

Australians at War Film Archive

Frederick Williams (The Kid) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/780>

Tape 1

00:41 **Could you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?**

I was born in Rockdale in the St George [Sydney] area. That's why we always follow St George. We moved around quite a bit.

01:00 But, I'm lost.

You moved around a fair bit as a kid?

Yeah. Some of it. Funny things I can remember. We were knocked back from Sunday school. We were standing outside and there was young girls, like yourselves, all standing around outside the Sunday school and my brother turned around quick and said, "Look at the naked man." and they all turned round and he laughed like mad.

01:30 And they just said, "No more back here you kids." But I had just a normal childhood. We lived quite a bit of our time at La Perouse. I used to go out with the real Aborigines and go to Kurnell and collect. We used to get amongst the mangrove trees to cut the knees out and that's how they made their real true boomerangs. We'd cut the knees out, take them in the boat back and then we'd band saw them into slabs.

02:00 And then they taught us how to make them up and they used rafts, grass and then sandpaper. And then they had fencing wire bent into a pretty-sharp shape, put it on a little tin that was heated up and that's it. They did all their drawings on that. And they taught us how to make moa moas and spears. The woomerahs [throwing sticks] taught us how to throw the spears. We thought it was great. And they were gentlemen. Really nice people. Very musical.

02:30 Picked any sort of thing up quick. And they had a steel guitar, more like a harp, you couldn't hold down. And this old, he must have been very old Aborigine then, and I said, "I'd like to learn to play that." And he put a sheet of paper under it and put these little dots. And he said, "Now you work that." and I could play tunes. And I thought, "Now that was them years ago." That would have been '22.

03:00 Before, around, near 1930, and they do that today and it's all modern. Like these organs and that, they have these things on so you can play. And this old Abo [aboriginal] did it then.

How did you meet these people?

Oh, well we were kids and the Aborigine kids were at school, it was called Yarra Bay school then, it's La Perouse school now.

03:30 We just teamed up with them and we used to go out in the bush with them. We used to catch lizards and snakes and we used to catch snakes and lizards and take them to the snake charmer, George Cann. He ended up curator at Taronga Park Zoo. And we'd sell them the snakes. If they want to go out and not do anything, they'd make a lot of noise and you wouldn't find a snake. But if they were after snakes, they'd go and they wouldn't say a word. They taught us how to do all that. Oh yes.

04:00 The only, there's a sort of a bit of a down side. They had what they called the mission. The Aborigines lived in a mission and there was no white person allowed in there after dark. Well, all the people around, they called it Happy Valley in them days, they used to - every Saturday night - have a party in your house. So they would come over and they'd go round and they'd bring their food, like, cooked the same as we did. And you could eat it. And they were clean. Perfect in every way.

04:30 And the only reason you knew they were Aboriginal was because they were dark. And they were just the same as us. And then after we moved from La Perouse and went to Yarra Bay, it's called Philip Bay now, I think. And while I went to that school I passed what they called the QC [Qualifying Certificate] and went to Sydney Boys High [School]. When I was at Sydney Boys High and did the first year there

- 05:00 and the Depression hit and my father was out of work and I had to leave and I went selling newspapers at Central Railway [Station], the old Central Railway. And I can always remember a little bit in the Telegraph [newspaper]. I was the best educated newsboy in Sydney. Straight from Sydney Boys High to selling newspapers. And I graduated from there and worked in a factory, Gladstone's.
- 05:30 And then we went back to La Perouse again and I went caddying up in the New South Wales Golf Club. And while I was there, one of the managers from OT Tiora Limited [?], he was a golfer and he asked me if I would like a job at their place. He took a bit of a shine to me. So I worked there for two years. Yeah, two years. And when the war started I left and joined the army. So that was my childhood.
- 06:00 **Can you tell me more of what you saw of the Depression and the effect it had on your family.**
- Well, a little bit devastating because my father was a truck driver for the Sydney Fresh Food and Ice Company and they made it that hard for him. And we found out afterwards that one of the managers, he wanted to get his own brother in the job. So my dad left that.
- 06:30 It's a little bit like today, in a sense, if they want to. Now, my brother who's next me, who died a fair while back, but anyway, we used to go down the markets and get speck [marked] fruit, clean that up and you could take that home and then work for the stallholders. There was one chap in particular used to get us to clean his place up and everything like that. Take all the old cases away.
- 07:00 And instead of giving us money, he'd give us a box of fruit. And he said, "You get that in your billy cart and you'll earn much more with that than if I gave you money." So instead of giving us two shillings or five shillings, he gave us a case of fruit and we'd go round probably sell it for five pounds. Another wrinkle [trick] we got was milk bottles. They used to have pint and half-pint milk bottles. Well they used to throw them into this big bin as broken glass.
- 07:30 My brother and I used to get down there, well it was still dark, it would be probably, it would be probably four o'clock of a morning, and go through it. And one of the fellows at the work came over to see what we were doing and I said, "We're just sorting these bottles here." We'd take them to the bottle yard in Wattle Street and sell them. I said, "We get a penny each for the big ones and halfpenny each for the little ones." Next day we went back there was miles of bottles. The fellow says, "Oh yeah, sometimes you'd get two or three bottles of milk."
- 08:00 They knew that we were battling so they helped us out like that. But you had to do it. There was lots of things you could do if you liked to get off your backside. They won't do it today. What other rent did we have? We used to play sport. My father was a coach and captain of the Ultimo unemployed football team.
- 08:30 In his young days, I can put in a plug for him; he was in the charge at Beersheba in the Light Horse [Regiment]. And he was, at that time, one of Australia's best long distance swimmers. He used to swim with Boy Charlton or swim against him. And my brother next to me he was called Donald Andrew and it was Andrew was Boy Charlton's name. He was a captain of the St George reserve grade team
- 09:00 around about 1922, I think. The time they played then they won the comp. I think they didn't have their lines crossed. So we've been St George supporters ever since.
- You mentioned your father was in World War I. What did you know about his service and what did he tell you about that?**
- He didn't say a lot. Like, when we went to Palestine he wrote a letter and was telling me about the Dead Sea.
- 09:30 He said, "When you down the Dead Sea along the river, you can look up along the left-hand side and there was these caves like a monastery. He said, "It will be off limits," he said, "But that's where the Dead Sea Scrolls come from in that area." And he did warn a little thing,, who to look out for, "You've got to watch what women you go to and all these sort of things." He advised everything like that. But Tibby Cotter was our fast bowler of the day then and Pop took a shine to him.
- 10:00 And when he was killed and, I don't know whatever happened to it, but my father had a photo of his grave for donkey's years. And he reckoned it was a bit hairy to be a charger at Beersheba because you not only had to ride your horse but make sure you didn't get shot jumping across the trenches and that. But he didn't elaborate a lot. The First World War was a lot different to the second one. It was worse, the First World War.
- 10:30 **What was your impression of soldiering or the army?**
- Well, I think, like any other normal boy, you always had this glamour about the army. I was in the Boy Scouts and all this sort of thing. But I think there's a bit of glamour attached to it or otherwise we wouldn't have joined up.
- 11:00 My cousin, who joined up when we were both well and truly under age, but we used to go out shooting, not at animals and that but target shooting and we were both really good shots. And we thought, this is the idea, being in the army to do the same thing again. No, but that is just the glamour. It was different with the older fellows. Like a lot of them had never had a job

11:30 and that broke the Depression, the war. And when anyone ever tells me, oh yeah, the Depression did end, this Depression will end. I say, yeah, they only end in a war. That's the only way.

Can you tell me when you heard that the war had been declared?

Yes, well, that was on a Sunday night and my mate and I, we had two girls down on the beach on La Perouse. We didn't do anything wrong.

12:00 And when we got home, I forget, six or seven o'clock at night or something, we heard Mr Menzies declare war. And, well, at that time, I thought "I would like to join the air force." So I went down and the first thing they said, "You're miles too young. And not only that you have to have your intermediate certificate." You had to be well educated. So I lost out on that.

12:30 Then I had two goes at first to join the army and because, well, you can see the photos I've got there, I was miles, didn't even look anything like twenty. So I got knocked back and they wanted volunteers for the 2/1st AGH [Australian General Hospital]. So I went down for that and the doctor said, "You'll be right, you'll be a doctor's batman." So that's how I got in. Otherwise I'd have had to wait. You had to be twenty and not only that,

13:00 you had to have your father's permission. So I filled that out for him. I could write fairly well, like he did.

Why were you so keen to join?

Glamour. Well, not so much glamour. I don't know what you'd call it. It wasn't really glamour. Sense of adventure. We were going to go over there, the war was only going to last six months and it'd be over

13:30 and everything like that. Once you got there you soon found out that was wrong. But there'd be a lot of young people the same, sense of adventure. I don't think I ever met anybody who said he joined up for the fight for the flag. I don't know whether they do think that, but nobody ever said they did. Like in our unit, as soon as you got over there

14:00 and they saw that it was a rotten place to be and that, they used to grizzle and I used to say, well, you're old enough to know better. I was young and silly. So that's how we got away with it.

What was your parents' reaction to your joining up?

My mother was very upset. But my father said, "He's too young, they won't let him leave the country. He'll be in a base unit." And that satisfied her to a certain extent.

14:30 But after the boat left, we left on the 10th of January in 1940, she was very upset about that. And I think it was her that tried to get me stopped because while we were on the boat going across to Fremantle, we didn't, we were going to Fremantle but on the way over there one of the fellows in the orderly room said, "They're looking for you because you're too young." So I just kept out of the way and then when we got across from there to Colombo, they let it go then.

15:00 It had gone too far. But I know she was very upset. I say upset, she was worried and she had a lot of good reason to be.

Can you tell me about when you enlisted and the first bits of training and camp life?

Well, we had virtually no camp life in Australia.

15:30 We both went in in December 1939. We had a little bit of training with the AGH and then all of a sudden we heard that they were wanting more volunteers for the infantry so we put in for a transfer. And as soon as they saw these two twenty year olds wanting to join the infantry, we were snapped up. And they just came and said to us, "Right oh, tomorrow we're going down on the boat." And that was it.

16:00 You got on the boat but because we'd come from the 2/1st AGH they thought we were medical people. So they drafted us into the stretcher bearers and we did a really good training course. I think by the time we got there we were almost as good as a doctor. It was a doctor who instructed us on it and there were about twenty of us. So he had a class

16:30 and we learnt all about that. Then, when we arrived in Egypt, a place called El Kantara, then from there we went on the train across to Dulas and then we did the rest of our training there.

When you were in the 2/1st AGH, can you tell me about what you were doing?

Well, actually, all we were doing was marching, learning to march.

17:00 Marching and discipline, because I mean we had Christmas at Liverpool at the AGH, well that was the 25th of December and yet on 10th January we were on the boat. So there wasn't much...I know I got sick from the injections. I spent three days in the hospital but that was it. And so did a lot of other people. But all we did actually was a little bit of marching and discipline in that part of it.

17:30 But once we were over in the Middle East we really hooked in then. I've got a couple of photos. We had to dig trenches. And the silly part, they did trenches the same as they had in the First World War...real wide ones so that you could carry stretchers around and all that. So somebody was dreaming because

they were useless in things like that. But we finished the rest of our first-aid training

18:00 and then you did the same training as the ordinary infantrymen. Because as an infantry stretcher bearer, you go in with the troops and as soon as somebody's knocked over, you're there to fix them up. But the training's quite intense. I met some nice local fellows there and I had two good friends. One was a Jew and one was an Arab. And I thought, well that dispels this myth that they have to fight. But they didn't.

18:30 They're just the same as us. But I got on good because I was so young. Like I turned eighteen in Palestine and on my eighteenth birthday we were having a recreation camp at a place called Ashkelon. And I got washed out in the river, almost drowned. So I nearly never got my eighteenth birthday. And the ruins at Ashkelon are, somebody told me, in one of the hymns. Part of the hymn says, "Change and decay

19:00 all around I see." Well, they reckon that was Ashkelon. The fellow who was in the boat, making that up out at the ruins at Ashkelon. But that was a sort of a rest for the day. Individual companies would go there and you'd do nothing. One company would act as the guard and you just laid your, you got up and ate when you like just like a week's holiday. I spoilt it

19:30 by almost getting drowned.

Tell me about when you heard the news that you were heading off?

We were quite happy, glad. Oh yes, when they said, "You know, you're going to the war tomorrow." we said, "Whoopee, good." We couldn't get our gear together quick enough. We went down on the train and the Otranto

20:00 was the ship. We went from Pymont. But the SS Otranto was the ship we were on. It was the first ship outside the heads. And I'll always remember, HMTU4 and that was His Majesty's Troop Unit 4. We went out on that and I always remember we were on D deck, bed number 7. I pinched the little number seven. And we were a bit lucky there

20:30 because we had bunk beds. Some of the other fellows had to have hammocks further down. We had the nurses on it. Part of the 2/1st AGH was on our ship and I got seasick going across through the [Great Australian] Bight. We were quite happy to go. Knowing what I know now, I wouldn't have.

21:00 Where did you think you were heading?

We thought we were going to England. We did. That's what we thought. We were going to England and it would be nice and easy speaking to people and then going from England to France. But no, we went up the Suez Canal. I always remember, it was really nice going up the Suez Canal. You look out and see the land on both sides and went through the Ishmailiya,

21:30 the great big lakes. And I think Anthony Eden, the Foreign [Secretary], came on and met us on the boat. And we got off at El Kantara and nearly everything happened always in the night time. We got on a train in the night and they gave us their camel-hair blankets. They were warm but very rough and hard. You wouldn't want to. But it was a good experience.

22:00 Colombo was a nice spot. And the funny part about that, well, we thought it was funny, the natives probably didn't, that if you started to argue with one of the Singhalese people and the police would come up with these big sticks and they wouldn't ask anything. They'd just start whacking into them. They weren't allowed to haggle with us. And some of the fellows had a few, a little bit too much to drink and they'd have salti [?] races, like a rickshaw.

22:30 And I always remember this, the rickshaw driver, sitting in his seat and the fellows running with him and the bloke jumped out quick let it go and it sped along until it hit the footpath and straight up and out he went. And they'd have rickshaw races. Oh yeah, we thought it was good but I don't think some of the natives...it wasn't a real good thing to do, I don't think. And the same happened

23:00 at Fremantle. We met up with New Zealanders and I can always remember the New Zealanders picking up this car and carrying it up the steps of the post office. And this poor fellow sitting inside. Only a small car. Yes. I wasn't involved in that but they thought it was a joke. But probably the fellow who was in the car didn't. I think something like that, it didn't get you a real good name with the local people. They were probably glad to see us go.

23:30 I can imagine at seventeen a lot of those things were quite eye-opening?

Yes, oh yes. I was seventeen and a half, almost to the day, when I got on the boat. I'd had, compared to a lot of people, a really quiet life in a way. Sort of sheltered. I never got up to a lot of the tricks that a lot of the other fellows used to. I don't know what I missed out on.

24:00 What was the hardest thing to get used to about army life?

Discipline, which was good. Discipline's good. But when you like something, you don't mind the discipline. Had to get a bit used to the food. It was wholesome. Not something that your mother would make but,

24:30 no that was, the discipline was the first thing that struck you. But then I didn't see too many people that didn't like the discipline. Some of the things you'd wonder why you were doing it. You had to turn this way, and turn that way and all that. March along with a broomstick over your shoulder, saluting trees and things like that. Seemed a bit silly, but discipline...it's what we need today.

25:00 Not just...it's self-discipline. I mean we like it so we were quite happy to do your own self-discipline. When you were told things, you did it. You didn't argue or.

How was that discipline maintained on the ship on the way over?

Well, the same as any other part. You did as much of the training as you could.

25:30 Apart from the lectures you did physical training. That was to keep you. And then to practice shooting they used to blow up condoms and throw them off the back of the boat and shoot. I don't think anyone ever hit any of them. We probably came a bit close. But no, shipboard life wasn't too bad. The really good part about it was of a night time

26:00 they used to give us Saos [biscuits] and cheese and cocoa. And the nicest cocoa I ever tasted. Like an English crew and it was really good. But there was just, well, as normal as training as you could do. Especially lectures. You couldn't do any route march or anything like that actually on the boat. But physical exercise. It was a bit hard to get used to the saltwater showers or saltwater baths.

26:30 They made you a bit sticky and they had special saltwater soap. And they had canteens but you didn't have a lot of money so you didn't buy them. But, no, it wasn't too bad. Always remember when we had left Perth heading to Colombo, I was just talking to one of the sailors and I said, "How far from land will we be?" And he said, "About three miles." I said, "Oh come on, you can't see it." And he said, "No, straight down."

27:00 And another thing that we thought was good, they had, they called paravanes. They had a big cable from the front goes down each side of the boat and they had these things shaped a bit like a torpedo with jaws on it. And if they was to hit a mine, cable or that, it would break it out from the boat and then cut it off and let it come up so they could shoot it. But it was academic then because there had been no mines laid around that area, but they had to do it for precautions.

27:30 And there was Polish ship behind us, a Serbi Eski [?], and every so often you'd be zigzagging and turning like that and we used to watch it and we all thought, "One day if he zags and we zig, we're going to be in trouble." And then somebody died. One of the New Zealanders died at sea. Sort of a procession passed while they dropped the body overboard.

28:00 And then we had an aircraft carrier and I think the [HMS] Ramilies was one ship. And when they broke off, they were our escorts and when we got close enough to Egypt, they sort of left us and you had to all stand on one side and salute the ship and then run round the other side and salute the other ships and that. Oh no, it was alright. Broke the monotony.

What had the New Zealander died from?

I had no idea. All we knew, there was a funeral

28:30 and he just died at sea. A bit sad. We had one of our fellows die on the boat when we were coming home. But they took him back ashore again.

Arriving in Palestine, can you tell me about the training you were doing in the desert?

Well, it wasn't, Palestine's not the desert. Oh, well, there is desert in Palestine but we were on the coast.

29:00 And most of our training was digging trenches in the wheat fields and things like that. And the band would come around, six o'clock reveille. The band would march up and down the line so as to keep you on your toes. Then you have the roll call and then breakfast. Then your training. We used to have to do plenty of route marches. And stretcher training. How to pick up stretchers

29:30 and all those sorts of things. And then lectures from the doctor. More route marches. We marched around quite a lot of Palestine. The weather was good. You had perfect weather for probably nine months of the year. Blue skies and it was hot but it was a dry heat. I mean you could go and sit in it for hours and hours. Not like here. You couldn't sit for hours and hours in the sun here.

30:00 The training was pretty intense. Every so often you had to go to the rifle range and do shoots. For the Bren gun and rifles and all the other different little bits and pieces with it. Even though you were a stretcher bearer, you had to be able to do all that. A lot of people had the idea that you went in with your rifles and that. But you didn't, all you had was your medical gear and an SB thing on your arm.

30:30 We used to hope that the enemy knew what SB meant. We used to say it meant 'silly buggers'. It was 'stretcher bearers'.

How happy were you being assigned to being a stretcher bearer?

Not very happy. The idea was we went there to be in a rifle company. Well, in the long run we were attached to a rifle company but we would sooner have been just straight-out infantry soldiers. We used

to have to do our share of guard

31:00 and everything like that but it was a little bit different. The infantry training was a little bit more intense. Well, they were more intense to help you to kill people. But we were meant to be there to help save them. But, oh, we didn't mind. In the army, once you're told you just put up with it. They don't pay you to buck the system. I learnt a lot.

31:30 Actually, in retrospect we were better off doing that, because I learnt a lot of first aid and lots of other things that came in very handy in later life. We didn't mind it.

How close were you and your cousin able to stay?

Well, we stayed together while we were at Julis. Everything was going alright,

32:00 the tents were all in line and everything like that. But when Italy came into the war they had to be all spread out and you had to dig down, about three foot down and put the tent over that. But once that was happening, his mother put in that he was under age so he had to go back to a back unit and he went. We split up. That was the first time that we split up and he went back to the pay corps. And he was very, very disgusted with that.

32:30 And I was lucky that my mother hadn't put in for me to go back then. I think my father probably said to her, "Well, he's a stretcher bearer." I used to write back quite often. Like the photo I've got there, the first time my cousin and I went on leave to the Hotel Fast[?] in Jerusalem. And she probably thought, "Well, if they're that good." so she didn't complain. It wasn't at that time, it was a lot later on that she changed her mind.

33:00 No, we were good mates before the war so we just stayed together as long as possible and he was very disappointed. A few times I got on leave, he was stationed in Jerusalem, we used to go and meet up there and go around and have a talk to the girls. Which was a big disadvantage. Like the Yanks [Americans] had it made here. They spoke the same language. Over there, you had a different language.

33:30 And apart from that, any girls that were talking to soldiers, they were downgraded. So you could only talk to the one sort of girls. But you didn't mind. It was something new. Strange. Things like that. It was alright if you went into the cafes and the bars and that. Like, they'd all talk to you in there. But that was the end of that. But the language bar, it was bad. And all the first lot

34:00 of language you learnt, was all the bad ones. How to swear in Arabic and Jewish and all that. And we taught them how to swear in our language. I can always remember the paper seller walking through the lines and, I don't suppose you're allowed to say anything, but he'd be singing out, "Good news, the colonel's got the pox." And the old colonel, he didn't like that at all.

34:30 But we went AWL [Absent Without Leave] a couple of times. Never got caught, fortunately. You needed the right way and the taxis would come out and take you in and then they'd take you back out. And the lead bus, that was a hairy thing. If you went in their buses, they used to trust to Allah. And just before you got into Jerusalem, what they call the 366,

35:00 used to be a very windy, twisty thing and they'd fly down round there. Was alright and you looked out over the side and a drop either side. And we'd used to think, "Well, if ever Allah lets them down, we're in trouble." But I can't understand why they've got all the trouble there now. Like the way that we got with them and they got on with one another. I can understand them, like the Jews

35:30 were more a modern set up. The Arabs, for doing their wheat and grind and that, they'd have a donkey and a woman going round chasing it round and round and round. And the Jews wouldn't have any part of that. And they used to buy the land off the Arab and as soon as they bought that farmer's plot off him, they'd put a big fence round it and a big tower up and on top of that tower up was a Vickers machine gun so they that they wouldn't come back and take it off them.

36:00 And we often wondered at that. And then they'd have, we used to call them 'love colonies', but they'd have a settlement and a couple could go there, not married, and live together there and if they split up, the State would look after the children. But if you were there with one women, like, as a de facto wife, you weren't allowed to just change on the spot. You had to go. If you wanted to change, you had to leave. And the country would look after the kids.

36:30 But they were building their population up. And we saw on the beach at Tel Aviv, where they used to bring...the people would come from other countries and beach the ship. And because they beached the ship they had to be allowed ashore. And that's how a lot of them got away from Germany. And then the Jews, they had their own terror gangs then. I don't know, people have probably never heard

37:00 or don't realise that. But they had two lots. The Irgun Zevai Leumi or the Stern Gang. And they were terrorising against the British army. I don't know why but Australians always got on good with all of them. As soon as they saw the Australian badge, not a worry. So you did George [?], you were one of their mates. But they didn't like the English. Today it's in reverse. They don't like the Yanks. But it's only the policy they're cutting off, not the individual person.

37:30 Although, well, some of the pommies are a bit...thought, we are the better people. But they weren't all

alike though.

Did you ever have any trouble with local populations?

Never. No. I can honestly say that. Sometimes I think we should have. Like if you were out on a route march, you'd be sitting along the edge of the road, the idea of a route march, you'd march for fifty minutes and ten minutes stop. And you had to do that

38:00 on the hour. Don't matter if you start on the half-hour, you still only stopped at the hour. And the Arabs used to come round with a donkey and they'd have a big chaff bag cut through the middle and lay it each side and fill it with oranges. They'd sell you the oranges. And some of the fellows would cut the bag, would get a knife and cut the bag and the oranges all over the place. But that didn't happen often. No, but by and large Australians, as a whole, got on good with every place. Don't matter what country we went into. You'd always get the odd idiot.

38:30 Or some of them would go in a restaurant and there'd be some fellow there drunk and didn't know, and they'd all go and sit with him. And when they got up they'd say to the fellow, "He's going to pay." And they'd go out and the poor fellow's sitting there, didn't know what was going on. So that didn't give us a good name.

During these camps, how keen were you to get into some action?

Well, that was what we were there for.

39:00 I mean the camp life, well it was alright to a certain extent, but, you know, all we wanted to do was get in and get it over with and things like that. There was the odd air raid scare. But Haifa was raided a few times but that was a fair way away from us. We went up there on leave once. We had a lot of training with aircraft.

39:30 The idea was you had to try and shoot the aeroplane down and they always used to fly down low over your head. And I was talking to one [pilot] at Gaza because I was very interested in aircraft from a little boy and he said, "The worst thing is that the pilots don't like is to go over the infantry because each one is firing a shot, they're aimed at me," he said, "And if it's one bloke with a machine

40:00 gun it goes all over the place and you might never get touched," he said, "But when you go over a heap of troops..." But they're that far, you wouldn't see them. But no, everyone was keen. All wanting to get into action. And it was like a little bit of a thrill about when Italy came into the war because everything changed then. Troops had to actually go out with live ammunition and guard the different

40:30 installations and things. And there was one part there, when you went on leave you had to take your rifle with you and take five rounds of ammunition. And I said, "Five rounds!" Well, the idea was if you got a lot of rounds, they'll knock you over and they'll get a lot of ammunition. But this was like, they were a bit worried with the Arabs and that. And the Julis village, it was only a little Arab village with the mud huts and that. And this young Arab boy

41:00 wanted us to go round and meet his family. So we got the leave. We got a rifle and my cousin and I went down, and they took us in and they gave us this coffee. Oh, you could stand a spoon up in it. A little thing. Sweets and watermelon. And we were talking to this old fellow, it was only two of them that could speak English, and they were telling everyone else what we said. And he said, "Why do you carry a rifle?" I said, "For protection." He said, "In this room, you are the safest person in Palestine." He said, "Because

41:30 you are my guest and people here, outside, would like to cut your throat." He said, "But while you are my guest you are safe. Nobody will touch you." He said, "When you leave here and back in your camp it's different. But while you are in my house." And I thought, "Well that's real good." He meant that. You weren't allowed to have anything to do with the women. That was the code that they had. I don't know whether they carry it out today. They were very strict. I

Tape 2

00:31 Can you tell me about when you moved out of Palestine?

Well, from Palestine, yes, we went down into Egypt. A little place called Helwan, just out of Cairo. And it wasn't very far from the air base and there was an Australian fighter squadron there with

01:00 their Gloucester Gladiators. And we did a lot of extra training. It got a little bit fair dinkum and a couple of times we had to go down to the Gladiators, they weren't used to the speed and they'd go off the track. One time we had to help them to get one back on. But we went on leave into Cairo.

01:30 We had strict warning of where you could go and where you couldn't go in Cairo because they had riots and things. Well, still had a few riots there this time but I wasn't involved in any of them. But we were more interested in sightseeing. I used to say, we'll try to see as much of the country as you can. We went to the pyramids.

- 02:00 A mate and I went in the Pyramid of Cheops. Where the guy took us in and he had a candle and that so you could see and we went right in the very middle of it. And this was supposed to be where Cheops the king was. And the whole wall was black and I could run my hand round, you couldn't feel the joins. So I don't know how in the heck they did all that. In the finish he wanted more money
- 02:30 or he would take the light away. But my mate had a torch; someone had told him all about him. So we told the fellow to beat it and we went around with a torch. But it was a really eerie experience right in the middle because everything was so dark, naturally, not the slightest sign of light. And you're going up these steps and to one side was just a void. So I don't know how they worked that out. But, well, you know
- 03:00 the big square blocks of stone they make the pyramids? Well, we guarded a place called Tura[?], just down the Nile river a bit up and up, as you're looking south, on the left-hand side, they had this sort of big hill and the whole thing had been quarried out and they reckon that that's where the stone for the pyramids came from. Well, I've never seen anyone ever talk about that. But they were huge caves. There were three main caves.
- 03:30 And when you looked at it and you see where blocks had been cut out that side and it was an ammunition dump. And you had to guard it and they each one barred off and everyone who went in, there was an English soldier searched them and we were there to make sure nothing bad went on. They said that when they tried that out, they bombed all round the front of it for quite a long time.
- 04:00 It didn't cause any damage so then they decided to make an ammunition dump. People say, "Oh, I wonder how they built the pyramids?" Well, we used to think to ourselves, "Well, it was on the side of the hill, so therefore they cut these blocks out, and they had plenty of labour, drag it down to the Nile, float it down to where they wanted to build it." That was just our idea. Whether that was true or not, I don't know. But you could
- 04:30 nearly bet one hundred percent that's where the rocks for the pyramids come from. But then there was lots of other pyramids, little ones all over the place. But those big ones there, that was a very worthwhile thing to see. And I learnt fencing there. One of the pommy, English fellows he was good at fencing. Apparently, had made one of the Olympic teams or one of that
- 05:00 and he taught to use the foil at fencing. So we did alright there.

Can you tell me about when you got news that you were going into action?

Well, we were out on a route march, at a place called Sunstroke Plain. We had marched out and all of a sudden the boxer come and told us. He said, "The Indians have broken through at Mersa Matruh heading

- 05:30 for Sidi Barrani. We've got to go straight back to camp and we'll be moving up." And we thought we'd be moving back up with them. So it was a forced march back. I ruined one of my ankles on it and I ended up on the truck going back. And we moved from there straight up to a place called Amiriya, just outside Alexandria. And we had to dig our tents in there. And it was quite a few air raids, every night, over Alexandria.
- 06:00 And because we were all, well thought ourselves battle-hardened troops, although we hadn't fired a shot, we used to lay back in bed and then they brought up reinforcements. And the air raid siren went and of course they jump down and run in the trench. And us old soldiers lay back and said, "You fools." And the next minute some of the anti-aircraft shells didn't go off and they come straight back into the camp and we were very lucky they didn't hit anything or anybody. But they went off with a hell of a bang.
- 06:30 And we were straight down in the trench on top of the other fellows. That was a real pretty sight that. You'd look up and all the different colours were anti-aircraft fire going up. Bursting way up in the air. And now and again you'd see tracers where the night fighters were firing at the bombers. And they were all Italian bombers. Used to go up high and fly over. And of a day time, there weren't too many raids through the day,
- 07:00 but we used to wonder why, as soon as the fighters would take off, they'd go for miles, level with the ground. And I said to one of them, who was on leave, "Why don't you fellows go straight up." And he said, "No, the idea is go a long way away from the aerodrome." He said, "The aerodrome is camouflaged." and he said, "If they see the fellows up on top, like the reconnaissance planes, if they see that, then they got where the aerodrome is." So, he said, "We fly a long way and they're camouflaged, you wouldn't be able to see them too easy."
- 07:30 And then, oh I forget, we were quite a while there. It'd be a couple of months because it was getting on towards Christmas. And we moved up to a little place called Burjalarab. And then we went through Mersa Matruh, Sidi Barrani and Salum was the first time we had any sort of action. We were outside
- 08:00 Salum, just bivouaced. You had no tent. You were just out in the open. And the bombers came over and bombed Salum Harbour. And one of our quartermasters was there, he was the first fellow... Ernie Elks, I think his name was. As far as I know he was the first Australian killed in that sort of thing. He was killed in a bombing raid. And then after that, that night we marched up what they called 'Hellfire Pass'. Was Helfaya. We marched up there.

- 08:30 We were outside Bardia then and we were actually sort of classed as being 'in action' then. Because every so often the Italians would fire artillery rounds back. I don't think it ever hit anybody. And we were dug in alongside the road that went into Bardia. It was a bitumen road. Bits had been dug up and our
- 09:00 YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] officer and the padre went off in a car and they went all the way in and straight into the Italian outpost thing. They were taken prisoner and when they told them, they could see they were YMCA and that, they let them go. And we were there and we had no, well one lot of bombers, they didn't bomb us but we saw them come and go back. And on the way back
- 09:30 you'd see one of them was in trouble. He'd drift back a bit and the engine started to smoke. And then he started to spin as though he was going to crash. And he levelled off and when he levelled off the parachutist, like the crew, jumped out. So he must have been a pretty brave pilot. He hung on to it. And two of them came out in the one parachute. And, oh, they didn't last. Once they hit the ground, that was the end of them. One fellow came out alright and landed and we got to him. But the plane ended crashing.
- 10:00 That was the first time I saw a plane actually crash like that. And that was the first bad thing we seen. And just like anybody else. The next time, we, amongst us, called them the circuits. Like they had circuits in the First World War, so we called that the circuits. And we watched the Hurricanes get stuck in and they shot them all down. Hurricane fire
- 10:30 just came up and caught them. And they shot them down. That was the end of the circuits. Then it started to get, we were sending patrols out for them. I always remember one fellow, the Italians had hand grenades, like the little tin thing with a little flap and you pulled the flap out and threw it and whatever it hit, it went off. So as a booby trap, they laid it on the ground, pulled it out and if you kicked it or stood on it
- 11:00 it would go off. And one of our fellows stood on it and it went right up into his heel. He ended up losing his foot. But he was sort of the very first casualty I seen coming into the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] tent. And they had 'shock stretchers'. They had a stretcher up on...ordinary army stretcher...stuck up on a boxes and things to put it on and they had a Primus [portable cooking stove] underneath
- 11:30 with a dish in it. And that was the shock stretcher. They had a blanket on it so the heat was coming up underneath. So when the casualty was laid on that, he was kept warm. Because to keep them warm was one of the best ways to stop the shock. And if you'd just stood on a hand grenade, you would be in shock. And then they brought in one of the English anti-aircraft batteries. A bomb had hit them and they brought them in. They were knocked about. A rotten sight.
- 12:00 There's nothing worse than seeing bodies with great lumps out of them. But we were slowly getting used to it.

How did you react to that and how did you cope with it?

Well, I don't know. I could be a bit hardened and things like that. It didn't sort of worry me, like to make me frightened or scared or anything like that. You just sort of, that was your job. You were trained

- 12:30 to see that sort of thing. It's like the ambos [ambulance officers], paramedics of today. They're used to that. You sort of get used to it to a certain extent. But you don't like it but you get used to it. Then we sort of got into it slow. You didn't sort of get in it, like once we actually, the fights
- 13:00 got really into Bardia and that, that's when it sort of...when you go round picking up bits and pieces in the bag and you don't know if they all belong to the same bloke. But you have to do it. You can't, you see these dramas on the films today where they run and do all that, no, that's crap. Well, I suppose you've got to do it to make the film. But it is, it's crap. As far as we were concerned anyway because you had to do it. And you seen fellows you knew.
- 13:30 And stretcher bearing, you were a stretcher bearer but you had the same danger as others. We had four of our stretcher bearers and the casualty on it wiped out with one shell. And they were terrific fellows. They were bandsmen. And when you went into action the bandsmen become stretcher bearers. And these fellows picked up this casualty and the shell landed right on them. Killed the five of them in one go.
- 14:00 Well actually three of my mates won the MM there. The Military Medal. One, me mate, not that long ago he died either, last eighteen months. But I don't know, people say, "Oh, the Italians wouldn't fight and everything like that." But nobody, I haven't seen anyone say the reason why they went
- 14:30 so quick. Because the English, it'd be the engineers or someone like that, they designed and helped build the defences for Bardia. So we all knew what was happening on it. And a couple of days before the attack they had this sand model built. And all the posts were numbered. There was a tank trap around the whole perimeter of Bardia and barbed wire and things like that.
- 15:00 And they had these posts. Well they knew where these 'sangars' [breastwork of sod or stones] or 'dongas' [steep-sided gully] were and they were all numbered to us so that your unit was allocated to

take 45. I think 45, 46, 47 was ours anyway. They went into them through the wire, turn right and mopped up that way. And one mob went left and one mob went straight ahead. And the reason, the big reason why they

15:30 went down so quick, we had the [British] 7th Armoured Division with us and they had I tanks. Like 'I' stood for infantry. They were a special tank, very heavy armoured at the front and the sides and the gun turret. And the infantry walked in single file behind it. So when you've got a fortified position, it just went straight up and it had, I think, it was a seven pounder gun. It'd start blasting away at the fortification and they had this BSA [Birmingham Small Arms] machine gun. It was a tremendous rate of fire.

16:00 They'd start sweeping the fire along the top. Well, everyone kept their head down. So when our fellows got, all they'd do is look over the top and say, "Right oh boys, out." So, being sensible, that's what they did. And mount these individual posts, they had tank trap dug and covered over with bores and dirt so you wouldn't know. And the idea of that, was when the tanks were to come from, they'd go through the bores, down, they'd be at a disadvantage. But because the English had

16:30 designed and built it, the tanks were told, I think it was something like a hundred yards, "Do not go closer than a hundred yards." So they stood back and they never caught any of them then. And the Italians had these little tiny tanks; they were more useless than ours. And one shot from them and that was a bit bad. Trying to get them out of that.

17:00 **How were you prepared for the work that you were going to be doing in the stretcher bearing? What had you been told about what to expect at Bardia?**

Just that. You're going to see wounded, dead and...oh I bandaged up Italians and our own blokes. We went into one dug out, there was a dead Italian in it but he'd shot himself. And they were told what we were going to do and torture them and everything like that.

17:30 They were scared and they had posters where they were huge fellows with this big gun and all that. A little bit like the American idea. But no, we were more or less prepared anyway. Well I was anyway. I considered that it didn't worry me. It did a bit when they, you're going through a barrage, like a shell's starting. And the idea was, in an artillery barrage you try to keep going forward

18:00 because if you stay there they got your range. So you'd keep on going and a couple of times blasts knocked a few of us over but luckily we didn't get hit. And that's the thing that plays a real big part in it, is luck. Real luck. And I always think to myself, "He don't want me up there so I got to stop here." No, lots of time I've had fairly close goes. Fairly close goes.

18:30 Like fellow's shot with a bullet, that's not bad. But when it's shrapnel gets them, it makes a hell of a mess. Oh, no, by and large, after the first half hour or so, well they gave us, it might seem funny, but they had what they called a start line and a line running up to that and everyone lines up at the start line and when it's the right time, the barrage gets going and then you move off.

19:00 Well, they'd come and gave us this type of rum. And I'd never ever like it, but anyway I got it down and, oh, it makes you feel terrific. But half an hour later you wish you'd never had it because you're in there and all of a sudden you're saying, "What an idiot I am." Well, you got no, you never thought about going back. You'd just keep on going. But that was the thing that sort of, well something I didn't like to see was this fellow laying there and he had the rifle

19:30 between his legs and you can see he's shot himself in the head. And I thought, "Well why the hell would you do that?" All he had to do was just sit there. The idea was a unit, a battalion, a company would go so far and then someone would leapfrog through them. Although one of the Victorian battalions, they came through us but they stopped under the barrage. Boy, they got knocked about a lot. So our fellows had to go back through them again.

20:00 The Italian artillery was pretty good but once they knocked them out it was just a cake walk then. And I'd seen lots of things on the film and since and that's been posed. You can tell straight away.

Can you explain for me, when the infantry are moving forward at Bardia,

20:30 **are the stretcher bearers going with them?**

Oh, you've got to go with them. Oh yeah. Like you don't get out ahead of them because you're no good then. I don't know, you'd probably be a hundred yards back. But then you sort of lose a bit of time because as somebody's hit, you've got to stop and attend to them. And the system is the infantry stretcher bearer; you're the first phase fellow, on the spot. Nine times out of ten, you don't have to carry them back. You

21:00 put their bayonet in the ground and the helmet on it so the RAP, Regimental Aid Posts, they follow up behind and they've got the doctor. And from there, they go back to the ADS, the Advanced Dressing Station, and then the main dressing station, the casualty clearing station. But our job is to be virtually on the heels of the actual fighters and pick them up when they get knocked over. And we used to have in our water bottle strong, sweet

21:30 tea. And the idea of the tea, you can drink tea whether it's hot, cold, any other way. Like water would be

no good because it would get too warm. So that was the shock treatment. As soon as someone, as long as they weren't hit in the stomach, somebody just wounded, you'd give them a swig of the hot, sweet tea. Bandage them up. Each soldier's got their own field dressing and that's only a little

22:00 package about so big. But we carried a bigger one called a shell dressing so that you could use his bandage for small wounds but a big wound, like shrapnel wound, you'd use these shell dressings. And patch them up. Sometimes you might have to move them back a bit, but you have only two of you. And I can't really think back why we never actually carried a stretcher with us. Now, that's strange.

22:30 My mate and I, we never carried, we just went along. The only difference between us and the troop, we didn't have the rifle. And what worried the Italians a wee bit, when our fellows went in, they had the rifle at the high port, up like that. And you had to keep well apart. Like when you see it today, the Americans on the films, they're all shoulder to shoulder. Well, that don't work. But

23:00 and we were issued with a leather jacket. It was sleeveless and it didn't button up and they thought that was bullet proof, the Italians. But there was, it was leather on the outside and a felt thing on the inside. And because it was cold, when we were in action we had overcoats on because it was really cold. That fooled them a bit because the prisoners said they thought that was bullet-proof jackets so it was no good trying to shoot them.

23:30 **When you're running around behind the infantry treating the wounded is there a point where you have to prioritise who you treat?**

Oh yes. Well, standard practice, if a man is so badly wounded that he's got no hope of living, and there's somebody else likely,

24:00 you always look at the likeliest wounded first. And in an evacuation, the lightest wound would go back. Leave the worst wounded behind. So you've got to work on that. Like if you look at a fellow and he'd been with shrapnel and lost half his stomach or something like that, you know in your own heart that there's not much hope for him. And the fellow next door's just been bullet wound, you have to decide. It don't,

24:30 well, much later on I copped a lot of that. But we coped with that. You just, you've got to harden yourselves to it. Just like the ambos today. They've to harden themselves. They see some shocking things but, car smashes are worst, but they're hardened to it. We had to do exactly the same. I mean you're just quite happy that you weren't the one being shot. You didn't have so much to worry about rifle

25:00 fire as a stretcher bearer because rifle fire is directed at somebody. Well, nine times out of ten if you had some sort of, like this SB, they wouldn't deliberately shoot you. But artillery respects nobody because all they're doing was dropping them over and if you're in the road, well, stiff cheddar [bad luck]. Even your own artillery backing you up, a terrible sound, hear them all screaming overhead. And now and again the driving

25:30 band, the shells on them have got a band round it and that comes off, and you hear this loud 'bing' and you hope that you don't cop that. Anything going up like that at tremendous speed, even that coming down would kill you. But the stretcher bearer, you didn't, you just got used to it. Used to it. You didn't,

26:00 well, you didn't like to see young fellows getting shot. But, yeah, we seen enough of it.

I imagine it would be very hard to maintain control in that situation.

Oh, no. You train. Don't ever believe what you see in the films and the way they carry on there. Not with us. No, well, you didn't think of yourself as a hero or

26:30 anything like that. It was just a job. You did it. I mean if someone's, say, with the rifleman, if someone's shooting at him, you're going to shoot back. You know, it's just part of the job. Like I see the films today where they're arguing, deciding what they're going to do and that. To me that's crap. I don't think the other armies were any different to our fellows. They just had to do it. But, no, I

27:00 honestly can't think of any time, of anybody, being out of control. Going berserk or anything like that. No. I remember one stage where they had a waddy, it's like a dry creek, and we're all sitting alongside that, a shell landed just on the other side. Everyone went, "Oh, that was getting a bit close." But nobody worried. Whether it's fate, you just think to yourself, "Well, it's not going to hit us." That was one that. My first

27:30 sort of hard battle casualty other there a bloke got a shrapnel wound in the groin. In the femoral artery and it started to pour like mad. And I just raced over and stuck me finger on it first and put the dressing on and said, "You can hang on to that." And if, when you put a tourniquet on you had, and you never see an indelible pencil, and put a 'T' on his head and the time that tourniquet was put on then so that a little while later...

28:00 and later on, much later in New Guinea, you had to put an 'M' on it for morphine. When you gave them the morphine. But, no, I'd say basically anybody I knew just put up with it. You were trained that good and you didn't worry about it. You didn't like it but it was no good whingeing or crying or anything like that. You just did the job.

28:30 And the ordinary digger respected you because they knew, "Well if I get hit, I hope he's there with me."

What did you feel about treating the Italian wounded that you found?

Just the same as anybody else. Feel sorry for them. Feel sorry for them. Oh yeah, we did, fixed up quite a few. One fellow he was an officer who could speak English. He was shot in the knee. And he was telling me how bad

29:00 and that and all I could say to him, "Well, mate, all I can do is this for you. Our doctor will be up after; he'll be able to do a better job." And he said, "Thank you." And we just moved on and left him there. But, no, you didn't. Any of the enemy, not even the Japs [Japanese]. They're the same as us but they're on a different side. That's all. The only ones who argue and fiddle around is politicians.

29:30 And they're lucky because they're not there.

What level of fear there might have been in treating the enemy that they might still have had a bit fight in them?

No, well, not until we got the Japs. Not the Italians or the Germans. If you're there, that was it. They're quite happy to get treated and get home the same as we were. They...but as far as fear,

30:00 the only people who didn't get frightened were liars and idiots. I never struck any fellow who wasn't frightened at some stage of it. Boy oh boy, I had my share of getting frightened. But you can't do anything about it. You know, if you're getting shot at, well that's it. You just hope that if you get hit it be a nice one that either finishes quick or a little one that'll get you back home. No. No, as far as

30:30 the Italians and the Germans go you could treat them and not a problem. The Japs, we never struck it, but they said the Japs were a bit different but I never struck that.

What specific instructions were you given about treating the enemy?

Treat anybody. Well you were never given a specific instruction, well we weren't. You just.

31:00 Like, I can remember one fellow hit in the side of the foot and it was half blown away and I just bandaged it up and later on I was talking to the doctor and said, "That fellow would probably lose his foot." He said, "No he wouldn't." No. They're all, like naturally, you'd look after your own wounded first, but when you go along a dug out, you find somebody in it that's wounded, you fix them up.

31:30 Best you could. It might not be like that today. I do worry. I feel sometimes when I see and hear things, I feel a bit disgusted by some of our fellows the way they carry on. But we wouldn't. And with the prisoners, any fellow, like one of our fellows, if he was to try to ill-treat a prisoner, your mates would be right down on you. Leave him alone.

32:00 He surrendered, he's a prisoner and that's it. More civilised. I don't know whether it was only Australian. I can only speak for Australians. When they talk about torture and that I think, "Well no. I can't think of any one of our fellows would ever have stooped to something like that."

I can imagine in a battle

32:30 **like the Battle of Bardia, the stretcher bearers are doing a lot of work around the clock.**

Oh yeah, well everybody. You don't knock off at tea. You do. You work. But nights are a little bit different because nobody likes too much of a night time. Yeah, it's a round the clock job. Because wherever the fighting's on, you've got to be there. Any

33:00 sort of a fight someone's going to get wounded, either us or them. So you've still got that job to fix them up. No. There's no strict rules about hours.

How long would you have been treating people in the field before you were relieved?

Oh, you never ever got relieved. While the battle was on, you were there.

33:30 Probably about three days, I think. And the whole thing was over and that's when you could say, that was it. But then we were going out with patrols rounding up prisoners, but no fighting. You had to go through different, it was like a rabbit warren of caves and things like that. And the Italians had been there that long that they had cases and cases

34:00 of all their own gear. Shirts and things like that. Cameras. Of course everyone's in souveniring them. But, no, you just, while ever a shot's fired, you were there. But once the actual shooting finished in Bardia, that was the end of that. There was no more worry. I remember seeing some of the shells that fired from the, they had an English ship, the [HMS] Terror, used to fire these huge 15-inch shells.

34:30 And they were about that round and about so long, but they hadn't gone off. Enormous. And you'd think, "Gee whiz, fancy one of them hitting you." But that's, while ever the shooting's on, you're working.

How do you overcome the fatigue of working three days solid?

Oh, well, you, know, you're not actually, you can sit down

- 35:00 or lay down or doze off or things like that. You're not keeping awake all the time. I mean when you're under a bombardment and that, you don't think too much about sleeping. No. You just sort of get used to it. You get by. You've got to eat. You have to eat. I mean sometimes they could, one of our stretcher bearers was a shearers' cook in private life and at Christmas Day he made a
- 35:30 bully beef stew with bully beef and the Italian sort of a tomato puree. Oh yeah, it was alright. But as a stretcher bearer you've got a little bit better chance because the rifleman he's in the front, he's got to be more alert. But we're sitting at the back a little bit, waiting to get called up, things like that. So, yeah, eat. Oh yeah. But

36:00 no, it was not that bad. Not for us anyway.

With casualties that you were getting, how much could you do for them in the field?

The stretcher bearer individually, not a lot. Stop the bleeding. That was virtually all you could do. Make sure they

- 36:30 didn't bleed to death. And make them comfortable and that. We couldn't do too much with broken bones, like a bullet in the bone, a shattered bone, things like that. Just dress them up and make them comfortable because the doctor's coming up behind and he's got the job of doing that. Well, he's got his own staff and the RAP. Regimental Aid Post, RAP
- 37:00 stands for. I've got a photo there that you can see after; we're outside the RAP tent. But stop the bleeding, keep them comfortable, keep them alive. If they were going to die, well you couldn't do anything about it. It's a hard thing but that's, you just sort of make the fellow comfortable and just move on to the next one. But we didn't have such a hell of a lot of casualties.

- 37:30 Thank god. But what was there, that's all you could do. Stop bleeding, keep them alive and move on to the next one.

How much of a problem were things like flies and insects?

No, the flies and the insects would have been too scared I think. But they did have a spider. Oh, it was a huge, when it hopped you could hear it

- 38:00 flop on the ground. And I was telling a fellow back in Alexandria, he reckoned they called them sand tarantulas. But they used to have in the tobacco tins, this thin foil. And they had these claws and they'd bite at that. You wouldn't want to have one bite you. And the only other one was scorpions. You had to be a bit careful like to shake your blanket a bit
- 38:30 in case one of them. I can't remember any of our fellows ever bitten by them. And some other people have been bitten but none of our fellows. They were a pretty ugly looking thing, the scorpion. The old big number seven boot fits them. But as far as like mosquitos and that, there was nothing like that there. Too cold of a night.

I wondered about flies or something around the wounds.

No, it never.

- 39:00 Never that. No. It was later when we was on Crete, I had a bloke had maggots. But no, they wouldn't be there long enough anyway. And you've covered the wound over. So we only went as far as Tobruk. The other battalions went further out to Benghazi and Tripoli. But we only went to Tobruk and I don't think the,
- 39:30 to be honest, I can't remember any flies.

I just wondered if there were difficulties.

No, not as far as I can think. No. I honestly can't remember flies.

- 40:00 I remember these scorpions and the big sand tarantula things. Can I stop for a minute?

Tape 3

- 00:31 **Before we go on to talk about Tobruk, from your descriptions, it sounds like Bardia was quite well organised. Can you tell me about the sign posting?**

Yes, because the Royal Engineers had designed and they did the brainwork. The making it and that, they had this

- 01:00 tank trap right round the whole perimeter. Quite a long one and they had barbed wire and everything. But facing the sea and the gullies and the waddies, were big concrete emplacements. So that if anybody had tried to attack it from the sea, they'd have been wiped out. But because you were going over it from

land, all you needed was big heavy tanks. If it had just been an assault with the gear that we had, like Bren-gun carriers was our main armoured weapon, you wouldn't have

- 01:30 had any hope whatsoever. It was just because they knew the lay of the land and they had these heavy infantry tanks, the 7th Armoured Division, the pommies. We could go through it easier. But because they had it mapped out on a sand model on the ground, they decided they would name the posts so that 45, 46, 47, a number like that, was what we were to take so that they
- 02:00 knew then when they spoke and said number 45 post had gone, whoever was the supreme controller would say, "Well, that's that one's gone." And they'd move on like that. So they knew exactly what was happening. And there was the 2/1st [Battalion], they went through ahead of us. They turned left and took up the post along the left-hand side of it. The 2/2nd [Battalion] turned to the right and the 2/3rd [Battalion] went straight ahead for the artillery.
- 02:30 So it was really well organised. It was just that because we had those tanks with us that it made it real easy. And of a night, like before the actual attack, patrols would go out and find out which was the best place to attack and to make out where you could easily dig a ditch down. See the first fellows really in front were the engineers. And they had what they call Bangalore torpedoes.
- 03:00 They were a great long length of pipe with explosives in it. And they shoved that under the wire and detonated it and because it broke off into little bits, it would tear great wholes in the wire. And they also dug down so that the tanks could go down and up and out the other side. Because a tank is very vulnerable if it goes up in the air and the least armoured bit is underneath it. So they make sure that they don't have to go too far with their front up in the air. So they dig down in the ditch.
- 03:30 So as soon as they blew the wire and the artillery would open up first. They'd let go and it made a hell of a din. They had rows and rows of artillery pieces. Twenty-five pounders. And they'd sort of saturate the area and while they're keeping their heads down, the engineers would be able to get right up below the wire, dig the ditch and away go the tanks. And as soon as they get in, they just turn and head for the fortified post. And the infantry would walk behind it. And they'd keep the enemy's
- 04:00 head down and then they'd, the infantry, would get right up. Sometimes they'd only have to throw a grenade in or just put your head over or sing out, "That's it." And they'd surrender. No-one likes to get shot. But it was really, really well organised. And they had good back up. They had the [Royal] Northumberland Fusiliers, that was like a machine-gun unit. They had Vickers machine guns. We had,
- 04:30 well we didn't have Vickers. They had a Vickers platoon but the main thing was done by the straight out rifle companies. And the Bren guns, mortars, things like that. But I think you could not fault the organisation. No way. And that played a real big part in it. And they didn't know how many Italians were there, but I think there were 45,000 of them came out. Most of them came back home here. Waiting here when we got back.
- 05:00 No, the organisation was terrific. I haven't seen yet anything on any of the films saying about these sand models all laid out. They didn't have the same thing at Tobruk but the procedure was the same. Follow the tanks in. All they had to do, I was told by one of the tank
- 05:30 fellows, that they, when the enemy were getting away on some of their trucks and things, they'd let every third or fourth one through. That means then the others would have a go to try and get through so they could blow them up. Because if you blew up every single one the others would stop, wouldn't want to go. But every now and again they'd let one through. So a lot of them would have got away.

You've described

- 06:00 **how you would sometimes put a pole with a hat on it.**

Yes, a bayonet. The fixed bayonet and just jab it in the ground and the people coming up behind you would know straight away there was a wounded fellow. Even if the fellow was dead, you still do the same thing. Because they had a war grave mob following up too to, pick up the bodies. But we were lucky. We didn't have so many.

How would you know to proceed? What would be your start signal?

Well, when they got on the starting line and the

- 06:30 artillery barrage got going, we wasn't in the actually first line across, but all the officers would just say, "Forward, away you go." Or blow a whistle. There was no bugles or nothing like that.

I'm wondering how you being a stretcher bearer, how would you know?

If you're attached to a company, like I was attached to C Company, as soon as C Company moved off, you went with them. Like the officers would just say, "Right oh, let's go." or something like that.

- 07:00 Sometimes they'd sing out, "Ready to move. On your feet. Ready to move." And you'd get up on your feet and they'd say, "Right oh, move out." And away you go. So I'm pretty certain it was A company was the first company to go through the wire. It was only, it was very rare to get casualties before the wire. Only when the odd artillery piece fired back. But once they got through the wire, they started to get casualties.

07:30 But not a lot, fortunately.

You've mentioned that you sometimes were quite frightened?

Oh, yeah. As I said, "Only idiots and liars weren't frightened." Fellows who won the VC [Victoria Cross] will tell you, they done it on the spur of the moment. You stuck out like a country dunny, so you've got to do it.

08:00 If you stood still there, you're going to get killed, so they do these things, but they're still frightened. Oh yeah. I was frightened. Many a many a time frightened. But you overcome the fear. What do they say, 'when you get frightened, it's fight or flight'. So you're trained to fight and not flight. Like if someone does something real quick near you, what do you do? You turn round and go back or you run.

08:30 So it's fight or flight. And that's bred right into you and the idea is you fight, you don't flight.

In those first days of being under fire and being a stretcher bearer, what did you learn quickly to help you get through?

Just be calm and don't worry. I mean you don't hear the shot that gets you, that's for sure.

09:00 Well, you don't hear the rifle shot at all. But you hear the shell go and you might reach and duck but it's too late. It's already over and gone. There have been odd times, if a shell coming the other way loses the driving bag, you can see the shell coming through the air. Spinning end over end and you just hope that, well, that it's not going to hit you, but that it will go somewhere on behind you. But, no, you definitely just sort of don't worry.

09:30 I don't know. Fatal approach or something like that. You just know you have to do it and you're that intent on doing your job that you haven't got time to sort of get real frightened.

You told us you joined up for a big adventure, I'm wondering when it was that you really felt this is not an adventure, this is war?

Oh, after we were in Palestine for two or

10:00 three months. Because when you've got all the training, you're a long way from home. I'd never been away from home. A lot of the fellows in it were married, moved out of home and all. But my, I had sort of lead a close-family life all the time and all of a sudden you're stuck out there on your own. Especially after me cousin went back and that. But, no, that's when everyone was, I don't know, they thought everything

10:30 was going alright but as soon as the grind set in they started saying, "Oh, wish we hadn't come." and all that. And I could say to them, "Well, you were old enough to know better. I was young and stupid. I've got an excuse." I don't think they liked that a lot. Even though you know, well it's not good and you wish you hadn't have got there, well you just put up with it because you know you can't go back. Well, I could have. I could have just said, "This is it,

11:00 I'm too young. I want to go back." Or they would have sent you to a base unit. But, no. I was in the infantry and that's where I wanted to be. I was a stretcher bearer not by real choice, but still, you put up with it. That's your job. I mean you've got your job now. You like it. Even if you don't like it, you do it.

How vulnerable did you feel not carrying a rifle?

No, that didn't worry me because

11:30 you've got lots of fellows around with rifles. And your job is to look after them. If you look after them they'll look after you. No, I never ever felt vulnerable. No. Not until we were getting chased out of Greece. But no, never, thought never entered my head. You just go against all these fellows, all these well armed, big, strong, bronzed Anzacs so you didn't feel fear.

Being the youngest,

12:00 **how were you received?**

Well, some of them used to call me 'The Kid' and I know, yeah, I got lots of help in lots of ways. They didn't try to make out, but you knew that, like being that, I wasn't that weak but I wasn't all that strong either. So some heavy job came up you'd get help. And

12:30 you sort of got a bit of counselling too of what to do. They sort of looked on you as one of their kids, I suppose. So, you know, you got sort of looked after. They used to say The Kid and other things like that. But everybody knew I was too young. If they didn't, they were silly.

And

13:00 **did you have a nickname?**

No, not really. There was a another one called me 'Old Fred'. From memory, I don't think there were too many nicknames. I don't member, like you often hear all these stories and that but no. There's an odd

one, just said about The Kid but that was it. But I wasn't known as The Kid. Just Fred. That's what I like, still known as Fred. I say

13:30 Fred, yeah, Fred's me name. So that's who I am.

You've mentioned that the Battle of Bardia was very intense for three days and then it was over. Can you tell me where you went after that?

Straight up to Tobruk. Like, we went up in trucks, naturally. It was a bit far to walk. And we did the same thing there. Just camped all around the perimeter of Tobruk. Like, everyone had their own sector

14:00 and Tobruk was a bit easier to take than Bardia. But it might have been because it was the first time. No, it wasn't too bad. I do know that during the night, they had a big ammunition dump, it was huge, and I've never heard as big an explosion. There's a huge sheet of fire and the hill just disintegrated. It must have been an ammunition dump and they decided

14:30 that because it was going to be captured, they blew her up. And there was a boat, an [Italian] battleship, the San Giorgio. It was resting on the bottom. And they had little brooches. The Italians must have had it made, and I had one of them and somebody pinched it off me back home here. But whenever you see a photo of Tobruk harbour you can see this ship and the smoke coming out of it. And that is the San Giorgio. And there was

15:00 a flying boat. A small one. On the bottom like they'd probably strafed it and sent it down. But they had a factory there. And we had, we got in there and we had condensed, Nestlé's condensed milk. It's in the Italian writing, and that. And they had a sort of a soft drink plant there. I forget what they called it now. But we got bottles of soft drink

15:30 out of that. But it was definitely a lot easier. Less casualties than Bardia.

Can you describe to me the action you saw at Tobruk?

Well, virtually copycat of Bardia except that our battalion went for the artillery this time and that was a little bit

16:00 further back from the front line. It was a bit better dug in with what they call breeder [?] machines. A very heavy machine gun. More like our [Bristol] Beaufighter's guns. And, well the artillery, once you got up close it was a lot easier to take. They weren't dug in like the Italian infantry were. But I think

16:30 for us it was easier at Tobruk to, it was the same rationale. Move in behind the tanks and Tobruk was a township. We saw one house, it was the back end of a British bomber. Sticking out, like it must have been shot down and crashed and the front half had gone straight into the house.

17:00 And we laughed at some of the houses we went into. In the whole of that campaign, for us, Bardia, we'd only ever seen three women. There was a mother, a daughter and a grandmother. They were the only three women. But in Tobruk there must have been a lot of ladies of 'comfort'. You could see all their paraphernalia on the wall that they used. But they'd all been taken away. Got out beforehand. And

17:30 we were camped on the beach after it was taken and we were all just sitting there and we see these three planes come racing in. And I just sat looking at them and once they got closer, you could see they weren't ours. And they dropped bombs in the harbour. Hit an oil tanker. And that was the first time I'd ever seen an oil tanker go, like the oil's all over the water. And that was a shocker for the poor fellows in it because they could dive under the water but when they come up

18:00 they're right in the middle of the fire. And that wasn't a very nice thing. We got fish in the harbour at times...throw a hand grenade in. But, no, Bardia was only a few houses, well, a few compared to Tobruk. But Tobruk was actually, had been a city. And that was a bit easier to hold. Like the 13th Battalion, our Australian Battalion, was

18:30 one of the main keepers there. But that made that a lot easier to defend because all the fortifications were bigger. More concrete and whatever. But I would've hated to try to take either of them places if the Germans had of been in there. Because they were a little bit more efficient and they had a bit better gear. They had better tanks or as good a tanks as us. But, no, Tobruk, to me, was fairly easy.

19:00 **How did you cope with the desert conditions?**

Oh, well, it was a bit cold of a night. But otherwise we just took it in our stride as if you were out camping. You couldn't do much about it. I mean you got used to, at any time, you put your tin hat on the ground, laid on the ground and that was your pillow. And you're just laid out looking at the stars. There was nothing else you could do. You didn't have a tent.

19:30 It's not like today. They have tents and have all these things with them. But no, you're just out in the open. If you're lucky enough to be near a dug out that was captured, you could get down in that. But otherwise, and the crook part about it, you daren't get up and walk around of a night because if you got away, you could not find your way back. Everything looks the same in the night in the desert. Well, we call it the desert but it wasn't like sand. Some of it, you were flat out digging down into it. There was so much rock and stone.

- 20:00 And a fair way in they had the escarpment, of just like a ranger, he was going along Well, we never actually got up into there at all. We were down right on the sea coast part of it. But all you got was the dust. I remember we was asleep in the back of a truck and woke up in the morning and we could hardly chew, your mouth covered in. That's how I reckon I got this sinus trouble. But no,
- 20:30 you just coped with it. You can't do anything else about it. It wouldn't matter if it was the other way around, you're in mud. You've got to lay in mud. You can't do much about it. You wish you weren't. My grandson, who I reckon was a realbut he said to me once, "Pa, where did you used to put your pyjamas?" But, no, you cope with the desert. It was fairly warm during through the day but bitterly cold of a night. And the fellow
- 21:00 who wrote that song, "I'll love you 'til the sands of the desert grow cold." he wasn't a big lover. Because it gets awful cold. And if you're lucky you could dig down, say, two feet, three feet, and make yourself a bit of a hole and put your groundsheet over and you had a little bit of a cover. But, no, not too much. Not too much at all. And there again I can't, don't remember
- 21:30 anything about the flies or anything like that. Whether the shooting worried them. But you did, just like any other thing, you put up with it. That's like I say, the big, bronzed Anzac put up with anything.

What could you do to protect yourself against the dust and the wind?

Nothing. Put your handkerchief over and hold it and that. Today you'd be wearing masks and everything. But you, honest, you just had to put up with it.

- 22:00 Shut your eyes. See today they have, well some of them, have goggles you put over. We never had anything like that. We just had the same suit on that if you went on leave, or if you died and got buried, the same one. The Australian Army as a whole, was the worst dressed of all the armies. Because you lived, fought and died in the same uniform. But no,
- 22:30 you couldn't do anything special. You know, used to pity the doctor in his tent and that. They usually have the back of a truck with the tarpaulin over the back, camouflaged and things like that. But when the dust got going, that's it. You can't do anything at all about it. Today you can shut the windows and all this but you couldn't do it then. And they called it the 'camseen' [literally 'south wind']. I only ever saw the real one, and it's just the wind and it's a cloud of dust. You can't see through it. It just comes on you.
- 23:00 And people say, "Oh, that's the thing to attack behind that". But that's rubbish, you can't. It gets into everything. Ruined machine guns and everything like that. But you just actually put up with it. No matter where you are in the army, especially the infantry. You just put up with it. That's my advice today to anybody. Don't join the infantry.
- 23:30 It is better today, the infantry. But no, still no good. Still no good.

How were your supplies going by the time you got to Tobruk?

The supplies, well, the food coming up was alright. Water was a bit of a pig. I know that when we were outside Bardia, they were pumping the water out of Fort Pilastrino and our fellows were still drawing water out of a standpipe in their little water-carrier trucks and bringing it round. And the Italians woke up

- 24:00 and they bunged them in the sea and we pumped the sea water through. And that was all wasted. And you had your little water bottle, I think. What did the water bottle hold? I think less than a litre, about a pint of water. And that was your lot. You washed, shaved, drank and everything in it. Well, you didn't bother about shaving or washing. You just keep it for drinking. And then they had to stop, when they started pumping the salt water out, so then only the fresh water came up in the little petrol tanks. Two gallon
- 24:30 petrol tins. And they tipped the petrol out, put the water in. And I tell you what, it tasted awful. But you had to drink it because there was nothing else. You know, some fellows said, "I'd sooner drink wee wee." and I said, "Well, you're entitled to, but I won't." But that was the only real privation. With our mob, our ration, a tin of bully beef and a packet of biscuits. And that stuck to you and that was the best ration of any army. The old bully beef [tinned corned beef]. It don't matter how much they sling off at it,
- 25:00 it was the best. I'd still like to enjoy a tin of bully beef and biscuits. But that seemed to come up alright. But when you're winning, you've got the line of supply coming up. It's when you're going backwards that's the problem. But because we were going forward it was alright. And I think lots of the Italians, when they were put into the prison camps and things like that, they were quite happy because they were getting fed.
- 25:30 **Did you have much close contact with the Italian POWs [Prisoners of War]?**

Not a heck of a lot. Although one we had for, he was not a bad little cook either, a sort of a servant, looking after us. He was alright. But some had done a couple of silly things to him and so he got the huff [a passing mood] and left. But, no, by and large, talking to them was the hard spot. But if you got the odd people to speak English,

26:00 they was just the same as us. Today, I don't know some of these other stupid armies, but it's been known that some of the fellows that say to the bloke, "Carry the rifle for me, I want to do something." Carry the rifle for me and that. No, they, they're not much different to us, the Italians. Not really. All they want to do is go home. Same as us. But

26:30 any to do, and as I say, you would not dare to ill-treat one of them because I'm sure if you was to try and say knock one of them around, your own fellows would be right on to you, "Leave him alone." You know. Just because he's a prisoner, he's still a man.

You told us about finding someone who shot themselves. Did you come

27:00 **across anybody you actually asked you to kill them?**

No, I didn't. No, I won't mention his name now, but I know a bloke who did. This guy, he'd been hit by a lump of shrapnel in the stomach and his intestines are hanging out. And they tell you, when you find that wound, you find a nice clean towel and warm water and lay it over it until they get better treatment. But I mean out there when the whiz-bangs

27:30 are flying and this fellow's saying, "Shoot. Shoot." So he did. He probably would have just died in agony. If he'd have been, today's war, if it had been today he'd have been alright because he'd have had a helicopter pick him up, doctor and that. Like the wounded today are much better off than our day because they're back real quick. Badly wounded can be brought round. But in those days, no. But this fellow he did. He reckoned he did and I

28:00 believed him.

That was another stretcher bearer?

Another stretcher bearer, yeah. Yeah, but...

How did you react to hearing that story?

Just took it for granted. You know. You wouldn't...well that was it. He said that, and you thought, well, that was kind. I mean you'd put a dog down wouldn't you?

28:30 This fellow had no hope. I mean, there's some dreadful wounds with shrapnel. I mean a piece of steel like that, flat out there, red hot and it's faster than the speed of light. It comes straight out of an explosion. Just happened to be straight across his stomach, opened him up. Our doctor said to us, "When you find those sort of casualties, this is the treatment." And you think, "Yeah, that is the treatment. But how in the heck are you going to do it?"

29:00 First of all you haven't got a towel with you and you haven't got any water. So all you could really do in that case, if it's too big for shell dressing, put his shirt or something over it so it's not open to the air. And leave him then until the doctor got up. But no, this fellow just kept saying, "Shoot. Shoot. Shoot." That's what he wanted. He probably knew he had no hope. But the, you

29:30 hear rumours and things like that, but this is the only time I could say I really heard the man say that's what he did.

That must have been a terrible story to hear. Were there any moments that you froze?

Quite often. But you sort of stop in fear

30:00 but you go on ahead. Like, as I say, they gave us the toddy [drink] of rum. That makes you feel good. It does. But then as soon as it wore off, I swore never, ever again will I have it. Because once it wears off it's worse. Worse. Like when we were, we were a bit lucky because the ground, how could I put it, if the ground's a wee bit soft, you're better off because the shell goes

30:30 in the ground, it comes up that way. But if it lands on rock it comes out that way. And when we were going through we had to walk right through the barrage, because the Italians put this long barrage, they probably had ten or fifteen guns, and shells were dropping on the floor but you keep moving through it. But sometimes the blast would throw you over. You're flat on your belly, look around and get up and keep on moving forward. You knew you had to do that. I mean

31:00 if it actually hit you, you wouldn't have any more worries. But it is quite frightening. The scream of the shell coming for you and once you, zoom. I think they only had, what do they call them, 75mm, not like our 25 pounders. A much bigger shell, making a much heavier noise. But, no, those first

31:30 shots and that, you sort of get a bit apprehensive. But then you're disciplined, well trained, so you just keep on moving and just take it and put up with it. Yeah.

You've mentioned that later you would carry morphine. Were you carrying any pain killers in the Middle East?

Not then. No, no. Not til we were in New Guinea.

32:00 And I don't know how much that was, well, regimental. But still that was what was done. But, no, we

didn't have anything like that. Only a cup of strong, sweet tea in the water bottle. Sometimes you were tempted to swig it yourself. But you didn't. You just kept it for them. And after that was empty and you've got water, then that's what you'd have

- 32:30 because you couldn't get the tea all the time. But compared to other parts that was, it was easy. I mean it wasn't 100 per cent easy but it was a lot easier than a lot of the other actions we had to go through. You would sooner have fought against the Italians than anyone else.

Did you expect to be fighting near the Germans

- 33:00 **and were surprised that it was the Italians?**

No, not really. We knew that the Italians were the ones in Libya. That was part of their place. Cyrenica comes in. But Libya and all that was like an Italian colony and they were the ones that were pushing through. I think they got as far as Mersa Matruh

- 33:30 and they were held up there. Because they weren't like the Germans. They didn't have the same gear anyway as the Germans. The Germans were much better organised and everything like that. But, no, we sort of recognised they were the first ones we were going to strike. And we were quite happy to put up with that.

- 34:00 **Do you recall how long you were at Tobruk?**

Probably a week. That's only a guess. Sort of in those days time meant nothing. You didn't know whether it was Monday, Tuesday anything like that because days just kind of followed after the other and if you were quiet the next night you were quite happy. But while we were actually at Tobruk, apart from these three bombers that sneaked in and got away again, there was no hassles.

- 34:30 Nothing like that. Like, other units were heading up, I think Derna was the next place up and they were heading up there. But we didn't have any hassles at Tobruk. Always remember we used to have Primus' and they kept aviation fuel, get a drum of aviation fuel put in your Primus, you didn't have to pump it up, it roared. Of a night we had a kerosene tin...fill it with sand, pour aviation fuel in it and light it. And when it started to go out,

- 35:00 you'd rattle it and it flared up again. But compared to other places it was sort of home away from home. You had a swim in the sea and tucker was, you know, pretty good considering.

And were you able to make close friends that stayed with you?

No, it didn't pay to make too close a friend because you, in a way, yeah, well,

- 35:30 I did, certainly at the very last bit I did. But then you were just sort of all mates. Now and again you might have someone a little bit special, but, no, it didn't pay to have real close friends. You were never enemies, nothing like that. But, yeah.

Why do you say that?

Well, if something happened to them it would sort of, you know, you'd feel a bit crook. But

- 36:00 the odd friends I did...well, I was never an enemy of anyone. I got on good with everybody. But one of my best mates wasn't in our section, he was in another section. You'd always ask, how did he go? He was still alive so I was quite happy. But, no there was none of the dramas or things like you see on the TV.

You must have then

- 36:30 **got some leave into Alexandria.**

Not from Tobruk.

No?

Oh no. You couldn't have leave in Tobruk. It was so far away from Alexandria. I mean, there's no way. It was only when we went from Tobruk, they told us we were going to go across to Greece. So we went straight back to Alexandria. And, gee, I forget where we actually were camped. But anyway

- 37:00 we were. Had leave and we were actually in the picture show and the provos [Provosts. Military Police] came in to tell us all of our unit was to go back to your hand. And they were giving us a hand in all ways to get back and they told us we were going to Greece. So we never got a real good leave in Alexandria after we come back from Tobruk. I can't think where we, I know we did, we come back.

- 37:30 Could have been Amiriya .But anyway, I know we was on leave and we were told to come back to camp. And I can remember we got in and I was in the RAP tent and Captain Blamey came in. He was General [Sir Thomas] Blamey...you've heard of General Blamey? His nephew, it was. We just sat down and he got a bit of a talk. Like I was pretty good with the doctor, like he was my

- 38:00 immediate boss. And this Blamey came in and the doctor actually said to me, "This is Captain Jack Blamey." And I said, "Oh." And he said, "Don't hold that against me." He was a top-hole [excellent]

bloke, Jack Blamey. And like after that we were...

Was he the only dignitary to visit?

Who? General Blamey? No.

- 38:30 Mr Menzies [Prime Minister] did. We were...that was outside Bardia. Like after Bardia. It was after Bardia. General Blamey and Mr Menzies did. Because I can remember him saying something about how good the company was and some fellow from the back screamed out, "Yeah, looking at you it is good." But I remember I had, I ruined my
- 39:00 boots and I had a pair of Italian boots on. And when the officer came along to inspect he made me get in the back row because I had Italian boots. He said, "We don't want Mr Menzies to see that you've got captured gear on." And I thought, "Yeah". He wasn't the flavour of the month, Mr Menzies. But there was no, I can't remember any other dignitaries. I'm just trying to think
- 39:30 yeah, well General Blamey, yes. But he was only part of the army. He was at Gaza and we were camped at Gaza.

Did the visits from those dignitaries help lift the morale?

No. I don't know about others. Anybody, my friends around me, no. You just lined up for nothing. But no.

- 40:00 It don't lift your morale at all. Because you think to yourself, they probably caused it. But, no, there was the odd, like general and that, they'd put on this parade and march and everything like that. Well, you didn't like that. No. Certainly would not lift your morale. Maybe if the Queen turned up, maybe. But no. Definitely not.
- 40:30 He'd have done better staying home.

What was the general mood amongst the troops towards Blamey and Menzies?

Well, you didn't make too much but, Blamey, nobody sort of worried too much about Blamey until New Guinea. But no he was a, well, we thought he was a decent sort of soldier and that. I can always

- 41:00 remember our bugler, used to play retreat at six o'clock of a night and Blamey called him in and told him where he went wrong and he said, "You know what? Blamey was dead right." It was ta ta ticket ah, like that to him. And he knew straight away. He said, "Blamey knew." So I thought, "Oh well, he's been in the army for a long time." But, you know, because you did sort of come into contact with him
- 41:30 I mean officers higher up, the troops would have nothing to do with them. Your main, main boss was your platoon, or your corporal section leader, your platoon boss, and then the company boss and then the battalion boss and after that you didn't have any worries. You knew who your CO [Commanding Officer] was, things like that. But after it got to that you sort of didn't have any contact. They made the decisions and you did it. And when it filters back, your main boss who is the corporal of your section...

Tape 4

00:31 You were just about to tell me about the brothels?

Yeah, right. A lot of fellows, people will say, "Oh I've never been in a brothel." Now, when you're in town on leave or anything, units have to supply what they call brothel picket. Now, the picket, you're like, act like a military policeman, except all you have on is your belt and a bayonet. Nobody argues with the picket because

- 01:00 it could be your job tomorrow. So they had what they called brothel pickets. So the picket is there so if a row starts or anything like that, he just walks up and says, "Calm down fellows." And that's it, you do it. Because it might be your job tomorrow. And they have fellows sitting at a desk with a book and everything like that and as the fellows come out from the lady, "What room was you in?" Your name, unit, the room.
- 01:30 They write all that down. OK, that's, it's not against them or anything like that. But if that fellow gets VD [venereal disease], they go straight back and they look down and they say, "On that particular day, all these fellows were there so therefore they go straight to their unit, to the doctor." Check them out. To see that they haven't got VD. And you'd be surprised at some. There's one, a Turkish girl, had 126 men in one day.
- 02:00 Now, you might think that's impossible. It's not. A hundred. And they used to laugh and joke that she had a radio, a radiogram, you know, record player going and she could change a record and not miss a stroke. Fair dinkum. That's what the blokes used to say. So very, very
- 02:30 few people in the army who never have been, a lot would only go to have a look and that. And the funny part about it, these girls, Arab women covered up in the purdah [concealing clothing] and all this sort of

thing, but they were Christians, not Muslims. The Christians covered up like Muslims. But when they went in, they'd only be in that brothel 30 seconds and they'd have nothing on virtually. In there to turn the quid and in Damascus, oh it

03:00 was beautiful. And the furniture in it. It was in a mansion. Beautiful mansion. And there was a lovely girl, a French nurse. And she was in there to earn her dowry. That's all she wanted to do. Earn enough money to get married. And she worked in there.

It's really interested to hear you say that a lot of blokes wouldn't fess up to going into a brothel.

03:30 **Why do you think that is?**

Oh, I have no idea. But I know, especially some of the self-righteous ones. We had one of our fellows, twice he got VD, and when he come home to Australia he found out his wife had had an affair and he wanted to divorce her. And the fellows said, "Now, come on, look what you've had." Twice he had VD. But anyway, that was the thing.

04:00 But I don't know why you wouldn't. I'd be quite happy...people say, 'the house is like a brothel'. I've never seen a dirty brothel. Never. I mean I'm not going to say I went to every brothel in the state. But they were all clean because they were regimental. The doctors used to check them out every morning before, usually ten o'clock was when they first got going. Before that they would check the girls out. And that's what they should do back here now. Make them fully

04:30 legal and medically tested and do the same thing. And you wouldn't have any VD or AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] or any of those sort of things. Oh, no, I don't know whether it's, what do you call it? Sort of a sense of shame or something like that. But these things is a fact of life. They've been going since the time of JC [Jesus Christ] so why pretend it don't.? It's one thing, you're not compelled to go there. You go there by choice. And that.

05:00 **And how did you come to go to a brothel?**

In the first place on leave, curiosity. That is dead right. My cousin and I went, this is when we were still only 17, we'd heard about all these things but went out of curiosity. We were in, Jaffa was the Arab part of Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv's Jewish, Jaffa's Arab. We were there having our dinner and they had the cancan on.

05:30 Like the girls doing the, terrific and that. And we're sitting there, not much further than from where you're sitting from me now, and I look and I said, "Look at that. They've got no pants on." And it was true. They were doing the cancan with no pants on. Yeah, and I thought, oh well. It didn't turn us off our tucker anyway. No, but that's true, curiosity. And there's lots and lots of them are the same. Yeah.

06:00 **How did you react to the Middle Eastern women?**

Well, you couldn't, the average Arab or Jewish girl or woman, they didn't want to do anything. They wouldn't talk to you because to talk to soldiers, especially because the soldier couldn't speak the same language,

06:30 they might think, well you're a prostitute. So they didn't want to know you. But if they could, I can remember, there's a photo there of a café and I was standing outside the front and these two ladies come passed and they looked back and said, "Oh, that's a nice young Australian." Just like that. And I ran out. I said, "Excuse me, Ma'am, but I've never heard people talk." And we got talking to them and they took me home and all. And that was because you could speak the language and they were both English, married to

07:00 English Palestine policemen. But you couldn't really have much to do with many of the women. Greece was a bit different because Greece was under attack so they really appreciated the Australians. No-one was ashamed. The women weren't ashamed to talk to you there. But, like, you've got to think too, those places, especially Palestine and that, we were sort of,

07:30 in the ordinary time, what would you say? Not invaders. But outsiders coming in. We weren't there to protect them. We were there because we wanted to be there to attack somebody else, see. So that meant that we put them in the firing line. So they weren't very happy about that. And you had the Jewish terrorists trying to get rid of the English and they were shooting them and everything like that. They didn't have bombs like today. But they had their terrorist gang.

08:00 **In the brothels, how would you cope with the language problem?**

You don't have to speak. No. Well, they eventually could, some phrases and things like that. And, but, you know, as long as you've got the money in your hand. As I say, money in one hand and yeah.

08:30 **And how much would it cost? Do you remember?**

Some were about two pound. One pound or two pound. But, in some of the off limit ones, boy oh boy, a shilling. You must remember, too, that those people had nothing. Like, we think here about being poor. They used to sleep on the street of a night. I don't know where they went to through the day, but of a night you'd have to

09:00 step over them in some places. And on the beach at Alexandria, a woman would come along and she had a baby. And she'd get the husband to hold the baby while she went down on the beach with a bloke. Got the money and took it back to her husband. Now, that's true. That's how desperate and poor they were. And the king then, I suppose you could mention that, [Egyptian] King Farouk, he was a womaniser, he was. The only good thing he done was to die.

09:30 But that's how he had the country like that. He was fabulously rich. Lived on the best. He even almost got shot at Giza, where the pyramids are. At the Shepherd Hotel, he tried to knock off one of the English officer's wives. And the English officer wanted to shoot him. So that's the sort of fellow he was. But the country was so desperately poor. We even had a boy come to us, my mate and I, and said, "I take you to my sister.

10:00 Very good, very clean, very hygienic." And, I tell you what, she wouldn't have been 10 year old. And I said to Ray, "Mate," I said, "no way". I said, "We're not that bloody low". So we gave her two bob [two shillings]. Two ackers, they call it. Gave her the two bob and off. But somebody would have. Somebody would have. But, no, I...we weren't that bad.

How nervous were you the very first time you went to a brothel?

10:30 Not nervous at all. Just inquisitive. Yeah.

And where did you get your condoms from?

You get them from the camp. They had what they called 'Blue Light' set ups. A little packet. Two ointments. Put one all over it before you started; one when you finished. And they were called Blue Light centres. I laugh now when I see these

11:00 Blue Light discos. Because the Blue Light, PLC, prophylactic ablution centre, it was. They had one in each camp. Like a tent. And they had these syringes where the Condys' crystals and all this sort of stuff. That was all there to help prevent VD. So there was all those sort of. And they had them still in the brothel, some of them. And they had, because they were a bit of a joke. The girl, when she was finished, "Abdul, bring in the Condys',

11:30 the Australian is finish." These were all the funny things that were said.

And how helpful was the Condys' Crystals?

Well, I don't know how it helped them. I don't see that it would have helped them. But, well the way it was used in a syringe then, like a douche can, that would help the blokes. But I don't know how it helped the women. Because, you know, the moment, the first

12:00 egg gets out. And some of them did get pregnant. But, like, some of the girls there, like, today they'd be film stars. They were beautiful. But no money. No money. I mean, let's face it, I mean a lot of the women here today, they've got families, no money so that's what they do. Earn a lot of money, get out of it. Like that was

12:30 the thought, get your money and then...but if you stay in it long enough it'll kill you. But there was this French nurse, a beautiful, really beautiful girl, and she was in there to get the...and she was going to marry an officer in the Foreign Legion. And if you saw them on the street you daren't even look at her. Like she could speak reasonable English and she'd say, "You see me on the street, you know nothing." and everyone would think that.

13:00 I'd hate, the Foreign Legion bloke was a pretty well looking fellow too. I'd have hated to say anything to him.

How did the army look upon you going to the brothels?

Natural. Natural. They had VD parts of the hospital. I mean it's just a fact of life, isn't it? I mean, you can't abolish it, it's been going too long.

13:30 No, it's, there was even the joke about the fellow said to the matron of the hospital, "I got it off the toilet seat". And she said, "Well that was a terrible place to take a woman". Because you can't get it off a toilet seat. Crabs you can but nothing else. But the army, that,

14:00 they had regimental brothels. And they were regularly policed. And if you were caught outside one of them, it could have got you in a lot of trouble. They used to call them 'black brothels'. Off limits. Well, that's where they had the kinky shows and all that. That all took place in them. Didn't take place in the regimental ones. It was like a business. Each room was numbered so they'd write all that down. I don't know what happens today. But I wouldn't be bothered going to one today.

14:30 Couldn't afford it anyway.

And did you go to any of the off limits ones?

Oh, yeah, went and had a look, yeah. That's where I first seen the, we got a nurse, respite care, she does belly dancing and that and I was saying to her the first we saw the real belly dance girl. And someone said, "Give her a shilling, and you'd go straight out the back with her."

15:00 And I said, "Not me, mate". You know, they did the ruby in the thing and the bare belly. They did it properly and that, but there were some kinky things you wouldn't talk about in them. But if the provos raided them, you got hauled off. Like they'd take your name and regimental number and it goes back to camp and you get fined and confined to barracks and all these sorts of things.

And were you ever fined?

No, not for that.

15:30 I went AWL a couple of things. But, no, I ended up coming out with a clean bill of health. But, no, we went through, a part of our learning when we first went to Palestine, went to the VD hospital in Gaza. When you saw the cases and they were bad. Like, these were the Palestinians, the Arabs and that. Yeah. You know, like once...fellow would make

16:00 you a virgin for life when you saw that.

What did you see?

All the different parts, like the syphilis and gonorrhoea and all these. One fellow, his nose was gone and all that. And they said that was caused by VD. No. But they were a definite fact of life and in some of the armies they took camp, well, even in the real early days,

16:30 when they had elephants, they took camp followers with them for the men. Well, there's the Italians had them in Tobruk. And they shipped them out buggered.

I imagine for a 17 year old, spending a bit of time in the brothel helped you to grow up pretty fast?

Oh yes, you grow up very fast. Very, very fast. See, when you're in the company of men

17:00 all the time, like that, see them days, I was the baby of the whole lot. Today I get to the fire brigade, the opposite, I'm the oldest. So everything's about face. But, no, you grew up quick and you had to grow up quick. You know I say I was never a mongrel, but I was never a saint either. Yeah. That was my first experience. But, no

17:30 they're a fact of life and you have to have them so therefore they should be like the army, regimental. Run by the health department. And there'd be none of these, you know, pimps getting around and things like that. My mate and I, we took two of them to the pictures. That's how I knew the French went, "Quel film alle vous voire?" 'What film are we going to see?' And everyone's at the backing looking at these two girls.

18:00 But as soon as it finished, you just took them straight back there. And that was it, you left them there. It was just nice going out with two girls. And the fact that they were prostitutes had nothing to do with it. We had tea out and for the first time I had frogs legs. Beautiful frogs legs. Terrific. And the big white snails. They're like a big slug. Beautiful to eat. Frogs legs are like the taste between chicken and

18:30 veal. But they're not like the little frogs we got here. But, no, that was a good experience. Probably one of the brightest parts of the whole lot.

I imagine that in some way it must have been a bit surreal. Going to war one minute and then off...

Well, you just got used to it. It'd be just like today.

19:00 Getting up from here and hopping in the car and going into town or something. It's just every day life. You accept it. Like, the human body, you can adapt to anything. We went out, it was summer after summer. It was summer we left here. Over there in summer and all of a sudden we're in Greece in the snow. Your body, you adapt to it. You know, the old human, he's a very adaptable person. An the same as the happenings and that, you just get used to

19:30 it. You go to one camp, you get used to everything about there. You move on to the next one, you get used about there. But usually the first time you went to a new place you worried about the nearest big town and where the knocking shops [brothels] were, sort of thing. Well, they didn't call them that then. Yeah. Trouble is, it cost you money.

From the way you're talking about it, it sounds as if it really did help you?

Oh, yeah, too right. See, the philosophy you got, go for it now, because next week you may not be here. Yeah. We weren't as bad off as the poor old bomber pilots but, no, but that was the philosophy.

20:30 Enjoy life while you can. It's a bit different today. But, you know, that's the way I like it. Go for it. Get as much as you can because next week may be none left.

That's a very fascinating story of the brothels. I appreciate you talking to us about it.

No, you should

- 21:00 talk about it. Why not? It was there. Fact of life. And that's it. You don't glory it. You don't belittle it. Because while they're there, nobody can justify rape. If I was a judge and someone came up before me on rape I'd say, "Fellow, as long as you've got a quid in your pocket, you don't have to rape anybody". And I'm hammer him real hard. But, no, good experience, made a
- 21:30 man of you.
- You were just about to tell me about getting movement orders to go from Alexandria down to Greece?**
- Yeah. Well, we had to go back to camp and then, I forget the whole rigmarole. We had a ship called the Bankura. It was a British India
- 22:00 Steam Navigation [Company] ship. Only a smallish one. And they told us it took so many donkeys off to put us on. Because I remember the fellow next to me saying, "Oh well, four-legged donkeys off, two-legged donkeys on". And they had a sort of an Arab crew with English officers. I had some very nice photos and the fourth engineer, I think he was, he was a camera buff, used to develop them all on the boat. And it just happened he was talking about these
- 22:30 photos that I had and the negatives. Took of them in the brothel. And we got on good. So I shared the cabin with him. The other fellows had to sleep out on the deck. And the natives on one end and they used to make these chapattis [flat course unleavened bread]. They make it, heat it up and they had sort of a hot plate, fed with fuel, and they'd roll it out like a big pancake. And we were so, "Oh, you know, never eat them". Yeah, be blowed, they went real good with bully beef.
- 23:00 And we went off on that and they put all the Bren guns around the top, like for anti-airgun protection. And the boss said, "Right oh, at such and such time we're going to let them off and see how they go". And it scared the hell out of the captain of the boat and he told them they had to take them down off the top deck. So they did that and we were out one day, we left sort of today and tomorrow, we got raided with
- 23:30 three bombers. And they whipped the guns up real quick again and that's all that saved us. Because there was such a high volume of fire going up that the planes give us a miss. And I was looking out the porthole and I seen a bomb come out of a plane and on to an oil tanker. The tankers have got a bit... superstructure, the bit in the middle, and the bomb landed right at the base. You could see it leave the plane. Whack! And, ooh, up she went. And, of course, it started to burn and it dropped
- 24:00 back out so I thought, "Oh well, that's it. It's going to blow to bits and sink." And we just think one of them got hit because one of the three planes, they were Italian bombers, flew away with smoke coming from one engine. Like some of them reckon, like, "Oh it couldn't have been Italian because they tried too hard." But I think they were but they didn't hit any of the troop ships at all. Just this one, they may even have wanted to get the tanker. And we just carried on then to Athens.
- 24:30 And when we got off the boat in Athens, or Pireaus was the harbour, the German consul was sitting there in the car watching us because we weren't at war, he wasn't at war with Greece. The Italians, they were fighting Greece, but not the Germans. And when we got there, we thought that was what drew the crab [attracted the enemy], so he's gone back. And then Germany attacked and that was the end of us. But like there was
- 25:00 rumours of them taking heavy guns off while we were going on. But they had no hope of holding Greece. None. It was too hard to supply. You had to be supplied by the sea. Because the Italians were on one side having a go and the Turks, well the Turks were neutral, so they couldn't do anything that side. So the Germans came down from the North. And they, they attacked. The Greeks actually were beating the Italians. They'd held them up. Like the Greeks had a shock
- 25:30 troop system called 'evzones' [soldier in an elite Greek infantry unit]. They wore these real (UNCLEAR) and they had pom-poms on their shoes and a white skirt and look more like ballet women. They were in khaki but they were real good fighters. But they were front-line troops. They're only problem was they didn't have the proper gear to beat the Germans. And neither did we. And we moved up to a place called Marissa and they had an
- 26:00 earthquake. Shook a lot of the buildings to bits. It looked to me as though it had been bombed. And I said to one of the Greek fellows, "What had happened there?" And he said, "We had an earthquake one day and Italy bombed it the next day". And they were very cranky about the Italians over that. And we went up to, we were camped not far from Mount Olympus. You could look across and up a bit and there was this snow-topped mountain and that was Mount Olympus. And then we went up to Tempe Gorge,
- 26:30 up Peneus River [ancient name for Salambria river]. And that's where the Germans got stuck in to us. And, like, after a couple of days, we had no aeroplanes and virtually no tanks. So the only good thing, when you saw an aeroplane, you know it was one of theirs. And when you saw a tank, you know it was one of theirs, too. So we just, you know, just got pushed back and back and back. And in the finish they broke through so many places that the whole units
- 27:00 all disintegrated and you had to sort of get out the best. We went straight back to Athens. And some of the other fellows went across land and ended up in Turkey. Got away on little boats and that and got to

Turkey. They were interned, like taken intern, and then they sent them straight back to Palestine. The Turks never held them there at all, but they just sort of interned them there for a day or so and sent them back. They'd help if they wanted food and that. But we had to just

27:30 sort of keep going back.

I understand that your orders were to take a river?

Yeah, that's the Aliakmon. Supposed to look after that. The fellow who caused the most damage was the, well, he's died now, poor old Spongy. He was the mortar platoon sergeant. And they had a 3-inch mortar to put a bomb, they put a charger down and the mortar bomb drops down,

28:00 hits the charger: woof. And you often see them, they go ping, ping and it shoots these things out. And it couldn't quite reach the river so he put extra charge in. And they have a big base plate about that, and that was going further and further. I didn't actually see this but it's what the mortar fellow was telling me. Going back and it was dropping in the river and it was killing lots of lots of them trying to cross the river. But then, once they get some across and they start to attack and move around, there was more of them

28:30 than us. So they started infiltrating. Well, as soon as they look like cutting them off, you have to go backwards. And I know, like, because you're not in touch with the whole boss, the high up, and it sort of filters down that we had to stay for, I think it was 24 or 48 hours to hold them off so that the other fellows could come back. And we held them off, it was the 15th Brigade. Then it just disintegrated. They just got through and the battalion

29:00 had just ceased to exist as a unit. Someone said to me once, "They gave the order, every man for himself." but that just, "I do not remember that ever being said up there". It was only when we were down the other side on the Corinth Peninsula. And we sort of went back, leapfrogging back. We were the first mob ever to lose Thermopylae Pass. The Spartans held in the early days [480 BC]. Leonidas [King of Sparta], or whatever they called him.

29:30 But anyway, they didn't have parachutists in them days. So they sort of got behind and we just kept going back and back and we ended up at Daphne, where we first went to Greece. Our first camp was Daphne. It had a big air force supply dump there. And our job was to destroy everything. I remember Rolls Royce engine in their crates. Bashing into them. Put a grenade in and get away, boom. So that they were all destroyed. And the food,

30:00 that had to be destroyed. So what we did, the cases of bully and that, we took them into Athens, the Omonia Square, and left it there for the people to get. And then...

And what was your role during this time? Had it changed?

No, just, once it disintegrated, you were virtually on your own. You were a stretcher bearer but you weren't, well, you weren't part of an organised fighting unit at all. You was different fellows. We were in with a couple

30:30 of fellows from Queensland who thought they were God. Weren't even in our battalion, they were one of the 18th. But anyway, they were different units entirely altogether. But you all sort of get together and in the end there was about 20 of us and the officers just decided that we'd be a rear-guard unit. We didn't thank him very much for that but still, he was the only one who knew what was going on. So, we just sort of drifted our way back. And we got across the Corinth Peninsula.

31:00 But the thing that used to look crook, the civilians were all heading south. They wanted to get as far away from the fighting as they could. And you'd be strung across the road like a lot of idiots as a rear guard. I mean if we'd have been attacked you'd have got wiped out in seconds. But still. And they moved through and then after they'd moved through, we'd up and most times we had a truck and they'd take you further back and you'd form another position. And the same people would be coming through again because you leapfrogged over them.

31:30 But it was a great shemozzle [confused state of affairs]. A real shemozzle. We lost lots of prisoners and that there. Lots of prisoners. Because they couldn't move back quick enough. And we got back to Argos, that was a Greek, a little Greek village. That had been bombed because when we went through it a lot of the houses were on fire and you could see all the poor buggers standing around crying. And then we were told we were going to get off on a British

32:00 destroyer at Marathon, Tolo Bay. But by the time we got there, the (UNCLEAR) had left and one came in, the Germans, like we were sort of behind the Germans. Couldn't do anything. And they were on the edge. And one of the idiots fired a shot at the destroyer. Well, that's...we heard the explosion and reckoned that's what happened. He got too trigger happy, fired a shot and the destroyer opened up then.

32:30 It would have made a hell of a mess and it just moved off. Because no ship was safe because they had the dive bombers. They sank a lot of ships those dive bombers. And they, they weren't as accurate as they thought because my mate and I, there were two of us ended up at that last part together after Tolo Bay and Marathon, just the two of us. Jack White and myself. He was the lance corporal and he decided we'd walk. So we walked along the road...

And why did

33:00 he make that decision?

Because there was nothing else. You couldn't fight. All we had was a rifle and a bayonet each. And I think I had 10 rounds and he had five. So the idea was safety. There was, it was just a disintegrated rabble. And an English officer had us...oh there was about fifty of us in this clearing. And he said, "If you can make your way out, head north". And there was the two lots there. The Cenicks [?] and, I forget,

33:30 the other lot. He said, "But go to this lot". And I said, "But they're the Fascists." He said, "Yeah, but the other side's Communist". I said, "The Communists are on our side". We weren't allowed to go to the Communists. I said, to you. And he said, "From now on, it's every man for himself". There's supposed to be a lot of crap, a law, once you're told, every man for himself, you're finished with the army. You know, like my mate said, "I don't believe that". I said, "Neither do I". Because some of the English fellows said, "When he's told us, every

34:00 man for himself, you don't believe that you're in the army any more". And I said, "Well, while ever I've got this on, mate, I'm in the army". And we went along and it just came along dark. And we went to the house on the side of the road and as you walked in the door, this lady looked up at us with fear in her face. She said, "Romanos" [Italian]. And I said, "No, Australian". And they sat us straight down and give us tea. Eggs. Eggs for tea. And the next day we went further on.

34:30 And the road, I've often wondered if they ever finished with it. It was a tar road that went to the end and just went into the hills. And this little farm house. We went to there and we'd only been there a couple of minutes and we heard this noise of the bikes. So we goes up and there's a platoon or so of Germans coming along on motorbikes. So we shot out the back up in the bush out the road. And about half an hour later, this fellow comes back with bread. 'Psomi', they called it. "For us," I said, "What's happening here?"

35:00 "Germans in house. Stay here." They never done anything to him and I don't know where in heck they ever got to. But as soon as they left we went across the road and up through the hills. And we headed up, come out at, on the edge of a, well, it was the ocean. But this island was special. We didn't know what it was called then. Everyone would say to us, "Falica". And I would think, well, that's the name of the town. And I'd say, well, "Ou et la Falica? Where is Falica?" And they'd point that way. But it was the sea.

35:30 Falica is sea in Greek. Or that's my pronunciation of it [English pronunciation would be 'Thalassa']. And there was, like a bit of a bay, or there was a fair-sized bay and there was a ship in the middle of it. A fair-sized ship, too. Suppose you would have called it trans stream or something like that. But it was resting on the bottom. And around it were hundreds and hundreds of shell holes. Or bomb holes. And I said to my mate, "Well that's the Stukas for you." They've eventually sank her, but look at all the bombs they've wasted. So they weren't as accurate as they made out.

36:00 And we got on to a fellow on a rowing boat and he decided it was just getting on towards dark and we would go across to this island, Especa [?]. And, as I goes to step in, the boat moved out and I went behind the boat, and straight down in the water. Ruined a lot of me gear and everything like that. Anyway, got out. I was cold. But he rowed us across and we got off in this tiny blue bit of water. And we started walking into where sort of a town was and this group

36:30 of girls were coming the other way. And Culinicter [?] was Greek and they just Culinicter [?] and they could tell the accent and they came running back. And they were nurses trained in America. And you'd have thought they were American. They spoke just like Americans. So they took us to their hospital. I got dried out and boy, oh boy, yeah, that was lovely there. We got well fed, yeah. Should have stayed there I suppose.

37:00 I said to my mate, "No, we'll be wore out".

What do you mean, you'd be wore out?

Oh dear, oh dear. Well, one of them explained it to me that all of the eligible Greek fellows are in the army; away. And because you're passing through, they've got no worries about you going around talking about them. So I thought, well, that sounds alright.

37:30 But...

So that means the girls were entertaining you and vice versa?

Yeah. So that was good. But while we were on there we heard that the official evacuation of Greece was finished. Over the radio. And this was the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] and I thought, "Well, this is good, we're still here and it's all finished". And we saw three Blenheim bombers go up to bomb, we think it was Tolo Bay or something. They might have had a thing there. And we're still here.

38:00 Then, I've got a photo there, taken on this island. I've got a Royal Marines cap on. And the terms were that you were not to, if you were in a tin hat, you were still fighting. If you had displayed any weapon you were still fighting, you could be shot. And they made the people on the island, they had them old muzzle over cannons. Ornaments. They had to take them off the stand. And every ship,

- 38:30 like, they all had to carry a white flag otherwise they'd be strafed or bombed or that. And we were sitting there. I suppose it must have been near a week. It might have been a bit more than a week. Anyway, there was this flying boat, Italian, used to come, circle right round, check everything out and go off. And I said to the fellows, "If he lands, I know how to fly a plane. We'll get that and we'll take off." They were all, "Yeah, this is...". I'm glad. I knew in theory
- 39:00 how to fly but, boy, you wouldn't have got off the water in a flying boat. Probably, if we'd had the crew, they'd have soon seen that. But then we decided we'd get a fishing boat, a trawler. And we got on with the captain of one of these big enough boats, about 30-foot long. And the engine had had a part taken off it and he wouldn't take us. So there was a couple of pommy engineers with us. And they made, one lung they called it. They made this
- 39:30 part and put it on. And I can remember barking [taking skin off] my knuckles. You had to rock it like that to get this diesel engine going. Once the captain heard the engine going, he decided he'd take us. We paid, I forget how much. I didn't have much money left on us. And he would take us to Crete. And we stopped in a school teacher's house a few nights. And he was real worried because my mate and I just camped right down on the floor. Just nothing. Right down on the floor
- 40:00 and that was it. And slept like a log. But when we were about to get on the boat, the Greek lady brought down this stew. And it was octopus in olive oil. You know, we was that hungry we got stuck right into that. And I was feeling sick, and we got on the boat and the boat's rocking a wee bit. And the smell of the diesel off it. And then one of the Greeks, he wasn't a sailor but he was going as a crew, he sat down alongside me and breathed garlic on me. Oh and I went straight to the side and head over the side and
- 40:30 every time the boat would rock, me head would go under water. And the fellow said, "You'll drown". I said, "It's better than being like this". Gee I was sick. But I got over that once we got out to sea. And we had...our ration was a slice of bread and a lemon per day. It was only for three days. A real good adventure.

You've just described a very, very close escape from Germany.

Oh, it was close in a sense. It was close.

- 41:00 But we didn't think about it then. It was just every day. You know. Today America would make a film on it, you know. That's the way I look on it. But I've got a compass here, they would have made a film on it. But, yeah, no we just...

Were you scared when you were hiding out at the house?

No, no. Because they were off on the mainland somewhere.

- 41:30 The only thing that worried me was if they did get there, like while we were there, what they might have done to the people. But we just made that thing. There was two of us and then there was some other Australians, one who's name was Bamford[?]. He worked with the Melbourne Times or something. And I forget the other captain's name. But anyway, they said, if the Germans actually land on this island, we tell them that we have forced the people to look after us under...

Tape 5

- 00:31 **This morning you were talking about Greece. How did the job of stretchering change in a retreat?**

Well, in this particular time it changed altogether because everybody was split up. So you were disorganised. You had no gear with you. So you just become one of the mob. And if you could help somebody, you did. But it was a complete rout, you know. Some of the units

- 01:00 could stay together but our unit couldn't because the position it was in, we just split up. If all you have is just ordinary rifles and things like that, you're no match for what the Germans had. Like some of the hills are so steep...that saved us because the guns on a tank can only tilt so far up. And we used to laugh, they'd say you'd hear the gun twice: the shell when it passed you and then when you passed it.

- 01:30 That wasn't quite like that. But, you know, there was lots of...trucks couldn't move on the road in daylight but they were shot up. And we had one fellow, Tom, I won't say his other name, but he had a broken ankle. And when the truck stalled on the road and the Messerschmidt came down behind him, he was faster than everybody. He's off and running. Yeah. Trucks are slowing him down. Disorganised, you can't do a normal thing.

- 02:00 Yeah, so all you want to do is stay alive. If not for the Greek people we would have been in a lot of trouble. They took lots of risks because they were told they'd get into trouble if they were sheltering the troops. But they had people to guide us back. They didn't have a lot to eat themselves, but they shared it. You know, so, yeah.

Was there a sense

02:30 **of disappointment or shame at being in an army that was retreating?**

Yes. Well, yeah, disappointment. Not so much shame because, well, you know you couldn't have done any better. But disappointed to think that they'd put us in there, knowing that you had no hope. They had no, no way that we could have stopped the Germans there. All it was done, was Mr Churchill's grand idea

03:00 of proving to the Greek, you know, we was going to help them. But I think, I don't know, I could be wrong, but I think that we should not have gone in there, the Germans would have jumped down. The only strategic side they reckon on it was because we held them up that long, it stopped them from going into Russia. Now that's academic. It could have been true but the Germans actually thought they would have got through quicker than they did.

03:30 But they were held up and then they held up a lot more on Crete. So, yeah, you were disappointed. But I wouldn't say we were ashamed. No.

Something that you saw in both Greece and Crete were the paratroopers.

Yeah, they didn't use paratroopers so very much in on Greece. It was Crete where they really, they wanted to take Crete with parachuting bays. And that was another bungle. Crete. It was a bigger bungle than Greece really.

04:00 Because, like I said before, we got away in this fishing boat. And we stopped at one island, I don't know the name, but I do know there was a copper mine on it. No inhabitants. But the next island was Milos, a fairly big island, and because in daylight the boat stopped, we went ashore and climbed up a hill and you could look across and the Germans were there slave, well, we'll call it slave labour, building

04:30 an airstrip. Laying it all out for an airstrip. And we said, "Well that's if they do invade Crete, there's their airstrips to bring their supplies in." And then we, back on the boat we went on to Crete, up one end a place call Kastili. If you look at a map of Crete, you'll see at one end of it, the western end, the Gibraltar end, there's like two fingers of land point out. Well, we landed in there. It's Kastili.

05:00 And when we went ashore the intelligence, the intelligence in name only, come and they said to us, our experience and that and I said to them, "We saw parachutes coming out from two hundred feet." "Ah, not possible, they break their legs," they said. I said, "They come out from two hundred feet." They found out afterwards, how they come down that low is because they have that long thing and it comes out under the tail and the parachute is open before they leave. A lot of them did get

05:30 broken legs, but it's better than getting shot. And we told them about Milos and they said, "No, they could not make an airstrip there capable of carrying heavy aircraft." I thought, "Yeah, all right, well you fellows know." That's where they were doing their round trips. They could pick up troops and back, take them over and keep bringing them back. So that was their intelligence. So that was a big bungle. And we

06:00 were nowhere near Maleme aerodrome, but you could hear all the row and the noise going on. I was told afterwards by one of the Kiwis that they had an I Tank there. A big infantry tank. And I said, "Why in the heck didn't they?" They could have done anything in the airstrip and they said they didn't want to go out in case there was a bomb. And I said, "The idea is you take all them risks." You know, my mate and I thought, "Well, if you've got a tank that big, it's going to be hard,

06:30 like it's not so big from the air but it's going to be hard to knock out." And there's nothing on the ground could have stopped it. So it was nearly touch and go whether they stopped the Germans there. On Maleme aerodrome. But once they controlled the aerodrome that was it. They just brought in supplies. But we were sitting on a really good spot on the hills. There was, they took naval guns off one of the ships and took it

07:00 down below us and they concreted it in and we were there to guard them. And I said to the fellow, "Like if you fired them they could clear the hill and drop on the aerodrome." He said, "No, we don't want to fire in case we give our position away." And I thought, "Well, that's strategic crap." But this ship that was, we saw hit by a bomb when we were going over there, the oil tanker, it had got to Souda Bay. I only found out in the Australian Woman's Weekly [magazine], the story. But the, I think it was the HMAS Sydney, one of our ships. The Sydney?

07:30 Anyway, don't matter, one of our ships put a crew on and they took it to Souda Bay and beached it. And it was still there. And also there was a warship. Would be bigger than a destroyer because these guns were big 6-inch guns and the guns off that were what we had below us. And we had a grandstand view of anything that went on in Souda Bay. It was an island in the middle of the bay. It had a big tower sat on it, and that was their observation and warning tower. When an air-raid

08:00 was on, they flew the red flag. So everyone could look around and say, "Well, the plane's coming." And we watched this bomber come in. And he got a stick of bombs and the last bomb fell right on this place and in one go it just disappeared. So whoever was in that, he was on his way to heaven. And they had anti-aircraft batteries came out from Dover for a rest and that. And the Stukas knocked it out. It were just like watching a movie. They just came over with about

- 08:30 20 of them. They just went round and round and one after the other, down they went. A few of them got hit. But they wiped out the anti-aircraft battery. So, yes, just one bungle after another. And we never fired a shot. We were told, "Move back." We went from there through Kalives and to back up over the hill. They said, "We're heading for Spartia, which is a little village on the far side of Crete." So we walked the whole width of Crete.
- 09:00 We done that in a night. Just going back and back and back. The idea was to leap frog. Like you go back and the other would retreat through you. But instead of them retreating through us, we stood back and left a position for them. And while we were there we heard the 1st and 2nd Battalion was cut off at Retimo and Iraklion. So our fellows said, "Well we ought to go through to see if we could relieve
- 09:30 them." But anyway, when all that was discussed the officer came and he said, "It's useless. As far as I've heard they've surrendered." So it was [New Zealand] General Freyberg, he won the VC in the First World War, he came down in a vehicle and he stopped at our road block. And, like, once we knew who he was you had to let him go through and he went down and I think he got out on a Sunderland flying boat. But it was a disaster.
- 10:00 And the last stretcher bearing job I did was a New Zealand officer who had been hit. A ball off a Messerschmitt went in under the arm. And he come to me because it was so painful. He didn't know who I was at the time, but I could see this bandage and I said I was a stretcher bearer. And he had all maggots in it. So I took almost of them out. I said, "I'm going to leave a few because maggots will only eat rotten flesh." And I said, "While they're there eating that rotten flesh you'll feel it".
- 10:30 And he took me name and address and he said. "After the war I'll write to you." But he never, ever did. Whether he, he would have been taken a prisoner afterwards, because they never got off. And the only way we got off the island of Crete...there was 31 of our battalion was left and they could only take five of our battalion off on the evacuation ship. And we stood in a circle and the office, Lieutenant Wright, stood there
- 11:00 and said start counting. And I was three. And it was 3, 13, 23, 31, 33 to get off. OK. And we made arrangements to get off, the one's who were sort of friends, whoever went off, went off. None of this hero something. So yeah, we agreed with that. So I got off. And afterwards when I saw the other fellows I said, "I know what's happened here. He's only picked specialists. I was the stretcher bearer, another
- 11:30 fellow was a signalman. One fellow was a cook. And someone was from the I section [intelligence]." So he's wrote their names down afterwards and he was the only person killed the next day. Lieutenant Wright[?], he was a fantastic bloke. But he was killed. And we got off on an English heavy cruiser, the HMS Phoebe. And the captain said, "Four o'clock, we're gone." Because that gives them time to steam away from the range of the [Ju-87] Stukas [dive bombers]. And right on the stroke of four
- 12:00 we were on and there was another one about to leave the shore. They went out on landing barges and you had to leave all your automatic weapons behind. You could take a rifle on the ship but no automatic weapons, which I thought was rubbish. But anyway, that was their idea. And they just said to them ashore, "No more. Finish." And up the anchor and off. And there was, I forget the others. There was two other ships with us. And they head flat-out back to Alexandria and we got
- 12:30 just the one air raid from a team of Stukas and as soon as they said, "Air raid. Stukas." They shut all the doors. Like we were all locked inside. You weren't allowed to go out. I asked the bloke, "Why'd they shut the doors?" and he said, "Well if this compartment gets hit, it stops the rest from sinking." And I said, "Well, if this part gets hit that's us." And he said, "Yeah." But anyway, what happens is, as soon as the air raid and the ships all get real close together and, like he said, sometimes you think they're going to hit one another.
- 13:00 And they just all fire up in the air and no-one can, the planes can't get through. And when you get a bit out in the open part, he said, it was the padre, they lay on their back, up on the top of the bridge to watch the bombers. And when the plane comes and drops the bomb they turn to port or starboard quick so that they miss them. So we got a bomb to bomb description. Oh it was good fun. Good fun. And we got good cocoa on that boat too.
- 13:30 I don't know, the pommies, they had good cocoa.

It must have been pretty rough that out of 30 something men you could only take...

Five, yeah. I think that was academic too. But I'm sure there was others would have got on. Like there was a bit of a rag-tag, just a great long file of blokes heading down to the beach just to get on. They put them on a landing barge and it went out and then off the landing barge. Because probably why they said no automatic

- 14:00 weapons, they would have held them up a bit. Because you had to really fly straight up the ladder. They were taking them by the scruff of the neck, you know, on, on, on. I didn't mind that. But I don't know what happened, Jack White [?], I've got the photo of him there, him and I in the (UNCLEAR) boat. But I don't know if he survived or what happened. When we got to Alexandria, in the harbour there was all
- 14:30 the boats. Some with the front off, the back off, blown to pieces. And we had our boat there, the HMAS Perth. It was only a small bomb dropped right in the middle on the gallery. Killed a...I don't know how many, killed a few people. We went on and you could see where all the damage had been done. And that

was only minuscule compared to some of the others that had the whole middle part blown right out. A 1000-pounder [bomb] does a lot of damage. If they

- 15:00 drop it right on a house, a 1000-pounder will just leave a huge hole. Nothing. Like if you dropped one down here there wouldn't be this place and probably half of his and half the hall.

The parting on Crete of the men that were grouped together, what about the men who were about to be left behind?

Well, they had two alternatives. Some of them were taken POWs. Either that or head for the hills.

- 15:30 A lot headed for the hills and the Greeks looked after them. A mate of mine, well, one of me mates, he was a corporal. He was taken prisoner and they marched them back over the hill to the camp. And he said the fellows guarding them were Hitler's Youth movement. Only young boys. The guns, they were nearly as big as the guns. And while they were in the camp, one of them came up and kicked him up the backside. So he turned around and walloped him, knocked him down. Well they grabbed him

- 16:00 and took him up before the commandant of the camp. This is what he told me himself. And the commandant was going crook at him and everything like that and my mate said, "Well, if you was a prisoner and someone kicked you up the backside, what would you do?" He said, "I'd hit him." He said, "Well, that's what I done." He said, "Alright, don't ever do it again." He said, "Now, you're off" and he was going to give a blurb to the fellow who done it, who kicked him. He said, "But don't ever do it again. I could have you shot." So Reg thought, "Oh that's good and off he went".

- 16:30 But he eventually did escape and him and, I think it was five or six of them, got off on a submarine. And they had it worked out, like, when the subs could get there and they would be waiting on the beach and there was no time, you know, if you was half a minute late, that's it, you were out of it. And they got on the sub and they were sitting down on this part, he was saying about how good it is to be here. And the bloke says, "See all them there?" And he said, "Yeah." He said, "They're torpedoes."

- 17:00 He said, "If this ship gets hit you'll get blown straight out through the top." But they didn't. They only, they submerged until they got a bit away from the island and then they ran on the top. A lot of them ended up with girlfriends there because they were there for a fair while. But they had to leave all them behind. But it was a nice feeling to get off.

- 17:30 **So you went back to Alexandria?**

Yeah. We were old soldiers then, we could work all the lurks [tricks]. I went to the store place and got a new uniform and everything like that. And got some pay. I think I still got my old pay book and in it is the words, 'Free Crete'. And I thought, well that's a good thing.

- 18:00 And I pigged. I had a great feed and fruit salad and ice cream and everything. And I got out in the thing and I got real sick. Down in the gutter and I was sick all over the place. And I looked up and there's a provo, see, and he put his hand and shook me like that. He said, "Are you drunk?" I said, "Mate, I just got off Crete." "Oh, right oh," he said. Helped me to me feet and took me to this Red Cross place and there was a Mrs [Barbara] Moriarty there. And she said, as soon as I went in, like I

- 18:30 explained everything to her, and she said, "What battalion?" And I said, "2/2nd." She said, "Oh my husband's in the 2/1st." I said, "That's Captain Moriarty." She said, "Yes." And I said, "Well," I said, "he got shot." He got a sniper, like we heard all about this when we got off. She said she had heard that. And I said, "Well there's fellows from the 2/1st that got away and come back to us, said he was shot".

- 19:00 Yeah but I was there for a few days. And then I got off, we went back to the place called 'Cairo 89' was what they called Infantry Training Battalion. The reinforcements went back there first before going back to the unit. So I just went back to there and was there over night. Another set of clothes, too. Everywhere I went, I got a set of clothes.

- 19:30 And I went back to our unit and it just formed back up just as though nothing had ever happened. But for days units were coming back. Because, it's still marked...I've got the old freedom of information files, I was supposed to be missing in action. And that's my mum, that's one of the telegrams I never ever got to see. She got a telegram saying I was missing in action. It broke her up a fair bit too. And then one day, there was a lady used to read the tea leaves.

- 20:00 Nobody believes her and she walked passed my photo and she said, "Fred's found." And she got a telegram the next day saying I had rejoined my unit. So, even though I don't believe in it, that's ESP [extrasensory perception]. But it was sort of exciting, in a sense, to be missing in action and you know all the time you're not really missing because you know where you are yourself.

What sense did you have at the time of the Greek and Crete campaigns having

- 20:30 **been pretty much lost from the start?**

Well, you couldn't do anything about it, but afterwards you think, "This is the way high pressure politics works." And they don't even do it right to this very day. Nobody worries about the lies as long as it works in with their agenda. Like, Crete, absolutely they did not want to have Crete. If we'd have had an army stationed on Crete, you couldn't have done anything.

- 21:00 You've couldn't have attacked anybody. You couldn't even have attacked the Cretes. You couldn't supply them because you had to go from Egypt to Crete and that left you vulnerable to the Stukas. Because once they got the Stukas there, nothing else could get there. And it was a bit too far for fighters to come and help, like. The Stukas would live where the fighters were but it was too far for a fighter to go from Alexandria. But, no it was a bit of a
- 21:30 shemozzle. And we had even a bigger shemozzle. When I got back to the unit, I just from memory, can't remember how long it was. We got woke up about two o'clock in the morning. Officers come around yelling, "Everybody out." And I said, "What's going on?" "Germany has invaded Russia." Russia, because they hate Stalin, will give in, they'll join Germany and come straight down through here.
- 22:00 And we had these little cane beds. I leaned across and said to me mate, "We'll be home for Christmas." "How do you work that out?" he said. I said, "Well, we couldn't even stop the Germans. But if the Germans and the Russians come down through here we'll all be sent home as POWs." But anyway, as history happens, they lasted longer than three days. They lasted long enough to cripple Germany. And then it was not long after that, the word come through,
- 22:30 my mother, because I had been missing in action and got back to me unit, she put in that I was under age and I had to be returned. All they did, because at that time I turned 19 on Crete. We got dive bombed for my birthday. That's an actual fact. But they said I had to go back but because I was so close to being 20. They only sent me to officer's training school at Duntroon[?]. So my job there was to be
- 23:00 a batman to three officers. So I stuck that. Through the day you did nothing, you just took them in tea and cleaned their boots and arranged their gear and the same thing of a night time. You almost had to go and tuck them in. But they were three terrific officers. And, yeah, that was that. And there was some Kiwis there and one loudmouth from the 2/25th Battalion. He was always telling me how they beat the
- 23:30 Foreign Legion and all that. I thought, "Oh yeah, good on you." But anyway, I remember we got a tin from home. They used to send tins wrapped in calico and sewn up and everything. Adora cream-wafer biscuits. Of course, I opened them up and everyone seen them and I thought, "These are not going to last." Anyway, the next morning when I took the tea to my three officers, they'd half a dozen of these Adora cream-wafer biscuits on each of their plates. I was king dick for a while after that.
- 24:00 And then one of their mates came up from the unit to say, "Tomorrow or the next day after we're heading up to Syria." And I thought, "Oh no, I'm not stopping here." So I just went that night and said to each of the officers, I want you to promise me you'll give me a bit of a go. They'd want to know why and I said,, "This is why. Now, I've got one of the Kiwis to come and look after you in the morning." I said, "And as soon as you report me,
- 24:30 straight away." I said, "I don't mind that," I said, "but I want to go back to my unit." So they agreed with that. So, instead of going straight to the unit I got the brainwave, "I go straight to the entrance of the training battalion." And I marched in there and the fellow said, "Where are you coming from?" I said, "Just come back from Crete." "Oh, good," he said. "The draft's going up in the morning. So," he said, "you'll be going up on that." So I went back, marched in and become part of the draft. Not a word said. And I don't know how they worked it but, officially from that
- 25:00 day to this, I'm still AWL from that unit. But it did work out real good later on. We went up to Syria and oh, we had some good times and everything there. We had a blizzard. A proper snow storm. I woke up one morning and put my hand up and just above me head was loaded with snow. And I had a photo, I don't know where it ended up. But they had the dunnies in a low row out in the open,
- 25:30 full of snow all over them. And the fellow had just opened the thing and was just sitting his bare backside on the snow. And, anyway, we had the usual training and we were digging the defensive position and it was supposed to be if they [the Germans] came down through that way. And then we heard afterwards it was only to make it look as though they were going to defend it. Like when the reconnaissance planes came over we only...what they call spit logs, little holes down in the ground,
- 26:00 but it was the outline of the trenches. And nothing like the first, these were little narrow trenches so that it was hard for the aeroplanes to get into. We did all that. We had Christmas there in Damascus. Had some good fun there. Yeah, some good fun.

What did you get up to in Damascus?

Oh, all sorts of things. They had the,

- 26:30 this terrific, the 'White House' they called it, that's where they had this terrific French nurse that was serving her time to get her dowry. We had some very nice times. And it didn't cost a lot either. I was learning to speak French a bit. And one of them kept calling me something like 'Ach Shoot' and I said to the Madam, and I said, because she was so old and I was so young, she always looked to me as a son, and she said "That that's a pimp." I said, "What's it mean?" She said, "Pimp. You know, pimp.
- 27:00 You get work for the prostitutes." I said, "No. No, I don't do that." She only laughed. But, yeah, we was living it up there. That was the first Christmas time that I was so drunk. There was three of us and we had a bottle of cognac and a bottle of green crème de menthe each and in the afternoon we drank a bottle of cognac and a bottle of crème de menthe. Oh my God. I honestly cannot remember how or why

we did it. And I can remember walking to the door and not another thing until

- 27:30 I was crawling up the steps into the hotel. And I was that sick, I got me mates and I got sick under his bed. And I thought, well, if they find out, he'll get the blame. And the next night two of us got together and the other, the mate who I sicked under his bed, he never came home. I said, "Now, Potsie," I've got a photo of the three of us after all this happened. I said, "No, Potsie's a real rough and tumble bloke. If the provos picked him up, there's going to be
- 28:00 a real fight." So we went down to the provo headquarters and marched in, saluted and done all the right things. I said, "Excuse me, I'm looking for my mate, Potts." "Oh," he said, "Dan Potts?" [?] I said, "Yeah." He said, "Out the back. Go and take him out." And I said, "Any trouble with him?" I said, "Well, that's strange." They said, "Trouble? He was swimming in the fountain." He said, "He couldn't even stand up." He said, "We just dragged him in, threw him on the floor and he's bein' wet, he's laid there on the floor. He'll be sober now."
- 28:30 So we got him and took him back. And that was just one part. And then another night, I stayed too long with me girl there and stayed out overnight. So I was AWL. And I went back and I said, "Oh, I met up with my...", they knew my cousin had been there with me. I said, "I met up with him and we had a few beers and got sliced and stayed behind." I didn't say I stopped with a girlfriend. And so I sort of got let off. I got a good chastisement. He told me
- 29:00 he thought I was a good soldier. Then we heard we were coming back home. So everyone's running round looking for souvenirs. So this old, there's a photo of him there, Harry Burr, I said, "What have you got we can take back?" He said, "Well I'm trying to get five quid for a Barretta automatic [pistol]." I said, "Oh, I'll have that." So he goes to his tent and he pulls it out. A Barretta, it's only a small automatic. Took the clip out of the handle and you sort of pull the lever and go like that, go like that and it comes apart. But he didn't
- 29:30 tell me there was one up the spout and it went bang, through my little finger, straight past his stomach and into his kit back. That's how I lost my little finger. And, boy, that, you know, because I said to him, "Mate, that was stupid." I said, "What if I'd have pointed it at you or looked down the barrel at me?" I said, "It'd kill you. In a tent," I said, "why have one up the spout?" Anyway, it was too late. So all we had to do then was to get rid of the magazine, because they confiscated that.
- 30:00 In the army you are not allowed to have a weapon that you are not issued with. And I had to go into the hospital in Damascus. That's where they took my finger off and complications set in there, got infected and I remember this dear old lady visiting. This visiting coming and asking, "Do I play the piano?" Because, you see, with this finger gone, I'd be crook playing the piano. I wasn't interested in the piano. And the doctor came around and he looked at me and he said, "Ah, here's the man who shot his finger off." And I jumped and said, "Hey!." And he said, "Stop. I know all about it," he said.
- 30:30 "Don't worry," I said, "The main thing, sir, I want to go back to my unit because they're going back home. I don't want to be left in this dump." He said, "That's alright," he said, "I'll give you the letter and everything." And I went out of the hospital in a sling and went back to me unit and headed off back home down the Suez [Canal] to get the boat back home.

Was there a worry, because it's a self inflicted wound...

It was a big worry, but because I'd marched out of the base,

- 31:00 to that officer training unit, like the lieutenant explained to me, when I said afterwards about a charge or that and he said, "No." And it's marked in there about that. Accidental discharge, I was not on duty. And there was no crime, punishment or nothing. He said they come to the conclusion, they did have a court martial but I didn't have to go to it, that if I had of wanted to stay out of the fight, then I would have stayed back there. And he said because of your record of service with
- 31:30 your unit, nothing's done. It's just admonished. And we went down, we stopped at 'Cairo 89' and one of me good mates, Harry, he won the MM [Military Medal] at Bardia, they were practising fire of this anti-tank missile. And when they went to put it in an ordinary rifle, with what they call a discharger cup on it, and you put it in it, press the trigger and it shoots it out. But when they picked it up, it fell on the ground,
- 32:00 see, so they picked up, put it in. When they pulled the trigger, it went off in the cup and it peeled it all back. Killed him instantly. He got showered all through the head with this shrapnel. And the other fellow, Rick Finess [?] was wounded by it. We had to go to that funeral. That was awful because he should not have, he was just a terrific boy, really terrific fellow. And then we went home. We come home on the Orantes.. And the rumour was we were going to go to
- 32:30 Java.

Before you were coming home, what did you know about Japan entering the war?

All we knew was that Japan was in and Australia was threatened. You didn't, well you couldn't get the full story for nothing. There was not too much in the paper. Well, you didn't get the paper like you do here. All we knew was, and some of the fellows had their girls write to them and accuse them of being squibs [cowards]. "Why are we over here fighting when the Japs look like landing in Australia?" And I

thought, "Well that would be par

- 33:00 for the course." But amongst a few of us, probably amongst a lot more than a few of us, was talk, "If they don't let us go back home, we're just going to down tools and march off." Because why should we be in a dump like that, where sort of nobody really likes you, and come back home to fight for your country.

You mentioned you'd joined up for a sense of adventure. How did the

- 33:30 **purpose of your soldiering change when Australia was threatened? Did that change your attitude?**

Oh, yes, my world. You've got to look after your own dunghill [place] sort of thing. That's entirely different. That's why a lot of these countries that are being attacked, Iraq, we've attacked them. They don't all agree with the enemy but they don't agree with us either. We've attacked them so therefore you fight better when you're fighting

- 34:00 for your own country. That's why they would never conquer Russia. Because that's their country. It's the same here. Like, I joke and say, "I'll take up arms if they come across Corribar Creek down there. Until then, no." But you would. No, you fight. And this country should fight the same as they're doing in Iraq. As a guerrilla, you never ever fight a full force. You wait until they're separated. And

- 34:30 that's where these idiot Yanks, they are a team of idiots, the Yanks. Blind Freddy [slang for 'needs no explanation'] could have seen what was going to happen there. The Iraqis, they knew they was too strong. So you don't fight. Like I wouldn't go and try to fight, in his top, Cassius Clay or any of them fellows. You wait until they're not looking and then whack them with a lump of wood. No, I've said that and that's my philosophy right through life. Is some big hoon wants to give me a hiding,

- 35:00 I'll lay on the ground like a mongrel's dog. But you want to watch his back the rest of his life. You don't confront people like that. And that was our idea. You're back here fighting for your own country. That's entirely different altogether. And we did amongst ourselves, we'd be sitting there having a beer in the tent, if they're not going to let us go back home, we'll tell them they can stick it and we'll walk off. You wouldn't do it really, of course.

- 35:30 They could have you shot if they want to. But then your own fellows are likely to say, "We're on their side too." But they did make up their mind. And anybody who was unfortunate enough to be left behind ended up at El Alamein. Because they transferred them straight into these other units. So that wasn't a place I would have liked to have been in. It would have been a little bit better than New Guinea, but not much.

It must have been pretty rough for your mates who were getting the letters from their girlfriends back home?

- 36:00 Yeah, but we used to say to them, "If that's what they thought, you don't want them as a girlfriend." I mean, how stupid could you be. You're over there, Japan wasn't even in the war then. And they would not have come in the war only for us and our American friends because they told them, you either do this or we'll declare sanctions on you. So the Japs said to themselves, we can't, they're not going to give us, they'll take it.

Can you tell me about coming home that first

- 36:30 **time between the Middle East and going up to New Guinea. How were you welcomed home?**

Well, we had a good welcome home. We stopped for a while, it must have been a couple of months in Ceylon [modern day Sri Lanka] but then we landed in Melbourne on the 4th of August. That must have been in 1942, wouldn't it? Yeah, 1942. You didn't get a huge welcome from heaps of people then because

- 37:00 well, they're not supposed to know you're coming and all this sort of thing. But it was good because we brought a lot of things like Ceylon tea. Tea was rationed here and, at that time, I was the Bren gunner. When we were on Ceylon I gave the whole stretcher bearer set-up away and I become 7th section, 15th platoon, C Company, Bren gunner. Because I used to liked the Bren gun. I could do all sorts of things, pull it to pieces

- 37:30 with my eyes shut and everything. But, anyway, I said, "I'll carry the gun off and we'll load the..." they had a box that was to be carried in, they filled it up with tea. So our section did that and we had all this tea between us. And we went from there to Seymour and we stopped, it was a few nights in Seymour and then we were given leave. You weren't allowed to take the Bren gun on leave with you. So then it had to go back into the box. But the tea was out of it by then.

- 38:00 And it went away. And you were given the rifle that had been yours in the beginning. And when you went home, you had your equipment. No bullets but you had all your gear so if something went wrong, you'd go straight back to your unit, get your bullets, and you were mobile again. Like when we got down to Albury station, it was cold as blazes in the middle of the night and we got on the train and we were on, they had POWs,

- 38:30 the Italian POWs in it. They were inside and there was no room for us inside so they had that little stand thing at the back. And we could have waited for the next train and I said, "No way in the wide world. We're going on this one." So we got on and one of the railway fellows brought on these tins like so, like that, full of hot water. Like feet warmers. Said, "Here digger, whack these." And the three of us sat on that platform and, oh, we went for miles and miles and miles. And we stopped at one of the stations, I don't know,
- 39:00 still don't know, can't remember the name of the station anyway, and there was the guard's baggage van behind us and he got out and said, "What are you fellow's doing?" I said, "Here." He said, "In the cold?" I said, "Yeah, but we're going home." He said, "Out of there, get into the van." So we got in, slept in the luggage van. Did that all the way to Sydney. And when we got off there was no-one to welcome us back there.
- 39:30 And we got off the station there and I went to get a cab to go out to La Perouse. And I asked the fellow. Oh, he whinged and grizzled about going all that way out there, you know. And I said, "Well, mate, I'm going home." I said, "Have you got the right to knock me back?" He said, "No." I said, "OK, mate I'll hop in." So then he was, "Look, if you like, put your gear in the back and sit in the front." So I sat in the front and on the way we got talking about tea and he wanted to buy some of the tea off me. I said, "No, mate, it's my family's".
- 40:00 And I'll always remember getting out of the cab and my mother comes running out. She singing out, "My son, my son." Yeah. But that was, it was only, I think we had a fortnight's leave and then we went into camp at Wallgrove. Marched through Sydney. Straight on to the train up to Greta and we were there a couple of days
- 40:30 and word come, "No leave tonight." No-one to leave the camp because in the morning we're going up to New Guinea. So we said amongst other things, "Bugger this." "No," I said, "I'm going home to see my family." Not going to do it like I done last time. So there must have been hundreds and hundreds got the same idea and they just marched off the camp, onto the train. And when we got to Strathfield, they must have told ahead and as we got
- 41:00 off the train, we all walked down to go on the other station and there was this heap of provos to catch us, see. And they took one look at, you know, two or three hundred men, all soldiers marching along, they just stepped to one side, hopped in and drove off. So I got home like that. I spent only the one night there. Next day back on the train back to the unit and straight on to the boat from there. It was one of the liberty ships, they call them. All welded. The John Steel [?] was the name of it.
- 41:30 And while we were on the boat, we all got fined for AWL. But he smiled when he, he said, I must do this and it was entered on the book. Now, of everybody who went there was only one person who never turned up. And we found out afterwards he was in an accident. But everybody else, all turned up.

Tape 6

- 00:37 **You were talking about all of your unit showed up again. Can you explain why that was?**
- Yeah, the unit is your family and you're very proud of your unit. Like, we're very proud of 2nd Infantry.
- 01:00 Our motto, 'Molly's the gun, second to none'. They've all got their own little things and that. But no, you always look after your mates. You don't let your mate down. And if you've got any sort of sense, you carry it right through to today. If you've got a mate and he's in trouble, no matter if he's in trouble because he's an idiot, you still stand by him. And that's, well, that's why I'm here now. She's my mate. Everyone says, "Oh, you should do
- 01:30 this and should do...." No. She's here. She'll peg out here. But, no, but that's it. Esprit d'corps, I suppose they call it. But you do, you look after your unit. You're very proud of your unit. I know there's one or two units in New Guinea disgraced themselves. But when you know the full story about it, it wasn't a disgrace at all. It was just a bungle. And the bungle always comes from higher up. The higher up, the bigger the bungle. Because when you're a little fellow down below, you can't cause a big
- 02:00 bungle. But no, that was it. I forget the fellow's name but someone said he had an accident, got hit with a car or something like that. He couldn't come back. But everybody else came back and everybody else had to come up before the boss, the CO on the boat, who read out the crime and all like this. They were doing them in threes. You could have said, "I demand to go on my own." but they did them in
- 02:30 batches. Get them through quick and that.

How battle weary do you think you were at the time?

Oh, at that time we weren't battle weary really. It had been a long time since we'd actually really been in action. While we was on...all we did was train on Ceylon, got used to a jungle. But the only action we saw was from the air. We saw planes shot down and we went out to one and they were all dead in it. But you do the right thing,

- 03:00 you get them out so they can be properly buried. Or whatever they do to the Japs and that. But no, we weren't, we were reasonably fit when we got there. The ship we was on was called the John Steel. I can remember I had my Bren gun on the side, tied up. I don't know why we did that because there was no way planes would come out to attack you that far. And there was a rotten smell of fuel because underneath where we were sleeping was the cans of aviation
- 03:30 fuel. If we were torpedoed we'd have all have been straight up. We'd of ended up with our wings quick. Yeah, but we had no instances at all getting to New Guinea. The only disheartening sight was going along the river out to sea, there was a boat on the side and they said that was a liberty ship that cracked. We thought, well this'll be handy. If ours cracked why did you go along. But no, but it made it,
- 04:00 it got there alright.

After experiences with the Germans and the Italians, what had you been told about the Japanese?

Well, virtually nothing. Virtually nothing. Heard a little bit, they were very good jungle fighters and only a few of the little tactics they had, all come from General Bennett.

- 04:30 Like, they made out that he shouldn't have run off but he done the right thing. He'd have done no good as a POW. But we didn't sort of know anything really and truly about them. Because, maybe up on top they did, but down us as the poor old foot sloggers you didn't hear too much about it. And when we landed at Moresby about, oh, I forget what they call the place now, and
- 05:00 stopped. We were there for a few days. I remember going through a rubber plantations. But all that bit, honestly, is a wee bit hazy. They used to spread these rumours, like we were told, they seen two Jap soldiers somewhere like that. And I said, "Gee, this seems strange, they walked a long way. Why are they down there?" But that was told to keep you on your toes. Like, when you went out on a patrol you would really look for somebody. There was no-one there. And they would say that,
- 05:30 you know. So that was the sort of training we had. And then when they said we were going up over the Owen Stanleys [mountain range]. We went to a place called Ower's Corner. We went by truck to there. That was just inland. And from there you were to go, march out. So what they did, in an infantry unit, the lowest unit down is the section, the rifle section. Supposed to be 11 men. We never got more
- 06:00 than five. So we were under-strength when we parked. Anyway, you get the corporal, lance corporal, Bren gunner and two others, or maybe three others sometimes. That was your section. Each section sort of had to be independent starting off because we weren't going to meet the Japs in the first of it. And everyone decided the rations, you had to take so many rounds of ammunition, so much food, I think it was try and carry in
- 06:30 three days' food. A groundsheet, half a blanket and distribute other little bits and pieces through the section. So I said, "Well, I'm the Bren gunner so if you like I'll carry the gun and I'll carry a couple of spare magazines." Because every fellow, all those pouches you see like that, they're for Bren magazines. So, in theory, the whole section idea is to keep the Bren going which is stupid up there. I tried to tell our officer
- 07:00 but he was going by the book. I can explain afterwards why I say that. So I said, "I'll carry the gun." So I carried the Bren gun from Ower's Corner right to Sanananda. And other fellows say, "Oh you're a bit of a fool carrying that." No, they're carrying the other gear. So we split it out that way. And it worked real good. We didn't live too bad. I mean we didn't live too good either but it wasn't too bad. But the worst part
- 07:30 there is the privation, the conditions. Every afternoon, round about three o'clock, it poured. Fell like mad. Come pitch dark, the rain would stop and you are soaked. And if you're unlucky enough to be in a real bad spot, you could lay down, you could be laying in real damp ground. So that's how you slept. Put your helmet under your head, that's your pillow. And you tried, you pick your mate, you hang a groundsheet up,
- 08:00 your groundsheet up, his underneath you, and you have half a blanket each and you sleep back to back to try to keep one another warm like that. And at all times, because I had the gun I had to try and make sure the gun was alright. Yeah, well that's how you went. When you got right up, like walking up, you still can't, at times I shake, you still can't believe it. You hear all the stories and everything. And it is not possible
- 08:30 to any person to think what it was like unless you were there. I'll defy anybody. Now I've got a real good friend, only a youngish fellow, Geoff. Oh he'd be in his 40s now I suppose. Works for Rotary International [community volunteer organisation]. He's in the fire brigade. He's been up there two or three times building these hospital things and that. And it's not that long ago that he was up there again. And he come to me and he said, "Fred, I have no idea how you did it." He said, "I'm fit and I reckon I ruined my legs
- 09:00 and I was only walking (UNCLEAR)." And I said, "Well you had to do it." You know, you move on. You can't go round saying, "I'm not going." So you go on and on and on. Up the, we didn't know they called it the 'Golden Stairs'. And people who've been there since, I've got letters and that from the fellow who runs the tours, things like that, did you notice this view, did you notice that? I saw nothing. All I could

see was a bloody bush in front of me. Because that's all...you're not looking at the scenery.

- 09:30 You're not a tourist. All you're thinking to yourself, as long as I'm getting there. At times we'd think, "Gee, I hope we get shot." Because you were that bugged. And you were tired, foot weary, hungry. But you just had to keep on going. And that's really caused more casualties than anything else. And then when you sort of got up towards Templeton's Crossing, you saw the wounded coming back. Oh, some dreadful sights. That's why I have things wrong with me and
- 10:00 I write them off. I don't worry about it. I had two knees done, not that long, only about three months ago. I got them both done and I came round. Fellow said, "You're mad!" like that. I said, "Mate, I've seen what happens. I've seen what pain can be to others. No, don't worry about it. I'll survive." But, you know, blokes dreadfully wounded. You have to...there's nothing up there. Like, the nearest thing we ever got was the Salvation Army. That's why
- 10:30 I always support the Salvos. The Salvation Army fellows making cups of tea and that. But they can only go so far up. And you knew that any fellow who was badly wounded, after Templeton's Crossing, just going to die. You just couldn't get back. Like, they had the stretcher carriers bringing them back and that but they couldn't go quick enough. They did save a lot of lives, the old Fuzzies [fuzzy wuzzies - indigenous New Guineans] . But, no, that's...and the true-blue
- 11:00 heroes of them fellows that were in New Guinea, were the young fellows who was the first to meet the Japs. Some of them had never fired a rifle. They were conscripted in, it was a disgrace to this country. Conscripted in, sent up there and the people they fought were Jap professionals. They'd come right through Malaya. I know that because I had, well, my son's got them now, things that were captured in Malaya, I got off dead Japs. So that's,
- 11:30 they were fighting them. And the thing that, what they did with no training whatsoever, had to fight a retreat, and it's a lot harder to fight a retreat because the enemy knows where you are so they can get around and do all these sort of things. And they're the ones who held them up long enough for us fellows to get there. They got as far as Ioribaiwa or Imita Ridge and I get lots of books and that on it.
- 12:00 And one of the Jap survivors said they could see the lights of Moresby and they run out of puff. No food, nothing. And that's stopped them as much as a 25-pounder. Really stopping them because he had a mountain gun, 75mm, it could out-weigh any of the guns we had. But this 25-pounder could out-range them. And it started to pound them at Imita Ridge and places like that. And when the fellows were retreating, bayoneting your
- 12:30 tins of bully beef and leaving it there. Well it'd start to go off so the Japs would eat it, poison them. Many a Jap, you'd see with a big swollen belly, dead. And, you know, that was demoralising. Well, not so demoralising but it made you feel real on-edge. Every part of the track you'd see this little cross: 2/14th or 2/16th. They didn't put who was there but you know he was one of those battalions. Shot and they just had to bury him where they were
- 13:00 because after a day the body'd start to putrefy. And if you went back after an action, you only had to smell and you knew where the dead were. And we sort of saw all that. But you sort of still weren't worried but it was only when we got to Templeton's Crossing, where the Japs decided to stop and fight because there was a good spot to pick to fight and that's where, first action we went and we got a thrashing.
- 13:30 Because our idea was you saw it and you just raced in, firing and doing all these sort of things. And they were sitting there in their little holes and they just, we lost officers. There were terrific officers there. There's an old fellow, he lives out here now, Lewis Callaghan, he come in once and wanted me to join the RSL [Returned and Services League] sub-branch here and I said to him, "No, I'm, I joined here anyway." But he said, "What was you in?" I said, "2/2nd Battalion." He said,
- 14:00 "Oh, we covered you at Templeton's Crossing. Oh," he said, "you were the fellows that were doing all the spraying." They had the heavy Vickers guns and they fired and the idea of that, you scared the enemy to keep them down a bit so we could get right on top of them. But a Vickers gun, it's a terrific gun, but it's no good in real jungle because you can't see where you're going. Our fellows run down spurs and ridges and they got knocked off left, right and centre.
- 14:30 **You mentioned that you weren't really happy carrying the Bren gun.**
- It wasn't so much carrying it as the way it was used. And I have been told later, that was amended. You went in a line, you knew the enemy was there, so you had to go round to get round them like that. So they form a line and go like that. Well, my idea was, the Bren should not be in that line.
- 15:00 But when the boss said, "You got to be in that line." well, you are. Because as soon as, the first shot usually kills somebody or wounds somebody, the first shot. You're down to ground. You don't know where they are. Well, the Bren gun is a pretty awkward sort of thing. Especially on the side of a hill because it's got tripod legs and you've got to balance them up and get that and as soon as you open up with that gun, you draw the crabs. Because that's...the enemy's always looks for the machine gun. So you'd fire a burst
- 15:30 and straight away you got them all at you. Well, it's not so much of being scared but that's wasted. So

my idea was, keep it back so that when you're going up, make sure you're in a good position where you can, well, get a good go with it. So as soon as someone gets caught, they're all pinned down. You get back a bit and you open up. And as soon as you open up, fellows get out. So that was my idea.

- 16:00 But it was sort of ruled out. But when we got up to Templeton's Crossing all I could hear was just, you couldn't see anybody. You just fired bursts like this and just hoped that what come back didn't get you. It was real confusion. It was wounded being carried back and you could hear them crying and screaming and everything like that. And if somebody was badly wounded it was, you couldn't go to them because that's
- 16:30 what they do. Try and shoot them in the stomach so that they're painful and then as fellows went to get to them, shoot them. And you end up losing a lot. So the idea is why waste three lives for one. So you just had to either wait til dark or something like that to get them out. And one of the little papers I left there, it was one of early (UNCLEAR) and in that they got the story of this Vickers platoon. Now Vickers platoon operates
- 17:00 with the Vickers gun so they're not real good to operate straight as the rifle section. But anyway one mob got pinned down right on the right-hand side on the right flank, on the side of the hill. And they sent a runner back to guide. So the only one left was a Vickers platoon. So he led the Vickers platoon up but he took the wrong track and he walked straight into an ambush. So they lost four dead in like that. Just plonk down. And the rest were pinned down. So it says
- 17:30 in that paper, part of sort an official history about the two Brens come up and the EY rifle [Lee Enfield 303 SMLE Mk III Extra Yoke] when they discharged. Well the two Brens were myself and Frank Bolton. And they had this huge log about that high, and they were speaking about that, and that's when they went around that and that's when they met the ambush. So I said to the corporal, sort of a friend of mine, he was our section leader I said, "If we get over that log, get down, open up with the gun, two guns, we'll open up with them
- 18:00 so they can get out." It was Alan Lacy [?], who was the sergeant of the Vickers platoon. So he said, "Yeah, good idea." So we got over the thing, we were about six or eight foot apart and Lieutenant Erwin, he was our boss of the platoon, he said to the bloke with the EY rifle, "Set that up." And an EY rifle is an ordinary 303 with a special binding around the butt of wire and they sat this cup on the end of it and fire a ballistite cartridge without a projectile in it. You put the hand
- 18:30 grenade in that, pull the pin out, sit it down in it and pull the trigger and it shoots it up. And that went up and heard the big boom, like that. And they said, "Let her go Fred." So we both opened up. I fired two mags and Frank Bolton fired two mags. So all the fellows jumped up and got out straight away. Like the fellows who were dead, we come back. While we were sitting around I said to Dick, "That's what I've been arguing about all along, mate." I said, "The Bren, even if we keep the whole platoon, three Brens
- 19:00 keep them back. So as soon as someone's down, get into it." I said, "You see what happened there? You imagine if there were three Brens." I said, "The Japs are not that stupid. They don't want to get killed." I mean if they get killed, stiff cheddar, but they're not that stupid. But anyway, no we got overruled. But I have heard that when they went on further to Shaggy Ridge and all them places, that's what they did. Kept the Brens back. You still draw the crabs. I mean the enemy's looking for you.
- 19:30 But you're usually in a bit of spot so you get a bit of a clear go.

That must have been a bit frustrating for you.

Oh, it is, but you accept it. You have to accept it. You can't go and argue with the boss. He's doing what he's trained in and that's their idea. In the end, him and I got on terrific in the long run. But

- 20:00 yeah, we went out on, oh what was that? At Eora Creek. It was a, that was a pretty savage spot. We were camped on the side of a ridge and they were ranging that with this 75mm gun. They'd fire it into the trees and when it goes off in the trees all the crap comes down. So you're in trouble there. And we went out on this, supposed to be a 100-man patrol but someone must have count wrong.
- 20:30 There was nowhere near 100 men in it. And there was one patrol had gone out and was lost. So they sent us out to try and find them. You could easily find them because you follow where they left their bits of rations behind. And we come out onto this sort of a track and the shooting started and you could see that the fellows were dead up each side of the track and things like that. So we went round to get round the side of them and our sergeant, he was a sergeant but he wasn't a platoon sergeant,
- 21:00 he's going up there and I'm standing next to him and he kept coughing. I'm saying to him, "Don't make a noise, don't make a noise." And the others are out like that. We come round this big tree, he went round that side, I went round this side and there was a bang and he got it. And as soon as he got shot, I sort of half turned and as I turned, woof, straight passed me. There was two of them there. One on one side of the tree, one on the other side of the tree. So I dropped straight down and every time I went to move the gun up like that, bang. I said to myself,
- 21:30 "Here we go, Fred." This is what I'm harping on all along. I could have got up and started shooting like mad but you're only going to get shot straight away. Because he could see me and I couldn't see him. So I got down a bit and thought, maybe he's up in the tree. And I blazed away at the top of the tree. But no

because he kept shooting back.

How did you get out of there?

I went to get help for Ron. Because I wasn't a stretcher bearer then.

- 22:00 But it wouldn't have made any difference. He was shot in the stomach, he was going to die. A spot like that. And the other two fellows going up that side, I don't know, all I could hear was grenades going off up there. So when I went back, there's the main body of people all pulling back. I said, "What's going on here?" I said, "Ron Cadell's round there shot." They said, "We've got orders to pull out." Because the Japs are coming round the topside. So, yeah, we pulled out anyway.
- 22:30 The next day, because I knew where Ron Cadell was, I was told to go back, to bury him really. When I got them, he only went and made Jack Clements. Him and I were the real buddies. He was there dead too. And what had happened, the only thing I could surmise, he's come back and he knew someone was there, like dead, and he's got up to see what he could see and the fellow's been sitting there. Killed in one shot. He just rolled back down the hill. Now,
- 23:00 we buried them both there. And when I say buried, all you do is put the tin hat over their face, took their wallet and part of their identity. And they were to go back. And Ron Cadell, I took his compass. It was no good to him any more. And we left them there and the padre and the intelligence section fellow were supposed to mark the graves. Well them two fellows are still there. Still there. Because
- 23:30 when Jeff went up to Ashen to go the cemetery and he asked if he could take a photo of their graves and he took a photo, I've got it there, on the wall and it says there's these fellows are dead but they don't know where they are. I said, "I know where they are." And I got in touch with this Clive Baker, he does the treks from up there back, and I've got a letter from him. The last part he asks me, "How fit are you?" Meaning if I could go up and walk back there but, no,
- 24:00 I couldn't. No. Not now. And Jeff has been up to Sanananda, well, he tried to get to Sanananda to find out where the graves and that, had they all been shifted and things like that. Yet the Japs, some of their fellows have gone to get their dead and take them home. But not our mob. Mongrels I call them, but anyway. You look at the Americans. Any one of theirs dead,
- 24:30 stiff, half a dozen fellows carrying him off with the flag and all. Not our blokes. Dig a hole and throw him in it there.

When you went back the next day, why would you have thought it was safe to go back?

Well, we were told that another, might have been a 2nd or 3rd battalion had sent a fight (UNCLEAR) and chased them back out.

- 25:00 See, when you're out on a patrol like that, you've got three days' rations but you're there for six days. So that's probably some of the reasons they told us to pull back. But no-one had been eating for a couple of days so you had...plus nobody, but nobody realised what it was like. Only that mongrel [General Douglas] MacArthur, reckoned that we weren't getting killed enough, that we weren't fighting hard enough. That's true. Because we weren't getting enough casualties
- 25:30 we weren't fighting hard enough. And he was going to bomb the gap. The gap was miles and miles and miles wide. And it's only a little narrow track in the bottom. You couldn't, like they done at Vietnam, millions of tons of bombs. No. They got no idea because him and [General Thomas] Blamey only in New Guinea a few minutes. And they knew all about how to flight and all. Well, they'd never been there. But that, I went back with the padre and the I-section fellow and brought the other guns and bits
- 26:00 and pieces back with us. But, yeah, but that's, you know, and I think today they talk about war and all that and the war fellows there. And what did it do? Nothing. Not one thing. Didn't serve. I mean they're our best trading partner now. And that's how it should be too. And I would love, like Jeff said, one day, he's actually wrote a book, not on so much on New Guinea but all about his experience
- 26:30 building things. And he was going to write one and see if somebody would sponsor to go up there, like you'd have to go so far by helicopter. And land it down, and I've got the maps, this fellow said, "To get the rough idea." He's got a metal detector. If you went with that would they be able to find anything metal? They were buried with everything on them but their rifle. The bayonet and the scabbard and the belts and that on. They'd be well and truly disintegrated.
- 27:00 Tin hat, everything. So, unless animals have got in and disturbed it. But one of the war graves fellows told me that all they do is, a main bone and a skull, that's all that's buried in the cemetery. I don't know how true that is but that's what I was told.

And why do you think is it so important to you to have retrieved

- 27:30 **those dead men?**

Your mates. You don't like to leave your mates there. They deserve better than that. Just to be left. I know you can't, this is the, I know I can't do a thing about it. But I still think it's wrong. I've actually wrote to [The Department of] Veterans' Affairs, like when you're, this review board for pension and all this sort of thing. And I say, that still plays on my mind.

- 28:00 Now, if I was a Vietnam vet, counselling, post-traumatic stress syndrome. TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated] pension. Not a problem. I don't begrudge them. No way do I begrudge them. But why was that different to us. I've always said, and I've got some good friends here, Vietnam vets. They should not have had that march they had to welcome them home. They should have come back home the same as we did. Welcomed back as heroes. But they were sent there.
- 28:30 They were in the army. Once you're sent there, what it is, you, we know, you go where you're sent, you've got no option. So they were sent there, that's it. They were good blokes, bring them back. I feel sorry for these fellows who went to Iraq and all that. If they cop some hideous disease in years to come they'll be told, "No." They'll fight them for that. The government will fight them over the pension. That's the sort of people they are.
- 29:00 But this Clive Baker and his son they went. But it's a bit hard after 50, 60 years. They had a book launch down there and I went out, Dorothy and I both went to Newcastle. And they stopped in the same motel. And we stopped there until about two o'clock in the morning going over and talking about all these sort of things. And I kept saying, in the back of my mind I could go straight to it. But...
- 29:30 **I imagine it must have been terribly difficult for you who is obviously so loyal to your unit and to your mates to have to bury...**
- Yes, like, he was special. Two nights before that we were laying, waiting our turn to get woke up to go on guard. He used to sell newspapers and so did I. And we were going to start at the Quay [Circular Quay, Sydney] and drink at every pub until we couldn't go any further. And two nights later he
- 30:00 was dead. Jack Clements. And on the thing they've got him down as lance corporal but to my knowledge he was not a lance corporal at all. But that don't matter. His regimental number was the same. Yeah. A really nice fellow. But Ron Cadell, he was a nice bloke but he was, he should have really been too old to have been there. He was quartermaster, sergeant. And he should not have been in the
- 30:30 infantry line like that. Should not have. But there was nobody else there. There was one, two, three, four, five of us. Yeah, there was five including the lieutenant. So actually there was four of the section and the platoon commander in that skirmish line to go up. Yet the mob on the other side were withdrawing. So that's, yeah, they're the sort of things that happened. See that war was a private war. You know, in the open you're all out
- 31:00 and at one thing. But there you had a rough idea where he was so you was trying to get round to him and he knew where you were and he was trying to get to you. So you usually pick a tree, well there's that many trees you couldn't do anything else, and you dig a hole about that round and about that deep and put a stick across. And they sit in that and put their rifle like that and they'd cover one another. So this fellow here didn't have to move his rifle over like that. Because the movement, you'd see it. Because that's what you're looking for, movement.
- 31:30 Everything is so still, you see a bit of movement, that's a human. That's why, people who smoke, you wanted nothing to do with them. Although our section nobody smoked because if you're out in virgin jungle and you smell cigarette smoke, you know it's not the natives. In the rifle section, no, you did not smoke. But that's the sad part.
- 32:00 I've got copies of a letter here. Once, when they had the [1980 Moscow] Olympic Games, they wanted to boycott the Olympics because they were in Russia, over Afghanistan. And this lady doctor somewhere on the North Shore [Sydney], wrote in, shouldn't do it, think of all the graves on the Kokoda Track and all that. So I wrote back, yeah, I helped bury some of them graves. I said, but, now after it's all over, once this Olympics is finished, we'll all be buddies again and the only one that'll lose out, the same as always lose out,
- 32:30 the real good young people. And you look at some of our athletes. They didn't go because they were paid not to go and that. Look at it now. Mates. We all go. But just because Russia was into Afghanistan. No, I get real lost. In the end, they tell me that's politics, keep out of it.
- How did you manage to pick yourself up**
- 33:00 **after burying your mates?**
- You have to. You just must. You can't, you know, life goes on. Life's for the living. Like the worst thing you can do is lose your spouse. I can tell you for sure, I know that. But after a while you've got to think to yourself. She's gone, I done the best for her while she was here, I gave her the best life I could and she did. And she did, she returned it, but she's gone.
- 33:30 You know, oh, it was over 12 months I think when Dorothy and I got married and some of the kids thought, "Oh, bit quick." I said, "Why?" I said, "We're both in our 70s. How long have I got to wait. If I wait til I'm 80, too late then?" And now they all agree. They think the world of Dorothy. Specially now she's not real good. But, yes, but it's, you know, waste of life. And that's
- 34:00 and that was Eora Creek and then we got to Oivi Ridge and we lost, oh dear, we lost some fellows at Oivi Ridge too. And they were going to call in air support, American squadron. And our CO said, "But the moment they're going to come I want them to stop til I can evacuate all my men." And they said, "Why is that?" He said, "We're on the side of the ridge." I mean you've only got to see what they do

today

- 34:30 with all their latest, the loaded bombs and that, they still bomb themselves. So that didn't come to anything. But all we were doing really at Oivi Ridge was putting pressure on them. And then one night they just pulled out. Retreated. And they had little tins and they had a candle in the back of the tin so they could see and then out. And we thought there was only a few handfuls. But there was hundreds of them there. You could see afterwards.
- 35:00 And they had these, oh, I don't know, three 'woodpeckers'. And woodpeckers are a very heavy calibre machine gun. And they call it woodpecker because they go choom, choom, choom. And it hits leaves and that, it would crack in your ear and the chips would fly off the trees. And if you want to get a thrill, hang on to a tree and get someone to fire a 303 into it. And you think to yourself, now that's what it does to the tree, what does it do to you? Tell you what,
- 35:30 it's frightening. After a while you don't worry because they're that high up. If you feel the little chips of wood, then you worry. But when you don't, they're firing, they don't know where you are they're just firing over the top. And at one stage I can remember, I don't talk, I tell you honest, I haven't said this to anyone else before but because you're doing this. On the side of the Ridge at Oivi and the machine gun burst comes round and hits the
- 36:00 'Doc' Cross, we called him Doc, and killed him. And I said, "I can see that spot." So I wriggled the gun round and it's on the side, and I'm hanging on like this and holding like that, fired a burst and all of a sudden whack and I just yelled, "I'm shot, I'm shot." It was only the bullets; the spent cases coming out the bottom hit me on the hand. Yeah. And then they, we huddled down on the bottom and someone
- 36:30 said "There's someone coming back through the trees." And the boss said to me, "Hop up Fred and have a look." I don't know why he always picked me. But anyway I got up and I said, "Alright." I stand up and he's coming back, crawling down the hill. He was a corporal. And then we used to call it a 'H shoot' [?]. You start off real early in the morning and blaze, get into a spot and blaze away. And they all fire back. If they don't fire back, you know they've gone. So then you can take the risk of sneaking up to make sure
- 37:00 they're gone. And this time this, we knew where the, roughly where the gun was, so Frank Gotch [?], he was a corporal. Not my corporal but he was a corporal. And he was going to get a compass, take a bearing on it, mark it on the ground and that night, on that bearing because you've turned over and it's got the luminous light, and go up and try and throw a grenade in. We stood up and we let go and the next minute he come back, holy ghost they sure fired back. First bullet
- 37:30 took his eye out. That was him. Little Billy Matthews [?], he got hit in the ankle and blew his ankle to pieces, sort of thing. And the (UNCLEAR) got shot in the side of the calf of the leg. So I'm helping them back. Gotcha [?] couldn't see properly. Just got them back out of the thing and the boss said to me, "Where's all the guns?" I said, "They're still up there, I just got these back." He said, "Well, go and..." I said, "Yeah, I'll go and get them." I had to go up and pick up the Bren gun, the Tommy gun, a rifle and one of
- 38:00 the other fellows had dropped his revolved, you know. And I'm, I thought, "Oh well." But it was very exciting, I'll tell you.

It sounds more dangerous than exciting.

No, but as I say, that's a part of the job. You do, you have to accept that as part of the job. Now, at this Oivi Ridge they thought, now, we're copping a hiding here so we'll go out

- 38:30 and go round them. So I don't know if you know much about compass reading and all that. But they give you a compass bearing, you start from here and they say 1000 yards. So you pace 1000 yards that way on that bearing. A thousand paces on that bearing, 1000 on that bearing. Theoretically that brings you behind him. So then you set up an ambush so when he starts to come back, you start knocking him off. Yeah, that's a real good idea. So we gets out that way and that way. The only problem was the track went up a bit ahead and then made a right-hand turn.
- 39:00 So when we come up this way, we're going up alongside them. We're on this ridge and they're on that ridge. And all of a sudden you're near them. They must have suddenly seen us and they start opening up and we're on the side like this. The only one that got hit was Amos Brian [?]. He got hit on the bum. We used to say to him, well, you've got a big bum anyway. Wounded enough to go back out. We were lucky, we snuck round like mongrel dogs. And that was a big problem because there was no-one knew where the track went.
- 39:30 Anything like that. But eventually they, I think one team made them leave there because it was further, I think it was the first battalion that burst in on them and they killed hundreds of them at some place. And that meant that this mob here either had to go back or get cut off. So they went further back. We just followed on. By that time we were getting into the flat. And all that was there was the kunai grass and it was stinking hot.
- 40:00 That's where all the mosquitoes were. There was no mosquitos up on the top. We only struck mozzies when we got out, there was a road running through Kokoda down to Sanananda. And they had a corduroy and the corduroy road was like logs laid along side one another. And that sort of helped them

to get through the bog. So we got out of there marching. And there was only twice on that section that I was the forward scout. And I thought to myself, "This is an honour, I'm leading the Australian Army."

- 40:30 But you hear the glamour things, oh I was forward scout. Well, virtually every member of the infantry at one time was forward scout. Because you took your turn. And the forward scout was out enough in front, second scout was behind him and then the corporal and the Bren gunner. So that, in theory, as soon as he got spotted, usually got spotted when he got shot, everyone else would dive off the track to either side.
- 41:00 And I struck nothing on my two stints. And the other time I was second scout and Paddy McNamara from Barmenen [? Balmain?], he was a hero in Barmenen [?] and he was a good bloke, old Paddy. He went out of sight around the kunai bush and all of a sudden there's these footsteps coming flat-out back. I thought, "Oh, what's going on here." So I get off the track, every one of us off the track and Paddy come back full-out puffing and blowing. I said, "What happened?" What had happened, he'd gone around the bend and this native had stepped out ahead
- 41:30 of him, full war dress, carrying his spears and all. He took one look at Paddy and went that way. Paddy took one look at him and ran back this way. Everyone thought it was a great joke. We struck some of the blokes...

Tape 7

- 00:32 **Your time up on Kokoda, having come from the Middle East, what was the hardest thing about the war in the jungle to get used to?**
- Conditions is the first thing. Because you're
- 01:00 either walking up or walking down. See, most of New Guinea...in Australia you've got ridges go for miles and miles. They're not usually going up or down. And, unless you've seen this jungle you couldn't believe it. It's so impenetrable. The track is not very wide. Some parts it's, yeah, well, maybe two people could walk alongside. Because of the wet, you're walking through bog lots of the times. Because the track gets used more and more times, naturally it's going
- 01:30 to be more boggy. And well the actual conditions. Food, like, well, you've got bully beef and biscuits but that is all. The 'Bully Beef Bombers' [aircraft, typically DC3/C47 Dakotas, that dropped food to troops in the jungle; more popularly called 'Biscuit Bombers'], yeah, well you couldn't have lived without them. But a lot of the stuff they dropped was broken or knocked up and things like that. And I remember some of the funny things...we used to get dried apricots,
- 02:00 Lactogen [baby milk formula], you know, the old Lactogen the mothers used for food. And that was terrific. Lactogen. The tea, we used to make a cup of tea and then keep the leaves. I think by the time they got home they were almost white. But, no, the conditions, well the rain...but one, after we got, they issued us with what they called anti-gas capes. They were meant if you were involved in war gas
- 02:30 they were, well they weren't plastic but that was the idea. They looked like plastic. They smelt of this funny smell and they were camouflage colours. You put them on and then you put your webbing gear over that. And that, to a certain extent, kept you dry. The only trouble, because you're up and down hills in the heat, they got awful hot. But then it was better to get hot from your sweat than the rain. And it helped for laying on the ground too.
- 03:00 Like, if you were ambushed just on grass, where you laid, that's where you slept. And it was no good moving around because you couldn't see. And the conditions, privations, were as bad as anything else. And I'm sure, many felt the same as me often said to yourself, "Well, I'm that buggered, I might as well get shot". You know, it was, that was part of it. And you always had that fear, you couldn't see
- 03:30 them but they could see you. If it was reversed it wouldn't have been so bad because they'd have had to look for you. But I can always remember our first sort of bit where we stopped, not at Tepaluka [?], but near there, we dug our trenches and we threw the dirt straight over the top. And one of the fellows from the brigade, he'd been told by somebody from General Bennett's staff, "Forget all about that. As soon as the enemy come along and sees all that dirt spread out...
- 04:00 it's not natural." See, that's why the Japs, when they dug this little hole, they take the dirt away and you couldn't see it. And the very first time I ever saw, it was alongside the track. What they'd done was cleaned the ground clear under the bush, got in it, pulled the bush over themselves. And you wouldn't see them at all until they fired and then it's too late. And that's, there was all that at the back of your mind.
- 04:30 Once you were back in, like they had the lead battalion. One battalion would lead. And then after a while they would stop and the next battalion would go through. And you used to always hope that it wasn't you that got shot first. The other battalion didn't matter. But, yes, that's really the hardest part was the actual conditions apart from the fighting. And the Bully Bombers, they were the old Dakotas,

- 05:00 they used to always come down the one way, right across the Jap lines and drop the food. Some of it would drop short and the Japs would get it. We'd get the rest and I asked an old mate of mine, he was a squadron leader up in New Guinea with these...not the Hercules, the other one [DeHavilland Caribou]. But anyway, he said, "You should know about that because why they did that, if they were flying uphill
- 05:30 and something went wrong, they're done. But when they're flying downhill, something goes wrong, they've got a shot of getting out. So that's why." Because I was wondering why they flew across the Japanese line. And there was rumours, I didn't hear them but someone told me back home here, that the Yanks wouldn't fly the Bully Bombers. They made the Australians do it. And I thought, well, that's absolute garbage because I can remember this one plane in particular. Right on the nose, he was very, very low down.
- 06:00 Eager Beaver. It was a painting of a beaver and it was called Eager Beaver. And when he come over us and moved away you could hear the undercarriage or some part hit all the trees. And I thought, "Well he was game because if he ever hits them he's finished". But, no, no, they were dropping it out.

Can I stop for one second. From Kokoda you mentioned that you trekked across to...

- 06:30 We didn't, our battalion didn't get into Kokoda at all. We turned off at Alola, or Elissa [?]. Alola I think they called it. We made a right-hand turn. We went through. But they'd actually got up to Kokoda and one thing I don't think you hear a lot about; we had the 3-inch trench mortar. Now they used to pop the mortar bombs down by
- 07:00 parachute. Well, they were killers because when they dropped, when they hit the ground it gets a set back. A shot like that gives them a 'set back' so they're armed. So when it goes down the mortar next time, goes off in the mortar. Killed more than one mortar crew like that. I can remember one fellow screaming his head off looking for his leg. Didn't have any legs. And they decided then...oh I hope that they've done away with them completely, that the only mortar rounds to use were the ones that was brought in. They
- 07:30 land at Kokoda and put them in that way. Because that was the only sort of weapon that we could use. It wasn't as long a range as theirs but still, that was it. But that, our own mortar killed a few people like that. And it was only when we got out on the flat, amongst the kunai grass and that, that you could sort of, yeah, well you could see
- 08:00 where you were going and everything like that. But at that stage we stopped and I think it was the first battalion went through us. And we were following up. That's where I got my souvenirs. There was a couple of dead Japs on the side of the track. So I raided their pack. I got a fountain pen. I gave it all to my eldest son, he's got them. And then they decided, the brilliant idea they would cut the track behind the Japs and surround him and squeeze him in, finish him off.
- 08:30 So C and D Company, I was in C Company, we went round to the right and A and B Company went round to the left to get in behind him. So we goes away out and because had no maps, didn't know what was there and we ended going through a swamp. And I'm walking through it up to here, up to the waist, through mud. And when you wanted a rest you hung on to the tree. And we went right round and we thought we'd come to this track so we said, "Oh, this looks like
- 09:00 we're round behind them now". And away off you could hear the Japanese talking. So we sort of snuck around a bit further and the boss said to me, I don't know why he always give me these jobs, "Just creep up there a bit and see what you can see". So I wriggled myself up and looks down and there was three of them sitting around a fire. Well it was something like a fire, what they were doing. And they were talking away to one another and there was this big hut. And they were
- 09:30 near it. So I wriggled back and I said, "Now, if I go up there with a gun and ready, so as soon as you go across the creek," I said, "there's a log across there, we can see the log". I said, "You can go across there and I'll open up with that". And he said, "No, no, you'll come across with us. Good. Right." So that was OK. So everything got ready. So, zoom. Charges across. Of course the three Japs that was there, they took off. I could fire one burst from the hip. I don't think I hit anybody but one burst from the hip.
- 10:00 So they got away. My idea is I would have got the three of them, one hit. Even though it would have alerted everybody else but at least we would have got three. And they got going and it was on. There was shots and there were grenades going left, right and centre. And we lost 13 people in the first five minutes. And the old Sergeant Major, Warrant Officer Henry 'Harry' Honeywell, well he was a man and a half. He was in the First World War and he walked right
- 10:30 across New Guinea with us. He was, well I modelled myself on him. I like to think I've ended up like an old bloke like him. But anyway, he come down and he said, "How are they going?" And I said, "Well Dusty's been shot". He was the stretcher bearer. He said, "Give that gun to somebody else and you look after them". So I looked round at the fellow who was our acting corporal and I said, "You can have this. Harry said I've got to look after..." He said, "Right oh," and he grabbed it. So I went back and I had the job then, for the rest of the war as far as I was concerned, back
- 11:00 as a stretcher bearer. Looking after them and, boy, there were some bad ones. So bad. Fellows blinded.

What was it about Harry that you looked up to?

Well, he was a corporal in the beginning. Corporal Harry Honeywell. He was in the marines in the First World War and he was a strong, for an old fellow,

- 11:30 I don't know if you've ever seen a 303 rifle? But if you grab that behind the front sight, like that, and lift it up like that, that's strong. I couldn't. I wouldn't be able to do it with two hands. Him and our corporal, section leader, could do that. And anybody that got a bit smart and thought they were going to take him on, like he'd never come to fight anybody but he put them in their place quick smart. He'd grab a hold of them. And I heard him once, we were on parade and this officer started walking
- 12:00 across the parade ground. He said, "Mr. Brown, do not walk across my parade ground, please". And he said, "Oh sorry," and backed away. No, he was a soldier and a half. Harry Honeywell. And about five minutes after that, he was dead. Like I was trying to get the wounded into this shed, drag them in and everything like that. And you've got to keep your head down because there's shots left, right and centre. Because that was the
- 12:30 last part of Sanananda to be taken. They used tanks to get into there, it was so heavily defended. And we had actually captured their main store line. And I was getting them in there and I went round the front to see if there was room in the front and there was Harry sitting back laughing like that. I said, "What are you doing there Harry?" And he was dead. Mouth laughing and eyes wide open but dead. He was shot straight through the heart. So I'd say, and I was a fairly tall fellow, he was standing up near the track and
- 13:00 someone's sniped him and got him. Shot him. And [Captain Athelston] Bosgard, he was the captain of C Company. He come in and seen Harry and closed his eyes and he cried. I was standing there and he cried. I just patted him on the back. I said, "It's alright mate". He was a gentleman and he was killed there and so was Jack Blamey. He was killed there too. But that was a very, very nasty place. And because
- 13:30 they knew I had been a stretcher bearer and the boss guy come to me and he said, "From now on you're in charge of the medical side here". He said, "You tell us what you want, how you want it or anything like that". He said, "Now there's a stretcher bearer carrier pack coming here tonight". He said, "You pick out six fellows that'll be alright and send them back". I said,
- 14:00 "We've got a couple of seriously wounded fellows here". And he said, "No, you pick the ones who are going to be alright to go back". I said, "I just choose who's going to live and who's going to die?" He said, "Fred, that's your job". You know. And I thought, "Here am I, 20 years old and that's my job". Fellows told me once here, not here, when we were living down at Maroota [NSW], you don't know what responsibility is. I thought, "Mate, you don't know anything about responsibility". And when you've got the responsibility to say who will live and who will die,
- 14:30 that's responsibility. But, like everything else, you have to do it. So they come up, I picked this out, I don't know as I should mention names. But there was a Mark Strong, sergeant but he ended up being a lieutenant. And I got him in and got him sort of settled in this hut, laying down and everything. And he kept saying, "Freddy, I want a sip of water". So I'd give him a sip and I had a look, he'd been shot through here. And I said,
- 15:00 "You're not having...you've got a stomach wound, mate. I'll let you have a sip." So he had a sip and that and, even though he was a lieutenant, he'd call me Freddy. So I'd give him a sip. Anyway, I dozed off and when I woke up the next morning he was dead. You couldn't have got a nicer fellow and it's only in the last couple of months through another person, I've managed to get a message to this fellow's niece. They often wonder what happened to him. And I said, "Well, you can tell them from me,
- 15:30 this is gospel, he died peacefully in his sleep". And he did. No pain, nothing. All he wanted was a sip of water. Anyway, when I was wounded and got brought out, I came out through the RAP and I happened to say to the doctor what had happened. And I said, "Mark, now all he wanted was a sip of water, why was that?" He said that the bullet had nicked his aorta and that's gone down your throat and because your blood is salty, it's made him very thirsty. I said, "All I kept giving him were sips of water". He said, "Well, that's all you could do."
- 16:00 I said, "Now if I could have got him back here, he'd have been alive?" And he said, "Most likely". And I thought, "Now here you go, see". If I'd have said, "Right oh, Mark can go back". But they said, "No," only walking wounded. But yeah.

As such a young man, how did you...

Well, I'll be honest. That shattered me to a certain extent. But you have to, you've got to carry on. But then later in life it started to come back.

- 16:30 And that's what really p'd [pissed] me off with the higher ups. But in the finish it was my job. If somebody was badly wounded and brought back, was going to die, I was the one who said, "That fellow's dead". I said, "But that's the doctor's job to pronounce somebody dead". They said, "Not in the jungle it's not". And I can remember, we dug one hole and I said, "Well, that fellow's not going to last because he had the death rattles already." So they dug the hole. As soon as he died, straight down the hole.

- 17:00 And in that spot the river sort of was a wide creek, come round like that and it was tidal because you dug your hole and you'd have it that deep, it'd be dry. High tide come in, you were sitting up to your waist in water. No, fellows had to put up with that week after week, you know, and they talk about, oh, people talk about privation. And in this hut, why the Japs wanted it and they tried and tried to get back into it,
- 17:30 cos it had quite a lot of rice and barrels of some real terrible stuff. My brother did tell me it was something to do with what they eat. You couldn't eat it but they had a full case and that deep full of condoms. So they were going to have a good time when they got to Sydney. And there was a box of invasion money. Money printed in Japan for use here. So that was why it was so heavily defended. Why they wanted it. And on the second, yeah, it was the next night.
- 18:00 That night, all night we copped it. The Japs would sneak up and word went round to all, say nothing. Like, if you knew they're there don't even say, if they fire at you, don't fire back. Because as soon as you fire back, if you want to do something, throw a grenade. And they'd sneak up where they thought and they were throwing hand grenades in. And we got quite a lot wounded coming back like that. And we got so weakened with losing them that they sent an American company up to us. And the poor old Yanks, they come through the bush and their helmets looked just like the Japs.
- 18:30 And a few of them got shot by our fellows until they suddenly woke up. When they snuck in behind us, we had this log to walk across and I said to them, "You know, you walk across there." And he said, "No, no, no." He said, "Like sitting ducks." So we had to crawl through the water. So I said, "Well, that's bad news". Because there was that real fine sand in the water. And all it done, like we got caught ourselves, I only got it in me boots. But they had it all in
- 19:00 their clothes and they had to strip right off and shake it out because it itched on them. But that was it. But we sort of bedded really good in with them and they had their rations and they'd give us two of their rations for one of ours. They had chocolate and lollies. Not chocolate. Lollies and cold-water coffee, biscuits. And we had bully beef and biscuits, which is much better than theirs. They were really, really nice. Terrific fellows.
- 19:30 I'd say probably we were the first unit to actually fight alongside them. They were in amongst our...you know, I'd be here, a Yank there and a Yank there and an Aussie there, like that. And they had a machine gun. It was a pistol grip on a tripod pointing down the track. And these two fellows sitting there so I crawls over along side and says, "How're you going?" "Alright," he said, "What are you going to do," I said, "When they come along the track?" Like, we thought they were going to come en masse, straight up the track, we'd start firing on them. "What are you going to do, yell out bang, bang, bang?"
- 20:00 He said, "Why?" I said, "Where are your belts?" No ammunition. It was on the ground. They were that excited, they forgot to put it through. But I got the job of cleaning my gun again, too. It got all, I don't know how it had come to get water in it, but I pulled it to bits and cleaned it up for them. But Lieutenant Urwin, he said, "You're still the stretcher bearer.
- 20:30 Don't forget that."

What did you think about being made a stretcher bearer again?

Oh, I accepted it. I realised I was doing more good that way. There was nobody else there to do it. I was the only one. But, yeah, it's much better just sitting there firing shells sometimes. But I can't think exactly how I got this, I think they sent it up, morphine tablets. Two little tablets, put under their tongue. And the Yanks had syrettes of morphine.

- 21:00 Well, they gave me a heap of those. And I was actually looking after the Americans, our wounded and their wounded, and I had to look after some of their fellows who were dead. Say, "Yeah, they're dead." And I got these, they were like a little syrette about that long and you jabbed it in through clothes and all and squeezed it. And usually in their backside. But the other ones you just put two tablets under their tongue. And I don't think I was the only one to do it but anyone who was really badly shot in the
- 21:30 stomach, four and a glass of water. They just dropped to sleep and they don't wake up. And that's not a nice thing but it's much better for them. Because a stomach wound is a most agonising...like, if they've been hit and you can't get to them, all they do is scream til they die. And that don't help the people around them either. No, don't help anybody. But yeah, but that was sort of to me a coming of age
- 22:00 in a sense. That's why it got the MID [Mentioned in Despatches] for that.

I was going to ask a bit about that. But just with giving the overdose of morphine, it's pretty hard decision to have to make.

It is but, as I say, I don't speak lightly or go around telling everybody. But I probably wasn't the only one that did it. Because, that's why I said today, like those fellows shot in the stomach today, straight in a helicopter, back. No problem at all. No problem at all.

- 22:30 And because you're in a confined area too, like the Japs know where you are. The only good thing, their mortar got knocked out real quick so they couldn't get in. The mortar that hit them was only a 2-inch one. A little thing about that round and that big. It went off the edge of the bit and come down, and straight down my leg here. The flash and that blinds you, and the blast deafens you temporarily. And it

was an American sergeant that dragged me out.

- 23:00 He was saying, "Are you alright Fred? Are you alright Fred?" I said, "Can't see. Can't see." I'm panicking. "Can't see." Like they'd run a land line through then and they sent another stretcher bearer up so I could go out.

In that time when you are deciding who lives and who's too bad,

- 23:30 **the number of wounded and the number of dead, is there a point where you become quite overwhelmed by the suffering?**

No, not overwhelmed. You have to do it and you accept that. It's just like, I've explained to my doctor and he said, "Fred, erase it from your mind." He said, "If I was there, I'd have to do the same thing." He said, "You're doing what you're told to do

- 24:00 and that's it." But, yeah, but it does, it's not real good. Especially when all them fellows are all battle hard and they walked all across, all that way, battle hardened, terrific fellows. And one fellow, Shorty Husband [?] we only found after, he had about seven kids. And they had the whole (UNCLEAR) and all waiting for him. When I just checked him out,

- 24:30 I said, "Yeah, he's gone." No prayers, nothing. Straight down the hole. But that's why Jeff Bell, I asked him, when he went to Oro Bay. I said, "If you can just get to Sanananada, just go to, it might still be there this hut, on a track. It was in a banana plantation." And the banana plantations are chopped to ribbons, machine-gun fire. And he tried to get here but apparently they have sort of land feuds there and

- 25:00 his guide and the fellow who owned that bit of land in that area were going to get into it by machetes. So Jeff said, "Come on out. I don't want to worry." And poor Jeff got malaria out of it too. I ended up with malaria too. So did 99 per cent of all of us. And there was some ridiculous bumf [rubbish] come from high up. "We're issuing you with mosquito nets. If anybody gets malaria now, it'll be an offence because you've got to put the..."

- 25:30 And I said to Erwin, the boss, I said, "How idiotic is that?" I said, "Can you imagine us putting up mosquito nets here?" And he said, "Fred, don't let it worry you." He said, "Any mosquito net come up here, it'll go straight down the water." I mean how stupid, somebody thinks like that. Yeah.

Can you tell me, you were awarded and mentioned in dispatches. Can you tell me about the incident when that occurred?

- 26:00 Well, the only thing I can think of is something to do with that. Like, as soon as, it didn't matter, as soon as someone screamed out, "So and so's been hit", you just run out instinctively. Check them out, if they're dead, leave them for the time being until the night time. If they're alright, try and drag them in. And sometimes you'll be laying down, dragging along like this on the ground and you can hear the shots going over the top of you. Because they know he's been hit and someone's going to try and

- 26:30 get him. So they, see what they had, or I would call them tool boxes, they're not. But they had dug outs with just enough room, the only one I ever seen was about that by about that along with a machine gun like that to fire through. But they had coconut logs on the top. And any bombs and that that hit them, I'm talking about mortar bombs and then the 25-pounders, it'd bounce them and it wouldn't go through. So, you know, they

- 27:00 knew where we were so all they had to do was just fire away. I've only thought afterwards, if they same thing was on again, even I could have done it, you only wanted a good rifleman to get in a good spot and then encourage them to shoot and then just fire a shots. Single shots. Straight through that slat. And when they stop firing you say, "Oh well, there's one gone". But I don't know, but I do know that they used tanks in that last bit. It was a last part in that area to be captured because it was so strongly defended.

- 27:30 And I often thought, I wonder if it was because there was a box of money there. Something like that. Yeah, there's some good fellows buried there. But apparently they were shifted away, like, exhumed. It'd be a right job exhuming them. Because you can imagine laying down in the water.

Given that it was a swamp and there are dead being buried, the smell...

- 28:00 The smell was very high, I can tell you that. See, this plantation was a little bit higher up. That wasn't in the swamp. The water came up into the weapon pits but the swamp, probably about that high, you can say the swamp was. But because, and we had no idea, I've seen films since of the area and it was nothing like what I imagined. We were nowhere near the actual beach. You could smell it. It was near a sort of a

- 28:30 bay and, like, Jeff has often said, but I could not, not now. He said, "I'd like to approach Rotary to take you back just to there". I couldn't leave Dorothy behind so I said, "No, forget all about it". But I'm nearly sure I'd recognise it. As long as they didn't take the hut away.

- 29:00 But I have been told that they exhumed the body. Now I had a bloke, Vercoe, lived in Queensland, he was writing to Jeff and Jeff told him to get in touch with me. Now his uncle, Harold 'Hal' Vercoe, I knew

him, he was a corporal. He was killed there. Americans had a heavy mortar and it was up in the air and the tail fell off or something like that and it dropped right down on our company headquarters. And it killed him

29:30 outright. It killed Jack Blamey. Well, he was supposed to have died of wounds. When they dragged him back to me, like, his face was as white as a ghost and he had all these pock marks of shrapnel in the head. Like his hair was cut real short. And I felt his pulse and it was really weak. And I said, "Now, take him back, but he's dead, he's as good as dead." And there was Hal Vercoe and him. They were sort of dead straight away. There was a brigade major from

30:00 headquarters, like he was probably the highest ranking officer there. He was wounded pretty bad. I gave him morphine and about an hour later he wanted more. I said, "Oh, sorry sir. No, no, no." I said, "Sir, I am as good as the doctor here, I'm telling me now, you've had two. In one hour's time, you can have another time." I said, "But by that time, they'll probably have a stretcher party here and you'll go away." I said, "On your forehead I've marked the time

30:30 so that in one hour you'll get another shot." I said, "But I cannot." In the end, he said, "Look, I'm sorry." So I could throw me weight around. I was told I was the medical boss. But, yeah, that was sad. And there was an American, Wax I called him Waxy. A lieutenant. He said, "How bad am I?" And he was laying (UNCLEAR) and I said, "You'll be alright." I said, "Only a bit of cosmetic." And he about that big, right out his back

31:00 and you could see all of the linings that covers your organs inside. I asked afterwards and they said, "No, he's dead". He could not have lived like that. You couldn't get a skin graft to cover it. You couldn't believe the people, that that could happen to them. The shirt and everything sort of went. His uniform thing. And it was like that, just as thought someone had gone like that and picked it out and you could look in like a window.

31:30 In his back. And he was a lovely fellow. Terrific bloke. He used to always call me Freddy.

You hear from nurses and I wonder if you had the same situation where someone is mortally wounded but you use little white lies to tell them that their not.

Oh, yes. You don't say, "Oh shit, you're going to get it.

32:00 You're on the way." You know, anything like that. I just say to him, "It's all cosmetic mate". And he said, "Oh good." You know, he couldn't see it. Even with the fellows looking at me. I said, "No." A good fellow. Good bloke. But this fellow, I think Peter, he rang up and he wanted to know did I know where his body went. I said, "Well, look he was buried at Sanananda, I can assure you of that." I said, "I know that." I said, "But what happened afterwards

32:30 I don't know." And that's when he got talking and said about Mark Strong. I said, "Oh, I know all about Mark Strong." And he said, "Well his niece lives near me and she often wondered what happened." So I said, I explained to him what had happened. Said, "You tell her. No, he died peacefully. No pain or nothing like that." But it wasn't so easy. I had a Yank; he was trying to crawl along near a log. Anyway he got shot

33:00 and I crawled up alongside. The log was about that high. So you crawl up and I had this syrette. And I said, "No, hang on mate. I'm going to jab this in and you'll be out of pain." I jabbed it in and he went, "Ooh", like that. And as he went up in the air like that, bang, shot through the head. They must have, like, they must have just actually knew where we were but they couldn't actually shoot us. But the minute he lifted his head up, bang. If he'd of laid down, I could have dragged him by the feet away. But I didn't want to drag him because he was hit up near

33:30 the chest and, yeah. But that's one good thing about the syrettes. You could whack it in through the uniform. Squeeze it in.

It's a pretty amazing effort and self-sacrifice on your part to really be putting yourself in the firing line.

Oh, yeah, but that's part of the job. I mean as far as I was concerned I was safe. I mean you're crawling up like that. And then you just wriggle your way back out again.

34:00 But this compass I've got, one I got off Ron Cadell, I stuck it in my haversack. And your haversack's on your back. And we're in this spot and I was blazing away quite happily for a while. Drew the crabs a bit and I started to go back. This, well, the only thing I could think of was a woodpecker. Came over the top, straight through the haversack. Made a hell of a mess of the haversack and I'm screaming. "Oh, oh, oh." And someone sings out, "Oh, Fred's been hit.

34:30 Fred's been hit." Anyway, I sneaked a look back and it made a mess of all my bully beef and all of that. And it cracked the glass on the compass. That was the only injury. But there was lots of fellows had escapades like that. Yeah. Lots of them. We had, now Cyril Gleeson, he was a sergeant and he had, he looked just like a, what would you say, like a bank manager. Only a little fellow but, you know,

35:00 real, like that. I saw him walking along the main street of Taree on one side. By the time I got over on the other side he'd disappeared. And I said to the fellow coming along, now, "See that fellow over there?

I see him in New Guinea, a Jap threw a grenade at him and he jumped over the grenade and shot the Jap dead." I said, "Have a look at him like that, you wouldn't." He said, "You wouldn't pick it." I said, "Well that's the thing, mate." I said, "He was Sergeant Cyril Gleeson." He died, oh a while back. I see his name in the paper, he died.

35:30 But, yeah, so you can't pick them.

Given the pressure of the situation, was there anyone that ever cracked up, that couldn't handle it all?

Never ever seen it. Oh, we did have one fellow, a captain. He was our captain for a while. And he eventually went back and he joined the air force. But I think, I think he did lose it but

36:00 not like you see it, gibbering idiot. Nothing like that. I think he just sort of thought, no. And he sort of, well, got crook and went back. And I did see him on a film, of course you didn't have TVs in them days, joining the air force. And I thought, oh well, that's his lot. He's in there. But the poor old Bosgard, like, after Blamey, he was dead. He came up and we were just sitting down talking and that.

36:30 Oh, we were just discussing the usual things saying, how am I going and anything I need. And nothing like that. Anyway, the next day he came up to me and he got a bit of shrapnel had got in under the eye. And I said, "I can see it there," I said, "but I don't want to touch it because it's your eye." I said, "If it was anywhere else, I'd dig it out." I said, "Just go back to the doctor." So he went back and he came back again the next day

37:00 and he said the doctor said it was just as wise because where it was close to some of the optic nerves or something like that. So we had a bit of a yarn. Anyway it was six o'clock the next morning. The first shots went off, well, two minutes past six to be exact. Two shots went off at six o'clock and two minutes past six their mortar comes back. And I stopped there for a couple of days but then I started to get too crook and I couldn't move around too good. So I

37:30 went back and I found out after, the day after I went back, he was killed. So they lost two company commanders in a week, something like that. Which is not real good. But, like, but after all that, I got taken back. Went through the system to Popondetta airstrip and they, the Dakota landed

38:00 and they opened, well they didn't have to open the door, the doors are, but they put this ramp down and out came a jeep, one tonner, 25-pounder. And they said, "The wounded's going back.." And this time, it was the same old thing again, the least wounded, first on to it. So I was only a leg wound so they thought, oh well, you're not going to be too bad. So we got on and we're laying on it on the stretcher there. And the old Yank, he was a good old Yank sergeant, he was a sort of the bloke in charge of

38:30 the mob. And run the engines up all ready to take off and, stop, engines down. And I thought, "Oh, you, what's going on here, don't tell me something's broke down." And I said to him, "Eh Yank, what's wrong?" He said, "We've just got word the [Mitsubishi] Zeroes are over Sanananda." He said, "We'll have to wait until they leave. If we take off now, we're sitting ducks." So if they hadn't of got that message and took off, there was two Zeroes doing bits of strafe runs and they can only stay there so long because

39:00 once they look like running out of petrol they've got to go home. Yeah, we'd have got shot down. So we flew out and I start to feel sick. I didn't realise at the time but malaria was starting to come on. And I said, "I'm going to be sick." So he said, "Hang on, I'll slide your stretcher back." And I looked out and you can look down and there's all the jungle on the white below. And he said, "You can be sick now." And I said, "No mate, I'm not sick."

39:30 **Being wounded yourself, how did you rate your wound? Did you know that it was going to be OK?**

Oh, yeah, yeah. Actually, I could have said, like you saying, I could have said, I would have thanked that Jap. You know, I got out of it, out of the mess like that. But, no, I didn't feel real happy but I had to go back because the longer you stay, the more the stuff starts to work and in the end you could have been bad. But I had malaria.

40:00 Like, I didn't think I had it then but I had a bad dose of MT. MT malaria is the one you get first. That's called malignant tertian. And that recurs. The next one is benign tertian. But I started to feel crook on the plane and when they put me on the ward, in the tent hospital, you got sort of fished up. And I always remember at night, in the operating theatre, it was still in a big tent and these big open window and there's all the

40:30 fellows outside looking in to watch you. Like a production line. They X-rayed you just to see where the stuff was. And then you go along, put you out, take it out. Like, because I said to them about keeping the bits and pieces. They said, "No." "No," he said, "Too many bits and pieces hanging around." Yeah. So I was in there for a few days. And while I was in there, down one end on two stretchers on the floor was two Japanese officers. Like, they'd been wounded and that. And someone threw a

41:00 can at them. You know, and I screamed out real loud, "That's wrong. Don't ever do that." I said, "Because I don't give a damn about you fellows but," I said, "I'm an infantry soldier and they're against

us." I said, "But they're wounded so leave them alone. Leave them alone." I went down to apologise to them but they couldn't understand what I was talking about. I just hobbled down but and said, "Sorry." So I don't know if they understood that.

41:30 They could have been war criminals for all I knew.

Tape 8

00:31 **You were telling us about being in hospital after being wounded. You were talking about defending some Japanese patients. Why do you think you felt the way you did?**

I don't know. Because, I don't know. I know

01:00 probably we wouldn't have got treated as good as they did. But I don't like the idea of kicking anyone when they're down. You know, and you don't know what happened or why. And they would have had it tough. Don't you worry. They would have had it a lot worse than us, those Japs. Ordinary Jap soldier. Oh, my very word. Like, they had virtually nothing to eat. And we were sort of driving them back. No, they would have sort of had it worse. No food supply line. And that helped them

01:30 to keep going back. And the only reason they didn't go back a lot quicker is we couldn't afford to lose a lot of men. Like, as MacArthur thought, they were, you know, there's 100 Japs, we'll send 2000 men in. But you couldn't send 2000 men in there. You could only go one at a time along the track. And it's no good saying, "Oh you mass charge off the track," because there's too many trees and bush and everything. Like, they got no idea. They were maniacs.

02:00 You could not, because they weren't there, nobody who wasn't there has got any idea. No idea. You talk to any digger that, like a front line soldier that was there, you can not imagine what it was like. Even Angry Anderson [contemporary Australian rock singer], he went up and he sat down and cried. He thought the privation would have been so terrible. It's bad enough having to put up with that and then to be getting shot at the same time. Oh yeah.

02:30 That was as big an enemy. And I can remember them saying, "The Owen Stanleys would stop the Japs." And I thought, "Oh well, that sounds good. No-one's going to come over the mountain." But no-one stopped to say there was a track. It was only a goat track, but it was a track. And they had, I don't know who would have put that in, where the steps and that were, in some places they had a log across, well, little log like so and something down, to make it a rough step.

03:00 So someone had to do all that. But no, it was not a place for fast accurate things like that. And even, I've got books here written by fellows that won high commendation medals and things like that, they were talking about 'killing fields'. We never ever spoke of that, of a killing field. But they were saying that. And that's all it was. They were told they had to take this place by a certain time. Open ground.

03:30 You got to run across and you hope that the enemy run out of bullets before you're all finished. That's virtually that. So it's, that was the thinking. But this is not at my, this is afterwards when they were following up what they called the 'unnecessary war'. They could have starved them out. But then the generals wanted more kudos. Like, my brother told me that they thought they were going to be in with the relief of, in the Philippines and that.

04:00 But MacArthur said "No". He wanted it to be all Americans together. You know, look good. He was one of the worst. I don't know, you're not supposed to say that, but still. I put him down to being one of the worst generals in the war. You know, him and [General Dwight D] Eisenhower, after the First World War and its history, the Americans refused to pay their veterans their deferred pay. So they protested and were on the walk

04:30 somewhere. And Eisenhower and MacArthur let them have a charge. Calvary charge in to get these war veterans. That's them. Why ever they put them in charge as they did. Oh, you can see why, I mean they've got the money and that. Everything's big about them, especially their mouth. You shouldn't say that, I know, but, and I don't put that at the ordinary American person.

05:00 The fellows that fought alongside with us, only their different accent, that's the only way you told they were different from us. But it's when you get up amongst their hierarchy and things like that. I have a lot of contempt for them. The mess, they got so many men and they count their victories by the dead. They lost, at the Tarawa Island [1943, part of the Gilbert Islands], I think it was, they lost more

05:30 men per yard than anywhere else in any war. Now, isn't that a great history. Great way to win a battle. So one dead for every yard you gained and all like that. It sounds good, real good to the general. But it's not much good to the poor bugger down the bottom. Yeah. We like to stay alive.

At the time, given that you'd fought in the Middle East, how your views

06:00 **changed about your enemy. You hear a lot of stories about how people thought the Japanese weren't an honourable enemy. What did you think at the time?**

At the time, I had sort of no thought. All we knew is that they were good fighters. We had no idea about their code of honour. I've learnt a lot more about them since because my brother married a Japanese girl and he was in Japan for a long, long time. And he sort of got in. In the end I think he knows more about the Japanese history than

06:30 our history. But, no, they've got this code and they did it tough. We tried to make it tougher still but they did it tough. You know, when you see the places they had to be in and all those, I remember there was this one Japanese and he was getting out of the pit and he must have been shot. He was laying back with his mouth wide open and had a real big gold tooth sticking out. When I come back it was gone. And they said, they put the bone on and hit like that, get it out.

07:00 And it's gold, pure gold. I couldn't have done it but somebody did. But no, that, there's always the stories you hear about eating the people. But I think that was meant to frighten us. We had one of our fellows, they found him afterwards, he was killed in the fight. And he had slices cut off his buttock on a big sort of leaf thing. But they hadn't

07:30 touched it. But we often thought maybe that was to frighten people. No, they were a pretty desperate fighter. And they had their own sort of code of honour. But this idea of them all wanting to run out and get shot, was a bit crap. Now, if you opened up with a gun and started chopping the bush and they'd all round ahead of them, they'd keep their head down. They didn't say, "Come and shoot me Fred." No, once it's all over, you should forget it.

08:00 Well, the politicians do, don't they? They're our best trading partner now. Or supposed to be. No, I don't hold with this. Look at some of the cruel things the Germans done, not to us, but, and out of all the enemy, I think the worst one to be prisoner of, oh no, the Japs. But the Italians, it wouldn't be good to be prisoner of them. Because they were

08:30 the sort of person that when they were on top, they'd be all over you. When you had them beat, they want to kiss your boots, idea. But that did happen in war.

Well, it's still a very individual act of yours to defend the Japanese patients in the hospital.

Yeah, but see, what annoyed me,

09:00 I don't know who threw the can, but it may be somebody who never actually, because there was lots of other people in the ward, who'd never been fighting. They were stationed there and you always got different diseases around the camp. Something like that. No, but I, you know, I know we only ever actually seen one prisoner coming back and the provo, I suppose he was the provo, had a rope around his neck leading him along and his hands tied behind his back. And he baulked at going across the creek so he kicked

09:30 him in the creek and dragged him head first across the creek like that. Our sergeant raced up and said, "You want to watch yourself mate because these fellows shoot you if they see you doing that." He said, "He's a prisoner of war." That's it. See, the big thing with prisoners of war, if you take no prisoners, they don't want to be taken prisoner. So they've got the idea, same with me, if I knew that the enemy would not take prisoners, I wouldn't want to be taken prisoner. I'd shoot until they shot me. So you lose

10:00 more people. But that's just plain common sense. The more prisoners you can take, the better it is. Because they're going to surrender and they're out of the fighting. Sometimes there's too many of them and it stretches your resources. Like with the Italians, 45,000 of them. Well, if you had to feed them in a little area, it'd be a bit hard. But they were quite happy to go back. But there were actually,

10:30 in real actual practice, there were very few live Japs I could say I seen that were fighting. You couldn't see them and you knew where they were, you were just shooting at that spot. And you could hear fellows saying, "There's one there," or something like that. Throw a grenade, you'd hear the boom. And you'd just wonder whether, you know, whether it actually got them or not.

11:00 **You've been using the terms 'crabs' a bit to describe, I wonder where that term came from?**

I don't know. I've heard it and it was only, like, from going into the army. They'd say, you know, "Keep your head down or you'll draw the crabs.". I don't know. It's just a saying. Or to draw the crabs is to get the enemy

11:30 on to you. Or if you're committing a crime, draw the crabs, you're going to have the police on to you or something like that. That was the, you know, I tried to convince my boss that if I get in a good spot and open up and draw the crabs, it's going to take the heat off them fellows. And he'd say, "Oh yes". But he'd say, "This is the way we have to go". Because, with a rifle, it's not so hard but with a Bren gun you've got these

12:00 legs on the front and you've got to watch it. When you're on the side of a hill there's a long one and a short one or vice versa. You've got to fold them back or fold them forward and all this. You haven't got that hassle with a rifle. So if you're in a spot and you hear the first shot, you can build yourself a real good cover straight away and open up. And when you opened up they're going to look for you and not worry about him. But that wasn't the way they sort of worked. But that was a theory.

- 12:30 Going right back to the very start of the war before Japan was ever in it. Bren gun, they had a Bren gun carrier like a little track thing. The only thing that it stopped was 303s. Any other bullet would go through it. But that was to get the Bren gun from place to place. Open warfare. There wasn't open warfare in New Guinea. And, no, they were useless. Carrying people around, yeah, but that's about all.
- 13:00 **You've mentioned so many incidents and actions you were in and a couple of times you thought you were shot and panicked. Given that you, in your role of stretcher bearer, and seeing all the sights that you saw, were there any times when you just broke down and had a good cry?**
- 13:30 No. I can say that. No. Never. I'm thinking back. No, no, never. No, I did feel a bit sad but I would say never broke down and cried. Back home when my wife and all things like that, yeah. But, no, I don't think so.
- 14:00 I often think I should have cried at some of the stupid things they done. No. But I think, in a way, it makes you hard. It does. You sort of, hard, things happen to people and that and you sort of, you don't let it get to you. You can hide it or something like that. But later on it
- 14:30 catches up. It catches up. Like I was out of the army and I had a nightmare one night and my wife thought I was mad. The way I was thrashing about and the sweat pouring off me and things like that. And she said, "All these things you're saying." I said, "What were they?" She said, "I can't tell you." So, you know, your subconscious must pick up and, anyway, she made me go to the doctor.
- 15:00 And a Dr O'Brien at Umina [near Gosford, NSW]. And I started to explain to him and he said, "Have you been and applied for a pension?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, why don't you?" And I said, "Why?" And he looked and he said, "Where do you go?" And I told him and he said, "You know what, that's a pension straight away. Ten per cent pension." I think it worked out about \$2 a week, something like that. And he said, "So, therefore, go." And I went to what they call the DNR [?] ward and
- 15:30 I was saying about all these jobs after the war. I went here, there. I couldn't settle down. I'd start something, get half-way through and finish it. And he said, "That's like a neurosis from the war." And when I went to the DNR [?] ward, went to the 'head shrink', we call him, like the psychiatrist fellow. He just said, "Temperamentally unstable," or something. I've got it written down somewhere. But meant, "No, it was nothing." "You know," my doctor said, "they should throw that
- 16:00 man out." He said, "If he knew on your record what you went through, they couldn't say temperamentally unstable." See today that would be called post-traumatic stress syndrome. But in them days that wasn't heard of, you know. So like a fatalist, you just wear it, you know. As I say, there's a good bloke, he's as fit as a fiddle, TPI pensioner.
- 16:30 Over \$600 a fortnight. Because they were walking through a paddy field and they started shooting at them from a haystack. And I said, "What were they shooting?" He said, "Bullets." I said, "Well I wonder what they were shooting at us." I said, "We didn't get anything like that." But anyway, no, that's. Like they say, the wounded don't cry. And that's true. You see sometimes these films, I've got to keep saying, it is the
- 17:00 American films that they've got them screaming in agony and all that. I never ever seen it happen really like that. If they're wounded, laying out and they can't get to them. But they just quietly slip away in the night. Like Mark Strong. Just lay quietly and die. Sad. Well, it shouldn't happen again. It'll be too good next time. Like we'll just press a button and blow the
- 17:30 people up.

Can you continue your story and tell me how you managed to recover from your injuries and what happened?

Well, while I was in hospital they decided I had malaria, MT malaria. So I had the quinine to start and that sort of fixed me up. I could still hobble around, walk and that. And the head nurse just came up to me and said, "Can you

- 18:00 walk alright Private Williams?" I said, "Yeah, why is that?" She said, "Because the hospital ship Manunda is leaving and if you can get down to it, you'll be able to go home." And I said, "I'll run." So I got everything and they put me on a stretcher. You had to do everything nice. And straight down on the hospital ship Manunda. I've got a photo of it there. And I left there, I think I wrote down, the 4th, anyway, it was December. And we went to Milne Bay, picked up
- 18:30 more wounded And then back to Sydney. And one of our fellows, Alan Lander, he was wounded. He died when they dropped anchor on the 13th of December. Someone come along and said your mate just died. And from there I had a hero's trip. We got on the hospital train, must have been at Brisbane. Anyway, hospital train and went down
- 19:00 through the...I can always remember coming down through Taree and everyone's running and giving us cups of tea and cakes and oh patting us on the back and big hugs. You know, big, bonzer Anzacs. And we got off the train at Rosehill [western Sydney], the race course, into an ambulance and I went out to Baulkham Hills, it used to be the Masonic hospital or something. And I was in there and that was

getting close to Christmas. And I wanted to be home for Christmas. They said, "No, because you're wounded and on

- 19:30 this malaria treatment. You can't go home." And I said, "Oh yeah, that'll be alright." And I got on to one of the nurses. Conned her up and I said, "Can you give me some extra quinine and things like that?" She said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I'm going home for Christmas." She said, "You can't." I said, "I'm going home for Christmas. Now, if you think of me and want to treat me, you'll give me that medicine. The moment roll calls in the morning you put me in as being AWL." She said, "Right oh, that's OK." So I got all the stuff.
- 20:00 Out. Taxi to Parramatta Station. Home. Back out to Yarra Bay by taxi. Nice Christmas at home. I paid for it. Like, I got fined. I didn't care about that. The officer, Captain Cook he was, when I explained to him, I said, "All these years and that I've been away. I get back from New Guinea." and I said, "I was posted missing, I've been wounded in action and all that.".
- 20:30 I said, "It knocked me mother about.." He said, "Well look, I have to do this." He said, "You've got seven days CB [confined to barracks]." And that was good. And then I ended up, oh I got lots of attacks; I don't know how many times I had malaria. And if I was on leave, I only had to have half a dozen beers or something like that to come down with it again. And in the end, I thought, "Now this is a good idea if I want to get permanent leave. All
- 21:00 I've got to do is get drunk and get malaria again." And there was a real old fellow, doctor, and I forget his name now. He was really old. He said to me, "Son, you carry on like this and I'll go to your funeral." I thought, "Well, by gee, that's not a good recommendation." So I started to get off and they had what they called the GDD in the showground. General Details Depot. So I went there. That's where you'd get drafted back to your unit.
- 21:30 The first time I actually got malaria at home. I got it while I was at home and they took me straight back there to the camp hospital. And they were treating me for pneumonia because I had pneumonia. But I kept saying, "I've got malaria. I've got malaria." No, no, no. Anyway I was getting a sponge bath and the nurse said, "What's all these bruises down your leg?" I said, "That's shrapnel wound." She said, "How long have you been in the army?" I said, "About three years." She said, "Where were you?" I said, "In New Guinea."
- 22:00 "Oh." Raced straight down. A terrific dose of malaria. Because I looked so young and they thought, "Oh, everyone's saying they've got malaria," because I'd been brought from home in the ambulance. I had malaria and pneumonia and they thought I could have died because they allowed my mother to stay in the hospital with me all the time. And they had, when I was boarded, I was boarded 'too unfit for marching'. And they had no hope of getting me away. If I,
- 22:30 I said, "If you send me back to my unit, I'm right." They said, "You can't go back to your unit because the infantry have to march." I said, "Yeah, well if I can't march, I'm not going anywhere." And there was a sergeant, he was a horrible insect. Because I was so young and had so much service and action and all that, and I don't know why it should worry him but he never, he used to sort of stick it in to me. I'd call him a 'cut-lunch commando' [derogatory, part-timer]. And that was the end of that. He said, "I'm getting you posted to the armoured division in Perth."
- 23:00 I said, "You've got no hope, mate." I said, "I'm an old soldier." And I hung around there. I'd get leave.

Do you recall where you were at war's end?

Yes. We were living in Regent's Park. Because Helen was

- 23:30 born in Crown Street hospital the day they dropped the bomb and the war didn't last very long after that, did it? Yeah. So that was it. I was doing alright. I was getting my army pay but I was also getting night jobs. That helped me to get a house together. In the end they got rid of this horrible insect, cut-lunch commando.
- 24:00 And the fellow said, "Whenever you want to hang around, hang around." And I think I got out in June 1946. Think it was June. But they had, either went back to my unit because I thought, well, I've walked out once before and went back to them. So I'm not going to go to no armoured division in Perth.
- 24:30 **You've mentioned that you found it difficult to adjust after the war. Now, looking back, how do you think the war changed you?**
- Seeing what happened. Like, when you've seen, you know, people killed and blokes you see, really terrific fellows and next day someone says, "Oh, he's dead." You know, and this stretcher party with the crowd on it. There was Teddy Proudfoot, Stevie Dunn,
- 25:00 Billy Sharman they were the band. And they were as fantastic fellows. You know, you could lose your wallet with them. They were fantastic fellows. And one shell comes along and wipes them out. And the poor fellow on the stretcher, too. I forget who the fourth bloke was. They carried the stretcher up on their shoulder like this and marched off. And the shell came, wham, right amongst the middle of them. And, you know, and you see that and, oh no and see all these.

- 25:30 New Guinea was the worst. Like when you see the fellows there that you knew if they were back somewhere else. If you knew that they were somewhere else they'd be alive but because they were up there they weren't. And I suppose strategy wise, if MacArthur had been like he did to all the others, a landed invasion of Buna or Gona, somewhere like that,
- 26:00 it would avoided all that walking over. And I used to say, "I'm really chuffed. I walked right across and then got shot". If I had got shot on this side it wouldn't have mattered. I wouldn't have done all that walk. But, no, it's...but I could not hold a job down. I couldn't. I was here, there. And every boss I worked for would give me a good report. But I'd just say, "Mate, I'm sorry,

- 26:30 I just can't." The longest sort of work I did was truck driving because you're around, hopping around. I had my own truck for a little while.

Do you think you understand about why you couldn't settle?

Oh, I know why. Because of the war. Because before the war I was pretty casual and no problem. But,

- 27:00 oh yeah, I don't know how many, how many places we moved to even. Oh, I'd say we probably moved about 30 times. Phenomenal. This is the longest I ever lived in the one place. Here. That's going on for 13 years. And some people live 20, 30, 40 years in the same house. Although not today. I think people do move about today a bit more.

- 27:30 **And what would you be looking for or what would you hope the move could do?**

I don't, honestly, I don't know. It was just like did something and got tired of it real quick and moved on to something else. And try and do it real good while you're doing it but then just move on. Move on and, you know, I told my doctor, he wrote a strong letter to Veterans' Affairs saying, in my opinion, this man deserves a much higher

- 28:00 pension. That was it. Like, he acted like a counsellor. He's looked after my first wife, myself and Dorothy. He's a fantastic doctor. He's too good, he worries too much. You know, and I, some of the things, like I've told you and I've told him. And he said, "You've got to get them out of your mind." I said, "You do to a certain extent, but you can't." You can't. You don't.

- 28:30 But when I look back and I think it's made a better bloke of me, really. Because you put up with more. See, when I, they were going to close the fire station down here and take the tanker away and everything like that. And they wanted to reform the brigade. So I had been in the bush fire units before. They come and asked me, "Would I take it over and run it as the captain." So I did that. But I just got on there good with everybody. And when they left me as a captain, I took them all down the shed and I said,

- 29:00 "Now, most of you fellows I don't know, you don't know me. But I tell you one thing now, I will never put you in danger. But when we're on the fire ground you will do everything I say. I don't want any arguments. When we come back, whatever I've done wrong, tell me all about it. But," I said, "I don't want to know what I've done wrong on the fire ground. If you don't want to stick to that, I'm out. I don't want it." They said, "No, that's good." And they carried it right to the finish. I would never say to them, do something that is stupid.

- 29:30 Now and again somebody's queried it when I've got back to the fire station. "Why did you do it that way?" And I'd say, "Well, I did it that way because if it went wrong, I'd get the blame. If I did it your way and it goes wrong, I'd still get the blame." I said, "The captain gets the blame, no matter what happens he gets the blame. He's the one who's there to OK it." So then they said, "That's fair enough." And that still goes today.

I'm wondering what it was that you

- 30:00 **missed about the army, if anything?**

Well, comradeship. You know, they were all good blokes. All good blokes. And it's hard to say. Really hard to say. But comradeship would be one of it. Because you depended on them and they depended on you. And, you know, when you know fellows depend on you

- 30:30 that was when I was a bit cranky when I got wounded because them fellows depended, they knew that if they got wounded, I was there to help. But when I was gone, that was it. I don't know, I have no idea who replaced me. No idea at all. But I do know that we went up there with probably 600 men, which is well under the strength. And there was less than 100 2/2nd men were left. And they reckon out on patrol and they were like walking wounded. Every man of them had malaria.

- 31:00 Some had scrub typhus and all these sort of things. But you imagine going on that walk, right across there, putting up with all that. And that's like, when they were relieved, that's all that were left. I joined, they started an association like 'civvy life', [civilian life] sort of thing, and I joined that. And every so often you'd look down the list and they've have last post and you'd

- 31:30 see these names, I knew him, I knew him, I knew him. But then like later on when you got reinforcements come and they come some from Victoria, some from Queensland, like QX you say is Queensland and VX is Victorian. And I was talking to old Bert McGrath, not all that long back. He was one of the reinforcements a bit along the line. He said, "You know", he said, "there are very few of those

four letter numbers still alive.”

32:00 Like mine was 9342. Most of them were over the hundreds of thousands. And he said, “There’s very few of you four letter numbers still alive.” But, as I told the bank manager the other day, I’ve got to go to 112. Yeah 112. An old fellow died at 111, an old digger and he got a state funeral. So if I can go to 112, I’ll get a state funeral and Dorothy won’t have to pay funeral expenses.

32:30 I really intend to live as long as I can.

Well I wish you well with that endeavour. How would you like your division, the 2/2nd and the 6th Division to be remembered?

We was the first unit to leave

33:00 the country. I don’t know. Well it was the first division to go and everyone thinks his own unit is the best. No, I, what I’d like to think of the whole mob is a mob that did their best. With what they had, they done their best with it. We first went away, we had Lewis guns. Old things

33:30 like that. I can remember firing a Hodgkiss gun on Crete. Now that was a First World War gun, Hodgkiss. And a Lewis gun. I fired a Lewis gun. I had that in Greece, but we only had the one magazine so I got rid of it very smartly. But, no, that’s be remembered, they done their best with what they had. And they deserve more,

34:00 much more. We had some officers went up high in ours. There was the fellow that died, that was killed in Korea, Charlie Green. He was a terrific fellow. Big, raw boned, cow cocky [cattle farmer]. And I can remember at Bergalow [?], him and Captain Buckley, yeah, he was the captain then too, Captain Buckley and Charlie Green. Charger we called him. Just sitting having ordinary yaks [informal conversations]. Just as though we’re ordinary people.

34:30 No blokes this. You know, they wondered why I joined up at that age. I said, “Because I was young and stupid.” No, and Buckley was still the, he ended up our commanding officer. He got that up. When I come back wounded, he come over and he put his arm on my shoulder. He said, “Why did you have to do it, Fred?” He said, “We were counting on you.” I said, “Well, blame the enemy, not me.”

35:00 Adrian Buckley. And our first bloke, what’s his name, Archie McClellan. I think he died not that long back. But he sat me down to give me a talk on the facts of life. Yeah. He said, “You’ll meet these women.” I said, “I’ve already met them, mate.”

Looking back is there

35:30 **one moment that stands out as your proudest?**

Yes. At Sanananda when Bosgard sat down to talk to me as man to man. To say how he thought of my effort.

36:00 Like, when your captain, he’s the captain and you’re a private. He come, put his hand on your shoulder, went sit down there Fred and start talking. He said, “The whole company here are indebted to you.” He said, “I know you didn’t want this job,” he said, “but you were given the job and you carried it out.” He said, “I want to thank you.” I thought, “Well that’s not bad.” That would probably be the highest

36:30 spot. I was only sorry the poor bugger died or got killed. Erwin, Oswald Erwin, I think he may still be alive. Because when they were talking at one of these veterans’ review board, sort of a bit about confirmation. I forget, it was something come up for confirmation. And I said, “Well the two company managers are dead but

37:00 Lieutenant Erwin, as far as I know, he is still alive.” I said, “And you would have records somewhere along because he was an officer.” I said, “You can ask him all about it.” Oh that’s it, they wanted to know the full situation about MID. And I said, “Well, I don’t know. No-one came along to me and said, you’ve just been given MID. Nothing like that.” I said, “He would have had some input

37:30 because he was my platoon commander.” I said, “But I would say, it came from Captain Bosgard.” Because Blamey was dead before then. And to me the medals and all that, I’ve seen things that would have earnt the VC but they don’t get seen by the right people. And they allocate a certain amount of medals for each campaign. That’s why I can see it. To me it’s a lot of hooey.

38:00 Like there was a bloke, I think it was [Private Bruce] Kingsbury, he got a VC with a Bren gun. And he did, he had to do it. He was there and he had a run and he got shot and killed. And I thought, well, if that was mean, I probably would have done it too. But if I was to stop and think, I would have said, “No.” I mean self preservation is a big thing. I mean but a VC’s earnt on the spur of the moment. Like we had one, [Lieutenant] Albert Chowne.

38:30 But everyone used to...or was he mentioned in dispatch, too? Or get the MC [Military Cross]? But anyway, they all said he would get the VC or the MM [Military Medal]. And he got both. So, there’s a point where, yeah, you can exceed the bravery limit.

We’re coming to the end. Is there anything you’d like to say in closing?

- 39:00 No, as a matter of fact, I think you've worn me out. No. It's been a pleasure. Like I've never, I don't think there are very few people round here that know I've had a MID. I don't worry about that. They probably don't...mad idiot dog they say to me or something like that. I used to,
- 39:30 I had the fire brigade march in the Anzac Day march. I never believed in the Anzac Day march at all until we was living at Nabiac [NSW]. And they came and asked me to make up the, there was very few of them left, to come up. And so I marched there and I've marched here. I didn't march last year. The two years before that I rode in the jeep at the head. Because the old knees were gone. I've got new knees now so I could probably march next time.
- 40:00 No, I think everything is, if you see anyone in Veterans' Affairs, tell them I want an increase in pension or something like that. You know, our welfare officer, he's been through it time and time again. He's said, "Fred, go back again." He said, "You're on 90 per cent. Surely, they must give you
- 40:30 a 100 per cent pension." So I says, "OK, mate." So he goes through it all again. I gets a letter back from the delegate, might have been Len Gow [?] or the delegate. Some funny name. He says, "We've check up on it, should be only 80 per cent but we'll let you stay on the 90 per cent." So I said to Lewis, "Forget it. No more mate. That's it. They've decided that's all I'm worth, I'm not going to risk losing any more."
- 41:00 But it is, it's handy. Because the good part about it, it's not included in your income. War disability pension. It's only in the state. If you want things through the state government. I think they count it in your income. When Dorothy went to get glasses once, like, they said the pension and they checked up and they said, "Oh you've got disability pension." and it was about \$5
- 41:30 too much money. I said, "Don't worry about it. Forget about it. We can afford the glasses."

Well, thank you so much for speaking with us. It's been a real pleasure.

Likewise. How I'm going to get anyone to believe I sat in a darkened room with two beautiful young ladies all day.