Now that's a big statement and that answers your question.
- And what about specifically in your unit, how did you feel?**
- You had to be self-reliant. You had to be. If you couldn't do it, they didn't want you. Just because you've got three stripes on you, if you had to dig a latrine,
- 38:00 the RSM before me, he'd be down there digging a latrine, and he didn't have to do it. But there was nobody else to do it. So he hopped down and done it. So this is what I'm saying. It's not that you don't want to do it; you've got to do it. It applies to officers as well.

Tape 4

- 00:36 **Tell us about leaving for the Middle East on the boat.**
- Yeah, all right. The - well as I said, we went down to Sydney and we got on the boat. Now, when you get on the boat, it's a different format altogether. What you got to do then - one of the basic things, they've got you
- 01:00 create ways of fitness which they do. It drives you mad. We had to do a lot of physical culture work, arm stretches. All this running and jogging up and down. General routine fitness training same as they do in any sporting fraternity. Well, you had to do that. And then there was always the boat drill, allocating boats.
- 01:30 Life jackets. You've always got these life jackets. They'd put on false alarms and you'd have to - oh they were doing this all the time and you'd have to race up. And they were always making sure that you got to your right place all the time. And also the boats for being torpedoed. Then
- 02:00 as far as mess time goes it was only routine, nothing marvellous about it. The only trouble is that I used - it was pretty hard. You'd be queued up walking along and especially when we went down south and everybody got sick. Nothing's worse than going through the galley to get your food and somebody's spewed up everywhere. And you're walking through it and trying to - it's pretty lousy. You can't do a thing about it. Another thing too, is
- 02:30 water for bathing, I'll do it in two ways this. I'll jump ahead at the same time because it's not far. One is a liner we went over. The Orion was an ocean liner. So it had certain facilities on it that they could do their own desalinating salt water. They had equipment and all
- 03:00 that to do it. And therefore your ablutions weren't so bad. But then when sickness come - and that's a thing too - when you're sick you don't eat, do you. You just curl up and hope to Christ you bloody die, don't you. You ever been seasick? I tell you what if you've ever been seasick you'd understand what I'm talking about. You wouldn't care if
- 03:30 the next day didn't come. It's horrible! Basically it's a paid tourist, you might say, but the only trouble is you've got to do as they say and train as they say, and eat what they say. And sleep where they put you. Until you
- 04:00 get there. But something I'd like to bring in here which might help a little bit, unless you want to come back to going up into the islands. I can elaborate on a few things on that.

We might get back to that later.

Because it's going to clash.

Yeah. We'll get to Palestine. Tell us about...

But anyhow, when we called into Colombo there, and they gave us a bit of...It was pretty

04:30 routine. The only thing is that we went to outside Fremantle they form up with a lot of ships and you've got your naval escort then for protection. But there's nothing much exciting. I mean seasickness and general routine training till you got to Colombo. And they'd give you maybe half a day's leave or something like that. But prior to going,

05:00 I think they gave us about three or four days' leave. Prior to embarkation leave. They didn't give you much. Then we eventually got to Port Said. One thing I'd like to mention when we got to Port Said there, there were a lot of - we call them wogs. Gypos [Egyptians] and oh there's millions of them. They were unloading the ships

05:30 and they used to go out in these barges and load them and then they'd come up to the wharf and then they'd lift them up on to the ground and these grounds would lift them up on to a stack about this high. These were mostly wheat and foodstuffs. And then they'd go up to a warehouse and stack it there. And they used to run up. And they were like going round in circles and

06:00 this one would run round in a circle and another one. They were sort of running round in circles, lifting on to his back and he'd go around and carry. And I said to him, "Why don't you use mechanisation?" You know what his answer was? He said, 'If we had mechanisation," he said, "we'd have hell to pay. This way we can employ the people." Mechanisation would have been detrimental to it. In other words, mechanisation,

06:30 then they would have trouble on their hands. By them working, it kept them occupied. And this is what they did. And eventually most of the unloading was done this way. That was a fact then.

And so, tell us, you were taken to Palestine, tell us about that.

Kilo 89 was a staging camp.

07:00 Which was - that's Palestine. 89 was 89 kilos [kilometres]. Now I just don't know. It's 89 kilos from somewhere. It might have been Alexandria, I don't know. But Kilo 89 was the name. I suppose they could have had Kilo 20 somewhere else, but ours was Kilo 89. So we were camped there,

07:30 and that was more or less a staging camp. And with staging camps you sort of, they relax a little bit, because we knew we were going to be moved and they didn't sort of run much at all. More just physical work to keep them in good condition. Our biggest thing was you spent more time getting the people to guard the bloody stuff, rather than

08:00 doing anything, because the wogs were pinching it. And it might seem strange at that time we were in Gaza, Gaza Ridge. Some of the blokes went up there for a walk and they found old rifles from the First World War. You wouldn't believe that, after all that time. It wasn't so long, it was only 25 years. But outside of that it was more or less

08:30 well, they play. They went on leave. Went to Tel Aviv. I'll just tell you - I might be talking out of turn here, but I'm going to say it because it's true - when I was in Tel Aviv, it was the greatest hotspot. Because there were Nazi spies, everything in there. You wouldn't know. And you had to be very careful

09:00 and outside was a ship full of Jews and they wouldn't let them land. And they were all the refugee Jews. And they're the ones today are causing a lot of trouble because - and it's not only me speaking, other people would say that - they reckon Palestine was their home. It was not. It belongs to the Palestinians.

09:30 And when I were there, they wouldn't let them land. It belonged to the Palestinians. Now what I'm saying is, we were there, we saw it, and I know what went on. And not only me, thousands more like me. So anyhow, we went on, and after that we all know what has happened since then. But I'm just saying that little part, that was true.

10:00 From there we went down to Port Said and then on to Tobruk then and the first time.

Back in Palestine, talking about what you were just mentioning to me, tell us about some of the cultural aspects you noticed.

10:30 Well, we'd go along, we used to love it, we'd go along to the bazaars. Now we used to have a 1936 two-bob [two shilling] piece. They'd love that, because 1939 two bob piece is worth more in silver than two bob. And nobody knew this, but the wogs did. And they used to belt these out and make filigree

11:00 jewellery out of them. And I got some - they're beautiful work, and they'd belt and belt and belt these till they get it very thin. It's silver, it's nearly pure silver. And of course they took it out of circulation pretty quickly. But that was back here too, if you get a 1936 two bob, I think it's about 75 per cent silver or something. But you'd go along to these places, and

11:30 they loved to barter and our blokes used to love doing it too. They'd turn around and they'd say, "How much?" and they'd say, they might say, "Five akkers [piastres]." "Here, I'll give you two akkers." So

you'd end up getting it about three and a half akkers. They're happy, you're happy. But it was all the time, you had to barter. If you didn't barter they'd think they're not doing any good. And we used to send stuff home. No problem

12:00 at all. And I think - I don't know whether Mary's still got some or not - but some of it was very, very nice. There's a thing here... I'll show you. Well it came back and I thought it's quite neat. It's a little car. But outside of that

12:30 you'd stay at motels there and the owner of the hotel would say, "Do you want a woman?" "No, no." "Very good, very clean, my wife." They'd sell their wives. They wouldn't care two hoots. And that's how they lived then. Nothing, as long as it's money. But they're a low mob. They're low, low. But none of us - I mean

13:00 it stinks. I would not go over there for a holiday. I wouldn't go to India for a holiday. A mate of mine, he was a bit of an artist. Oh, he was good. And we were in Port Said there and he said, "I'm going down to so I can get somebody to model for me." He come back and I said, "How did you go?" "How'd I go?"

13:30 He said, "She bloody well stripped me." But you know, they're like that. All they're interested in is doing something to get money. That was their attitude. I mean they'd sell themselves. You want me to tell you some stories?

Yep, sure.

You get the wog, he'll come round to your camp with a donkey. He put on a demonstration in front of everybody with a donkey. That's how low - they're low!

14:00 Oh, no, no, no. You've got no idea how filthy they are. And they're no different to what they are now. So much, so much. We'll drop that one, that's enough of that.

Well, just tell us quickly, you did mention that they would castrate people.

Oh, that was the Bedouins, you know, they got mud villages. And you cannot molest their women.

14:30 I mean if you molest their women they only have one law. Castration. And if you go up there and you molest their women and they catch you, they will, they'll get you and they'll castrate you. That's their law, not yours. You're not allowed. You daren't touch them. If you touch them, you're gone. Not with the Australian, oh, they'll get you, don't you worry about it. Because they're there too.

Did that ever happen to any...

No.

15:00 That's what we got warned about, see. Some of them are pretty savage.

Okay, well you had desert training for three months. What kind of training were you receiving in Palestine?

In Palestine? Oh, mostly marching, fatigue marching sort of, route marching. Oh you'd do 20 or 30 kilometres

15:30 a mile. Things like that. They go daily and they'd go all day. It was just mainly for building up stamina. And physique. To make sure you don't go to fat. But you're in bloody good nick. I mean really you are. I was 21 around the waist and 9 stone six. You wouldn't believe that I was. It knocks all the fat off you. Well, that's what they wanted, anyhow. And then you had to

16:00 well, pack, you know, carry your own pack. Well the first time we went up - that was right - that was the night of Malta. I'm corrected. And that's what I used to call it - the night of bloody hell. Because it was bloody hellish. You wouldn't believe the Mediterranean could get so rough. But it was so rough that you couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, couldn't do anything.

16:30 But there was no bunk, you slept on the deck. But you sort of left this morning and got there tomorrow sort of thing. You know, left overnight. It was patrolled by navy all the time and aircraft, but it wasn't so bad the first time, because we'd pushed the Italians down. They had right down to the Egyptian border. At this time, old King Farouk,

17:00 he was king of Egypt, he was plying all the Australian Army with cigarettes. The little flat oval cigarettes. They were awful stuff. We used to chuck them away. It was only bribery to get on our side, more or less, because the Gyppo, you couldn't trust him. He was on the winning side, we put it that way. If you're winning, he's on your side, if you're losing you're... And so he would,

17:30 that was in Egypt. And that's getting into Alexandria. Well, I went to Alexandria a couple of times for leave. You might have seen me on a horse, driving a thing there. But we used to have a lot of fun there. We used to have those buggy sort of things. We'd get the driver and get him and say, "Here you are, here's an extra bob. Now you get in the back seat, and we'll do the driving." Because our blokes used to have a lot of fun. They used to drive round and let him

18:00 be a passenger. And they used to think this was a lot of fun. They did the right thing. Outside of that -

but you had to watch yourself all the time. You never went on your own. We kept with a couple of you, because it's dynamite. It was a time bomb all the time. But outside of that, yes, it was mostly going on leave, having a look at the place. I couldn't go to Cairo

18:30 because I didn't have enough money. I was prepared to save my money, and you had to have so much money in your bank book before they'd let you go to Cairo. But I didn't lose any sleep over that.

What were some of the stories that people were getting up to in Alexandria and Cairo on leave?

Well, to be honest, some of them run amok with their women for a start. But also, taking over and riding around

19:00 on the carts, driving around, but they were all right. Oh, riding pushbikes and these hoists. A lot of these - what's the word for it - I couldn't be bothered going to them - demonstrations if you like, to put it in a polite sort of way. Sex demonstrations. A lot of pornographic and all that stuff

19:30 goes on. I wouldn't be - I mean I wouldn't, didn't suit me. A lot of our blokes didn't, but some of them went.

What were they exactly?

Well one particular, one bloke said, I'll bloody well fix them. Well, a bloke - one of these big buck niggers - would get on top of a woman there with a big artificial penis and he said he'd make bloody sure he'd put his foot

20:00 right in on her bum, and he pushed it right - and he said, "I'll make sure you put the bloody thing in properly." But that was only one. But I give it away after that. It's cruel, it's dirty, it's filthy. Where they turn around and you go there. Can I talk openly now?

It's up to you, yeah.

Well you get a woman turns around, got a cigarette and puts it in it and takes it out and wants to put it in your mouth, all this sort of thing.

20:30 You've got no idea how filthy they are. Look, I hope I'm not saying, but you asked the question.

No, no, that's fine.

I mean I tell you, you asked me, I tell you.

That's fine.

I'm not telling lies, because people have seen it too, as well as I have. But I mean I got to be careful, I've overstepped my mark here.

All right, well, we'll go to

21:00 **fighting. Like you arrive in Tobruk. What were you expecting?**

We didn't know. The only thing, when we first arrive in Tobruk, now the ablutions and the latrines are totally different to what you - I didn't know at the time but when we went there, they don't use toilet paper. They squat and they use water. That was one of the things that

21:30 they did. They'd blocked it all before we got there. But we never used that. We had to build our own. Just a point. We always built latrines. And this did actually happen one night. They used to bomb us. Now when you get a slit trench, which is in the ground, which you dive in, and you get a latrine trench, there's not much difference. Now what's happened more than once, they dived in and dived into the wrong trench.

22:00 And that's not very nice. That's true, that did happen. Because half the time they didn't screen them off, see. But a lot of them were screened off. They were very primitive, gee whiz, only a slit trench was with a pole along. I mean everything wasn't so polished. I mean you couldn't do anything about it. That was the - oh yes, it makes it...

22:30 But outside of that, and they were running. They were running a hospital there, a small one. And the sisters did come up at that time, but they weren't there long and they shot them out of there, it was too dangerous. They never brought the women in where they thought it was too dangerous. And it was. I mean they were blowing hell out of them. Outside of that, I mean we weren't there long. Then we started to go up into

23:00 North Africa, right up into Benghazi.

What opposition did the Italians...

What opposition? When we were going up to Barce and Benghazi was it was nothing to see 5,000 troops with four soldiers running back with them. One at the back, one at each side, one on the front. They didn't want to fight. They never did want to fight. In fact, when I was in Tobruk at one time, we had working parties

23:30 there with no worries at all. They were quite happy, at least they got a feed and they got a bed. In fact, one dived into a trench alongside of me one night, and I looked at him and I said, "Gawd blimey, it's a bloody Italian." But there was no animosity. They did not want to fight. So that's why I think they did give it away... and that was all the way through. The only thing different with the Italians, they used to have a travelling brothel.

24:00 That was part of their equipment. They had a brothel travelling with them. I didn't know that until we were on the way up at that time and that's when we come across one.

What was that like?

Eh?

What was it like?

The travelling brothel?

Yeah.

It was a caravan for the service of their soldiers. In the services, in Haifa, in Palestine, they had Haifa.

24:30 Now Haifa was a regimental brothel controlled by the army. And the doctors. But that didn't belong to the army, that was there, but they under the control of the army. The travelling brothels from the Italians wasn't a stationary one. It was a travelling one that travelled with the troops. That's the difference.

Where were

25:00 **the women from?**

Well, they used to have all sorts. Mostly black, white, Jewesses, Arabs. They weren't my kettle of fish at all. But what they had to watch is VD. If you got VD in the army it was classified as a self-inflicted wound,

25:30 and they stopped your pay. Completely stopped your pay. And anybody that got it was in for a lot of trouble. And I tell you what, that was a special ward in the hospital they used to treat, and if you see what some of those poor buggers went through for treatment, I don't think you'd ever look at another woman. I'll tell you right now.

What did they go through?

26:00 You ever heard of the umbrella? They poke it down the penis and open it up and drag it out. That's one of them. That's for syphilis. That's part of the hospital treatment too. But oh, no, I mean there's a nasty side and that's one of the nasty sides. But they check you all the time.

26:30 They have short arm inspections. They check you all the time.

What were the men like who had it?

Just ordinary people.

What was their morale like?

Just ordinary people, but the thing is they're bloody foolish. Just bloody foolish, ignorant, and don't care a damn. But once you've got it,

27:00 you could be sent home and all with it. It was serious. In fact, it was an offence. Oh yeah, for sure.

So what did you see of the Italians when you first arrived in Tobruk? Were they already gone?

Yes.

27:30 By the time we got there, they'd been rolled back. They just started to be pushed back. Except they were flying the high bombers. Not the strafing, the high bombers. Right up. They're the ones who were dropping mostly dropped booby traps. See, you had two types of - see Italy had a king, King Emmanuel.

28:00 That photo I showed you, that's the Royal Italian Navy personnel. But when the fascists took over, that was another side. And the fascists were the side that were trying to do the domineering and the multitude were the ordinary lay person who didn't want it, who were conscripted into it. And the first chance they got of getting out of it, they got out of it. And that's what it was

28:30 all about. But we had them in the thousands there. I mean honestly you might have seen photos of them, 5,000 of them walking along. Couldn't care less, but they were, they were finished. I mean they were happy it was all over. But the Germans were a little bit different.

Tell us about them. What happened?

I don't know much about them. Because I wasn't involved. As I said

- 29:00 we got to Benghazi and that's when they started to push us back. Just one point there, I didn't see it happen, but it wasn't happening very far from us, we had - you were asking about the initiative of Australians - well, here's a perfect example. We had a cookhouse not far from us. With cooks.
- 29:30 Of which they got on - see over there there was ammunition and field pieces lying everywhere. And a lot of the stuff was taken and sent to Crete and Greece by the 6th Division. So much so that they drained us of a lot of equipment. Therefore we couldn't
- 30:00 retaliate much against Rommel as what we would have liked. So we were short of equipment, because the powers that be had sent it to fight the Vichy French in Syria and tried to stop the Germans coming down through Greece and Crete. Now, the ...

On the initiative.

Oh yes, see now this is in

- 30:30 Tobruk, while we were there they - the Germans come down and they were trying to take us. We were only, I think it was about 30 mile around and ten miles deep. That's approximately. Now that's not very far. You might as well say from here to Coolangatta, or here to Southport, and where we are
- 31:00 is the Mediterranean. It's 30 miles and I think there was about 30,000 personnel in that area. It was pretty well congested. Now out on the perimeter, they had the 18th Brigade, the Gurkhas, oh gee there were tons of others, but
- 31:30 these cooks got hold of a field piece and in between cooking they had a bloke, one of the cooks used to go up and watch it, and they were firing this bloody gun into the Germans. And they were doing all right. They're not supposed to do this. But this was initiative. You were talking about initiative. But they tell me, afterwards I was talking to a bloke and he said, "Yes," and they were lost and he come home and he took over and he said, "But they stopped them doing that." Now the other
- 32:00 part was, on Easter, Easter was where the breakthrough was on. And, oh you could hear it. What they did, the perimeter's like that. Now the Australians dug trenches and they got in the trenches, slit trenches. And when the Germans come, they just went like that. They opened up and let them in. And when they went in, they went like that and they closed them out. But what happened
- 32:30 when they went through, these Australians used to get iron bars and as they'd run they'd put them in the tracks, and of course they'd throw their tracks and they couldn't move. And they done a lot of that. And that really damaged the Germans a lot. And created a weakness, then closed. And that was one of the turning points. Rommel tried so hard to break through and he never could break through.
- 33:00 But all the bombing, and when I say bombing there was a lot. Oh gee whiz. You've got no idea at the bombing and strafing. But as I said, there was no front line, none at all. So outside of that, I mean they eventually held and held and held and held. One thing about the Gurkhas - an argument with a bloke was telling me, one of the 18th Brigade, he said because they hated them,
- 33:30 they're the worst people to have against you. The Gurkhas. When they used to go down on patrol, they used to come back and say, we got them, what do they call it? I forget how they call them. They used to cut off their ears to prove that they got somebody. That's the Gurkhas. They bring back evidence to prove that they'd done it.

What were your interactions with the Gurkhas, did you talk to them?

Oh, God, they're terrific.

- 34:00 Oh yeah. In India, they break their neck to join the British Army. But now, they don't any more because they're independent. So when England had it, and they're very, very good. I'd hate them to be agin [against] me. But they are very regimental. They were spotlessly clean. Oh, gee, they're a typical professional soldier. That's my personal opinion of
- 34:30 the Gurkhas. No wonder the Gurkhas... like the other Sikhs and them, but I only know the Gurkhas.

How did they get along with the Australians?

Good. Very good. Oh yeah. For sure. No problem at all. We had Poles there. Poles were mostly used on the wharf for unloading and things like that. We had the Royal Horse Artillery. And the Northumberland Fusiliers.

- 35:00 Now the Northumberland Fusiliers was unlucky. They are the British infantry. Prior to the war in Egypt, there was a bit of commotion. They got into a big argument and run amok in Cairo. And they give the whole battalion three years field punishment. During that period the war broke out, so they had to stay there, without leave for three years.
- 35:30 But we used to feel sorry for them. See what I didn't like about the British Army so much, the officers got the first cut of the rations, sergeants got the second, and what was left went to the ORs [other ranks]. But we used to get our cooks to save them stuff, and they used to come down of a night time and we'd give them rations.

- 36:00 I mean I thought that was lousy what they - and our rations weren't the best, but it was better than theirs.
- So they had a fairly class based system?**
- Oh, very much so, yes. And they weren't - how will I say - what's the word, self-motivated? I mean if I had a bloke to rely on, I'd rely on the soldier quicker than I would -
- 36:30 he would do as he's told, but he doesn't use this. See? Whereas an Australian, they'd tell an Australian, "We want you to do that," and they'd bloody well do it, you know, you don't have to tell them how. They'll do it. The other ones, if this bloke says - like the old one of the British Army, the Thin Red Line, they'll stand up there and fire and get shot. But the thing is, why do that to get shot?
- 37:00 So this might help to answer your question. They are self-motivated themselves. And it only needs a bit of training and professional brings it out in them. And they could do it without a command.
- So how were the officers with the enlisted me in the Australian forces?**
- The officers? I would say 80 per cent were
- 37:30 no class distinction. They were an officer and you had to respect it at that. If he says yes, you've got to do it, because if you don't you're up. But as far as - they'd drink in the mess with you and they'd - but not the British Army. Do you follow what I mean here? They would come in in rank. You couldn't go into their mess, but they could come into your mess.
- 38:00 **Tell us your feeling as you had to withdraw from the oncoming German Army after you went out following the Italians. When Rommel...**
- Yeah, well all you had to do is just leave everything, just leave it, just leave it. Everything. Don't say, "I want this." That's it. And whatever vehicles were available you jumped
- 38:30 aboard them. And they went like hell. Doesn't matter who got their first. Just imagine, somebody comes round here to cut you off, you got to go fast enough to beat that, and that was the whole system. And that went on right to Egypt. Right back to the border of Egypt and North Africa - Cyrenica.
- 39:00 Well then, that's how it goes and don't forget there's a lot of country to travel in that time. If you looked at the map, you have a look how far they went. And if anything broke down, right. It went over the side. When you jumped aboard something else, and you can just imagine - it's a terrible thing to see an army, a whole army in flight. And we're not talking about talking, we're talking about going
- 39:30 hell for leather. No blocking roads, no nothing. Over it goes. I mean I would say a lot would have been caught, captured, they would have had to have been.

Tape 5

- 00:38 What I was saying, there's one part I forget to omit, which is in Tobruk, when we first got there the first trip, they got a bank there, an Italian bank. And of course naturally when they got, they raided it, but the Italians, being at
- 01:00 war, we understood that their currency would not be currency. Well, in fact a lot of them were using it for toilet paper and all that sort of thing. It was all over the place. Until we discovered one day, that in Cairo, it was accepted as currency, Italy being at war, but the currency was still currency. So there was a
- 01:30 mad panic on, everybody racing around trying to pick up all these liras. And it was legal currency. Now there was an instance where an enemy's currency was still legal. And nobody woke up until one day somebody was in Cairo and found out they were accepting it. It was still legal currency in Cairo, which was odd. But the German currency was different. They had counterfeit currency ready to step in.
- 02:00 But when - a lot of these places, they bring currency with them, so it makes your currency obsolete then. But that never happened with Germany. They never had the chance to do that.
- So we were talking before about the withdrawal.**
- Now the withdrawal, when - I just can't recall the generals at the time, but you can find this out.
- 02:30 On the way up, they captured a lot of vehicles, Italian vehicles. They had a lot of desert equipment. See the Italians had been in the desert for a long time, many, many years. And for example, Abyssinia was part of Italy at one time and they had a lot of trouble. And there was a lot of equipment which they capped. Now at this stage - this is the early part of the war - Japan wasn't in it or anything like that -
- 03:00 but Vichy French, they're the ones who went over the side to Germany, they were in Syria. Now the 13th, 15th - anyhow, the 6th Divvy [Division], they were in the first push up and then they were taken

out of there and sent back to Syria to fight the Vichy French. And also go to Greece and

03:30 Crete. Now this was where the 7th Division came in to take over from the 6th Division in North Africa. But doing that, they took a lot of equipment, captured Italian equipment over to what you call it, Syrian. But when Rommel came down to push us back, naturally we were lacking

04:00 equipment and transport, because more or less they were bled dry to a certain degree for other fronts. So therefore that was one, we understand, was one of the main deficiencies we had. And that's where the stampede was on, was to get back, intact, with what we had of personnel as fast as we can without worrying about equipment. But as I say, on the way back, it was a matter of

04:30 breakdowns, you pushed it off the road. There was no time to try and repair or anything like that. Bang, finished, that's it, goodbye. And then it as to a matter of how fast it was, well, we raced like hell. I was in all that, and like I said, we called it the Benghazi Derby. And it was a sight to behold, to see thousands and thousands of troops retreating so fast . But anyhow,

05:00 they beat the Germans to Tobruk. And that's where we stopped.

What was the atmosphere like?

Oh, gee. What, with the personnel? Going like bloody hell, because we had nothing. We lost all our equipment, but the idea was to get there, to Tobruk and hold it. And once they got there they bloody well held it. And I tell you what, the odds were so great and the history has said it, I can't quote you

05:30 exactly, it's the greatest siege in the history of warfare where an enemy did not take it. Even more so than what the one in Russia - what was that - Stalingrad... More so than that one. Because they did not, they held out. They wanted to hold out for six weeks. That was the rule. Hold out for six weeks, and they

06:00 held out for eight months.

When you were at Benghazi before you came back to Tobruk, what was the point when you were - describe the retreat orders.

See, they knew they were coming, they had to have a rear guard. Now the thing is this.

06:30 I suppose they looked at it this way. We were running a field station there, therefore you can't just go and leave them, can you? But actually, I think that's what eventually did happen. I'm not sure of that. They asked for unmarried personnel to stay, all married personnel to leave. And at the time I wasn't married, so I had to stay, but the point is this, that then

07:00 the powers that be have changed their mind, and they said, "Full evacuation." So we just left all of our equipment. Now in that book you can pick up this information about the equipment and how they tried to get more equipment. You'd have to follow up on the book of Weary Dunlop's. To fill in the bits of stopgaps. And it tells you how they had to scrounge equipment and how they'd do this. But anyhow,

07:30 by doing that, therefore it's a matter of as you are, as you go. And then when we got to Tobruk, we didn't even have a tent, nothing to sleep under. Nothing at all. We had a place, it was an old building with no roof on. I think it had a bit of a something on. That was a

08:00 cookhouse by daytime and it was sleeping quarters for the men at night time. And behind it there was two walls; the roofs had been blown off, that's where I slept. So it'd be about as big as this here. And I used to say to myself, "You buggers, if you can bloody well hit me here, good luck to you." I mean - so that's where I slept. And so that's how it was, a cookhouse by day time, sleeping quarters by night. And that's until such time as we got down to the beach

08:30 and that's when we dug slit trenches and we lived underground and that's where the words 'Rats of Tobruk' come into operation.

Tell me a bit about what Tobruk looked like?

Gee whiz, now this is one. I'm just trying to picture something. Can you imagine

09:00 I'll have to guess this - it's a very deep harbour. There was a naval base, and Italian naval base, originally. I suppose - oh it could be from about here to Burleigh wide, so roughly like a big bay would come in, and I suppose it would be about

09:30 from about here to Coolangatta deep. Visualise that. Now they had wharves this side, the docks, and then big open spaces. Up there there was a headland, I'm coming in say, and on my left was a big headland, and that's where it had fortresses up there. That's Bardia.

10:00 And all the way down to Alexandria, they had fortresses. Now you must remember, all evacuations from here were by navy. The navy done a terrific job. They were doing 40 knots running the gauntlet, and they used to leave at 2 o'clock in the morning, and they had to run the gauntlet of all these fortresses - and they had a few of them - on the mainland, and they were trying to get the destroyer as they go down.

- 10:30 All evacuation of wounded, all evacuation of personnel were on the decks of destroyers. Now in Tobruk we had our first casualty. He got hit by a 9.2 shell from Bardia. They used to bomb them over the harbour. And then there was a hospital ship come in there and just they bombed it and they beached it straight away and blew it up.
- 11:00 And we had a chap - Don Greer - if ever a man should have been decorated, that man should have been. They never did. What they used to do - we used to send the wounded down to the dock, and at 2 o'clock in the morning, they'd load them on to barges and take them out, tow them out to the bay and load them on a destroyer.
- 11:30 Now, this can be during bomb raids, strafing, all the time, but they got to - they were trying to pick times when - now this day it broke away from the towing boat and started to drift out. Now this chap dived into the harbour and swam out to grab the towline during an air raid to bring that line in so they could tow it, and he was never - now he was one of our unit. Now he was never, ever recognised. And he
- 12:00 that was a risky job to do that. So outside of that, as far as Tobruk goes, the first part of it was no problem. But the second part was a different kettle of fish. That was on the retreat. They bomb, they. The one thing I - what's his name?
- 12:30 What was that photographer? Well known during the war years - I thought to myself, "You bloody liar." He was just up the road from me. There was a plane crashed and he went and turned round, and they put some petrol on and took a photograph. He said they shot it down and he took it coming down in flames. He did not; it was there on the ground. Now I'm going to tell you something you mightn't like.
- 13:00 I myself haven't got much time for Red Cross. Now I know you got this on tape. Because I saw with my own eyes, in Tobruk, the staff of Red Cross, getting supplies and selling it. Now that's a big statement. That was a fact. And most of it was fortified wine and I think it was brandy they used to use as stimulants.
- 13:30 And I think that's stuck in my gizzard ever since. And this episode of Bali, and I thought to myself, I don't blame - and I reckon they've done the same thing. Somebody's got away with money in it somehow. Sorry I've got to say that, because that's in my gizzard and I never forgot that. But that's a little bit. So that's what happens in wartime. The needy doesn't always get it. I know somebody that will hit the
- 14:00 roof, but I tell you what, it's true. Now I don't say they did a lot, but this particular time they did. Outside of that, they worked hard. There was no pleasure. Water was a big premium. Water was a must. I mean water - it's not much. I mean you didn't bathe, you couldn't, there was no facility, no water anyhow.
- 14:30 But we survived.
- Tell me about how in Tobruk your unit was split in half?**
- Now we were out - I think, I'm not sure, was it Sidi Banu - I'm not too sure. I've been looking it up and I can't find it. Well, anyhow I know it's Fort Palestrina. That was the fort
- 15:00 the Italians had inland from the harbour, and oh, there must have been big guns there because we saw some of the shells; they were big shells that they fired. Well they had caves in the mountains which we used to use as hospital bays, but we lived outside. But from there they used to send them down
- 15:30 the harbour, which was used as a despatching, holding there waiting for the destroyers to come in and take them away. See, you couldn't send them down during the daytime, they'd send them down on dark, down there, hold them, in, out, by 2 o'clock in the morning. It wasn't used as a I suppose you'd call it a transit hospital. Ours was more or less an
- 16:00 operating hospital. They did do some, but Weary Dunlop, at the time, he'd joined us up there. He come down from Greece through there and into us. He was forming this mobile surgical team. It was a system he was working on where instead of splitting the unit as we were, he was to make composite units, which would be, how we say,
- 16:30 they'd be up just behind the infantry and the field ambulances used to just bring them straight out to them. But they had to carry everything on their back. Everything. And then they would - if a chap say got shot, well they'd do whatever they could as quick as possible to get him transferred back quick into a bigger hospital. And that way the idea was to stop losing lives and also - which did do a good job.
- 17:00 That was the formation, that was his baby. And that's what I'd like, one day, if you got nothing to do, read that book and you'll read all about it. He was running the dock hospital. We call it the dock. Ours was out at Fort Palestrina. Our first, Colonel Wilson,
- 17:30 he was the first colonel we had there, and he died. He got consumption, sand in the lungs. He died there. It's a place where disease was pretty - see I had dengue fever, I've had sandfly fever, I mean you get all these sort of things. And this is one of the big problems we had too. Disease was sometimes

18:00 worse than the actual bullets and things you might as well say. See they had to cover all this. But that's why it was split in halves. But it stayed that way right until - well it didn't get a chance to do anything else, because two-thirds of them went west and prisoners of war and only 20 of us got home. Which is a

18:30 pretty high casualty list. They were going to disband us completely there was so little. So anyhow that's the story how they split. Started to form, embark, they went west and we went home.

There was a team who was on the perimeter, and they were

19:00 **they would bring people back to Fort Palestrina.**

No, Fort Palestrina was us. That's the headquarters. That was more or less the headquarters. That was the unit, that was the main - they call it the heavy and the light unit. We were the heavy unit. This is where we had all the big wards out there. The people who were wounded, they were patched up and fixed up, sent down to the docks for evacuation to Palestine.

19:30 **And how did people come from where the fighting was to where you were?**

By stretcher bearers, by their own motor ambulance convoy. You know what that is? It's a special unit, MAC [Mobile Ambulance Corps], which is purely ambulances, with a big red cross on them. They'd transport them. And likewise from us to the hospital.

20:00 But don't forget there's no rules in war.

What was your job at Fort Palestrina, what did you do on a typical day?

What did I do? First of all I would have to supervise the erection of wards. I would have to do the

20:30 allocation of staff for duty. And sometimes even take over ward duties where you might be short of staff to take over that job also. Which I did have to do once or twice. Or to improvise things to help or assist. And don't forget you got your hygiene back again too. Don't forget you've got the hygiene of your patients too. I know I'm bringing this in, but it's a big factor.

21:00 I mean all units have the same but they all got a separate section for looking after this. But in hospital it's a little bit more critical I think because you got people who are practically - well just on death beds, some of them. But mostly that's what it was all about. You have a job. And also rostered administration, I mean it's you've got records to keep.

21:30 But you've got a record staff. You might see on those things, well that's done in the unit and sent back to the main headquarters. Basically that's what it is..

Can you go through each of those things you just mentioned in detail.

Well, erection of a ward - what I'm saying is, first of all, if you have no facilities - well luckily

22:00 we were using two tunnels, three tunnels. One was a small one the officers used to use as their quarters. They used to sleep, and they slept in the tunnels and we slept out in the open. But I'm not here to criticise this. But the other part were what they call magazine - that's where you used to store all the ammunition. There was no ammunition in there then. They took it out. And then they had beds in there, which they used to treat the patients. They had lights, because we had our own

22:30 generator. But you could not see it from outside because it was all sealed off.

What did the tunnels look like?

Like a big - you can understand a train line with a - when you go through a tunnel in a train - but the other end is closed. More or less like that. Built into a mountain. It was an escarpment, a big escarpment.

23:00 And that's where they were, and in front there was a big wall which you more or less have to go round like that to go in. I think they called them a baffle wall, to stop any bombs, to stop the blast from going in.

What was the atmosphere like in those tunnels? What was the light like?

Well, it wasn't bad, because you weren't worried about anything coming down from the top. No, it was all right in there.

23:30 No, it was very safe. No problem at all. Outside, we had wards out in the open too, that was what the trouble was. And we had more wards out there. You couldn't fit them in. There weren't many. They might only hold about 20 patients, that's about all. But you got them outside. As I mentioned before, one chap, one of the orderlies, I was out there, I don't know what we were doing, we were doing something, and this bloke, he started screaming. He started

24:00 running. And this bloke, one of these wards men raced up and he hit him. Knocked him out. Had to because with the other patients, the nervous strain of some of them, you don't have to - see, because one will start panicking, and then you'd find another one and another one. And then you got bloody trouble on your hands. Of course he did this one day. But we had no trouble. See one of our other

- 24:30 biggest problems, they used to go in for a swim. And that was a danger. I mean what happens is, anybody done anything they had to have lookouts all the time. But what they did, even on the mess parades, they used to come across and photograph the times they'd be swimming or they'd be messing. And they would come over at that time - and this is what they had to watch -
- 25:00 oh gee, you're game if you do that. Because they seemed way up high, so high you can't see them and they drop bombs. But anyhow, but you - it was rough, but the point is this that, it's a bit hard, you know, it's a bit hard, to visualise it. There was no pleasure. None at all.
- 25:30 And you couldn't. What it reminded me of, you know those little animals you see, they poke up and they look like this, you know the ones I mean? That's more or less what it's like. You come out of your slit trench and you're looking around like this, and then duck down in again. And they just remind me of those little animals. You follow what I'm trying to get at. And one night there, they dropped them and
- 26:00 flares down, and one hit the end of a padre's trench and he yells out to his batman to come and put it out and they all yelled out, and they said, "Put the bloody thing out yourself. Put it out yourself. It's your trench, not ours." Oh no, they're pretty tough. Bigger that. Let them put their own out. And it was sitting on the edge of his trench, it happened to fall down and that's where it went. And lit up all his blankets. But he had to go and put it out himself. It's no fun.
- 26:30 **You said you were in charge of staff allocation.**
- Well, one - yeah, all right, now they'd have - how would you say - wardsmen. Or nursing. They're not; they're wardsmen. They're doing the same as what a nurse does in the hospital.
- 27:00 And then you got your Ward Sergeant whose responsible for the ward. And don't forget they go round the clock. I mean you've got to roster staff on and roster staff off. And then if they haven't got enough, well you have to turn round and fill in for one of them yourself. Well, that's all right, that's part of it all. But you don't have to do it often. And then you got to assist - everybody works, I mean it's not a matter of because you've got rank you didn't do any work. You had to be a
- 27:30 stretcher bearer sometimes yourself to give them a hand. But each one had their job, but when it come to certain jobs, certain ones had to do. And that was their main job, the rest they filled in. If a thing was made easier you'd try and devise an easier way. But when it came to actual operations and things, oh no, that's a different kettle of fish and that's another domain. The theatre is -
- 28:00 you don't touch it. The theatre part of it, your radiologists and all that. So you got the theatre assistants. These are specially trained personnel, some of the sergeants were even anaesthetists. Well, they weren't anaesthetists by profession in civvy [civilian] life, but they've been trained under supervision of an anaesthetist to a certain degree. It wouldn't be major stuff. It'd be mostly injections or locals or
- 28:30 things like that. To get them back to the part where they can do serious operations. And that was part of Weary Dunlop's mobile surgical team, where they could do most of this there and then on the spot. That was what his wish was.
- It must have been pretty hard to control the hygiene in a tunnel...**
- Well, it is. I mean hygiene's a hard thing. As I said,
- 29:00 it had to be disposed of. Because you had staff to do this, but the point is, you still had to make provisions for it.
- Tell me some of those ways you would ensure that there was good hygiene.**
- Well, most of it was done by burning. That was the easiest way out. Or by slit trenches. Now I won't talk about the islands, you haven't touched the islands yet. There they have slit trenches. Now slit trenches
- 29:30 and then they put lime in it and then they'll bury it, yes. That's basically the system. But don't forget there is places where maybe you can't do that. See, it's all very well to say, yeah, you can do that, but sometimes it's pretty hard. But that's mainly what it is. And there's no - how would you say - not so much there's no pride - but we're talking about all male personnel.
- 30:00 Ninety per cent of the time we never had women with us. Ninety per cent, because it just could not be. So therefore there was no privatisation as we would know privatisation. So outside of that, it went pretty well. But what used to make it hard for us is when you turn around
- 30:30 and got to help other people, on that retreat from Barce Benghazi, we had nothing so therefore we didn't even have a tent. We had nothing. So therefore all we could do was - this hospital was caught there in Tobruk, which is rare, but it was. That's the second AGH [Australian General Hospital]. It was - ah gee - and then we would
- 31:00 have to go up and restore tents or do things to get them back in operation again. I mean it wasn't a matter of - well what you'd do, they'd just send you up and you can go and help them recover. And it was blown to pieces; a lot of our blokes got killed there too. No worries. But that's the hard part. Sad part,

31:30 a lot of places. You know, one time I went up there, walked past a tent, and I went in the tent, and I said, "Oh no." Old Lance Corporal Tombs, you know, when I looked at him I thought to myself - you know, I'd met his wife before I left and I thought little did she know he's not any more, you know. These are little things that get you sometimes, but.

What happened to him?

He was killed, he was dead. They put him in a tent. He'd been killed and they took him in and just put him in a little tent there

32:00 till they could get him back to bury him. But yes, I mean there's a lot were killed that way.

Which way?

By aerial bombs. Oh, it was bad. I mean they used to use daisy cutters. Daisy cutters are bombs that come down so high off the ground and they burst, and they go, they shower. But they

32:30 had no consideration for hospitals or hospital ships. And that made it hard. We had no air force. Had nothing. But that's what I say, people, you know, the powers that be recognised the effort put up by the people of the army in Tobruk, is one of the greatest things in the history of Australia. Only for that, they would have been overrun. Not because of me, I'm talking about thousands more besides me.

33:00 But that was a big thing, that. A very big thing. That's why I all so proud of it. And there's not many of us left now. I can show you a photo there, an association down here, I suppose they'd have 20 people. Two years ago they had a hundred and fifty. It's not many. If you're lucky, you're getting some of us now, because there's not many of us left.

33:30 So I'm just trying to tell you what I can and hoping one day you might... My wife and my son are very happy that you are listening to some of the things. I know a lot of it is not a story. I don't know what you're looking for. But I will tell you as I saw it and as I had it. I can't tell you a lot of things, because I was not there. But I can tell you - and if anybody challenges me to say that's not so,

34:00 I'm sorry, I'll defy them. I'm saying this now because that is actually true. Now we're back in Tobruk, sitting there, getting oily clothes with the rocks smashing oil all over my clothes. Oh, dear. Never mind.

I'm still interested in the tunnels where you were.

34:30 Oh, they were proper made tunnels, because they'd been there for donkey's years.

Oh, yeah, yeah. I mean in the way that it was set up. What sort of equipment would you have to attend to wounds.

The best that you could get. This is before we lost everything. This is before we lost all our equipment.

35:00 There's two stages of us there, one going up, and when we come back we had nothing. When we first went up, we had everything. And we advanced up and when we come back, we didn't even have a - anything. We didn't have anything. We had ourselves, that's all.

So how did you do your job with no equipment?

We couldn't.

35:30 We used to have to go and help another hospital. Some of the doctors went and helped them. And we used to go up there and help them.

What would you do to help?

Well, fix their tents up, or look after their wellbeing. They were there with duties they wanted doing. That's all we had. We had nothing. When I say nothing, we had nothing. We'd lost it all on the retreat.

36:00 And that's where - if you read that book you'll see where they scrounged, and one part of it there, he's mentioned, when he got on the ship, he ended up with a pannier which is about that big, and about that high. And that's all the equipment they had to board the ship to go to Sumatra. So they didn't have much, did they? And we're talking about x-ray equipment, x-ray machines, they all went west.

36:30 **I'm interested in after you'd come back to Tobruk and you had nothing, what did you do for the rest of the siege? Can you tell me about how you scrounged equipment?**

We didn't, there was none there to scrounge. We basically didn't do much at all. Only patch up the

37:00 damage done by air raids to a hospital. Which was done pretty often. Outside of that, no. Build dugouts to live in. That was the problem. You couldn't work with nothing much at all. So we did diddly [nothing], but nowhere near what we were trained to do. You couldn't, because it had gone. Just more or less

37:30 like - we helped the 2nd AGH, that's where we used to have Italian prisoners of war to help us. Oversee them, get them to do the work and you look after them. Overseeing them. Putting up tents, repairing tents, pulling them down, putting up new ones. That was basically what was happening. There's no building. The buildings that were there were blown to pieces. No one knows, that sort of thing. Sorry,

- can't answer much
- 38:00 more than that for you. I can't invent anything. I don't intend to. But there was no hospital ship, it was blown up. So it was a matter of helping them get away on the destroyers.
- So you would help transport them to the docks.**
- Oh, I think some of our personnel were helping them like that down there, yeah. Evacuation centre. Things like that. Where they didn't set up actually a hospital, they
- 38:30 set it up as an evacuation centre.
- What would it take to be decided that someone had to be evacuated?**
- Well, a doctor would do that.
- But in your experience, did you see...**
- Oh, no, not for me. That's where they would say to evacuate these people. And then you've got to arrange for people by transport, by personnel to evacuate, take them to an
- 39:00 embarkation point. It's up to you to get them there. But if you don't tell them they got to go, a doctor will say, "This man's fit to go. Take him." Or, "This fellow's high priority. Let him go first." All this sort of thing. And then the doctors wouldn't worry about how they got there. All they just said is and that'll be your job to organise staff to do that. See you have a field staff, I suppose you'd call it
- 39:30 Like my job wouldn't be - although I am attached to administration headquarters, I'm also outside in the field all the time. And if you haven't got anybody to designate a job, well you got to do it yourself. So one minute you're outside and next minute you're inside parading a man on a charge before the CO. That's the variety of work.
- 40:00 Can I help you any more than that?

Tape 6

- 00:40 **We were talking about some of the things that Weary Dunlop had said about the kind of stations that you were running.**
- Like the --
- 01:00 what, like the docks and things like that?...Weary Dunlop was very, very good in this way, that the function of a CCS is to receive patients direct from the front line, for patching them up or making them in a condition, or just try and help wherever we can for transportation back to ah...
- 01:30 hospital or a field hospital where further treatment can be carried out. Now, to do that you got to be up - very close to the lines. As I say, there's no lines, I mean, they would patch it up and you couldn't say, "No, we got a full house, we can't take them." No, that's not the point. If you, once you've been say...
- 02:00 Well, just say for argument's sake, a person lost his arm or something like that. Well they'd fix it - if they didn't have these and had to get him back, he could most likely die before they got him back. So what they did, they would operate on that man and put him in such a condition that he could travel back. But they wouldn't keep him in hospital and say, "Oh you can stay here till it heals." No, they couldn't do that. Longest maybe he'd be there, operated on today,
- 02:30 he might be there tomorrow and gone the next day. He'd be on his way. Or if it was serious, they'd get him back on his way that night. Do you follow what I'm trying to get at there? It's not a convalescent hospital, so therefore you don't sort of fill it up with patients and treat them as a normal - no, that's not the point. But Weary Dunlop was going further than that. He was breaking that down,
- 03:00 instead of being one Casualty Clearance Station, they'd have a Casualty Clearance Station Headquarters, what you'd call the administration. And from there they'd send out surgical teams. There could be three. I don't think they had any more than three. Which would comprise of a composite, say half a dozen personnel. Now on that, they would take all their equipment to do
- 03:30 what they had to do there. And that'd be a long way forward. And then they'd patch them up and they couldn't hold them at all, because they had no wards at all. All they had was an operating theatre. So therefore they'd have to get them back and they would get them back to the main unit, which was us. And then we'd get them through and then they'd convoy them and things like that. They'd take them away to the - we wouldn't hold them
- 04:00 either. We were the people to disperse to. I'm sort of getting a carried away a bit, because I know how it operates. You got your body like that, because when you're not doing, then it goes out, fans out. They could be way over there and way over there. See, just for argument's sake, they could be say one at

Runaway Bay, one down at Ballina, and one up at [Mount] Tambourine.

04:30 You follow that? And here we are here. And they come in like that. And then outside there is the wharf waiting to put them on, away it goes, maybe down to Brisbane or something like that where the hospital is. Can you follow that now? I hope so. I try. Now you understand how his function was to basically do that. Up to that stage, we were only working with two units. One the heavy unit and one the light unit.

05:00 Because he hadn't had a chance to put it in full operation before they were taken prisoners of war. But it did operate in the islands.

That must have been an incredible danger for the small teams that went out.

Only us too, because they weren't far from us either. See, as I say, what it is, it's - we weren't -

05:30 oh, how can I say - Yes it was. I mean - I tell you something. Just off the record. To answer that question. The biggest casualties in some of the infantry battalions were stretcher bearers. More so in the islands. Because they used to take potshots at them, and they'd knock them over like tenpins. But I'll talk about that later.

06:00 **Were there a number of losses amongst your unit?**

Oh yeah. I would say 20 per cent. Yeah. Don't forget you haven't got wounded; you've got disease as well. Oh yeah.

Did many people contract -

06:30 **Did many of your unit contract diseases?**

No, no, I don't think so. We were fortunate. One of the biggest problems - I'll just divert here - in my petition for a pension, my biggest problem was a lot of us never got our complaints recorded, because we were in a unit and we used to go along to the doctor, "Can you do this,

07:00 doc," you know, "Can you give us..." And they used to do this for us and no recording, But it could be a complaint which afterwards would come against you. That's the problem with having facilities, you know. See some of them kept going, you know. Over in Finschhafen I had neuralgia, acute neuralgia. And it nearly sent me off my rocker. But I had to still keep going Oh,

07:30 I was in hell, I was drinking liquid aspirin to try and kill it. And they couldn't, they tried everything. And I was in hell and agony. And it wasn't till I got back to north Queensland that they found a dying nerve on one of my tooth was the trouble. But gee, I suffered all that time. But still you had to keep going. I mean it was all right, but then I was living on aspirin. But there's a point now

08:00 that you get treatment on the run. And that's what does happen. See sandfly fever - I don't know, I got it there. I was in hospital a couple of days. But they'd put you back on deck again. I mean if you come in from a battalion, they'd say, "Right, he's in hospital." Well I could be in hospital a fortnight, a week.

08:30 **So in the desert, was it things like air raids that were the cause of some of the losses in your unit?**

The air raids was the - we were the most bombed area in the world. More than London. Now that's in history, that is. When you get them all day long, being strafed and bombed, it was like that all day long.

Can you describe to me what it's like?

Like?

09:00 I was the greatest runner and diver you ever seen. But I said to you, I dived on the ground and I'd lay flat on the ground, nine inches high your body is. And the only way they'd get me is strafing me if I was unlucky to cop a bomb direct. Other than that I was safe. If I'd got up and run they'd bowl you over. If you were lucky enough to dive into a slit trench, as I said, I dived under a truck one day thinking I was safe. Till the next time I saw

09:30 what they'd do to a truck, I never got under another truck. See, what you're trying to do, it's no good running. Where are you going to run to? But if you lie flat, they can see you run, but you lie flat on the ground until they strafe you like that. Well, yes, they'd get you. But oh no, I mean it's on all the time. All the time.

10:00 And that's why most of it we were underground all the time. But they'd still hit you if you were there, landed on you. It's just - what it is, I tell you what, no honestly, it'd be about, oh gee, how high, about up to the end of that photo, about that deep, and then it'd only be enough for you to lie down in. And outside you'd dig a little

10:30 trench so you could get in and get out. And that's what it was. That's where you lived. You crawled out of that and you crawled back in it again. And when mess time's on - I felt sorry for the cookhouse, because it was just out in the open. But anyhow.

And what would you do in these trenches?

You couldn't do anything. You don't come out until you have to come out.

11:00 They're not trenches, they're holes, holes in the ground, like little holes. You'd have to do them yourself. There were thousands of them like this. That's what I said, Rommel called us rats. That's where the rats came from, because we lived like rats. But it's no good living in buildings, there was none there. What buildings were there were blown up.

11:30 And what buildings were useable for the powers that be, they used them for administration.

So with such intense air...

It was, very much so.

It must have put a lot of pressure on the wharves, on trying to get people onto ships.

That's exactly right too.

Can you tell me how...

I can't tell you much about this because I wasn't stationed there. Although some of our unit was there.

12:00 They also had docks. They had small tunnels which they used to hold them in, to take them out to get them on the thing. We had bigger tunnels than what they did. But this was small ones where they held them and more or less put them in such a condition they could get them on stretchers on to the - they used to just take them out and put them on the deck of the destroyers and away they'd go.

12:30 Two o'clock in the morning. But they done a terrific job. Gee, they did a big job. I know I come out on a destroyer. And they were fast. And you're a sitting duck all the way. Besides being bombed from above they're hitting you from the mainland too. But they were good. I took HMS Hero. I remember it clear as anything.

Tell me about some of the men who were in your unit who you were close to.

13:00 Oh yeah. Reg Brunner was a rogue. He'd take you down for two bob. He was - as far as his job goes, he'd do his job very well. He was a male nurse from Willaburn Hospital in Toowoomba. Jackie Upton was a male nurse from Willaburn. These are trained, proper,

13:30 highly qualified. They're the ones that are trained even as much as a sister in a hospital here today. They're male nurses. He was a good footballer and played for Australia against England. Who else do you want to know? Eric Cox was a bloke in the 17th Ambulance with me. He was bugler. I'm trying to think of odd ones.

14:00 The bloke - oh, I forget his name. He was... Johnno. He was a linesman for the electricity department. He was another one. Another one was - oh I can't think of his name, but he was an ambulance bearer.

14:30 When I say ambulance bearer, he was like the ambulances, but they're highly trained too. One of the sergeants, his parents owned the sugar mill up in Mackay. Cocky Grey. He was a coal miner in Ipswich.

15:00 I'm trying to remember. I'm trying to cross them up for you, but - Sandy Bales. He was a bloke, he wasn't a bad bloke, Sandy. He abused me one day and I went and got temporarily demoted and I said, "Now abuse me, we're having a proper fight," and the CO said, "Righto, provided we've got a referee." Anyhow I fell over a kitbag and I said to Toddy -

15:30 Toddy was a wharfie - he was a bit of pug too. He said, "I backed the other bloke," he said, "He won Syd." I said, "Hey, come off it." He said, "Yeah, but I got better odds on you." He backed the other bloke. I had to laugh after that. Anyhow that was in Tobruk. Oh, they come from all walks of life. But the doctors were really good. There was Murphy,

16:00 he was a physician, very top physician. Wolfie Parks, he was a surgeon. There was - you heard of the Centaur? Well he ended up, he was on the Centaur and he joined us when we come back from the Middle East. He bumped into us up Queensland. That was Altridge.

16:30 I never took much time for him, he was the one that paraded me when I was a warrant officer - "How come I didn't have people on a charge?" But the point is this, you don't charge people for the sake of charging them. They've got to do something wrong before they're charged. But outside of that, oh no, they were all pretty skilled people. Oh, we had one doctor went back and committed suicide. And another bloke was sent back

17:00 sick, pretty sick. It was a big strain on some of them, very much.

Did you find some of the things that you saw hard to deal with?

No, because you become very callous. That is a hard thing about it all, you become very callous and very hard-hearted. I know it is wrong

17:30 but I think you've got to adopt the attitude, "Well, just bad luck, boy. It was your turn. And what will be, will be." And that's the attitude you've got to take. If you're going to adopt the attitude, "Oh I can't do

this because this will happen," that won't be any good. You're there for a purpose, whatever will be, will be. And that's my attitude and a lot of them are the same way.

18:00 **Were there any sorts of wounds, like you would have obviously seen a lot of wounded people, were there any sorts of wounds that were more feared than others?**

Landmines. Landmines would be worse. Which thank goodness I didn't come across too many of those. They're the ones that will blow you to pieces, you know.

18:30 The - outside of that it's mostly - I think a lot of people who got hit generally got hit for keeps, you know. If you get hit with a bomb you won't be there to worry about it tomorrow.

Did you see any sort of miraculous survivals?

Oh, no.

19:00 No. The only miraculous I would say, if you happened to be in an area where nothing happened, and if you had have been there, I would say mine is a perfect example of that. If I wasn't where I was, I wouldn't be here now. If the CO didn't get toothache, I wouldn't be here talking to you today. Would you call that miraculous. And that's the whole story.

19:30 It was only him getting toothache three hours before I was due to sail, I was changed places with him. I think he was still alive, I've been trying to trace him but I can't get an answer. I don't think he's alive now. That's the nearest I can answer that one for you. And to my language, that is a miracle in my own way.

How much were you involved in

20:00 **patching up wounds as they...**

Myself? Very little.

Can you tell me about some instances when you had to?

No. I did not myself personally no. As I said I was only administration, organising and supervising other people. And delegating other people. I wasn't a trained personnel

20:30 to do certain jobs, yet I was trained in other aspects to do a job. I have to tell you that, because that was right.

When men would come in who were in a really bad way, probably weren't going to make it, were there certain things that you'd say to them, or talk to them about?

The nearest I can get to answer that, we had three padres in our

21:00 unit. One a Catholic, one a Presbyterian... Church of England. And the Catholic priest used to say to me, "Syd, I treat all the same. The only thing," he said, "I have different from anybody else," he said, "I do confession. Outside of that,"

21:30 he said, "my services are available to everybody." Now, to answer your question, I can be a little bit upsetting in this one. First of all, to answer your question is if you have a problem like that, you try as far as possible to find out what religion he is and call on a padre to carry out that answer that you just give me. Which would be part of my job to designate - and this is answering some of your questions.

22:00 And it's not for every Tom, Dick and Harry to do it. I'm there to cover a lot of aspects. Now the other thing is I was asked to pass the padre one day - "We have some people to bury. Would you mind organising?" And he told me they weren't of his religion. And it'd be better for him to find somebody else. Now that hurt me. And that was in Finschhafen. The other thing is

22:30 another one is while we were in the islands there, there was a Salvation Army bloke. He used to have the greatest gathering of all of a night time. Irrespective of who you were, he used to fill the tent right up. Anyhow, that's as near as I can answer. Does that answer? I'm trying to give you an idea. And they're the only people that can do what you said.

23:00 I myself, I'm not a counsellor. They are more in a position, and their job is such is to do that. They're not people who wait on, like to help patch up people. They can be used as a stretcher bearer, they can be used as a counsellor. They can be used as a minister of religion or whatever they want to. But they can be called upon to do those sort of things.

Was there any sort of protocol is someone was dying?

23:30 What was that?

I've read things, they wouldn't let anyone die alone.

Oh, no, you got me there, because I have never been in that position. The only place I've seen is I saw a mate of mine being put in a tent

- 24:00 lying there and he was dead. In fact, he had all the top of his skull blown off. And I just lifted, to see if he was, his skull moved and I knew he was dead then. But outside of that, no. I have seen people killed. And take it as a matter of fact, this is war. And I'm afraid that's callous,
- 24:30 I know. And I think the average soldier coming back, whether it's navy, air force, has the same attitude. They go away a very docile person, and some come back a gutless, hard-hearted that you wouldn't think it was the same person. And it's very hard to feel sorry for something that people treat seriously and to you it may be very mundane. But that's life, you turn around...
- 25:00 You see so much of it, you live with so much of it. It's just part of life. It's cruel, isn't it? I know that's hard and you might think I'm hard saying that. But I'm not the only one that says that. It's a cruel world. It's very, very cruel.
- 25:30 **I'm interested in the every day things of life in Tobruk. Tell me what you'd eat.**
- What we'd eat? Bigger all. All right. If you can picture - do you know what a copper is, what they put in the wood fire? Right, they used to use them. Can you imagine say about three or four dozen tins of herrings, tomato sauce,
- 26:00 all plonked in together. All mixed up and that's it. And one tea and a dixie. And when they come they go, zonk, like that. It's a stinking hot day, there's a bloody sandstorm blowing, you're trying to chew it and you're chewing grit. And look at your tea, there's a bloody - you see on a beach where you see all the ripples on the sand - that's what your tea's like, all the ripples of the sand in the bottom of the tea. And if you don't eat it or drink it, you don't bloody well get any more.
- 26:30 So you say food, there's no variety. But we didn't complain. I can tell you stories on the islands a lot different. But the thing is this, I have done two sides of this war which I think is a little bit different to a lot of people; they've either done the Middle East or they've done the islands.
- 27:00 I don't want you to get too confused. But as far as that goes, we never had any right. We used to have these bloody biscuits. They were bloody awful. I don't know what they are, they were as hard as hell. You could break your teeth on them. But no, no variety, nothing. But we think we were grateful. Oh, yes, I'm sorry, we used to have vegetables.
- 27:30 They come along the line, and they give you ascorbic tablets. Now ascorbic tablets are to stop scurvy and things like that, we'd substitute vegetables, and the vegetables would be a tablet. And we used to joke, and say, "What is it today, cauliflower or lettuce?" That was this stuff plus a tablet. That's your meal for the day. I mean that's the vegetables for the day.
- 28:00 So there was no vegetables. No bread, no butter, no nothing. But at least we were better off than the Poms [British], they got a raw deal. We used to feed them, we used to ask the cook not to throw anything out. We'll give it to the Poms. Because the officers used to take the best and the sergeants used to take the rest and the ORs get whatever's left. And oh,
- 28:30 gee, it was crook stuff there. So we used to ask them not to throw it out. They used to come down at night time and we used to give it to them. And it awful you know, and they used to think it was beautiful.
- We spoke before about the legend of the Rats of Tobruk. Can you tell me anything about the morale of the troops?**
- 29:00 The morale was so - it was the greatest - how would I put it - there was no defeatist attitude whatsoever. They were so determined. I think if Rommel had twice the troops he had, he would have never beaten them. Because the intuition and the - as I said, when the cooks get a rifle and they say, "Bigger you, I'm going to have a go too," where you get men
- 29:30 dropped in trenches, get iron bars and shove them through - how could you beat people like this? They're not going to put their tails between their legs and run. No way. And I tell you what, they were so determined, they just couldn't break their spirit no matter what. If you saw the bombardment at Easter, what went on there. Easter was the greatest bombardment ever. And they generally hold memorials sometimes on that.
- 30:00 But no, they didn't break. In fact, it was the other way around. I really mean that, because they'll all tell you the same. When you got the navy coming in and to hell - to whip in and whip out. No. No air force. Don't forget we had no air force. It was gone. No, no, no worries. Don't let anybody say they put their tails between their legs. If they did
- 30:30 they wouldn't be here today.
- Tell me about how you didn't end up on the ship with most of the unit.**
- Well, I was a Staff Sergeant at that time and we had an RSM then, he was the original RSM, he joined us from the day of the formation. He was,
- 31:00 I think he was regular army to be honest with you, before the war. He was in the permanent regular army, I was in the militia regular army. Can you put it the difference? Mine was only part time, his was full time. That was his job. That was Dave Topping. You'll see that his name is mentioned in that book.

And then there was me. So Dave was the administration side, he was sort of,

31:30 he wasn't a nursing bloke, he was administration. And I was next. Now I was allocated the job of stores and looking after with the working parties and things like that. Until we got down to the wharf. Now I was to go, and Jock Clark was to go with Wolfie Parks, the doctor

32:00 - they always put a doctor on a ship for RAPs for medical purposes, you know, like for treatment. And then he was to go. Now he wasn't a doctor, he was a dentist. And then at the last minute, the CO had this toothache. And of course, he being the CO, has got the power to do what he wants. So he said to Jock, "You can send me with your job, and

32:30 you come on the ship with me, and you can fix my tooth up on the way over," see. And that's how it happened. So I mean you know the rest. You say that's not luck. Nobody won't tell me that's not luck.

When had you heard the news that you were heading back to Australia?

When I hit Cochin in India. When we found that our troops had been taken POW [prisoner of war].

33:00 **So when did you find out that you were leaving Tobruk?**

Oh, we heard that we were going to go to the Far East. And then eventually this happened pretty sudden then. We were told to go. But don't forget, in meantime, El Alamein was come through. They held El Alamein, broke through and pushed Rommel back, pushed them back past Tobruk. We went out and others come in

33:30 they sent a lot of the Poles and that in to look after Tobruk in the meantime.

Had you heard much about what was going on in the Pacific war with the Japanese?

No, no. Not at all.

Were you aware that your brother was...

No, not - no, not till I got back to Australia. No, listen. I met him in Australia. He come back, he was in the 18th Brigade, he was down in Adelaide too. See, we all come back

34:00 together. The brigade came back and we came back, only 29 of us come back. Now he didn't know that I got back until I got in touch with him. And I could do that. But then he was sent ahead of me and then he went up north and I didn't know he'd been killed until after my mother come down and went back again.

34:30 And they sent me word. So I didn't know, no.

And while you were in Tobruk, did you get many letters from your family or from Jean?

Very few. Not that they didn't send them, but the mail was very scarce, you know. Maybe one a month or something like that. If we were lucky.

What effect did the letters have on you?

Oh yeah, we always looked forward to them. The hardest part for us, when we wrote a letter we had

35:00 to get all our letters censored. And a lot of the time we sent letters a lot of stuff was cut out. See we weren't allowed - some of the officers had cameras, we weren't allowed to take a photograph. But the padres used to do the censoring. All your mail was censored to go out. But coming in it was a different kettle of fish.

35:30 **I understand that it was a fairly intense period in Tobruk, but where there any sort of times for any laughs?**

How's that again?

I mean was there any sort of humour that kept you going?

Oh yeah, all the time.

Can you tell me some examples of that.

I ended up having a fight with a bloke in the middle of an air raid in Tobruk. Now you wouldn't

36:00 believe that. Because he called me something and I said, "You're knocking me. Rank or no rank, but I'll get the matter, you call me to me face." But we were the best of mates after that. But yes, we laughed and things. We - different things that happened. But there's more serious things unfortunately than laughable things there, because there was nothing to laugh about. I mean that was the problem. See, that's what I say,

36:30 you get a screaming man who had to be stopped going berserk, because it's like lighting a fuse of a bomb. Gee. And if you get a few people go berserk, you got people in bloody pain there and you got people waiting for treatment, you've got people who are a nervous wreck, and you got somebody

screaming, oh gee, that's no cop at all. No, that's bad business. The same as at what happens is when the hospital got blown up

37:00 this bloke got up and run with a full plaster on his leg. You wouldn't believe it. I saw that - I can still see it. How the hell he ran with it, I don't know. He'd just had his leg put in plaster. But yes, I mean it's fear. Fear is a big thing. Fear. You're on tension all the time, you know. You've got the raids, the bombers come over and you hear the scream, and

37:30 you're looking around, where the hell's it coming from? They put whistlers on it to nerve-rack you and things like this. You know, make funny noises as the bombs are falling. But they do that to upset your nerves. But then you can say, "Missed me you bastard. Try again," you know.

Was there much of a difference between night and day?

38:00 **In your freedom of movement. Could you move round more at night than during the day?**

Well, I would say yes. Because the more you kept out of the bloody way - yes, because what we had in Tobruk was what we called 'shoot first and ask afterwards' it was. And the bloody Poms were doing it, they had the job patrolling the beach head on the Mediterranean right where we were. If you go out and you only walked about 20 yards, you're likely to have a bloke with a bayonet stuck at you. Because

38:30 they were frightened of invasion from the Mediterranean. And they never ever did that. We can't work out to this day why they didn't try and come - I think the navy had them bluffed there. See they were patrolling night time, patrolling the beach, the beach head at night time. Wasn't beach, it was rocks, but it was still a beach head. And that's why you didn't go out at night time. There was nowhere to go anyhow. Where would you go? If you weren't working.

39:00 If you weren't working you were in bed.

Was your uniform marked in any different particular kind of way?

No.

Markings on it saying you were a medical...

No. No, no. To look at them you wouldn't know one from another.

Was there a reason for this?

In what way would they be marked?

So there was nothing on it saying you were

39:30 **part of a medical...**

Oh no. Only a colour patch. And if you didn't know the colour patch, you wouldn't know. If you see that uniform of mine you'll see it with a red dot in the centre. But how often - you wouldn't know that, would you? And someone got a white dot. That's something else. And someone's got a green dot, that's something else. No. The only thing you'd have a marking on

40:00 was a hospital ship and a hospital. That made no difference.

So the stretcher bearers didn't wear anything different?

No. They might have a band on but I've never seen them wear it. Half the time they're flat out trying to do what they're doing and worrying about that. Where would a person be safe - see this is the point. In the desert, there's no front line, there's no troops

40:30 firing at you, there's either shell falling on you, or bombs falling on you. Whether you had a red cross on you or not it wouldn't have made a bit of damn difference. And that's the difference. We're talking about two things. Now you talk over in the islands I'll talk to you different. But I'm talking about the desert. No, there's no way of distinguishing you, and half the time we never had a red cross on the tent where we were. They just

41:00 put up a tent and that was a ward. And hope to God that they didn't knock it over.

Tape 7

00:37 **Tell us about that?**

Well, I'd like to emphasise here, when we got our orders to leave the Middle East, arrangements had been made, which I've previously mentioned about where I was to go and where the others would go on the troop ship.

01:00 I'd like to quote an episode and refer to this book again, because I want you to do this, because I want

you to do this, because in my records there is two blank lines which are the finish and the starting of a new era. Now to fill that one in, give me here and I'll give it to you later where the pages are marked, which fills in this gap which you were just asking to get me on my voyage on the ship. I cannot answer. I'm best to leave it till you read that.

- 01:30 That'll give you the correct thing. Now I'm on the ship, which is the Cape Wrath. It's a little Scottish vessel. I palled up with the engineer, who was a Scottish bloke, and we wallowed - oh no, we got to Cochin, that was right, and we learnt that the rest of our unit had been taken POWs. This was not a very nice thing to know.
- 02:00 Here we were. And I thought, "Well I've only got one option, which is the RAP officer and myself," about three trucks, gear, maybe I think we had a couple of carpenters, engineers and electricians, all those. These are the key personnel for - you know what I mean for setting up a hospital. And here we are,
- 02:30 and on our way and Major Parks, who was acting as ROP officer on the ship. We got to Cochin where we knew everything that I said - POW sitting there, didn't know what the hell's going on. No shore leave, just stuck on this bloody tub. Quarters were lousy, just swinging in hammocks on the deck. No quarters.
- 03:00 Basically our meals were more or less iron rations, not cooked rations. Iron rations are sort of biscuits, tinned bully beef, nothing cooked, just stuff like that. And then after that we got word we're moving, and when we went outside we were just like a lame duck in the middle
- 03:30 of the ocean. No one around, no ships around, no escorts around, I thought, "Oh boy." And on that ocean, I still remember to this day, up in the sky if you look, have you ever seen the Saucepan in the sky? What they call the Saucepan. I used to lie in the hatch of a night time, just looking at that hatch and looked at that Saucepan. Every time I looked at that Saucepan in the sky it means we're coming across the Indian Ocean.
- 04:00 And we're there, and I tell you what, nothing to do, just sit there and you've just got your fingers crossed that a sub[marine] doesn't get us. Remember, at this time, the Japanese had come into the war. So we had the Germans not out of the war yet, but Japan's coming into it. And I amused myself watching the Portuguese Man o' War sailing by the ship and flying fish. First time I ever seen flying fish. And one day I was talking
- 04:30 to the engineer, and I said, "Gee we're going fast." And he said, "Ah son, no you're wrong. That's the tide going past us." We were doing four knots. It's not very fast. So we wallowed along and wallowed along, and fortunately eventually we pulled up and I said, "Where are we?" And he said, "Oh, we're going to call into Adelaide." And it went right down the south and then - and I thought, "Well, this is lovely." So we pulled in to Adelaide, and
- 05:00 I thought to myself, "This is lovely now." I've got Wolfie Parks and he's yelling out. "Abandon ship! Abandon ship!" And I said, "Wolfie, we're pulled up at the wharf." And it'd got him down too. I mean he being the medico, maybe he hit the drugs there a bit, I don't know. Eventually we got to shore. But before we did they went around commandeering houses, or bedrooms, in

05:30 houses to house us, plus many more. Which we got billeted in these houses.

Can I just take you back to the separation... From your perspective about what happened and why that separation happened.

Well, I was

- 06:00 - you've got the RSM who was with the other show. He was there. I was the Staff Sergeant, which is his next to him. You know what a Staff Sergeant is, don't you? That's three stripes and a crown. The next one is a Warrant Officer, but he was. I was 2IC [Second in Command] to him. So when we were there, the CO,
- 06:30 the officer was going where I was ended up, was going with the troop ship, but being the dentist. He was a captain, he was the dentist on our strength. And the CO had toothache. So he thought, well, he being the CO, he said to Jock Clark, "You come with us and you can fix my tooth up while we're travelling out to the West Indies." Then I can be detailed to take his place
- 07:00 with the transport. So that's what I did. So that's what happened. And say, "Righto, goodbye." That was three hours before we were due to sail. So away I went. And we, being a little old slow boat, they went and they were the fastest boat, the convoy, because they had to get there fast. They ended up at Colombo and we ended up in Cochin, by the time we got to Cochin, they were in
- 07:30 Sumatra POWs, that's how fast they went. Well that's the story there.

How did you hear the news exactly? How were you told the news that they'd been taken POW?

Didn't know until we got to India.

I mean, how were you told?

By word of mouth, by other - oh, there were dozens and dozens of ships held there because they

couldn't go to Sumatra. They were on their way to Sumatra and they couldn't - they were all POWs.

08:00 **What were your thoughts when you heard about the transfer from the Middle East to Asia? What were you expecting? What were you thinking?**

Oh, nearer home. Nearer home and you know, we might have a better chance of getting relief there. See, time's running away with me, and then I thought to myself, "Well,

08:30 I won't be going home for a while now. If we are going to there, it'll be a long while before I get home." So anyhow, oh I don't know, but I think the biggest shock came is when we got to Adelaide. When we really discovered here we are and this is all there is of us. And they said they were going to disband us because we didn't have a nucleus. And

09:00 that really upset us, because what was I going to do? What where they going to do with me? You get yourself into a unit of running a show and then something takes you, could end up... but as it turned out they decided then to build up the unit again. So from 100 per cent Queensland unit, it was made up with the majority of South Australians.

09:30 And then they built it up and built it up and built it up. But then come the job, which was bigger for me. Now don't forget, the RSM had gone, so it was my job then to take his place till such time as they got another person to take, and through that, I had to, with what I could - now Wolfie Parks - were the only ones of the original.

10:00 So between us, we had to beg, borrow or steal you might as well say, till we can build something - and then we had to train people to do a job. Now the biggest trouble of this was, I've had the experience and you've got new blood into it, and they all know what to do. They've been trained to do something back home, but that's no good. I mean what you learned here, boy, you can forget.

10:30 We're going to a different type of war now. Now this is going to make it double hard. So we built up and built up and built up, till such time as we had a full strength. Then they shifted us up to Tenterfield to set up a training hospital of these new personnel. This time the sisters joined us again. Don't forget

11:00 we hardly ever saw the sisters. Once in Tobruk, once on the mainland. We only saw them three times, right, through the whole of the five and a half years. Because we were never in a position where we could accommodate them, nor would it be safe for them to be there. So we trained there and trained there, and an RSM turned up.

11:30 Yeah, he was with us, that's right. And at that time a lot of them could bring, the ones who were there, their wives could come and stay at houses around where we were, and they had their families there. But then my mother came down to me and that what I told you, she said she only wanted one thing in life to do, was to sit down in the middle of the street and eat a pie in the gutter. Which the two of us, we did do and that fulfilled her.

12:00 But on the way back she was to discover that my brother had been killed in Milne Bay. But in the interim, I'd met this girl before I went away to the Middle East, but when I come back and up to Tenterfield, she come down and we got engaged there. But we decided after that we were going to get married in October. Now, just side tracking that, that was that.

12:30 But oh, it was settling down now. It was more or less just routine work and, I mean, Des Cameron, who was the CO, he left us then and he more or less left me on my own. There was another chap who was a Staff Sergeant, but he belonged to this special surgical unit which Weary Dunlop was building. He was part of that. And so he

13:00 had jobs to do and I had my to do. He had it with the surgical unit, I had it with the main administration. So that was all right. We went to New Guinea then.

Can I ask you about arriving back in Adelaide. What was it like to come back to Australia after all this time?

Oh, what would you think? It was good. We sat down in the gutter and drank a flagon of wine. And next day we drank another one.

13:30 And the public down there didn't take us very kindly. They called us a mob of drunken louts. And the general who was in charge of us got stuck into them and wrote up in the paper, "What you condemn as drunken louts, I'm proud of, and what's more I'll join them tomorrow, I'll get drunk with them. Don't you criticise them. If you'd know what they've been through maybe you'd form a different opinion."

Did that affect you, that story?

Oh yeah. It did, it did. It affected a lot of people. Oh, they were

14:00 savage on that. They had no rights, the papers, they had no rights to do that. I mean they hurt a lot of us, them. It wasn't their fault. Anyhow, he got stuck into them straight away. Really put them in their place.

What did you think of that?

I don't know what their reaction was to that, I didn't worry about that. But it was pretty lousy.

What did you think of the general?

14:30 Oh, good. 20,000 troops were thrown on Adelaide overnight. Unbeknown to anybody. And of course they just went mad. Wouldn't you? I mean they just went mad. They had nowhere, they had nothing. Don't forget these who landed in Java, you know what they landed with? Pick handles. Most of their stuff was on these cargo ships that we were on in Adelaide.

15:00 Oh, bad administration. But anyhow, that's a sore point with the whole administration. That's not me to worry about, that's for the other boys. Bennett was involved in that one too I think. I don't know.

And you were in Tenterfield?

Yeah, Tenterfield. They set up a hospital there.

15:30 **You mentioned your mother just wanted a pie. Why did she want a pie?**

No, all her life, just some of the little silly things. She said I'd like to sit in the gutter just to eat a pie in the main street of a city. That was her fad. And I said, "Right Mum, let's do it." We went and got a pie and sat in the gutter at Tenterfield and ate it. But that's life. We did that and of course

16:00 she went back, unbeknown to her, her other son had been killed. And that didn't go over very well, because my cousin happened to be visiting somebody in the hospital and saw somebody from his unit there and he said, "Oh where's Merv?" "Oh, didn't you know? Merv was killed a fortnight ago at Milne Bay." And that was how they found out. Which is pretty lousy.

16:30 But when I'm in Tenterfield there and then I hear that we're going to go again. So I said to Jean, this girl, well what do you reckon? She said, "Well why don't we get married before you go?" So we ended up getting married in Tenterfield - the dates are all there - 7 o'clock one night, it was a military wedding. She was a nurse, she was in uniform, I was in uniform. And our unit padre

17:00 married us and that was 7 o'clock that night, and 4 o'clock next morning they come and got me and that was the last I saw of her.

How did they get you?

They just come down and said, "You got to go." That's how things were.

Knocked on your door?

Yeah, "Righto, let's go." And all had to go back to the unit, had it all packed up and gone the next morning. It was all on the train, heading for Brisbane. And from Brisbane we went to - that's right -

17:30 we went to Port Moresby and up to Koitake, Thabelia [UNCLEAR] and [Owen] Stanleys Range. We stayed there and set up a hospital and that's when the sisters joined us again. And we were received as a hospital there, we were classified as a forward hospital. Receiving people from the Kokoda Trail to be evacuated back home or back down to Port Moresby.

18:00 **What was it like in this new environment?**

Oh beautiful. The only thing that you had is beri-beri sickness, malaria, dengue fever. Disease was very big. Malaria was a big thing.

18:30 And beri-beri, oh yeah. Bad. But they were very strict on this. We were going to make a bigger burden to protect people from this thing. Don't forget you're not only protecting yourself, you're protecting the hospital as well. See this is the problem. And you'd get up in the morning and you'd have to shake your boots before you put them on, because

19:00 poisonous spiders were bad up there. They'd get into your boots. Or you never made your bed before you - when you got up in the morning, you folded everything up because of snakes would get inside. They would do that.

What kind of wounds were people coming back with from the fighting?

From the islands now?

No, no, from the Kokoda Track.

Mostly firearms and bombs. Mortar fire. Not aerials. I'm not taking away that the war

19:30 was any worse or any better. There's two different facets. There wasn't the aerial bombardment in the islands like there was in the desert. I would say you would be more open to wounds in the desert than what you would be in - outside of disease. There was more disease in the islands than what there was in the desert. There was more wounds in the desert than what there were in the islands. Now, it's

20:00 mostly from sniper fire and things like that. But this game, which I'd like to elaborate, one of the things on the Kokoda Trail, when the stretcher bearers - I wasn't there but there were reports come back to us

- they had to have a special guard on the stretcher bearers for the snipers up in trees shooting them. So it seems pretty tough. And there were very, very high casualty lists. So you asked about

20:30 wounds and the medical personnel, and it didn't matter two hoots whether you had an armband or anything. But that's by the way. But there rain was a big - it rained like hell there. And you had this to contend with. You had - we had a Koitake plantation. There was a big rubber plantation.

21:00 And you had the old anomaly, "Don't touch this, it belongs to the natives." There was a plantation there had a lot of banana trees. We used to go and get the bananas off them. But that belongs to the - this is what you had to watch. You had another - not an enemy - you had another population there who had nothing to do with us. And yet they had their

21:30 Papuan constabulary there. They were proud people, highlanders. You'd see them marching along with their rifles, the natives. They were perfect in drill and everything. But they did all right. They had their job to do. But another thing we had to watch - they were gamblers, very big gamblers. They'd even gamble the clothes off their back with a pack of cards. We used to see them, we used to have a special ward for them when they were sick. And they'd be betting their shirts off their back.

22:00 But that's their problem. If they wanted to do it and get around that way, they could.

So you had a special ward...

Oh yes, for them.

So how was it organised?

One of the biggest problems there is language. See, that was the trouble. But most of them were beri-beri and malaria. Those sort of cases. Not so much actual wounds.

How would you divide up a small hospital unit?

22:30 **How would you describe it?**

For these Papuans?

Would it be set up with different wounds and different diseases? How was it organised?

You'd have a medical ward and you'd have a surgical ward. Yes.

And were people put into certain places depending on their disease or their injury?

You'd have contagious wards.

23:00 See, we had malaria. If you get malaria and you don't watch out and don't treat it right, well they can be bearers of malaria, and bitten by a mosquito would carry malaria virus. That's not for me to do anything about, but I knew, we had all been briefed on this thing. The surgical wards were separate. You'd have isolation wards. And the native wards was down outside

23:30 a long way away.

So that was almost like a separate place?

Oh yes. A long way away too.

How far?

Well, these were up in the plantations. The main hospital, the operating theatre and the x-ray units were in the homestead of the plantation. The rest were down the hill on the flats.

24:00 Could be five or six hundred yards away.

And would your personnel look after the native people?

Yes. But with an interpreter. Oh yes, that's right. But I think it was more or less male orderlies, the male nurses used to look after them rather than

24:30 the female ones. I never had much to do with them. They used to be self supporting. But under the jurisdiction of our unit.

Were they involved in some of the roles, like stretcher bearers?

Yeah, ninety per cent. More. Well they used to bring it from there to the likes of us.

25:00 And from us we'd send them back by motor transport. There was no way of transport. We never had any helicopters to drop them or anything like that. But it had to be back more or less to access road by manual power.

Tell us some examples of initiative used to transport people from the Kokoda Trail.

Well, I can only speak up to where they come up to

25:30 the end of this track. We weren't actually on the track, because we couldn't. Set up didn't permit us. But what Weary Dunlop was doing is forming up a surgical unit which would go on the Kokoda Track. You could see his motivation. There was only a small, which they carried on their backs. And there, would bring them back. Or send them back to us that way.

26:00 **Did they carry them physically on their backs?**

With stretchers... Oh well, they improvised them, didn't they, with poles.

I'm asking for examples of that that you heard of or saw yourself.

Unless they was in such a condition that they couldn't be transported that way. But most of them were head injuries, chest injuries, wounds, rifle fire injury.

26:30 Till such time as they got into a place where it was booby trapped. But there couldn't be much of that. Mostly rifle fire and things like that.

And what was some of the immediate first aid that people would do for a rifle fire injury?

Well, I'd have to surmise from what little knowledge I do have, first of all you'd have to stop the bleeding. And the next thing would be treat it with antiseptic.

27:00 And you couldn't do any more than that, and get them back fast.

Take us through your role. Tell us what you had to do in this new phase of the war in New Guinea.

27:30 We went from there, now let me get this straight...

You had that new role back in Australia of course, didn't you?

No, no. Oh, what's that?

You were talking about the sergeant major had gone.

I haven't got up to that stage yet... I'm still only a Staff Sergeant.

28:00 And we still had the - we didn't have an RSM at that time. He'd left down in Tenterfield. Where am I? Up at Koitake. We come back then, we were going to go over the other side of Owen Stanley and they were going to fly over there with all their equipment. And we went back to Port Moresby, and that's what I was

28:30 saying, when I got back to Port Moresby, I received news that my wife had died of meningitis while nursing in a hospital. Now, they said I better go home. They give me 10 days leave and they flew me straight home. I was lucky there, because we had been all packed up and of course the rest went over to Buna and Gona, and I picked them up again at Finschhafen on the other side.

29:00 And when I got to Finschhafen, we were there for some weeks, set up a place there and that was more or less looking after the northern part of New Guinea, north-west part of New Guinea, looking after them and evacuating from there. It's a different set up there to what it was in the desert. I mean that was a dead end, that was bang, that's as far as you go. And then from there they were sent back. A lot of them were flown back.

29:30 They're flying them back this time. Unless a hospital ship was there and they could put them on the hospital ship. But they were getting them back to Port Moresby and from Port Moresby they'd go by hospital ship back. Now we were there, and then they said we got to go back to Australia. And we went back to Australia and we went up to north Queensland. Now up in north Queensland the first army

30:00 - oh gee, it was thousands and thousands of troops up there. In fact, if you went up there now they've still got certain parts of the place say this was so-and-so. We set up camp there. Now that was being trained for the big invasion up further. We were going to hit Borneo. Whilst I was there I was promoted to warrant officer and I was given the job as RSM. Now this brings in that side now.

30:30 Now my job took on a different role altogether. Now we were full time responsible. No fraternisation with troops, no sleeping in the same quarters as troops. Have to know all the administration. Had to know the army rules and regulations. Had to know the correct procedures. How to make a charge sheet too. Answerable only to the CO and Adjutant. And also advise officers.

31:00 Being medical officers, although they take parades, they are very naïve as far as what they can do or what they can't do. And my job was to tell them. Or they'd ask me, "Is this correct?" or, "Is that correct?" Or no. Which is part of the job.

Why wouldn't they know?

Well, they're medical officers. They're not army personnel. They're medical officers joined the army. They're a doctor. But they got commissioned on

- 31:30 their qualifications. But an Adjutant is different. An Adjutant is a permanent army. But I am a warrant officer which has come up through the ranks. In other words, when I went back I could have become in the permanent army full time. There wasn't so many of those. At the beginning of the war there was a few of those, but not many. But they
- 32:00 generally, for some unknown reason, they sort of petered out. When I was made there, the push was on then, the training was really on. We were walking miles and I mean you didn't go in no more trucks. As I said, if there was a cricket match on about 13, 14 mile away and they said, "Who wants to go to the cricket match?" they put up their hands and they said, "Righto,
- 32:30 fall in at 7 o'clock in the morning." So they fall them all in. It was my job to get them all out. They said, "Righto, away you go," and we had to walk 14 miles. And when you're finished you come back again at three o'clock in the afternoon. They went to the cricket match, but they used it as a drilling exercise as well. Another time we'd have to learn to swim in the Barron River with full pack.

What about crocodiles?

No, in the

- 33:00 - where we were there wasn't. In fact I wish I had my photos... I've got photos of up there when we were in the desert. And then from there we went on the biggest invasion fleet of the war. You wouldn't credit how big it was. We went on an LST -
- 33:30 a Landing Ship Tank - slept on an iron deck with just a little tarpaulin thing over. That was us. No walls, no nothing. And all you had was a groundsheet on the deck. And bloody hot as hell. No fresh water. The only fresh water they had was what you were allocated, which wasn't much. Now for ablutions you used ordinary
- 34:00 salt water and you used salt water soap. And I tell you what, it's not so bloody wonderful. And then we sat there, and then we used to line up for rations - and this was run by the American army . First up in the desert, it was the British Army. In the islands, it was American army. And they used to have a meal at 9 o'clock in the morning and 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And if you've ever seen a mob of Australians rebel, you should have seen what they did.
- 34:30 They all started to eat their iron rations. And they went berserk. Anyhow, the Yanks had to give them three meals a day, because they were used to it. And the iron rations was a no-no. You always carried iron rations. Iron rations is a tin about that long and about that wide and about that thick. And in it, it would have prunes a couple of biscuits, things like that. Survival things. And also they had about three cigarettes. Which makes me laugh
- 35:00 today. So we were eating those. And of course they said that's a no-no. So we landed at Morotai. Now Morotai was an assembly base for the whole force. We was there and then it was on. We were on H plus 1
- 35:30 which was one hour after landing. Of the invasion. Like the assault troops go in and we go in one hour after. But we sat out there, oh, I don't know how long it was, it would be fascinating and you saw fireworks. Some of the best fireworks I've seen in my life and ever seen since is there. There were these Yankee ships that would come in broadside in like that and run along the beach and fire 20 rockets at one time each one. And there were dozens of them.
- 36:00 They were retaliating with mortar fire, but they didn't do much harm. So eventually they landed and we landed and then we set up camp at... Balikpapan. So we were there and then we set up a proper place then, and of course then things were getting pushed back a bit then. And things were getting a bit more docile
- 36:30 now, and people were having a game of cards at night. And just doing the essential things. And more or less looking after people who were sick, but it wasn't so desperate as to what it was before. Until one day the war was over, and they approached me, "Would I like to be in the Occupation Force?" And I said, "I'm very sorry, I'm very tired. I want to go home."

37:00 Tell us about that day.

Well, they come - well what they did, a fella said on parade, and they said, "The war's over now because they'd dropped the atomic bomb. And we are going to send personnel home. But they'll only be sent home on a roster system." You had to have so many points before they'd leave you go, and the higher the points you had,

- 37:30 the priority you had. And if you were married, you'll get a certain amounts of points . If you weren't married you only got a certain amount of points to your active service. So they fell us in and they said, and they extended the offer of... an occupational force in Japan for two years. And that's when I said, "No."
- 38:00 And they said, "All right." So they took a census of the point system. And you wouldn't believe it. Even though I was not classified as married there, my points were so high that I was on the priority list. Because I'd been overseas for so long. And then I went home.

Tape 8

00:36 **I'll just ask you about your role as a RSM.**

Well, it's a standard procedure. An RSM is a Regimental Sergeant Major which is a warrant rank. Now a warrant rank is not a commissioned rank and yet they hold, more often than not,

01:00 more power than a lieutenant. Their role basically is to understand the rules and laws of the army. To be an adviser to the officers or to the administration. To be able to format a proper parade.

01:30 To be able to administer and carry out training on a parade. To understand law and procedure for the purpose of trials and court martials. To conduct

02:00 routine orders as laid down by your superiors. To designate duties, according qualifications of personnel for their particular job. To partake for the sake, there's one job that they can designate you to do is acting orderly

02:30 officer for the day. You are an officer with a warrant. Not an NCO. And that is different. You're not entitled to a salute because you only salute rank, you don't salute the person. You salute an officer with two pips, but you don't salute a warrant rank. A warrant rank is dressed the same as an officer, they wear the same brown, strap

03:00 across there and across there And if it comes to ceremonial dress they dress the same as an officer. And can wear arms. At all times they've got to maintain disciplinary protocol and procedure throughout the unit at all times.

03:30 Mainly all leave has got to go through the RSM for his endorsement before it can be granted the necessary party or person within the orderly room. So an officer couldn't grant a person leave without the endorsement by the RSM, because the RSM would have to give the okay for him to go on leave because he could be a personnel who was on duty.

04:00 It's a pretty big job. It's a lonely life. They give them more money for the job. They give you mess allowance. You get a batman to look after your clothes and look after your comfort and your quarters. That's a joint batman, he's more or less got you

04:30 and somebody else. And also you must be quartered in a room or domicile of your own and not be fraternising or living in the same quarters as the personnel of your unit. So it's a pretty lonely life I can tell you. That's the penalty you've got to pay.

Why do they do that?

Because you're above fraternisation. No concessions given.

05:00 No fraternisation. Well, to put it bluntly, I don't know whether that's right or not, but you're a god unto yourself. You are God. It's a very powerful job. But if you wanted to use it. If you ask anybody or see anybody with that rank, you always see them, when they're on parade, they're right out here on their own.

05:30 They're not told to do that, that's what they've got to do, that's their policy.

And why do they make sure of that?

No, that's the procedure of all armies. Now in America they call it master sergeants. He's got three stripes down and three

06:00 stripes above. You often hear him bellowing them out and all that. They're the equivalent. They're law. And they don't buck. Boy, for an officer, they couldn't go and dress an RSM down in front of the parade. You couldn't do that. But they could call the RSM up to report to the orderly room or to the CO.

06:30 And then they would ask you why. But still you can prove it wrong, well they got to say sorry.

So what kind of people are they looking for an RSM?

First of all experience, an ability to train people, ability to administer, ability to organise things. Abilities to actually do it in action

07:00 as it is for us. Mine was a promotion in the field, which is the highest one you can get. You earn it. The other ones get by schools, going to school. Mine was in the field. Now to earn it in the field is pretty high. Because he would carry more qualifications than a bloke who's learnt it from a school.

07:30 **What were some of the harder aspects?**

To charge people and put them on a charge. Knowing I'm forced to do it. It's very hard. With all this regimentation and that, they are still your mates. But your mates must respect you for your job. If you know

08:00 they've done wrong, you must just say, well I've done wrong, I deserved it. But if they don't take it in that attitude, well then they won't even talk to you.

Did you lose touch with some people?

Sometimes I think I could have been harder with some of them. But I try to be a logical man too. And this way I found out I do better.

08:30 This is what you've got to learn too, you can demand and order a mate, and what satisfaction do you get out of it? When you want them to do something, yes they do it and as soon as your back is turned, they'd just tell you to go to hell. But if you earn the respect of them, even though you have this job, you've got a better chance of getting on with everybody. To respect somebody and detest anybody is two vastly different.

09:00 **Did you ever have to court martial anyone?**

Not me, no. But charge them, yes. That's part of the job. Oh yes. But more often than not a person, an RSM will authorise a sergeant to put somebody on a charge. Not so much the RSM charging him. He'll authorise it

09:30 because the RSM is the advocate in the case of a charge. He has got to be the Bible referred to in order or out of order, and if they do something and they find out, it could be a CO, what you do is turn around and say, "Sorry sir, according to article so-and-so of so-and-so, we cannot do that." And you can say that.

10:00 You're not saying it, you're only quoting law.

Were there times when you had to do this with officers?

No, I never did that, but on the parade ground, yes. I've gone, "I'm sorry sir, you can't do that." And he can overrule me, but he'd be foolish if he did. Because then he would be admonished if I was proved

10:30 right. Not by me, by his CO. Make sure you're right before you accuse him. I'm quoting normally here.

What about the doctors who weren't really army men at all, who were appointed as officers? What would you have to tell them?

Some of them wouldn't know their left from their right foot. So what's we'd generally do

11:00 - an RSM falls in the parade, the full parade. Then he will get them all ready to march off and he'll go up to the officer and salute him. Sir, the parade is now ready. And the officer will more or less, he'll say to the RSM, "Move them out, sergeant major."

11:30 He's not using himself, but he's using the RSM. The RSM will issue the order as given by - but that's how it's done. He'll present it to the officer of the day. The officer will then say, "Move them out," or "Do so-and-so, the parade is yours." And then the sergeant major will take over .

12:00 If you heard the British Army. Sergeant Major Britain from the British Army, the Royal Guards, you want to hear him, he's dead now. You'd understand it all then. Then off they go. And then they form in the column of route. The sergeant major would be there and then the officer would turn around and march out to the front. And he'd give the order, "Quick march." And that's it.

12:30 **Because these were a particular case, some of the doctors, where they had nothing to do with the military, any amusing situations.**

Well, in other words, if you're a good RSM you don't let it get into that position.

Any cases of them going to places which they shouldn't have been?

How do you mean, the officers themselves?

13:00 **Being totally unaware of some of the army's rules.**

Oh yeah. I mean but I can't think of them off hand, but that happened a lot. If they've got any courtesy in them they'll come up and they might say, "Syd, listen, what do you do in a case like this." If they've got any decency they'll do this. See, you're the walking Bible. But it makes them look good too.

13:30 But they can get out of it by saying to you, "Sergeant major, you take over now." I can't defy his order, because he's my superior. And then you'll do it. And then you hand it back to him. It seems silly, but you asked me the question.

What were some of the things you'd do in your spare time

14:00 **in Papua New Guinea?**

In Papua New Guinea, we built a hall, out of tarpaulins, put up some posts, built a little bit of a stage, put tarpaulins over it and we held concerts. Impromptu concerts. And they were very popular. If somebody got a, we happen to get a piano out of the

- 14:30 homestead of the, the plantation owner had left his piano there. So we got that. And I sent home for some music. My mother sent some music up and the pianist bloke, he could play by ear, and somebody would get up, an impersonator. Also don't forget, they had entertainment units in the army, if you had the facilities to run them. We
- 15:00 had a bit of a hall, there was no seats, it was built on a slope so everybody sat on a slope, when it rained the water used to come in. But left them like that and the stage was down there.

Tell us about some of those concerts?

Well, gee, who were some of them? They were before your time unfortunately. But where we were

- 15:30 I'd like to say something in here, in conjunction with, which I omitted. It goes back to the Middle East. The concerts. The Americans had everything, we had nothing. But we were smarter than them. What we used to do, the rule was, if there was an air raid, there were three shots rapid on the firearm, and you run to the shelter.
- 16:00 What our blokes used to do, is go over there with a rifle and fire 3 shots rapid, and all the Yanks used to run for their lives, into the shelters and all our blokes would go down and grab their seats. When the firing was over, we had the seats and the Yanks had nothing. I had to mention that, you're talking about concerts. As far as concerts of our own, we had basically our own, but sometimes you got a patient
- 16:30 who was able to get around a bit, not fit enough to send home, it was just a matter of a couple of days, sometimes you get them, if they were versatile, and they'll do a song, or things like that. It generally worked out pretty good, not very often that we had them That's what we did. You'd try.

What about the female impersonators?

On yes, I don't think we had none. It was impromptu. When we had the nurses there,

- 17:00 they used to scrounge up some things from the nurses to do up as women, you know. They never got the women, it was all done themselves. But it was entertaining. Just one other part I just might mention here. I was one of the head brewers, making grog for the army. You wouldn't believe this. But on Sunday when they're not using the cookhouse, we'd - first of all we'd make jungle juice out of fermented apples, you know, it makes pretty good brew.
- 17:30 But then I done better than that. You're talking, this is part of the entertainment. My mother used to send hops up, but the only trouble is, we'd bottle it all but you'd have to put a raincoat on when you opened it because there was so much gas in it; it used to blow everywhere. But in the end we done better than all this, my mother got past muster,
- 18:00 they'd used to have the Yanks come out and stay at our place a bit and she used to get grog off them. And to get a loaf of bread, pull all the stuffing out of it, and then push it in back into the bread, and then push all the bread back into the packet. And she used to send it up to us, I thought that was pretty smart; it didn't break. Outside of that, no, not much, play cards, things like that. It wasn't so bad
- 18:30 in the islands as what it was in the desert. The desert was more edgy I think. I thought so. I'm not condemning, it wasn't any worse or better, the only trouble with the islands, you could be well today and sick tomorrow. And that was bad, and not only, if you'd seen my chap, I had dengue fever, I didn't have malaria thank goodness.
- 19:00 And I got tropical ear, see I had a bad ear, I got half deaf in this ear. That was from the wogs in the water. You never got that in the other place. You had to fight two enemies, the real enemy and the native enemy. Well that's about that, I've answered that one.

Did you think about your brother

- 19:30 **a lot?**

Oh yeah. My brother was, we were close and when you're close brothers, boy, I tell you what, listen to your brother. I don't know if you've got any brothers...

No, I've got three sisters.

With brothers, you talk the same language, you act the same language, and you don't always

- 20:00 get on together, you fight like hell, but boy, you're the best of mates. For sure. We did some cruel things, just by putting bird lime on the railing, when you're grandfather goes down he gets it all over his hand, these are cruel. But that's life. It was just wrong.
- 20:30 Oh no, so really speaking as far as New Guinea goes, it wasn't as bad as the rest.

You heard the bad news about your wife?

Oh that hit me hard that one.

How did you deal feelings you had?

Well, they sent me home.

21:00 I couldn't understand it. I could not understand why. That's the, the only thing. We've got a bit of our fight on our hands at the present moment, and I'm not doing it, Mary's doing it. She was the first one to die in the act of service in Australia. You wouldn't believe that would you? In Australia, I'm not talking about outside, in Australia. They put a plaque on her bed

21:30 in Viewstokes Repatriation Hospital. It was only lately, a few months ago, its been taken over by a private concern now, with certain sections of repatriation the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs]. There was a collection plate taken up and a memorial plate was put on one of the beds in the hospital in her honour. The beds were taken out and sent, we've been chasing it

22:00 ever since. The plaque is not in existence any more. We've got an investigation going on - Where's the plaque? Why, the DVA, they can't do anything about it because they didn't ordain it you might as well say, because they didn't put it on. But they've still got to find out where it is. Because by rights, they should've asked me or her family before they disposed of that. Now I'm getting away from that, that's just an item there.

22:30 To answer your question, that's all I can answer. Because outside of that, the other part of it was when I went back to Australia after discharge.

How did she contract meningitis?

Nursing a patient. She was a nurse. Never survived 12 months' marriage. I was married for about 7 hours, 8 hours or something. It would be about the shortest wedding anyone's ever seen, that

23:00 one. But anyhow, that's life. You talk about it being hard, not hard, it hits hard. But fortunately I have a very understanding woman here, and she knows all about her. She knows the family, she knows everything about it. We're like that.

What did you have to do in those 10 days before returning?

Well, first of all,

23:30 condole her mother for a start. Spend time with her family. It wasn't so much my family, it was her family. Oh dear, it was more over there than our place. Till such times, and the final decision came from her mother,

24:00 not by me. She could see the problem, it was pretty hard. I shouldn't say this but I feel that my own family couldn't give me a better consideration than what they gave me. I felt like hell, but, although there was sympathy, I never got the understanding that I wanted.

24:30 So it hit me pretty hard. So outside of that, took me a couple of years to get over it. But sometimes I hate to say it, you still don't forget. You can't. But luckily for Mary, here she is, writing letters to send to people, saying, "Where's that plaque?"

25:00 And all the person says was, "Its got nothing to do with me." But she did. I met Mary; she's my late wife's sister. This is where the condolences come through, they were trying to fill a gap, but that I don't know how far you want to go here, but there's a tale.

25:30 I can go, this part of it. My whole ambition was, as I said earlier in the thing, to save enough money to establish me when I come out of the army. To give me a home and children and sent me back to a normal life. I come back with a discharge, with an empty world,

26:00 with an empty world, with no potential. All I had was my ambition to have enough money to get what I want. All I had that. And I felt there was no answer to it. It was just an unnecessary venture to do, because there was no answer to it. And that was very hard.

26:30 And I spent many a lonely hour working this one out. Here I stood, all ready to go, to give me what I wanted, and the thing was cut down when I was up the tree. Well, eventually we got over this but, through her family, not my family, I'm not running my family down, don't think this,

27:00 that I met Mary and with this, she was able to give me what I tried to get before by a home, by a family. And just to, I'm repeating a little bit that's on the tape.

27:30 But as a coincidence, that's where I started my army career, in Fraser's Paddock, I ended up living in Fraser's Paddock. With no, I hadn't arrange for this at all, it's the way the thing went. And I was able to buy a piece of ground, put a house on it, and my two children,

28:00 which was the answer to what I started to do in 1939. Now if you were, if you can understand that, what I'm getting at, well anybody can, that's a hard thing. I think I summarised up on that tape, at the end, as best I could, where I ended up, where I got, and where I am now.

28:30 **Talking about after that hard time, the tragedy that you had, you were sent back only 10 days after, straight back?**

Yes.

Tell us about what you were thinking as you were sent back?

- 29:00 Here's. They would only give me 10 days' compassionate leave, for a start. I walked home, I was sent home, and I walked up the back stairs of my home, of my mother's place and she was there, and she didn't know I was coming, and when she saw me she got a hell of a shock. And I said, "Yes, I'm here on compassionate leave." So that was good, everything
- 29:30 was all right. But oh no, it was very hard for me explain that. If you ever know what an empty room is like, to walk in, no matter who was there, nobody was there. My mother was there, I'm not condemning her. There was a friend of ours was there too, but there was that missing
- 30:00 link, all the time. It was a long while after that. But when I went back on compassionate leave, I devised the policy to carry on, I have a job to do, and I done it. I kept going until such time that they didn't want me any more. I feel, I,
- 30:30 wished I had done it. I wished I stayed in the army. I had the opportunity to do it. I think I would have been better off. Because I was in an environment I was comfortable with. Do you understand? Because this was my life; this had been for 5½ years. I had a life waiting for me, but I lost it,
- 31:00 and what am I going out of the army for, to what? This is cruel, saying this. And I did this and I've been sorry ever since. Not because I married Mary; that had nothing to do with it. She gave me, fulfilled the obligation and gave me, and I respect her for it. And I think the world of her too, don't worry about that, so that is a little part of it,
- 31:30 which you wouldn't know about it there, unless I told it to you.

You're back in the field, you're back over at, where did you go from your compassionate leave? Where did they take you?

From Brisbane to Finschhafen. North of New Guinea.

And what were you doing here? What kind of work were

32:00 you doing in Finschhafen?

The same, I was a warrant officer there. I was the same as what I just told you.

Tell us about your preparations, ah okay. So then you came back again to Australia, tell us about that?

Well we come back to Mapee, out

- 32:30 in the Tablelands there. Mobilising for a big invasion of Borneo. This is getting towards the end of the war, with the Japanese. They, see America was still in the other, the other islands, and we were doing Borneo, Morotai, and New Guinea, and all those. We were going through all those, and they were doing the other way. Getting ready for the invasion there. Actually more or less, it
- 33:00 was the final show. And basically it wasn't so hard either because it was there, and they hit so hard, with the bombs dropping, they just capitulated. There was thousands of ships, not just hundreds, thousands of them, the whole world was planes and ships. It was fantastic.

33:30 Describe what you saw.

It was landing ships, tanks. If you can see night and day, shells flying over you and landing all the time, and these ships, which are multi-rockets, all banks of them like this, broad shouldering along the shore and just letting them go, one after the other, they were only from here (points) practically, just across the road from where

- 34:00 we were, on our ship. "Hello, you can come in." So anyhow, and that keep on going for a couple of days. It was deafening, but we didn't mind because we were on the right side.

How were you feeling at this stage about the war?

Well, we knew it would be over soon. Well, that was no problem. We weren't...

- 34:30 We were still sleeping on top of the decks, still watching all the fireworks. It was only a matter of... Have you ever seen a landing ship tank open up the front of the ship? And they're run right up the beach, and they're running out from underneath us. That's about all I can say there.

And when you landed, how long was it before you heard the news that the war was over?

- 35:00 Well, I'll have to have a guess. 8 months, that would have to be a rough guess. At Balikpapan, I reckon, I'd have to have a guess, it was 6 to 8 months.

So tell us how you set up your unit there?

Well, we were in civilisation then, because they set up a hospital in the building there, and the living quarters in tents, and also the non-serious ones were in tents. The serious ones were in the hospital building. And all the operating theatre was there. And it was civilisation there. Balikpapan was a city. Not so bad.

What was happening with the fighting at Balikpapan?

36:00 Well, they were gone; they'd chased them. What wasn't surrendered, were killed by... A lot of the Dayaks killed them, the Japs. Pushed them into the jungle. In other words, they were just pushed back, nowhere to go, you might say. "Come into the parlour, said the spider to the fly." I won't say a lot of them, but a lot of them was...

36:30 We didn't see any captured, except a few which we had as working parties under the control of Indians, the prisoners. The Japs, they were going to kill them anyhow, so we took them away.

Tell us about the Japanese POWS?

There were only a few of them. We had them there as. As far as I know, you couldn't talk to them - you couldn't speak their language. But I just think that they were...

37:00 They thought they were just it. They were masters. But we thought we were doing the right thing by putting the Indians in charge of being their controllers, but they were so serious, the whole lot was reversed, they were more the prisoners than the Japanese. And we had to pull them away because they were going to kill them. We didn't have them very long, because they couldn't have

37:30 stood up to these. Revenge is sweet isn't it? They crucified them, "Well bugger you, I'll crucify you."

Was it difficult to stop people taking revenge?

Oh yeah, for sure, it would be. These blokes they were... They'd cut their throats quicker than lightning.

Was that part of your role, to stop this kind of thing happening?

Well, you'd have to try. Well I think what we'd do. We'd just look the other way. You've got to be careful, otherwise

38:00 you'd get yourself into strife. But it wasn't, what happened after that, a matter of closing down the unit, forming a section to go to Japan, to maintain a bit of discipline and order,

38:30 this was after the bomb had been.

What do you remember of being told about the bomb?

Nothing. All I know is what I've ever read in the paper. I don't know, we didn't hear anything much about it, only hear they'd dropped a bomb. You didn't hear a lot of things really, because you had no way to communicate, we didn't have any communications,

39:00 but I don't know. Water Canal was the other place I was trying to think of. You see, they were doing one way and we were doing the other. I think myself, as far as America and Australia goes, I think they get on pretty good together, and I feel that

39:30 if they hadn't won the Coral Sea battle, we wouldn't be here today. That was the turning point. Because if you only look where the Coral Sea is and where we are, we're not far away.

Can you remember where you were during this battle?

Where I was. Down the bottom, near Tenterfield.

What news were you hearing about these battles?

None, just we know that there's a sea battle on.

40:00 I think we are respected by them too. I don't think they condemn us, I think to this day, I suppose I shouldn't say it, but I think they way things are, I think they're still pro-Australian. I think they're a little pro-American they are. And you can see what goes on, this tradition has

40:30 been right through from that war.

Tape 9

00:40 Balikpapan is in Borneo. It's on the east coast of Borneo. It's a major city, as far as major coastal city. Brunei is not far, as the crow flies;

- 01:00 it's mostly oil. A lot of oil. It is controlled by the one party. Still, it was in the limelight then. Well it's mainly... It's all natives. more or less. I don't know what it would be like in peace time, I would say it would
- 01:30 be a resort. Because, I think what we did at one stage at Balikpapan, there was one chap we had, he come from Western Australia, and he done a bit of sailing outside and we didn't have much to do, so we scrounged around, and we got a bit of timber, and we got tied up with army
- 02:00 work, and they cut this timber down and we made a sailing boat, a proper sailing boat. Not a little one, a big one, you go in. And we made it in such then we scrounged up, and we used to, it wasn't the best of boats, but we used to sail it in the water, just for, I don't think it was so good, I think it struck a lot of leaks in the end, but then the time we did have a bit of fun, that's why I think...
- 02:30 But I think what you'd have to watch too. There would be a lot of sharks and stuff around too. You'd had to watch that sort of thing. Swimming, there was no such thing. I don't think they worried about those sorts of things; those things weren't even thought of. I don't think it would be such a marvellous place to live, myself. We went there,
- 03:00 it's not a place where you can say, "Oh, we've got to move this here or there," there's none of that - purely a native, overgrown native village.

Can you make any comparisons between the different kinds of places you saw in New Guinea?

In what way?

In the different kinds of work, was there a difference being at Buna, than at Balikpapan, with the

03:30 work that you were doing?

Ah, Balikpapan being towards the latter end of the war, made it very mundane, the work. There wasn't much high tech and wasn't everybody's taping off; they knew it was a matter of time. And one of the things I thought I'd do was make sure, and why I got paraded one day, is I said, "Why aren't they on a charge, chief?" Well I thought to myself,

- 04:00 "Well, blow this, the war is nearly over. I'm not going to put myself out." If they wanted to have a bit of fun, let them go. But as long as they didn't overstep their mark. They used to have a two-up school there. They used to play two-up dice at the night time there. I never worried about that. Gee whiz, it was tough enough as it is. So,

- 04:30 therefore, nothing very much, I would say in Koitake and Port Moresby side, I think we created our entertainment. I feel overall, I'm not running anybody down, but I think the war was easier in the islands, than it was in the desert. And I was in both, but I'm not saying I was in hardship.

- 05:00 But if you look at the casualties, you'll notice there was more in desert than what there was in the islands. And the islands, when I say casualties, I'm not talking ships sunk, we're not talking about that. We're talking about on the land. I feel that, as I said, sickness was our biggest enemy.

- 05:30 I know they had a rough old trot, as far as the jungle and the things like that, I don't deny that. But don't forget that it wasn't always the enemy fire, a lot of it. The sickness was bad, it was really bad. Which I think is a different outlook and all.

- 06:00 And one thing about it. You can get sick up there and when they come out of the army, that can kill you in the end. But you got a rifle bullet, they'll fix you up, you'll be good as new in a few days. That's the main thing. New Guinea, no, I mean it was only in actual with those in contact. If

- 06:30 he saw you first or you saw him first. A lot of it was sniper work; a lot of it was tree work. There was no such thing as tanks in the jungle, put it that way. There was small few pieces, mortar fire and things like that. But I'm not rubbishing them at all; they all had their problems. But as far as the islands,

- 07:00 even with the Japanese. Island hopping, see you went from one island to the other island. Lines of communication were a different factor altogether. I think in sickness wise, and comfort wise, I think the islands were worse, but

- 07:30 as far as, how would you say, injury wise or comfort wise, I don't know. I mean, the desert, it's a horrible place. The only thing is, in the warfare, its open plains and you're open slaughter.

- 08:00 What they, they haven't got the sickness, that you had in the jungle so you've got to weigh one against the other. And that's what makes it hard so I just don't know which I'd rather. I feel, I would rather be in the desert than in the jungle, although the casualty list in the desert was greater.

- 08:30 In the jungle part, you didn't know what was around, what mite was around the corner. You could be well today and a cot case tomorrow. I feel its an unknown enemy in the jungle, more so than what was in the desert. I hope that answers your question.

Can you tell me about the reactions of the troops when you heard that

09:00 **the war was over?**

Well, from what I vaguely recall, is the stop and stare. It wasn't a matter of waving your hat, or throw your hat up in the air.

09:30 It just felt as if a big burden had been taken off your shoulders. And you just sat there waiting for the explosions, and someone would say, "Oh, its over." "It hasn't sunk home." "Oh, we're going home." "When are you going home?" "Oh, you're lucky." That sort of happened, see. Back in the cities, it would have been a different thing;

10:00 they had reason to rejoice. We had too, but we couldn't. See you must stop and think that, over the period of years, I'm talking years with me, I lost a lot of good mates, so where's the rejoicing there? I had a lot of sorrow myself, where's my rejoicing?

10:30 They say, "I'm going home." A lot of people I think they were just thankful. "I'm going home." I hope that answers what you're talking about.

Did you think about the mates that you'd lost a lot when you heard that the war was over?

Oh no, but you do eventually. Even now, you think, "I wonder where he is now?"

11:00 Is he still here? I wonder what so-and-so's family's doing know." You do; you do. Like I was down the coast and when we first come down the coast, we met a few of them, and they said, "We must get together." But it was only a matter of time, 12, 2 years, they weren't here any more. See, it takes it's toll afterwards. And this is why

11:30 I can't understand. I've been fortunate that I've lasted this long, and there's not many of us left. I've only found one of us in the last two years. I don't know where they are now. Just one point, my wife asked me to mention this. Not so long ago we held a world reunion for the Rats of Tobruk in Brisbane. You might have seen that one time. You would

12:00 have been around; it was only 2 or 3 years ago. We were sitting at the table, and lo and behold, the people we sat with were people from the Panzer division of the Rommel's Army. Now that's a rare one. And also some Polish people. And she said to the woman, she could speak English, "It's a big thing for you to join us out here,

12:30 in a world reunion of the Rats of Tobruk, we being the victors, and you being the defeated." And she said her words were, "I think it was a victory for the world, not for individuals." That was her answer for it. A victory for civilisation she was more or less saying. But I'm sorry, it never turned out that way; this is a war.

13:00 That what she thought by doing away with one evil, it might make it better world. I think that's what she was getting at. And she was very happy and it was a big thing to come all the way from Germany. To Brisbane here. In this reunion. There was a couple of others. I think that was a big thing, to have to do that. But she was thankful

13:30 that it ended up, not as a victory, not as a defeat, but actually as she said, a victory for civilisation.

In the same vein as that sort of comment, even though you won the war, did we win the peace?

No we didn't. We haven't

14:00 have we? I can't see it. My thoughts on all that. I've never thought, and I've been saying this ever since, I wish I had studied Ancient History at school. I used to hate it, but since the war I've taken a lot of interest in it. For, if you think back, from life to eternity, there's been a war about every 25 years.

14:30 And most of them have been in the Middle East. And you think back, if you know your world history, the war of Alfred the Great goes right back, Trojan Horse, they're all in the Middle East. Genghis Khan, he was in the Middle East. But I'm not saying they're... But it seems to be the trouble spot.

15:00 And even the Second World War, it was in Germany but a lot of it was down in Middle East and north Africa, just the same. This is what, this is what they were heading for, and this is what Japan was heading for, to go across to Burma, the Burma Road of course, to go across into open air. But I think where, they're still fighting for this, but

15:30 I just don't know. I can't answer that one, I don't think anybody else has got an answer. We just can't get on with one another. I don't know.

I'm going to go in a completely different direction for a moment. I'm interested in Weary Dunlop as a man, can you describe him?

16:00 He was a man; he used to go for a swim in Tobruk Harbour every morning. He used to go for a trot along the beach, along the wharf, in the morning, irrespective of air raids. He was a man with an ideal. He was a great sportsman. He was a good mixer; rank didn't come into it. He was a determined person.

16:30 He set his mind to something, irrespective of who you were, what rank you held, including generals, and eventually he got what he wanted. But never had the chance to carry it out because he was a POW.

Was he a friend?

Yes. Yes he was. A real friend; yes he was.

17:00 He was superior as a man and in his position, to the average doctor that was in the ADS [Advanced Dressing Station]. Now that means that, I'm not talking about over-fraternising, but he did fraternise with his troops and that's why he got out of his troops what others couldn't. Does that answer it? Yeah?

17:30 **When you came back to Australia, how long was it before you were involved in any Anzac Day celebrations?**

Only with the marches. I still do but I can't walk any more. No I, getting away from that.

18:00 My son, my daughter, and the wife, and the mother of my former wife, used to go at 4 o'clock in the morning, every Anzac Day and go and put a wreath for my brother, and her daughter. And that was after we were married. So we made her, I think she's Gail's...Is it Gails's?...godmother, but she's dead now.

18:30 So, yes, I've always been tied up, how much more I'll being doing it, I try. Last time I went I happened to get a seat, but if I don't get a seat, you see I can't sit down. I can't stand up. I try to march and I can't. But don't mind, see how I go.

How do you feel about the Anzac tradition?

19:00 Very much so. How do I feel about it? It should be more pronounced. It should be taught at schools. It should be, I don't think, they started to a little bit. They've now built a memorial at Southport school up here. You know that, don't you? Well, they have.. I would say, its not their fault, is it,

19:30 that the children of today don't realise what their forefathers went through. And I'm going right back, I'm not going just locally and I think they should be told more. Then I think they might have a better understanding.

Did you talk to your children about the war?

No I didn't, now, not much. This is what I have to do, this is the reason

20:00 he got on me, and he blamed me for it and I do blame myself.

Why didn't you talk to them about it?

Because you couldn't. It's very hard for me to talk to you. And you're lucky that I can do this now, it was all these years, and I couldn't do it before.

Why?

I don't know. It was inside but never coming out. That's the truth that

20:30 to go back fifty odd years; it was still all there. I can talk to you as if it was yesterday. But for me to do it, it's been very hard. And she was the one that got on to me. "Why don't you ring them up and tell them your story?" I only hope that what I've told you can put to some use. It's been hard for me, I tell you.

21:00 I'm glad I've spoken. I feel better. I feel it's been, since I've done that and you've come into it, I hope they understand what I'm talking about. I hope I'm not talking in riddles. I don't think I have. I try very much not to. But I feel that as I call my tapes, destiny. That's what I call them.

21:30 This was my destiny. That's it. Any more I can say? You don't know how I feel. Just like a burden come off me. Oh, I'll be all right. Anyhow, I'm all right. What else would you like to know?

22:00 **Do you want to stop? Do you have any final things you want to add to that? I have a few more things I could ask but if you wanted to sum up anything else?**

I think I was doing that unbeknownst to myself. I've achieved within myself, doing there and with you people,

22:30 what I think I should have done a long time ago. The only thing is what I would like, and I'll give this to my son, I'm not talking about my daughter, to my son, because my daughter's got access to it all. He's the one who was interested in having access of my past. And I think I would give him a card, and then he can ring them up and have a yarn.

23:00 Because he was worried that this thing was going to be misused. And that's how important it is to him, you understand what I mean? You find out people get these things and exploit it for their own benefit, and this wasn't, anyhow, that's right. I'm all right.

23:30 We can all be sentimental at times. It's been hard. This has been hard. I appreciate you coming. I feel that things are good. I think that things will be right. Health-wise, I've survived a lot, and I think too, as

I said before, I'm not religious, but I do believe

24:00 somebody's guiding me somewhere because I'm doing better than I should be. And that's a lot to say that. But I've been through bloody hell too. And I've got there. I don't worry. I feel good. I'm cut from there to there. I'm cut there. I mean, you name it. I've been in and out of the hospital. I've got to go into hospital again next month. But then that's nothing, they're only little things.

24:30 But I'm surviving, that's the point. I've survived. And I think, by getting things off your chest a little bit, helps you survive more.

What do you think is the strongest lesson you take from your war years? What's the strongest thing it taught you?

I think number 1, determination.

25:00 "Never say die." "There's always tomorrow," and "Don't leave till tomorrow what you can do today." And this is the philosophy I'm doing. I'm still doing this. I've got a pair of hands I can hardly use which eventually come off, but I'm not letting that stop me.

25:30 I'm flat out driving a car because I couldn't turn the steering wheel, but I'm getting better now. But I don't stop and won't stop. I feel, I hope I'm not boring you. That's what I hope. Because I'm proud of what I've done and I don't regret what I've done.

26:00 And if anybody went through what I've been through, and still survived the same, and I say, "You're a lucky man, same as I am." That's it.