

Australians at War Film Archive

Keith Howard (Blue) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/835>

Tape 1

00:35 **You originally came from Sydney but you grew up in Perth?**

Yes.

What can you remember about growing up in Perth?

Yes. That's a few years back now. We came over here when I was just approaching four so that there isn't much that I can recall. Other than when we came to

01:00 check the house that my father had bought in Walcott Street in West Perth and it was on a slope and I was left in the car and stupidly but rather boyishly I played with the brake and I can remember distinctly the car rolling backwards down the hill. But luckily it jammed into the kerb. And my parents and the land agent sort of came running

01:30 out and rescued me and smacked my backside. I think that's probably my earliest memory of Perth Western Australia. But following that we go on inevitably to school days. This house that I mention was on a slope and at the back of it was a lane and down this lane in those days 1924, '25, '26 of course the

02:00 sanitary wagons used to drive along the horses towing these big carts. And several boys used to live down along the lane whom I befriended and I can remember us running along behind the sanitary carts hanging onto them as they galloped along you know and that was quite an adventure. There wasn't much other kind of adventure in those days, those sorts of memories.

02:30 Father came across here to take over a business, which eventually began to sell large style phonographs and gramophones and then later on refrigerators and washing machines, which came in wooden cartons or crates in fact. So we had quite a collection of these wooden crates down at the back

03:00 corner of our yard in which I built a cubby house. And these friends of mine these lads from down the lane we used to meet there and discuss matters of great moment as kids do of seven eight and nine. And I can remember again a little later I think I was eleven or twelve, and we went on one or two school tours

03:30 to places of importance, Parliament House, Peters Ice Cream, Pascomy Milk Factory and so on and Michael Eadys Tobacco factory and one of the boys in passing along the corridor noticed a lot of bulk tobacco in a big carton and he took a handful and put it in his pocket. And the next day

04:00 in our gathering in our cubby house in the boxes at the back of the garden he produced this tobacco and some brown paper, which he proceeded to roll into cigarettes. Anyway just at the critical moment I was called away by my mother to go down to the shop and buy some milk or something and when I came back they said, "Oh we got rid of all that tobacco except we kept you one." And they handed me a bit fat cigar like roll of

04:30 brown paper with tobacco like material in which I puffed away at and they were all sitting there looking at me and laughing. And it turned out that in fact it was horse manure that they'd collected from the back lane. I can remember that quite clearly as you can imagine. Memories of that kind. I recall that for some reason or other my younger brother five years younger than I, and I must have been about ten so he would've been

05:00 five or thereabouts fancied a goat as a pet. Why I could not tell. However we had this small goat in our backyard, which was quite extensive. We had fruit trees and so on. And this goat used to wander round. But finally it died. And so we buried it with due ceremony under a little plum tree which hadn't been doing very well. And were amazed the next year or two how that plum tree flourished with

05:30 the goat underneath. And that as I say is a memory that lives with me. I can go on from there of course to later years but you were mentioning the early years and that's those are I think the memories that I have from say age four to ten or eleven, twelve thereabouts in Walcott Street North Perth.

What school

06:00 **were you going to?**

Well at this time it was North Perth State School, which was walking distance. And I had a lot of friends there and some of them used to come and join us in our cubby meetings who weren't necessarily residents close by. So I developed quite some strong friendships that lasted for many years. It was necessary to walk to the school via

06:30 a reserve. Woodville Reserve which was used for sports and in later years I was selected to play for the North Perth Soccer Club, which was in those days one of the first league of Soccer Clubs in Soccer Clubs in Western Australia and this was at home ground. So that reserve has very fond memories for me. Another memory I

07:00 have is on one occasion of playing cricket there with some friends one of whom was the son of the proprietor of a little handy food shop, which was just on the corner of the street next door to the oval. And somehow or other the batsman hit a ball high into the air and I in the outfield ran to catch it but failed to catch it and it hit me on the top of the head and cracked my head and blood began to

07:30 flow. And this fellow Freddie Stone I recall took me carefully into the shop where his parents were and his parents and his little sisters and Fred tended to me and bandaged me up, and Fred walked me up the lane and delivered me to my own parents. That's Woodville Reserve. Also it was a place where

08:00 one could sit and talk to friends on the way home from school. But it was a pleasant little break in the walk to school, which took about twenty minutes I suppose. North Perth State School was quite big school. It was very interesting in that it was on the boarder of new developing areas in Mt Lawley. But it was close to Chinese Gardens down at the bottom of

08:30 one hill and in the other direction was getting close to the what was called in those days the Mohamed and Mosque. And also the Jewish Synagogue so there were immigrant boys or immigrant families living fairly close to the school because of their patronage of those religions and as a result we had quite a mixed bag of kids at school.

09:00 Much is made of multi-racial contacts at school these days but we had them and I don't recall any problems at all. The kids got nicknames of course. There was Jewy somebody or other and there was a Greek fella whose father owned a fish shop so he was Fishy Zanthis. And there was another one called Zimbulis whose father

09:30 owned a very nice green grocery store nearby and Ross Zimbulis was a very close friend of mine and he was killed in the air force in the war unfortunately. His brother Tony Zimbulis became a very famous West Australian slow cricket bowler. State bowler. I'm not sure if he weren't selected for tests at one time. So these sorts of memories are quite full and it's a pleasure

10:00 to go back with them now and again. I went up there under parental guidance of course to join the school just after I turned six. That was the age for joining primary school and we had a Miss McRae was our first class teacher, which was known colloquially as the bubs class. Miss McRae a tall rather gaunt greyish looking lady but

10:30 very gentle and nice I'll always remember her tenderly. Some of the other teachers one doesn't remember quite so tenderly. I remember when I was seven or eight I think I was moved up into a class taught by a young lady I think it was her first assignment. She was a trainee teacher I think and probably was twenty-one or twenty-two, quite attractive looking called Gladys Richards.

11:00 And together with the other boys of eight and nine, we all fell in love with Gladys. And as a matter of fact through somebody reminding me just three or four years ago that Gladys Richards was still alive and in a home and I visited her and she was just as delightful even though she must have been ninety years old. And but she'd married in between of course and her husband

11:30 I find with interest was a sort of a business associate of my father. He was killed in an aircraft accident. Civilian aircraft accident, but she's a very fond memory of those days. The other teachers as we went up the ladder in third standard there was one called Miss Manyon I think and then we had Miss Sayers a big formidable

12:00 woman. And then we went to Charlie Cook in the fifth standard who was a state sportsman and very well revered by the students. And finally in the sixth class was an institution called Smith. Mr Smith [was] a big man florid faced middle aged who was an excellent teacher. Devoted himself to his students and also taught

12:30 the boys cricket at playtime and lunchtime out in the playground. But his main forte was cultivating his best students for scholarship examinations to go to Perth Modern School. And happily I was one of those that were considered by the school to be a suitable candidate and I was in Smithy's class and happily at the end of sixth standard I together with eleven

13:00 other students from North Perth School very high percentage of the intake at the Perth Modern School as a matter of fact. North Perth School always was through Smithy's influence, so I went to Modern

School at the age of thirteen and I spent the next three years in a complete different environment. Modern School in those days had an educational system called the Dalton System, which was quite

- 13:30 different from where you were taught in the class and given a smack with the cane if you didn't learn. The Dalton System provided for teachers giving you various assignments. You did your own study. You presented your own text reports reviews and so on. And it was very interesting and also of course we went into quite different types of study from
- 14:00 the state school, chemistry, physics and also manual training, physical training things like that, which were stimulating inspiring and I learnt a great deal at Perth Modern School I must say. And it was interesting to know that at that school a great number of the state's famous people had attended as scholars went off to be Rhodes
- 14:30 Scholars [and] became very well regarded in the professional field, political field, the military field and I was at the annual reunion just last week as a matter of fact and have done for some years the reunions are held now. Where the school has changed of course. It's not scholarship entry anymore. It's a sort of a district high school like most other government
- 15:00 institutions now. But they do cater especially for musical and art training. And wonderful orchestra there, which performs overseas and it's a delight to attend and be musically entertained and to meet those friends from way back in the 1930s. However after that time after three years one normally sat for the junior examination this was
- 15:30 the standard education criteria at age fifteen. And you really had to pass the junior to get a job anywhere of any substance in the government or insurance office or bank or anything like that. If you didn't you could go to, technical training and learn a manual trade and there was plenty of work, or I'll correct that statement. This is the middle of the Depression there wasn't plenty of work.
- 16:00 But least there was an opening for people who didn't pass the junior in that field of activity. Those who were particularly talented scholastically and whose parents could afford to keep them at school went on at Modern School into the fourth and fifth years to sit for the leaving examination. It was from that leaving examination of course that university entries were affected and these people that I mentioned who'd achieved
- 16:30 greatness in the world subsequently were all from the fifth year through the leaving level. But I didn't achieve that standard and I went off and in 1936 I joined the ES&A Bank [English, Scottish and Australian Bank]. No wrong, 1937 after finishing Mod at 1936 joined the ES&A Bank as a junior clerk and worked there for two or three years until the war in fact.

17:00 **What sort of things did you do as part of your work duties?**

Well I was a junior clerk as we were all called, and that's how we were paid. Thirty bob a week I think. I won't try and relate that to modern currency but it was a minimum wage and of course as I mentioned earlier middle of the Depression so one was very fortunate to be able get a job like that.

Did you get a job through contacts with your family?

Well I think that probably my

- 17:30 father whose business was with the ES&A Bank perhaps approached the manager I don't know. I suspect so. It was not uncommon practice in those days because jobs were hard to find so if you had any influence well this was exercised on your behalf. Anyway the work I had to do in the beginning was in the headquarters building, which was in the central St Georges Terrace. 99 to 101 St Georges
- 18:00 Terrace. A fine building, English Scottish and Australian Bank owned by London shareholders primarily but with an Australian head office in Melbourne and my job was as an exchange clerk. And the banking system then provided where cheques were received from different banks well everyday clerks from the head offices used to meet in the Exchange Room and we'd
- 18:30 exchange the cheques and balance up. So your bank owes us so much, and your bank owes us so much. And we owe that bank that much and so on, this was run by a chap by the name of Richardson who was employed by the Association of Banks or whatever was the formal coordinating organisation. And we used to go down there twice a day to exchange cheques with young officers of other
- 19:00 banks. All males in the early days but as the years went by 1938, I think '39 some female clerks came down there. I always remember Richardson's daughter sometimes came down the stairs to visit him in the middle of our exchange programming and she was looked at with some interest because girls weren't as a rule down there. And in later years my
- 19:30 wife and I have become very friendly with her with the name of Joan Dalson who's a very well known person around in ex-wartime nursing services and RSL [Returned and Services League] Services, women's ex-services organisations and so on. So Joan Dalson was the daughter of Mr Richardson who looked after our exchange activities down there. They're memories. Quite a number of the fellows from the other exchanges from other banks along the St Georges Terrace where most of the bank headquarters

- 20:00 were became friends and together with other clerks from insurance offices stock firms and some government offices along the Terrace, which in those days was the sort of the centre of business activity for Perth. We used to meet after work at the Palace Hotel just across the road on the corner of William Street there, which had an underground or downstairs bar which was known as the
- 20:30 Palace Dive. And this was an essential rendezvous for fellas who worked along the Terrace and as a result, great friendships developed there as well. And when the wartime came and enlistments took place there was a great bonding of people from those Terrace connections in the various units,
- 21:00 which they joined including myself. But maybe we can talk about that a little later but those are childhood memories anyway from the age of four to nineteen, wrong, eighteen yes. It was more when I turned eighteen. This relates to firstly meeting.

Before we go on I've just got a little bit of a tap. Have we got any (interruption) okay rolling.

- 21:30 **Not quite sure where we were before that.**

Yes well I was going to talk about things from the age of eighteen on. But I didn't mention perhaps its important to say that my parents were quite musical people but also but also quite earnest church goers and when we went to live in Walcott Street North Perth when the

- 22:00 family came from Sydney my father and mother both joined the North Perth Congregational Perth, which was about twenty minutes walk from our house. And father became quite prominent in the church as a deacon, so called you know, one of the church elders. And also with his musical background from the

- 22:30 Mosman Church in Sydney he established a church choir and my mother had a splendid soprano voice and this choir developed remarkably. North Perth Congregational Church Choir became quite well known around musical circles. And eventually it was occasionally invited to perform at festivals and such the like

- 23:00 under the title of North Perth Choir. When the Westralian Farmers first established radio 6WF my mother was one of the artists who performed sang with her as I say lovely soprano voice in their musical programs. And then when in 1936 or '37 I think we had visits

- 23:30 arranged with the prominent English musicians conductors particularly such as Malcolm Sergeant Sir Thomas Beecham and people of that ilk who came to conduct choirs in musical items such as Handels Messiah. Father was given the job of coordinating choirs from around the city of Perth. The University Coral Society and so forth and he was the

- 24:00 as I say the coordinating conductor and then when these important English conductors came they just took over the choirs the combined choir from father. And so that was an interesting experience as a background to childhood. But in my own case and my brother's case of course we were required to attend church. Certainly in the mornings not night-time church but in the afternoons.

- 24:30 Always at Sunday school and I eventually achieved the grand status of a teacher in the boy's bible class, lads twelve or thirteen. But by the age of seventeen I was starting to get a bit red raggish I suppose. I became a bit interested in communism and such like, joined the Left Book Club,

- 25:00 which was regarded as a bit (UNCLEAR) and also to study the validity of scripture. And I had the temerity to talk to some of my bible class students on the fact that some of the biblical stories and the miracles had very natural explanations. While they were remarkable and notable and useful for biblical scholars to make a

- 25:30 point they in fact were very reasonably natural functions. Well [the] Sunday school superintendent didn't quite like this so I was invited to leave.

Your interpretation of the bible being from a parable situation is not going down well.

Yes exactly. No essentially while the Congregational Church was non conformist there was still some rather conforming people there. And I suppose as I say at the age of seventeen

- 26:00 one was a bit of a rebel and looking for things that you could kick against the bricks a bit and that's what happened. But it's always remained in my memory. I had very fond memories of those Sunday school days and they were quite intellectually stimulating. But coming back to the back and the age of eighteen. A memorable event is one day I came out of a door at the back of the banking

- 26:30 chamber to walk across the chamber to the other side for some purpose or other with a bundle of papers in my hand and siting outside the manager's door on a reception seat where visitors used to wait until he was ready to see them was the most attractive young lady. And she subsequently joined the bank and her name was Joan Pocklington, and she's my present wife.

- 27:00 So we have been acquainted since 1938 we weren't married till after the war but that's another story. But that was one of the great benefits of the ES&A Bank but that I met this lovely lady and while we had minimal and a very polite social contact in those days

27:30 the war came and as I say we weren't married until after the war.

With the war being on the doorstep from what you've just told me I mean you're obviously a thinking person considering the fact that you're considering Communism and also your own interpretation of the scriptures. What was how much were you reading of what was going on as far as the war is concerned?

28:00 The literature as I recall was primarily newspaper. I don't think our family contributed to periodical magazines you know Time Life or anything like that. So that the information was by newspaper but also in these little gatherings of friends you know down at the exchanges or across the Palace Drive there was an intense consciousness

28:30 of the possible threat of war. And it was discussed in an air of youthful excitement I think as much as anything. And it was particularly interesting that in 1936 the government felt that there was some need to upgrade the military strength of the country and certain

29:00 changes were made in the army organisation and there was one of the militia battalions that had been re-established after the First World War and continued on a voluntary basis. There were quite a number of them. One of them I think it was a combined unit. I think it was called the 16/28th was split and the 28th was raised as a unit of its own and the 16th was raised as a unit of its own. I'm talking about 1936.

29:30 And because of the interest of the Perth Scottish community in possibly fostering some kind of military unit the 16th Battalion was raised with the support of the Scottish establishment as a kilted regiment. And it was titled the 16th Battalion The Cameron Highlanders of Western Australia anyhow this aroused intense interest and while

30:00 I was much too young to join, the minimum joining age was eighteen quite a number of friends of mine or associates anyway particularly along the Terrace decided that this might be a nice thing to join. It was a potential social activity, which in those days we had very little off because of the Depression state of affairs and shortage of cash and so on so that we saw quite a number of

30:30 what we might call fashionable young men the chaps working along the Terrace joining the 16th Cameron's. And the commanding officer was appointed, a famous queen's counsel along the Terrace Thomas Louch. The second in command was a well-respected man called John Lloyd who was a prominent member of the real estate firm along the Terrace

31:00 and company commanders were appointed. Keith Barker who was the local representative for Spalding and Slazenger sporting goods and was a prominent chap up at Kings Park Tennis Club. And people of that nature joined the 16th Cameron's. So this unit became something of a social entity in the community as well as a new military unit.

How did you go about joining?

Well as I say I was

31:30 only sixteen at the time it was raised and it wasn't until I turned eighteen in November 1938 that my father permitted me to join. Although I think some people had put their age up but then one just presented one's self at the depot. The depot, which was at the foot of William Street on the corner of that Esplanade down near where the parking

32:00 area is at the present time, the public park bus station and so on. There was a new depot built down there a training depot and one went down and presented one's self and went through a medical examination and was accepted as a private soldier in the 16th Cameron's. So this is what happened and from that time on as I say that was December 1938 until this very day I'm still

32:30 very closely associated with the military activities in Western Australia in one form or another. The battalion was built up quite quickly and when I joined there was a new company being established and this is one of the reasons why one was very readily accepted. We were all recruits for this new

33:00 C Company and this was going to be commanded by this Keith Barker chap that I mentioned who was the prominent member in the sporting world and I became a member of C Company. Private K D Howard. And it was interesting that a couple of my friends quite close friends joined with me and there were others in the battalion as I say from

33:30 slightly wider acquaintances along in business circles. And the Cameron's both before the war and after the war has been a very important part of my life. Shortly after this of course we had to attend a recruits camp. Rookies as we

34:00 took an American term. Rookie's camp and it took some time for our Cameron Highlanders uniform to be prepared. Each kilt was made to measure you see, and because it was a different uniform from the standard military uniform, which the Australian government provided. The government did not provide the Scottish uniform and this had to be provided by the Scottish community

34:30 and the recruits themselves. So we had to pay two pounds towards the cost of a four-pound kilt. The

other the jacket and the beret or Glengarry and the spats and hose I think the Scots found the cash for but we certainly had to contribute to the kilt. Well this took a little time to make so that for the first few months and as I say the

- 35:00 enlistment was December I think it was January, February we went off to this rookies camp at Swanbourne and were taught the rudiments of rifle drill and so on. And we also highly privileged to be visited by the colonel in chief of the 79th Queens Own Cameron Highlanders in Britain, which was a mother-allied regiment as it were. And he came out here a General Cameron came out to inspect
- 35:30 his new boy in the colonies and so we had some very good parades and had the privilege of meeting this Scottish gentleman, which was a great pleasure. But it was interesting that because of our lack of uniform we had to appear in giggle suits, so called giggle suits, which were ordinary fatigue khaki uniforms and a floppy khaki hat.
- 36:00 So we were rather a little incongruous little group at the end of this splendidly attired Scottish rather Scottish regiment. That's a memory that lingers. Now this of course was a voluntary organisation and the pattern of attendance was Tuesday nights where one went to the parade ground to the drill hall and sometimes
- 36:30 if the weather was fine went out onto the Esplanade and did some drill there as a parade ground. And then there was a monthly weekend bivouac, and we'd go and spend this down in the Swanbourne camp, Swanbourne rifle range. And we'd spend our time practicing shooting and other military exercises under sergeant majors and other young officers
- 37:00 of the Australian regular army who were assigned to do the training of these new militia personnel. So there were some very good people there working with us, and friendships widened of course. I must say that in my own case and I think it was typical of many others I mention the social
- 37:30 glamour if you like of joining this unit but it also did pay a little, which augmented a rather meagre income from our work. And we also received every Tuesday night when we went we received cash tram fares. My tram fare I think was tuppence I think from North Perth but we got sixpence, which left four pence.
- 38:00 And it was possible with that, four pence and perhaps another penny or two to buy a pot of beer and a pie. So this was the social event of the week after your parade to gather in the troops mess and have a pot of beer and a pie with your comrades in arms. That was great. And then at the weekend bivouac there was access to canteens so we'd have a few
- 38:30 drinks together on the Saturday night and it was a great social rendezvous the battalion supplied something, which one didn't have in ordinary life. At the same time I must admit that we were thinking more and more about the seriousness of the situation. It wasn't all social fun. And this was brought very much home to us the week that war
- 39:00 was declared in August 1939 and the 16 Cameron's were called up immediately, at least one company of them not my company. But the B Company and the headquarters and were moved in immediately to Rottenest Island to establish defensive positions in the event of a German invasion of the Fremantle Port and they were there for a month and they dug
- 39:30 trenches and established machine gun posts, fields of fire along the beaches and this sort of thing. And then after their month the rest of the battalion including my company went to Rottenest to take over the duties. And this was the first real taste if I can call it a taste of war. And that was in September 1939 and we were manfully
- 40:00 defending the approaches to our home country at Rottenest Island. In 1936 there'd been some coastal artillery built in out there, 9.2-inch Howitzer's. So this was an interesting aspect and our defences were planned around the beaches and with trenches inland and fall back positions and all this sort a thing. It was highly interesting exercise in
- 40:30 retrospect and very useful training. Of course looking back at it now it was rather farcical to think that there was any considered threat at that time.

That's what I was going to ask you actually how much of a threat do you think there was you know from your point of view at the time?

Well I can't speak authoritatively about what the high authorities thought about it. Whether it was just a means of the military getting the community alert to the fact that there

- 41:00 was a war or not I don't know. And as I say I often think back and thought well it was a pretty futile exercise in the bigger picture, but from the point of view of the local military it was an alert and from that time on our military training took on a new aspect and everything that we did had a possible ultimate battle usage.

Before

- 41:30 **we go onto the training about the possible battle usage with the training that you're getting**

we just need to swap the tape.

Yeah right.

Tape 2

00:30 **Okay that's rolling. Okay we'll go from there. What sort of training changed as part of the 16th Cameron's?**

Yes the actual context of the training didn't change very much because right from the beginning we trained as infantry soldiers, which was required, elementary things like rifle drill and marching.

01:00 Then the operation of your personal weapon, firing your rifle, instruction on what was in those days the old Lewis machine gun, map reading, field sketching, a little bit on the construction of barbed wire obstacles. A lot of the stuff of course had a strong flavour of the First [World] War trench warfare. Digging of trenches

01:30 was important, trench systems, strong posts and so forth. But the expansion of the training relates more particularly to the establishment soon afterwards of two weeks a year full time training, which normally took place then in the Northam Training Camp, which had been established in 1936 at the same time as the guns. And

02:00 the 16 Cameron's had been raised [as] Northam Training Camp had been opened. And from there we were able to conduct field exercises where we had enemies established on Tea Top hill and Bald Knoll and places like that and we'd be taken across the country and we'd do flanking attacks and assault charges up hills and that sort of thing.

02:30 And there was also the opportunity given for those that were regarded as perhaps brighter in the ranks to do supplementary training classes to equip them for non-commissioned officer eventually perhaps even commissioned status. So that the training was more fulsome

03:00 more full time. And again as I say the attitude was well this is something serious now and while we still enjoyed our fellowship in the canteen after parade hours during the day we were up quite early in the morning; reveille, serious exercises, physical training, meticulous

03:30 attention to neatness. Ensuring that our sleeping accommodation was tidy and cleaned and the equipment your brass was polished, boots were cleaned your hat was properly set on your head, shaved of course. So these were all much more serious and our

04:00 instructors as I mentioned earlier were regular army chaps who had been very well trained in quite a hard school. They themselves had been trained usually soldiers from the First War who'd continued on in the regular service and so we had some excellent instructors I must say. I met them some of them in later years in the army and I was

04:30 always very impressed with their ability, their dedication to their task. And eventually many of them of course rose to quite high rank and performed successfully in the field as well. Slightly different environment from the parade ground but the same kind of devotion to duty steadfastness and so on those elements still persisted in the other circumstances.

05:00 That's how the training changed [and] became more serious more long term, and a bit expansive in its scope.

Were you involved in any sort of formal demonstrations? Because I'm just visualising everyone in their kilts I mean it's pretty spectacular, were there any sort of formal parades or anything that you were involved in?

Yes. The Cameron's themselves

05:30 were always very happy to appear publicly. I won't say that this was done without a military context. I mean for instance if we were going to Swanbourne Rifle Range for a weekend bivouac well the battalion would march through the city streets down to the railway station, that sort of thing. And everything was there with the bands

06:00 playing the pipers and so forth. It was quite an impact and the people lined the streets and applauded. I shall never forget one very naughty incident. I think by this time we were equipped with our uniforms and we'd gone to a rifle-shooting day at the Swanbourne Rifle Range. Sometimes we had a special day for rifle training exercises

06:30 and we'd present ourselves at the range. We'd come down in uniform on the train or bus and we'd present ourselves to the rendezvous at the range. We'd undergo our training and after we're dismissed we'd find our own way home. And I remember on one occasion we had a lance corporal called Bickford and he was rather a thin-faced little chap with a moustache and we had been to

- 07:00 our Rottenest period by this time and this chap was seen to have a resemblance to a quokka. So he was known as Quokka Bickford. Quokka Bickford was a very good chap a lance corporal. And anyway about six of us caught the train back from Swanbourne to Perth Railway Station and he said let's put on a performance. So we said, "What sort Quokka?" And he said, "Well let's march back to the drill hall by ourselves."
- 07:30 We said, normally we would've broken off and gone to our tram you know or bus or whatever and gone home. So we lined up six of us there were and Quokka at the side, and squad halt, slope arms you know, quick march and the six of us marched in single file from Perth Railway Station down to our training depot at the bottom [of] William Street with Bickford on the side, left right, left right. Quite unofficial and people applauding on the
- 08:00 street sides and we said so we felt it was a job well done. As I say it was something on the line of the answer to your question. But no the battalion did from a recruiting point of view I suppose. A morale point of view for the soldiers go on parade in public now and again and got a tremendous reception from the public, 'cause quite spectacular and otherwise rather colourless environment of the day.
- 08:30 Yeah.
- What happens after you've gone through all the training? How are you approached that you could quite honestly be recruited for?**
- For overseas service in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?
- Yeah. Sorry I couldn't think of the word overseas service. Yes that's it.**
- Yes this occurred fairly soon. Recruiting
- 09:00 offices were opened. I can't speak positively of the date, but certainly soon after the declaration of war. I would think in probably September, October because we did have soldiers going overseas very early elements going overseas in late '39. And again because the minimum recruiting
- 09:30 age for overseas service was twenty and I was eighteen, nineteen I wasn't involved although I had my ambitions, but father was quite strict about it. He said well you know twenty and then we'll think about it. But quite a number of my friends and quite a substantial number of the 16th Cameron's of older age and also other militia battalions
- 10:00 moved to join the AIF and very quickly the 2/11th Battalion was raised and an artillery regiment, engineers services. The various supporting arms and services were raised from volunteers from the street but also a substantial number of persons from the militia.
- 10:30 And importantly quite a number of officers, senior officers, junior officers, NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and private soldiers, all levels from the militia rallied to the colours as they may say within very early days of the war being declared. And it was always the thought
- 11:00 among most of us who were still in the battalion or underage or prevented business connections or family connections or something like that from enlisting it was always well to the fore of our minds that when the opportunity arose that we would follow our comrades and join the AIF and go overseas to serve the Motherland who was in trouble at the time. You know traditional stuff that we do.
- How were the**
- 11:30 **Cameron's viewed by the AIF?**
- In the early days because there were Cameron's in the AIF and other chaps in the AIF who hadn't had any militia service anyway it was a militia battalion that had got service so therefore you know was part of the system. It wasn't until quite a lot later really that there
- 12:00 developed this feeling about returned servicemen and the Chocos you know, the Chocolate soldiers who had stayed in Australia and not gone over to face the heat of battle and that sort of business. That took quite a long time because in those early days as I say everybody was part of the same deal and we had at least fears somewhere the possible fear [of] invasion of our country so there had to be some kind of
- 12:30 forces in Australia. No there was never any derogatory feeling to my knowledge anyway of the militia by the AIF or from the populous. If you were thinking of you know the white feather incidents and so on I don't remember anything like that. Later
- 13:00 on I think when the Japanese were closer there were some incidents of that but I don't know. I never had any experience of it. I wasn't in the country very much during the Japanese period so I can't say, but in those early days that we're dealing with no. No problem it was all part of the deal. All good stuff and anybody in uniform was worthy. It became rather
- 13:30 difficult in the militia battalions of course because the members who'd left particularly in the more senior ranks left vacancies that had to be filled. And while this was a very nice opportunity for junior people to be promoted and to fulfil these vacancies in many cases the junior

- 14:00 persons were not quite adequate to do the job. So there were some difficulties there for a while. But simultaneously with the enrolment of AIF there were also training schools set up by the army for all persons AIF and militia for
- 14:30 advancement to non commissioned rank and to officer rank. And students at these schools were both AIF and militia and they did the same training same qualifications, and whether they went to the AIF or whether they went in the militia that didn't matter. So this problem while it never really
- 15:00 was overcome it was substantially dealt with fairly quickly by the authorities and it wasn't really a major factor. I don't think that you could say that the militia suffered unduly because of [the war]. There was a personal experience that might be worthy of recording. I was commissioned quite early. I'm certain that I would not have
- 15:30 been had not these vacancies occurred. I was nineteen years old and received my appointment as First Lieutenant in the Cameron Highlanders in 1940 September 1940 and I would think that I was not as experienced or mature person as some of the other officers who'd left and gone to the AIF. However when I turned twenty I prevailed on my father to
- 16:00 permit me to join the AIF. And so I went to the recruiting office and they said well you're a young lad and in any case we'd had enough officers out of the militia for a while we don't want to deplete them anymore. So you go back there we've got you on the books and we'll call you forward when we need
- 16:30 you. So in effect I was sent back to make sure that the militia was not bereft too much of its members. And they also indicated that there was a need to perhaps bring up chaps who'd enlisted from the street as it were to get them to officer training school so they could come into the AIF as well. So I think it
- 17:00 had a dual purpose. But it certainly was quite a positive indication to me that officialdom was a bit concerned about the possible running down of the militia because of excessive AIF enlistments.

How disappointed were you that this happened?

How did?

How disappointed were you?

I was sad. They relented

- 17:30 after two or three months and they gave me a full time job. They said, "Well you know we know that you're anxious to get into service so we'll give you a full time duty at the Guildford Training School." Now Guildford had it was an old light horse so called what's the name of it? It was a horse depot anyway and they'd converted
- 18:00 it to this training school for NCOs. Staffed it with regulars. And it was one of these institutions as I say they'd been set up quickly by the army authorities to get people up in the ranks, and so they said, "Howard righto, well for a couple of months we'll give you a job up there on the Instructional Staff of the Western Command Officer Training School," as it was called. And so I went up there and was appointed an instructor. A very young
- 18:30 fresh faced lieutenant. Red headed freckled faced and wearing a kilt, and most of these blokes of course were AIF chaps and very often dour middle aged fellows but it was an interesting exercise for me.

Did you get any ribbing because of the kilt?

There was a quiet ha-ha here and there.

- 19:00 But it wasn't too bad. It was all in good spirit. There was a, you know a tremendous spirit of dedication among the military forces at the time.

Did you actually ever consider joining any of the other forces?

You mean the air force or the navy?

Yeah.

No. It's an interesting question that because from the 16th Cameron's while I mention that groups of friends went off to join the AIF also groups of friends went off to join the air

- 19:30 force. I don't recall anybody going to the navy, but the air force was new. I think it was exciting. A bit glamorous and we had in our ranks in the 16th Cameron's quite a number of chaps because of the shall I say the class if I can use such an expression of employees along St George Terrace in the banks and insurance companies very often were ex-
- 20:00 students of the public schools. Guildford Grammar School, Hale School and so on and so on and they had a very cliquey relationship of their own of course. Even in the Cameron Highlander's within the Cameron's camaraderie there was also the public school camaraderie and a very great proportion of them went off and joined the air force, but I had no inclinations at all. Rather

20:30 strange because when I was a kid I thought you know my lifetime ambition is to be a commercial air pilot. But now having a rifle in my hand I felt well the army is what I know something about so I'll stay with it and I did. And had no ambition at all during the war to be anything else. No. The period at Western Command Training School was very interesting

21:00 and useful. I was given jobs to do, training in subjects of which I had no knowledge at all so I had to do some rapid study on them.

What were those sorts of subjects?

Well one was equitation, horse riding and in those days of course all officers traditionally from the First War rode horses and even in the 16th Cameron's. On parade we'd have our officers on horseback out in

21:30 front of the soldiers on the ground. They didn't get on the horse in their kilt of course they were equipped with what were called trews [triubhas], which were tartan slacks, rather tight trousers. So officers wore trues on horseback and the soldiers on the ground wore the kilt. Anyway the

22:00 inclination to ride horses had never come to me and when I suddenly found myself taking over from another officer's job, he was a regular army officer who was going off to the AIF you see, he'd been accepted by the AIF and so I had to take over his job. And he was an instructor in equitation and also medium machine guns. I had nothing to do with medium machine guns either. So horse riding wasn't one of my subjects

22:30 nor medium machine guns so the instructor at the school said obviously we've got to reshuffle. So I got reallocated my instructional subjects in something that I was acquainted with like as I say map reading and field sketching and gas warfare and military obstacles and such like. And that was quite a happy couple of months up there until eventually the AIF said, "Righto we're ready to take you now." And off I went up to Northam camp as a

23:00 young officer, as a reinforcement officer to the 2/16th Battalion, which is a well known Western Australian battalion of course and by that time the battalion had been formed and had gone overseas. By this time it was I think early 1941.

What sort of training did you receive in Northam?

Well I was responsible for the training in fact. Another officer and I, and this was the system.

23:30 You were recruited into a particular battalion as a, reinforcement and you were fifth reinforcement sixth reinforcement or seventh reinforcement and I was the seventh reinforcement, which was another officer and myself and we had eighty soldiers. And these were soldiers AIF chaps mostly from the street some ex-militia chaps. But we had the job of preparing them for

24:00 service overseas. So our job was primarily instructional at Northam Camp training these soldiers in the elementary subjects and things that I'd gone through in the previous couple of years in the Cameron Highlanders and out at Guildford. And then eventually we were gathered together and were embarked for the Middle East. And at the time in Northam there were various

24:30 areas. There were reinforcements for the 2/11th. There were reinforcements for the 2/16th and I think by that time also there were some reinforcements being prepared for the 2/28th Battalion, and also in other ancillary artillery engineers and so on. And when it came time for us to go, shall we say the convoy facilities in the

25:00 2/16th Reinforcement group we had the 5th the 6th and the 7th. So we had something like 250 soldiers and six young officers to take this group of fellows to the Middle East and join the 2/16th Battalion, and it was interesting the reinforcement officers I can recall. My own was a chap called Bob Collins and I lost track of him and I don't know what happened to him.

25:30 But in the one before me the 6th Reinforcements were two quite well known people or who became quite well known. The first one was a chap called Jack Girk who was a very prominent cyclist state champion sprint cyclist Jack Girk, subsequently stayed on in the regular army. He got a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] in Korea and so on. He's still around but rather faded now, and the other one

26:00 was a young fresh faced boy I think my own age and probably equally naïve called Bill Graydon. Bill Graydon subsequently became a member of the local parliament here. And while a meek and mild chap certainly in contrast to Jack Girk he became a wild and woolly fellow around the place. And I think at one stage was arrested for punching some fellow in the Windsor pub when he'd had a few drinks. Quite a contrast from the younger Bill Graydon that I used to

26:30 know, but a first class chap Bill Graydon. And I was with him just a few weeks ago at the opening of the 2/6th at the 16th Battalion Memorial at Kings Park. We had a good old chat about that trip to the Middle East, which was quite notable in its own right because it was on the Queen Mary and it was so early in the war that the Queen Mary was still in it's original splendour and the staff, were there from the trans-Atlantic tourist trip,

27:00 all in their white jackets and so on. And the only real difference we found that we were occupying a suite but instead of just two people there were six officers in this suite room, which was not much smaller than this room here. And we had beds and en suite toilets and the interesting thing that none of us had seen [that] before and we all looked at

27:30 with great interest was a one of those

Bidets?

Bidet yes, which was given a rude name, which I won't mention just now but yes this was a very curious piece of equipment, which none of us had ever seen before. However the service was in its original form. We all went down to the dining room and we had Queen Mary dining room service. This was the officers anyway. The soldiers down below had

28:00 tourist type catering and their sleeping accommodation was rather more dormitory style. But no it was a very interesting trip.

You were in a very responsible position though like up until this point for a man of such a young age?

Yes well that is so. We had as was customary on all transports either shipping or train or bus or whatever we had so called

28:30 Draft Conducting Officers DCOs and these were chaps usually of a senior rank and from the First War who'd come in especially for this job so they're you know, like father figure. And they'd marshalled us and ushered us and watched over us, and so on. But we had a job Collins and I had a responsibility for our eighty soldiers and we just had to visit them every day. We had to bring them onto the decks. We had to exercise them, conduct lectures on

29:00 various aspects of military conduct and behaviour and expertise.

What were some of those things about conduct?

Well the usual sort of things that I'm talking about earlier on. Map reading was a fairly obvious one, physical training of course we did. We didn't do rifle exercises. That was a bit awkward under the circumstances. But talks on minor tactics,

29:30 development of field defences those sort of things. Things that we could do sketches of and you know in a lecture form in fact yes. That from memory I think we were about two weeks on this trip and it was an interesting thing that. Our departure from Fremantle was in convoy and we were escorted by a large

30:00 British warship, a Royal Navy ship. Cornwall I think it was, a cruiser. But shortly after leaving Fremantle because of the Queen Mary's speed the Queen Mary divorced itself from the group and shot off. It was believed I understand that she was so fast that she was able to operate by herself without having to worry about any possibility of enemy interference, which wouldn't catch up with her. Well that was quite

30:30 comforting. It was interesting when we called into Trincomalee harbour in Ceylon as our first experience of overseas countries for most of us. We didn't get ashore but we looked over the railing and saw this strange new country. We stayed in the harbour for refuelling for overnight I think. Saw chaps come up alongside trying to sell stuff and then off we went to Port

31:00 Said.

Before we go to Port Said I just wanted to ask you a little bit about the trip on the Mary 'cause you were mentioning conduct and I'm wondering if at any point you were instructing fellows about well VD [Venereal Disease] about gambling you know what is allowed and what is not allowed from that sort of a conduct value?

Yes my memory's a bit vague on this area. I'm certain that I didn't give any

31:30 lectures on VD. I didn't know anything about it and I'd had no lectures on the topic at all. We did have some medical officers on board and it may well be that there were some talks on that topic. The need to take care in the Middle East of course, which is a hot bed of this problem, I think you're probably right. But I don't recall and I certainly didn't participate in them. No. There were certainly lectures on conduct as

32:00 a prisoner of war. You know, taken captive and what one should talk about and all that sort of thing. Some wider subjects than had been the topics in Northam and elsewhere. Topics more related to actual contact with the enemy yes, but as I say my memory doesn't run to the actual curriculum so I can't be explicit in that area no.

That's okay I was just wondering if there was 'cause obviously you were

32:30 **on the ship for quite some time so what sort of things did you get up to in free time? I'm thinking maybe there's a bit of drinking going on and gambling?**

No the access of the troops to those facilities was very limited. And perhaps I gave the wrong

impression about the freedom of access to tourist facilities. They were there but

33:00 they were controlled in a military sense. That the soldiers from memory I think didn't have access to bars but they were issued with a bottle of beer a day or something like that, which you know they drank down in their quarters and they probably had their little sing songs and that sort of thing. But there was no difficulty with conduct. Gambling I think that's possible. I mean when soldiers group

33:30 together they play cards, poker and such like and I'm sure there was a bit of that going on. But if they weren't required for any training duties or other duties and there were some called on to perform cleaning duties in their own residential areas and so on. If they weren't required and they were given free time well if they were going to sit around and have a game of cards well normal. No problem. Yeah.

34:00 **Did you manage to get to know any of the folk who were actually sailing the ship?**

The crew you mean?

Yeah?

No there wasn't any intimacy like that. I perhaps the you know the draft conducting officers had some relationship with the captain and senior crew but it never happened to us. We were looking after our soldiers and then we went to the dining room and

34:30 after the dining room we came back to our quarters and bunked down. 'Cause we had to get up early in the morning you know. No it wasn't really a social journey in terms of the Mary's original purpose. It had the same facilities but our access to them was, dictated by our own necessary program really. Yeah.

How

35:00 **much information were you told about where your final destination would be and when was that revealed?**

Oh we were always aware we were going to the Middle East because that's where our battalions were you see. We were reinforcements to the battalions that were already in the Middle East. And while I'm not sure about any topical information coming during the course of the journey we

35:30 were aware before we left, in general terms anyway, of the operations that the AIF had been involved in the Middle East and there were some part of the discussion program you know during the training periods on the sort of operations that were possible potential activities. By that time of course the 6th Division

36:00 with the 2/11th Battalion and the others in the 6th Division had a highly successful advance up North Africa against the Italians and this was subject of some interest, the capture of Bardia and Tobruk and finally the advance on Tripoli, and then unfortunately the catastrophe in Greece and Crete. That was all

36:30 either en train or at least close enough to be talking about quite intimately. So those sorts of things were discussed at information sessions you might say during the course of the trip yes.

Were you briefed separately to the troops that you were in charge of?

Not on the ship itself. We had information given to us material that we brought aboard for training purposes. You know

37:00 officer training manuals and also supplementary information like that was given to us for use during the period of the trip yeah. It was considering the fairly early stages in the war things were reasonably well organised. In retrospect I often think that it could've been a lot worse. There were lots of limitations and vagaries,

37:30 inadequacies of course but in the light of the situation and our sudden projection into the circumstances I think our authorities did pretty well. I mean our regular service is very, very limited. Our permanent military forces were very limited indeed, the organisational strata small.

38:00 The majority of the members of the permanent military force were lower ranking people out in the militia doing training on the ground in elementary levels. High-level strategy and planning for big campaigns and so on, very few people indeed at a high level in the services and certainly none to speak of in the air force as far as I'm aware. And very few in the navy because we were

38:30 very much a component of the Royal Navy at the time. So no it took us some time to get a grip on things. I'm talking in terms of months and years.

Where were you heading from Trincomalee in Ceylon where were you?

Into the Canal area, Port Said and Port Tewfik, and we were

39:00 discharged there and from the ship and moved into a transit camp. And from the transit camp we were put on trains and taken up to Palestine. What had happened was that in the early days of the war and the AIF movement into the Middle East training depots for all the

- 39:30 units and formations of the Australian army were established in Palestine. These were camps, which were set up, tented camps in the main. Close to particular villages and I don't know what the particular reason for their establishment in place A, B or C was although there was quite a high concentration around the town of Gaza.
- 40:00 That did have some facilities. The British were ensconced further north in Palestine in Haifa and to some degree in Jerusalem. Tel Aviv was a very new city a Jewish established city and the British of course had been there for a long time, since the mandate days of 1921, '22
- 40:30 and so their military installations were at Haifa and inland at one or two quite well known establishments. So when the Australians came we had to set up our barrack down further south. As I say centred around Gaza. Places like Kilo 89 and to the south of Gaza in what has become part of the famous Gaza refugee camps now, [Al] Mughazi.
- 41:00 Several other names they escape me just off the top of my head. And our particular 2/16th, training depot was outside a little village called Dimra, which was about twenty kilometres north of Gaza on the road leading up towards Haifa. And just south of Dimra was
- 41:30 another village called Deir Sunayd. And here pretty much an army headquarters area was established. Not an army headquarters in terms of military control but the headquarters of the training area in Palestine was at Deir Sunayd and this was, commanded by a brigadier but out at Dimra we had the training depots for
- 42:00 the three battalions of the 24th Brigade.

Tape 3

- 00:30 **Keith I was wondering if you could just go into some details about the kinds of training or acclimatisation courses you were doing in Dimra?**

Yes. The subjects are not very different from the basic ones. Of course an infantryman's training is fairly stereotyped and with the regular battalions we don't get involved in commando type operations

- 01:00 but things like night training, moving across country, compass work, the approach to defensive positions in quiet stealthy manner. This is all useful sort of training.

What kind of strategic manner would you travel across the country in the night or approach an enemy position?

Well

- 01:30 nothing more than on foot. I mean infantrymen, PBI Poor Bloody Infantry. That's it footsloggers and we go by foot. At these days I'm talking 1941 there were never any special kinds of footwear for night work you just wore your regular army boots and you just went as quietly as you could. This was part of the night-time

- 02:00 exercise. And later on in the desert or anywhere else where you were in a defensive position the Australian army has always had a policy of controlling the no-mans land by night patrol. We dominate the no-mans land by night patrolling and this involves night movement by stealth. And it's quite an important part of training careful movement by night with

- 02:30 compass and the use of star navigation. So that sort of thing was rather new to us in Dimra.

Would you say that night manoeuvres are something that we could pride ourselves on in controlling the no-mans land at night?

I certainly think that we were rather unique in that way. I believe it's a tradition that grew up in the First [World] War and maybe at Gallipoli I'm not

- 03:00 sure. But certainly in World War II and subsequently it has been a positive policy to control the no-mans land. Obviously because if you control it, it denies the enemies use of it and if you deny the enemy the use you deny the enemy access to information on your locations. And conversely if you dominate the no-mans land you can have access to information on his movements

- 03:30 and his locations. So it's a sound policy but somehow or other it seemed to be rather unique to Australians yeah. Some other people may differ on this one and things may have developed in other countries other theatres of war subsequently, but certainly in my experience in World War II that was the form. And as I mentioned in

- 04:00 in our El Alamein activities it was our number one priority because the daytime nothing very much happened. It all happened at night-time yeah. So that was quite a prominent part of our training that was a bit different from Australia, but otherwise just perfection in routine infantry basic training, weapons, skill at arms so called.

04:30 Field craft, cross-country, navigation, defensive development, development of defensive fire zones, cross fire from differing points and defensive posts and so on.

Can you maybe discuss those points a little further?

Well yes. Obviously if you are holding a line

05:00 a line of defence we might say one does that through positions on the ground which one holds, rarely nowadays. Rarely in my day were trenches dug in a line as they were in World War I, Flounders and so on. Although occasionally there were

05:30 small communication trenches dug between strong posts. But basically you constructed your defensive line on a series of strong posts with interlocking defensive fire across your front. So that these points one two three four at whatever distance was appropriate for the particular terrain, you were able to command the approach to your hole

06:00 front by fire, small arms fire. Mortar fire from within your own lines to land quite close to your front, but in defence of your front line, the use of barbed wire obstacles to restrict enemy movement to contain him and to be a component of your defensive fire system. So that if an enemy was, held up by a barbed wire obstacle

06:30 or any other minefield or any other obstacles that you constructed he was in more vulnerable to the defensive fire which you had organised to be brought down on that particular front. So it's a quite an important part of infantry defensive tactics to establish strong points with appropriate view and appropriate field of fire and appropriate accommodation for the particular weapons

07:00 that you have available; medium machine guns, light machine guns or whatever. This as I say has changed a bit over the years with more mobile troops and vehicle transport and that sort of thing. But in the days that we're talking about World War II the footslogger established strong defensive positions where he and his weapons controlled your own security.

If I can interrupt Keith at Dimra did

07:30 **you mock up entire lines of defence during your training?**

No I don't we weren't. I'll start again. Normally those sort of exercises are conducted within a unit, which has its regular component platoons, companies, the battalion as such, which is all integrated in a defensive system so that you're digging of trench lines

08:00 and that sort of thing would normally take place in a company exercise or a battalion exercise. But in Dimra and the other training depots we were groups of soldiers small groups, who we'd take off in groups of ten for instruction by NCOs or officers in the minor tactics or the basic skills that I've been talking about weapons and so forth,

08:30 and occasionally we might organise a small facsimile exercise of a platoon size or even we might mock up a company size. But not much of that because we weren't in fact companies, as part of the battalion component. But in the battalions they were doing that sort of thing yes certainly. That's part of normal defensive training, and in the North of Syria, oh no I'm jumping ahead I'll leave that till later on.

All right.

09:00 **Was there much attention being paid to acclimatisation to the environment?**

I don't recall extensive medical training in acclimatisation. I think we were given good advice on the need for conserving water.

09:30 We were all issued with a salt tablet each day, which had to be taken to replace the inevitable loss of salt through perspiration. There was certainly advice by local medical officers on the dangers of leave recreational facilities in terms of VD. And in fact there was as part of the Australian

10:00 establishment in southern Palestine a hospital for venereal disease as called 8th Special Hospital. And known colloquially among the soldiers as the Pox Hospital. And one did one's best at avoiding being an inmate at the institution. And I don't know whether it was well patronised or not. I didn't ever know anybody who was an inmate down there. But it certainly

10:30 was available and there was a consciousness among the authorities that this was one of the dangers of young soldiers going on leave. And leave was while I won't say it was generous it was fairly regular and one was able to go off to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem or Gaza most frequently. There was a sort of a café down there run by a

11:00 long established company called, oh God, I'll think of their name a little later on. Anyway I think they were actually New Zealanders who'd stayed there after the First [World] War you know and set this catering establishment and they also made sausages, which were said to be issued you know, they were the sausages that we got for breakfast. And they had this sort of

11:30 large tea house in Gaza and if you got a day off you could go down and take tea in the British fashion.

But strangely enough all the waiters were long gowned Arabs with big moustaches and turbans on their heads in the sort of Egyptian style. Yes. So that if we're getting onto the recreational need because it certainly was well controlled and

12:00 well directed and advisory lessons given on sexual behaviour particularly, but also on food one was warned to be very careful about the kinds of foods, which one ate out of the camp, which perhaps weren't as hygienic as we might have wished. So one went off on leave with

12:30 a fair amount of knowledge expertise you might say of living conditions in the local area yes.

How early did you receive leave into your service?

I think the leave as I say was a fairly frequent and readily available thing. I would think from memory that after a fortnight in the camp you got say a weekend.

13:00 And then after three months you might get a week and you could perhaps even go down to Cairo or even up to Beirut. There were the Australian Comforts Fund had offices in the main areas and they conducted trips and tours for soldiers on leave. So it was very well organised in that way. There were

13:30 occasions when one could go off by oneself. This wasn't normally favoured although I did go off by myself on one or two occasions, had some quite interesting experiences. But by and large it was a group arrangement, leave was a group arrangement and was under conducted tour arrangements because of the facilities that provided accommodation was booked just like it is today you know. The odd

14:00 independent tourist is unusual compared with group tourist and that's how it was out of the training camps in Palestine. Yeah.

What were some of your memorable encounters while you were on leave Keith either in a group situation or on your own?

Yes. One particular incident I recall. I went off to a very nice little town called Rehovet, which was established very early

14:30 I think in the 1890s by some of the earliest Jewish immigrants from Russia and they'd established this little town farming area and it was quite well cultivated. Trees greenery and a very pleasant environment and nearby in 1900 or thereabouts Barron Rothschild who was an English

15:00 philanthropist had interested himself in that area and he'd set up some vineyards there. And so it became as I subsequently found a centre of wine production in Palestine and probably is still in Israel. But I was sitting there at lunch in this little accommodation, it was sort of a boarding

15:30 house come restaurant thing. And I was having lunch by myself in this little place and across the almost empty dining room was another chap and he said in a very British accent, "I say come and join me here old chap." So I said, "Okay," and went off and joined him at his table. And he turned out to be a British army major who'd come up from the Gulf area on leave.

16:00 And he said, "Would you care to share my bottle of wine?" And I'd never had a glass of wine in my life. And I think what was I? Was I twenty yes, and I said, "Yes indeed thank you very much." So I had a glass of wine and I enjoyed it very much. And from that time on you know for the rest of my life I've enjoyed a glass of wine whenever it's possible. So that was it was rather a memorable experience

16:30 in my life on that little independent trip.

What did you and the major discuss over the bottle of wine?

Mainly his life in the British Army, he was a regular army officer and he had this posting down there with some unit or other. I forget what it was, but I was young and I asked him one or two questions and he was willing to talk and

17:00 it was just about life in general, nothing specific or dramatic or earthshaking no. Just a pleasant experience that I recall seeing you asked me. But by and large I went off with groups or sometimes met up with fellows who were on their own. You know we sort of joined together in a small group and

17:30 had a meal together or had a few drinks together in a café or that sort of thing yeah. And I can tell you this that on one occasion and this is a memorable occasion. I was in Jerusalem this was some little time later a few years later on after my Alamein experience and I met in a pub there some fellows from my platoon

18:00 and we had a few drinks and they said, "Oh come on Blue." I was known as Blue. I was red headed you see with freckles. Blue Howard and they said, "C'mon we're going to get some tattoos." And I said, "My God." "C'mon, c'mon," they said. Well I'd had sufficient glasses of wine to go along with them. Not that I had any intention of being tattooed because I had

18:30 visions of great dragons, and I love Mother and tombstones you know, the traditional things that you sometimes see on tattoos. And we went we were at a place called the Fast Hotel. Why it was fast I don't know. It was a local word, which didn't mean fast I don't think. But it was an Arabic Hotel on the

outskirts of Jerusalem, which had been taken over by the Australian Comforts Fund and

- 19:00 this was now the Australian official leave hotel. So we were at the Fast Hotel and it was on a slight slope and under the slope were small shops souvenir shops and that sort of thing. And one of them was a tattooist and they said, "We're going to see this fellow down below." So I tagged along with these four or five fellas and it was a very dark and dingy place.
- 19:30 And this fellow he had a tattoo needle, which was plugged into a light socket in the ceiling and came down with the cord and it had this sort of juddering needle on the end of it, which you dipped into a bottle of ink or something like that and then he went dit-dit-dit-dit-dit-dit-dit on your arm or wherever it was punctured holes into your flesh into which this ink went. And I saw with horror
- 20:00 these fellas getting these inscriptions and they said, "C'mon Blue you've got to get something, you've got to get something done." Well I eventually decided that well I couldn't say no to these chaps they were being so decent about everything and I decided well the least I can have is my army number tattooed. And so I got it tattooed on me forearm and it's still on me forearm, and there.
- 20:30 And that occurred in this dingy little place under the Fast Hotel in Jerusalem in 1942 I think it was '43. And I've thought about getting medical attention to remove it but they say it'll leave a bad scar so I might as well leave it. But it was interesting that on other occasions in later years when I've spent some time in the Middle East and in the streets of Israel I'm often
- 21:00 accosted by Jewish people, and said were you in a concentration camp in Germany? And I said, "No why?" And they said, "Well you've got this tattoo on your arm, because in the concentration camps in Germany we all had our numbers tattooed on our arms." I said, "how very interesting." No I was not a participant in the holocaust thank you. So that was another interesting little episode when I went off by myself. But
- 21:30 even further than that if I can take that story further. I did go back to work with the UN [United Nations] in the 1960s and '70s and on my first day there I was met by a couple of Australian officers and a New Zealand lieutenant colonel and I had a couple of days before I needed to report to the UN Headquarters. And they said, "While you're waiting we'll take you round the old streets
- 22:00 of Jerusalem and we'll show you some of the places where you should go," and so on. So they took me up the street and showed me [a] good place to buy souvenir this and a good place to buy a carpet and this is a good chap if you want to change money and this sort of thing. And we went into one very nice shop and there was a nice young man there, his name escapes me just now but Abdul something or other
- 22:30 and he's a good fella to buy Arab arts from, and in the conversation this fellow said, "Oh you're an Australian." He said, "My father used to know a lot of Australians." And I said, "Oh how was that?" He said, "Well he had a tattoo shop under the Fast Hotel, which was an Australian leave hotel." I said, "You're kidding?" He said, "No that's true." And I said, "Is he still alive?" He said, "Yes
- 23:00 he lives with me." And I said, "Look at this," and I showed him my arm. And I said, "You know that was 1943. It's now 1967 and your father did that." He said, "Oh you'd better come round and meet him." I said, "Yes I'd like that old bastard." So he took me on the street down and there in his house was his little old wizened father sitting in a corner. Not too much compus mentis.
- 23:30 And I showed him this arm and I said, "You're the bastard who did that." And he said, "Yeah yeah. Very good very good." Anyway we became quite friendly with this young fellow. When my wife came I took her down and introduced her as well and we bought a few things for them. We lived in Jerusalem for some time and he became not exactly a friend of the family but passing acquaintance and father was quite a feature in this
- 24:00 reunification as well yeah.

That's unbelievable.

It is.

It's a small world.

Yes, yes.

While we're on the subject of leave Keith what you must have found in the various locales where you took leave quite exotic and the local culture very exotic. Can you extrapolate maybe on how eye-opening it was?

Yes.

- 24:30 As I said earlier our first sight of an overseas place for most of us was Trincomalee in Colombo and to hit the Middle East, which was something quite unique to any of us I think I should say that the terrain was not too difficult to deal with. I mean to West Australians anyway and particularly country West Australians the arid nature of the countryside wasn't too much of a shock. But

- 25:00 to go into a village or a town to see the markets or suks as they were called it was it had tremendous cultural impact. I won't say a cultural shock because I don't recall anything particularly shocking or revolting about it. It was unique, fascinating
- 25:30 and if I can go ahead to my future years there with the United Nations in later times. My wife and I found that part of the world quite captivating and fascinating and intriguing and we never lost interest and the possibility of finding something new and novel that we hadn't known before. Stemming of course from
- 26:00 its ancient history both of us and I even at that stage still had memories of school by history lessons and ancient history. And we also had had some education in our early military times of Australian army activities in the Middle East with the side issues involved so that
- 26:30 it wasn't so strange it was just wonderful to make contact to feel and smell and touch things, which we only suspected and found so fascinating. Yeah. There were cases and I must say that the living conditions in some of the Arab villages in Southern Palestine was
- 27:00 not exactly what we enjoyed in North Perth Western Australia. But they were all reasonably happy people and in their own way lived their lives. They were supported by their religion and food was available if they worked. Fruit growing particularly in the south near Gaza.
- 27:30 Naval oranges, was a very big business and they got quite a good income down there. So yes I can't think of anything in the routine life in those days that was a disturbing or distressing. Novel, fascinating, intriguing yes.

Any distinct impressions as a young man?

- 28:00 **Perhaps pertaining to the seedier side of culture in these exotic far off lands?**

Well I must say that there were some aspects of life, which I saw that I hadn't experienced before.

In North Perth.

The nocturnal activities in particular, something that I in my circumspect life in Perth

- 28:30 religious upbringing and so on I found a bit strident. Nightclubs. The flamboyance of some of the young ladies around the place that sort of thing was part of growing up I think really. It was different yes. Surprising.

What was your reaction?

Well this is life

- 29:00 yes. So roll with the punches. Yeah.

Stay out of trouble.

Yes that was the guiding motto stay out of trouble.

'Cause I believe the entertainment in some of these bars and clubs was very popular you know regardless to what personal restraint you showed it'd still be quite amusing or entertaining to visit some of these premises?

Yes. I don't recall anything very

- 29:30 involving or sordid or seedy you know. There were you'd get wriggling people come sit on your knee and that sort of thing and you know belly dancing going on and so on but no I didn't find anything you know really revolting no.

Well you wouldn't have seen a belly dancer before would you?

No. As I say it was novel and intriguing. But no we all went there and we sort of sat around, and we

- 30:00 laughed and drank our beer and toasted the performers and came out . I don't recall. Talking about loose women I don't recall any streetwalkers per se. One was approached in places of entertainment frequently but on the streets no. No. But again

- 30:30 the areas that we frequented were usually the popular tourist areas. We didn't get off down into backstreets. I didn't anyway. Some chaps may have done. But no I was fairly circumspect.

I understand that the brothel industry was eventually managed by, the Australian army or our forces at least.

I've no idea of that I'd

- 31:00 not heard that no. No I wouldn't be able to speak on that at all.

Can't confirm that?

No. I'd be surprised if it were yeah.

Oh okay. Well what if we return to sorry the name of the place was Dimra. Was this just after the Syrian campaign had come to a close?

Well it was

- 31:30 just towards the end of it yes. And this is one of the problems that I had or it was a longer term problem in that the casualties that had been involved by the battalion in the Syrian campaign had been filled by 3rd, 4th and then some of the 5th Reinforcements and some of the 6th. So when I got there really reinforcements were not urgently required
- 32:00 and particularly among officers. But from Dimra there was a gradual flow of soldiers to the battalion, which was in Syria had taken part in the Syrian campaign. And I got on one occasion moved as far as the crossing point into Syria and then found that for administrative reasons I had to go back to Dimra so didn't actually get to the battalion,
- 32:30 which by this time had fought its way up through Syria and was now in the north and was taking up defensive positions in the north of Syria. You may recall that about this time 1941 the Germans had advanced down into Greece. They'd advanced down quite a lot through the Western Desert and it was feared that they may come down through Turkey,
- 33:00 and through Palestine to envelope the Suez Canal in a pincer movement. So there was a very strong desire to ensure that the north of Syria was defended against any possible German advance down through Turkey. Out of Greece and through Turkey and into Syria. As a result 7th [Division] and British Forces as well and some of DeGaulle's Free French forces were in the north occupying defensive
- 33:30 positions along the Syrian boarder. So that it was a static situation. The casualties had been replaced and except for sickness the odd repatriation of a soldier home for some reason or other there was very little draw on our resources in Dimra. And as I say apart from that short exercise when I was on my way to the battalion and then it was found that I wasn't needed and several of us were
- 33:34 sent back to Dimra I never actually never actually served in the with the 2/16th Battalion.

Who, sorry to interrupt, who was involved in the defensive positions at the time or the defensive role?

Who?

Which battalion was involved in this defensive role?

Oh all of them. The whole of the 7th Division was dotted along the Syrian frontier in various defensive postures in

- 34:30 what was a national frontier defence see. So the 2/16th was part of it, the 2/14th, and the 2/27th and the other brigades of 7th Division they were all up there it was a big deal. And in fact the 6th Division the 2/11th Battalion and others, which had been those that were left of them after the tragedy in Greece and Crete were also reformed to a
- 35:00 degree up in Syria and formed part. So we had in fact our training area still down in Palestine but our combat forces 6th and 7th Divisions up in Syria and that was the drill. Subsequently when we went up to the Western Desert the training areas remained in Palestine and the combat forces were out somewhere else in another country. So during this time
- 35:30 we had this very big array of training depots of the three Divisions. By this time the 9th Division of course was in the Middle East and were occupying Tobruk but they had training depots as well. So we had the entire Australian army's training depots base areas in Palestine and those officers of us who had any
- 36:00 background perhaps expertise were used for training purposes in other depots where there was need for instruction lack of instructional ability and that sort of thing. So two or three of us from Dimra, a 2/14th fellow and I think a 2/27th chap and myself were on a kind of a training round
- 36:30 at other training depots giving instruction in infantry tactics even at engineer and armoured not armoured, artillery depots for quite some time. Then I had a period in hospital. I got a rather serious case of laryngitis or pharyngitis or something like that. And at the critical time when I was in hospital the Japanese came into the war here
- 37:00 or had come into the war and 6th and 7th Div were pulled out, shipped back to Australia en-masse. And we people from the 6th and 7th Divisions who were in Palestine not part of the active components of their battalions were left there waiting for a subsequent ship to come back to Australia to join their units. So this is rather distressing circumstance.

Did that leave you in a vulnerable position?

- 37:30 Not militarily no, it was just that we were out on a limb. We didn't belong. Well we did, I mean there was still an Australian army organisation there, and the Australian 9th Division was still there of course.

And to cut a long story short eventually the 9th Div, which had been sent up to the north of Syria to replace the 6th and 7th Div after they'd come out of Tobruk went up to Northern Syria

38:00 suddenly Rommel [Field Marshall Erwin Rommel] captured Tobruk from the South Africans who'd taken over from the Australians. Great distress in the Australian army ranks when Tobruk fell after the valiant efforts for seven months of the 9th Div holding the bloody thing. And Rommel made his advance onto the Canal. 9th Div was pulled suddenly out of Northern Syria and shot up to El Alamein in the Western Desert.

38:30 And we fellows from 6th and 7th Div who were still sitting there waiting for a ship back to Australia suddenly became legitimate source of supply personnel to 9th Div in the Western Desert.

Who replaced the 9th Div in Syria after they were pulled out?

Oh well I dunno. I think some British some Lebanese some Syrian. It was abandoned because the much greater threat was from Rommel advancing

39:00 on the Canal you see. And so in effect I and a great number of other 6th and 7th Div chaps waiting to come back to Australia suddenly felt a found ourselves shot up in the Western Desert to join 9th Div at El Alamein, and that's another chapter of my life.

We're reaching the end of the tape. Perhaps we could just briefly go into your movements between Palestine and

39:30 **Alamein how you travelled there just before the tape closes?**

Between Palestine

Dimra yes.

and El Alamein? Yes well there was a routine train service civilian train service before the war built by the British of course running from Haifa down to the Suez Canal, [El] Kantara crossing by ferry to Ismailia,

40:00 and then a branch down to Cairo and a branch up to Alexandria. Now this railway line during the war was converted pretty much to military use you see. So that just as we'd come up from the Canal to Dimra and the other training areas by train so when 9th Div was rushed up to

40:30 to Alamein they went by rail and some accompanying motor transport on a side road. And when I went up together with all the rest of the fellows that were going up there we went by troop train to the Canal. Crossed the Canal by ferry and then onto a troop train up to Alexandria. And then by Alexandria we went by motor

41:00 transport up the connecting road. The vital coast road, which runs from Alexandria right up to Tripoli and there's a you know, strategic importance. We went up that road by motor transport.

What kind of motor transport?

You know trucks, GMC 3-ton open trucks. Normal troop transport, which mostly bought from the Americans I suppose yeah. I think there's some British vehicles there but mostly big

41:30 American type trucks.

Did you encounter anybody along the way?

You mean antagonistic people?

No, were there any British forces that were returning?

Staging posts you know and people who just sort of checked you through and off you went. Official staging posts yes which had been established a long time. 'Cause we'd been sending troops up and down to Mersa Matruh and

42:00 so on for some time and other areas for other reasons.

Tape 4

00:30 **Okay if we could just pick up where we left off with that movement.**

Yes the transport as I say was quite reasonably well organised by rail down to the Canal and then by ferry across and then from the Canal up to Alexandria and on by road transport. The staging points were well established and not only had the Australians

01:00 had movement there prior, but of course the British were well established in Egypt and their operations over a number of years in Egypt from Cairo and Alexandria had involved an enormous amount of

activity in Egypt and there were as I say staging posts transport arrangements all kinds of British encampments and that sort of thing between Cairo and Egypt and Cairo and Alexandria and even

- 01:30 a little beyond so that there was plenty of allied presence on the way yes. But when we moved from Alex up to the desert, and I should say the 2/43rd and [2/20th] and my Brigade and whole of 9th Division had gone up a few days before earlier in July. July 1942 and they'd
- 02:00 made contact with Rommel's advance in the area of the Alamein station, which is a strange little wooden shack on the railway line, which runs from Alex to Tripoli and this railway line parallels the only bitumen road in the area. So the coastline, the strip along the coast with the railway line and this one road
- 02:30 is as I mentioned earlier a very strategic strip. Inland in the desert it's wild. A few oasis's dotted around here and there, but no communication means at all. All right for cross-country vehicles tanks and so on but for infantry and supply transport and that sort of thing the coast is where to go. Anyway our division had gone up the
- 03:00 coast road and by transport as I did a few days afterwards and they encountered the Axis forces around the El Alamein station and one of the other brigades of 9th Div fought a very fierce action to secure slight eminence between the railway line and the shore the coast line called Tel
- 03:30 el Isa, or Tel el Eisa. Tel being hill and Eisa, Jesus, the Hill of Jesus, and this brigade had captured that area with some casualties some VCs [Victoria Cross] some very brilliant fighting. My Brigade had established itself just south of the Alamein station in a line running roughly south-east and the other
- 04:00 brigade was just behind in reserve and on our left were some South African Indians and some British forces running a little further south to what was the main obstacle in movement across the desert an enormous low lying area called the Qattara depression. So that in fact the strategic area for Rommel's attack on Alexandria was along this
- 04:30 coastal strip between the coast and the Qattara depression where very substantially the defences were maintained by the Australian 9th Division and others just to the south. So that when I joined them my battalion was the 2/43rd Battalion. A South Australian battalion and this is the interesting thing too that reinforcements went where they were needed. No necessary affiliation with your state. As I had gone away
- 05:00 to a state battalion the 2/16th and there was the 2/28th also a West Australian battalion in the same brigade. I went to this South Australian battalion because it needed people more and I spent the rest of the war until the war ended in August 1945 with the 2/43rd South Australian Battalion.

How did you slot in with the 2/43rd?

Well it's a long story and

- 05:30 the 2/43rd was established rather like a West Australian battalion with a prominent group of South Australians as officers. They had a very good state tradition I don't decry that. They always looked with suspicion on any other states as we did in our state battalions looked at any blow-ins from other states. So that there was just that sense
- 06:00 of difference and also as with all battalions in the AIF there were the Originals and the Rios [reinforcements]. The Rios being people, who were reinforcements, who were not there right in the beginning, so yeah that was a state of affairs that existed right the way throughout the AIF. The Originals and the Rio's, and your own state and the mob from elsewhere.
- 06:30 In some cases there were very serious feelings about other battalions in total. I won't go into details but you know if you had a battalion or such and such a battalion from such and such a state on your right flank you felt very happy indeed. Queensland. It was very nice to have a Queensland battalion on your right flank. But if you had a battalion from somewhere else on your left flank you didn't feel quite
- 07:00 so happy. Anyway I joined.

Are you sure you can't afford to incriminate yourself?

No I won't elaborate on that. But anyway to come back to your point yes there was a sense of difference between the South Australians of my battalion and West Australians. We had quite a few West Australians and continued through the war to reinforce the South Australian 2/43rd Battalion.

- 07:30 And others came in from Victoria and elsewhere as the war went on.

They obviously needed a few West Aussies did they?

Well some would like to say it gave them a bit of substance yeah. I wouldn't play this in South Australia. But it wasn't a serious situation and I didn't find it affected my status at all.

You might as well get in first Keith because South Australians will be interviewed

- 08:00 in the next round and they're obviously going to be bagging the West Aussies so.

Well they will do that I'm quite [sure]. Like as I say if I'm talking as a 2/28th Battalion man I would be looking askance from other blow-ins. So we'll leave it at that if we may, and we'll move on to the fact that I arrived there and the battalion had established it self in elementary

08:30 defensive position with the Germans and Italians about 2,000 yards back. They'd been held there by the 9th Div coming up, and while one brigade was on the coast at the Tel el Eisa feature our Battalion was on another little feature called Hill 20. And I

09:00 mention it as Hill 20 because 20 was twenty metres above sea level and if you think of a battalion's strategic position or tactical position, defensive position being on a feature only twenty metres above sea level you'll realise that the desert area there did not undulate much and any kind of feature at all that gave any eminence was of some strategic purpose. So that from the top as it were top of my little

09:30 slope virtually a dune one could look across no-mans lands and see the defences of the Italians and Germans roughly 2,000-metres away.

Can you describe what you saw?

From that distance no. Very low sort of breaks in the line of the desert, which one realised were fence and barbed wired establishments.

10:00 Minefields being laid, but there were no buildings of course being put up because it was trench defences so that very little break in the silhouette of the panorama as with our side. And I'm quite sure that on the German side some of their areas a bit back from their front line were a behind undulations in the desert as well. I should say that desert perhaps is a slight

10:30 misnomer although certain parts of the area were sandy like the Sahara. Much of the El Alamein area is not dissimilar from our Nullarbor Plain no trees but odd little shrubs and tufts of grass here and there and the earth not sandy rather more than clayey. Certainly in the coastal areas where

11:00 we conducted our operations anyway. And our trenches, which we dug every man had to have his own slit trench. That was your place of abode during the defensive period, the slit trench of two feet wide by four feet deep by six feet long. Standard military engineering procedure was rather into a clayey sort of substance rather than sand, which kept

11:30 falling in. So the sides held up reasonably well they didn't need very much riveting and what you dug out of the ground you placed around the edges of the slit trench in a sort of a mound to give you that little extra height. And as time wore on we were able to get sometimes bits of galvanised iron or timber and put those across one third of the length of the slit trench and put either sandbags or heap a little

12:00 more sand over to give some head cover if in the event or when in the event of a bombardment you could stay in your slit trench and curl up at one end of it with a little more cover over your head than just the open trench itself. That was the standard type of defence. Well not actually defensive position, they were gun positions a little more forward but that was the sleeping area or rest area you might say.

12:30 The when I first arrived as I say the Battalion was just starting to settle in there and there was a spare slit trench in this platoon. I was allocated to be Commander of 11 Platoon B Company and I was greeted by my platoon sergeant who was a South Australian chap called Joe Waites. A very

13:00 sturdy commonsense practical man who gave me enormous support and I never found any reservations about my lack of experience. He'd been in Tobruk of course with the rest of the Battalion. My lack of experience in that theatre nor the fact that I was a Rio or a West Australian. He gave me wholehearted support and I had great admiration for Joe Waites. Anyway he said, "There's your slit trench." So

13:30 I went over to it with my haversack on my back and put my haversack into it and assumed control of the platoon, which was at three-section strength. I don't know if you wish to hear the detail of the composition of a force on the ground, but normal military company infantry company, which is commanded by or in those days commanded by a captain

14:00 now by a major. There's three platoons each commanded by lieutenants, and each lieutenant has three sections each commanded by a corporal and the lieutenant has a sergeant with him in the platoon headquarters. So that my little platoon headquarters was the Sergeant Joe, myself, an orderly and we were about 80 to 100 metres behind the front line where we had

14:30 a row of barbed wired dannert fencing. So called dannert, d-a-n-n-e-r-t, a particular type of wire and then some coiled barbed wire as well. And then just inside the wire we had a minefield a row of four or five lines of anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines. And then quite nominally our front line,

15:00 where we had a couple of the sections they had their slit trenches in a tactical position so that they when they stood up in the aperture at the end had a firing position out over the front of the defensive position. And they had crossfire arrangements with the machine gun in the section with the machine gun in the next section. As I was talking earlier on about having the planned crossfire defence

15:30 out in front of the slit trenches and crossing the obstacle so that if the enemy was held up at the obstacle they were caught in the cross fire from either side of our defensive positions, and there we

were. My thirty three odd lads, three sections, myself, the orderly and Joe Waites in the platoon headquarters. I was under the command of a South Australian captain called

- 16:00 Hair. Captain Ivan Hair who was a schoolmaster from prestigious Prince Alfred's College in Adelaide. He was known as 'Bunny Hair' of course. Rather an austere gentleman and I didn't have a great deal to do with him but he was fair and decent and we had a amicable relationship such as there was, I mean one didn't have much of a relationship when you were out there with your
- 16:30 soldiers and he was back another hundred metres or so in his own slit trench. But we had conferences now and again when we'd sit around his slit trench when it was quiet and talk about what we were going to do and get a briefing for our nightly patrols over this no-mans land or whatever was happening.

How would you return to his slit trench to his?

Oh we'd just walk over. You see two things. Firstly this slight eminence that I'm speaking of Point 20 we were actually

- 17:00 behind just behind the crest of the hill from the enemy position so all our defences were out of sight. The minefield and the barbed wire were just over the crest.

Can we just pause there.

That's Joan. She's looking after it.

We'll just we're pausing aren't we? Oh we're still going. Okay sorry.

The second thing is that

- 17:30 during this stage of the war until Montgomery [Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery] amassed enough forces to make an assault on the German lines, which began on the 23rd of October 1942, the Battle of [El] Alamein, for the period July, August, September, October beforehand was the Defence of Alamein. That's the sort of official battle on the [nomenclature] the Defence of Alamein and during this period
- 18:00 the 8th Army, which had then virtually ejected from the desert from Rommel and had run back through El Alamein was being reformed behind our lines. So for those three months of Montgomery's reformation of the 8th Army we were holding the defensive line and making occasional forays against enemy just to show that we were not
- 18:30 quiet and that we were alive and well and somebody to be contended with. So for this reason there wasn't much daytime activity in terms of battle. There were occasional shelling forays and we'd find ourselves at the centre of a German barrage, which would arrive in our area and we'd get into our slit trenches and wait
- 19:00 until it subsided and we'd get out and pick up the bits. Any casualties.

Were casualties very severe at this time?

Not severe, because these artillery barrages were not very frequent, but I must again say one of my most vivid and poignant memories was the day after I arrived. I arrived in the evening, into my slit trench and the next morning quite early the area was subject to

- 19:30 quite a heavy barrage and I was sort of peering out of my slit trench. And in a slit trench just about eight metres away from me was a soldier and he'd leapt out of his trench in the middle of this barrage, the top of his head was missing. And he sort of in a reactionary way the body ran a few metres and collapsed. But to see this
- 20:00 headless or the top of his head headless emerge from this slit trench in the middle of a barrage and run wildly and then collapse is a something I try and suppress in my memory. But it was a most vivid memory and it was so soon after my arrival on the scene that it made an enormous impression and I've never forgotten it. It's quite painful to recount it actually, however to get back to your question.
- 20:30 No because the barrages were not that frequent and we were able to get to our slit trench fairly quickly. We had one perpetual difficulty in that we had a Salvation Army chap who had a little base at the back of our brigade and he insisted on bringing his little vehicle up in the afternoon with hot coffee to give the chaps.
- 21:00 And he was difficult to restrain but he'd get there come up when you weren't expecting it and he'd say, "Come and get your coffee." And the fellows'd get out of their slit trenches and they'd come and congregate round this Salvation Army fellow and drink coffee. And whether it was because the Germans knew about this or what but so very often the bloody shelling'd start just about the time the Salvo man was there doling out the coffee.
- 21:30 And of course he'd have to dive into a hole and everyone'd go diving back in their holes and so on. But no the casualties were very limited I'm happy to say because they weren't too frequent and we had our slit trenches to get into. The other occasional danger was sometimes there'd be a bit of an air bombardment. But very few because the Allied

- 22:00 Air Force dominated the scene from just eighty miles back at Cairo and Alexandria you know, while the Germans had very few aircraft right that far forward and were suffering supply difficulties of course. Malta was knocking off a lot of their supply ships coming across the Mediterranean and Rommel's army was pretty short of stuff.
- 22:30 So that we didn't get too many air strikes but occasionally a bomber would come in or sometimes even [an] isolated fighter would come in and strafe along the line. But you could hear him coming and you'd watch him and if he was approaching you'd get down in your hole. And we didn't have too much of a problem like that. Conversely every morning without fail we used to have
- 23:00 a flight of Liberators or something like that would go from our side across to the Germans. Eighteen. I don't know how that comprises in air force terminology, but they were known as the Football Team obviously. There goes the Footy Team and away they'd go. These eighteen allied aircraft would go over and bomb the German lines. So that always got a round of applause and a shout from our slit trench fellows down below. So
- 23:30 the casualties during this period of defence were not high. The Germans did try an assault during August on the area quite close to us. I don't know what the purpose of it was. I think it was something of a diversionary attack in the north because he was conducting some operations down at the Ruweisat
- 24:00 Ridge, which was fairly well down the south. Rommel did try and make a breakthrough in the south in August and we were anticipating a perhaps a diversionary attack on us at the top and we did have one at night but we were very well prepared. Chaps such as I were out on the other side of our minefield and wire with a telephone and we were watching and waiting and listening. And as soon as we heard sounds, which we thought
- 24:30 were enemy approach we sent a signal back through the telephone and our mortar barrage descended on the minefield and the defensive machine gun fire up and down the wire as had been planned as I mentioned earlier. And that particular attack, which was on the battalion just to the right of us as a matter of fact not our battalion was beaten off, but other than that the actual assaults on our position
- 25:00 were fairly limited and I don't recall any patrols at night time across no-mans land. Because as I said earlier we tried to dominate the no-mans land and we had patrols out every night from one part of the line or another and I think that denied the use of it to the opposite side. They never tried to
- 25:30 combat our patrols or rarely tried to combat our patrols in no-mans land. Obviously when the patrols reached the German lines and start to do whatever they were going to do either search for information, check the minefield locations or on some occasions break in to capture a prisoner or inflict some casualties it was only when that became apparent to the enemy that they had our forces close by that we got any kind of reaction from them in terms of counter fire from their trenches and so on. So that was the reason why casualties during the defensive period on our side were relatively low. The casualties primarily casualties if I can use such a term were for medical reasons. We had
- 26:30 terrible trouble with flies. Between us and the German Italian line were an enormous number of corpses left from the contact the original contact with the Germans when we came up there in July and of course nobody was going out there to bury corpses so there were a lot of those around. There were a lot of them behind our lines but we buried those fairly quickly. But flies were terrible,
- 27:00 swarms of them on you, on your face on your hands all the time. So eye infections were bad and if you suffered desert sores, which were quite common they got infected very readily and I can speak with fulsome strength on this one, because I've always had trouble with skin being red headed and freckle faced, and wearing a steel
- 27:30 helmet in the Western Desert sun for a few weeks doesn't do your face any good. Anyway I contracted desert sores after a couple of months up there and these became infected and I was evacuated. So I was a casualty of the defensive area but not for combat reasons. And I was one of a great number who were evacuated
- 28:00 for skin infections fly borne diseases.

Can you I know this sounds crude but can you describe the symptoms of these skin diseases?

Pardon?

I know this might sound a little bit crude but can you describe the I suppose the symptoms of these skin diseases, the kind of infections that you got.

Well they're sores. Desert sores, which come out and they originate on the exposed parts of your body but then

- 28:30 spread to the rest of your body. And I had very bad infections in fact from while I had them on the arms I had very bad infection from the waistline down across by buttocks and down to my knees. These were in the form of sort of rashes scabs and appalling appallingly painful. You know I like most chaps
- 29:00 there you don't go running off to your Regimental Aid Post every five minutes and I maybe left them too long before getting them treated and they spread. But they in my subsequent stay in hospital which was

for two months I was being bathed in sulphur baths and dabbed with stuff and dressings two or three times a day for as I say weeks at a time,

29:30 very uncomfortable. Very demeaning also to be evacuated from a battle area because of your bloody skin complaints, but that's what happened in my case and with quite a number of other chaps as well.

Were ticks also a problem?

Tick? I don't recall that.

You were preoccupied with the skin sores probably.

Yes I don't remember it being mentioned.

30:00 There were interestingly enough after we'd been there a while and supplies started to flow forward we got a couple of blankets each and these were put down in the bottom of the slit trench so that when you did have time to rest during the day before your night time activity you had a blanket to lie on. And also while it was very hot in daytime

30:30 night-time was bitterly cold. So that if you weren't out on patrol or otherwise occupied you were actually glad to have these blankets. Well now there was a suspicion and I can't speak authoritatively on this but there's a suspicion that some of these blankets might have come from Egyptian sources where they had bed bugs or lice or something like that. But there were fellows who had skin irritations of different

31:00 kinds that were suspected might've been carried by the blankets. And you mentioned lice well maybe they were in there but I don't have any specific knowledge of that no.

Where were you sleeping and eating while you were in the trenches Keith?

Well the sleeping such as one got was in the bottom of the trench. It was six feet long you see and

31:30 it was designed that length so you did the average chap could stretch out. And during the night when you weren't on duty and as I say on patrol or on sentry duty or manning a weapon or something like that and I'm not speaking of me particularly but my whole platoon the whole battalion that you took the opportunity when possible to sleep in your slit trench. And in fact there were some chaps who we didn't approve of much who because they were

32:00 a little tight down in the trench used to take the blanket and sleep on the side of their trench out on the surface. But that did leave them open to mosquitoes a bit more, which was a bit of a problem. Although I don't recall that we had any incidence of malaria not that I heard of. Anyway that's what used to happen in the trench primarily. Because if something happened, barrage or attacked suddenly you were at least in your protected area, even if it weren't that comfortable. In the

32:30 daytime when there was no operational activity you were either improving your trench or just relaxing. You'd sit on the edge of your trench dangle your legs over gaze at the scenery or get down in there and try and get some sleep. But it was terribly hot in the summertime in the daytime so that the slit trench was very hot indeed

33:00 and you couldn't sleep much down there in the daytime. As a result we used to be wearing our slouch hats or steel helmets. But slouch hats when it was reasonably quiet and we believed it was safe to do so and a pair of shorts. No shirt and no socks, boots with the [laces] undone and your feet just in the boots.

33:30 And there you'd walk about your boots flopping and these short khaki shorts on. And probably to some degree that did encourage the growth of sores on your bare upper body. I shall never forget one rather humorous incident speaking of sitting on the slit trench with

34:00 my shirt off and no socks on. While we'd heard it was going to happen I was a bit surprised to see coming across the desert to the back of my platoon position a small jeep, and out of the jeep got a British army officer dressed quite immaculately in a khaki safari jacket and pressed trousers and a cap

34:30 with a shiny badge on the front and desert boots and long stockings. Immaculately dressed British Army officer, straight out of barracks in Cairo and [a] young lieutenant of a particular British regiment that we knew was coming to send people to live with us for a few days to get a feeling. They'd just come out from Britain and they were part of Montgomery's gathering together of people for his future assaults you see.

35:00 So they were given some acclimatisation experience by being sent up to sit for a couple of days with the Australians to see how things were, and anyway he got out of this vehicle and he said to me, well I walked over to him you see. And he said, "Where's the officer old chap?" And I said, "I'm the officer." He said, "No, the Lieutenant." And I said, I had no badges of rank on you see. And I said, and he's a

35:30 bit surprised about that, anyway. But then I looked in his jeep and he had a tin trunk with all his gear in you see uniforms and one thing and another, and also unbelievably a set of golf clubs. So I said, "Well you'll be sending all that stuff back." He said, "I suppose I have to don't I?" And anyway I said, "Well we've got a slit trench here ready for you." And he was a bit taken aback by that

36:00 as well. Anyway he stayed with us for a couple of days and he I think learnt quite a bit. And he was quite a decent chap and we were happy to see him go because it was a bit of a responsibility and they didn't quite exactly fit in but a nice fellow for all that yeah.

Did he get a bit of a haranguing at all?

No our chaps were very understanding and you know, I took him around to the various

36:30 section positions and showed him our defences and how we were laid out and so on. And the fellas all said, "How ya goin' mate," or words to that effect, which he wasn't used to. And the other thing I was going to say about you asked about the cooking.

Yeah.

Well now we were confined by water supply theoretically to one water bottle per man per day and with that you had to

37:00 shave. We were meticulous about that everybody had to shave everyday. Bathe with whatever underarm or dabbings that you were able to do and drinking and also cooking. So that you had your mess tin and we had gasoline available and what we'd do we'd make a little heap of sand and put some petrol on it

37:30 and that would be the fire. You'd do that at the bottom of a slit trench and you'd put over the fire a little bit of water in your dixie mess tin and your bully beef out of the tin, which is standard fare. Bully beef and biscuits and you'd just heat the bully beef up a little bit and you'd eat it with a spoon, and that was your ration virtually. Bully beef and biscuits, heated if you felt like it over

38:00 a little petrol fire at the bottom of a slit trench. That was pretty boring and I'm not sure nutritiously very valuable but that's what it was. A bottle of water bottle a day and bully beef and biscuits yeah.

What time of day would you usually sit down for your meal your daily meal?

Well it was pretty much an impromptu thing you see. There was no

38:30 routine other than waking when the sun rose. What I'd do just go round my Section, walk around see how they were and they were all up and about and so on. I'd also do that in the middle of the night. I'd walk over with a blanket round my shoulders and I was known Grey Ghost. I'd visit each of the section positions see that they had the sentry and the look out alert.

39:00 It was just to make sure that our defences were alert all night. But at what time you did what was pretty much your own time unless you had some organised operation or action in hand, which wasn't very often. Night patrols as I mentioned or if as on one occasion we were standing to, to act as a reserve to support the 2/28th

39:30 Battalion in this attack on Ruin Ridge, which was just on our left flank and we were in the overall plan. Supposed to move to Ruin Ridge after they'd captured it and help them consolidate.

Can we just back track a little. We've only got a couple minutes left on the end of this tape Keith so I might just ask you a few smaller questions. Just how many hours were you getting sleep each day?

Oh well it varied depending on how you felt and what you were doing.

40:00 I would say and you were snatching. I mean you'd get an hour here half an hour there, couple of hours somewhere else. Some at night-time maybe. No. There was no plan you just grabbed time when you could. When it was operationally convenient or when the temperature or the flies or your body permitted. Yeah.

And where were the latrines?

40:30 This in the early days you just went for a walk with a shovel. It was the traditional you know I'm going for a walk with a shovel and you just went you know a few metres away dug yourself a hole performed in it and filled the hole and came back to your slit trench. But after we'd been there for a while we did do a little better than that and we dug some holes slit

41:00 trenches with but it was just a little sort of eminence with a seat on it and you'd go out there and you'd say, "Hi Jack," because you're only you know fifty metres away and in full public view. It was a fairly public affair.

So, no room for modesty.

Modesty's the last thing that one can consider under those circumstances yeah. Yes interesting. But that's how it was and it went on for weeks,

41:30 and months until the battle commenced.

We're at the end of the tape there.

Tape 5

00:31 **Keith if you could tell me a little bit about the patrols that you were doing?**

Yes they were very important as I think I might have mentioned before. Because for the three months or so of the actual defence of Alamein prior to the big battle beginning in October the 23rd October, night-time patrolling maintained

01:00 the allied defensive position or certainly as far as the Australian aspect of it was concerned anyway. And in our Battalion and I think probably in the adjoining battalions that had defence responsibilities along side us we maintained a policy of patrol every night. And this patrol rotated of course along the platoons and sections

01:30 of the actual front line and that meant that in our Battalion we had a patrol from my platoon with me as with other young officers once every ten nights. And this was a very challenging operation because it means that you are moving out and across 2,000 yards of no-mans land in the darkness.

02:00 And then you're going to confront the enemy on his own ground. Happily from the darkness point of view usually certainly at that time of the year anyway July, August, September, October the sky was clear and there were bright stars and quite often a moon so that the light was reasonable and it was possible to navigate.

02:30 As I did mention earlier also part of our training was movement at night with the aid of a compass and this was the modus operandi as it were. From our lines we'd go out through a gap in the minefield and wire and the patrol commander who was usually the platoon commander with some seven to ten to

03:00 fifteen members of his platoon depending on what the purpose of the patrol was he would be the patrol commander with the compass and he would then direct a certain individual to march out to the limit of visibility on the compass bearing. The patrol would then follow him to his point of stopping and then the same would be repeated. So it's a

03:30 succession of members of the patrol going out on the fixed designated compass bearing and he'd stop and the patrol would catch up. Out he'd go, stop, the patrol would catch up. And this went with measured paces until one arrived within what was known as the proximity to the enemy lines from

04:00 air photographs and the maps that we'd had. Patrol reports from previous operations and then the patrol at the enemy line would commence to do whatever its particular special function was. It could be either just to ascertain that the enemy had minefields and wire at this point at this distance from our line in this direction. It could be

04:30 squirming on the stomach through the minefield under the wire and into the enemy territory to ascertain what enemy defences were built in behind the line and any strengths if it were possible to ascertain. And then squirming out under the wire and through the minefield to rejoin one's patrol, which was outside the wire

05:00 and returning with the information. That was one quota reconnaissance patrol. Another patrol could go a little deeper than that searching a little more for enemy positions to ascertain strengths style of defences if possible, again a reconnaissance patrol. There could be the

05:30 purpose in the patrol of entering the enemy lines and either embarking in a very active action against any enemy posts stumbled across. Or alternatively sneaking in quietly and attempting to abduct without fuss one or two of the enemy to bring them back as prisoners of war.

It sounds very much like it's a commando operation?

Well I suppose they are in their own

06:00 way yes. That was called a fighting patrol. But they were specifically infantry operations out of infantry battalions and this was part of the deal. So there we were and every ten nights this officer and my comrades along the line would be faced with the prospect and I can remember one or two particular instances that

06:30 might be of interest.

Well it sounds incredibly dangerous you know crawling on your stomach.

Oh yes, yes incredibly dangerous.

It sounds like suicide actually.

Well you are throwing yourself into the hands of the enemy or close to the hands of the enemy anyway. It wasn't so bad on the reconnaissance patrols where one had to go stealthily up to the minefield and wire and then report back in terms

07:00 of the distance and direction from your start point. Then this could be mapped and perhaps the patrol

from the next battalion had done similarly so a line could be built up of the enemy of minefields and so on. I must say that I did mention aerial photography. This wasn't at a high level in those days and ground reconnaissance was much more used and much more reliable. The fighting patrol was a different kettle of fish of course because you were there

07:30 throwing yourself into a combat situation in fact. And I recall a couple of instances. At one period in fact for quite a long period of time we had Italians opposite us and it was their line that we were investigating and the Italians were generally not terribly excited about being in the war. They weren't very dedicated

08:00 to the cause and unlike, well I say unlike the Germans. The Germans were much more professional dedicated soldiers anyway so whatever they thought about the war they were very soldierly, but the Italians were very reluctant and if they heard a noise they would very often make their presence known quickly in the hopes that you would check

08:30 that and make your notes and go away. And I remember one memorable occasion and I was leading the patrol in and I

Can we just pause with you leading the patrol in ... if you could just say again.

Yes. On this particular occasion I was leading the patrol and we had to move in to

09:00 try and capture a prisoner or two to get some information, and as we came through the wire and the minefield a couple of us approached to be what seemed to be a defensive position all of a sudden loudly outburst a group of singing, [Oh sole mio, oh sole mio]. Oh it was frightening in its way but of course indicative that they wished their presence to be felt

09:30 and known so that maybe we'd be frightened away. Well obviously it was very helpful to us 'cause we just moved in gently. Took two or three of them and said, "C'mon Antonio," and off we went. So that was a very successful operation.

So they didn't actually?

No. No resistance at all. And on another occasion I wasn't involved in this but I heard from one of my other officers who did strike this occasion that

10:00 they went in there with the intention of killing, destroying you know attacking. And as they approached the Italian position fellows leapt out of the hole saying, "Aussie no bayonets no bayonet Aussie no bayonets." Which was a pity because that's in fact the sort of operation that it was designed to be. So that was rather a nasty one but it's the sort of thing that happened. I can remember another

10:30 occasion that involved me. I went out on one occasion with the role of going through the minefield and wire and trying to ascertain locations and nature of the defences behind and I don't know whether they were Italians or Germans at the time. But I selected one of my chaps and said we'll go in together. And his name was Schultz. South Australian of

11:00 course from I think the Barossa Valley, old German immigrants up there Schultz. He had a rather long face. He was called Chisel Chin in the platoon. Chisel Chin Schultz but I think his name was John. Anyway I said, "C'mon and he was rather reluctant to come in." But anyway we crawled through the minefield and the wire and we only just got through the wire then all of a sudden

11:30 just on our left flank about ten, fifteen metres away a machine gun opened up (sound effect) and sprayed the ground right in front of us. And we went to ground of course and lay there waiting for something to happen. And Schultz I looked across and he was in a pretty bad way I think.

When you say a pretty bad way was he just in a flat panic?

Well yes weren't we all. However I think he

12:00 possibly felt that it might be very awkward with him with a German name to be sort of grabbed as one of the enemy you know and a traitor and so on. I think that in retrospect I may be wrong, but anyway we lay there quietly for a couple of minutes hoping that things would fade away but then the machine gun burst again and shot across our head and I thought it was about time we got out of here and our security is breached you see.

12:30 And I was just about to slither out quietly with Schultz when the deputy leader of the patrol who at this time was an old forty odd year old Englishman with a broad accent. He was left or what was left on the outside of the line you see he said, "C'mon lads," and then (sound effect) blasted out with our patrol machine gun

13:00 in the direction of the one, which had been firing at us. So Schultz and I both back slithered through the sand through the wire through the minefield and back to the patrol and we rapidly decamped and moved back to our own lines, which was lucky we got out of it, but we'd breached our security as it were, and it was safer that we got out of the place altogether.

That's just.

13:30 **You've got enough to worry about when you've got a minefield let alone getting shot at.**

Yes that's true. That's true but there we are, that was one of the things. The mines were spread reasonably widely apart and if you could sort of sense that they were there or see a little ground or maybe even touch one then you could slither through in between, pretty dangerous.

Touch one?

Yeah. Pretty dangerous.

What sort of mines are they? Are they pressure mines or what?

Well usually they were anti-tank. Large dinner plate

14:00 size, which when depressed by heavy weight ignited of course. As I said, primarily tank defences. Sometimes though they had anti-tank mines anti-personnel mines mixed in with them but this wasn't often on the other side anyway. So that it was a problem that we didn't have to worry about too much. Sometimes with a big operation if we were going to make a company attack or something like that we'd have with us

14:30 an officer from the engineer corps expert in mines. And he very bravely and I used to admire them they'd go out in front of us and they would in fact detect the mines with their hands and they'd say okay and they seemed quite excited you know about the whole prospect. And they'd stop at the wire and sort of let us through the gap that they had ascertained. Very interesting. Coming home was

15:00 a much better situation of course, a much happier atmosphere than going out on the patrol in the first place and it was very interesting and useful that mainly as I mentioned earlier our line was going south east. So when we went out to meet the enemy we were travelling down to the south of us and when we about turned to come back home we were travelling north.

15:30 And in the bright sky the North Star was always our guiding light, prominent brilliant and a saviour. And we hardly looked at our compass. We went for that North Star and moved quite quickly. There was none of this business of putting a soldier out in front for x-hundred metres and then say okay and meeting up. We were just move, move, move altogether towards the North Star. And we usually had it calculated that we could

16:00 go either to the right or the left of our exit point through the gap in the wire. There were several gaps along the wire. Different battalions had their separate gaps with a listening post outside you see, and we would normally go to the right or to the left so that we knew that when we came to the wire we turned left and we'd move along and we found our listening post and we'd be challenged halt who goes there you know. And we'd be admitted back into our

16:30 own lines. So they were interesting exercises but as I say once every ten days this sort of thing was a bit testing a bit wearing.

Were there any fatalities that would happen out on patrol?

Oh often yes. There were often fatalities. I was fortunate that I didn't have any in my particular patrols. And when there were it was an exercise particularly if they were inside the wire sometimes

17:00 it was too difficult and they were abandoned, became prisoners of war. There were occasions when the enemy fire inflicted the casualty in no-mans land, and then it was sometimes possible to pick the wounded chap up or dead chap or whatever it is, and transport him back. But there were difficulties with that because it slowed up the process and made your presence more obvious and more susceptible to fire

17:30 and so on. So that was unfortunate. When there were casualties it was very difficult yes indeed.

How would you actually communicate that there was an injury or a fatality?

Well you couldn't communicate. You weren't normally carrying radio sets or anything of that nature. Your report was when you got back. It was a very lightly equipped thing, unless you were going in to really do some damage when you had arms and ammunition. Normally reconnaissance patrols you were

18:00 very lightly armed indeed. The officer may carry a pistol, his soldiers would have their rifles of course and there would be one as in my case with the Mr Schultz and come home lads there was a light machine gun in the patrol, but it depended on what the job was, yeah. So that patrol program was very important

18:30 and quite a significant part of the psyche of the location, and the soldiers themselves of course. The officer perhaps more so because of the responsibility, but the soldiers them selves were apprehensive about when was the next patrol, are we going out next time? 'Cause with three platoons and then three sections you could usually change them around so that

19:00 while you may cop one every ten days the soldiers in your platoon might cop one every twenty or thirty days or something like that. But that was a you know quite a mentally stressful exercise in the defensive program that we had.

Would there be any things like superstitions or lucky charms that would go along with these patrols?

I didn't ever hear any but I'm quite sure there were some people thumbing little things around their neck,

19:30 in their pockets or whatever. Yeah. Yes interesting it hadn't occurred to be but I think you're probably right.

Oh we ask every question possible.

Yes.

So how long were you actually in this situation where you had to do the patrol every ten days?

Oh well I think I was there from, as I say I arrived in July, August, September. I was evacuated to hospital in late September s it was two or three

20:00 months, yeah.

So well that's quite a stretch?

Yes. It was interesting that I was in hospital for about two months I think. Well successive hospitals. The chain of medical evacuation in the army is very well organised. It's traditional. You've got your own sort of regimental aid post in your battalion. Then you go back to

20:30 what's it called? The field dressing station, which deals with a bigger group of people, then you've got the casualty clearing station, which is a bit further back again and sometimes you find that there's medical officers there and perhaps temporary surgical treatment and maybe even field ambulance that can take you by vehicle somewhere else. And then you go back to the main dressing station. And I went through this process with my problems and each time they said, "You know we can't deal with you here mate.

21:00 Off you go." And [I went] down the next stage of the medical evacuation, anyway I finally finished up in a British casualty clearing station some thirty or forty miles back from the front line and they said, "No we can't do anything with you mate." So I got put on a train an ambulance train taken back to Alexandria where there was an Australian field hospital. 1st or 2nd AGH [Australian General Hospital],

21:30 I forget the [nomenclature], and I was down there for two or three days and they said, "No we can't do much for you mate." So I was put on a hospital ship out of Alexandria and went to Haifa. And from Haifa by hospital train again down to the 6th Australian General Hospital, which is at Gaza Ridge so called just outside the town of Gaza in Palestine,

22:00 which was the main Australian base hospital. And that's where I spent the time for the next two months.

Sorry was that actually on a hospital ship or was it on the land 6th AGH?

No 6th AGH was a hospital on land yes in on the ground just outside the Gaza town. A well-established base hospital, base facility with all the bits

22:30 and pieces everything.

So how long were you on the actual hospital ship?

Oh only a couple of days. It was you know from Alexandria to Haifa by hospital ship a couple of days. And then from Haifa by train down to Gaza to the 6th AGH and then I was in Gaza for six weeks or something like that.

'Cause that's, you've done quite a bit of travelling in a short period of time?

Yes. Interestingly the chap looking after me down in the 6th AGH was

23:00 a medical a skin specialist from Melbourne, which in those days was fairly rare. But he was a very good fellow and I was something of an interesting patient for him because of the severity of my condition.

Was there any sort of treatment that you got at all before you made it to 6th AGH?

Oh well I was getting calamine lotion dabbed on me you know that sort of elementary stuff just to

23:30 soothe the aches and pains and itching and so on, but when I got down there to 6th AGH he as I said earlier in the interview I think he got me into baths. Sulphur baths and all kinds of treatment that hadn't been heard of or I hadn't heard of it before it might have been medical practice in the professional field.

We've heard of sulphur pads actually.

Yes.

24:00 Well I don't know. I as I say I wouldn't really remember but there were a hell of a lot of things tried on me and it took a long time to cure me.

So they tried sulphur baths,

Yes.

and various ointments?

Medications, moppings in ointments and dabbings and very odd, but I do recall with great pleasure that eventually 9th Div after the

24:30 main battle of Alamein which I regretted very much that I didn't attend but probably I was safer where I was.

Well you were in absolutely you know no shape you know to?

Oh no, I wouldn't have been in shape physically, and certainly probably as a result of it not mentally able to do what I should've done.

'Cause I also suspect with the severity of what you did have even though it is you know regarded as a skin condition, which is minor in comparison to you know other fellows who had been shot up.

25:00 **You would've been in a pretty bad state by this time?**

I think so yes. I don't remember that I felt mentally affected but one can never tell of course. The proximity of war, the danger of death and so on is ever present and whether it was any worse because of my physical condition or not I can't say. I don't think it was. I just felt so

25:30 bloody uncomfortable and it got to the stage where I couldn't sit for a minute without scratching. So I thought this is no condition to be. So I went and got you know involved with the medical people and hence the pyramids. But it was a great delight eventually to be almost cured and 9th Div came out of Alamein after the battle and Montgomery and the 8th Army mainly British and the others

26:00 moved on but 9th Div had to come back to Australia because of the problems out here. And there was a grand divisional parade on Gaza airstrip and we chaps in hospital who were mobile enough were able to stand on the sidelines. And this was there my division, the 9th Australian Division on parade (sound effect) lined up on the Gaza airstrip to be

26:30 inspected and addressed by Field Marshall or General at the time but Field Marshall Lord Alexander who had at one time a little earlier become the Commander in Chief Middle East and was a man that everybody admired. Upright, terribly British looking, soldierly. Spoke in a clipped accent and was the guy that we sort of thought

27:00 a British general should be. Contrary to Montgomery who was a bit of a Galah we thought the way he went around the place wearing funny hats and badges and you know. Obviously in retrospect he was doing what he had to do to try and revive the morale of the 8th Army, which was down zip like that after the retreat in front of Rommel and he would get around in all these sort of head dresses and get out and meet people and became an identity.

27:30 So everybody knew that Montgomery was the boss. Even though they Australians anyway thought as I said that he just over did it a bit, but Alexander that's something else. And he stood up on the dias and addressed us. He'd driven around inspecting the ranks of the 9th Division stretching you know hundreds of metres must have been almost 20,000 of us there I suppose. And as he stood up

28:00 there he said, "Among other things I shall always have as my most treasured memory that once under my command served the 9th Australian Division." And I looked along the line and the chests went out. You could see it. It was marvellous, absolutely marvellous, and a great memory that I shall never loose, yeah. Funny. And I joined the battalion shortly after that and we

28:30 came back to Australia.

How did your battalion actually fare in El Alamein Battle?

It had casualties of course quite a number, as did every Australian unit that was involved there. I can't tell you off hand who and what. One or two fellows I can think of but they don't rate a particular mention now. No we suffered our share

29:00 because we participated. As I say we, the battalion participated in the toing and froing of the main battle, which lasted from the 23rd October until the 3rd November, coming up shortly to the anniversary. And then when the line was broken and Rommel's Afrika Corps began to withdraw the Australians were

29:30 detached and sent back to Palestine and Montgomery and his 8th Army galloped on up the coast road with Rommel in withdrawal.

At the time how are you actually hearing about the progress at El Alamein? 'Cause you're in hospital?

Yes, I was. Interesting I don't think there was any sort of intermediate information. There were no correspondents there and no television or

- 30:00 radio communication, but when it was over and when the battalion came back or even before the battalion came back I think we got BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] news and that sort of thing to say that there'd been a successful battle fought and so on and so on, and the word gets around you know. I don't know by what means, but we weren't we didn't have a blow-by-blow description of it. Subsequently as I say when the battle was over
- 30:30 after the ten days we heard fairly full detail from various sources yeah. The trip back home followed shortly afterwards and quaintly enough it was on the Queen Mary. The 2/43rd Battalion had no knowledge of the Queen Mary going over. I was a bit unusual in this. But it was very interesting for me to see the transition
- 31:00 of the conditions. As I mentioned earlier our movement to the Middle East in 1941 early '41 was under the old tourist circumstances of the ship. In the interim the Mary had been converted to a troop ship for the transport of Americans across to Britain for the Normandy operations and as a result was a very Spartan vessel indeed. And
- 31:30 the luxuries that we'd enjoyed a couple of years earlier were completely absent and we just lived on like an ordinary troop ship. But we still had the same advantage of sailing out of Port Tewfik, I think directly to Fremantle I don't recall we had any intermediate stop. Came straight back to Fremantle. Or was it even Adelaide? My memory's a bit vague on this one I know
- 32:00 because my mind is taken up with the fact that we were released anyway and had a couple of weeks holiday in Perth Western Australia. Whether we actually disembarked in Perth or Adelaide I can't remember.

Can you recall what sort of a convoy you came back in?

No well I don't recall there being a convoy. As I say I think it was the same as before that we shot through as a solitary ship. That's my memory. I won't swear to

- 32:30 that but that's as I recall yes. And it was a pretty quick trip and we were all thinking what's gonna happen at the end rather than what's happening on the way. But it was I think potentially a much more dangerous trip than the one going out. Because for the same reason that the 6th and 7th Div chaps such as I were unable to get
- 33:00 back from the Middle East when the 6th and 7th Div came back and we were sent to 9th Div we couldn't get back because there was very little transport, the Indian Ocean by the time of 1942 was dominated by Japanese submarines and so sea travel was fairly dangerous. Military transport was a bit sparse and so we sat
- 33:30 in the Middle East with 6th and 7th Div fellows waiting for transport. Waiting for transport [which] didn't come. And when the Alamein issue arrived, up we went. So that coming back again in February, March 1943 the same hazards existed of Japanese domination of the Indian Ocean. But again I don't recall any particular convoy arrangements that we made a direct
- 34:00 fast trip in the Mary by ourselves yes.

Can you remember how you found out about Pearl Harbour?

Pearl Harbour? December '41. I suppose we must have heard about it but it was very far from our minds. That was December '41 yes.

Because they would've been shipping you back because

34:30 of the threat ?

Well yes of course we were yeah. Oh we must have heard about it, army newspapers and that sort of thing yes. We're going back a bit before Alamein now six or eight months before. I didn't go up to Alamein until July '42 and Pearl Harbour was December '41 of course. So I'm sure we got it through our news in the routine way. But while I'm sure we all felt a bit apprehensive

- 35:00 about what was going to happen in the Pacific and home locally and so on we were much more concerned with Mr Rommel and his friends. Much more you know proximate and our likely commitments over there. You know they'll look after it over there, you know we've got our own problems.

Did it occur to you when you were coming back to Australia that you were probably going to have to have a short stay in Perth and then go into the Pacific?

Oh yes I think that was

- 35:30 inevitable. I don't think that we had very much briefing or guidance on the way back as to what [our] circumstances were likely to be, I don't recall that. But certainly we were aware that our next operation or role would be against the Japanese in the Islands north of Australia.

- 36:00 And so when we came back and had our leave, disembarkation leave so called we were prepared for new field of operations and it was very nice to have a couple of weeks in Perth in March I think March, April 1943. Renew old acquaintances. I met Joan again
- 36:30 for a few brief minutes. She'd been in the nursing service but in the interim she had become engaged and then married to an acquaintance a mutual acquaintance. One of the fellas that she'd been friendly with in my time before and he joined the air force and going ahead a
- 37:00 bit he was killed in 1945 left her with two children and when I came back after the war and we renewed our acquaintance I married her and adopted the two children and we've had a family of our own subsequently. But that's something else. But it was part of the holiday disembarkation leave in Perth in April, March April 1943. And our parents were very glad to see us of course.
- 37:30 **How much did you talk about your experiences that you had in the Middle East?**
- Yeah that's a good question. I don't think much. I had a particularly good friend who was in the 9th Div with me he was an anti-tank chap who'd been at Alamein and we'd been friends from before the war and are still today and in fact we were best man at each other's weddings later on. He
- 38:00 and I spent quite a lot of time together in this two weeks knockin' about the place. Visiting old friends, going to parties at the Scarborough Hotel and things like that you know.
- Was there some sort of a pride and welcoming back amongst the general populous Perth from folks such as your self who'd come back from the Middle East?**
- There was no formality. Unlike some
- 38:30 you know return from the war marches there were nothing like that because we were only a small group relatively small group. 9th Div's come back from the Middle East okay. But 6th and 7th Div are out here they came back some time ago and we've got our own fellows. We had the 1st Australian Corps established in Western Australia with it's headquarters up in Perth College. The 1st Armoured Division was up north of Northam and so on, so there was a lot of military activity in Western Australia and
- 39:00 concerns about dangers in the north and so on and the fact that 9th Div was back oh well that's a good idea. Welcome back old fella. Now as we were we saying? That's my memory of it. It hadn't occurred to me before to think about that but I don't recall any particular celebrations or no nothing.
- When you were sort of out and about and I'm assuming you'll be wearing your uniform while you were out and about**
- 39:30 **in Perth?**
- No I don't think so.
- Oh okay.**
- No I think we got out of [uniform]. We went out on leave and got back into civvies and became members of the public yeah. There was no point in us no need for us to wear uniform because we're on leave and so that's normal leave dress. Then of course at the end of that we had to report back to Karrakatta which was the
- 40:00 sort of the main depot for moving in and out and so on. And we were put on a train to go from Perth to Cairns because the 9th Div as had the 6th and 7th Div before them come back to Australia and established these substantial training camps on the Atherton Tablelands. So that's where we headed.
- 40:30 I can always remember this train trip with some anguish. When I got on the train in Karrakatta I felt a rather irritating slight pain in my left buttock, which became worse sitting in a troop train eleven days I think getting worse and worse and worse and worse moving further and further onto the other buttock. And eventually
- 41:00 when we got to Cairns I thought well I'd better go and have this seen to and it was found to be a seven headed carbuncle that I'd been sitting with across this journey. So I got some treatment there and then resumed the journey and rejoined the Battalion the 2/43rd, most of whom had come from South Australia of course by separate means. And so we were reunited
- 41:30 on the Atherton Tablelands, and training then commenced for operations in the jungle, which were a bit different.
- Probably before we get into the details of how the training in the jungle was different to what you were learning about coming from desert situations, I think we just have to change tapes.**

00:30 Okay so what happens in the Atherton Tablelands Keith?

Well this form of training as one can anticipate was quite different from training for operations in the Western Desert or even in the Syrian hinterland. The close proximity of

01:00 jungle undergrowth and so on nullified completely the open warfare technique advances and defensive positions and weapon fire coordinated defensive fire and all that sort of business and became very much an individual operation. Now on the Atherton Tablelands although Tablelands one would think flat there was wide areas of

01:30 very dense tropical forest and it was these areas where we went for our training primarily. And we had to begin with individual training of movement by stealth, the setting up of systems of signalling by signs. By this time of course

02:00 we'd been equipped with some more modern radio equipment too so we had to learn about those. Because the difficulties of communication were probably the biggest obstacle, in contrast to open warfare where you can see somebody and signals, visual communication is possible. In tropical warfare this is impossible

02:30 and has to be very much individual small unit operations, with as I say close contact for communication purposes. Now this meant that while there were still larger scale plans of course for a complete military operation they were much less of mass operations.

03:00 Rather more of small individual ones as components of the major issue, and we could talk philosophically on that point. But from the actual training of the soldiers were concerned mainly movement through close undergrowth keeping contact and firing quickly from improvised firing positions

03:30 rather than from fixed defensive positions. There were other aspects too but those were the main ones on the ground anyway. We still had to talk to the soldiers about their map reading of course even though maps were pretty vague and not all that frequently encountered but in some places maps were available. The other things that I've talked about

04:00 earlier you know barbed wire defences and minefields and that sort of thing less important. Minefields were still in some areas of possible use but nothing like the extent of their value in open warfare. Intelligence gathering, ascertaining the significance of

04:30 signs on the ground of movement of other persons. You know, broken foliage tracks on the ground and all that sort of business was part of the scheme. A whole wider range of training, which you can visualise of soldiers moving in small groups in dense ground rather than big groups in open country. That probably sums it up yeah. From the higher point of view I wouldn't know what they were doing too much at a higher

05:00 level but certainly at my level as a platoon commander and a training officer those were the things that occupied our mind. Still important in terms of weapon training of course and we had the Owen gun now as distinct from the Thompson sub-machine gun, the so-called Tommy gun, which we had in the Middle East. We had the Owen [light submachine] gun. The Lewis [medium machinegun] gun, which for a while we had in the Middle East it switched to

05:30 Bren [light machine gun], which [is] now of course all Bren gun. So there was a little change in technique there to some degree in weapon training, but the old precepts of sticking to the task determination you know the sort of spiritual virtues are all part and parcel of the training scheme yes. And it was tough because we had

06:00 to learn to carry equipment and supplies for long periods over very difficult terrain, which hadn't always been the case previously, so that our training in the jungles of the Tablelands was pretty much physical as much as technical. Getting ourselves really fit for the rigours

06:30 of tropical warfare of jungle warfare, yeah. It was an interesting aspect. Also as a something of a relief we had training in embarkation and disembarkation on landing craft because it was never quite sure, which island we were going to have to land on and so on. So that

07:00 we used to go down from the Tableland to Cairns and just north of Cairns there's a useful training place for landing craft and we learnt techniques on boarding and disembarking from small craft troop carrying vessels and operations on landing on beaches. Moving rapidly across the beach, taking up positions undercover,

07:30 reorganising, regrouping that sort of thing. That was a pleasant break yes.

So what kind of exercises did you do? Did you mock up landings full-scale landings?

In the early stages no they were a small individual unit. Small unit groups but towards the end of the period and more particularly in later times after the New Guinea campaign and in preparation for Borneo and so on

08:00 there were quite large scale operation battalion [size]. And I think even on one occasion we had a brigade landing exercise and then to go ahead further when we went to Morotai there were very big operations. Training on models of the operation area to be landed upon and some physical training out with vessels and vehicles yes. But in the early stages of the Tableland's

08:30 operation that I'm speaking off after coming back from the Middle East no fairly elementary stuff. We didn't quite know what was going to happen and we got ourselves involved in individual training in close warfare yeah.

Were there any particular survival instincts or processes that you learnt while you were doing the jungle training?

I can't recall any specifically. I imagine that there may well have been

09:00 some special training on self survival you know, treatment of injuries or wounds. 'Cause one was very often remote as an individual left behind or working separately, but I can't remember specifically no. No what I've said is about all I can remember in that stage.

How long were you at the Atherton

09:30 **Tablelands for?**

Well now this is interesting because I think about three months and I had my platoon and also I was seconded on occasions to do some training outside the battalion, on infantry training because it was recognised that some of the other weaponries the artillery and the engineers and so on whereas in open warfare

10:00 are usually sort of back a bit a bit remote and not involved in close warfare. But in the jungle warfare they were going to be part of it like everybody else. So there was quite a program of initiation of these supporting arms and services into infantry type behaviour if I can put it in such a way. And so a couple of us from my battalion

10:30 were seconded on a temporary basis as instructors to these other arms and odd camps and so on. And then and this was a big event in my life. The Brigade the 24th Brigade, which my Battalion was a member of, was directed to supply an instructor to go to the Australian Army Officers Training

11:00 School at Woodside, South Australia, where every potential officer for the Australian Army had to go through a three-month training school and there was a vacancy for an officer instructor. And because I'd done a bit of this over the years Howard was appointed to go to Woodside South Australia where this new

11:30 Australian Army Officer Cadet Training School as it was called. It was being set up it was just newly established. It had been up at Bonegilla in a sort of a half-hearted way but they really got stuck into it and set up this big place in the Army Training camp in Woodside. Now whether the 2/43rd Battalion was assigned to supply a person because it was in South Australia or not I don't

12:00 know. Anyway West Australian Howard went down there and I was down there for the next twelve months as an instructor in one of the wings of this Officer Training School, which was a very testing productive stimulating and satisfying assignment I found. Because through this school came every

12:30 potential officer in the Australian Army. Selected by his commanding officer as a likely officer for his particular unit. And we had sergeants, corporals, sar majors sometimes. Many sergeants sometimes the odd corporal, who were chaps who'd performed well in their units and their commanding officer had decided that they were going to be officers. So they sent them down to us to give them the

13:00 necessary training so that they could come back to their unit as with a qualification and approval. And this training school was divided into three wings so called. A Wing was specifically weapon training and the officers of this were substantially regular army officers not who'd had that

13:30 much overseas training but were very good people on the rigours of routine weapon training. The next wing and after a month of this A Wing the students moved to B Wing you see. In B Wing where I was assigned we had things that I was accustomed to be talking about. Infantry minor tactics, map reading, field sketching,

14:00 obstacles, defensive works of minor kind and so on. And then after a month of that, which was sort of a broadening of the officer potential they'd then go into the final wing C Wing, which was the tactics wing. And there they would do tactical training under officers in the main who had come down from early

14:30 jungle operations and were up with the needs of the current situation. Not that the Woodside terrain was terribly heavily wooded but at least the thrust of the work was on jungle training. But it was a broader view of course wisely because jungle warfare wasn't going to be all that those officers were going to be encountering in time or could not be. So it wasn't devoted to jungle warfare

15:00 but the basics of jungle training were also inculcated there. As it was in B Wing where we taught individual movement and camouflage and concealment and that sort of thing, and we had quite a

number of chaps who'd seen some service in my wing as well. And on each wing I think we had something like sixty students. So there were close on 200 students going through this

- 15:30 school at one time. And was commanded by a fellow who curiously enough had been the original commanding officer of the 2/43rd Battalion. So he'd come home to roost. There were one or two changes during my twelve months there but he was the original one. The officer commanding my wing B Wing was a very tall,
- 16:00 austere regular army former Warrant Officer Class One now was Captain called Breely. Joe Breely a fine man but very conservative chap. But he had a quite a high pitched voice and when he gave his command in front of the B Wing students he'd say, "B Wing," and so he was called Ricochet. That was
- 16:30 his nickname among the troops 'cause that's what a bullet sounds when it you know ricochets off something else. So Ricochet Breely was the OC [Officer Commanding] of B Wing and he and I got on very well indeed. And one special thing about old Ricochet apart from being an austere and conservative gentleman he had a good taste for wine, and in South Australia of course Woodside's not exactly in the
- 17:00 centre of it but at least there's some wine close by. So Joe Breely used to bring wine in and put it in the mess and people who were interested he would invite them to sample and from my little memory back in the Middle East that I mentioned earlier in the interview I felt well a glass of wine is quite nice now and again. And so I helped Joe in his
- 17:30 sampling of some of the local wines and that assisted my education. Not that I wish to talk too much about that as being a outcome of one's wartime experiences. But it was interesting. And Joe was a West Australian actually and we met after the war on quite a number of occasions in the Regular Defence Forces Welfare Association and we maintained our friendship. He died not so long ago
- 18:00 old Ricochet Joe yeah. Anyway that went on for about twelve months before I was called back to the unit.

Keith if I can interrupt, would you mind devoting some time to perhaps going into detail about the training program in B Wing?

Well as I mentioned earlier it was the subjects were

- 18:30 very much how can I say academic in their way.

Theory?

Map reading and field sketching, desk type stuff, illustrations on blackboards and that sort of thing, very much interior classroom style of training. Concealment and camouflage was obviously an external

- 19:00 thing and we would go out into the nearby woods with concealment and camouflage equipment. Personal uniforms garnishings and so on and also material, which could be used for concealing and camouflaging defensive positions. Canvas calicos and all that sort of
- 19:30 thing. Gas warfare was another subject, which we touched on there and involved very largely study of possible gasses. We didn't have any actual experience of it. No gas chambers there but discussion of the various kinds and the use of respirators gas masks and so on.
- 20:00 A number of other sort of shall we say not exactly peripheral but rather broadening wider general aspects of military training as distinct from pure weaponry and pure tactics everything else that officers should know. Troop morale the maintenance of
- 20:30 troop morale. A good deal of time was spent on staff duties, which is the military term for military writing, proper formation of orders and instructions. There was a an item in the military vernacular called Appreciations and this is where the commander sits and studies a particular tactical situation and in a logical fashion
- 21:00 examines what is needed, what is the aim, then looks at the various factors. There's this and there's that. There's the weather, the enemy, what's he got, what have I got, the terrain, what does that give and so on. And eventually you come down to the point where you discuss various options considering all these factors. You've got alternative this, option that. Alternative that and finally you arrive at
- 21:30 what you believe is the most satisfying option and you formulate an outline plan. Now this is called an Appreciation. This is quite an intellectual sort of study and took up quite a bit of time in B Wing but again an internal classroom sort of matter yeah. So I suppose in B Wing mainly as I say it was internal lecturing and study and table work paperwork. But a
- 22:00 few outside exercises just on the periphery before getting out to the tactical field in the next wing.

And were you promoted at this time?

Yes. I was made a temporary captain.

Temporary Captain?

Temporary Captain yeah. Well you see in those days and I think it still applies that your rank in the service is to fill a particular vacancy in your unit. Now I was a member of the 2/43rd Battalion.

22:30 There was no vacancy for a captain in the 2/43rd Battalion I was still a lieutenant, but to go down there where a captain was a more appropriate level considering the work that I was doing I was made a temporary captain. And there were two other two or three other chaps who were lieutenants in their own units who came down and were made temporary captains for the period of their duty. And then on return to their own battalion as I did, I reverted to lieutenant for a short time.

23:00 **So was the promotion to temporary captain with a pay rise?**

Oh yes. You're paid as a captain but your status is temporary and when you revert to a lieutenant on your return to your unit you revert to lieutenant's pay yeah. Well that's how it was then anyway. As I say it's a hundred years ago so. But shortly after returning to my battalion the Battalion had been

23:30 in this interim period to New Guinea for a while and involved in campaigns on the north coast at Lae, Salamaua and they came back to the Atherton Tablelands and I rejoined them. And there were vacancies or at least a vacancy for a captain and so I was appointed Captain back in my old Battalion as part of the establishment so called. Capital E Establishment is the

24:00 structure of the Battalion with it's appropriate ranks and quantifications yeah.

And what was it like being reunited with your battalion after they'd been to New Guinea?

It was very interesting indeed. The Battalion had changed a little. They'd had a couple of COs, commanding officers in the interim, but the fellow who was now the commanding officer

24:30 was somebody I'd never seen in my life before. He, I say this with some hesitation. But we'd had a CO who'd been brought in from somewhere else during the New Guinea campaign and he didn't do very well and the Battalion had suffered in morale a bit as a result of this. So when I rejoined the Battalion we'd just had a

25:00 new CO appointed. A fellow who had a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] he'd commanded one of the 6th Division Battalions in the Western Desert and in Greece. And he was a bachelor a very acerbic humourless fellow without

25:30 any smile or sympathy or warmth at all, a real, real machine. He was red headed except that he had a bald centre, but he had red fringes around here and his face was red and he was known as the Red Fox. But he was famous and great battalion commander you know very successful. Noel

26:00 W Simpson DSO, and I arrived back there and became a Captain and he said, "Howard you've had some experience staff experience and instructional experience so you're going to be the Battalion Adjutant." Now the adjutant is a very responsible position in a battalion. He is the CO's Staff Officer and what the CO says the adjutant

26:30 has to initiate by written orders. You have to be an expert in written orders and so on. You have to control the regimental sergeant major, the orderly room and be in fact the be-all and end-all other than the commanding officer. And this was a very onerous position and so I accepted with

27:00 "Sir," saluted smartly and sat in the chair. It was interesting that in the Battalion Headquarters at the time it was a hut. Well they all were just.

Can I just interrupt you sorry.

Yeah. Say when.

Okay rolling.

Yes well the Red Fox was as I say a very austere and strict disciplinarian and the huts

27:30 such as we had in the Atherton Training area were I think they were called Nissan huts or something like that they're just a long hut. But the Battalion Headquarters was divided by hessian walls through which you could speak, and the CO's office was at one end then came the adjutant's office and then there was the general office with the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] and the Regimental Office Staff and so on,

28:00 on the other side. And inevitably of course being the Staff Officer one was on the job first very early in the morning checking the incoming paperwork and so forth and the CO would arrive a little later on and go into his office. And his first job was to call me in to discuss what was in my in-tray or what was in his. What was the

28:30 program for the day ahead and so on. And if he was in a good mood he would say, "Captain Howard." I'd say, "Sir," and I'd go in there with me bundle of papers and we'd discuss the days activities. But if he weren't in quite such a good mood he'd say, "Howard." And I thought, "Things are not too good today." The third alternative if he came in and he said, "Adjutant," then I was really in for trouble.

- 29:00 Yes a difficult chap, but anyway he was highly respected. I didn't ever have any trouble with him. And I recall eventually after he'd been with us for six or seven months he was promoted to be Brigadier to go off to the Solomons or somewhere to command a militia battalion that had been involved in operations. And we had a
- 29:30 we had a farewell dinner for him and the Second in Command of the Battalion in his speech of farewell said you know our Commanding Officer is going off to be a Brigadier in Command of X, Y, Z Brigade and some slightly drunken lieutenant down the table said, "Never 'eard of 'im." And Simpson said,
- 30:00 tapping his cigarette, "You will gentlemen, you will." And we did too. He became quite famous later on in the operations of that brigade, which he took over. So he was an interesting aspect of my life together with as I say this period of Adjutant of the Battalion and it was very useful training, and I got to know the
- 30:30 Battalion again very quickly, which I'd been away from for twelve months because everything really came through me to the CO, then appointed to Command was the Second in Command who had been in the Battalion. An original South Australian chap called Mervin Genes, who was also well decorated. He had
- 31:00 taken charge of our first action against Rommel on arrival of the Battalion in Alamein in July 1942 and conducted a very successful action against the German forces and was a well respected officer. In civilian life I think he was a Senior Executive of John Martin's, which is a big department store in Adelaide. And I met him subsequently
- 31:30 after the war back in his job there and we were on quite good terms, so that for a while I was the adjutant to Mervin Roderick Genes MC [Military Cross]. And he commanded the Battalion from there until the end of the war. Shortly after his appointment to command a senior
- 32:00 South Australian officer, senior to me who'd been at a Staff Training School came back and he was appointed Adjutant and I was then appointed to be Second in Command of Don Company. Again with a captain that's a captain's status. Don Company's commanded by a captain but also the second in command is a captain. And we were advised of course that our next
- 32:30 operational role was in Borneo and this was late 1944 or early 1945. And so we began to prepare for landings in Labuan Island and on the mainland of Borneo and this operation I was discussing before of beach landings and so on was stepped up and widened into a bigger formation operations,
- 33:00 which we discussed earlier on. And my job in Don Company as the Second in Command was to back up the CO who was a Tasmanian. We had some Tasmanians in the 2/43rd also. He was a Tasmanian called Mervin Glover and was a good fellow we got on quite well. And eventually we embarked on an American
- 33:30 liberty ship and sailed off from Cairns to Morotai, which was the island between New Guinea and Borneo, which was the centre of Australian operations by now. Australian Army Headquarters were set up there and I think Blamey, the Commander in Chief had his office there and so on. And we began to train extensively for the proposed landing
- 34:00 on Labuan Island which is off the coast of Borneo and then onto mainland Borneo itself where the Japanese were quite heavily ensconced.

What kind of harbour or port facility was at Morotai?

At Morotai? I don't remember much about it. We arrived in our liberty ship and got off and got onto trucks and went off to our training areas. I don't remember the harbour at all quite frankly. What I do remember is that

- 34:30 it had been captured earlier on by the Americans from some Japanese and they had established a defensive position in the area of the harbour where the Australians had come and established headquarters there as well. And out from there about twenty kilometres was a defensive line and within that defensive line was the allied possessions
- 35:00 but beyond the defensive line who knows. Anyway quaintly enough we got on our trucks [and] drove through the defensive line. A lot of American Negroes were standing there wondering what was happening and off we went and set up our camps about five kilometres further on into this unknown country. And the Brigade established itself there and there was never any problem about it. It was always very quaint.
- 35:30 Going out into this unknown territory on the other side of the defensive line. And whenever we went into headquarters for any reason we had to come in through the American defensive line before we got to the headquarters at the harbour. However that's by the way. We went through very, very intense training programmes there. Getting back to this landing practice that we talked about, we had
- 36:00 quite extensive what we used to call sand models. In fact they were made of plastic and sacking and so on all conjured up and properly prepared models of the island where we were going to land. The airports. The objectives and all of the plans were formulated from these models and we practiced as far

as we possibly could on the beach

- 36:30 near our camp on the process that we were going to operate on. And there was this company and that company and then there was Don Company and so on and so on. And eventually I think it was in early June 1945 we got onto landing ships. Landing ships VP, landing ships vehicle and personnel. Quite
- 37:00 not as bit as liberty ships but designed particularly for beach landing operations where vehicles were involved. And we trained there onboard the ship as the ships made their way in convoy with Royal Australian Navy and also American naval vessels as escorts a very big convoy towards the island of Labuan, and we were trained in this ship to go down in to the hold and mount
- 37:30 into Landing Vehicles Personnel LCPs, which were tract vehicles like small tanks with an open top into which we got as people. And we were transferred from this larger ship down a big ramp into the sea and across the water and theoretically up the beach and into the plantations where we'd get out and fight the war. So this was a good part of our training onboard this ship during the
- 38:00 couple of days three or four days journey across to Labuan Island off the coast of Borneo.
- Excuse me Keith were these LSTs?**
- An LST was slightly different. That's Landing Ship Tank, slightly different because it carried a much heavier vehicle and twenty or thirty people but same sort of thing. Same sort of thing we were LST also mounted the beach as we going to. However came
- 38:30 the and I was as I say Second in Command of the Company and traditionally in Australian military practice and I think probably British practice is that when you're going into an operation you establish a group called the LOB. Now this is Left Out of Battle and the seconds in command all the way down
- 39:00 through the structure are put in this LOB and when the operation goes forward the LOB comes just at the rear and it's a reserve in case the commanding officer gets killed the second in command is in the LOB he moves up. And the seconds in command of all the little commands through the battalion structure are in this LOB. I was Second in Command of Don Company so I was in the LOB, and we
- 39:30 were second wave onto the beach. Eventually we got into these landing craft, and dawn and preceded by tremendous gun fire from the naval ships and to soften up the Japanese positions, which were believed to be in a coconut plantation just in from the beach and then beyond there was a strategically important airstrip
- 40:00 the Lahar airstrip, and this had to be captured. This was the main objective of our Battalion's operation. 2/28th Battalion who were on our left they had to capture the so-called Government House, which was the local residency there. Anyway our first wave went and they went up on the beach. The second wave with LOB came along and I had a great big American Negro
- 40:30 driving this ship or landing craft whatever it was and I had about fifteen fellas there with me here and we got to within about twenty metres of the beach and this fella stopped. And I said, "Hey, hey," you know. We've got to go up the beach and we're going to debauch. That was the term that was used debauch means get out of this particular kind of vehicle and form up into military formation and advance you know, with bayonets fixed and so on.
- 41:00 We were going to debauch in this plantation. Anyway he stopped about twenty metres off the shore, and I said, "What's the trouble? Get movin' guy." And he said, "No man." He said, "I ain't gonna go up there." He says, "There's mines on that there beach and that's too dangerous for me." I said, "Get movin' you bastard." I had a bayonet on my rifle and prodding. He said, "You can do that if ya like but I ain't goin' up there," which was a very disconcerting
- 41:30 beginning to a beach landing see. So I accepted the fact, well he's not gonna move so I said to fellas, "Overboard." So we all jumped out of this thing and found ourselves up to our necks.

We'll just cut there we're at the end of the tape anyway I think.

Tape 7

- 00:31 **Before we just had that short break you were mentioning that your Negro friend was not about to take the vehicle up onto the beach because of possible booby-trapping and so you were basically up to your necks in water?**
- Yes. Really up to our necks, which of course is not a very good way to start an advance onto land where you've got to live on what's on your back.
- 01:00 So apart from the morale aspect of advancing over open country into possible enemy fire, we faced the prospect of clothes, wet rations our blankets and everything else on our body. Anyway that was just a little incident and fortunately either the mines on the beach weren't as bad as were expected and the Japanese were not ensconced

01:30 in the coconut plantation, so we were able to struggle up the beach soaking wet and made our way into the plantation. Formed up, and continued our advance to follow the rest of our Battalion who had found similar ease of movement through and we advanced onto the airstrip, which was the main objective of our particular Battalion.

Were you at

02:00 **all concerned about bobby traps?**

No it hadn't been mentioned as an aspect. There was the possibility of mines on the beach and the mines would normally have been for armoured vehicles landing vehicles. Not booby traps because normally troops wouldn't be walking up there they'd be carried across by the vehicles, so that the mines would have been anti-vehicle. Anyway we moved up towards the airstrip, which was a kilometre

02:30 or two inland and as the forward companies of the Battalion onto the airstrip, which was contested by Japanese defenders and there was a bit of an operation going on. I had my fellows waiting in case of need about three or 400 metres short of the actual airstrip operation and we were huddled along

03:00 a little grassy bank waiting news looking expectantly forward. When along a track immediately behind us we heard a sound and turned round and lo and behold a group of people led by you won't believe it led by General Douglas McArthur himself, yes astonishing. And behind him was our Divisional Commander General

03:30 Leslie Morsehead and behind him was our rather portly brigadier, Brigadier George Wootton and various other odds and bods. And yeah I was very impressed having not had much time for Mr McArthur to find him there within some well less than an hour after the landing and getting quite close to the scenes of operation. Anyway

04:00 he sort of looked at me down there and I looked at him, you know my jaw dropped a bit and then by this time a couple of cameramen in his entourage were there as well. I thought bloody hell is this the war or not? And anyway they said, "Righto General," and there we were down there and the General was looking at us and he said you know we'll take a picture. Now and the General said, "Just a moment. Just a moment." And he tilted his chin up and posed and

04:30 click the photo was taken. So there was General McArthur in his best posed position having a look at us as the war when on. Anyway they went away and that was the end of that. But it was an interesting experience to be looked at so suddenly by the Supreme Commander of the whole allied effort in the South West Pacific.

You'd had absolutely no idea that he was in the area?

No not a sausage. No it was quite exciting.

05:00 And as I say it changed my views a little bit about McArthur who I had very bad thoughts on about his behaviour in the New Guinea campaign and his handling of our operations up there.

Well there was quite a bit of concern in relation to the whole New Guinea effort?

Oh yes.

While we're on it you know what are your thoughts on that whole?

I don't know the detail of it but I do know that we had a lot of trouble on the Kokoda Track of course

05:30 because we were a very small force and the Japanese were a very large force and we had a couple of militia battalions who performed very well indeed, the 39th Battalion and the 55th Battalion but were chopped to pieces. The AIF 7th Div people came up there under Commander Brigadier Arnold Potts and he very cleverly fought a delaying action back along the track,

06:00 which under the circumstances in retrospect I think everybody agrees was the only thing to do. But McArthur made great criticism of this and relayed his views to Blamey, and Blamey afterwards criticised the 7th Div in terms of scared rabbits or something like that.

06:30 And he deposed Brigadier Arnold Potts also the General who was there whose name escapes me just now and so from a West Australian point of view anyhow the 2/16th Battalion and Arnold Potts who was an ex 2/16th man and well respected chap we thought it was a dirty business by McArthur to act in this way and transmit his views through Blamey,

07:00 and it was very bad of Blamey to react in that way as well. However as I say to find McArthur right there on the spot at our landing at Labuan was quite interesting. Well the battle went on and we captured the airstrip and then

How long was the battling going on ?

It was a matter of some hours only. It wasn't a momentous event. But it

07:30 **Was it mainly fought just on the ground?**

On the ground oh yes. The Japanese were not very strong. They were mainly ground forces, local ground forces and I don't recall them having any armour there and there was certainly no aircraft. Heavy machine guns I think they had but I don't recall any artillery or mortars or that sort of thing. Anyway

08:00 then we had to swing left because there was another airstrip to the east and so the battalion moved in that direction. And the group that I was with the LOB group was sent out there and we found that there was nobody on that secondary airstrip but the airstrip had been filled with poles stuck into the ground to prevent its use by light aircraft. So we

08:30 occupied and took charge of it and waited the next event in the operations, which was the 2/28th's operation to capture the so called Government House area. They had a lot of problems there, the Japanese had concentrated around that area and while we weren't actually involved in it 2/28th was our sister battalion and we were sort of hearing odd things. And they had difficulty

09:00 there and the operation went through several phases. It finally succeeded but it was a very messy untidy thing and unfortunately the 2/28th commander a Colonel Hugh Boyd Norman, well respected West Australian was removed and somebody else was appointed. So it was an unhappy event that Government

09:30 House business for the 2/28th but for 2/43rd we did all right. We got the airstrip and then the second airstrip, and then the organisation was set up to cross from Labuan Island on to Borneo mainland.

Can I just ask with the Labuan when you had injuries and people hurt, where are you removing them to?

Back onto the beach and there were hospital facilities on ship just off the

10:00 shore. I dunno who and what and where

So a hospital ship?

But there were logistic support ships, which would have included medical just off shore. So that the beach was our line of communication back through and then back to Morotai if necessary. And eventually of course when the airstrip was cleared and became operational

10:30 our planes come in there and there was a medical evacuation out of the airstrip. That was a few days later on of course. But in the interim as I say we formed up and were ready to advance across to the mainland of Borneo. And somewhere or other I suppose higher authority provided landing craft again. So we embarked on those

11:00 and crossed to the other side to the mainland and then commenced an advance up the Padas River. The Padas River was quite a substantial water body, which flowed down from the inland town of Beaufort and up beyond Beaufort again was the town of Tenom, which was the headquarters of the Japanese operations in that part of Borneo. So the aim of the exercise

11:30 of our Brigade including the 2/28th and the 2/32nd Battalions was to capture firstly Beaufort. Our 2/43rd role was Beaufort and then the others were to proceed on to Tenom. I was still with the LOB group and the Battalion moved by jungle

12:00 track up the Padas River towards Beaufort, which was probably a day's march. I'm speaking from memory here it might be different from that. But that's what it was I think, and they had some encounters with Japanese on the way. My group the LOB group I had two jobs to do, the first one was an unpleasant one in that we were informed

12:30 that there was a small body of Japanese in a village just a couple of miles away to the left of this main track where our force was moving. So Howard was given instructions to gather a platoon of troops and take them over and deal with these Japanese in this village.

When you say deal with the Japanese in the village what does that actually mean?

Well capture kill dispose of whatever. Anyway

13:00 we moved quietly over and we saw this little village on the side of a hill and some open clear land down in front of it. And as we got closer very carefully moving up through the jungle we were able to observe that there were five or six Japanese sitting on the ground in front of the village sort of looking down this large open space

13:30 and some villagers just at the back of them. So they were obviously occupying this. It was only a village of two or three farmhouses you know, very small. So we moved up and I arranged for our people to set up a machine gun to a flank, which would cover our advance and then together with four or five of the remaining fellows I said, "We will charge in there and deal with these Japanese."

14:00 So we did, happily they were relaxing. They weren't standing there with their weapons pointing at us. They weren't expecting us we caught them by surprise and we moved in and we disposed of them by

submachine gun fire. But it's one of the memories that I have poignant memories that I personally bayoneted two Japanese then and there. Things I'd never

14:30 done before nor since, and it was a very traumatic experience but I can recall being absolutely carried away a blue feeling of intense emotion. No fellow feeling other than this has to be done. I kill them or they kill me, fear I suppose. Tension. Anyway in I went with my bayonet and

15:00 bayoneted them both.

How hard is it to kill somebody with a bayonet?

Well in my CMF training before the war we'd done quite a lot of bayonet training and we were fairly proficient at it. Anyway it was a thrust withdrawal thrust withdrawal in each case and an, expiration. Now some of the fellas behind me came along and I think probably dealt with them with machine guns as well so

15:30 whether they were killed with the bayonet thrust. I think they were because it went straight into their chests and they would've been killed. But it is a memory that's lived with me poignant and you know arouses the emotion every time I think of it. In retrospect you know to go around killing people like that under any circumstances but in such a form is a frightening, frightening thought.

By this time had some of the

16:00 **stories about the cruelty of the Japanese filtered back to you?**

Yes. But that didn't matter. They were human beings there. They were enemies, I suppose faced with a similar situation Italians and Germans one would have done the same thing. I don't think the fact that they were Japanese made any difference. It was just that they were enemy and they would've done me in if I hadn't done them first. I was quicker than they, that's all.

I'm just wondering also if any of the information

16:30 **about the Sandakan death marches had filtered through to you ?**

No. I don't think Sandakan. No at that time no. I'm not sure that it wasn't still in progress at that time.

I'm thinking maybe it's even simultaneously happening?

Yes around about that time. No we hadn't heard about that no. Anyway that was one exercise during my little period with LOBs. The second one was that

17:00 I was told that there had been some Japanese seen at a small village up the coast. So I had to go up there and deal with that situation and take five or six fellows with me, but this time there was a small Royal Australian Navy frigate I suppose, very small vessel available.

17:30 Where that came from or who organised it I don't know. Anyway I took my chaps aboard and we went up and we had to go about twenty kilometres up the coast and there was this little village fishing village. So the frigate came quite close and got in to wading distance. So I went overboard with my fellows and you know it was quite comfortable. And we went in there and the village was almost

18:00 deserted, and we were you know looking for Japanese occupants and so on and all of a sudden three or four people appeared with their hands up and they were Indians turbans and you know moustaches and the women with their veils and so on, which was a great surprise. Now I don't recall how they got there but they'd either been

18:30 brought from Victoria, which was the capital of Labuan up there as hostages or something like that and the Japanese had disappeared and left them and they were the only occupants of this little village. So we gathered them up. They were very pleased to see us. And we put them aboard the frigate and we went back to Victoria harbour in Labuan and handed them over to the authorities there. Whatever happened to them I don't know, but it was a contrasting pleasure after the first incident I've

19:00 described to be able to find that we were able to be helpful to somebody. So that was a contrasting emotion. And so we went on after that up to Beaufort in time for the capture of Beaufort and it was a rather messy battle up there.

Can I before we sort of get into capturing Beaufort. What were your impressions of the jungle in Borneo? I understand that it's incredibly dense but also

19:30 **quite beautiful.**

It's quite beautiful but it varies a bit. This part of it that I'm speaking of the mouth of the Padas River up to Beaufort quite a lot of cultivation, villages, Borneo villages. What are they the Murut, and the [Kadazan] Dusun the local

20:00 Borneo people and the areas that we moved through whether they'd cultivated them because it wasn't very thick jungle in the first place or not I don't know, but we didn't find the jungle impenetrable. Nothing like the Atherton Tableland, no, it was very much easier very heavy savannah really one could say. Up around Beaufort itself,

- 20:30 which was getting more inland and the ground began to rise a bit beyond Beaufort up to Tenom. It got a bit thicker and slightly hillier. But no it wasn't anything like the jungles of Queensland and like some of the New Guinea operations that I'd heard about either. Very attractive in its way, very beautiful, yes I was quite delighted
- 21:00 with the Borneo topography one way and another.
- Did you come across any wild animals?**
- I don't recall any.
- Wild animals?**
- No I don't recall any no.
- Okay I thought you said something else that's okay. Julian [interviewer] thinks its very funny, okay.**
- No, only the Japanese.
- Was there much souveniring going on? We hear stories about soldiers taking you know like little trinkets or buttons**
- 21:30 **and things like that was there any of that going on?**
- Generally not to my knowledge, when we arrived in Beaufort and set up our defences around I rejoined my company and the company commander for some reason or other was evacuated and I became the
- 22:00 Company Commander. And I took my Company up north of Beaufort to a place called Membakut on a railway line a light railway that ran from Beaufort up to Jesselton [Kota Kinabalu] the capital of British North Borneo. So I don't know much about the Beaufort operations. Except that I do know that the CO of one of the other battalions in some way that
- 22:30 I don't know was found to have pilfered some crockery or valuable items from somewhere or other and the fact that it became known caused this chap to commit suicide in Beaufort itself. He was very respected and very genteel sort of fellow. Very surprising indeed the news when we
- 23:00 heard it but that's what he did. It's funny you should raise that 'cause I'd never heard of any other misappropriation of local people's property except that one. And I didn't know much about that except that he did commit suicide and it was because he was alleged to have misappropriated property. So we stayed in Beaufort for in and around Beaufort some little time. The Japanese
- 23:30 had withdrawn up to Tenom up the hills and we set up defensive positions around Beaufort and our other battalions I think sort of made tentative moves up to Tenom and eventually the Japanese surrendered. But this is some time later on. We had a glorious children's party in Beaufort a gala open day, and all the children
- 24:00 from round the neighbourhood came into this party that we put on, games, stalls and all kinds of things. The 2/43rd Battalion and one of the other one or two or the other units there and it became in later times remembered as quite a gala event, apart from the fact it was liberation from the Japanese and this great celebration.
- How did you find the locals?**
- Very, very pleasant people, very pleasant people indeed.
- 24:30 And some years later I think in the 1980s after I'd finished my tour of duty with the UN in the Middle East 1981. I took Joan my wife Joan to some of the places that I'd been during the war just to see where I'd won it you see. And so we went to Beaufort and I'd had advice to go and see a particular chap who was a tailor
- 25:00 or something like that who'd been there during the time of our occupation if you like. So I went to see him and I said, "I'm Howard and I was here with the 2/43rd Battalion in June, July 1945." You couldn't have imagined the effusion and enthusiasm. And he took me down the street introducing me and people said, "Ah you're a member of the Army of Liberation." I said, "What?" "The
- 25:30 Army of Liberation." And in subsequent conversation it appeared that they thought that we had been created purely and simply to come there to relieve them. They had no concept of the wider ramifications of the war at all. We'd arrived, we'd freed the people of Beaufort from the Japanese and that's all that mattered. Oh no they were lovely people and the 2/32nd Battalion in their association has I think
- 26:00 sponsored one or two students from Beaufort to come to Australia over the years for study and that sort of thing. So there's still a connection between West Australians some West Australians that were there and the people of Beaufort today.
- That's a wonderful story to hear apart from the fact that you decided to go back with your wife.**

Yes. Well we went to a lot of places. We went to Alamein together and to Beaufort and across to

26:30 Ambon, where I went after this particular operation that we're talking about. And

We'll get onto it. No it's just a really wonderful thing to do you know years later.

Yes. Well it is to recapture one's own memory but also to show her what had been an important part of my life in the past yeah.

Indeed.

So that was Beaufort and we stayed there for

27:00 quite some time and an interesting aspect was that the Japanese in Tenom hadn't heard the news of the Japanese surrender. Or didn't want to hear it perhaps. But we had these defensive positions. We knew the war was over. The surrender had been not signed but the Japanese Emperor had surrendered. But we had Japanese patrols still coming close to our lines. And of

27:30 course it was terrible to think that any of our people could be killed in action against the Japanese after theoretically the war had finished.

Can we just pause there for a moment, I think we've got too much sound. Rolling. Pick up from where you remember.

We were talking about our apprehensions about suffering casualties after the war had actually ended and the Japanese around the Beaufort area

28:00 hadn't got the message. So that while we had to have defensive positions manned by our people and on constant alert we had to be very sure that we didn't get into any conflict at all. Now there were some occasions when the Japanese approached very close and there appeared to be a possible danger to our people in their defensive positions. We had to open fire, which the Japanese responded to

28:30 but happily to my knowledge we didn't incur any casualties. But as far as I was concerned about this time and it must have been a week or ten days after the end of the war a message came around, which said in effect that a junior staff officer is required on a new headquarters

29:00 being formed. Now I pricked my ears up at this because I was twenty-four, a captain. I'd been through some fairly interesting situations so I could say I was a reasonably experienced soldier at a young age with perhaps some years ahead and maybe potential. I didn't really want to go

29:30 back to the bank as a bank clerk on thirty bob a week. So I thought well my further possibly lies in the regular army. And this new headquarters being formed sounds to me like it's something to carry on after the war. [British Commonwealth] Occupation Force perhaps or something like that. So I put my hand up. And lo and behold after a few days a message came back through Battalion Headquarters that Howard

30:00 had been accepted in view of his staff training and adjutant's duties and so on he'd been accepted in this appointment as so called staff captain learner, which was a funny terminology in military parlance at the time. It means the second level staff captain. Staff Captain Learner on the Headquarters of 33rd Infantry Brigade. Wow. So I

30:30 **Pretty exciting stuff.**

Packed up my bags, said farewell to my soldiers, went through the headquarters, shook hands with the commanding officer, went down to by truck to Labuan Island, got aboard an aeroplane at the Labuan airstrip, which we'd captured a month or two before. I'd never flown in an aeroplane before and it took me to Morotai. Back to Morotai,

31:00 to the Australian Army Headquarters inside the American defences in the island. And they said, "Yes good Howard. Glad to see you." Unfortunately Headquarters 33rd Brigade with the Brigadier and the Brigade Major and the Staff Captain that you were going to be Staff Captain Learner to they've all left and they've gone down to Darwin. I said, "Oh." They said, "Yes. This

31:30 force was going to go to Ambon but we've decided that it will go to Darwin will go to Timor and because there are more troops in Timor than there are here we've sent the Brigade Headquarters down to Darwin and the Brigade will be formed and go to Timor from Darwin." So I said I didn't want to go to Timor. They said, "Well what you're going to do is you're going to raise this new headquarters here for a force to go to Ambon."

32:00 I said, "Ambon?" Yeah. Well to cut a long story short there was nothing, nobody, and there I was in a tent with a clerk I think. But gradually various units came in different people and then eventually a brigadier arrived and a brigade major and eventually a couple of battalions of infantry came in from Australia, Townsville or somewhere and

32:30 we got this force assembled which became known as 'Am-Force', Ambon. Still took the 33rd Brigade title and off we went down to Ambon. Now there's a lot of detail about this and I don't want to, you

know, bore you or clutter up the interview with that.

There is no chance of ever boring or cluttering up the interview as far as we're concerned. No we'd like to know about Ambon 'cause Am-Force

33:00 **sounds like a very strategic part.**

Well Ambon was a place, which was an island with a very good harbour. And which in the days of the Netherlands East Indies administration was used by the Netherlands East Indies, for example the Dutch Navy, Royal Dutch Navy as a harbour base. And when the Japanese came down through that area they took over this Ambon harbour and

33:30 developed an extensive naval base for themselves. And in and around Ambon Island they had something like 70,000 Japanese naval personnel at the end of the war. It had had an unfortunate history because before the Japanese came the Australians had posted a force up there called Gull Force,

34:00 which was about 1,100 Australian soldiers together with a Dutch Colonial Force as well occupying the island. And the defence was split into two. About 300 Australians guarded the airport the so-called Laha airstrip, which is on one side of the island. The island is rather like a hollow tooth. The harbour down the middle and two

34:30 sides of the island. On one side of the island across the harbour was this airstrip and on the other side was the town of Ambon, and the defences were geared into the harbour and its entrance. Well cleverly the Japanese of course ignored that and they came round the bottom of the island where there were some rather rugged cliffs and no beaches or anything but they landed and they climbed up the bottom of the hollow tooth and expanded round the two sides

35:00 advanced on the airport on one side and on the town on the other. The Australians at the airport put up a very strong defence the 300 of them. They were finally overcome and the Japanese it is said, in difference to their gallantry gave them the correct military death by beheading them. They dug their own graves and they were beheaded and buried then and there.

35:30 The rest of the Japanese went round on the other side of the island 800 odd and the Dutch people who were ostensibly defending the capital and the entrance to the harbour. But for some reason or other there was very little opposition and that force up there capitulated and marched into prison camp with their rifles on their shoulders. Organised and

36:00 marched in as a formed body. Now that prisoner of war camp became notorious over the next three or four years from 1942 till 1945 and by the end of the war when we got down there I think there were something like a hundred odd only left of the 800 who'd been there. Some had been shipped off to Japan. Many of them had died. Many

36:30 of them had been executed for various malefactions in the camp and there were this hundred odd left. So number one priority of our visit there was to recover and repatriate [them] quickly to Singapore and eventually to Australia, these prisoners. The second task was to apprehend the prison guards and those responsible, many of whom

37:00 had been detailed as very cruel individuals and many of them eventually became, were tried as prisoners of war and executed as criminals, war criminals. In this Brigade I was quite fascinated because the Staff Captain had gone off to Timor and there was no

37:30 Staff Captain, I moved up from Staff Captain Learner to be Staff Captain. So we had the Brigadier and the Brigade Major and Howard in that order on the Brigade Headquarters. So I was quite deeply involved in the administrative side of all this. And it was a very interesting exercise. We had to occupy all the areas. We had to take a formal surrender from the Japanese commander, Vice Admiral [Ine-iche-si] who was a very decorous,

38:00 correct man. And who through the whole period that I was there had his Japanese conduct themselves in the most regimental military and proper fashion. Caused no trouble at all. Contrary I'm afraid to the Australians who, the two battalions of them were young fellows, conscripts, with no military background. Very little training indeed and were very unruly and undisciplined

38:30 and a very unsatisfactory lot. Part of my problem was the lack of discipline among the Australians and some of the things that they did to the local people, and

Such as?

to the Japanese, robbing houses, and abusing the local population, physically and sexually.

So you actually had more problems with the Australians?

Oh yes. I've got quite a few documents over there of letters from

39:00 the Japanese authority on some of the malefactions of Australians against Japanese personnel. And so it was a difficult exercise from that point of view. I tried to, when I finally left the area the brigadier in command who was a new one since the original chap who was quite a good fellow, second brigadier

said, "You can't, I want you to write a report on your experiences you know, to go into

39:30 the army records." And quite prominently in this report were critical remarks about the unsuitability of Australians of this nature coming into a delicate job like that. But he refused to accept it and I had to go and rewrite it in a more moderate tone.

What were some of your major gripes as far as the Australians were concerned?

Well they were mainly those things that.... bad dress you know the

40:00 hats on without their proper chin straps, shirts undone or [no] shirts, undisciplined dress, and a bad impression in front of the Japanese. The Japanese were occupying what had been the Dutch residency as their headquarters. So when we came down there we took over the Dutch residency as our headquarters and moved the Japanese Vice Admiral and his staff into some

40:30 suitable buildings just across the street. And whenever one went out of one's headquarters the Japanese had sentries on their headquarters, meticulous like guardsmen at Buckingham Palace. Australians similarly very, very poor discipline, badly dressed and so on.

Why was it so important for you, for the Australians to look good in front of the Japanese?

Well because I must have been fairly punctilious sort of officer who thought

41:00 that Australian soldiers or any soldiers should be properly dressed and behaved. I might have been a bit over the top at that part of the war, but that's how I felt about it, and the two commanding officers of the two battalions of Australians were officers who hadn't, they were regular army colonels. Never been overseas, never been considered fit to command and I think this was a soft job for them to go overseas, so they could get a medal when they came back to

41:30 Australia. That's my view, don't quote me, but anyway they were not very satisfactory COs and they had very little power of discipline over their soldiers. It was a bit of a rabble really. I won't go into any more details. But it was just a very untidy unsoldierly sort of group of people that we Australians were there in front of the Dutch the local people and in particular the Japanese. We had the Dutch

42:00 the Netherlands people.

Tape 8

00:30 That's so but again it was all rather bewildering and my memory is not as good as it should be. So what I've said is the sort of thing that I'll be saying and I'm not sure that there's too much more than I can add.

Whereabouts were the Japanese POWs contained?

Those that we retained they were the guards we kept them in the same prisoner of war enclosure where they had the Australians and

01:00 they were looked after, supervised by members of this group that was part of Am-Force called the Prisoner of War Interrogation Unit and they were headed up by a Chinese Australian I suppose he was. I didn't question his nationality but I assume he was a naturalised Australian Chinese who spoke Japanese and he was in charge of this group who took over this prisoner of war camp,

01:30 and with medical assistance took them out and had them evacuated back to Singapore and then to Australia. Some of them may have even gone directly to Australia I'm not quite sure, but the guards of whom we heard very bad reports not surprisingly were retained in this enclosure and guarded by some members of the Am-Force personnel

02:00 under the supervision of the Prisoner of War Interrogation Interpretation Unit until they conducted further enquiries into the behaviour of this and that and the other individual. And they did this by reference to the evacuated people before they went

02:30 and also I believe by subsequent correspondence. They also discussed relations with the local inhabitants around the area and some of the information, which the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration people who'd been interred also. So they guarded information about these prisoners of war, the prisoner of war guards the Japanese guards and as a result of that

03:00 those that were regarded as eligible qualified for or deserving of trial as war criminals were taken back under guard to Singapore and encompassed there in the very large Singapore prisoner of war trials, the war criminals trials that were conducted at Singapore over the next few months.

03:30 So we didn't have or I personally didn't have very much to do with that aspect other than it was a sort of a file in my in tray but it was looked after by and large by this Chinese chap and his staff, with

acceptance by the Brigadier and the Brigade Major of what was going.

Did you say he was Chinese Australian?

I suspect he must have been an Australian but he was certainly wearing an Australian uniform and he was Chinese

04:00 but a fluent Japanese speaker.

I don't suppose it could have been Jack Soo?

No it wasn't Jack Soo.

Couldn't have been too many Chinese Australians?

No it certainly wasn't Jack Soo. I've known Jack Soo quite a bit subsequently.

I thought I should ask.

Yeah. No it wasn't Jack no. He was a much taller fellow than Jack. A very big Chinese fellow he was, Jack's rather a short chap.

And how were these Chinese guards treated in custody?

Chinese guards?

I mean Japanese guards?

04:30 Well I don't think that the Australian guards around treated them with much sympathy but they were just kept in custody. They were fed with our regular rations and supervised and kept there. I don't think that there was much opportunity for anything other than the normal supervision. Somebody might've given them a clip over the ear sometime but I don't believe there was any repression or particular aggressive control of them. I don't

05:00 believe so. But as I say I wasn't closely associated with that part of the operation.

So you weren't privy to the kind of interrogation that they would?

No. This was strictly our Chinese officers province and in Japanese of course, which I wouldn't have known anything about even if I'd been at the place. No I don't recall anything other than there may have been mess conversation sometimes about a particularly bad one or a particularly good one or something like that but

05:30 I don't recall anything official passing across my table no.

What about some of those unofficial conversations do you recall those?

Only that there was this one wasn't a good chap. And this one was one of those fellas that was you know mentioned by a prisoner, earlier prisoner so and so and so and so. It was very informal and as I say I wouldn't quote it anything authoritatively about that aspect of the affair really. Just a general

06:00 impression. They got out, our own prisoners were got out quickly. The Japanese were held in custody interrogations and investigated and most of them were moved back to Singapore. But I think that one or two of them were released back under the control of the Japanese commander who was still there with his people or many of them when I left after three or four months. That was a

06:30 unique aspect but our main job in general terms was the disarming and repatriation of this 70,000 personnel. And they were dotted about not only in Ambon itself but in some of the surrounding islands Seram and Banda and as a result we had a Royal Australian Navy corvette attached to us under the

07:00 Brigadier's control for surveillance purposes. And every now and again the Brigadier the Brigade Major and even I on one or two occasions would get on this corvette and we'd go to an adjoining island and supervise or see how the disarming was proceeding, and this was done by the Japanese assembling arms and equipment in a central place, which were then transported

07:30 mostly by Japanese vessels still in the area under Japanese control but with our supervision were brought to Ambon itself and inspected and we had a staff of ordinance personnel in our headquarters who were responsible for supervising this equipment and any equipment such as optical

08:00 equipment, binoculars, telescopes that sort of thing, which could be of some value to Australian forces were retained and put in the Australian ordinance store. Things which were superfluous to needs extraneous to our needs were taken out and dumped in Ambon harbour and there was a session daily of dumping programs in the deep water in the middle of Ambon harbour of Japanese

08:30 arms and equipment, which was not required. This was all done as I say under the supervision and as far as we could see clear cooperation of the Japanese Vice Admiral, and we had frequent conferences with him on progress and our instructions were carried out and he'd

09:00 write a report on how it was carried out you know. He was a very good subservient officer under the

circumstances. It was an interesting situation I together with the four or five other officers in the headquarters in this previous Neeka Headquarters building were provided with Japanese servants.

- 09:30 We had a fellow supervising the cookhouse provided the meals on the table, but more personally I was allocated a Japanese as what we used to call them a batman. A manservant, who sort of looked after my gear, cleaned my quarters and that sort of thing and curiously enough he was an extremely well educated well set up Japanese naval petty officer. And how on earth
- 10:00 a petty officer in the Japanese navy could stand being put in a subservient position like that I don't know. But he did his job meticulously and while he used to I see he had a fleeting supercilious look on his face every now and again he did the job and no complaints, first class yeah. So that I think he was indicative of the fact that they accepted the situation. The Emperor had said
- 10:30 do this so they were doing it that was that. And then progressively with some American ships that became available slowly we were able to send some of them back to Japan. The people less involved and I suppose they had their own system of grading like we did after the war. Older fellows with families, higher repatriation
- 11:00 points as we used to call them got priority in repatriation and demobilisation. So maybe that's what the Japanese did I don't know. I don't know how they worked it out, but we sent a few off progressively whenever we had shipping available. And there were still quite a number of them there. Many of them were still there when I left in February of 1946. I might say at this stage that
- 11:30 my father who'd had rather a tough time in the war with his business and also with his health asked me if I would ignore my earlier thoughts of staying in the regular army and come back into the business with him, and for a number of reasons I decided that I would do that. So in late
- 12:00 December, late January early December early February of 1946 I abandoned my duties in Ambon and happily enough the navy corvette that we had attached to us at the time was replaced within a few days of my scheduled movement out back to Singapore or Morotai and back on a troop ship to Sydney and a troop train back to Perth.
- 12:30 This ship was scheduled to come back to Australia for what was the term, signing off and the ship was called Broome. So that their route home was going to be from Ambon via Broome via Fremantle and then off to Melbourne and Sydney for it's decommissioning, that's the term I was groping for. And the captain said, "Would you like a trip back to Broome and Perth
- 13:00 on my ship as my guest?" I was very reluctant to say no so I said, "Yes." And that was a very comfortable and notable ending to my career in World War II that I joined him as his guest. Joan must be home, and we travelled down through Broome. We had a day's stopover there and celebrated with the local people.
- 13:30 All the crew got off and the local people the mayor and what not entertained us all.

How did they entertain you?

How?

How did they entertain you?

Oh dinners, free drinks all round. They had a bit of a racing carnival in the afternoon. The captain of my ship got drunk, I had to commission a utility and put him in the back of it and drive him back to his ship and usher him on board. Anyway

- 14:00 we got to Fremantle safely and I got off the ship with my bags in my hand. My father with his car met me, put me in the car and drove me home. I think it was the most momentous ending to wartime service. But I was sad to leave Ambon and there was still a lot to do. The Netherlands administration were gradually moving in and assuming control of the local people and normal civil administration. You know,
- 14:30 revival of public services and all that sort of business, and I think probably Am-Force was wound up not too long after that, certainly when the Japanese had been all evacuated anyway. And we left the island back in the hands of the Dutch who were the colonial masters at the time. One thing that's interested me subsequently and I've been back there in more recent
- 15:00 years they're mainly Christian. I think that they were very susceptible to early Dutch missionary activities and a tremendous number of them were converted to Christianity. So we could say Ambon virtually was a Christian island and one of the things that I think was linked with this the fact they provided the main content of the Dutch Colonial Army in Indonesia
- 15:30 or in the Netherlands East Indies so called. So that if there were any troubles anywhere else such as in Java the locals the Dutch army would come in to suppress it and these people were largely Ambonese. Hence tremendous antagonism between some other islands in what became Indonesia and the Ambonese. And particularly with the Javanese who [are] primarily Muslim of course
- 16:00 but more than that are a nasty lot I found. And when Indonesia was established because that was the

capital Java and they provided the main content of the new Indonesian army police force administration and so on they were sent to Ambon. An occupation force of Javanese soldiers, Javanese police, Javanese civil administrators and of

16:30 course they all hated the Ambonese because of the Ambonese content in the army beforehand. So apart from the suppressive message we had a conflict of religion and a great deal of the early religious problems in the Indonesian empire were in Ambon and the Ambonese Christians suffered very badly. When I went back in 1981, '82 took Joan there and met some of the

17:00 people that I was friendly with they had very sad tales to tell about the repression of the Javanese in these civil administrative jobs that I've mentioned, very unhappy group of people in Ambon. Whereas when I was there apart from the Japanese they were a very nice happy content, well-organised and regulated community. But now not so, pity.

That's a terrible outcome.

Yeah. Anyway that's nothing to do with the war but it's an aftermath of a

17:30 wartime situation I'm afraid.

Direct aftermath yeah.

Yes. So.

How did your father greet you on the wharf in Fremantle?

Oh he was very glad to see me. I think paternally before the war he and I had some rather extreme views as I mentioned and he was a very strict disciplinarian so we had some strong antagonisms in

18:00 my age seventeen, eighteen, nineteen. But during the war we reconciled those and after the war we became very good friends and being associates in the business, in fact he very largely handed over the control of the business to me and it's been my life work for quite a number of years associated with my return to the military service in 1948 as soon as the

18:30 military was reformed. The militia was reformed in 1948 and I immediately rejoined and carried that on in parallel with my civilian occupation, until in 1967 I abandoned the civilian occupation again and joined the regular army and went off to the United Nations in the Middle East peacekeeping.

What was it like returning to civilian life at the end of World War II?

Well it

19:00 it was not easy because in 1946, '47 the country was still suffering from the deprivations of the war of course everything was rationed and so on, and we still had rationing for some little time afterwards. I lived with my parents because I was still single. We were given a grant of course. Everybody who left the service

19:30 was given a financial grant. And I bought myself a motorbike because I had no transport and I didn't feel like travelling by bus or tram now at the age of twenty-five. So I bought myself a second hand 1934 vintage Harley Davidson motorcycle with a sidecar, which I wish I still had. It would be worth quite a bit I think. It was a lovely old vehicle you know real sit

20:00 back job. And I did my courting of the young lady that I'd been friendly with before the war and she was by now as I said a widow with a couple of kids. And so I used to go and visit her with this motorcycle and live with my parents and worked hard in the business, but as I say as soon as the army reformed and the Cameron's 16th Battalion Cameron

20:30 Highlanders was reformed in 1948 together with other militia units and I joined straight away. Together with quite a number of my old colleagues from the Cameron's from before the war, who'd gone in various directions. AIF some of them had stayed on with the militia Cameron's during the war some of them came back from the air force. I mentioned how some of them had joined the air force at the beginning of the war. They came back from the air force and joined the

21:00 Cameron's. So it was a reunion of a great number of old friends, but a different kettle of fish altogether because the Battalion was now staffed with officers with very proximate military experience, which we all respected. The commanding officer was Colonel Frank Sublet, DSO MC [Distinguished Service Order, Military Cross], distinguished himself [with] 2/16th Battalion in Syria and on the Kokoda Track and so down the line. The various

21:30 officers all I think had had military experience and it was a very good efficient military unit. As were the other ones as well, but not as good as the 16th Cameron's of course.

What did that reunification mean to you at the time?

It was a continuation of military service, which is very hard to shake off.

22:00 I found and also as did the other chaps who rejoined, we rejoined because we missed the army. I think it's as simple as that. With the camaraderie, the commonality of aim, the coordination of effort, the

organisation and order of activity. All this sort of stuff, which has inculcated you in the service lives with you and it's very good to be associated with people

22:30 who have similar attitudes to life. That's how I found it anyway.

Had you missed it during the previous civvy years, before this opportunity?

Yes well I think so. It didn't manifest itself too publicly or too consciously but underlying yes. I didn't mention but I think towards the end of 1946 or in 1947

23:00 a staff officer on the headquarters Regular Headquarters of Western Australia in Francis Street the Swan Barracks took it on himself to invite officers to join an informal group to conduct little military exercises of our own and quite a number of us did that. So in fact it was a kind of an interim period before the army was revived again in '48.

What kind of exercises would you do?

Well there were

23:30 strategic studies based on some of the wartime operations. We did some little field gatherings, very informal. We did class studies up at the headquarters in the mess there and enjoyed a glass of wine and a meal together. So it had a social aspect but it brought back those military that military atmosphere that we missed so that was a help along the way.

24:00 And then as I say in 1948 a great number of us really got back into uniform again. And because of our pleasant associations with 16/28th, the 16th Cameron's, it was called the 16/28th Cameron's on its reforming in 1948 and stayed so until I think 1951 when it became 16th by itself and the 28th set up their own battalion. But no a good number of chaps and even fellows down in the

24:30 other ranks area, non commissioned officers had been in the Battalion before the war. Had seen overseas service. So it was a very good and efficient unit I might say yes. Frank Sublet was an excellent CO and we all respected him very much. We worked together. I was given command of the company that was raised at Fremantle C Company and I had two or three

25:00 very good officers attached to me down there and local Fremantle chaps. It was quite nice until during the period after that the system was revived of training for promotion and examination for promotion. So I think in 1950 or thereabouts I

25:30 did a training course and qualified as major. I came back from the army as a captain you see. Qualified as major in 1951 and because of movement of other officers and so on I became Second in Command of the Battalion. Frank Sublet had moved on. There was another CO now. So I was Second in Command of the Battalion and in 1952 I think I qualified or 1953 maybe I

26:00 went for a qualifying examination in the field at army headquarters, qualified as Lieutenant Colonel in 1953, and then in 1955 when a vacancy occurred as Commanding Officer of the 10th Light Horse Regiment I happened to be the only major around in Western Australia who had qualified for Lieutenant Colonel. So

26:30 curiously enough they said to me, "Howard would you like to be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and be Commander of the 10th Light Horse Regiment?" The most famous regiment in Western Australian history, and an armoured corps of course. And I said, "It's ridiculous, here I am a kilted major with only infantry experience and I'm put in command of a prestigious armoured regiment." "Oh that'll be all right," they said.

27:00 Anyway the commander at the time and I should say that contrary to our experience in the infantry where we'd all be overseas been together and rallied round as soon as our infantry battalion was reformed, the Armoured Regiment or the Australian Armoured Division during the war had never gone out of Australia, was kept in Australia as a sort of local defence in the case of Japanese invasion of the country. It was a quick

27:30 and ready reserve to move anywhere quickly. And as a result few if any of the Armoured Corps officers had seen any overseas service. Therefore there was a kind of an inherent lack of the camaraderie that had existed between the infantry and armour and so on who'd seen overseas service. Now when the 10th Light Horse was reformed in 1948, '49 very few fellows

28:00 came in from wartime service, quite unlike the infantry. They scratched around in 1948, '49 to find a CO for the 10th Light Horse and the best they could do was to find a retired farmer around the York area who was a West Australian by the name of Patrick Keenan. And Keenan

28:30 his father was a famous West Australian lawyer and attorney general in the parliament called Sir Norbert Keenan. But he was Irish by extraction in fact probably by direct birth or Norbert Keenan was, and Patsy that's his son had been sent off to England to be educated quite early and had been at a British private school and then he'd gone to Sandhurst. Graduated in the British Army as an officer and had been sent to the Indian army to one of the

29:00 prestigious Indian army regiments called Hodsons Horse. And at the end of the war 1948 at the time of

the British departure from India, Patsy Keenan was Major Second in Command of Hodsons Horse. But of course all the British officers were the demobilised and the Indian army units were taken over by Indian army chaps, Indian chaps. So Keenan came back to Australia as a retired Indian Army

- 29:30 Major, but with an impeccable background Sandhurst, and all that stuff, so he was chosen to be the CO of the 10th Light Horse. Hodsons Horse was an Armoured Car Regiment. 10th Light Horse was an armoured car regiment. So Patsy was CO for a couple of years and because he didn't have too many officers he'd enlisted to support him a number of British Army, retired British army chaps around the
- 30:00 state. Some of them one of them was a farmer in Three Springs another one was somewhere else and so on. So there was Patsy the Brit and two or three of his officers Brit and not very many Australians. It was a short of officers. Anyway there was a farewell party for Patsy Keenan when it was decided he should step down and of course the incoming CO Major Howard from the Cameron
- 30:30 Highlanders was invited. It was a uniform party and Howard arrived there wearing his kilt and a major rank on his shoulder and all these cavalry officers you know with spurs on and high boots and pukka attitudes and so on, British army feelings. To think that this bloody infantry major was gonna command the 10th Light Horse and it wasn't a very popular
- 31:00 appointment I might say. Anyway I had a good adjutant who was very supportive and a couple of good officers in the Regiment who recognised the situation after a while I moved into it and I had four very fruitful years as CO of the 10th Light Horse and I can pride myself on several innovations I think. In fact the army it was raised in 1948 as the 10th West Australian Mounted Infantry because that was the
- 31:30 original Boer War name and somebody in Canberra thought it'd be nice to have the old Boer War name but nobody had every heard of it. They all knew 10th Light Horse from the First World War. So after some work I was able to have the name changed from West Australian Mounted Infantry to 10th Light Horse that one main achievement of mine I was proud of. Of course the West Australian Mounted Infantry were called WAMI by the Infantry oh the WAMIs have done this or that. Hated it.
- 32:00 10th Light Horse was a wonderful reversion to its original title. We had a badge, which was very close to the 28th Battalion badge. So I was able to have that badge changed to show an armoured car on it and crossed cavalry sabres. That was a bit of an achievement and one or two other things like that. I was also able to arrange for our movement to good barracks in Karrakatta, which is
- 32:30 still occupied and gave it the name of Es Salt which was a famous 10th Light Horse raid during the Palestine Campaign in 1917. That's still the name of the Barracks and I found that a very satisfying four years of military service as Commander of the 10th Light Horse Regiment. In fact I'm prouder of that I think than most anything else that I've done in my military career.

Keith what kind of red tape is

- 33:00 **there to make those sort of identity changes?**

Well again it was the old rule that no promotion without qualification and without a vacancy occurring for you to be promoted into. You just weren't given a rank willy-nilly. You had to have qualified for it and then there had to be somewhere for you to go. Now this was very unusual in fact I think it

- 33:30 was the first time in West Australian maybe the first time in Australia that there had been a corps transfer, from an infantry corps to an armoured corps. Subsequently whether I set a precedent or whether it's just coincidental I don't know but it's been quite frequent now. The 16th Cameron's after I left and after the fellow who was in the chair after I did he vacated it and the only other fella qualified was a major in the artillery. So the Cameron's got an
- 34:00 artillery major as their new lieutenant commanding officer. And it's happened here and there sometime. But in my case it was very unusual and under the circumstances was regarded with a lot of feeling by many people. But eventually it seemed to work out all right yeah.

How welcome were your creative suggestions regarding the Battalion's name and the badge?

Oh well that was very much welcome. I was fortunate that I was able to strike a rapport with the old 10th Light Horse

- 34:30 Association. A group of chaps from the First [World] War who had an association and I got quite close to them and I was able to get a lot of support from them in a number of ways. The change of the title of course was very quick. The name of the Es Salt Barracks they were glad about because they were very proud of that action of theirs in 1917. The changing of the badge they didn't like very much, but they did recognise that it didn't do much for 10th Light Horse anyway. I was also supported
- 35:00 very strongly and I can't emphasis this by the Governor of Western Australian at the time who was Lieutenant General Sir Charles Gardiner, and Charles Gardiner was a member of the 10th Royal Hussars. The British Regiment with which the 10th Light Horse was allied. Since 1936 there'd been an alliance between 10th Royal Hussars and 10th Light Horse. So he
- 35:30 became the Honorary Colonel. In the army structure you have the CO but you also get a distinguished fellow from outside as your patron as it were and he's called the honorary colonel. So Charlie Gardiner

the Governor of Western Australia became the Honorary Colonel of the 10th Light Horse and he wielded a tremendous amount of power. So anything that I wanted done I'd go down to Charlie, "Sir can you help us with this?" And he'd get on the blower to somebody in Canberra or

- 36:00 get onto the local Government and he'd arrange a lot of things for us, so he's a marvellous help. And that's what honorary colonels are for like patrons of any organisation. So he was very useful chap indeed. And we wouldn't have got half as far or I wouldn't have got half as far without Sir Charles' assistance. One of the memorable things is that he came back from one visit to 10th Royal Hussars with a
- 36:30 beautiful silver tankard, large tankard like this, which he presented to me on behalf of the Regiment there are pictures of it over there and this became known as the Hussars trophy. And that's been the prime competitive trophy in the 10th Light Horse ever since that presentation was made in 1956. And however many years subsequently every year there's a contest in the Regiment for the best
- 37:00 Squadron Troop. They have competitions in skill at arms and deployment and so on you know military competitions, and the troop that wins is awarded the Hussars trophy. Unfortunately Charles Gardiner said this is what it should be used for and I said, "Yes good idea Sir." Then he said, "Now we're going to have to put a base on it so that we can put medallions of which troop won it," and I said, "A base." And he said, "Yes you should get a
- 37:30 wooden base like that, which can be built on supplemented as the years go by and get the tankard screwed onto the top of the base." I said, "This marvellous Victorian tankard worth hundreds of quid," I said screwed onto. He said, "Yes, yes." Sir. So we did it. And there it is sitting on that base today with all these medallions. It's gone to about three or four levels now over the years.
- 38:00 But I was always very sad that he insisted on that yeah. I'm going to have to break for a moment if I may.

Sure no worries. Rolling.

Another challenge in this period in the 10th Light Horse was the fact that because of the change from its original horses to armoured cars and the technical problems associated with maintenance and so on it was decided to cancel the membership of the 10th

- 38:30 Light Horse persons from the country where they have various depots Geraldton, Waroona and so on and concentrate the Regiment back in Perth Australia where technical facilities were available. So this was a big part of the job during my four years there to virtually reorganise the Regiment back into the metropolitan area and cut its links off with the country, which is very sad but the only practical means of, that's how things stand today
- 39:00 with workshop facilities readily available in army installations in the metropolitan area.

We've got a couple more minutes on this tape so.

Yes. Well eventually after or three years was the statutory time but for reasons of somebody else not being available to fill the gap I was asked to stay on for another year

- 39:30 so four years was a fairly unprecedented period of time but it gave me another year's satisfaction and I was very grateful indeed to have had that opportunity. But eventually that time came, and so I moved on to another assignment, which at that time was a very small group involved with training young officers in Western Australia rather
- 40:00 than them having to go off to the eastern states. This was called I think the Western Command Training Group or a name something similar to that, and I was there for two or three years I think until 1962 when I was moved to the newly raised 1st Battalion Royal Western Australia Regiment. This was part of a new army organisation
- 40:30 called the 'Pentropic' Division when the various battalions, 16th Battalion and so on were all concentrated to be part of one big unit the West Australia Regiment Battle Group, and this was commanded by a full colonel. Colonel John Roberts and I went in as a Lieutenant Colonel as Deputy Commander 1962. So that was back to infantry again.
- 41:00 But I still wore my black beret because due to the mixed composition of the new group they decided that it would be suitable to have a non-infantry officer as deputy commander. So there I sat. Armoured Corps Officer Deputy Commander of an Infantry Battle Group for a couple of years.

Tape 9

- 00:30 **Just before we go into the next phase of your life, which I think you left off in 1962,**
Yes.

Can I ask you did you ever have any considerations about joining the effort for the Korean war?

No. I think at the time it was a

01:00 fairly small commitment confined to the Australian Regular Army. And as far as I was aware the Australian Regular Army was properly set up and well officered and I'd if I gave the matter any thought, which I don't recall doing I would probably have come to the conclusion that 1954 I think it was, was it not?

[1951 to '53]

01:30 Anyway I was just a Lieutenant Colonel or rising Lieutenant Colonel and the Regular Army didn't want a blow in lieutenant colonel coming in, there'd be no place for them. It wasn't like an AIF situation where you could be fitted into some think that was being expanded. So no it didn't cross my mind at all. And similarly with the Vietnamese War later on. Regular Army affair and officered by regular

02:00 chaps and I was on in the Regular Army at that time. And had other business involvement anyway. There wasn't the call for patriotic recruitment as there had been in the Second World War. You know with the help the Motherland and all this sort of stuff.

Just while we're on the topic of the Vietnam War so I just want to ask you want did you think about Australia's and America's involvement with that?

Could talk for a long time on that couldn't

02:30 you? Yes I think it was one of those situations because we tagged along because we needed American support maybe in a wider area. There was a possible long-term threat from the Communist countries in South East Asia posing possible dangers to Australia and I think that we felt with some degree of properness that helping America to

03:00 protect us in a wider viewpoint warranted our support in that war. I think in retrospect probably a lot of wasted effort and maybe unnecessary but I think there was a reasonable motivation for it at the time. Yes.

At the time did you support the decision for Australia to be involved?

I don't think I argued with myself much about it.

03:30 I think probably what I've just said would've passed through my mind at the time yeah.

So going back from the late 60s to more of the early 60s to 1962.

1962 yes. I was appointed as I mentioned Deputy Commander of this Royal Western Australia Regiment Battle Group and I found this very interesting because I was back

04:00 in an infantry environment but still had some other corps people associated with the formation. But then in 1964 Commander John Roberts retired after his two years in the appointment and I was promoted to full colonel and was appointed Commander, which meant reverting of course

04:30 to the Corps of Infantry and doffing my Armoured Corps beret and putting on a cap with a red band around it. So that was of course to achieve the rank of full colonel it was unusual, because normally under the ordinary and traditional army arrangements full colonels are very few and far between and they're usually off in some headquarters somewhere doing some special

05:00 staff job. They're not combatant people. So that under the

What your saying is that your job was very much physically full on? You weren't paper pushing?

In the new in this assignment as a full colonel, yes. So I say under ordinary circumstances one wouldn't ever be a full colonel. If you were lucky you'd go from lieutenant colonel to brigadier because a full colonel was a staff appointment somewhere off in some odd

05:30 headquarters somewhere, red hat colonels. We didn't ever see them in the combatant service, but under this new arrangement the commander of this battle group was a red hat colonel. So it was something to achieve that rank from lieutenant colonel, which was what I was anticipating was the end of really my military career. And so I had two years as Commander of the Royal Western Australia Regiment Battle Group, which was very

06:00 fulfilling because not only did it throw me back into contact with my old friends from the 16th Battalion who were concentrated into what was called the Cameron Company 16th Company but it also threw me into contact with friends who were rather more on the periphery from the 28th Battalion and the 11th Battalion Militia who were also integrated into the Royal Western Australia Regiment as companies.

06:30 So we had the 11th Company, the 16th Cameron Company and the 28th Company all officered by chaps that I had struck before but now we were more closely integrated. We all had a common mess over at Dilhorn the old Loaton House in East Perth a grand mansion and it was a very nice headquarters to be

stationed in and as I say very good to be with all these people. And a slightly different

- 07:00 command process because it was a different kind of unit. Rather than the regular infantry battalion you had this wider group rather more like a brigade or division. One had the responsibility of integrating into infantry activities the armour and artillery component of a wider military operation. So it was an expansion of experience as a commander.

What was the

- 07:30 **general mission statement with this amalgamation of different groups?**

Well I don't know that there was a particular mission statement that we followed, but it was designed the Pentropic Division so called. It was so named ridiculously I thought because the Americans changed their organisations and called it the

- 08:00 Pentomic Division because nuclear warfare was a sort of an aspect to be considered, so because our traditional training had been for European warfare and now we were more looking towards the tropics they called it the Pentropic Division. And the Pentropic Division as I say incorporated this expanded Battalion Battle Group and I'm not really quite convinced that it was a good idea. But that's what we had anyway.

- 08:30 And so I remained in command of that until 1966, and as such I was the senior Citizen Military Force Officer in Western Australia.

What sort of duties does that entail?

Well it was command of the force in the field at camps, organising operational training, attacks defence withdrawals with this

- 09:00 expanded unit and integrating into what I'd previously been involved with at pure infantry integrating the supporting arms and combined operation really, just a wider extent. Rather more like a divisional command and a general would have with a bigger group. This was a smaller group but with these wider ramifications.

Sounds like it's quite a complex sort of process?

Oh yes it was, overly complex I thought. And

- 09:30 also it was to coin a phrase, "neither your arse nor your elbow." And how it was ever conceived that a larger force was going to be more practical in a tropical warfare Pentropic I don't know. Because manageable forces in tropical warfare jungle warfare particularly are small groups, which can operate easily through restricted

- 10:00 access. As long as they've got communication and contact it's much easier to handle small groups even a number of them than one big lump. Anyway wisdom prevailed and the Pentropic Division ceased to exist in 1966 or '67. And we went back to the traditional brigade formation here with a brigadier and four battalions as had been the case for years beforehand.

- 10:30 Now coming back to myself after I'd finished these two years in command of this Pentropic Battalion or Force or whatever we like to call it, one had to move on. And the only other equivalent ranking posting, active posting in Western Australia at the time was the development of what I mentioned before as the

- 11:00 WA Command and Staff Training Unit, and this had developed into quite a large operation, which incorporated in its control the University Regiment and not only conducted officer training but NCO training classes as well, and that was commanded by a full colonel as was the Training, the Pentropic

- 11:30 Battalion. But in a way it was only sort of a fill in, satisfying and different, purely training, classroom training, theoretical training. And preparation of officers from the Western Australian University Regiment for qualification, quite interesting but not a

- 12:00 not a field command as was the previous one. Well then of course I said the Brigade was reformed with a Brigadier. And I thought a-ha that's the next step. But unfortunately the fellow who'd preceded me as colonel, full colonel and had been sitting on the waiting list while I was at the training group he was then brought out, John Roberts and made Brigadier. And he was going to have

- 12:30 two or three years as Brigadier and I when I finished my two years with this training group was going to be sitting on my backside for a couple of years idly not involved with the army actively at all. And this worried me a bit. I thought well I'll probably be a brigadier if I can hang around long enough because I'm the next one in seniority and so on.

So you were pretty keen on becoming a brigadier?

Well I was pretty keen in staying in the

- 13:00 army and if one's going to stay in the army one might as well progress. Whether it was a brigadier or whatever it was didn't concern me much but as long as there was a place for me to continue. And that seemed to be inevitable. And I felt a bit keenly about having to go and sit on the sidelines for a while.

Anyway I was talking to a visiting officer from

13:30 Canberra on this issue and I said, "Isn't there something you can give me? I've got some long service leave due with my company. I could get a year or two off. Could you give me some job in the Regular Army somewhere?" And he said, "Well no not really. The only thing we've got a vacancy coming up in the United Nations truce supervision in Palestine but it's only for a major. We only send majors there you see. We've got six

14:00 majors over there and there's no room for a fella of your rank." And I said, "Well what if I drop my rank to major?" And he said, "Huh?" You know this is unprecedented. "Are you serious?" And I said, "Yes, yes." I love the Middle East you know, I've been there in the war and wouldn't mind going back for a while. A couple of years would be nice.

This is quite funny. I mean you know you're waiting around to be a brigadier so naturally what you do is you drop yourself back to a major.

14:30 Oh yes but only on a temporary basis. However to cut a long story short, it was agreed. I took this unprecedented action of retiring from the army and re-enlisting as a major and off I went to the Middle East, and that is a very long complicated story, which if we can sit here for a while.

We've got it. We've got tape.

15:00 **Well for a start I need to know is have you married June by this point?**

Oh yes, yes. We were married in 1947 we're now talking '67. So we're twenty years and we've got grown up children. The eldest one and the middle one had both finished school, and were out in a profession.

15:30 The eldest one was a social worker. The second one was a hospital nurse. The youngest one had just finished school and was in training as a dental nurse. So this was a little bit of a complicating issue as to what we were gonna do but at least they weren't living at home as dependant children entirely. The youngest one was, but the other two were pretty much off on their own. And at

16:00 that time just before I made that fateful decision had decided to take themselves off to Europe anyway. So we were there with the seventeen-year old girl, and it's a long story. I got shunted by aeroplane. They had to come by ship, which the war in 1967 broke out on the 6th June in the Middle East. The ship couldn't go through the Suez Canal as it was intended to. Had to take a long trip round Africa

16:30 in through Gibraltar and Joan got a message in Gibraltar from her father that her husband Major Keith Howard had been wounded or had been shot. He'd been shot on the first day of the war 6th June in Jerusalem.

Marvellous. So please talk me through how you managed to get shot?

Yes.

'Cause this is you know.

Anyway eventually

17:00 she arrived in Beirut and was very glad to see me on the wharf waiting to greet her. Anyway, to come back I arrived in Jerusalem, which was the headquarters of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation brackets (P) Palestine brackets. The organisation was established in 1948 at the time of the ceasefire agreement negotiated by the United Nations between

17:30 the Arab countries and the Israeli army that had been raised underground and had set out to conquer the country and create the state of Israel. This armistice general armistice agreement was reached in 1948. The state of Israel was proclaimed

18:00 and a line between the state of Israel and the adjacent Arab states was drawn called the Armistice Demarcation Line. And the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation [UNTSO] (P) Palestine was set up to monitor and supervise the proper observance of the armistice agreement and the maintenance of the ceasefire lines. Anyway in 1956

18:30 we began to subscribe officers. The modus operandi was for unarmed officers to man observations posts and report any breaches of the ceasefire. There was no military intervention as part of the UNTSO. I'll call it UNTSO from now on. UNTSO's brief, purely observation by international officers reporting to headquarters in Jerusalem and then Jerusalem would report to United Nations headquarters in New York.

19:00 And if the situation was serious enough the Secretary General would call in the representatives of the two opposing countries Israel and Syria or whoever and bang their heads together about the breaches of the ceasefire and re-establish the situation. So I say in 1956 Australia was invited to contribute and sent four I think gradually increasing to six majors to take their part as the in the compliment of these officers.

Politically

19:30 **was this considered to be quite a delicate situation?**

I don't know how Australia viewed the situation at the time. We in 1956 there was an Israeli combined French and British invasion of the Suez Canal because the Nassirs [Abdul Nasser, President of Egypt] were seen as truculents

20:00 and it was considered in Australia in the Citizen [Military] Forces anyway that there was a possibility that we may be called in again to assist Britain in the Middle East. So I think there was a, certain sensitivity at the time because of this war on the Suez Canal, a certain sensitivity in Australia that we had some interests in the area. But I've never read any political reasons for it. So we'd had these people here from

20:30 1956, and in 1967 one of the six, they were there for one or two years depending on their function in the UN. If they were just the regular so called military observer or UNMO, UN Military Observer they'd go for a year and then come back to Australia and to whatever country they belonged to. If they got a job on the staff at one of the

21:00 control centres or something like that they may be asked to extend for an additional period of six months or even a year, so two years. I don't think when I went there that anybody from Australia had stayed longer than two years. However I arrived on the Friday in Jerusalem and I was met by a couple of Australian officers and I was talking about a New Zealand colonel as well and they showed me around the town and then on the

21:30 Monday I presented myself to the Government House Headquarters as the new UNMO to join UNTSO. I might say that I did appear on Friday briefly to say, "Well I'm in the area anyway," and they said, "Well go away and come back on Monday." But here's a car with a UN Number plate on it UN 77, and you can have that for the weekend and bring it back with you on Monday and when you're properly assigned we'll give you your permanent vehicle. Every UNMO has

22:00 a permanent vehicle you see, a little jeep kind of vehicle, which he retains for personal or military duty and personal use with restricted limitations. So I drove off on UN 77 on the Friday afternoon and on the Monday morning drove UN 77 back up to the Government House to the parking area. Put it in the parking lot. Took the key out, took it into the transport office and said, "I'm now

22:30 going over to be enrolled here's the key, thanks for the loan car." Anyway unbeknown to me or perhaps only mildly suspected the war was right like that. And over night on that night and early that morning Israel had taken punitive action with its aircraft. Bombed the aerodromes in Egypt and Syria and so on

23:00 and the war was virtually on as from the morning of this Monday 6th June and the UN Headquarters had some inkling beforehand and they'd warned the civilian dependants of the regular staff. There were a couple of hundred regular UN employees you know drivers radio operators female clerks in the headquarters and that sort of thing together with the military observers from

23:30 many different nations and in many cases their families as well who were permitted to come. They'd warned the families that they should get out of the way. Go off to the coast somewhere Haifa or somewhere like that but a lot of them hadn't. And anyway during the morning I was told that you know there were the staff were otherwise occupied. We can't handle you, sit there, so I sat in a chair like this just inside the

24:00 front door and then gradually certain family members women little kids came drifting in and sat down there as well and we had a long line of civilian females and kids there. And then we saw through the grounds some Jordanian soldiers. Now this headquarters old Government House was the old Red Cross Headquarters there and it was in no-man's land. Neutral ground. To see some Jordanian soldiers in there was very naughty indeed.

24:30 And they eventually a couple of them the senior officer came in and interviewed my Commander who was a Norwegian General Odbull.

Can I just ask like so the place that you're based is it sort of considered to have the sort of kind of sanctuary of an embassy?

Oh yes. Absolutely, not only to have that sanctuary and status as an embassy but it was also physically located in neutral no-mans land. So while we had Palestinian servants who had the right to

25:00 come in it was not occupiable or enterable by a military forces of either side.

And were you living on the premises?

No. Only the Commanding General had an apartment at the top. All the staff had premises, residences down in the city of Jerusalem, mostly in the old city on the Arab side because they were friendlier and cheaper. Anyway we saw these Jordanians come in and the commander

25:30 and a messenger went upstairs to talk to General Bull and say that he'd heard the Israelis were about to occupy the area, which had a good vision across the old city of Jerusalem and they wanted to get in first. And the General said, "No old chap. Off you go." So the Jordanians went away, but the Israelis from that time on held the fact that they saw Jordanians digging defensive positions, so they themselves

invaded. And they did. And they

- 26:00 invaded and they came up to Government House they blew open the front door with a tank and a big cannon. Bullets and things were ricocheting.

Where are you at this point?

I was sitting on a chair quietly minding my own business with these other people here and I got (sound effect) a bit of stuff in my leg, a bit of shrapnel or a bullet something ricocheting. So one of the UN fellows came down and he said, "Look you'd better go over here into this little passageway." So we went into a little passageway from the dining room into the kitchen

- 26:30 and we all lay down one on top of the other you see. And then in through the front door burst the Israeli army personnel and this chap who was with me this UN fellow he got up and I followed him and we said, "UN, UN." And this Israeli major with a submachine gun like that was pointing at us and we were all sort of waiting to be shot and he said, this Israeli major said,

- 27:00 "I think you should all be very careful because I'm rather nervous." And we said, "Yeah we are too." Anyway he recognised that we were UN.

Did you have any sort of like particular uniform on you ?

Oh yeah. I had my blue beret on but these civilians of course didn't. I was the only one with my UN beret.

Sorry can I just also take you back. You've got civilians in there 'cause they're seeking refuge?

They're seeking refuge they came up there because they found the war had broken out and they didn't leave the

- 27:30 the city as they'd been told to do.

And you have to like legally protect them?

Well I don't know what the legal situation was, I suppose there was some sort of responsibility but there was no legal protection when people were in there firing bullets around the place. Anyway to cut a long story short it was agreed with the Israelis who occupied the place that UN should vacate completely because they were going to establish a defensive position here on this dominating feature looking out over the old

- 28:00 city of Jerusalem, which they were then going to attack 'cause it was held by the Jordanians you see. And so all these civilians and the UN staff upstairs who had their official vehicles or their private vehicles all sort of went out and got in their vehicles and started to drive away. And I was you know didn't know anybody and nobody knew me or didn't worry about me and off they all went and I was left there

- 28:30 like a shag on a rock. So I thought what am I going to do? So I went out into the parking area and there was my little UN 77 over there but it had a flat back tyre and a pool of liquid underneath it and I thought, "Oh God," and a line of bullet holes. You know it had machine gun bullet holes. And I thought, "Oh bloody hell." The petrol tank's empty and a flat tyre but I haven't got any other recourse and I ran over to the vehicle and oddly enough the keys were back in there. Why they were back in there I have no idea.

- 29:00 So I jumped in started it up reversed (sound effect) and roared out the front door and I saw the tail of this convoy of UN cars and all the other people just disappearing round the corner. So I roared down there and just got to the corner and there's another corner in the distance and they were just going round there so I followed them. Car going like this on the flat back tyre and I was expecting at any moment the engine to cease or stop because of the no petrol you see. Anyway it didn't

- 29:30 but it started to feel rather warm. And I eventually followed and followed and followed and I finished up with all these other vehicles at an Israeli hotel that apparently the Israeli authorities had said to General Odbull and his staff you can go down there and I got there and by this time my engine was boiling and obviously the water underneath was the radiator water. And it was steaming and like this and over came an irate Dutchman who turned out later on I

- 30:00 found to be the Chief Transport Officer and he said, "What do you think you are doing driving that UN vehicle with no water in the radiator?" And I said, "Crikey." So I had a few quiet words with him.

You would've also been bleeding by this stage?

Yes I was quite badly. Anyway to cut a long story short the UN called in a doctor from Jerusalem who was the sort of resident consulting doctor for the UN Headquarters and he took me

- 30:30 over to the big Hadassah military hospital. The Israeli military hospital there or it's a public hospital rather like Royal Perth you know called Hadassah but it was occupied by military casualties all flying in with helicopters and so on. And some Israeli doctor looked at me and he said and he's got fellas with blown off arms and legs and all that sort of business. Anyway my doctor said he must be attended to. Dr Dole I'll shall remember him.

31:00 He was an Austrian Jew little round fat fussy man. He said, "You must attend him he's UN you know." So the doctor said, "Well we'll go and take an x-ray anyway". And they took an x-ray and brought it back and they showed that there was a projectile in there but it wasn't gonna harm anything. It wasn't near a muscle or anything. Leave it there and off you go. I haven't got time for it. So I went back with Dr Dole and rejoined the UN headquarters and you know I've still got it as far as I know. Nothing's ever happened about it. So that was the momentous first

31:30 day, and Joan who got the message in Gibraltar was apprehensive all the way along till her ship finally went through Athens and down to Haifa and or Beirut I forget where and I met her on the wharf and we were reunited and by that time I'd been assigned to a job up near Galilee based on the UN Headquarters in Tiberias and we bought a hired a little house in that area and were there for some time.

So hang on. You've

32:00 **gone from Jerusalem to Galilee? What's the distance on that?**

Oh it's about 150-k I suppose.

So is Jerusalem in some ways being abandoned by the UN at this point?

Oh no. It still remained the headquarters and the structure was set up in this hotel and was then finally moved into the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] in

32:30 in Jerusalem where better accommodation and it was there for quite some time. Until eventually after many months the Israelis allowed the UN to come back into Government House, but instead of having about thirty hectares of land under title the Israelis only returned something like four. Now that's in 1968 I think that happened and the land has never been returned to the UN and the Israelis I think are building houses or

33:00 something out on it. But that's by the way. Anyway the structure of the UN was that it had subordinate headquarters one in Tiberias, which looked after the people on the Israeli side of the Golan Heights. There was a headquarters in Damascus, which looked after people on the Syrian side of the Golan and then there was one down in Jerusalem, which looked after the Jordanian side and the one in Amman looks after and then there was also another one down in

33:30 Gaza that looked after the Egyptian side, and the Israeli side down there. These four regional control centres were commanded by an UNMO [United Nations Military Observers] of senior reputable ranks mostly lieutenant colonels who'd come from other countries. Some other countries contributed lieutenant colonels you see Sweden, France for example. Australia was only contributing majors. Anyway

34:00 I had some time as an UNMO there on the Golan. And then

Did you feel a little bit more safe in where you were posted than when you were in Jerusalem?

Oh no. Jerusalem had settled down a bit by the Israelis had occupied in Tiberias and got her in control. The Jordanians had vacated the area and the situation was static with the Israelis sitting on top. There was no problem there of

34:30 conflict no.

What would be like a bit of a daily routine for you with this posting?

This new posting? Well it depends on where one was assigned. The routine was for the control centre to assign the odd forty or fifty UNMOs who were allocated to that region to particular OP [Observational Post] duty and depending on the condition of the OPs. In a

35:00 quick change you'd perhaps be out in a hole in the ground or a little tent and then gradually there'd be a development and you'd get a better. You'd take a caravan out and then you'd have a little caravan to observe from, so eventually you get a wall around and it became quite an establishment, an observation post. We had seven down each side of on the Israeli side and seven on the Syrian side with the Armistice Demarcation Line in between. And so one's duty in

35:30 the primitive stages you only went out for three days with another UNMO. Towards the end of time after ten years there it was a ten-day sojourn on the Observation Post. And one always had to go out with an UNMO from another country because one couldn't run this risk of accusations by one of the Parties capital P either Israel or the

36:00 other country there, Parties to the agreement. If you went out with one of your own countrymen you could be accused by the other Party of giving observation reports, which were biased on one direction or another according to your national interest. So you were always out there with some other nationality. And as I say eventually after some years of the UNTSO expanded a bit in my time we had

36:30 seventeen different nationalities of unarmed Military Observers from South America, Chile, Argentina, Belgium and finally in 1973 we had thirty-six Russians as well. Americans, Russians, Fins, Swedes, Norwegians. You think of it. Belgians.

It must have been very interesting to be a part of this

37:00 well literally united front?

Oh yes. I've said many times that it's the most culturally stimulating period of my life. To be exposed to these other nationalities and particularly during your observation post duty just the two of you and we got to the stage where you'd take. You had to take your own rations out. No cooks or anything like that. So one was allocated the day of being the housekeeper one day and the other

37:30 one was did the observing and reporting. So that was cooking and looking that was your function you see cooking and looking. So it was fascinating to be associated as I say with a person just for the association but to have the exposure to culinary delights. It was something of a special project to present your nation's best dish to the fella that you were living with. Well I used to take out a

38:00 spaghetti Bolognese that Joan had cooked the night before. I'd take it out in the car and that was it, but some of them were very nice and I learnt some lovely things about artichokes from a French officer I remember. We were eating artichokes fresh off the leaf since that time and things like that. So that was very good but as I say this was the lighter side of it. Very often because we got out there early when ceasefires were made we were out

38:30 there before the Israelis or the Syrians or whoever and we got onto the best points of observation. And they in their military organisation later on after days used to come out and we found very often that they were looking for the same areas of interest as we because of the observation benefits of that place. So we found very often this particularly happened down on the Suez Canal that military positions were built very close to our observation

39:00 post and when there was an exchange of fire, which sometimes occurred the UN OP sometimes came under fire. So a priority in the development was to get bomb shelters in the OPs as well. So there was hazards at it and we did lose some UNMOs over the period of time by fire you know, through exchanges of fire on either side.

And you're completely unarmed?

Oh yes. I mean who are we gonna shoot at?

39:30 Anyway this went on for some time. I eventually was appointed to be the Commander of the Tiberias Control Centre and representations were made by the UN for Howard to be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, which was normal for an appointment, and Australia with some diffidence eventually did agree that I should go back to lieutenant colonel. It was a breach of twenty years of practice

40:00 of majors. Suddenly we had to provide a lieutenant colonel and it must have affected their military budget or something like that. Anyway there we are. So I was there looking after the Golan side of operations for a while. Joan and our youngest daughter were living in Tiberias and we'd go off occasionally when I got a bit of leave we'd go off for a couple of days in Beirut or maybe

40:30 Cyprus if it was possible. On one occasion we went off in a bus to Baghdad, which was very interesting.

What were the living conditions like in Tiberias?

Well they varied and it depended like everywhere how much you were prepared to pay. It's a reasonably civilised little town, and there were some apartment buildings there. Some of our people lived in apartments like this. Well not quite like this but similar sort of

41:00 structure looking out over the Sea of Galilee. We had a little cottage with a back view down over the Sea of Galilee, which was quite nice and the Golan and so on, not far from Capernaum the loaves and the fishes miracle and all that stuff. We had a priestly friend up there on one of the monasteries who was also an amateur archaeologist and took us out to quite a lot of places where some of

41:30 the things that we've got in the cabinet out there came from. So that was a nice vacation. Joan used to go off and the daughter when I was on duty she'd go off and exercise her self in these archaeological digs with local friends. So it was very satisfying and the people coming through the UNMOs from different countries and in particular their families living in the towns had their own social

42:00 groups of course. Joan was a member of a British

Tape 10

00:30 Yes. After some time in this assignment on the Golan we had a lot of trouble on the Suez Canal. I think the present Nassir set up what he called the war of attrition and he decided that he'd make incessant bombardments and air attacks on the Israeli positions, which were right along the bank of the Suez Canal

01:00 with some UN Observation Posts dotted in among them. So it was very hectic and dangerous and for

reasons that I won't go into it was decided that Howard should go down from Tiberias and be the Officer in Charge of this area down there, so we vacated our house in Tiberias and Joan moved down to Gaza and I took up this assignment

01:30 down on the Suez Canal, which was about three hours drive down from Gaza. And I had a headquarters on [El] Kantara on the Israeli side of the Suez Canal. The Israelis owned or were in possession of all the Sinai Desert by this time right down to the banks of the Suez Canal.

So you're going from a reasonably calm situation to the front line?

Yeah the Syrians and the Israelis was a fairly calm situation. The Israelis used to overfly every morning breaching the

02:00 agreement. There were occasional exchanges of fire, not much. Usually because there were some Syrian shepherds coming out onto what had been there traditional pastoral land. The Israelis used to shoot at them, but relatively calm. Down on the Suez Canal every day there'd be an outbreak of fire usually from the Egyptian side, which resulted in an escalation during the day from small arms up to artillery aircraft bombardments. A

02:30 frightful situation, which required daily representations by myself and sometimes even higher.

When you say representations what do you mean?

Conferences, confrontations with the heads of the opposing forces in the area. The Israeli Liaison Officer or the senior Egyptian Liaison Officer and remonstrate with them about these breaches of

03:00 the agreement and endeavour to reconcile the reasons for the outbreak and to settle it down. And almost invariably every day we'd get a ceasefire, which took effect during about four o'clock in the afternoon. But it was a very nasty situation and as I say went on from day to day, very wearing and testing and because of the proximity to our OPs from some of the Israeli positions particularly and the Egyptian attacks on them some of our OPs were badly

03:30 damaged. Some UNMOs were wounded and in fact one was killed. And it was very hazardous. Very often the OPs were blown up around their heads and they had to vacate to bomb shelters and that sort of thing. It was very dangerous and I could tell some funny stories well not funny stories but sad and mildly humorous stories about the incidents but it would take too long I think.

I'm interested to find out exactly if you've got all Parties coming together and trying to

04:00 **discuss what the problem is where are you meeting? What sort of territory what sort of building are you meeting in?**

Well usually the Israelis and the Egyptians. In fact the opposing Parties had representatives at the UN office. Not sitting together with each other but close enough so that they could be contacted and one would move from one to the other or call them in and

04:30 try and discuss the matter. This was known originally as the Mixed Armistice Commission, and theoretically there was a sort of committee in each place, which was mixed with representatives of both sides where these matters were discussed. After the '67 war this structure disintegrated a bit but there was still in various ways means of contacting the, and there was still a senior representative for both Parties who was available to discuss matters with the UN. So

05:00 if that didn't work and one could see it one immediately got in touch with our headquarters in Jerusalem. They had a senior Israeli Liaison Officer and he would work on the Israeli side, and we may have to go to New York instant communication and contact with the diplomatic representatives there. So it was you know a fast moving business. Well there's a war on you know and these things used to happen. They were very testing and

05:30 very wearing. So I was very relieved eventually at the end of I think three months when it came time my third year, the UN had asked for me to stay a third year and the Australian army said you know you've had three years so you better come home. And I said, "Well I'm quite happy to stay here," and the UN said, "We'd like Howard to stay." Anyway

06:00 it was eventually agreed that Howard would actually be relieved because he'd been there but he would be available as the next occupant of a vacancy in the Australian rotation. So I got I think three or four months off during which time Joan and I and our daughter came back to Australia and then I went back again to fill the next vacancy,

06:30 and from that time on I stayed another seven years. There was no call back by Australia and UN kept the pressure up for me to stay there. So when I went back the second time I went up to Damascus on the Syrian side of the Golan for some time as an Operations Officer and then returned as the OIC to Tiberias where I had been two or three years before.

07:00 And I was there during the war of 1973, which broke out in October I think it was. And I had quite considerable difficulties there with what was tantamount to a Syrian invasion of the Israeli lines because in 1973 the Egyptians and the Syrians had reached an agreement that they were going to get rid of the Israelis from their territory and they launched attacks both on the Suez

07:30 Canal, and across the front of the Golan.

What happens to your position immediately when there is this sudden upsurge? Are you like called immediately and immediately you have to come into an action situation?

Oh yes. Well the observers are all in the middle of it out in their observation posts and they're still supposed to be reporting you know as objective observers and we're in our control centres receiving their messages relaying them to headquarters in Jerusalem. Jerusalem's relaying them to New York.

08:00 So there's a constant flow of operational information coming from the front and we in our intermediate headquarters are trying to do what we can firstly to maintain our observation post to rectify any problems that occur. Evacuate any casualties that may've happen in close relationship with the resident Israeli Liaison Officer or the Syrian Liaison Officer whoever it is. So it's very active operation while that sort of thing

08:30 is going on. Yes I must say. Anyway the war was in full swing and it was so serious on the Suez Canal. The Egyptians had in fact recrossed the Canal back into the Sinai Desert but then [Ariel] Sharon who was Commander of the Israeli Southern Army had also gone down across the Canal and he was threatening Cairo, which of course was a drastic situation because while the Americans were supporting

09:00 the Israelis, the Egyptians had Soviet support and if Cairo was being threatened by Israel we were going to see Russia in, and if Russia come in and Israel is being supported by the US as I say we could have a Third World War on our hands.

'Cause this is still like with the Cold War?

Oh yes. So this was October 1973 and there was a sort of mild panic, and our boss by this stage was a Finnish General

09:30 Selastfoe was hoisted out from his control of UNTSO and shot down to Egypt very quickly to raise a new international armed force to be placed in between the Israelis and the Egyptians and this became known as United Nations Emergency Force UNEF Two. And Selastfoe grabbed some of his own staff officers to go

10:00 down and help him do this, he took his Chief Operations Officer from Jerusalem, an Irishman an Irish colonel. He took an Australian major who was also working at Government House called Allan Windsor and he dragged Howard down from Tiberius and we all went down to Cairo in a hell of a fuss and in a period of unbelievable

10:30 chaos and sleepless days and nights. We got fellows in from Cyprus UN battalions from Cyprus and then gradually from Nordic countries over a period of two or three weeks. Tried to accommodate them. I was classed as the Chief Personnel and Logistics Officer. Had to try and find accommodation for 7,000 fellas that arrived in three days with nothing, oh yeah quite an

11:00 affair. And this went on and I was a Lieutenant Colonel at the time and with this title of Chief Personnel and Logistics Officer UNEF Two. And however a ceasefire agreement was reached, Sharon was stopped. The Egyptian advance into the desert into the Israeli lines was stopped and

11:30 gradually with agreements Kissinger came out there and did shuttle services back and forth and we gradually got these troops out into the field and established in between the two opposing parties. So the danger of a world war threat was avoided and while there was still an enormous amount of work to do the threat as I say had lessened and UNEF became

12:00 established as an entity down there. And Selastfoe was made then Commander of all UN missions in the Middle East. Because now we had UNTSO and we had this new UNEF and simultaneously another one was raised to go in between the Syrians and the Israelis as well called UNDOF, United Nations Disengagement Observer Force because it sat in the middle of the disengagement but also used UNTSO Observers

12:30 as well as part of its military force. So we had now in by this time 1974 three UN missions in the area instead of the original one. Selastfoe was the boss and he eventually took over sort of supervisory control of them all. But as far as my own experience was concerned after three months down there and hair

13:00 turned grey you know, haggard and baggard.

What you're saying is that like the pressure under that extreme situation with the onset of a possible world war?

Very waring. Very wearing indeed. Waring I say, slip of the tongue but very wearing indeed, but anyway the headquarters began to be filled by new coming people who were assigned to UNEF so that the officers

13:30 from UNTSO that Selastfoe had borrowed were able to go back to their normal functions.

Do you want a glass of water?

Pardon?

Do you want a glass of water? You're just a little bit croaky I think.

Just a cough I think. Not much further to go. Anyway Selastfoe who had been the Chief of UNTSO his chair had been vacant while he was down there looking after this UNEF thing and the UN had sent out an Irish colonel who had been in the

- 14:00 mission before had some experience to sort of sit in the chair on a temporary basis, and this fellow whom I was acquainted with and had served in Damascus for a while said to Selastfoe, "If you going to release Howard and Hogan and Windsor and so on can I have Howard back at Government House with me as Deputy Commander of UNTSO?" And that was finally agreed. I was released from UNEF.
- 14:30 I wasn't a member of the contribution. Australia didn't contribute to the nationalities anyway so I was really an odd-ball as was Windsor and we were both sent back to UNTSO and I took up this new elevated post of Deputy Commander of the whole of the mission. And eventually again to cut a long story short this carried a colonel's rank and because Selastfoe had been made Commander of all
- 15:00 the missions there was no Commander of UNTSO and I was Deputy, the Irishman went home. There was a gap there. UN began to try and negotiate for an African occupant. 'Cause the Africans hadn't had any Guernseys in UN and they were trying to get a Ghanaian general to come in and be the chief on UNTSO. Israel wouldn't accept an African because the African
- 15:30 states mainly Muslims had no diplomatic relationships with Israel. So Israel wouldn't accept this Ghanaian candidate. So for four months while this bickering was going on I was in fact sitting in the top seat being the Acting Commander of UNTSO. And again the UN prevailed upon the Australian authorities to promote me to full
- 16:00 colonel. No said the Australian lot. No we can't make Howard a full colonel. We'll make him an honorary colonel. He can wear the rank but we won't pay him and we'll see what happens. So there I put up the rank. Me red hat and all that sort of thing from way back you know ten years before and assumed this very responsible job of looking after UNTSO, which by now had 298 military officers from seventeen different nations including
- 16:30 thirty-six Russians and thirty-six Americans. Still in the Cold War mixing them on OP that was a little difficulty you could say. Putting an American and a Russian out on an OP together. We had a lot of juggling to do about that one.

Well what would that usually, would it blow up?

Well you never know. I mean Russia and America were in all conditions except shooting at war weren't they in the Cold War? So that was a difficult diplomatic

- 17:00 state of affairs at the time. Among a lot of other complications but anyway we got over it.

What would you say would be the hardest part of that job that you had then as far as you were concerned?

Well it had overall problems because UNTSO had been very knocked about during war. The invasion of the Golan Heights, the new incoming UN

- 17:30 mission up there, the integration of the UNMOs in the Golan Heights with occupying military forces. That was a very big problem. The similar situation with our UNMO's down on the Canal, again while they weren't actually integrated in the UNEF occupation of land they had a policing of still neutral and unoccupied land to occupy to patrol and
- 18:00 supervise. So I think the reorganisation of UNTSO to accommodate newly armed UN bodies in their areas was probably the biggest headache of all. Anyway eventually Israel agreed to accept the Ghanaian general on the basis that he was a United Nations citizen. And he was treated
- 18:30 not as a Ghanaian, but as a United Nations citizen. And he arrived by aeroplane and I went to meet him as his forthcoming Second in Command you see, and I met the aeroplane and down the stairway he came. And he was wearing a blue UN beret and he looked like Idi Amin, black as the inside of a hat, big black smiling face, dressed in an immaculate British
- 19:00 army patrol. Very much like that English army officer who had come to visit me in the Western Desert I was telling you about with a beautifully pressed patrol jacket, Bombay bloomers, desert boots, stockings up to his knees, sand brown belt. No British stable belt, which is the one with regimental colours on it and he came down and I said, "Welcome General." And his name this Idi Amin person was Emmanuel Alexander
- 19:30 Erskine, which was a very odd name for an occupant of Ghana, a citizen of Ghana, but he had been the head of the Ghanaian Military Force and he grinned all over his face and he said, "Well hello chaps nice to see you." And he'd apparently had some time also doing military schools in Sandhurst in Britain so he was a sort of Britain in a dark coloured skin. Anyway the next morning I took him to

- 20:00 headquarters and showed him to his quarters and the next day I had to meet him in his office of course to brief him on the situation and hand over the duties and he was very genial and he sat me down and we had a long talk and I had a bundle of folders and I said, "Well you know the first problem General is this." And he said, "Well what do you think we should do about that?" And I said, "Well we've got entrained so and so and I think." He said, "Yes very good idea. You see to that. Next problem." Same, yes look after that won't you. Next problem yes, yes I think that's good. Off you go fix
- 20:30 that up. He said, "Well what's the time nine-thirty. I've got a ten o'clock tennis appointment so I'll see you sometime tomorrow." And that was his form, a real British commander in style. Studied the problem, gave his approval to the staff carrying it through and off he went to do something else. And he played tennis he went off to Cairo every now and again. Came back on Tuesday and that sort of thing.
- 21:00 But one thing I'll say for him if there was any stuff up he'd said to you that it's okay if there was any stuff up and you got in trouble he was behind you to the full. First class chap. Yes I admired him very much indeed. And as I say he was a bit of an incongruous introduction but he worked out very well. And about the time I left we established another UN mission up there on the Lebanese boarder called Interim UN Interim Force Lebanon
- 21:30 UNFL, and he was appointed the Commander of that and the Irish General came and took over in UNTSO in Jerusalem and my time came to an end. I'd reached by then Australian army retiring age so by mutual consent and I was quite happy they said the UN said, "Look why don't you stay on here." Let the UN pay
- 22:00 you relieve the Australian Army of your financial obligations as long as they let you keep your uniform 'cause we can use you. And the Australian Army said, "No we won't do that. Howard's finished his time got to come back to Australia." So I returned to Australia in 1978, retired from the army and with brackets RTD [retired] after my title and rank. So that was the end of my active
- 22:30 service, but I immediately got involved you know as Honorary Colonel of the 10th Light Horse. They were kind enough to invite me to be that position. The one that had previously been occupied by the Governor, patron of the Armoured Corps Association, patron of the 16th Cameron's Association for ten years both of those have gone on. Patron of the Military Historical Society I still am. So there's still a close contact with the service
- 23:00 after all this time and it's my life as you can see, some of it anyway. I'm glad there's another side as well but that's still very important to me. And it's when you think back I'm rising eighty-three next month, and I first put on a uniform in December 1938. You can work out how many years. I can't, but it's a long time. But
- 23:30 to be an army an Australian Army serviceman over that length of time is a very proud very proud heritage I have I think.

It's a wonderful, wonderful experience that you've had. I want to ask you like with all your diversity of experience as far as war and well you know

- 24:00 **being in the Pacific and being in the Middle East and then going back as part of the UN can you see that there's any distinct benefit for war?**

Depends very much whose at war of course. The quick answer is you know it's a fruitless and desperate and shocking business. I mean

- 24:30 going out and killing other people is a terrible business. Although it's animal heritage you look after your own plot and your own turf by your own physical ability to hang on. So I think overall there's that kind of rationale to it. But the legality the morality the legitimacy of some war situations is another question because very often it's
- 25:00 a seeking for accession of power in addition to what's there and what's legitimate and so on. I think one can philosophise on this topic for a long time. Basically war is bad. Sometimes it's necessary to protect your own interests, but if there was any other alternative one should seek it of course. The UN has had a good deal of success and
- 25:30 I'd say this in the closing remarks in this interview that not withstanding the UNs shall we say difficulties at times and what may be seen as ineptitude or inability to solve problems they have solved an enormous number of problems. And there's always the possibility of discussion. Sometimes there's a walkout.
- 26:00 Sometimes there's, vetos but at least the people are there. They've got a body that they can call on. And this latest event of the US and Australia unfortunately just denying the UN's part in the affair I think is very sad. I'm a stronger proponent of UN than a lot of other people because I have been there and seen that it has worked and can do good.
- 26:30 So I hesitate to support any bypassing of it.

I found it very interesting when Bush was just recently presenting his side of why he went on the invasion into Iraq and there was just this stony silence and what did you think when you were seeing that?

What do I think when?

When you were seeing that? Like the UN just being absolutely and totally

27:00 **silent in?**

I felt with the silence yes. Well the justification was puerile wasn't it? Oh yes.

Well what I mean this is topical now I mean and goodness knows it might be topical you know a thousand years from now. But with the invasion of Iraq off the back of the fact that they have supposed weapons that are supposedly there that have now been questioned very widely and it's even hampered you know some of

27:30 **Blair's ability to continue with government, which has been questionable after he went and supported Bush. What do you think of that whole situation?**

Yes. Well I think this is an inevitable reaction because invading another country is not something that you see every day. It's not an unimportant event. It's an earth-shaking event. And doing it on false premises lowers the credence

28:00 completely of the people who are guilty of such thing. I say guilty because I think they have been guilty of a very serious action. Now there are, always some kind of pretext that you can justify these sorts of actions. Whether they're supportable in extent content seriousness is another question. This whole business has perhaps some

28:30 grounds in understanding. There's certainly a great deal of antagonism towards Western influences exemplified by the USA in the East. I don't say Muslim countries only. Although because of the content of Muslim populations they are feeling. But there's a tremendous antagonism towards the USA in other parts of the world, which the US just doesn't

29:00 recognise, they think everybody else is wrong and they're the only right ones therefore if they're going to maintain their interests commercial political supremacy, which they have at the moment then these irritations have got to be suppressed. I think that's the general attitude. And I don't think anyone can condone that. I would hesitate to say so but one could almost say it's a bit like Rome towards the end of its period you know

29:30 start to get overexpansive overconfident and rotting away within.

Myonce Aztecsonics

Yes.

Do you think that with Bush's recent actions that he's in some way emasculated the power of the UN by completely absolving himself from that governing body?

I don't know that he's completely divorced

30:00 himself from it in the future. Even if he has I don't think that means necessarily the USA in perpetuity will be a non-member. I mean it's been behind in its contributions for a long time. Millions. Billions it has owed the UN for a long time. I think its influence is very important in the UN and if it hasn't got US

30:30 influence in some directions it could lack a lot of strength. I don't know that it's emasculated completely. I mean we've got European countries who are operating quite well at the present time in antagonism to the USA and well not in antagonism necessarily but certainly in an uncooperative attitude and I'd suggest it's probably a passing phase and that eventually that things will

31:00 recover. I have every hope that they will I mean an international body such as the UN must exist. Must exist. Otherwise the world is going to fragment isn't it? Yes. We're getting onto pretty serious stuff here aren't we?

No that's okay I'm quite interested.

I think you're, I'm getting.

We've got ten minutes left so we may as well use the ten minutes.

Have we. I mean you're

31:30 getting out of my field.

It's interesting to have your opinion because you have been involved in the UN and trying to settle all those sorts of things so your opinion is actually quite valuable. It's much more valuable than say my opinion because you're coming from a much broader playing field I suppose and it's you know, that's something that's certainly come up in the press quite recently

I think that

- 32:00 I must agree to some degree with the opposing view that a lot of the US actions in Iran, Iraq Libya are in the interest of its ally Israel. There is an enormous strength in the Jewish lobby, so called Jewish lobby
- 32:30 in the USA and it's the most powerful lobby in the USA so my friends in the USA say. And to a large degree the US foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East is dictated by the interests of Israel, and if there is any threat to Israel real or imagined or possible then
- 33:00 the support of the US is almost assured and that can go out to any sort of extreme. So I think that is a disadvantage. I'm not sure of any other country with strength in the UN that has such a close affiliation and does support so strongly as Israel as the US does of Israel. So that's an imbalancing factor I
- 33:30 think prejudices of US otherwise rational and logical view on matters in that area. And of course because of its world wide influence through the media the western way of life is exemplified by the USA and
- 34:00 the western way of life has a lot of elements in it which are very contrary to the way of life of people in some other countries in conflict. And the introduction of this sort of thing or the imposition of this sort of thing is resented. I mean it was resented firstly in Iraq when the Shah of Persia was very attuned to the USA and introduced all kinds of western measures into the country
- 34:30 that were bitterly resented not only religiously but commercially. The merchants of Persia of Iraq or Iran are very strong and they found their commercial interests being eroded even destroyed by intruding US western interests. So they supported the extreme religious elements in getting the Shah evicted
- 35:00 because he was an epitome of western values and was instrumental in bringing them into the country. And this sort of thing in the less direct way I think is also influencing a lot of the attitudes towards the USA in other countries in the Middle East and even beyond. Not only Muslim countries. Yeah.

Do you think that the so called, you know giant guerrilla kind of tactics of America are going to lead to its

- 35:30 **down fall ultimately?**

Well I think force has an end eventually yes. I don't what to predict when and how but I can only feel it has. I mean in world history it has always come to an end hasn't it? Yes. We quote the Romans of course because that's prominent but the German

- 36:00 regime, the Russian regime, military force had not lead anywhere in the end, oh well it's lead to disaster and reaction by the majority of the population against it I would think too.

I've just thought of a reasonably bizarre question but I mean considering this archive is going to be kept in perpetuity. If you could give some really good advice to UNMOs of the future

- 36:30 **what would that advice be?**

It's difficult to give advice where I'm not familiar with the actual situation on the ground now. I'm not even sure that UNTSO exists in its original form. I don't know if we still have OPs around there but there were certain basics that one was instructed to follow. Firstly be

- 37:00 absolutely and completely impartial in your reports. And as part of that as an illustration of your impartiality your neutrality make very sure that your personal life off duty is not involved with the local population of either side. This is very difficult to avoid if you've got your family and you're living in a community.

- 37:30 But we didn't find in my time very much affinity with the Israeli population because the Israelis by and large not only the army, but the population generally regards the UN as a restrictive and oppressive element on its national ambitions. Still does. Syrians on the other hand the people were very friendly because they looked on us as sort of a protective means against the aggression

- 38:00 of Israel. So those sorts of attitudes in the countries have to be looked at and you could as very easy to do find yourself becoming deeply immersed in the domestic life of women in Damascus because they're such nice friendly people and welcomed you with open arms, Egyptians to the same degree. You've got to be very careful about that. Maintain your

- 38:30 objectivity. Maintain your neutrality. Live in the UN community, respect the Parties but don't get alongside of them. That's about the best I can say under the circumstances.

That sounds like pretty good advice actually I didn't even think that yeah you would have to do that.

No it is. It's a critical issue because you're living in the area and I say most families are part of the

- 39:00 local communities, they shop in the local stores. Go to the local green grocer the local butcher and it's difficult not to get fairly close with the trades people. In Damascus I remember and Cairo to a lesser

extent there were certain favourite or favoured trades people. Jewellers, moneychangers, carpet dealers souvenir people and when you arrived you were taken this is x, y, and z.

39:30 They'll do you a good job and as I myself was led up the street to meet people that one dealt with in my first day in the country. And it's very difficult to not have relationships. You're always welcome to sit down have a cup of coffee and a chat and a chat can be on political subjects as much as anything. It very often is, so those you know you've got to be a bit touchy about that because the

40:00 word gets across to the other side remarkably. And whether by silly UNMOs who talk to the other side about what their mate does and so on. But your personal attitudes are always known to the other side and you can get yourself personally your country and the UN at large in bad odour with one side or the other if you don't

40:30 be very careful about your neutrality posture.

It's certainly was an interesting situation that you've been in with the UN and also with your entire war experience and I just want to thank you so much for talking with us for so long today and putting up with us.

Yes. Well I don't mind. As I say it's a pleasure to recall some circumstances and I just feel that I've been waffling on a bit but if you find it of some value well I'm grateful.

No, it's extremely valuable thank you very much

41:00 **and that's the end of the tape.**

INTERVIEW ENDS