Australians at War Film Archive

Oswald Pearce (Ossie) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 19th September 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/876

Tape 1

00:47 **Os, could we begin by you giving us a brief summary of your life to date?**

I was born in the 2nd of June 1919 at Marrickville. After going to school at West Marrickville, then

01:00 eventually I went to high school. Both my parents died when I was very young. My mother died when I was thirteen and my father died nine months later on, and I was virtually an orphan. Then I went to live with one of my sisters and then another sister. So eventually in 1939 I joined the army, the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and went away in the first convoy. I spent six years in the army in various theatres of the war. After that I went back to

01:30 work on the railway and I was told I didn't have a job because I was a junior, and I had to fight my way there. Eventually after winning the fight I eventually left there because one of the chaps out of the regiment wanted me to go into business with him, in the hotel business, which I did. I wasn't actually keen about it but my wife was in thrills about it. Then of course that's puts us at about 1964. We

02:00 adopted four children and I was very happy with the fact of the children, and I always have been. My wife died about six years ago. Since then I live on my own. I retired from business in 1984, so I virtually don't do much at all. I got blown up during the war with a bomb and my back is in such a way that I can't do very much

02:30 but still I try to keep along, and try to keep contented. It's a bit hard but still that's it.

Thank you for an excellent summary, actually. That gives us enough highlights and main points to be able to focus on later but that's great, excellent. Now we'll go back for some detail, particularly of your early life before we look at the war years. Could you tell us where and when you were born?

I was born in the 2nd of June 1919

03:00 at 401 Illawarra Road, Marrickville. In those days it was a homebirth and my mother had the same midwife for her previous children. There were six of us in the family. I was the youngest. I often think that I was a mistake because there's too many years between my sister above me and myself but then again, it was a very happy family, and a very happy home. My father

03:30 was one of the heads of the railway department. In those days the railway department used to employ 52,000 employees, different from today. My mother was very sick and she had been for some couple of years in and out of St Luke's Hospital, and eventually she was at home, and we had a private nurse looking after her. Unfortunately she survived. She was unconscious for about three months but she eventually

04:00 choked to death with cancer. It was devastating for me. I don't think I ever got over it. Then my father, he died. I came home from school one day for lunch and I said to my father, "What would you like for lunch, Father?" He said, "I'll have a couple of boiled eggs." I went out to cook two boiled eggs. I came in and he was dead. So it was very devastating for me.

04:30 I missed my mother so much. It was terrible and of course at the graveside at the burial of my father, I was told by half a dozen executives of the railway department that I was to leave school and I was to report next Monday to the railway employment officer to start work. I didn't actually do any exam. They said, "Here's the questions. There's the answers." Then I went to the medical officer

05:00 to be examined. Luckily for me I'm colour blind. I couldn't pick the numbers in the Japanese confetti business. So then I was told to report to the Railways Institute and they created a job for me in the Railways Institute, the librarian had an assistant. He didn't even know I was coming! I arrived there and he didn't even know who I was, what I was or anything else but that was it.

05:30 I stayed there until 1939.

Os if I can just halt you there because I would like to come back to the chronology of course but if we can just go right back. From your memories of your parents could you describe first you mother's personality as you remember her?

My mother was a lovely person. There wasn't a person she didn't help.

06:00 In fact we were comfortably off as far as the rest of the community was concerned and Marrickville in those days was a good middle class suburb. My mother used to send food parcels to various families and help people, both with money and food. She was very well liked in the whole area. My father was very strict.

06:30 He actually didn't display any affection or love with the result that I was frightened of him. My father would get off the train from work and he came in the back gate, and I'd run out the front gate sort of thing. There was no actual love between he and I because I was frightened of him, and he didn't show anything. He was such in those days that

07:00 he'd get off the train and the railway staff would come to attention. I think he ruled by fear.

When you say you were frightened of him, what was it that frightened you?

There was no affection, not that he ever hit me or anything at all. Once when we were on a holiday I gave him cheek and he chased, and I was faster than he was but I was frightened to come back again because I thought I'd get a belting, but

07:30 he didn't, but that's how it went on. My mother, well I was never keen about going to school and of course I'd drink salt water and everything to make myself bilious so I wouldn't go to school, and things like that. As I say, when my mother died – well I didn't start school until I was seven. By the time I was about eleven I was in high school and

08:00 then when my mother got sick, I started to wag school. I wagged it all right. I used to do it for six or seven months at a time, not for one or two days and of course eventually I got found out. There was no such thing as those truant inspectors in those days, but eventually the school – and of course they changed the school for me. I was put into another school

08:30 and eventually they put me in the Marist Brothers at Darlinghurst to try and put a bit of discipline in me but I was just as determined not to conform, as they were to make me conform. Then when my father died and I left school, I was happy to leave school but at the same time my life was turned upside down. I had firstly nothing and by this time

09:00 most of the money I think had been spent on hospital bills, and things on my mother, and so eventually everything collapsed. We moved from there. In those days it was sort of a tradition that if someone dies in the house you move. We moved from there to Kensington and that's where my father died.

Of what did your father die?

Heart attack. He was reading the paper and just dropped over

09:30 dead. Of course I found him. My second eldest sister used to be the secretary of Dutrebanne, The Sun newspaper director. I rang her up and I said, "Marjorie, Father's dead," and she collapsed. To me in those days being a young kid, I had no sensitivities about those types of things.

10:00 then it was decided what we were going to do and my eldest sister had married, and my eldest brother was married. My second sister and my brother decided to get a flat, and I tagged along, and they looked after me as best they could. Then my sister got married. That was the finish of that, so my eldest sister took me in and I lived with them but the

10:30 small amount of money I was getting, my brother in-law made sure I only had five bob left out of the money I was getting from work, and it was very hard. I only had my school uniform and that was knickerbockers [knee-length pants]. They used to call them poop catchers in those days. I wore those for two years. I never even had enough money to save up to buy a cash order. It took me two years to get a deposit on a cash order and I bought my first suit at Murdoch's.

11:00 I gradually kept plugging along and saving, and saving, and when I eventually left, and joined the army, I had quite a few clothes, and everything else but my sister thought I wasn't have been coming back because she gave everything away.

So you bought your first suit when you had been working for two years? So what had you been wearing up until then?

School uniform.

11:30 It was terrible, humiliating but still.

In what way was it humiliating?

Well all the others had long pants and I only had this school uniform thing, knickerbockers, you pull your socks up, and tuck them into the top of your socks, and all that kind of business. Well I couldn't

afford it. I didn't have anything to do, so that was that.

Could you describe the experience of living with your eldest sister and her husband?

12:00 My eldest sister was a very lovely person. In fact she was something similar to my mother, soft and kind, and her husband, well he was a bit of a bully. In fact on one particular time he was belting her up and I happened to grab a poker, and I said, "If you don't leave my sister alone, I'll kill you," not thinking that he could toss me out of the house or anything at all. He didn't and

12:30 from then on he laid off but when I wasn't around after I went into the army, he was still apparently belting her after that. Eventually that fixed itself up because she left him.

That must have been a fairly disturbing environment to be in?

It was but he – even though I was only slightly built, I wasn't frightened of him but I would have attacked him if he'd kept on going with my sister.

13:00 **So you began work for the railways. What were your day to day duties there?**

Taking the stock, new books and general helping around the place as far as books were concerned. The Railways Institute Library was the largest fictional library in the southern hemisphere, and they had branches in every different country town,

13:30 and books had to be sent out to them, and of course we had people coming into the library selecting their own books.

So it was a fictional library?

It was fictional and we did have a non-fictional section but it was a fictional library.

What was the purpose of the Railways Institute Library?

In those days there was no such thing as – wireless only started in 1932.

14:00 There was no such thing as television or things like that and most people used to read books, and people in the railway areas would send in their books that belonged to the library, and they'd return two books, and they were replaced with two fresh books for them to read. Reading in those days was more pronounced that what it is today because even though there are a lot of magazines on the market today here,

14:30 there most people used to read novels. Of course my sisters used to like reading the novels and I'd take them out for them to read, and of course I was in such a privileged position that I got all brand new books, which was good. I used to do a lot of reading myself and things like that

15:00 but that was the sort of general thing in those days.

What were your favourite sort of books?

Adventure books or things like that. We were made to go to school after work of a night time. We used to have to start school classes. The Railways Institute had teaching staff there on various subjects. All the apprentices that were employed there

15:30 in the railways used to have to go there every day to learn.

What sorts of subjects were they teaching?

All kinds of subjects, engineering, mathematical, various business principles but there was technical schools. All the apprentices that were employed in the railway department had to go to school one day a week and there used to be thousands of them in all kinds

16:00 of – mechanical or carriage building, engineering, and everything else.

For somebody that had wagged a lot of school in earlier years how did you take to this form of education?

I don't think I was a stupid kid. I didn't start school until I was seven but at the same time I had a very active mind. I was good at mathematics and everything else.

16:30 They wanted me to do these different exams and I sort of got to the stage I used to rebel, and I wouldn't do them. I was supposed to do exams and I wouldn't sit for them. I wouldn't go with the result that it held me back as far as promotion was concerned in those days but I don't know. I sort of didn't want to do anything.

What was it about education both at school and the Railways Institute that was so off-putting for you?

17:00 It wasn't the education part of the thing. I don't know. I was sort of rebelling inside myself. I was deeply hurt. I can't explain to you why. I can't explain to you why I was wagging school but I did. I didn't start school until I was seven and by – I think I was a little over ten, I was in high school. Unfortunately

17:30 for me I was the only one out of the class I was in – we went to West Marrickville Public School. I was the only one out of that class that got into the high school.

So you clearly had a few brain cells rattling around there?

Something there! I don't know what it was but I didn't want to be in it. I just sort of – I don't know whether I was rebelling against the fact that my darling mother had died

18:00 and I was hurt deeply?

When you say "hurt deeply," where did the deepest hurt come from?

I don't know. I was lonely. My mother and I, I was very attached to my mother and of course my mother was over forty when I was born. I do think I was a mistake but in those days

18:30 you didn't think about it. It is only in later life I've thought of that part of it and of course I used to get all of the attention in the world. Whatever I needed my mother would give me and I was spoilt, as far as she was concerned. I was good at mathematics and everything else. In fact every Sunday night there was always a game of poker at our house. My father wouldn't be in it.

19:00 My father was very aloof and he'd be in the front of the house. No one was allowed to disturb him. You couldn't even go to the front lounge room because he was there and he'd be reading or things like that. We weren't even allowed to go there and of course my sisters, and brothers, they had girlfriends, and boyfriends, and a couple of neighbours, we used to have a big poker school as far as we were concerned, every Sunday night. It was penny poker type of thing but

19:30 I was so good at it, I used to earn all my pocket money by playing cards and I'd have two or three pound a week. In those days two or three pound a week was a fortune. Of course when I wagged school I used to go to the pictures every day and I always had enough money to go to the pictures.

Where would you go to the pictures?

In town. What I used to do, I'd get the tram into town, get the tram from

20:00 town to Ryde. That was the furthest railway tram drive you had. I'd come back into town just in time for the picture shows to open. I'd go to a different picture and of course they used to change every week. There were heaps of picture shows around town. I'd go in there and when it was time to go home, I'd leave the picture show, and go home.

What era are we talking about here?

You're talking about

20:30 1932, '33 sort of thing. Of course they didn't have the truant inspectors around in those days like they've got today. Everything was cut down. If they could save money they'd save it and they cut out this, and cut out that, and in those school days you'd have 45 to 50 in a class, and all this kind of business, and I started to rebel.

21:00 **It doesn't sound like personalised attention was going on at school?**

See the trouble was in those days that there were too many students and the government were cutting down expenses, and they cut out this teacher, and they cut out that one. To me it was helpful because I didn't have to have the attention because the teachers were too occupied doing other things to worry about some

21:30 kid not turning up to school. They never used to follow it up.

If we're talking about 1932, '33, we're also talking about the Depression era. What memories do you have of that time?

Fortunately the Depression didn't actually affect our family. In fact we lived very, very well. In fact there was a choice of menu of a night time, what you needed. But my mother

22:00 was a very kind and loving person, and she used to give other people food, and packages, and supply different things to various people. In those days my father was on a fairly good wage or salary. I think he was getting over fifty pound a week in those days and that was a fortune but other people were very poorly off.

22:30 It was a terrible thing. My mother used to send parcels and give parcels to various people, and things like that. She was a lovely person.

Were your neighbours in financial straits at all?

No, the neighbours either side, they seemed to manage. We lived in Marrickville in

23:00 what was called Leofrene Avenue, which was right alongside the railway station. Of course I used to spend a lot of time in the railway station with a book and they knew who my father was, and they put up with me I think. They'd say, "Here's your father coming," and I'd be out the window, and over the fence,

and out because I wasn't allowed to be there.

Why were you spending so much time

23:30 **at the railway station?**

I don't know. It used to fascinate me. I used to sell the tickets in the booking office and collect tickets, and do all the things that I wasn't supposed to do.

Sounds great!

To me it was all right! It was great and of course there were several other kids around the place, and we used to play around there.

I was going to say did you have any friends at this time?

Oh yes! There was one particular kid a couple of doors up and

24:00 he and I were inseparable. Then of course when my mother died my life turned upside down. She died in 1933 and on the 19th of March. I've never forgotten it. It was the year before on the 19th of March that the Sydney Harbour Bridge opened. My father was on the official stand and everything else, and all that kind of business.

Were you there on that day?

I was

24:30 there on the bridge opening but he wouldn't take us or wouldn't include us in the whole thing. He was a very strict person and I don't know. I don't think I had any love for my father.

What was it do you think that made him the sort of person he was?

He was a strict as a militarian

25:00 and what he said, that was the final word.

Had he had war experience?

No. He came out from Ireland as a lad. He was 16 I think when he came here. His father started a wool mill in Bowenfels, outside of Lithgow

25:30 and they used to own this wool mills there. I don't know whether it still exists or not but he eventually fell in a vat of boiling water and it scalded him to death. I didn't know him at all. It was long before I knew anything about it. Anyway, my father started work in the railway department and he was a very clever man. He was smart

26:00 but he didn't have the – to me, as far as I was concerned, any affection. He might have had. I don't know but as I said before, I was the youngest. I think I was a mistake because there is too many years between me and my sister.

Just moving back to the opening of the Harbour Bridge. What do you remember of that day?

Before that, we

26:30 school children were all marched over the bridge a couple of days beforehand, to have a look at it sort of business. They had railway engines, old railway engines on both sides of the track. There were railway lines and tramlines on either side, and they had all these in there to test the strength of the bridge, and of course there was a great gala day. I went into the opening of the thing with

27:00 my eldest brother and his wife. My father was in the official dais for the opening but he didn't include us in it.

So where were you when the bridge was opened?

Actually I think we were down at Circular Quay at the time that the bridge was opened. We went up on the bridge itself when it opened but there was a great hullabaloo there with the big official stand and my father was on it

27:30 but as I say, we weren't included.

Did your father see de Groot cut the ribbon?

I don't know. I never asked him. I know it went on and we saw it. There was a policeman by the name of Mackay. I think he eventually became the commissioner of police just because of that happening but he pulled de Groot off the horse. There was a great hullabaloo and they tied the ribbon together, and Jack Lang eventually cut the ribbon again,

28:00 and away it went but the whole thing was a real gala day. There were ferries tooting and hooting sort of business, and of course it changed the whole system because Circular Quay in yester years was a

throng. The ferries went everywhere, people were coming there, everything seemed to start from there. The trams in those days, most of the trams used to terminate

28:30 at Rawson Place in town. There used to be a hotel there, the Prince of Wales Hotel and the trams used to circle around that section.

So Circular Quay was really the transport hub prior to the bridge?

It was and they used to have ferries with cars, would bring them from the north side over there. The trams used to terminate

29:00 over the other side of the bridge and then there were trams this side of the bridge. Milson's Point was virtually the terminus for the trains and of course the electric trains didn't start until 1926. These were steam trains before that. That's how the whole system – so of course the opening of the bridge changed everything.

What did it change?

29:30 The way the traffic went. Instead of cars coming over in the punts, they used to call them, the cars, they used to travel across the bridge and they had toll gates at both ends, and from memory now it used to be sixpence across the bridge. Even the tram fares or train fares, there was a toll on those as well. You had to pay – I think it was a penny to go on the tram extra. You got a penny ticket for that and

30:00 then a tram ticket as well for the toll bridge, and all kinds of things but eventually it all ironed itself out, with the result that I think it costs about three dollars to go in a car over the bridge now.

How could you best describe the character of the city of Sydney at that time?

In those days they used to have what they called the Razor Gangs and all this kind of business but it didn't affect the ordinary people.

30:30 they used to fight amongst themselves and they'd carry these cutthroat razors, and cut into one another but that was only supposed to be done amongst the crooks. That's how it went on.

You never saw any sign of that I presume?

Not physically, no.

I've interviewed one man at one point where he spoke about Sydney in the 1910s and the 1920s as being like a large village, where everyone knew everyone else.

In

31:00 suburbs everybody knew everybody. The sister above me, she knew everybody's business. She used to race around here, there, everybody. She knew everybody and of course, "Here's one of the Pearces." That was it. That was a passport, you know?

A passport?

Well if the Pearces wanted something they got it. You just had to say,

31:30 "I'm a Pearce." And you got whatever you wanted.

Because of your father's position?

Mmm.

Despite the fact that your father was a sort of dour character it sounds like you had quite a happy family life until you mothers death.

We'd have a big dining room table and there used to be a lot of visitors. There could be anything up to 12 for dinner every night. We had

32:00 different – as soon as my father had finished his dinner he'd go inside and that was the finish. We never saw him any more.

Were there visitors to the house though?

There used to be lots of visitors. My mother's side of the family traced back to the First Fleet and she had a lot of sisters. Her father, he came out from Wales. Her mother was born here.

32:30 A whole generation of family were all born here. On her side of the family, my mother's side of the family, her mother came from a family that owned a lot of hotels, and her previous family owned hotels.

So would it be correct to say that most of the people that came

33:00 **to the household had some sort of connection with your mother?**

Yes.

So who were most of the people that came to the house?

Well relations to my mother and there were lots of them. I know my mother, she had six brothers and sisters. In fact my grandmother, that was her mother, she had thirteen children but of the thirteen children

33:30 seven of them died, mostly at birth or one, or two years but she had a hotel business at Penrith before that, and they had another hotel at Oberon at the same time. My grandfather, my mother's father had a gold mine at Hill End. He made a lot of money there and he also had these hotels.

It sounds like quite an industrious family, a lot of energy and

34:00 **a lot of focus on things.**

There was and of course my mother's grandfather as I said, they had many hotels in town, in Clarence Street and everything else. They had about a dozen of them at the same time.

Once you'd lost both your parents it seems to me from what you've been saying that you became very much a loner?

In a certain sense, yes. My father

34:30 was a heavy gambler and he owned racehorses, and everything else but at the same time I think he used to back them when they lost, and he wouldn't back them when they won. That's how I summed it up anyway. I was never interested in gambling at all, in that way apart from playing poker of a Sunday night but that was it. I've never been interested in racehorses.

35:00 **But just getting back to the impact of your parent's death on you, it seems that although you'd had friends up until that time, it seems to me that you became a much more solitary person after your parents died.**

Well I did to a certain extent. My brother and sister, they got a flat at Strathfield and she was more interested in

35:30 her life. My brother, he was working in the railway and then he went to the road transport, and eventually he ended up as one of the commissioners of road transport before he retired. My sister married at Strathfield and of course that split that up, and that's when I went to live with my elder sister.

So did you have any friends after the various moves that you'd had to

36:00 **make?**

The move when my mother died split it up all together. I lost most of my friends in those days, the ones I went to school with and everything else. When we went to live out at Kensington you could say I had no friends. I went to

36:30 school. Eventually my father sent me to this Marist Brothers School at Darlinghurst. He thought that I needed discipline and then –

Did you make any friends at that school?

Two or three but after I left school and went to work I lost them all together. I wouldn't say that I had a real friendly life

37:00 with other people. When I eventually got to work there were some other lads there at the same time. They were all a bit older than me but we sort of had a make our own fun and we'd go on a coastal trip up to the Hawkesbury River on a boat. One of them could drive and we hired a car, and went to Sussex Inlet for the night fishing, and

37:30 camping. Somebody said, "I've got a tent." The tent had more holes in that tent that what you could put a – it was like a sieve. The water ran through and it poured while we were away. The fish we did catch, we cleaned them and put them on a rock, and the cats ate them. When you look back on it, it was a real funny day but it wasn't at the time. We used to make our own sort of time. We'd hire bikes out to ride down to Wollongong and all

38:00 kinds of things to try and make our own life a bit better. We used to play football or sport but life was never real good in those days. You had to make your own fun. They don't realise today how lucky they are with the sporting facilities they've got and the entertainment they've got.

Just moving back to the Depression for a moment, before we started recording you mentioned having seen a couple

38:30 **of musicians in the street.**

They weren't actually musicians. They were husband and wife I think. They were singing and I can always still remember, even to this day, Home on the Range. That made a very deep impression on me, begging for money just to sort of live. Things were very, very hard in those days and there was no such

thing as the Dole like they've got today. They got food coupons to live on. There was no provision of money to pay rent for

39:00 houses. People would live in houses with the landlord looking for money. They'd move that night. They used to call it the midnight flit and people would be moving everywhere. There would be people on the road camping out. Humping the billy, they used to call it. Life was very, very hard and there were a lot of food shortages, and things like that.

Tape 2

00:31 **Os you said that seeing that couple singing Home on the Range made quite a deep impression on you. Why was that?**

I don't know. I might have been at an impressionable age but it was outside the Palace Theatre of Burwood and they looked terrible, as far as their condition of health was concerned.

01:00 They were singing this Home on the Range begging for money. In those days it was sort of a common experience but I don't know why it was this couple, but it has never left me. I've always thought about it. Things seem to hit me at various times. I could see the same thing twice and not recognise it.

01:30 **We'll move on to what we were just discussing in a moment but just to round off that memory of the Depression and going back to that couple that were singing Home on the Range, there must have been something particularly desperate about them that caught your attention?**

I couldn't tell you what it was but I've never forgotten it. It was outside the Palace Theatre at Burwood. I don't think the thing exists now because I think it is a shopping centre now but

02:00 things were terrible.

Were there any other specific visual memories of the Depression that stand out in your mind?

You become a bit blasé about the thing. It's there. You know it's there. I don't know. You sort of accept it.

You're talking about the Depression itself?

Mmm.

What was it on a day to day basis that you accepted?

There was always a shortage of

02:30 food around for people. There was no money about. I know during the time that I was living with my elder sister, I'd get off the bus a mile or two, a mile away to save a penny, just walk the other distance and a penny was a lot of money in those days. I think it's wiped out all together now but in those days things were hard. Everyone realised

03:00 they were hard. Everybody worked as hard as they could and of course in those days the bosses had all the money. In fact at one stage during the Depression the banks closed and people were left with their bankbook, and no money. There were virtually people – they used to call them the Jews, whether they were or not I don't know, would buy up these bankbooks

03:30 for a fraction of the amount that was in the book and of course eventually the banks did reopen up, and they had all the money, and the people lost all their money.

How long did the Depression continue?

It actually started in 1929. As a kid I used to go around with another kid who used to sell papers and deliver papers. Of course I wasn't allowed to do any of those kinds of things but I went around

04:00 with him at the same time and at Marrickville used to have what was I think Holden or General Motors, had a big manufacturing thing that built cars and things there. We used to go there and of course I'd go with these kids, and go in these offices, and you'd get an entrance as though you were selling the papers. It was an entrance fee. We went down there this particular night and the next night we go down there, the place is locked up, and closed, finished,

04:30 no more people, no more cars.

So everyone had been laid off?

Yes! The whole place was closed up. A lot of those things went on and as kids we didn't sort of realise it or know much about it but it was. Then people, they were only giving them one weeks work in twelve. That was the only way that got money. Other people got issued out with food

05:00 coupons to live. Things were very, very hard indeed.

During that short break we had a moment ago you were talking about women who were given working opportunities. Could you – just for the sake of the recording?

Women who did go to work, all right if they were going to get married on the weekend, they were sacked on the Friday night before then. That was the finish. They didn't

05:30 employ married women. In fact women had a hard time getting a job and even so, they were only paid at half the rate of what a man was employed at.

Were there any working women in your family?

My elder sister, I don't know why she was allowed to go – my second eldest sister I should say, she went to work and she worked first of all for the warehouse firm. The next thing I know she's

06:00 working as the secretary to a man named Dutrebanne, who was the General Manager of the Sun Newspapers. She was his secretary. Other than that my other two sisters were not allowed to go to work. My elder sister was a too attractive person and she used to get accosted by very many men, and things like that, and my father decided she was not allowed to go to work because

06:30 of her beauty. She was a fantastic looking woman.

What sort of work was she doing anyway?

My sister? The elder sister wasn't doing anything at all but the other sister was the secretary.

What was your father's view of women doing work?

Men had to have the work in preference to women.

07:00 **Moving the focus back to you in the 1930s, at a certain point you joined the militia. When was that?**

It wasn't until 1937. I joined the cadets. I was in the 9th Field Brigade Cadets. We used to meet one night a week. I joined there as a gunner. They usually became what they called a bombardier, a two striper, a corporal in the infantry type of thing. Then

07:30 eventually as I got older they put me into the militia but I wasn't quite old enough. Then when the war started I was asked if I could do permanent work in the army then, "Could I get away from work?" I said, "Yes it's easy." By this time I'm a sergeant and they made me a recruiting sergeant at the 9th Field Brigade.

08:00 I was the sergeant and Lieutenant Thatcher was the recruiting officer, and that was started in September, and we were eventually sent out, and we were all set up to recruit for the Second World War. It was supposed to be a special force of 20,000 people. That was all they were going to enlist. Anyway, at the 9th Field Brigade we

08:30 selected them and those who came to the 9th Field Brigade for enlistment were to go into the artillery units. Eventually they started to recruit and they had to fill in these various forms. We had to get them examined by the doctor and fill in all these different things, measurements, and Christ knows, and they had to be in A1 condition.

09:00 There were quite a few people came along to join but a lot of them were knocked back. Eventually when they were issuing out the army numbers, when it came up to my number that I eventually took myself, they wanted to know – "Never mind, that's mine." My number in those days was NX3333, so I thought it was an easy enough number to remember, that's why I grabbed it.

09:30 **Actually before we move too much into the war, you say you joined the cadets. Was this at school?**

No. The senior Cadets at the 9th Field Brigade. They used to have cadets.

So what got you involved in the cadets?

I think I was a bit sort of interested in becoming a soldier type of thing you know? I liked the army.

Why was this?

I don't know. I used to read a lot of books about the way

10:30 World War I was. I had an uncle – my father was too old to be in the army but I had an uncle, who was in the army. He was in the light horse.

Did he ever talk about his war experiences?

Not really.

So what was it that interested you in World War I?

The fact of the history of it. I've always been interested in history. I do like to read books about history.

11:00 I don't know what it was. I don't think it was any romantic novels or ideas about it but then again, that's how it went along.

I interrupted your flow there. You were just starting to talk about what interested you in the army and if I could just have you continue on from that?

As I said, I joined the cadets.

11:30 We were in a drill squad and I was selected to be in this drill squad in a gymkhana. We had to compete with other different units with their drill squad and various performances of rifle drill, and things like that. Eventually we won the cup or a cup.

It seems to be that you had been drifting there for a while and the army must have represented some sense of stability for you as well.

Well I think it was a collection of friends. When I think back on it the fact of meeting people because I'd left school, I'd been at various schools and then I went to work, and I was sort of

12:00 looking for friendship I think. I don't really know but I think that could be the background of it.

You surely made those friends once you'd joined?

I joined and made friends there, and of course I used to play football. I was playing football for the – in those days what they used to call the Bondi Lifesavers. Before that I used to play Rugby Union in Burwood.

12:30 We lived in Strathfield and I was playing rugby with the Harlequins. Then when I went back to my sister there was only a Rugby League game there, so I used to play Rugby League. That was every Saturday.

When you say the Bondi Lifesavers, was that attached to the Bondi Lifesavers Club?

I don't know whether they were attached to it but that was part of it.

13:00 They used to call them the Bondi. Eventually I left the football and when I went to the army of course it dropped away all together.

How long were you with the cadets before you actually joined the militia?

I think it was two years. I was very keen about it and then we went to camp

13:30 at Liverpool.

When you joined the militia did you at that point go to Liverpool?

No, I think it was the last unit of the cadets we went to Liverpool and then with the militia we went there, and then of course in those days you used to have horses. Of course I was a gunner and

14:00 we had to take these horses down for them to be watered. I remember the sergeant, "Don't gallop the horses!" Of course here we were coming back after the horses were watered, they knew they were going to get fed when they got back and I had no control of it. I'm on one horse and leading the other, and I got abused for racing, and galloping the horses, and I had no say in it. They horses, they used to know

14:30 what was going on. I had no control!

How well trained were you by the time of your end with both the cadets and the militia?

I suppose we were reasonably trained.

What had the training consisted of?

Various rifle drills, gun drills and things like that. When I became this recruiting sergeant, well I was attached to the

15:00 regimental headquarters .

Just before we move into your activities as a recruiting sergeant, where were you when you heard that World War II had broken out?

I was in the picture show on a Friday night, well they were talking about it and the war actually was declared on the Sunday night but the whole hullabaloo was all boiling up on the Friday.

What do you remember about that particular Friday?

Nothing really

15:30 in particular. It was all in the air, the possibility of war and of course I think we were, as young lads excited about it. When the war was declared on the Sunday night, the next day there was everybody

racing around seeing if they could join the army. There was nothing doing. They didn't know what they were going to do.

What was your attitude

16:00 **to enlistment? We've spoken to various people who talk about King and Country, and patriotism, and things of that nature. What was your attitude to enlisting?**

I wasn't thinking about the King and Country business. I was thinking about the adventure of it because we had been leading rather a dull sort of a life until that time and no one had much money, and we didn't have any real holidays. The only holidays I ever went to, we would go to

16:30 my aunties. Most of them lived in the country and we would go to one of those but we thought it was an opportunity for adventure. It wasn't a fact of King and Country, and all that kind of baloney [nonsense]. We were thinking about where we could have a reasonably good time. You had to be 21. The age of acceptance was 20 to 35 and if you were under 21

17:00 you had to have permission. My elder sister said, "I don't think I'll give you permission." I said, "Don't worry I'll join under some other name, so it doesn't worry but I'm going and I intend to have a good time."

So did she sign you up?

Signed, yes.

She did sign the form did she?

Oh yes, she signed it. She knew that I was stubborn and pigheaded, and obstinate sort of business, and that was it.

17:30 **What do you recall of your actual enlistment?**

I was enlisted with Lieutenant Thatcher. He was to hold the bible for me to swear in and then I'd make certain they signed the papers, and things like that.

But your own enlistment, you'd gone from the militia, what was the process of you going from the militia presumably to the AIF?

As far as that was concerned we were issued with a militia uniform

18:00 at the time. I don't even recall now but it had to go back. I know that but I don't remember it going back. I know that when they were singing out about the numbers and issuing the numbers out to each one, they wanted to know about my number that I had allocated to myself, I said, "Don't worry, that's mine." So then I went and signed the papers, and that was it. Before that I was approached by

18:30 a lieutenant or captain it was at the time, Hans Anderson, his initials were JS Anderson. He was a permanent army officer. He came to me at the 9th Field Brigade at Victoria Barracks and said, "Are you going in the AIF?" I said, "Yes I am." He said, "Well I've got a job for you." So I said, "Righto!" That was it and the job turned out to be

19:00 the orderly room sergeant. Eventually we left Victoria Barracks, the last lot to go. They went in different drafts. Those with no experience whatsoever were put into Liverpool Camp for a couple of weeks, I think it was 21 days, I'm not quite certain now, training and then they were

19:30 to go over to the AIF. They were in the AIF when they signed up and they were to go over to Ingleburn. Ingleburn Camp in those days wasn't even finished. In fact it was a marvellous bit of construction when you consider there were no electric power tools in those days. It was all manual had sawing and things like that. That camp was constructed, built, designed, built and

20:00 constructed in six weeks, and it consisted of enough accommodation at Ingleburn – they haven't added anything on, in fact they've since taken a lot away, included huts, and kitchens to cook the meals, a hospital, and everything else like that. It was dusty old things, in fact a lot of people got infections from the dust up there at the time.

20:30 The hut that I eventually went into, they finished nailing the boards in the morning but we occupied the whole hut. We went to this camp at Ingleburn.

It sounds like a really marvellous exercise in rapid construction.

Oh it was fantastic! You know, when you consider eventually they had 5,000 troops there at the start of it or 5,000 bodies. You couldn't call them

21:00 troops. They had private contractors cooking the meals at the time and things like that, and private contractors running the canteen, and they were making a fortune. Eventually two or three fires broke out amongst these so called canteens and the Fire Brigade was held up. They let them burn out

21:30 deliberately so that we could get rid of these private contractors and the army eventually started their own.

So the Fire Brigade obviously knew of the reputation of these contractors?

No, they were delayed. They were stopped from getting there. They didn't know anything about it.

Who delayed them?

The troops!

So why did the troops not want the private contractors?

No one wanted them there because they were rorting the system. They were charging us triple the amount of money for the things

22:00 and everyone closed their eyes to what was going on.

So at that point the army set up their own canteens? Did the food improve?

No that was private stuff, like you could buy chocolates, cigarettes, things like that but the army food, well we got the best quality, but we had the poorest cooks! They used to muck it all up but the quality of the food was very good.

22:30 Eventually if anybody played up, "Oh you're going to be a cook!" So that's how it was.

How did they muck the food up?

They didn't know how to cook it properly. That was the trouble but eventually things got organised. You can't keep on going and being a fool all the time.

I'm interested in your activities in recruitment. What did you actually do to recruit troops?

23:00 We didn't go out singing songs or anything like that! We were just there and the people came to us. We didn't have to go looking for them. In those early days everybody – well not everybody but a lot of people wanted to join up.

At the time when you were recruiting where were you actually based?

I was living at home like an ordinary – and I would come to work sort of business. We used to operate out of

23:30 the 9th Field Brigade Headquarters in Victoria Barracks but we didn't sleep there. We went home to sleep and came back the next morning.

Was it very much a mass movement of people arriving to recruit?

There were lots of people turning up to be recruited and they weren't ready for them early in the days. They actually didn't really start until about October. I can't tell you exact things but it was around about

24:00 October '39, but it didn't take long. They had people at various places recruiting and they allocated the numbers, the army numbers, and both New South Wales and Victoria reserved the numbers NX1 to 500 for officers only. The same thing happened in Victoria, VX1 to 500 in Victoria. The other states didn't worry about it and

24:30 it didn't make any difference if you were an officer who joined in December, you got a number between 1 and 500.

At this early stage was there enough equipment to go around for the men?

No. There were no uniforms. They were designing and making, and creating the AIF uniform. As it turned out it was virtually like a copy from the First [World] War

25:00 but they had to make them. Those who were in the militia units retained their uniform and wore that whilst they were in camp but the other had what they classified as giggle suits.

What were the giggle suits?

Rough working sort of jackets and a pair of pants that fitted where it touched, and the same with the hat, a giggle hat.

They sound particularly ill fitting?

They were

25:30 terrible and of course what happens when some of the soldiers went on leave and they go to Sydney, in a lot of places they wouldn't let them in because they weren't dressed properly. They'd turn them away, you know? "Oh you can't come in. You're not dressed properly," and all this. That's what they had! It was terrible.

So when did that situation improve?

In the early part of the war it was terrible. We didn't get our AIF uniform, I don't

26:00 think, until about December. Of course there was a great space in the neck and General Blamey made a dramatic statement. He said, “With the good food and the training, they’ll fill those necks out.” I don’t think they’ve ever filled them out yet! When we got our uniforms we used to take them and get them altered, take the neck in, you could put a draft horse in the blinkin’ neck! That’s how it was.

26:30 We weren’t terribly welcome amongst the local population. They thought we were out of workers and murderers, and dole bludgers, and all kinds of things.

Are you talking about the Ingleburn population?

No, the general Sydney population.

Why did they think that?

Because – I don’t know. It wasn’t sort of generally accepted, the war and of course those that went first off, they said, “Oh they must be all unemployed and they’re looking for work.”

27:00 As it turned out our unit, I don’t think we had one unemployed person in it. That was in ‘ 39 I’m talking about.

It just sounds extraordinary from the present day viewpoint. We look back to World War II and you assume that the population was gung ho and right behind the war effort.

Oh they weren’t!

They weren’t? Why weren’t they?

I don’t know why they weren’t but we weren’t here long enough to worry about it. They weren’t generally accepted. It wasn’t I don’t think until

27:30 1942 when the war was hitting here in Australia that things changed. Our unit, luckily we had our uniform and we wore that until we got our AIF uniform but the others fellas didn’t have a uniform. They just had these what we called giggle suits and it wasn’t generally accepted but it made them bond better together in any case.

I was going to say how

28:00 **quickly did the men bond together?**

They did.

But how fast was that process of bonding together?

I couldn’t say how fast it was. It was the fact that it did happen and it seemed to happen overnight. We were in huts. I think there were about 20 odd in a hut and we were issued out with palliasses and straw. Of course

28:30 we weren’t all used to that type of living but that’s how it happened and I can remember I was in a hut, we were all sergeants and above in that hut. They separated us up like that. The gunners and bombardiers were put in one hut, and the sergeants in one hut, and the officers lived separately all together. This particular

29:00 time at Ingleburn there was a permanent army warrant officer came in and was throwing his weight around, and he was going to do this, and do that, and he was going out that night on leave. He was thinking he was still in the permanent army, so we fixed his palliasse for him. We put all the tins and God knows what inside the straw. When he came home he couldn’t sleep on the thing because it was full of bottles and tins, and God knows what. We thought,

29:30 “That will bring him down to tors [?UNCLEAR].”

I’ll bet it did!

It did.

What were the main activities while you were at Ingleburn?

The various squads were taken – we had no equipment virtually to start with. They were using the expression, advance with drag ropes or retire with drag ropes for on guns and of course they

30:00 were hitching up these bits of rope to tree stumps. That was just to sort of practice to get ready for how it could happen.

Could you explain that a little more? What were the drag ropes?

Well on the wheels of guns there’s a hook on either side. If the gun has got to be moved into position or anything they used long ropes with a hook on the end of it, and hook it into these parts of the wheels,

30:30 and either you move the gun forward or advance, or retire, and you move it out. That’s what they were training but they never had the guns to practice on. They were hooking the things up to tree stumps

and things like that just to practice. Others would go out and they would be using imaginary signals and all kinds of things, imagination. They had to improvise in lots of things but eventually we gradually got equipment.

How long did that take?

31:00 It seemed to be forever but still it didn't.

How long were you at Ingleburn?

We were in Ingleburn up until we left Australia on the 10th of January 1940. We marched through the city I think at the end of December or the beginning of January.

Just before we do that I just wanted to go back to one point because I

31:30 **then want to carry the story forward from the departure. You said something quite interesting a little earlier about the bond developing between the men and I think you related that to the rather bedraggled uniforms to begin with.**

Well they felt ostracised by the public and the fact that they were barred from going into different places made them collect together, and it did form a bit of bonding between them.

32:00 Unfortunately, we had two batteries in our regiment. The first battery, that was headway and the artillery was formed. The OC [officer commanding] of first battery was a permanent army staff corps officer, thought he was going to build up the spirit of corps between his men and he wouldn't allow them to associate with Second Battery. It was a silly thing because he was the one they didn't

32:30 like in the end. When he got captured in Greece they were all happy about it.

What was his name?

Peters. He was a major there. He eventually became a brigadier at the latter end of the war. He was a staff corps man and eventually the army kicked him out.

What were his shortcomings?

Living above his station.

33:00 **Living above his station?**

Well he thought he was far better than everyone else; "You're just mugs." See a lot of these staff corps fellas were having big opinions of themselves and they were very important as far as they were concerned, and he was a staff corps man. He had long been in India with the Indian Army and of course they had different opinions of

33:30 soldiers over there to what we were. After all we were all volunteers. We weren't conscripts. The whole lot of us were volunteers and even his own officers had a lot of trouble with him.

So the fact that you were volunteers must have in itself created an esprit de corps [camaraderie]?

It did and you weren't friends with everyone in the whole unit. You had your own little crowd, which you went on leave with and associated

34:00 with, and drank with, and ate with.

When was it that you first heard that you would be going abroad?

We had embarkation leave and I can't remember exactly when it was now. We were all given inoculations in both arms and some got sick with it, X-rays and all kinds of things. We had more

34:30 in the unit than what we needed because we gradually got weeded out. They weeded out – some had TB [tuberculosis]. In fact there were two brothers there, they'd come from a country farm. They had a big property and one of them was weeded out because he had TB.

This was during embarkation leave was it?

This was in 1939. We had to have all these various inoculations. We were all examined. We were all

35:00 100% fit. I was afraid I might get wiped out because I wasn't fat enough. I was lucky I succeeded in staying there but that's how it was.

And this was all part of the process for preparing you for departure was it?

Yes and we eventually had all these various tests, and then we were given embarkation. I don't remember exactly how long it was now, and went back to camp, and we were all back in camp by –

35:30 if I can remember. I think it was the 4th of January we marched through Sydney. We did get a rousing reception.

What can you remember of that occasion?

Mmm – except we were marching around the various streets and people were clapping and cheering, and all that kind of business. By this time we all had uniforms, the AIF uniform and we eventually went back to Ingleburn camp,

36:00 and we knew we were going away. We didn't know when or where and eventually some troops left the Ingleburn camp on the 9th of January. We didn't know where we were going but everybody else, the general public seemed to know where we were going. Eventually we left on the 10th of January and we went down to Ingleburn Station, got on the train, those old

36:30 suburban steam trains with the carriages, and we went through as a matter of fact the railway line down near the bottom of my place now, through down into Darling Harbour that way, and there were people all along the lines cheering and whatnot. Of course I got very insulted, these two women, "Oh look at that little boy!" Of course I got cranky about that! I was most indignant!

37:00 **Did you look particularly young at the time?**

I was.

What age were you at this point?

I can't remember. I think about 19 or 20 but I was very young faced. I'll show you a photo as a matter of fact. I found one of those days.

I imagine you thought you were going away as a mature soldier?

I was a sergeant at that time and my chest was all puffed out, and I thought I was big time!

Had you had any girlfriends up until that time?

I did

37:30 have a girlfriend there that I used to – in those days you'd go walking because you couldn't go spending money going anywhere. Money was a bit restricted and Saturday night you'd go to the pictures. Anyway, she went back to live – her father was the CPS [clerk of petty sessions] up at Casino, and

38:00 they invited me to go up there for a holiday. I went up there but by this time she'd picked up some other bloke, so I was on the outer and I wanted to come home, but the family induced me to stay there for the rest of the holiday, but it was difficult.

That must have been very uncomfortable!

Oh crikey and of course that on top of the fact of the unhappy life I'd been leading, it sort of put pain to everything!

When was this?

This was

38:30 around about the end of 1938, beginning of '39, something like that.

So had you had any other girlfriends up until the time you embarked?

No none.

But clearly when you went away you were writing to people, to relatives and so forth?

I used to write to my sisters and things like that. As a matter of fact, this girl's aunty used to write to me on a regular basis.

They clearly still

39:00 **thought you were OK?**

Yes and in fact they used to send parcels, and write to me regularly.

Tape 3

00:33 **Ok so Os, what ship did you embark on?**

We got the train down to Pyrmont and all right, now the artillery were supposed to be senior to the infantry in order of precedence, and everything else. There was the old saying, "Men of the infantry and gentlemen of the artillery." Our CO [commanding officer],

01:00 Colonel Kelly, insisted that we go on the boat first prior to the infantry because we were first. It was one time for the poor old soldiers of the regiment, they fell in the soup because they ended up down in the

bowels of the ship and the infantry on top! We went on this boat, his Majesty's transport ship, the U5.

01:30 The actual name of the ship was the Orford. It had had passengers on it down to Melbourne and they took the passengers off, and sent the ship back to Sydney to embark the troops. Fortunately for me I was allocated a cabin to myself. I was a sergeant at the time

02:00 and I was given a cabin. I'd never been onboard a ship before in my life. I wouldn't have been able to afford a blinkin' trip to Manly let alone go on a ship! Anyway, on this ship the steward used to bring me in hot water of a morning to have a shave. I said, "Forget that! I don't shave." You'd have a cup of tea and then we'd go down for breakfast, down to the dining room. We had a big menu every

02:30 morning and then for morning tea we'd have fresh cakes and scones for morning tea. We'd have lunch and we'd have a menu for that again, and afternoon tea, and another lot of fresh scones and goodies, and dinner at night. Each time it was a wide choice of menu. Of course we were all living very high in the hold as far as the food was concerned. It was fantastic!

03:00 The ship left Sydney on this day at about lunchtime. We passed under the Harbour Bridge. I thought to myself, "I wonder whether I'll ever see the Harbour Bridge again," which fortunately we did see it. We sailed and I think we must have gone down near the South Pole because this was on the 10th of January 1940, and it was a hot summers day, and eventually we ended up

03:30 with our great coats. We call them great coats, and army overcoat and it was cold, and big seas, and God knows what. Eventually we ended up in Fremantle. We were made very, very welcome when we got to Fremantle. The people over there couldn't do enough for us and we were welcomed left, right and centre. By this time the convoy – I forgot to say we joined up with

04:00 a New Zealand convoy and of course the troops virtually went riot, not so much with bad – with behaviour. The people were taking us into their homes and everything else, and they couldn't do enough for us, and of course silly soldiers, they were swapping hats, and uniforms. Half of them were dressed like New Zealanders and half Australian. Eventually they had to later on,

04:30 after we all got back to our ships there was a big parade. All these different things, different uniforms they had to take them off. They didn't say to that but when we got to Colombo I think they swapped over the various uniforms again.

What were the New Zealanders like?

Just the same as us. They were no different. They came from New Zealand, we came from Australia but

05:00 you wouldn't know. Of course they spoke slightly different to us. Some people could pick it up but I didn't seem to have any trouble.

What was the mood like onboard the ship?

Oh full of jubilation! Of course you couldn't do a great deal. They used to have exercises, physical exercises and things like that, and boxing competitions, and various odds and ends.

05:30 **While you were on the Orford what was your daily routine?**

General organization, running of the unit type of thing. I was in the regimental headquarters and you just had to see that things ran smoothly, carry out the orders that the CO worked out that had to be done. It wasn't a great deal.

06:00 It was more like a pleasure cruise.

How did you maintain discipline and physical health during this time on the boat?

If you got sick you went to the sick bay. A lot of people did go to the sick bay with various sicknesses and of course they had reactions from our injections, and stuff like that.

06:30 Generally the troops were getting a billy can full of beer for about threepence. That was a hell of a lot cheaper than anywhere else and I used to get the steward to put in my wardrobe, in the cabin I had, a couple of dozen bottles of Bass Ale. Every night some of my

07:00 friends from down below deck would come up and we'd drink the grog in my cabin, and of course they'd sneak their way back into their place. They weren't supposed to be up there but that's how it went! We enjoyed ourselves and we were well fed, and it was a sort of real happy time. After we left Fremantle we went to Colombo. We had some leave in Colombo.

07:30 I don't think there were very many out of the whole convoy that had been away because in those days with the Depression period everyone was saving their pennies.

Just before we do get to Colombo I'd like to go back to Fremantle and explore Fremantle a little bit more. I believe that quite a few men went absent without leave at Fremantle?

Well our own unit, we got rid

08:00 of about nine, which we didn't want any more. Their services were no longer required. We sent them to Western Command Barracks to be discharged out of the army all together – unfit. We did have a high standard and didn't want them. Some went absent without leave only because their enthusiasm of being away from where they should have been at the wrong time

08:30 and they didn't join up with the unit again because they didn't turn up to the ship to sail. I don't think they deliberately went away but they sort of got too overenthusiastic with the grog or something or other. They missed out but we got rid of about nine people all together.

Why did you get rid of those nine men?

Because they weren't suitable enough for the army.

In what ways weren't they suitable?

Well their behaviour and

09:00 what they were going on with. They weren't good enough.

Could you be more specific about the type of behaviour?

Either thieving or things like that. They weren't, in our opinion, good enough to be in the army. The army didn't accept the dregs if you think they did, they didn't. We were all volunteers and we did have a certain standard of

09:30 behaviour, and they didn't measure up to it.

Was it just thieving or was it other types of behaviour as well?

I couldn't tell you know. I've forgotten about it because once that happens you forget all about it. You don't harp on it or go back to it.

Now I believe that you use a particular term for AWL [absent without leave]?

It's either

10:00 ack willy, that's the Australian term, AWL or ack willy. There is a thing creeping in like the Americans call it AWOL, but we don't. We call it AWL. After all, 'without' is one word, not two words.

That's true, it is and how did it get the name ack willy?

It's just a slang term.

10:30 **From all the people that we've interviewed that's actually the first time I've heard ack willy being used, which is quite surprising because it's amazing how other terms come in, like AWOL.**

AWOL is an American term.

Yes but it's kind of taking over.

Unfortunately. I'm not particularly enthused with the Americans but still everyone has got their own opinion.

11:00 **You mentioned that you stopped over in Colombo. What happened in Colombo?**

We were eventually allowed leave there but it was strange and we'd never – I know I hadn't been anyway, into a strange country like that. We didn't know what to do with ourselves. You'd see these people walking along and some nice looking girls, and next minute they were going 'Sptttt'. They

11:30 spit betel nut juice. It's a red looking sloppy stuff they spit out of their mouths. Oh it turned your stomach!

So that would turn you off the girls I suppose?

Oh they weren't interested in us and everything else but that's how it went on. We weren't there that long.

How long were you in Colombo?

I think only one day or two days.

It must have been quite an experience to be in such a foreign country?

It was

12:00 definitely experience because I know myself I'd never been away like that and everything was new, and eyes boggling sort of thing. When we left there we went to –

12:30 **So Os you were just leaving Colombo?**

And we went to Aden. We didn't have any leave in Aden. Actually the ships were re-coaling and refuelling, to get fuel and stuff there. A couple of fellas jumped overboard and swam across to the shore but nothing virtually happened. We weren't there long. I can't tell you how long it was now but it didn't seem very long. Then we

13:00 sailed into the Red Sea and of course we saw porpoises swimming in front of the ship, and diving in front of the ship. It was fantastic. Then there were all these different spires of stone sticking out in the Red Sea, all something new to us. We had escort of one of the aircraft carriers. I've forgotten the name. I think it was the HMAS Eagle. I'm not

13:30 certain. Of course they used to fly planes over and on one particular day one crashed into the sea but they rescued the pilot.

Did you see that happening?

We could all see it.

Could you describe what you saw?

They were flying – the aircraft carrier was out – they weren't right alongside [UNCLEAR]. This plane was coming in to land and it didn't

14:00 land. It went into the drink instead and of course they soon had a boat out to rescue the pilot.

And he was rescued?

Yes but I think the war – the big battleship they had escorting us was the Ramillies, I think it was. The Australia and the Sydney – no the Australia and the Canberra were our escorts in

14:30 our fleet, and the English took over after that, and the Australia returned back to their area of patrol. Eventually we got to Port Taufiq and we got up the canal. I remember seeing some natives sitting on a camel up on the hillside there overlooking the canal.

15:00 When you think back, around that area was where the Australians were in the First War. We eventually got into what they call the Bitter Lakes of Ismalia. Then the next day we were up back in through the canal to a place called El Kantara. Then we got off in the middle of the canal. They lowered the gangplank down and the troops

15:30 trooped off the ship. There were about 5,000 Australians in those ships and the British army were there to do the catering. This was in the middle of the night at about two or three o'clock in the morning and we just lined up with our dixie [pot], and sausages and potato, and bread and butter, and a cup of tea sort of thing. They way it was organised I've never ever forgotten. The organization that must have gone into doing it because

16:00 it was no time and all the troops were fed, all on trains, and all away. What they did, these trains with wooden seats in them in carriages and those who had a rifle had to have their rifles ready in case of attack on the train, and they had what they call a 'flat top'; in front of the engine with a couple of natives tied onto that as hostages

16:30 from the various villages in case of attack.

Where were the hostages held sorry?

They were tied to a flat top in front of the engine of the train and the engine pushed that along in front. In those days were was a lot of the services over there. Even in those days the Arabs and the Jews were bombing one another, letting off bombs, and everything else.

So they

17:00 **were tied to that as a warning?**

No. It was as a protection for the train in case they blow the train up. They'd blow up their own villages. I don't think it would deterred anyone from doing it but that's the way it went on.

How many villages were held hostage?

We don't actually know that but that's how it went on. We eventually got to – I think it was Al Magel and we got out of

17:30 that, and we got into those old grey buses that used to fly around Palestine in those days. Eventually we went to our camp, which in those days was Quastina. The camp wasn't full built and it was like a dust bowl. It was a terrible place but that's where we went to first off. Of course the English were doing all the catering and settling us in, and looking after us. Of course we were on

18:00 English rations and I've never forgotten it. They had tinned bacon. Oh it was – you wouldn't call it bacon. You'd call it tinned fat. It was awful stuff but the Poms used to love it.

Is that like a Spam kind of thing?

No it was actual bacon but I think they only put the fat in there and left the meat outside. It was awful. Anyway, that's how it went on and eventually things got settled down.

18:30 **What was the relationship like between the English soldiers and the Australian soldiers?**

Reasonable. One time I remember these Poms were in a truck and they put their fingers up like that [two fingered salute], and to us it was the sign of a V but in those days it meant something different entirely to Australians, and I'm chasing this truck. I was going to belt the Poms in the ear

19:00 but the truck just drove off. I just reacted stupid.

I think George Bush got into a bit of trouble for doing that in Australia or doing it somewhere and the Australians took offence!

I did but that's how it went.

Was it at this point that you became part of the ack ack [anti aircraft guns]?

No, no, no.

No? Well perhaps if you could continue

19:30 **on?**

Well then at that stage each unit had to provide a sergeant into AIF headquarters to maintain the records and of course I was the one from the regiment that went in into Jerusalem, and I thought it was great because they put us up into a hotel, not hotels

20:00 as we know here but it was like a residential type of thing, and three of us to a room. Eventually we got organised for the records and things like that. Of course in those days you'd get leave every night and we'd go around exploring everywhere else, looking at this, and looking at that. I happened to be in Jerusalem at the time of the Easter time,

20:30 where they had the stations of the cross ceremony through the old city and we all joined in that. At that time I was saying to myself that I wish I had read the bible, understood the bible to be able to associate where we were with the bible.

What actually happened when you did partake in the stations of the cross?

We just followed the ceremony around to the

21:00 various places where Christ was stopped and all that kind of business, and eventually where the crucifixion happened. It was all new and exciting to us.

How did the locals regard the Australian soldiers?

We couldn't understand it but they were accustomed to permanent soldiers, permanent army soldiers

21:30 all that time beforehand, the British army and the soldiers were not looked upon with any great admiration. Soldiers in those days to them were just the bottom end of the rung and of course we couldn't work that out because we were all volunteers, and most of us all came from good families, and everything else, and that didn't work

22:00 out. We used to go to these different cafes and they were there. There were no hotels like draught beer. You'd go into a café and you ordered a beer. You'd get a bottle of beer and a glass, and water in the bottom. I know myself I turned the glass upside down to drain the water out and before I knew where I was, I was surrounded by about a dozen blokes. To them with the British in

22:30 those days it was a sign that I was the best man in the house and I'd take on anybody. I had to do a hell of a lot of talking. I had no intention of anything like that. I'd only drained the water out of the glass so that I could pour the beer in! Anyway, that satisfied them and most of the police in those days in the British/Palestinian Force were ex-British soldiers. They still carried on in the same old silly

23:00 ways.

What were their silly ways?

Like wanting to fight and everything like that. They were mad on having fights with everybody. That's how they seemed to want to survive, so that was it but generally speaking we got on very well with the Poms. They weren't too happy with our money. It was a lot more than theirs. They were getting about a bob a day and we were getting five bob a day. The same as when back here

23:30 in Australia when the Americans came over. They got a hell of a lot more money than we got. Anyway, that's how it went. We went to various places and sightseeing. At one stage a party of us went down to the Dead Sea. We had a taxi take us down to the Dead Sea. It's off the River Jordan, in those days in between Palestine

24:00 and Jordan or Trans-Jordanian, as it was known in those days, and the town of Jericho. Of course in

those days that's where in the bible where they walked around the walls of Jericho blowing trumpets and noise, and the whole of the walls fell down. Well in this Jericho town there was two rows of water sort of things. One was for drinking and the other was

24:30 for toilet facilities. All these things were entirely different to us but this place, the Dead Sea, nothing lives there. We went for a swim and you can't sink in it. You get in there and you can't swim along like you normally swim. Your bottom sits into the water and your legs are up, and your heads are up, and it was terribly, terribly salty. Your eyes sting with the salt but that was

25:00 another sightseeing. We were like tourists.

What were your actual duties during this time?

We had to maintain the records and stuff but that didn't last long. I went back to the regiment after a while.

When was it that you first heard that Italy had joined the war?

That was around about June I think it was, June '40. At that stage

25:30 there was always a tremendous lack of equipment and there was a shortage of ack ack regiments, anti-aircraft regiments, and they turned the Second 4th Battalion, the infantry battalion, and the Second 4th Field Regiment into X and Y Regiments to train, and act as anti-aircraft units. Anyway, the British were doing the instructing

26:00 and at one stage we here at Haifa at a placed called Mount Carmel, and Acra. That was X in Mount Carmel and Y was in Acra. Whilst they were getting all this training and things there they said, "What are these planes?" "Oh they're Wellingtons." They didn't turn out to be Wellingtons at all! They turned out to be Eytie [Italian] bombers. They came over and bombed Haifa, and

26:30 they bombed, and destroyed the oil refinery there. Of course in the news report they bombed but no damage was done. They only blew the whole thing apart that's all! They came back a couple of times after that but nothing very serious. The Italians I think made better lovers than fighters!

That's a good

27:00 **summary of your opinion of the Italians! So where were you sent to from Palestine?**

After the unit was guarding the canal and doing all these kinds of things, eventually time was progressing and around about September or October they were sent over

27:30 to Egypt. Before we first came there The Australians were put into Palestine and the New Zealanders were put into Egypt. The Egyptian Government didn't want the Australians because they played up so much in the First War. Eventually we went over there in any case and the British army just exercised their control, and we went to a place outside of Cairo called Helwan.

28:00 By this time we had another new CO and eventually we got 25 pounder guns, and we were training, and eventually we went up to Alexandria. By this time it was around about December '40 and the Eyties had been attacking the British, and

28:30 the British army were fighting them. One of the signals of the Coldstream Guard's sent back to Headquarters was, "We have acres of prisoners," so many acres of officer prisoners and so many acres of RR prisoners. They had that many they couldn't count them all. They relieved the British unit and sent them down to Abyssinia, the British Indian Division I think, and

29:00 the Australians were sent there. Then of course General Wilson was asked about troops available, "Oh we've only got colonials! That's all we've got left." He didn't have a very high opinion of the Australians but that expression of his went right the way through from the time we went to Greece and everything else.

29:30 **Did you actually see any action in Tobruk or Bardia?**

What happened was that Bardia was virtually the first place the Australians fought in, the 16th Brigade and the 17th Brigade later on but that's how it happened,

30:00 and the attack on Bardia happened in January, about the 14th of January 1941. The Australians captured Bardia and then later went on to Tobruk, and everywhere else but we didn't have a great deal of equipment, not that they didn't want to give it to us. They didn't have it to give to us because when you

30:30 think back on the war Britain had been disbanding their regular army, because of the Depression, and no money. Germany and Italy were building theirs up. It was the same with Australia. We didn't have much equipment. If it hadn't have been for the Italian food, petrol, trucks and everything else, I don't think we could have carried on

31:00 as well as we did. They were using the Italian's guns and using their trucks. They had enormous big

trucks. We'd never seen trucks in Australia as they had, these big long things. They could fit about three railway sleepers end to end on them. That's how big the trucks were.

So did this lack of equipment before you captured the Italian resources prevent you from seeing

31:30 **action in Tobruk and Bardia?**

No. We got what they classified as our 'war establishment' but after all the trip through all the desert – see between Mersa Matruh and Bardia is about 500 miles of desert and stuff gets worn out, sand and everything else. We had a LAD section with us. That's a

32:00 light aid detachment of mechanical engineers and they used to maintain all our trucks. They had to improvise and luckily Australians were great improvisers of all the things that were necessary to be done, and through the determination of the infantry – we were artillery support then, and they did all the

32:30 work, and they captured it. The Italians, I don't think they wanted to fight because most of them in there were conscripts and they didn't want to be in it. Any Italians in Australia that went over there to Italy for a holiday, they were conscripted into the army. Some of them were singing out that they'd been in Melbourne or Sydney. Some fellas they even knew! So that's how it was.

We heard of one fellow

33:00 **who actually captured his brother! So, "Hi!" How many Italians did you actually capture?**

In the end I think it was 125,000 and they were surrendering long beforehand. The ordinary Italian soldier wasn't very well dressed or equipped as far as their own personal equipment was concerned but the officers, a lot of them were just damn dandies and they used to use perfume, and God knows

33:30 what. Of course they had lots of good food, good quality tinned food and grog, and of course they soon got into it.

You mentioned the term dandy. Could you explain that?

Well, that was an expression I think in the old Australian vocabulary of more of an effeminate type of person.

Like are

34:00 **you insinuating homosexuality?**

No not that at all, but they way they were sort of 'la de da de'. We were a bit more down to earth than they were.

No perfume amongst your guys!

No definitely not!

You mentioned that you supplemented your lack of resources with Italian equipment that you were able to capture. What kind

34:30 **of equipment were you able to gain from the Italians?**

We gained everything. We gained petrol, food, oil, guns, like we used a lot of their Beretta machine guns but we were supposed to hand it all in and eventually it was handed in, but some of it got over to Greece, and was used for good effect over there.

What sort of things?

Well, they

35:00 had these Beretta machine guns. We never had enough. You can never have enough of good things because we had Bren guns and things like that but when you think back we didn't have the supplies. They couldn't make them and of course the British army by early in the war were in France, and they lost all their equipment there when they had to evacuate from France.

35:30 Equipment was at a premium.

What about what you were doing as part of Ack Ack at this time? What was your role within that section?

I was just in headquarters that's all.

What did that entail?

General running of the place and seeing everything works.

36:00 **So was it more of an administrative role?**

Yes.

In terms of like – you mentioned organising things but what was there to organise?

Well you had to organise troop movements and supplies, and everything else like that.

Because I imagine that must have been quite a logistical – ?

Look at it this way. When you see

36:30 a unit of quite a few hundred men and everything has to be done for them, like I didn't have to organise any food. That was the quartermaster's department but everything had to be found, organised, meals had to be prepared. They had cooks to do that and they had different organization. It was set to a timetable

37:00 and everything was done by organised times. If you bathed at a certain time you did it every day. If you had your meals at a certain time you did it every day the same. You knew where you were. There wasn't any hop scotch around the place. It was all done to a timetable.

Now what about other sort of larger Italian equipment?

37:30 **Were you able to capture any tanks?**

Oh God yes! They captured tanks, brand new ones at times a lot of them. The 60th Cav [Cavalry] Regiment, that was their name, 60th Cav but they operated Bren gun carriers and tanks, and they were brand new tanks, and they just painted a kangaroo on the outside them, and they used them that way. They came across brand new trucks and God knows what. Eventually it

38:00 all had to go back to the stores but as I said before, we needed all that equipment. We would have got on without it but still, it made it ever so much easier.

Was there any souveniring of other smaller more personal items from the Italians?

38:30 There were instructions issued out that we weren't to take their watches or anything at all like that but they did take revolvers and things like that. Most of it, the fellas that did have revolvers, eventually they had to hand them in. They forced them to hand them in. At one stage the regiment was at a place called Bakri and

39:00 we were advancing on that, and the regiment actually captured Bakri. It's unheard of for an artillery unit to actually capture a place but it was easy enough. All the civilians and everything else were still in the place and they fired one shot over the town, and they fired one before the town, and they dropped one in the middle, and they all surrendered. At the bank there they were just preparing the army pay for the Italians and

39:30 they cleared out leaving the bank open, and the vault open, and some of the fellas got heaps of money out of the place. They weren't supposed to but eventually they did. It got hidden away, so they were getting away with sandbags full of Italian Lire. They were lighting cigarettes with it and everything else. They were big noting themselves like in the American movies. You see them lighting up a cigar with a big note sort of thing. These blokes were doing the same.

What the note was wrapped around?

No.

40:00 They'd strike a match and hold it up to the Lire note, it might be 5,000 or 2,000, and light the cigarette with it sort of business. Some did keep some of the money. They weren't supposed to but some did.

Tape 4

00:40 **So Os, you were just about to tell us about a fella who got caught.**

At Bakri everyone was getting money left, right and centre. Anyway, we lost about 12 fellas, captured as prisoners of war to the Italians.

01:00 I know one friend of mine, he was captured there and then he had a lot of Italian money inside his socks. When the Italians searched him they didn't search in his socks and he was a prisoner of war – he got captured outside of Derna, so that's between January and February.

01:30 He spent the rest of the war as a prisoner of war and for over two years the money he had in his socks kept him supplied with extras in the camp, in the prisoner of war camp.

Lucky! What was your attitude towards the Italians as an enemy?

Well,

02:00 they weren't much chop. They were doing the surrendering without us asking them to surrender. The infantry fellas would fire onto some place and suddenly a white flag would go up, and about 20 or 30 would pop out of hole, and well and truly outnumber the number of Australians that were attacking them. One of our forward observation officers was

02:30 out in a Bren gun carrier. His name was Norman Vickery. The sergeant driving the carrier – the tractor belonged to the British army and we had two of our fellas in there. One was what was called an ack, an ack and the other one was a signaller. This carrier came up the back of these Italians, a field unit

03:00 with about six guns and quite a few troops. There were almost about 1,000 troops there and they took the surrender of all those. Norm Vickery was eventually awarded an MC [Military Cross] and the sergeant in the carrier was given an MM [Military Medal]. The two poor old Australian gunners got nothing.

03:30 Anyway, that's how it went on but to me for six field guns in the crew all with ammunition and a lot of troops, to turn around, and surrender to one lousy little Bren gun carrier, that just shows you what they were really like.

What was your attitude towards the British CO? Was it Wilson?

Wilson was the General in charge.

04:00 He didn't think much of Australians. He termed us as just being old colonials and later on, further on in the war when Benghazi got captured – Australia captured Benghazi, and that was one of the good quality towns in the Libyan empire. They used to grow a lot of

04:30 gardens, vegetables and things like that, crops and stuff in the place. The Italian troops themselves rioted and cleaned up what they could. Then the Italian people looted what was left over and then the Arabs got in there beforehand, the Libyan Arabs, and they looted the stuff.

05:00 Eventually when the Australians moved in to occupy, to take over the place, the Australians got blamed for looting. The Poms maintained that it was the Australian troops who did all the looting and it wasn't. Eventually after much trouble they agreed that it wasn't.

We just had a technical difficulty. Could you continue on with the story, the denial of the looting?

05:30 Eventually the British MPs [military police] came up to investigate and everything else but they eventually accepted that the Australians didn't do it, but they reluctantly did it. There was another incident up where some senior British Officers and I mean senior brigadiers, concocted a story that the Australian troops had assaulted him and his wife,

06:00 and took the wife's wedding ring off, and everything else. There were great protests about that but eventually it turned out that it was just a furphy story made up by the British to sort of put us in bad light.

So that must have affected the relationship between the British and the Australians?

Mainly by the British officers who were a different class all together than the British soldier.

06:30 They thought their poop didn't stink sort of business. That's how it virtually was.

How much did you observe the difference in the British class system and the way that the Australians worked?

They were definitely on a class system. In fact their officers were not allowed by

07:00 their own rules and regulations to associate with anybody. In fact at one stage in the early part of the war when a unit was doing ack ack around Taufiq, one of our officers and two or three of our fellas were in a café drinking together, socialising together, and the British MPs came in, and wanted to know who they were, and demanded the officer prove that he was an

07:30 officer, and took his name and number, and everything else. Eventually he got reported. They were going to report him and it eventually got reported back to the unit that he'd been there but we don't have that rule or regulation. It wasn't anyway. I don't know whether it has been altered since but we don't have that thing in our Army. The officers can associate with the men and that's how it goes. They run in a different way all together.

08:00 But I think you'll find the story I'm telling you about the looting thing and the other British officers, I think you'll find it in the official history book.

What about your opinion of General Blamey?

Very good. If it hadn't have been for General Blamey – after we were over in the Western desert,

08:30 Churchill wanted to send troops to help Greece. One minute it was on. The next minute it wasn't on. What happened that changed about it was the fact that the Prime Minister in charge of Greece died and

that altered the situation all round. Churchill was always talking about the soft underbelly of

09:00 the Balkans. All right now he promised to send to Greece three divisions of Australians, two armoured divisions of English, and a Polish Brigade, and some aeroplanes. Well they sent over 40 earlier in the piece. It might have been February, March when it was. They were up against the

09:30 Germans with 700 planes, so it didn't last long. They never had the shipping facilities to send the troops to Greece. We went over in bits and pieces. They started to send them in March and they were still sending the same part of the 60th Australians in April.

10:00 The first troops went over in war ships as sort of deck cargo type of thing. They never had the shipping to do it. Britain was fighting the world against everybody or against the well organised Germans and the Italians, although the Italians had already attacked Greece, and were going helter skelter through Albania.

10:30 Eventually the Greeks tossed them back and the Italians had to retreat, and that's when Germany decided to send their troops into Yugoslavia and Greece. All up there were about 26 divisions of Germans in against the Greek Army, when the Greek Army were very poorly equipped. They were worse than what

11:00 we ever were and their transport was mainly by mules. Their field commander – I've forgotten his name. I know it starts with a T, he'd made a secret peace with the Germans on the understanding that he would surrender the Greek army as long as he got made Military Governor of Athens. Unbeknown to the commander and chief of the Greeks, he did it. All

11:30 the Germans did was take their arms and let them go. Of course that's when the big withdrawal of the Australians, the British and the New Zealanders happened.

Before we go into more detail about Greece, if we could just go back to your time. I believe that you went on some leave to Cairo at one point?

That was after.

Oh that was after was it? That was after

12:00 **Greece?**

[nods]

Oh Ok, we'll talk about that after Greece. What do you recall of your own personal journey to Greece?

We went away on a ship called the Pentland. All right, before we got to Athens they'd had a big air raid and there was a ship full of Amatol, and it blew up, and destroyed all the wharves in Piraeus

12:30 and devastated everything else. Eventually when we arrived there, there was no wharf to get off on and we had some nurses onboard as well. They took them off and then that night we moved out, and circled around in the dark, and came in the next day to take us off. We went ashore in

13:00 the ship's lifeboats and small launches that came from the harbour side to take us off. We eventually landed in there and we went to a place called Daphni – that's the anglicised name of it – I think it's Glyfera or something like that – to this camp. We were there and we got a welcoming committee of an air raid

13:30 by the German Dornier planes.

Could you describe the air raid?

It was just a couple of bombs and shooting up sort of thing.

I've actually never been in an air raid. Could you talk us through and describe what happened, what took place?

They just attacked us in the area we

14:00 were in. We were in a spot, which was sort of a bay between us and the mainland, and at that stage the aircraft factory I think it was, they were still connected by phone to Germany, and yet Germany was attacking us. It seemed a bit funny. Anyway, these Dornier planes

14:30 came in and attacked, and dropped bombs, and machine guns with fair sized bullets. Luckily I wasn't a recipient of it. There was a fella lying on the ground with his head up against a tree and one of these large bullets hit the tree about an inch above his head. He was lucky he didn't get killed with that but anyway the raids were there and that's the way it went. We decided that

15:00 half the regiment could go – incidentally the regiment at that time didn't consist of the full regiment. It was only RHQ [regimental headquarters], 1st Battery, 60th Section attached and the LAD attached. That was the first part because they couldn't put it all on the one ship to take us over. Our guns had

already gone by transport beforehand. Anyway, they decided we could have half of the

15:30 morning leave and half in the night leave. So I went with the afternoon leave and we went into Athens itself. Whilst we were there during the night there was an air raid and things like that. It was about the only part in the world where we made a profit in our money because the Drachma was worth about fourpence ha'penny to a Drachma and we were getting 512 [to the]

16:00 pound, so we were well and truly in front. Of course we went on leave and went in a café, and were looking around the place, and sightseeing, and everything else.

Where was that at?

That was in Athens.

Could you describe Athens as you remember it?

I can't remember much about it. I know I went to a tourist place there to get a map because I didn't think we were only going to be there for a few days. I got a map of the whole area

16:30 for future reference for sightseeing and things like that. Well it came in handy later on that map and we went around, looking around the place, and seeing the Acropolis, all the ruins around there. It didn't interest me very much because it was old broken down stones sort of things. It had a lot of historical significance but it didn't make much impression on me anyway.

17:00 Anyway, the night kept dragging on and we were over enjoying ourselves, and there was one sergeant, he used to work on the radio. He was a radio announcer in those days but he had a very deep pocket and very short arms, and he used to penny on looking for something all the time from somebody else. A friend of mine,

17:30 Leo Shorty and myself, we set him up with the restaurant to pay for the whole bill for the whole place. It wouldn't have cost him much but we sort of got something back on him anyway. The air raid was going on and we were supposed to have been back in the camp before midnight, the old expression 23:59 [hours]. That's when your leave pass is up, one minute to midnight. Anyway, we were out enjoying ourselves, so we had no

18:00 way of getting back to camp. So Leo Shorty and myself, we pinched a police motorbike and sidecar, and drove back to camp but we didn't get back there until about five o'clock in the morning. Of course by this time we were supposed to have our tin hat and respirator, and that, and the adjutant spots me. We dumped the bike beforehand to get into the camp. I thought, "Oh I'll be in trouble." So I pretended that

18:30 air raid annoyed me and I was frightened about the air raid but it was only sort of a cover up to the thing. He said, "Sergeant, we're moving out at six am. Pack up!" I said, "All right! Good!" So I didn't have to worry about it. Anyway, we packed up and we moved out – what other gear we couldn't take with us, only a side haversack and stuff, had to be sent away to stores.

19:00 **What did you pack?**

I had a kit bag and I lost that but all the other things I had, and that was finished.

What was in your bag that you took?

Just eating utensils and shaving gear, and things like that, a towel. It wasn't a great deal but anyway we went down to Athens Railway Yards

19:30 wherever it was and we were lined up to get in these trucks. There was a carriage on the train for the officers and all the other ranks, warrant officers and sergeants had to be 40 to a truck, these cattle trucks. You're in there and you sit down, and put your legs over somebody else's shoulder, and you were sitting like that. When you wanted to go to the toilet, you said, "Move up!" And you had to move up

20:00 to the open door sort of business. Anyway we were on the train for a couple of days.

So you just opened the door?

Yes out the door.

Did your business out the door?

Anyway, it was fantastic country up around but their railway system is only a sort of narrow gated thing, and we'd go up through these different mountains, and we got attacked by

20:30 Dornier, Stuka dive bombers and stuff. We had spaced in between the carriages, an open truck with anti-aircraft Hoskins guns in it, machine guns. Anyway, it got too much for the Greek crew. They just jumped off and disappeared.

Why did it get too much for them?

The bombing and that got too much for them.

So this is while you were

21:00 **still on the train?**

Yes.

So during this train journey there was also a lot of bombing and attacking going on?

Oh yes attacking. The Germans had complete control of the sky and their dive bombers, the Stukas, well they have screamers on their bombs to terrify the troops, and they do do it. Anyway, that's how it happened but eventually we got where we went.

21:30 **What do the screamers sound like?**

A terrifying scream and the air circulates, and makes it worse, and the scream, you can hear the bomb coming down, and you'd swear it was going to land on top of you.

You mentioned that these screamers did terrify people. How would that emotion be shown?

Well you had to contain yourself

22:00 It was all up to yourself as to what you did.

Was there ever anyone who couldn't contain themselves?

You didn't notice. You were too busy looking after yourself to worry about others but it did happen.

Did you see it happen?

Mmm.

What did you see?

They just went mad and things like that.

How would they go mad?

22:30 The nerves get away from them. It did happen. I'm lucky it didn't happen to me but it did happen to others.

Was it an introverted reaction or an extroverted going mad?

I couldn't explain that but that's how – some disappeared, ran away, but eventually they got either killed or something like that. They were getting killed by these planes. It's not as if they were shaking hands with them.

23:00 **So this was while you were still on the train going along?**

Eventually we got up to a place called Larisa. At Larisa it wasn't long after that there was an ammunition train and they bombed him, destroyed the ammunition train, and blew the place around a fair bit. Then we were still looking

23:30 for our guns. We hadn't got our field guns at that stage and then the driver of the train disappeared. We ran out of water on the train. The engine ran out of water. We all had to line up with our water bottles and hand the water bottle in for them to pour into the tank of the engines. They intended to fill the water up because they needed water for the steam of the engine.

24:00 A couple of fellas out of the regiment ended up driving the train. Then we came across a train that had broken down and there were various people on the train that were packed into our train. Then we pulled into a station and the funny part about it, there was a woman standing on the platform there. She was very heavily pregnant and up on a chimney on top of the station was a

24:30 stork. We saw the humorous part of that of course! Then we were chasing around looking for food. We hadn't had any food for a couple of days and went looking for food. Eventually they drive the down and came to a spot. I think from memory it was somewhere around Dominicus or somewhere like that.

25:00 The adjutant and the IO [intelligence officer] went off looking for our guns, and they got a couple of donkeys, and they were riding these donkeys around looking for them. Eventually they found the guns and they located our trucks, and guns. So then we were united there with them. Then of course the Germans were well and truly attacking and

25:30 you can imagine. They had all the planes. They had tanks. They had everything.

So are you still on the train at this point or have you left the train?

When we got our guns and stuff we left the train.

That journey sounds like an incredible journey!

Oh it was! It was definitely an incredible journey.

I mean you're saying it in a very kind of a matter of fact way but in fact it sounds like it was quite traumatic and quite an epic journey?

26:00 **Looking back on it now how do you – ?**

I don't think about it but that's what happened.

How many men were lost and wounded during that train journey?

I couldn't tell you now. I've forgotten.

I gather there were quite a few?

You see, if you harp [complain] about what happened the day before it plays on your mind. You just forget about things. You don't remember.

26:30 You forget about it but then when we got our guns, all right we were well and truly – getting back to General Blamey. In the first place we shouldn't have gone to Greece. General Dill and Anthony Eden [British Prime Minister] spoke to Menzies, our Prime Minister, and said that

27:00 General Blamey had OK'd us to go to Greece. So he thought, "That's all right," and we go to Greece. They go to Blamey and tell him that Menzies had OK'd it. He hadn't and they were working the same thing on Blamey. Blamey reported it to Australia but we ended up going there and if it hadn't have been for General Blamey being in touch with Admiral Cunningham, who was in charge of the Mediterranean fleet,

27:30 we wouldn't have got off as well as we did. One of the first things that General Blamey did was to reconnoitre where it would be possible for Australian troops to be evacuated from in Greece. It was through his co-operation with Admiral Cunningham and vice versa that as many troops got off there as did. There was the New Zealand

28:00 Division there. There wasn't quite a full division of Australians and there was the British Armoured Division, the 7th Armoured Division there. It wasn't a full division of them either. That was all plus a lot of base troops and that's what, through Blamey and his forethought, happened. Now the British were trying to control

28:30 the fighting in Greece from Cairo, which was an impossible thing to do. It's like trying to run a race in Sydney and organise it form Perth! Then that's when they started – they reformed the ANZAC Corps in Greece and it was the one and only time during the Second World War that the ANZAC Corps was into being.

29:00 General Fryeburg with the New Zealanders, was the second in command. General Blamey was the commander and that's what happened. We in the 6th Division are the only troops who served in Greece and called ourselves Anzacs in the Second World War. In fact it took me a while to get it done but it's on the 6th Division banner. We were World War II Anzacs.

29:30 but anyway, getting back to up around Dominicus.

Was Dominicus after Larisa?

Oh yes after. It was on the way back.

So if you could just go back and say what you were doing at this particular time? That was a great background by the way to the whole Greek –

I don't know. I just sort of – they were

30:00 organising things and I had a list of people we couldn't account for. I was looking for them. I think there was 16 on the list.

What had happened to those men?

Don't know. They were captured or something, or killed but we never – we couldn't find them anyway.

I believe at one point you personally were attacked by the

30:30 **German aeroplanes?**

There was a spot there we called the Petrified Forest. We couldn't move in or out, couldn't do a blinkin' thing. We were near a railway track, a railway line. The German bombers came in to attack the train and the refugees that were on the train. These refugees were jumping out and running into paddocks, and they were machine gunning them,

31:00 and really doing them over sort of business. Our CO said to us, "Don't fire on them. They mightn't see us." Well in those days we had very little experience of being up in aeroplanes. Of course that was sort of unheard of as far as planes were concerned.

31:30 Anyway, these planes flew around and we had our Bren guns mounted up for ack ack defence of the

unit. We could have got some of them they were that low. They were just above the treetops, couldn't see us? Next thing we know around they came, a fresh lot of bombers and then they did us over, and we couldn't move one way or the other. That's why we ended up calling it the Petrified Forest. They did a lot of damage to us, our equipment and everything

32:00 else. Eventually we were able to get away and in Greece the roads seem to run in a straight line between the mountains. You'd leave this spot and then next thing it's a straight road to the next mountain. Of course you had to run the gauntlet of getting from one spot to the other without the planes coming in and there seemed to be a never-ending supply of them.

32:30 Anyway, we got heavily bombed again. I think – I can't remember the places now but luckily for my a bomb landed a few feet away from me, blew me up in the air higher than the treetops and I came flop on my back. I didn't actually get any metal from the bomb or anything but I damaged all my vertebrae. In fact most of them have disintegrated in my back.

33:00 I have great difficult in movement as a result but other fellas got metal in them. There was on particular sergeant Bert Stickles, he got some in and he was all the time saying about his wounds sort of business. We had one fella in our regiment that used to give everybody nicknames and he called him Glass Shirt. Bert Stickles, he eventually got a commission. They put him into the Second 1st

33:30 Battalion but that's how it went. You were just lucky you didn't get anything and these bombs were landing all around, and I'm saying to myself, "I'm going back to Australia! I'm going back to Australia!" I couldn't get into the earth quick enough. My nose was in a hole in the ground sort of thing.

Were you unconscious?

I got knocked unconscious after the bomb thing but I eventually came to and if you didn't come to, you'd be left behind sometimes. I got in the back of a truck. I was still a bit

34:00 silly and dazey but I didn't report it, and eventually to the next spot, and eventually that map that I bought came in very handy as far as the roads were concerned because I gave it to the adjutant, who was plotting out where we were going. The Germans were landing troops dressed in British army uniforms as MPs and directing people down dead ends, and all this kind of

34:30 business. There was a lot of fifth column going on. The Greeks sort of weren't united against the Germans. There were two lots, for and against, and they'd put out your signal wires of communication. They were cutting them behind you and all kinds of things. We eventually – down through the Corinth Canal and the

35:00 Germans were landing paratroopers behind us and trying to block us off of course. We eventually got down through the Corinth Canal, down into our departure place, was Kalamata. That's where all the Kalamata olives come from. Well we got down there and we had to sit on a beach waiting for the

35:30 destroyers to come in for picking us up. We were just sitting there on the beach and the next thing I notice, one of the sergeants out of the 2/3rd Battalion, his name was Bill Jenkins, he was a corporal in charge of a standing patrol. A standing patrol? He was marching through and he got ahead of all the rest of our troops. The destroyers had come in to pick us up. He marched his squad onto the destroyer. It was the Hero as a matter of fact and that was the destroyer I eventually got off

36:00 on. I'm standing on the deck there and I'm standing alongside the CO, and he saw the rest of the troops couldn't get off, so he walked off. A couple of officers had big valises. They had enormous big bed rolls. The sailors said, "That would make room for two or three men!" They just kicked them into the water. Colonel Harlock, who was our new CO. He was a permanent staff corps

36:30 man and more valuable than a gunner but he turned around, and walked off. He'd have been better off if he'd have stayed with the troops but during these air raids and stuff, we all used to have to dig our own slit trench. On one of these particular raids we were getting heavily bombed and everything else. The 2IC [second in command] jumped into one of the

37:00 slit trenches of the sergeant cook, Frank Hay. He's standing on the edge of the side of the slit trench abusing Flash Alf. Alf Young was his name. He was a major at this time and they used to call him Flash Alf, and he wouldn't get out. Frank Hay was mouthing off like nobody's business to him. Anyway, eventually

37:30 Frank Hay gets away. Alf Young gets away as well. They took us to a ship called the Dilwara. We got off in the dark and daylight comes along. Next thing we know, we're attacked by Stuka dive bombers. They never let us alone and they sunk one of the ship, the Costa Rica. Our ship,

38:00 steel plates were peeling off the side of the ship and you could see the water. One of the signal sergeants, Dick Love, we had the 60th Signal Section attached to us, he'd bought a bottle of Daphni. He was going to keep this bottle of Daphni for a grim moment. The plates were peeling off the ship and we could see water, and he went "Wooooah." He drank the full bottle in one go!

38:30 Anyway, luckily for us we eventually got to Alexandria and away we went back to Palestine again.

Just going back to Colonel Harlock for a second, why is it that he left the ship?

He left the ship because most of the regiment couldn't get on and he went back to be in charge of them. As a matter of fact, he ended up

39:00 leading an attack on the Germans after we'd left Kalamata and after a day's fighting there where they captured some German guns, eventually they got overwhelmed and captured. The Germans said to various people, "If

39:30 you don't behave yourselves we'll shoot your CO." They eventually rounded them up and they marched them to Kalamata to put them on trains. They weren't very well looked after and they were ill-treated, and everything else but they eventually got them back into prison camps. But they did ill-treat them.

So Harlock

40:00 **left the ship to make room for other troops?**

No, he wanted to be in command of the rest of the regiment that couldn't get onboard because he was the CO but not like in Malaya, where Bennett flew the troops and left. He was more valuable to our army than being a prisoner. All he did was make room for one person.

Tape 5

00:33 **Ossie of course you were mentioned in despatches both in the Middle East and in Greece. Can you just tell me what the actions were or the citations were for those mentions in despatches?**

It's leadership and behaviour probably. One that I didn't get that

01:00 I was recommended for in Greece was the fact of during an air raid some of the bombs landed near a gun in its trailer. In the trailer they carry the ammunition and the ammunition was exploding, and there was a possibility of that doing damage to the gun. So went to it and attempted to unhook the gun from the trailer whilst this ammunition was going off, and everything else. The gun was very important. This was

01:30 before we knew we were going to leave the country. Anyway, that happened.

Could you more specifically describe to me what happened there?

Well, the ammunition was going off and it could have damaged the gun, and I attempted to unhook the gun from the trailer because of the exploding ammunition. It could have done damage and there was vehicles near it.

02:00 **To what extent was the ammunition exploding at the time?**

It was all the 25 pounder ammunition that was in the trailer, which the trailer carries the ammunition and shells to be fired. The shell comes separately from the cartridge, which has all the cordite in it.

Were there any explosions at the time that you were unhooking it?

Yes it was going off.

What ran through your mind on that occasion?

Nothing,

02:30 only to sort of – the gun had to be preserved.

You say that the first two lots of mentions in despatches were for leadership?

I can tell you exactly if you want to know.

I'd like to actually. Oh you've got the document there.

03:00 "In recognition of distinguished service in the Middle East during period of February '41 to July '41." That was recommended by the adjutant, Captain J S Anderson and the CO, and the second one I got recommended for was, "In recognition of distinguished service in Greece April '41 during

03:30 a very heavy air raid he did uncouple a gun member full of exploding ammunition from a 25 pounder." That was the other one and then up in New Guinea I got recommended for an MBE [Member of the British Empire] for – the thing says, "Member of the British Empire; Warrant Officer Class One, O J Pearce, is recommended for the award in recognition of his

04:00 distinguished service and part played in helping to defeat the enemy of Japan during two years he served in New Guinea."

Excellent! Well we'll come to the New Guinea action later. If I can just hold on to this now and

just refer to it. So in relation to the Middle East, "in recognition of distinguished service," now what specific aspect were they referring to there?

The whole time, the period I was there.

04:30 I seemed to have been doing a little bit better than I should have been doing.

In what particular way?

Oh I don't know. It was the way I – leadership and way of behaviour sort of business.

What makes a good leader do you think?

Well, one considers the application to his duty and the people behind him. He's leading them and they thought they should

05:00 do it for me, so that's what happened.

If you were to look at your abilities as a leader, what do you think your main strengths as a leader were at that time?

I don't know. I've always thought that things should be done properly and to the best of the ability we can do it. I've always followed that throughout my business and in business I was very successful after the war but it's

05:30 only application to the fine details, and seeing that everything was carried out.

Does courage come into this as well?

Oh I don't know about that part of it. Everyone has got courage. Sometimes it comes out and sometimes it doesn't.

Were there any particular leaders that you admired that you perhaps modelled yourself upon?

I can't say that there are.

06:00 You see you take everything for granted. Whatever they do you expect them to do it. It's not as if they are doing anything extraordinary. Some fellas did, like in New Guinea they got up trees and got shot at but you mainly found up in New Guinea it wasn't the ordinary soldier that got the recognition. The

06:30 officers got it.

But if you were looking at the sort of leadership that you were exercising in the Middle East, what do you think was noteworthy about your leadership, which obviously earned you the mentions in despatches?

The fact that I applied myself to the job and I was always there to do the job. It wasn't as if I was away absent anywhere. Whatever had to be done was done and I knew what

07:00 I had to do, I did it.

Were those awards given to you at the time?

Not straight away it wasn't. They came out later on.

When did you first learn about them?

The one I got for the Middle East, the mention in despatches, I got that when we were in Ceylon in 1942. It took a while but it was promulgated in England, in

07:30 the official gazettes there.

So as a sergeant how many men did you have under you?

Well it wasn't actually the number of men under me but the fact that the job I was doing, it happened to be at RHQ and that particular job – all right, I didn't have to do any guard duty or any fatigues, or anything like that but I had to be there to see that all

08:00 the administrative work was done. It didn't matter whether it was 24 hours a day or 10 hours a day but it had to be done and the army doesn't operate on a weekly or daily basis. It operates on 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

So clearly it was your eye for detail that was something – ?

And the fact that I displayed leadership during action and firing, and bombing, and thing like that, that I

08:30 made myself prominent, not hiding behind the gunner or tree, or whatever it might be.

Which do you think was your most prominent moment in that regard?

I can't say I've got any prominent moments.

I think you're being very modest about it actually!

Oh – but that's how it happened.

I mean these decorations aren't given lightly, so clearly you had people observing

09:00 **your actions that felt that you well deserved these awards.**

Well the adjutant, who was a permanent army officer, who later became a major general, thought so. After we got back from Greece, we got back to a place called Khassa and we didn't have all of our full kits, and everything else, and all of the regiment had their kit bags in Alexandria kit store.

09:30 So they decided to send somebody over to Alexandria. So in recognition of behaving ourselves this fella called Ron Allpress, was a W02 [warrant officer, second class] and myself, and another chap, the driver of the truck was Fife Donald, we were given the job of going over to Alexandria, carte blanche, no particular time to come back or go, and everything else.

10:00 We were supplied with food and rations, and everything else before we left, and also money for subsistence, if we needed accommodation anywhere, which we did, and we took it liberally. We went to Cairo first and had a look around Cairo. We decided to go down to the Berka and have a look at the Berka from the First War. It was out of bounds and you weren't supposed to go there. We

10:30 were trooping around looking at everything and next thing we know the gyppo police have got a shotgun at each of our backs, and marched us off to the police station, where we were interviewed by the plain clothes British police, military police. Eventually after we were there a few hours and you could hear all these screaming Egyptians in the cells in the cells singing out, and the desk sergeant said to somebody else in the thing to keep them quiet.

11:00 Of course it was a bit cold at the time and they opened up the cell doors, and they had mats, coiled mats on the floor, and they pulled all that out, and threw buckets of water over them, and they kept quiet after that. So after that we left there.

Just hold on, before we leave there you said you weren't supposed to go into the Berka?

No. It was out of bounds.

Why was it out of bounds?

Oh from the First War. There was a terrific amount of trouble there from the 1st AIF with the Berka.

11:30 **What had the 1st AIF done there?**

They caused riots and everything. I think there was brothels and God knows what in the place. They kicked up a lot of fuss and the First War fellows behaved so badly over in Egypt we weren't actually welcome there when we first went there. We weren't supposed to go to Egypt but the war turned out that we went there.

So when you went to the police station how did they interrogate you?

12:00 They wanted to know what we were doing and that. We just said we were sightseeing. They didn't believe us but still and then the next thing we were kept there until the British plain clothes military police came to interview us, and ask us what we were doing there. We just said we were sticky beaking [spectating].

What did they fear that you were actually up to?

They thought we might be in there looking for prostitutes and stuff.

And so for how long were you actually kept there at the police station?

12:30 It seemed forever. It seemed for quite a few hours anyway but they eventually let us go, and they said, "We'll report this back to your unit." Eventually a report did come back but they tore it up.

Who tore it up?

I did!

Oh so you were the one to actually conveniently receive the report!

[nods]

That's extremely convenient!

Yes!

That's great! Talk about getting yourself out of trouble.

But then after that we went from there –

No actually we're missing a step here because

13:00 **I think you'd gone to Alexandria first hadn't you?**

No, no we went to Cairo first and then we looked around there, and outside of Cairo we were camped at Giza near the pyramids. We had a sticky beak in the pyramids and got up inside of one of them, walked up into this steep incline of stone. Half the time these great things, you had to stretch your legs to get over from one stone to the other. We got up in there and there was this long passage that carried us up into this room, and it

13:30 looked like a bath carved out of stone but there was no plughole type of thing. That's all we saw and it didn't interest us. We turned around and went back. We slept the night and then drove on to Alexandria the next day. Whilst we were out at Alexandria we went to the kit store. They said we can't go through the place and said, "Anyway we had an air raid last night and most of it has been destroyed."

So most of the equipment you had gone to pick up had been destroyed?

The kit bags, yes.

So what happened

14:00 **then?**

The said come back, so we went back in a few days time and they were still looking, and anyway, come back again later. We were enjoying ourselves and going to nightclubs, and everything else around the place, and we were having a good time.

What sort of nightclubs were you going to?

There's heaps of them over there. There's dancing or belly dancing, things like that going on in the place

14:30 and of course the usual food and grog, more grog than food! Eventually, as I say we got three kit bags after all that time and we took the long way back to come home. We went down to Port Taufiq and up the other side of the canal, up into Palestine. We eventually got back to the regiment with three bags!

What did the three bags contain?

They were three kit bags belonging to different soldiers,

15:00 their clothing. That was all that was there. That's all we got.

Belonged to different soldiers?

Well out of the regiment. You see, you have your own kit bag, a long cylindrical bag in which you put your spare clothing and things in, and personal possessions, and stuff like that, which you weren't allowed to take with you, and that's all we got.

So these kit bags were your property?

They weren't mine. They were three of the fellas out of the regiment. We had a list of all those that had kits in there.

15:30 **While you were in Cairo and Alexandria did you take a sticky beak at the brothel district at all?**

Only when we went down to this Berka place there. They did have brothels over there but you didn't have to go there unless you wanted to.

Do you know if any of your men went to places like that?

A lot of blokes did and they used to – I think they call it prophylactic places. I don't know the

16:00 full proper name of it. They could give them after treatment in case they might have got VD [venereal disease] but they did have a special VD hospital over in the Middle East. Eventually our regional regimental medical officer became the CO of it. Later on in practice here in Sydney he was a skin specialist.

Do you know if many of your men or many of the men

16:30 **in your company, or your unit actually got some sexually transmitted diseases?**

I don't think they got any but you see VD is looked upon as a self-inflicted wound in the army and anybody who got it immediately lost their pay, and it was put on their record. The army seemed to make a real thing about it because that VD question pops up on all army documents, "Did you or did you not have VD?" It doesn't

17:00 matter what sort of army document you're filling in, they always ask the same question.

Sounds like it would stand out like a red light!

It did and if they got it, well you got no pay. They stopped the whole lot and then from then onwards you

were a marked man but fortunately I don't recall anybody in our unit having it or getting it.

So what do you mean by 'you're a marked man'?

You've had it,

17:30 had the VD and every question they ever asked it was always put down that you had VD.

And the pay was stopped for how long?

All the time until you were back on duty again. You could have been in hospital for six months and you didn't get anything.

Can you describe the brothels that you saw in the Berka district?

In the Berka district that was in the First War and we only went down there to sticky beak to see what was

18:00 going on sort of thing.

So what did you actually see when you were in there?

Just dirty old squalid looking houses and the buildings, and sorts of things like that but it wasn't – we only went there to say we had been there, you know? There wasn't anything outstanding about it.

So you've now returned to the regiment with the kit bags, what happened next?

We just got on and carried on with the thing. We reported in

18:30 and had three kit bags. It was a bit of a joke really!

I believe part of the 6th Division was sent to fight the Vichy French?

What happened was we still had a battery of guns of the 2nd Battery that didn't go to Greece and they eventually came back over to Khassa to rejoin our regiment, and we had 12 guns there. Then we were supposed to go to

19:00 Syria to fight the Vichy French. We had advanced parties up there and the Second 3rd Battalion, and the 2/5th Battalion I think it was or 6th Battalion, went up to Syria as well. They called for volunteers that knew anything about skiing. They formed a ski patrol up there in the snow. After all this preparation and what

19:30 not they decided to send the 7th Div up there instead of the 6th Div, and we in turn had to hand over our guns, and equipment to the Second 5th Field Regiment.

So did you yourself actually go with the 6th up to Syria?

No. We lost all our equipment to the 2nd Field Regiment out of 7th Div and we were a bit annoyed about it. I was telling you how much equipment we didn't have, the fact we had to hand our guns over to somebody else to use, to fight!

20:00 That was the unit that Cutler got a VC for up in Syria. He was recommended for an MC up in Syria. Somewhere along the line somehow it was altered to VC and to be recommended for a VC you had to be sighted by so many officers. So I can't see how he could have been sighted by so many

20:30 officers and being an FOO [forward observation officer], that's a forward observation officer and get the VC.

That's very interesting. I hadn't heard that perspective before.

Well I might be cynical. I don't know but that's exactly what happened. He stayed there. He got wounded there and somebody else got wounded as well. They were in a lot of fire. The Vichy French were – it was a very vicious campaign

21:00 and they had the Foreign Legion against them as well.

So you didn't go up there?

I didn't go up there.

I believe in the meantime you'd met a woman who became your girlfriend?

Oh that was back – we were back in Khassa. They had a hockey game and I could play hockey, we were playing in a team to play against the team from Palestine,

21:30 and the game was up at Petka Tifka. Anyway, after the game – we had to play in our army boots. We never had any nice soft shoes or anything to play in, and I had mine, I had to kick mine off because I kept slipping over. I was playing centre forward. Unfortunately for me my feet got bashed around a fair bit with the hockey sticks. After that we went from there to a restaurant up in Petatikfer.

22:00 One of the daughters – the people that owned the restaurant were Germans. They were German Jews. We were there and they had a daughter there, and I got talking to her, and got to be very friendly with her, and she used to communicate with me, write to me, and things like that, and vice versa. Any leave that I ever got I used to go up there but Petatikfer was a

22:30 funny place. You had to carry side arms.

Why was that?

Because of the riots and troubles that used to go on up there.

Did you ever see any riots or troubles?

Yes.

You did? What sort of things did you see?

I saw a big riot in Jerusalem at one stage. People were rioting in the street and what used to happen, the police would come along with a tin hat, and a long pick handle

23:00 type of thing with lead down the centre, and a Roman type of shield, a round thing. They'd charge these rioters. They'd bash them over the head with these long sticks and stuff like that. If it got out of control the next thing the army used to come up. The Black Watch was the unit that was stationed in Jerusalem. They'd come up with fixed bayonets, a troops each side of the footpath and anybody that stepped over the footpath, they'd stick them.

23:30 **Did you see anyone being stuck?**

Yes.

Where would they get stuck?

'Spttt!', just like that.

Straight through the heart?

They wouldn't stick them in the heart but they'd stick them in the body.

What would happen to them after that?

They'd leave them there and the civil ambulances would come along later on, and pick them up.

That's a pretty hard line.

Mmm, but that's what went on. But there was a lot of riots going on in Palestine. Before we got there, there was a hell of a lot of trouble with the –

24:00 1936 onwards. In fact it got so bad that the British ended up bringing out a medal for service in there and they used to have what they called Police Forts. They'd have these great big built Police Forts within visual contact of one another because the communications in those days were not as advanced as they are today, and they could signal one another with a lamp. That's what went on. I don't know whether they're still there or not now.

24:30 Anyway, in Petatikfer there used to be a lot of unrest, Jews fighting the Arabs. That was going on then and it is still going on.

Remarkable that it's been happening for hundreds if not thousands of years.

It started in 1926 when the Zionist Movement moved into Palestine and it has been going on ever since. The trouble there today is that Jews fought the Arabs in 1967 and took all the land from them,

25:00 and that's the trouble. They won't give it back even now. When the Jews fought the Egyptians in the Trans-Jordanian and the Syrians, they gave back to Egypt because all they took off them was sand, so they got it back easily but the best parts of Palestine, the Israelis are still hanging onto it. They won't give it back and America

25:30 sponsors Israel. It's a sight actually as a fort virtually. They supply them with money, billions all the years and every year they get all the latest equipment.

Now to get back to Petatikfer and the girl that you met there, what can you tell us about that girl and her family?

They were German refugees from Germany. They were Jewish and I

26:00 was virtually keeping company with her until her father tapped me on the shoulder, and said, "Hannah has been promised to a good Jewish boy. Get lost." Even though I had that going on I still communicated. As a matter of fact, I received a letter from her a few days before we were to embark to come home, to leave Palestine and I couldn't communicate with her, and I never have since.

26:30 We weren't allowed to reply or leave the camp, or do anything about anything, in case it gives our

movements away.

So I get the impression you were rather keen on Hannah?

Oh yes, very keen!

What sort of future could you see?

I don't know. I don't think I was looking to the future. I was looking for the moment I think but we used to go to – the German Symphony Orchestra used to play in Tel Aviv, what was the German Symphony Orchestra, mainly made up of Jews.

27:00 We used to go to that and other entertainment.

What was it about Hannah that attracted you?

I don't know. I can't tell you now! She was young and girl. I was old and boy.

At one point you were supposed to go to Java weren't you?

Well as a matter of fact, we left Palestine down Suez. We go on the

27:30 ships there. We got on the Western Land I think it was and we had two cabin fulls of maps. We'd never had so many maps in our life. Of course maps were always a shortage and these maps were all Java, areas around there. Although the people thought we were going back to Australia, we weren't because Churchill had extracted a promise out of Curtin [Australian Prime Minister] or something to that's where we are going

28:00 to. The Orchades sailed the day before we did and that had a machine gun battalion on it, and they landed that machine gun battalion in Java, and then the Orchades withdrew out of the area, and hung about there. Then unfortunately for us or for the machine gun battalion, the Japanese captured them and they were all taken prisoners of war. The Orchades steamed off. We were about a day out of there and they turned

28:30 us around. They sent us back to Ceylon. We were in Ceylon about four or five months. We used to have to write home and say we were in the snow country, and it was stinking hot, and raining, and God knows what. It used to rain there every night at five o'clock.

What was the purpose for you remaining in Ceylon?

Well, we were training, jungle training. In fact

29:00 there was a lot of trouble even in Ceylon in those days. Even the Tamils were against the other mob. I think they're still having a go. Every shot that was fired we used to have to investigate, go through paddy fields and of course we were told elephantiasis is rampant here. It's from the worms in the paddy fields. So we were out on this

29:30 patrol one day and of course I wanted to go to the toilet. I dropped the tweeds and went to the toilet, and I looked around, all these worms! God! I was petrified. I couldn't get back to the RAP [regimental aid post] quick enough and they put me into hospital with worms, and of course all I could think about was elephantiasis. Anyway, that was it. They were string worms or some blinkin' silly thing.

How long did it take you to get over that?

I got

30:00 an attack of malaria in the hospital at the same time after that. When it was time to come out of hospital there was no vacancy in the convalescent camp, so they put me two weeks no duty back to the unit. I got back to the unit and the CO said, "How's your pay book?" I said, "It's all right." So he provided a truck for me and a driver to take me up to Detwala up in the mountains, and I stayed up there in a hotel for two weeks, and came back by train.

30:30 **That sounds nice!**

Oh it was! It was very pleasant.

What was actually up there?

It was where the British and that used to retreat to in the hot days down in the low lands. It was a lovely resort hotel and everything else. It was quite enjoyable. I had to pay for it of course but still.

You must have felt like a King for a week or so?

We were well and truly looked after.

31:00 I came back by train and of course on the way back I got off at the wrong spot. It was somewhere or other, I don't even know and I was getting a bit panicky. Anyway, I eventually went to the police station and of course they have police barracks where they all sleep in, and I demanded accommodation, not asked for it! I demanded it. Anyway, they put me up for the night in this hut with all these other Ceylonese

31:30 policemen and eventually in the daytime I eventually got back to the camp, which was at Horana.

So as an army sergeant you had the right to demand accommodation?

No! To bully your way around, you can't do that. I demanded it and that was it.

Do you think you were a bully at all?

No. I don't think I was ever a bully but still

32:00 it's no good going meeky miley. You've got to stand up for yourself and that's what happened there.

It just sounds like a good case of being assertive actually.

Yes, so that was it.

Once you got back to your unit what was the next step?

We weren't allowed to – where we were at Horana, we were in what was a rubber plantation. We weren't allowed to disturb the rubber trees. The rubber trees were more important than we were.

32:30 There were no bathing facilities, nothing at all there. It was rough and ready, and we were lucky as far as the showers were concerned because it used to rain every night at five o'clock, so we all stripped off with a cake of soap waiting for the rain! That's how we had our bath.

So you literally stood out in the open waiting for the rain to arrive and it would arrive promptly?

Yes or around about the same time. We had to soap ourselves up and clean ourselves up, and that was it.

33:00 We eventually got some palm frond huts built around the place without disturbing the thing. We had to pay the natives to build them and stuff.

So what sort of training were you doing there in Ceylon? You mentioned jungle training, what form did that take?

The artillery were more or less on guard duty, guarding this and ready for any attack, and during this period we had a couple of air raids from Japanese. Fortunately for us

33:30 there was a Catalina plane out on patrol and sighted this invasion force coming towards there of war ships, and troop ships, and what not. He got a message back to Colombo before he got shot down, which saved us because there was a lot of planes there, which were going to Rangoon or coming from Rangoon. They'd lost Rangoon already and these planes

34:00 ended up attacking the Japanese. Now we were very short of arms. We had one rifle between 20 men in the artillery, that's not too many rifles and the rest of us were given pick handles to repel these Japanese that were supposed to land. We were also given instructions to go to the ordinance depot in Colombo and draw 18 pounder guns because they make shrapnel

34:30 for 18 pounders but not for 25s, to mount the guns on these defences, and set them in. It happened to be Easter holiday time. They said, "Come back next week. We're closed for the holidays." The Poms – this is 1942 at Easter and they were still working on peacetime footing.

Sounds like a last gasp for the British Raj.

It was absolutely ridiculous.

35:00 At one stage before that we went some equipment in there for repair. They said, "Don't come on the weekends. We're closed on the weekends."

So what did you do?

Eventually we got the guns after much fiddling and diddling around, we got them. We had these rifles numbered off. You can just imagine, there was 20 men to one rifle and number one gets killed, number two takes over. It was ridiculous.

35:30 **Did you ever have to use the rifles or the pick handles in Ceylon?**

No.

What about breaking up fights and things?

No that was for the invasion of the Japs. As I said, the Air Force, luckily for us destroyed the convoy. Even though we'd had a couple of air raids – there was one on Trincomalee, a naval base further up and a couple in Colombo, they sunk most of the troops ships, with the result the Japanese withdrew.

36:00 The Japanese Navy were very, very active around there. In fact the third convoy that came in to pick us

up, the previous two had all been destroyed and we got on as I said, the Western Land, and we came from Colombo to Sydney – not Sydney, to Australia. It took us over a month and it's only few days trip really

36:30 in reality but we lived in life jackets, we ran out of food, there was riots onboard the ship. One of our fellas went up to the cookhouse and one of the Dutch cooks threw a meat cleaver at him. It caused a hell of a lot of trouble.

Hold on, why did the riot break out?

Because when we weren't getting enough food and that, and with the cook throwing the meat cleaver at the fella, that was the finish!

Can you describe that riot? Can you describe what happened?

They were fighting the crew.

37:00 At one stage there was a medical officer, the infantry blokes were just about to dump him over the side. Luckily for him some of the sergeants in the infantry pulled out their revolvers and shot the blokes that were going to throw him over. They dragged him in and oh it was real fun and games!

It sounds like a classic Australian versus Dutch conflict!

It was!

I mean I've heard that the Dutch can be fairly arrogant

37:30 **people?**

They are very, very arrogant.

So what – ?

And of course there was a great shortage of food. We were living on cheese and biscuits.

How long did the riot last?

It was on and off sort of thing, you know? There was an unhappy feeling.

What were you able to do in a situation like that?

I wasn't involved.

Were you in a position to be involved?

Well, most of the trouble was – the infantry fellas

38:00 were doing most of the trouble. There was grog onboard. I know one of our fellas went down in the hold and was brining up a demijohn [large glass bottle] of rum, and unfortunately for him he slipped on one of the ladders, and fell down, and the demijohn broke, cut all the tendons in his wrist and stuff.

So were you in a position where you could have intervened?

No I wasn't involved.

38:30 **Was it a question of the fact that officially you could not be involved?**

They held courts of inquiry on the boat and everything else while that was going on but there was still a lot of trouble. I don't know whether it was let out in the records but that's what happened.

Were there any deaths as a result of that?

No.

What about injuries, apart from the man that you've just described?

A few belts around, you know? Physical, that's all.

You've

39:00 **said that you were not involved but I mean as a sergeant were you ever tempted to become involved?**

Well, I wasn't up there, where all this was going on. I knew what was going on. We all knew but you know, you don't walk in where you're scared to tread.

Tape 6

00:34 **The 6th Division had a particular name for the 7th Division?**

That's what we used to think about the 7th Div, they were the pyrotechnics.

The pyrotechnics?

Yes, the pyrotechnic displayers.

Why were they given that name?

Well, all the flashes around you know, the gunfire and God knows what but they did a hell of a lot of good work, so don't put it in!

01:00 **Well, there's a lot of friendly rivalry between the divisions. We've heard stories about the divisions up on the Atherton Tablelands giving each other cheek and so forth.**

Oh yes.

Just returning, so it was the Westmoreland?

No, the Western Land.

Western Land?

It was another Dutch ship.

I think you arrived back in Melbourne didn't you?

Well first off we arrived back in Perth and we were given a very good welcome.

01:30 In fact one girl raced up to me and said, "Do you know so and so Smith?" We only had about a dozen of them in our unit alone, just imagine what was in the AIF! We were very welcomed and we didn't stay there long. I think it was a day. Eventually we got around to Melbourne. I think it was about the 7th of August 1942. The wharf loaders wouldn't unload our dangerous cargo.

02:00 **What was your dangerous cargo?**

Ammunition, you know? Like we're handling it every day of the week and they wouldn't touch it unless they got danger money or anything. Some bloke threw a shell amongst them and they all soon scuttled but it wasn't primed. You have to prime them beforehand and they had the same trouble going up to New Guinea. They wouldn't load the ammunition. They wanted danger money and everything else.

What was your view of those unionists?

We didn't think much of them at all. Like

02:30 here was Australia in dire straits of being invaded and these blokes wouldn't load ammunition onto ships because they didn't get danger money, and extra money, and all this kind of thing.

So what happened to that ammunition?

The troops loaded it up themselves.

Now of course while you'd been away there had been quite a few momentous events. There had been Pearl Harbour. There had been Singapore. There had been Darwin. There had been Sydney Harbour with the Japanese subs. How much of

03:00 **those landmark events had you heard about?**

We knew about Pearl Harbour. We didn't know anything about the air raids on Darwin because they kept that all very quiet. I don't know whether we knew about the air raids in Rose Bay [submarine raids?]. I can't tell you now. I can't remember. I know it happened. I couldn't tell you whether we knew it when it happened or didn't know. I couldn't tell you that.

While you were actually away in the Middle East and in

03:30 **Greece how were you being kept up to date about what was happening in the war?**

We used to have an army paper and up in New Guinea we had an army paper called Guinea Gold. Of course there was always wireless and things like that over in the Middle East. It was very civilised in there. We were virtually coming from non-civilised Australia amongst all the super-civilisations

04:00 of Europe and all those kind of places.

Can you give me a little more detail of what that meant?

We in Australia weren't looked upon as being up with the civilised countries of the world. We were just sort of dragged up. We were looked upon as being convicts and all that kind of business. In fact one fellow, who was an officer attached to a British Army

04:30 unit, a couple of these cheeky lieutenants lifted up his feet, “No, there’s no manacle marks there!” They both got a kick in the face.

I’ll bet they did. I was in Europe ten years ago and someone referred to me as a colonialist. I wasn’t too happy.

Yes.

And you referred to having access to radio in the Middle East?

In artillery units you have a lot of communication and

05:00 radio. You have your own regiment inside, which was your own information on lines and sig [signal] wires, and wireless and then from your regiment to the division, you have the sigs division, sigs like the unit section sig. They have radio communication. You can find out any information and we used to run our little newspaper in the unit.

Had you been concerned while you were away about the security of Australia?

We didn’t know anything about

05:30 it virtually in that way. It was something that was – we didn’t know much about it until we actually came home to Australia.

But surely you had letters from home, which talked about what was going on in Australia?

I don’t think we – I can’t remember it. I don’t recall it. We did get mail of course but I don’t recall that.

So when you got back to Australia you must have noticed some changes?

Well as I say, we arrived back in there on about the 7th of August.

06:00 I volunteered, about the only time I ever volunteered for anything in my life in the army, to go on the rear party because the ships had to be unloaded with all our guns and equipment, and trucks, and everything else. The other fellas all went off on leave. Of course we were at a place called Seymour [Victoria]. That’s not far out of Melbourne and of course we used to get a train and go down to Melbourne sightseeing, and all around having a good time. We had

06:30 a camp there and there was a lot of young militia fellas in the place. The day we arrived they were waiting on us with our meals and stuff. Someone said something and someone pulled out a revolver, and fired a couple of shots through the roof, and they all scattered. They were just being sort of show offs and nasty to frighten these poor young fellas.

That was one of your group that pulled out the gun did he?

Yes. This was in the sergeants’ mess

07:00 and we were getting waited on from them, and something happened anyway, and someone “Sptt, sptt, sptt, sptt!” It was silly but still.

And the mess emptied did it?

No, the mess didn’t empty but the young waiters all disappeared.

Did anything strike you about Melbourne at war that indicated to you that Australia was finally at war?

No, nothing really went on with Melbourne. We had quite a good time.

07:30 We used to go off into Melbourne. We had plenty of time to ourselves, so that was the idea of volunteering for it. They eventually loaded the guns and trucks onto these flat tops. It took a while for it to happen, virtually almost two weeks I think. It could have been closer to three. We went up around through Tocumwal and eventually we arrived

08:00 in Flemington. They said that we were supposed to be going to Narellan. Anyway, we arrived in Flemington and we pulled up in there, and there was a hold up, and, “We won’t be leaving here for two or three hours.” So I said, “I’ve got a sister in Strathfield. I’m going off to see her.” So I churned off there to see her and I came back in time, and we were waiting to see what was happening. In the meantime the war had been sort of going bad and we didn’t know anything about it,

08:30 and they sent us to Greta. Instead of Narellan we ended up in Greta in the middle of the night. We had to knock down all the fence from the Greta railway station to unload the trucks and the guns. We got them off and the next day I go off on leave. The unit was back and it was my turn to go on leave with the rest of us. So we were off all right. I had three days leave and was recalled.

09:00 So I got back to the unit. In the meantime they said to me, “You’ve got to go to Major General Clowes for an interview.” “What for?” “You’ve got to go there and report straight away.” So I go up to see Major General Clowes and he’s interviewing me to become the divisional artillery sergeant major of the 6th Division. I didn’t want the job.

Why not?

It was leaving the

09:30 unit. I could have gone before if I wanted to. I didn't want to. So anyway, I wanted to be paraded at the CO. "It can't be done. It's all signed and sealed. You've been selected. You're the one." "I don't want to." Anyway, that was it. They went and 6th Division had been disbanded because part of them came back in February '42

10:00 and we went to Ceylon. They were going to reform the 6th Division because in those days artillery was made up of our original adjutant, Anderson, and the original RSM [regimental sergeant major] was the DASM [divisional artillery sergeant major], and the staff captain was Ken James, and everything out of our regiment there, and they disbanded it all. That was all changed and they

10:30 were going to reform it, and I didn't want to go there. I didn't want the job. Anyway, I got it and I didn't want it. We had to start it all afresh and we had a month or so before – we were up in Maitland at a place outside of Maitland. I've forgotten the name of the place. They took over some big farmhouse and we were there.

What were your responsibilities in that position?

11:00 We had to work out training and discipline, and everything else. We had a – I've forgotten the fellow. He was a staff captain there. We didn't have the CRA up there, that's the commander of royal artillery. We eventually were up in New Guinea.

Hold on, you were in the house in Maitland, so what was the next step?

We formed up. We trained the squad that

11:30 we wanted and everything else that had to be. It was made up of the CRA, the commander and the brigadier, and then you have a brigade major, then you have a staff captain, and then there was the DASM, that was myself, and other sergeant draftsmen, and technical map readers, and makers, and all kinds of things like that. That's how it started off.

Just before we

12:00 **move the story along, why didn't you want to leave your original unit?**

That was home and I'd been with them from the start. I'd already enlisted a good three quarters of them. I woke up early to the situation that the job I had was a good job. It kept up with the knowledge of what was going on. You didn't

12:30 have to go and do guard duty, even though you worked 24 hours a day. You didn't have to go marching up and down, and changing sentries, and all that kind of business, and I enjoyed the job.

And you obviously had mates there as well?

Yes and I didn't want to leave. So what happens? I get shunted off to this place.

How important to you was mateship?

Very important. The fact that you live with the same fellows

13:00 and you knew exactly – like in Khassa, we used to call Khassa Camp the Siege of Khassa because we were there for so long. Anyway, scheming and what – we used to have a tent and there was a room vacant at the end of Regimental Headquarters, which was a building. So we put our heads together and we occupied that hut. There was six of us in that hut. All right, we used to all sleep

13:30 in there. We used to make our own supper of a night time and readily enjoy ourselves, and the company of one another. All right, when we went to Ceylon it was a bit different but we still had it. As a matter of fact, in Ceylon we sergeants, probably the officers did too, we got issued with a bottle of grog every week, a bottle of Gin it was as a matter of fact.

That sounds pretty good!

Yes we didn't mind!

14:00 **You mentioned those six men. Who out of those six men would have been your best mates?**

One particular fella out at the LAD over in South Australia. He got badly wounded by the Americans up in New Guinea. They're mad with their fire. They fire without looking and they don't know where they're going.

What was this guy's name?

McDonald.

McDonald? What was his first name?

14:30 We used to always call him Mac. We never used the Christian name. It was Mac. The same with the warrant officer out of the LAD, his name was Mostyn. We always called him Mossy, nothing else.

So what made Mac such a good mate?

Well, we used to associate with one another and go out together, and everything else, and that's what happened but after

15:00 I got shunted off to this job I didn't have much more association with the regiment, a little bit, not much.

Who had been your other good mates would you say?

There was another fellow called Norm Gibson and there was another fellow, Fife Donald. As a matter of fact, when we came back to Australia Norm Gibson got married and Fife was his best man, and I went to his wedding,

15:30 I was going to say funeral but wedding, and Fife Donald ended up marrying Norm Gibson's wife's sister. They went into business together down in Canberra. They were in a garage together and then they eventually went to Canberra into a printing business. They are both dead now of course.

I get the impression that war could form substantial relationships that then did continue on after the war.

16:00 Oh yes, so that's what happened. As I say, I didn't want to go there but eventually we ended up in New Guinea.

Before we go to New Guinea did you do any other jungle training?

No we didn't have to because we were experienced in it.

16:30 **So let's look at the journey to New Guinea. How did you travel up there?**

The regiment fellows, they all went up in Liberty ships, which was bad.

Why?

Well, there was no toilet facilities. You had to do it over the side of the ship and all your things were hanging out but they weren't looked after, and it wasn't so good.

How did you travel up?

I'm trying to think which ship we went on. We went

17:00 on a ship.

So you didn't travel on a Liberty ship?

No, we went on a – I don't know whether it was the Duntroon. I know went on the Duntroon at one time and I went on the Taroona.

So how was the journey to New Guinea in terms of comfort and conditions?

It was acceptable. I can't recall much about it as a matter of fact, so it must have been all right because it if wasn't you'd remember it.

17:30 **So if you could continue the story of the journey and then what happened when you got to New Guinea?**

We eventually got up to New Guinea. We arrived in at Moresby and we went out to what they call Murray Barracks but Murray Barracks is a non-nomer. It's only a tin shed on a piece of land, so there's nothing much about it. We went up to

18:00 alongside what was known as Ward's Drome and we established the Headquarters there. We met our CRA there, Brigadier Daley. He was out of the Second 6th Field Regiment and whilst we were there, the CO, my old CO, and the adjutant came up there to impress the CRA to let me come back to the regiment

18:30 because the administrative part wasn't working too well. He wouldn't let me go and I was pretty annoyed about it. He thought he'd probably teach me a lesson and he sent me off on a course to the 2/6th Field Regiment. When I got to the 2/6th Field Regiment for this course he was sending me to, I said, "I'm not up here for a course. I'm not going to do the course." So I sulked like a little boy in a tent.

19:00 **What was the course?**

A gunnery course.

You sulked all the way through the course?

I sat in the tent and let them go and do the course, and I waited until I qualified.

That's pretty extraordinary!

I come back – I didn't do anything. When they'd knock off we'd have exercise and playing a ring over a tennis net to sort of keep our – we were playing that and

19:30 anyway, I got back to the 6th Div, and it comes back I'd qualified. I hadn't done a bloody thing but I still qualified. Anyway, then we moved. Daley still stopped in Moresby because they moved him from 6th Div to New Guinea Force. We flew over to Buna.

20:00 The regiment already had guns at Saputa and Sanananda, and they also had guns brought in by sea at Buna. In fact the fellow in charge of the guns there, Kenny Kell, they had the guns on the barges and they just pushed, and they got caught on the reef. So they just pushed the guns into the sea and dragged them into the shore by drag ropes.

20:30 He got the guns in there that way.

What physically dragged them ashore?

Mmm.

Incredible feat! No use of block and tackle or anything like that?

No, well as I said before the guide ropes, they hooked them in the side of each wheel with a hook in it and just physically pulled them ashore.

Pulled them ashore across the seabed.

Because they could get across. The barge got caught. That's what happened with them.

21:00 the other guns that the regiment had, they took them into pieces and put them on the planes, and flew them to Dobodura, and put them together again, and manhandled them through the jungle, and that was the first artillery that had been fired over the other side of the

21:30 Kokoda. Of course when the infantry heard it they all stood up and cheered.

Before we get to some of the detail of the campaigns in New Guinea, what was happening to you at this point? After Port Moresby where did you go?

We went over to Buna.

To Buna. So this action with the landing barges getting stuck – ?

I wasn't involved in that.

You weren't involved in that. So where were you at this point?

22:00 We landed at Popendetta and we eventually got to an area where we camped, and that was the Headquarters Popendetta.

Now when you landed at Popendetta was this under any kind of enemy fire?

There was some around but a lot of it going on all around the area.

So how did you actually land at Popendetta? What took you ashore?

Douglases, you know, DC3s?

So you flew in?

Oh we flew in.

22:30 We were lucky. We didn't walk it.

I was going to say Popendetta is inland, so we're not talking about boats going to Popendetta?

No.

Can I get you to take me from the landing at Popendetta through to what happened next?

We just sort of established a Headquarters Popendetta. Headquarters is to co-ordinate things. All right, we eventually got a new CRA,

23:00 Brigadier Kitto, and that was around about December '42. The action all round that way was nearly all finished. I think it finished early in January. Then what was left of the fellows, who marched

23:30 and walked over the Kokoda Trail, they sent back to Australia. They were all full of disease and sickness, and everything else. There was more died from scrub typhus and dysentery than what the Japs shot.

I didn't know that actually. That's quite a remarkable statistic.

This mite used to get into your boots to give you scrub typhus. They were dying off like flies.

24:00 There was one Brigadier who was sick in the morning and dead in the afternoon.

I believe the scrub typhus was often associated with the kunai grass?

It was. It was in there in the kunai grass and the mites, well you can just imagine a mite less than a pinpoint, you wouldn't be able to see it.

Now you went to the Headquarters at Popendetta. What were your specific duties there?

We had to just organise the

24:30 attack, like the artillery situation. We had to end up giving the units various instructions on what they had to do and things like that.

So can you just take me through, if we're talking about an attack, can you talk me through what you would do to plan an attack?

We didn't plan it ourselves. The attack is planned by the generals. We were only there to carry out the instructions.

25:00 As far as – take for instance in at Sanananda; we had 511 Battery there. There were two troops, E and F troops were there. There were eight guns. At Sanananda the Japs was about nine thousand more Japs there. Incidentally, the American intelligence, I don't think they ever got over a

25:30 thousand and I don't think they could count. They always underestimated what was there and Macarthur [US General Douglas Macarthur] said, "Blow the Gap!" The Gap was only about 20 miles difference between one point to another and all this kind of business.

So if you're talking about underestimating, are we talking about Japanese numbers?

Yes.

How far out were they in terms of Japanese numbers?

Thousands. Macarthur and his mob, they thought they knew everything. They didn't give the Australians any

26:00 credit whatsoever. If it was Australia it was the Allied and then it was the Americans. They had the American 32nd Division up there. All right, they were complete failures. Each one of those units had three COs; one for breakfast, one for lunch and one for dinner. In the end he sent Lieutenant General Eichelberger up there to take control and fix it or don't come back.

26:30 **I believe he was quite highly respected?**

Yes but they had in that American Army, they had privates in charge of units.

So did Eichelberger manage to fix the situation?

Eventually he got it – but the whole division was so bad they sent them all back to Australia for further training.

What was their main downfall?

They didn't know.

They didn't know what?

Didn't know

27:00 how to fight or what to do and they weren't fighters. They were all running away and the officers were no good.

How many Americans are we talking about here?

The whole division. They'd lead an attack and they'd get shot up like nobody's business, and they'd run away then. It got so bad they were dropping their arms and running, and they had to –

27:30 our fellas were burying their arms so that they wouldn't – we ended up with all these Thomson submachine guns and things like that.

So these were men that were fighting alongside the Australians?

Fighting as a unit with Australians, weren't alongside of us and they just dropped their arms from lack of knowledge, and they were a bit frightened of fighting.

So the Australians were burying the arms? Why was that?

Well you couldn't let the Japanese get hold of them,

28:00 so they were digging holes and putting them in.

And Americans were bolting into the jungle were they?

Mmm.

How many situations or people are we talking about here?

Well as I just explained, they were having privates in charge of units. They were having three different COs a day and all this kind of business. There was a hell of a lot of trouble up there but it wasn't published or things like that.

Sounds pretty ghastly. It certainly sounds a long way away from General Macarthur's

28:30 **rhetoric.**

Oh, he won the war and he was the only one there.

To get back to your day to day activity in terms of putting plans into action there at Headquarters in Popendetta, could you just take us through an average day for you?

Actually the only difference was you'd be asleep sometimes. That's about all.

But could you tell us what you actually did?

29:00 **You were presumably stationed in an office?**

Well it was a jungle.

It was a jungle? Well could you describe where you were working and if you could just tell us what you were doing on a day-to-day basis at this point?

Not really. We just had to co-ordinate reports and things like that, see what was going on. You knew what unit had such and such. For instance, the

29:30 artillery fellas, ammunition was dropped about 800 yards behind their guns. They in turn, the gunners had to go in the night time and physically carry all that ammunition to the guns for firing. Now for instance, there was four guns there at Sanananda. One of the gun sergeants was Steve

30:00 Jack, a great tall fellow and Vasey spoke to him about maintaining constant gunfire to put up a good show for them because of the ammunition. I think they ended up firing about 17,000 rounds. They had to physically carry all that ammunition down to their guns and this particular time at Sanananda the

30:30 GPO, that's the gun position officer, set the guns in a dried up creek, which was silly but that's what happened. During this attack at Sanananda it rained. It rains nearly all the time up there, worse than Ceylon. Steve Jack's gun after two days was so deep in the mud it took them a couple of

31:00 days to dig the gun out of it. He reported his gun out of action because it was all lopsided and he couldn't do anything with it. He couldn't do anything more about it.

Sounds pretty momentous. You've given us a very clear and at times vivid, and dramatic description of what you were doing in the Middle East, and in Greece, so I've suddenly lost a clear sense of what you were doing in New Guinea.

Well I was virtually doing the same up in New Guinea as what I was doing in the Middle East. I just had to co-ordinate the reports

31:30 and things like that.

Were you ever going out on patrol?

Not in that sense like that. They sent different people out on patrol and things like that. In a lot of cases a patrol would go out and they wouldn't come back. People don't realise what a shocking place New Guinea was, more so for the infantry than anybody else.

Why was this?

Because of the swamps, the conditions, the rain, the lack of

32:00 food. The Japanese were cannibalising out troops and all those things that went on.

Did you ever hear information about the Japanese cannibalising our troops?

Yes.

What did you actually hear?

We were told about it. In fact, various fellows – one particular – the RSM. I think it was Second 24th.

32:30 I'm not quite certain. They were looking for him and they found him all right. His bottom had been

carved off and the Japan was cooking him in the pot. They were doing it and they in turn, their food was dropped in the wrong spots for them. They were starved. At Buna they had well dug positions for them.

33:00 What they used to do is they'd dig a hole, put the Jap in there with his food and everything else, and then roof him in. He couldn't get out.

They'd put him in the hole and they'd rivet him in?

No. They'd have logs and stuff over the top of him while he used to have to do everything in the hole, sleep there and everything else. They had no respect for their privates. In fact the way they trained their soldiers was that the officers slapped the

33:30 sergeants around and the sergeant slaps the private around. That's how they go on.

These are good general details about the Japanese but what was your own personal view of the Japanese as an enemy?

We didn't think much of them. We didn't think they were cowards or anything like that but they were dirty scum, the fact of the way they were treating our soldiers, and what we'd heard about the way they were treating them in Malaya.

34:00 **How much did you hear at that time and we're looking at later 1942, early 1943?**

We'd heard that they'd been captured and as a matter of fact, most of the blame for their capture went back to the British Lieutenant General Percival, a permanent British officer, like most of them that didn't know anything at all. He wouldn't even allow them to dig any trenches and stuff. "You can't lose face in front of the natives," and all this kind of

34:30 silly rot. There were three times as many Australian troops and British troops there than what there were Japanese.

If we're looking at you in Popendetta, you said a moment ago that you were in the jungle. Could you describe for me your actual working environment?

Well you couldn't call it a working environment. It was a fact of existing.

Well you were there as a person. Were you working with a group

35:00 **of people for instance?**

Yes we had out headquarters around.

Could you describe that headquarters for us?

It was like being in a paddock only there's lots of trees and lots of rain, lots of falling trees, and thunder, and lightning going on all the time. It never seemed to stop raining.

Did you have any kind of cover over you?

We only had what had gas capes and things like that.

35:30 **With the headquarters were you all gathered together in a tent or under a tarp?**

First off we didn't have anything like that. Eventually we did sort of a shelter built over us sort of thing.

So can you describe for me the place that you were actually working when you first worked at Popendetta?

It was straight out jungle, like trees and wet ground.

36:00 **How many of you were working in this one place?**

It's hard to remember now but I know there was about – there was the BM [brigade major], the staff captain – there was about half a dozen of us like that, and we also had a bit further away the sergeant draftsmen to do maps, and everything else.

36:30 **So your own responsibility was – ?**

I had to virtually co-ordinate them.

Co-ordinate exactly what?

All the rest of our Headquarters Popendetta, troops and stuff. The BM, he was making the tactical decisions. The staff captain makes the provisional decisions. Well I had to co-ordinate the rest of the troops around us.

What

37:00 **means would you use to co-ordinate things?**

Only a matter of voice control. That's about all you can say.

Voice control? So who were you passing on your information – ?

I'd get the instructions of what had to be done. I would make certain that this one does this, that one does that, whoever had to do the particular job.

So you were receiving information and delegating, and obviously making decisions?

You'd tell me what had to be done and I'd have to tell three or four different other ones what had to

37:30 be done, and that's how it sort of goes along.

Would those other people work with you?

Oh yes.

They would stay with you.

We were around and they had to do – see like the sergeant draftsman had to draw maps and plans, and that's how it went on.

Initially you were at Popendetta, where did you go after that?

Into Buna.

How far from the battlefront were you at Buna?

It was not far at all. It's only

38:00 a matter of a mile or two sort of business. Eventually all the battle ceased around that way. Gona fell first and then Buna, and then all the fighting troops that were in there were physically exhausted. This particular fellow I was referring to, Steve Jack, he and another fellow Larry O'Rourke, after the battle they were so

38:30 exhausted they just both collapsed, and there were not enough planes to take them back to Moresby, and they were still there a couple of days after.

So they were lying there suffering from sheer physical exhaustion?

Yes.

What was done to treat them?

Virtually nothing because most of the people there were in the same condition and they couldn't. The planes coming from Moresby – see to get over the

39:00 hump –

To get over the hump of what? The Owen Stanleys?

Yes. The conditions of the fogs and winds, and everything else – they might plan to come in and land but had to turn back, and go back to Moresby again. This went on all the time. The same went on up in Wau. They couldn't – there were periods there where they were in dire need of troops and they couldn't land

39:30 them because they couldn't get into the place. After Buna they relieved all those fighting troops from that spot and sent them back to Australia.

Tape 7

00:38 **Where were we at this point? Are we still at Buna?**

Yes, well Buna was just about finished then and that's when they sent all the infantry troops home to Australia, what was left of them. They were all badly mauled about with diseases and dysentery, and God knows what they didn't have. Then they

01:00 decided not to send 6th Division Headquarters home. What they did, they changed the name from 6th Division and the 6th Division RAA into 11 Div.

Before we go onto the amalgamation, the change into 11th Div, can I just take you back a bit to when you were working in the Headquarters Popendetta. How far away from the frontline were you?

01:30 I couldn't tell you now. It wasn't far. They can't have you too far away.

What was communication like with the frontline?

You had sig wire, signal lines run out and they used to run it in through trees, and everything else like that, and keep the communication like that by – I think it was called a Don 5

02:00 telephone. It was reasonable and of course in the artillery units you're full of communication. You have your own internal signals that keep the information going from the unit to the brigade or division. You've got the divisional signallers do it all. That's what they specialised in.

02:30 **What about runners? Were there any runners?**

Not so much. They did have runners through parts of the thing but not that much as far as – it progressed a bit from the First War with runners here, there and everywhere. It was like that picture you see in Gallipoli, the bloke running up and down the hill in Gallipoli but it wasn't so much as that in those days, but they did have bits of communication. In Greece they did have a lot of

03:00 runners that way because we never had enough sig wire to send it out to the units. It was too far apart and not enough equipment. Up there in New Guinea the communication was fairly good with the units.

Being back at Headquarters you must have observed the aftermath of certain

03:30 **battles when the men were coming back from the frontline? What did you observe of the men coming back?**

You wouldn't see the results of anything like that at all.

So you wouldn't see the men coming back from the jungle?

No because the units remained part of each other. In some cases there was part of one unit mixed up with the other because of the lack of men. When you consider that in the

04:00 infantry battalions, all right back up in Buna after they all came walking over that Kokoda Trail, they were badly mauled about. You might get 15 to 20 out of a whole battalion left and they'd all amalgamate with somebody else. They had a horrible time. Apart from the diseases and dysentery, and lack of food, and everything else, it was absolutely shocking.

Would any of the men coming back from

04:30 **battle talk to you about what they'd seen and what they'd done?**

No. See as I said before, we were very lucky. We flew over. We didn't walk that thing and those blokes did that, and fight at the same time. It was absolutely shocking.

From your perspective what was your understanding of what took place during those battles?

I don't really

05:00 understand what you mean?

What do you understand of what happened at Buna and Gona?

We knew what was going on and everything else, and the fact that the Japs were killing us, and we were killing Japs, and the sickness, and everything else. At one stage there the Japs knew that the artillery was there and they were purposefully trying to blow the guns up.

05:30 In fact on several occasions they attacked them trying to put dynamite down. In fact they did put one lot of dynamite down one gun and peeled off like a banana. I think the gun it still up at Saputa. They did try and repel them all the time. At one stage the Japs did get in amongst their lines, the gun lines.

06:00 This friend of mine Steve Jack, he said, "There's a Japan there! Kill him! Shoot him!" The other bloke said, "Oh we can't kill him. He's wounded!" "Be buggered! Kill him!" But they didn't. As a matter of fact, they got a lot of information out of that fellow because he wouldn't talk. He was starved and drink, and he wouldn't talk to them, and some intelligence officer out of the infantry battalion said, "Cook up some

06:30 rice and make it all nice, and smelly." They waved it under his nose and he eventually did talk, and gave them a lot of information but that's a rarity because they'd rather die than tell you anything.

Who were the key leaders in New Guinea?

Vasey was one of them.

What was he like?

07:00 Lieutenant General Vasey, I think he ended up getting killed in a plane crash. Most of the early Australian leaders who were actual – Alan, he was the brigade commander of the 16th Brigade. He became a major general and because Macarthur thought there weren't enough casualties happening, it was no good.

07:30 So they sacked him. Macarthur made Blamey sack him. It wasn't that at all. You don't throw men away like sawdust sort of business. He was looking after his men and everything else but Macarthur had no idea. He thought he knew everything. There was another fella, Brigadier Potts. He was in charge of the

30th Brigade and the Militia battalions. There was the 39th Battalion and 3rd Battalion, and

08:00 fight and retreat from Buna back to Moresby in the early part of the war, and because he retreated over there Macarthur had him sacked. Even though it was a strategic withdrawal it was extending the Japs' lines and shortening ours. In those days they couldn't get food and things, supplies to them but no Macarthur knew all. He sacked him.

Sounds like you didn't have a high opinion of Macarthur?

I hate the man.

08:30 I don't like him. I'm not particularly keen about Americans because they shoot their mouth off. They think they knew everything.

You mentioned earlier on very briefly an incident where one of your soldiers was actually shot by friendly fire, by American fire?

Oh the American Lightning planes! They used to come up there and they killed quite a few of our fellas up there in New Guinea.

09:00 They came back the second day and did the same thing over again!

What exactly happened? How did that happen?

They though we were Japanese. We were waving. I wasn't there myself but they were waving to them and everything else but they still shot them up.

That incident must have really affected relationships between Americans and Australians?

In lots of cases Americans fire and think afterwards.

09:30 You hear about them firing in a fight and they never stop firing. That's how they carry on. They don't know when to stop. I don't know whether they're frightened or what it is but they fire away like mad.

Apart from these awful incidents where people were lost, what other interaction did you have with the Americans

10:00 **in New Guinea ?**

Not a great deal, not personally with them, but we know what went on with them. All right, like everything else, there's good and bad. We depended on their planes, because we didn't have any, hardly. We didn't depend on their soldiers, because most of the fighting done in New Guinea was done by Australians, even though we didn't get the credit for it.

10:30 Macarthur took the credit. Everything that was won he took the credit. Anything that was lost it was our fault.

It sounds like there is quite a bit of resentment there?

I don't think really and truly you'll find that the Australians up in New Guinea have any good words to say about Macarthur.

It doesn't sound like he gave you

11:00 **a very fair wrap.**

He and Blamey used to fight. At one stage, I wasn't there to hear it but it all came back to us all, Macarthur said to Blamey, "If you were in my army I'd have you shot." He said, "If I was in your army I'd shoot myself!"

You mentioned one of your leaders in New Guinea, Brigadier Vasey. Was it Vasey or Vassy?

No Vasey. He was

11:30 Major General Vasey.

Sorry! Could you describe his character?

I didn't have anything personally to do with him, like you know he's the boss sort of business. You didn't go up and talk to him or do anything like that.

What was his reputation?

Very good. I think he was going to take over command of 6th Div and I think he got killed in a plane crash.

You've talked

12:00 **in various degrees about the physical conditions in New Guinea and how terrible they were. Can you talk us through what the conditions were like where you were sleeping, your living**

conditions when you were at the Headquarters in New Guinea?

It depends on where you were and eventually we got tents. After Buna Campaign was finished as I said before,

12:30 the fighting component of 6th Div all went back to Australia. The Headquarters was changed into 11 Div. Then the 1st Battery of the Second 1st Field Regiment was sent to Wau because the Japs were coming through an old track up in Wau around there. The 17th Brigade was kept at Milne Bay,

13:00 not over the Kokoda. They were kept at Milne Bay by General Blamey and he had them transferred up into Wau. Before that there were a couple of independent companies there and they landed in dribs and drabs in Wau because they couldn't fly in. They might come in with them and they'd have to return to Moresby because they couldn't get over the gap, through all that fog,

13:30 and low cloud. You could run into a mountain and you wouldn't know where you were. The 2/1st Field Regiments once again took their guns apart and put them in the Douglas planes, like the DC3s and they put them all together again on Wau aerodrome. The Japs owned the bottom part. We owned the top part. Wau Aerodrome is like running up a hill and they used to have to come in from the low part of the hill

14:00 and run up the hill of the thing. The Japs owned the bottom part and they were shooting at the planes, and killing people off on the aerodrome. Anyway, after the guns were assembled there they eventually got eight guns up there and they did a tremendous amount of damage to the Japanese. In fact they put over a few shells and there was one particular smoke shell they put over, and set the grass alight, the kunai grass alight,

14:30 and it set off a big ammunition dump, and killed quite a few hundreds of Japs up there. They were there for some time but they couldn't go much further ahead because with the way the mountains were. I think the guns are still there up in Wau. They weren't recovered anyway after the war.

So that was when the 6th became part of the 11th?

No that was part of the 2/1st Field Regiment.

15:00 Now the divisions – that was round about the end of January and eventually they were withdrawn, and sent back to Australia but we, at the Headquarters Popendetta, the RAA 6th Div was now known as RAA 11th Div, and the same with 6th Div. They were known as Headquarters 11th Div and

15:30 a lot of the troops thought they were strangers, and most of the people in the headquarters had been in the army for four or five years. They thought they were just straight out 'chocos' [chocolate soldiers-militia] and things like that. We were getting annoyed about it. That's what happened.

What was it like saying goodbye to the 6th Div?

We didn't actually say goodbye to anybody.

What was it like after they left?

They all went home. We knew they were going home and they deserved the rest, and everything else. They were physically

16:00 wrecks. I don't think many people realise the conditions that those fellas in the infantry had to put up with. It was absolutely shocking.

Yes you've mentioned in quite some detail the conditions and one can only imagine.

They were badly looked after. We were doing all right. As I say, we went up to Wau

16:30 and from Wau we –

What happened at Wau for you?

We just landed there and did a bit of organising sort of business, nothing really. We went from there to Dumpu up the other end of Markham Valley and then we had to walk over Shaggy Ridge, up through to Madang.

What happened at Shaggy Ridge for you?

We were just doing the same thing all the time, nothing much

17:00 different.

During this time in New Guinea did you have much interaction with the local population?

No except you'd sniff there, "Boongs are coming." You could smell them, same with the Japs, you could smell them. They could smell us too because we smelled different.

Would you see the local population around the area?

You'd see some of them around there. The women used to feed

17:30 the pig and the dog, and everything off as well as the child sort of business. They'd have one on one side, the other on the other. Oh, it was terrible.

You actually saw that?

Yes!

So she'd be breastfeeding a piglet and a puppy dog?

Yes, her own baby on one side and a pig on the other side!

Oh well, that's a good distribution of resources.

Fattening somebody up anyway.

Well if it's available why not make use of it!

18:00 **Even though you didn't have much interaction with the local population, how were they regarded by the Australian soldiers?**

Well ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit] used to control the natives and they used to have native carriers. They carried the Australian wounded and they used to carry supplies, and things like that. We never had any actual dealings with the natives but if you wanted some kunai grass cut down, they'd bring in a quad

18:30 of natives and they'd cut it all down.

Were they well regarded by the Australian soldiers?

We accepted the fact they were there. I don't know whether you'd say they were well looked after or well regarded but they did a marvellous job the ones that were doing the carrying and they used to look after our fellas well and truly. In fact even today, recently what

19:00 they call the Battle of Australia, which is the first Wednesday in September held now, they brought some of the New Guinea natives down from it to attend this ceremony. There was one fellow there, it was very cold there the other day and I think it was the 3rd of September, all he had on was a lap lap [short wrap skirt]. He must have been a bit cold!

We've heard numerous stories of

19:30 **natives in New Guinea looking after the Australian soldiers, especially the stretcher bearers.**

They did. They did very good there.

They've been credited with saving a lot of lives, which is brilliant. How did you feel about the army making you stay on in New Guinea?

At the time it didn't – I wasn't too happy about

20:00 the fact that we'd been changed over to the 11th Div but you just accepted it and you stayed there. It got a bit boring after a while, monotonous and stuff. As I say, we went over to Madang and then we went from there down to I think it was Oro Bay. I'm not certain but our new CRA, he used to like souvenirs and

20:30 there was a Japanese Mountain Battery up in Madang, and he wanted the cartridge case. They used to have a cartridge case about two inches high with a brass plate on the back of it was all this Japanese writing. He sent me and a sergeant from the Second 6th Field Regiment up to this Japanese Mountain position. Luckily for us they'd moved out but he wanted –

21:00 I had to take a couple of sandbags full of these blinkin' cartridge cases. He wanted them as souvenirs for ashtrays. See what you can do when you're a brigadier?

He'd make you do this?

Yes we had to go and do it.

Was that a common practice, this souveniring?

He made a profession of it. Another part of the time we were there he'd been in touch

21:30 with the Americans and the Americans even had ice cream up in New Guinea. They had their PX [American canteen unit] thing up there. Anyway, he bought from them six refrigerators, like a domestic refrigerator, big tall things and he had the forestry unit cut great lengths of cedar trees down, long planks. Now you just imagine two of those, end on end,

22:00 there was a cedar box built around those. There was three of those boxes with six refrigerators and I had to see that they were built, and made, and shipped off back to Australia. That happened at Oro Bay. Then he wasn't happy with that. He commandeered a yacht and had that sent back on the Westralia but

things were starting to catch up with him, and he got

22:30 bowler hatted.

What do you mean by bowler hatted?

Kicked out.

That's fairly outrageous! I assume this souveniring was illegal?

That was all illegal. All right, he bought the fridges from the Americans but having the forestry unit cut these great long cedar planks. They'd be over 12 foot in length.

What was his name?

23:00 **You don't have to tell it if you don't want to.**

He came from a very prominent Melbourne family.

Ok well we'll leave them guessing. You mentioned that you were at various places, Lae, Markham Valley, Shaggy Ridge and Oro Bay. How long would you have stayed at each of these different places?

I couldn't tell you. I don't know.

23:30 **Would it be a weeks or months?**

I'd only be guessing. I can't remember but I know that after I'd been up there two years we had movements to come back to Australia and all right, the Brigadier, the only thing he did good for me, he said, "You've had enough overseas service." By this time I'd had more than four and a half years overseas service. He said, "How would you like

24:00 a posting in Sydney?" I said, "I don't mind. I don't care. I don't mind." Whilst I'm on leave I got a telegram to report at my convenience. I thought, "God! For my convenience in the army? That's my home from home." As it turned out it was Second Army Headquarters at Parramatta.

Before we do go to that posting, we'll just go back to the jungle. You

24:30 **mentioned that it was quite boring and there was a lot of monotony. How did you alleviate the boredom?**

You just couldn't. All right, you weren't fighting and doing all those things every day of week at nine o'clock and knock off at five or anything at all. This dragged on and on, and on, and on. You could

25:00 be stuck in the same spot doing nothing and bored but that's how it happened.

What got you through the boredom?

Just perseverance. You couldn't do anything about it.

Was it like a mental state or discipline?

Up there you had no towns to go on leave. There was no such thing as getting leave and going down to the pub on the corner type of thing. There was none of that. There was no grog allowed in New Guinea,

25:30 not for the ordinary troops anyway. The Americans used to fly it in. I know that a lot of these general officers used to skive off about the amount of grog they used to drink. We never got any. Blokes used to make jungle juice when they could. I know one of my brother in-laws, who was a chemist.

26:00 He was in an ammunition company. Eventually they transferred him to the hospital unit to utilise his expertise as a chemist and they used to make grog out of the distilled spirit up there, and put a dash of this, and a dash of that in it, and they used to have all the drink they wanted.

Did you ever partake in the jungle juice?

I tried it once up with some fellas, a bloke named Dalrymple out of our unit. He made some. Oh God!

26:30 I wore a track between there and the toilet. Oh crikey! Never again!

From what we've heard the most people would ever have of jungle juice would be only two. After that it was too much.

It was devastating,

How would you contrast the conditions in New Guinea compared to the conditions in the Middle East?

27:00 Like chalk and cheese. There you could get leave. You could go to civilisation, towns and things like that. Up in New Guinea it was just like being dumped in the middle of a forest. You had no way of going anywhere. It's not as if I'm going down to town tonight or anything at all, nothing at all.

It sounds like it was a real struggle.

It was. People went mad and things like that.

What

27:30 **would happen when they went mad?**

I know of one particular officer, he disappeared over night and went off his head. They just transferred him out of the place.

What did he do?

He behaved in an erratic manner. It wasn't his fault. He couldn't help it. The conditions in which the troops up in New Guinea had to put up with were frightful.

28:00 **Did you ever struggle with your own sanity during that time?**

No, but my nerves were bad when I came home. I was like that [shakes] and I know after I got discharged out of the army I was in a picture show, and there was some noisy thing about the war going on. I had to leave the theatre. I couldn't stop there.

We'll

28:30 **go into more detail when we get to the end of the war because that's a very important part of your wartime experience. When you were moving from these different places, you know the Markham Valley and Shaggy Ridge, and Oro Bay, would the headquarters move together?**

You'd get your movement orders. You had to move by such and such a way of transport, and to go from Wau to Markham Valley we went

29:00 by plane, and the planes were strictly loaded according to so much weight. You couldn't have an ounce over because for instance, Dumpu, the landing strip there was on an angle. You come down and then they've got to make a sharp right hand turn to pull up. Some of the planes would come down there and they would lose their wing to make the turn. The American

29:30 pilots were sort of learning on the job and it didn't make it any easier but that's how it went on.

Would you be moving from place to place with the same personnel the whole time or would there be a change each time you moved?

Oh no. If you're posted to a unit, you move with that unit all the time, unless you were transferred out to somewhere else or you got sick, or something like that but you remained with the same people all the time.

Who were

30:00 **some of the key officers that you did work with all the time?**

For instance, the brigade major at the time was Graham Scarlet. Unfortunately he's dead now. When he left brigade major and went to England to do a counter mortar bombardment course. There was a fellow, Noel Winarski.

30:30 took over his job. Graham Scarlet after the war – he was original Second 1st Field Regiment and to me that was important. After the war he became the Registrar of Sydney University, a very popular officer in the regiment and well thought of.

31:00 There was another fellow, who was the staff captain of the RAA 6th Div, Ken James. He was another fella out of the Second 1st Field Regiment. After the war he became the secretary of Unilever. They're both dead now. As I said, the original regiment, there's only 41 of those original ones

31:30 still left alive.

Who was your closest mate during this time?

Well as I said before, there was Mac, McDonald and Fife Donald, Norm Gibson. They were virtually close friends.

So those friends were consistent throughout your time?

Yes but they're dead

32:00 now. The funny part about it, Norm Gibson said to me one day, "You know, you're too serious." I was shocked to think that I was too serious but still that's how it goes.

You mentioned that you were at Shaggy Ridge for a while and I've heard that it is quite a remarkable place. Could you describe what you recall of Shaggy Ridge?

Well, it was all up and down, up and

32:30 down hills sort of business. We were virtually like camp followers. We just followed along the line. We didn't do any actual fighting. We just got to the other end and that was it, and got up to Madang. That's virtually all there was to it.

What it a place that struck you in terms of beauty?

No. The whole of New Guinea I never want to see again.

33:00 One of the more relaxed, as far as temperature was concerned was Wau. It was a nice cold climate at the time up there but I never want to go back there. I could have had a free trip some years ago. I wasn't at all interested and never will be. One of my nieces' husbands, he was in

33:30 ANGAU, and Australian-New Guinea Civil Association, after the war. His father before him was in ANGAU before that. He went up around Buna when the Japanese ships with little tin boxes or steel boxes to take home the remains of the dead Japanese bodies. He had to direct the natives to put the parts of

34:00 Japanese bodies into these things and his instructions to the natives was, "Make certain you don't put two heads in the one box." Of course Buna was so badly – so much ammunition, explosives and stuff, unexploded explosives in Buna, they moved the actual town or village, or whatever you like to call it, of Buna to another spot. They relocated the whole thing.

34:30 They closed the old Buna down.

Why do you have these feelings towards New Guinea? Why don't you ever want to go back?

It was so horrible. That's to me. Other people loved it but I didn't enjoy New Guinea. It was just a hot jungle.

Was there anything that you enjoyed about New Guinea?

Nothing! I enjoyed getting out of it.

Were there any moments of humour or mischief that you – ?

35:00 I cannot recall any good moments at any time. We were there and that was it. You can't pick and choose where you go. The same as they say about the militia and all that kind of – they had no say in where they went, and a lot of these militia units put up a very good performance. You take one like the 39th Battalion,

35:30 they performed in an excellent manner and everything else, and what did they do to them? When they sent them back to Victoria they disbanded the whole battalion and put the remainder of what was left of the battalion out as reinforcement to all these different other units.

There must have been something in New Guinea, some light moments, some moment of humour that helped to get you through?

Tell me about it? When was it? I don't know anything about it.

36:00 **I mean from other people that we've talked to there was always a larrikin or a joker in the group and that made light of the situation, and made it bearable. Was there anyone like that?**

I know my batman used to run the two-up school. I knew he ran it. He wasn't supposed to but I knew he ran it and I closed a blind eye to it, but that was about it. Then at Buna he found some of those

36:30 horses that the Japs brought in and they trained them up, and they had a race meeting at Buna at one stage. He was an ex-jockey from yester year sort of business and he was training this horse to run in the thing. I don't know how they got on but that was it. There was no humour.

What about in the Headquarters Popendetta? Wasn't there someone somewhere that cracked a few

37:00 **funnies every now and then?**

I can never remember it. It was just a boring, boring, boring job. So you can understand I didn't enjoy being up in New Guinea.

Yes it sounds like it really wasn't a nice place for you.

It wasn't for me. I don't know about anybody else but it wasn't for me.

You mentioned

37:30 **before that when you did come home to Australia that you did suffer from nerves?**

Yes.

What was it about your New Guinea experience that gave you those nerves?

I think over the period of time, all right by back was starting to play up a bit on me.

38:00 I didn't have the movement like that. I had all kinds of malaria at times, like there was sand fly fever and dengue fever, and all those kinds of things. I ended up with malaria. I think my weight was down to about seven stone. We didn't have real good food. It wasn't

38:30 the fact that supplies couldn't get through but there wasn't anything. There was nothing sort of exciting to say, "We're going to have a nice night tonight." There was nothing like that at all. It was just a – you could say it was boring.

Was there any form of entertainment such as movies?

There were eventually movies but it depends on where you were. The

39:00 film unit used to put on movies. If you happened to be somewhere near it you could see it but in lots of cases you weren't near the movies, but they did have them up there in New Guinea.

Tape 8

00:33 **At what stage were you made acting staff captain?**

I was doing the staff captain's work for the last 12 months I was up in New Guinea. Even though they had appointed somebody as staff captain, he was incapable of doing the work. So I was doing the work and he was doing the credits.

Why was he incapable?

Because he didn't have the

01:00 administrative experience to be able to do it. He was a carpenter by trade.

What was involved in that position?

Organization of different things. You had to see that everything was organised, the units were functioning and everything else. You'd write nasty letters to the COs. That's how it went on.

We were talking in the break that you were recommended for an

01:30 **MBE at one point. What was your understanding of why you were recommended for the MBE?**

I was done because of the devotion to the duty and the carrying out all the assigned duties to me, and those of the higher rank, and that was the reason behind it all. Now the

02:00 major, Graham Scarlet was the initiator of that and it was seconded by the CO, Brigadier Kitto.

Was that MBE ever awarded to you?

I know it was recommended and I know it got down as far as army headquarters but I didn't get it.

Did you return from New Guinea before or after the war ended?

When the war ended.

When the war ended

02:30 **that's when you returned home to Australia?**

Yes that's when I went to 2nd Army Headquarters Popendetta – Parramatta.

And that was in Parramatta?

Mmm.

Can you talk us through what you recall when the Americans dropped the Atomic bomb on Japan?

Not really. I don't recall any big significance about the bomb going off. I know it went off but

03:00 I don't recall it being such a big deal. It probably was but you become rather blaze after a while.

We were talking about this earlier that you were potentially suffering from depression at this time and I'm wondering because like that's quite a significant moment, and it seems like you had

03:30 **quite a neutral reaction to it.**

Well my health wasn't in a very good state but probably in a backhanded way the CRA was getting rid of me sort of business because my health was deteriorating and he offered me a transfer. All right, I accepted that and as I say, I went to the 2nd Army Headquarters Popendetta, and they were at Burnside Homes, and I lived in one of the

04:00 homes. I had a very bad bout of malaria there at this time. They didn't believe that I had malaria because being at 2nd Army Headquarters where would you get malaria from but they forget the fact that I'd been away and came back to there.

But that was post the war wasn't it? The war had ended at this point?

No it hadn't.

Oh it hadn't? Sorry I thought –

See I went there in

04:30 November '44 and then all right, I was doing various odd things there, installing new guns at Middle Head and I arranged special ammunition. They put in twin guns there, twin 5.25s [5.25 inch guns].

05:00 Then in February our original RSM, who was at that stage – I think he was a major, he had a feeler out to find out where I was and he came to interview me. He said he had been told to form a special unit and he wanted me to be his 2IC, and we were to go – he wouldn't say where they were

05:30 going or what they were going to do but it turned out to be M Special Unit to go to Borneo, and reconnoitre behind Japanese lines for the landing at Balikpapan. I was supposed to go but I had been downgraded to B Class, therefore I was not allowed to serve outside of Australia.

Why were you downgraded to B Class?

Because of my health.

06:00 **Because of the malaria and the weight loss?**

Well the fact that my back was playing up and my health. I was down in weight and underweight, and everything else.

How disappointed were you to not go to Borneo?

I was disappointed because Ted Resuggan, who was our original RSM, I had a lot to deal with him whilst he was with the regiment. He left the

06:30 regiment after Greece when we lost our adjutant, and another fellow who was a captain, they all went up to 6th Div RAA. I would have been happy to have been able to serve with him.

Where were you when the war actually ended?

07:00 We were on Oatlands Golf Course. They'd moved us from Burnside Homes to Oatlands Gold Course and we were living in huts there.

For a second there I thought you were playing golf!

Oh no!

I thought what a marvellous image, war had ended and here's Ossie playing golf!

No I wasn't playing golf! That was it but I always liked playing soldiers, weekends

07:30 off sort of business. It was so easy.

So were you there to recuperate?

I wasn't there to recuperate. I was there because I was posted to 2nd Army Headquarters Popendetta. All right I had been downgraded medically but I still had to carry on doing the job I was supposed to do. It was easy. There wasn't really much for us to do and we could go home on leave on the weekends. It was

08:00 like the Poms in Ceylon during the war working on a peacetime basis.

What do you recall of the war ending?

Nothing in particular.

How did you celebrate?

I don't think I did. It was just another day. The war had finished and all right, "What's going to happen?" It was September before I got out of the army. I could have stayed there if

08:30 I liked a lot longer but I wasn't interested. When the war started I was keen as mustard to get in the

army and go away, and everything else. By that time all that keenness had worn off I think. When the war finished I said, “Righto! Good, I’ll get out now.” So that’s what happened.

What was the difference that you could see

09:00 **in Sydney from before the war to post-war?**

During the time I was at Parramatta I don’t recall ever going into Sydney. I can’t say I remember anything at all.

During this time that you were at Parramatta what were you doing for

09:30 **entertainment or social outings?**

Just drink in the mess. That’s about all. There was a chap I knew and met. He was from the Second 3rd Battalion and we were in the 2/1st Field. We were closely associated and his name was Tutty Bennison. Even after the war we used to meet

10:00 socially but he of course, he’s dead as well. Most of the fellas I know from the wartime are all dead.

Did you have a girlfriend at this time?

When I was transferred to 6th Div I met a girl in Maitland. Eventually we got married after the war.

10:30 **So you had been in communication with her?**

Oh yes, but as it turned out it was a failure. All right, after the war she used to be in a chemist shop and we eventually got married of course. I went back to work on the

11:00 railways. When it was time to finish and get out of the army I went back to the report. The director of the Institute said, “There’s no job here for you.” Of course that upset me a bit, so I bounced back again, the fight in me again and he said, “We’ll put you down to Darling Harbour and you can work there.” I said, “Mr Funnel, unfortunately my war injuries

11:30 preclude me from doing that and I just won’t. I’m having a job here.” Of course they put me temporarily doing this and one day or week or so I’m working for one section, then I’m doing another. By this time letters started to arrive between he and I, and the commissioner of the railways, and of course all the staff were on my side against him because it turned out that

12:00 he was sort of an enemy of my father, and he was taking it out on me. Eventually after much time, letters to the commissioner and everything else, they transferred me out of the secretariat branch of the railways into the financial branch of the railways. Within six months I’d received three promotions and marked down for further progression.

12:30 By this time a fella I had been in the army with, he was in the hotel business. He wanted me to go into pubs. I wasn’t terribly keen but my wife was. Anyway, I thought I’d give it a go. Well I did and went into the pub with him. He was at the same hotel teaching me the business. Eventually I went off in a hotel of my own.

13:00 He still owned part of the hotel and I eventually bought into a share of the hotel. I concentrated on the hotel.

Ossie, you were talking about going into the hotel business and talking about your wife?

Toohey’s offered me a job

13:30 managing the Civic Hotel in Canberra. I went down there for a while and then this army friend of mine came forth with an offer of becoming the licensee of a hotel in Scone, in which I eventually bought a third share in, which I took it over. All right, it was very difficult. Scone is

14:00 a funny place. They resent you coming into the place and they don’t like you leaving but I was up there for two and a half years or so. It was hard going first off but in the end there were six hotels in Scone and I managed to build the trade up to the fact that I was doing as much as the rest of the six hotels in the town all together.

14:30 **At this point had you and your wife parted ways?**

No, we were still there and of course I was devoting myself to the business more so. I was probably neglecting her more than anything else. Then again the trouble is that country hotels after hour trading goes on just as much as anything else and anyway at that time – I think it was ’54, ’55 or something like that,

15:00 Sydney hotel. This fellow owned another hotel in Sydney, The Rawson and the six o’clock closing business had stopped, and they were open till ten o’clock. They also had another time of opening in the morning. You could open at six o’clock, close at six o’clock. That was the finish for the day. You didn’t have to open the trade of a night time. So

15:30 I thought, “That’ll do me.” So we transferred down to Sydney. Well of course my wife was going out of a night time supposedly with her girlfriend. In the meantime she’d met up with one of the boarders in the hotel in town. I didn’t take any notice of it and I thought she was doing that but we were there,

16:00 and one Friday night prior to that her mother lived at Maitland, and she got flooded out, and lost her house. The whole house disappeared in the flood and at Scone we had two floods up there at Scone, one year after another, never had it before in their lives. They haven’t got a river in Scone, so we got flooded out. That’s my usual run of luck. So her mother came down to live with us.

16:30 She was a lovely woman. She started her own business in the hotel providing snack food. Of course in those days, the AHA [Australian Hotels Association] frowned on anything like that. In fact several of the boys came up to see me to tell me to stop it. I said, “Get lost! I’m going to keep it going.” Anyway she, my mother in-law in those days, was running it herself and running a profitable little business. This

17:00 one particular Friday night we go upstairs, my wife had cleared out, lock, stock and barrel. Her mother didn’t have the slightest inkling of it and neither did I. So it turned out she cleared out with one of the boarders in the hotel.

Did she leave a note?

No nothing, just vanished.

Did you hear from her again?

I was distraught and

17:30 looking everywhere. I couldn’t find a trace and eventually I found out about it through my sister, who happened to find out about it. She told me about it and she said, “You’ll find her in a car of an afternoon down at Narrabeen.” I’ve forgotten the name of the pub down there now – The Sands Hotel. “This fella, Jimmy Hilder drinks there of an afternoon.”

18:00 Of course I drove down there and I had a go at him. I had an old bayonet knife I had from the army days and I had it up against his stomach. I was going to stick him with it and oh – it’s not worth it. I didn’t. I went and took the keys out of the car, so I ruined them there. I went back home and went back to

18:30 the hotel. Anyway, I was pretty annoyed and I threw the keys down the sump pit down in the cellar, and next thing I know, the next day a detective calls on me. He said, “They’re going to take a summons out on you for pinching the keys. You threw those keys in disgust underneath the car didn’t you?” I said, “Yes I did.” And that was the answer. It turns out this Jimmy

19:00 Hilder’s, she used to be a madam in a brothel business. She was pretty well in with one set of detectives and the other set against them came to warn me about it. So I eventually got divorced from her and that was it. Then I met my other wife to be and eventually we got married in about 1963,

19:30 and we adopted the four children, and that’s how I ended up buying this house, so they had somewhere permanent for them to go to. I was still in the hotel business, from one pub to another and all that kind of business. So that’s how it happened. I wasn’t terribly happy with hotels but I’d committed myself to it and I had to keep going. We ended up pretty well. It ended up

20:00 we each had a third share. Unfortunately I never had enough money to have a third. I had a sixth share with another fellow and two others, they had a third each. In the end though unfortunately, the fellow I was in the army with was cheating us too. He was working on money he shouldn’t have had. We should have had it and I told the others about it, and they didn’t believe me. I said, “All right.”

20:30 And I ended up selling my interest in the various hotels to him. I didn’t get all the full money I got to it but he promised to pay me later on, but he never did and he died, so that was it. I was never happy about being in pubs but as I say, I was committed to it and there was not much I could do about it.

You mentioned that you used to break up a lot of fights in the pubs?

Oh God blimey!

21:00 Down at The Rawson Hotel down at Haymarket, the markets were all down there and we had early trading on there. In fact we used to have to close two till three and by doing that you lost all your customers, so I used to put a lot down the bottom, and I got pinched for trading after hours. I got the hours altered seven till six, which was straight through and you didn’t have to worry about things

21:30 but we used to get a lot of people in there, who were drunk, playing up, and abusive, and all kinds of things. The only one to do the throwing out was myself and I wasn’t frightened of anybody. So I used to wear old clothes until lunchtime and afternoon I’d have a shower, about two o’clock in the afternoon, get dressed because up until then I was the boxer.

Just out of interest were there many people coming into the pub at seven am in the morning?

Yes!

22:00 There used to be regular people. One particular fellow used to come in there, he'd put a handkerchief around his neck and he'd order a grog. It would be a whiskey or a brandy I think he had. He had one hand around the handkerchief and the other one around the glass, and he'd pull it over, half up to his mouth, and it went all over the place. After three or four he'd put the handkerchief away. Oh you've got no idea! The

22:30 things that used to go on early in the morning with people drinking and that.

Sounds like he was obviously an alcoholic.

He had the DTs [delerium tremons – shakes] and stuff, and we had a big lounge down there as well. Saturday morning was the big time. You'd get all sorts, all with hangovers from Friday night parties and everything else. At that same time at that

23:00 place, there were SP [starting price] betting syndicates that used to operate in Sydney and this particular crowd used to run the SP information on all the horses, and the prices, and everything else. Well I said, "You can use the lounge upstairs to sort your mail out." They used to post mail to all – that was on a Thursday and they'd post that to all over Australia, and then Friday night all the operators of the telephones used to operate out of the markets. They had the use of

23:30 that through their own negotiations and they'd all report to where they were working. That was the Friday night. Of course it boosted the takings up a fair bit and then Saturday they'd come back after their job. They'd all come back to the hotel to get paid for the day and away they went. So I used to be full of a Saturday and the markets were closed, and I used to be full in the hotel, and the other places round the place were all empty. Of course

24:00 I used to cash their cheques for them, like the betting syndicate had paid for their service. They'd give me a foolscap full of envelopes full of cheques. One week I'd bank them all, clear the money and then pay them the following Friday. It was so lucrative the taxation department got onto them and I had to go and front the quiz room down at the taxation department on two occasions.

24:30 They said, "Who are they?" I said, "I don't know their names." "Don't tell me you cash cheques for people you don't know?" I said, "Well I cash them, bank them, clear the money and then I give it to them." I said, "All I was interested in was how many drinks they were buying. I wasn't interested in anything about them." I wouldn't tell them how they were. I knew who they were but I wouldn't let onto them.

So working in the hotels and in the pubs you

25:00 **must have seen a lot of ex-servicemen coming in for a drink?**

Oh yes, Anzac Day most of the regiment – you're supposed to open at 12 o'clock on Anzac Day. All right, you could get a drink at The Rawson Hotel at six o'clock. Then after that I'd say, "I'm going out for the day," and I used to go. They all know. The staff knew where I was going and they all behaved. Anyway,

25:30 one particular day a bloke across the road potted me to the 21 Squad and they were waiting outside the door for me to open the doors. Anyway, I knew they were out there and I didn't open, and the fella opened before me across the road. So then I thought, "He's opening. I'm opening." They weren't worried about that and they come in, and pinched me. I said, "I thought you could open at quarter to 12." I said, "I thought I was running late."

26:00 Anyway, it was Sergeant Walsh of the 21 Squad and I had to go and front Liverpool Street Court. He got up and said, "He opened at quarter to 12!" I said, "He's a liar! I did not!" Anyway, I got fined ten pound plus court costs, pay before you leave.

Was alcoholism or the over indulgence in alcohol a problem in ex-servicemen?

26:30 I don't think so. I probably looked at it in a different light. I was accustomed to people coming in to drink but then again anybody that had had sufficient, they wouldn't get any more service because under the Liquor Act you were allowed to refuse to serve anybody. You don't have to give them a reason or anything at all and also if you serve a drunk, you're

27:00 liable for prosecution. I used to patrol around that hotel all day long, every day and watch the service, and everything else. Anyone that misbehaved I'd tell them to go and if they didn't, I'd throw them out. The staff knew their situation. I stood by the staff. Whatever they said, was law and that way by enforcing the regulations, and keeping it right, my trade built up because

27:30 other pubs they'd go into – I wouldn't allow anybody to hawk things around. In those days there would be a hell of a lot of hawkers and so forth. If you wanted a match, go and buy a box.

How do you think your wartime experience affected the rest of your life?

I don't know. I think it gave me a greater education because I reckon with the army experience and then

28:00 the hotel experience, it broadened my outlook tremendously, and I think the fact of my army experience helped me in the hotel business because I had learned to deal with men, size them up. I remember one

time on a troop ship, we were going around and we used to play cards a lot to while away the time. I got to the stage I was dreaming, “He’s worth a King, not he’s only a Two and he’s an Ace,” and all this kind of business. I ended up stopping playing cards for a while because

28:30 it was getting me down. But the experience with the men in the army and the types I think was a good education for the hotel business.

What about the negative affects of war?

How do you mean?

I mean you’ve mentioned that you’ve sustained injuries?

I just had to learn – well when I came out of the army I had to go to the Repat [Repatriative Care]. They had it at

29:00 Grace Building and I used to have to go there for treatment on a regular daily basis for infra-ray treatment, and ultraviolet ray treatment, and everything else. They said to me, “We can’t do anything for you. You’ll just have to learn to live with it.” I accepted that advice. I had to learn to live with it and that’s it.

What about the long term psychological effects of the war? How did that affect you?

Early in the piece I used to get nightmares and everything else like that but they gradually ceased. I am now

29:30 very wobbly on my feet, mainly through that stroke on the brain but at the same time I can’t bend down. I can’t bend down to tie up my shoelace or take my shoes off. I’ve got to use a stool to lift my foot up and then I’ve got to drag my leg up to put it on the stool to be able to undo my shoes. But you learn to live with it and you make provisions. You know you can’t do this, so you do something else.

30:00 It’s no good saying I can’t do this because I’ve got this or that, you’ll soon fall by the wayside.

How much contact do you have with your mates from the war?

Well I do ring a lot of them. They ring me. I am the delegate of the regiment to the 6th

30:30 Div Association. They don’t meet very often of course but all right, it’s difficult getting there but I get there. I’m pigheaded, stubborn and obstinate, and I don’t like to admit that I can’t do anything. In lots of cases I know I can’t but I try.

How important has it been for you to maintain contact with your mates?

31:00 It’s a funny thing about the army and things, you form a different bond with people out of the unit, different than what you would by going to work somewhere. Now you could be working in a big firm. You could be working with a half a dozen people. You wouldn’t be as friendly with them as what you would be with half a dozen fellas you knew in a unit. It’s a different sort of friendship.

31:30 It’s a different sense of bonding. You rely on them more than you would on the others and you learnt to trust them, and know their weakness, and their strengths. You don’t go around with your eyes closed. You do it subconsciously. You sum them all up and know what they’re worth, and what they’re like, and whether you can rely on them or not. That’s how it goes.

How important is Anzac Day to you?

32:00 It’s a form of meeting place. We hold ours every year. All right when I was in the country hotels I never attended but I couldn’t. Down here all right, I endeavour to make it every year. I can’t march. I can’t physically walk around that’s all but I go to where we have our function. We used to have it – to start off the

32:30 first one I think we had at ‘Paddington Town Hall’ and that was a drunken orgy but nowadays we have a couple of orange juices. Up until three or four years ago we used to have it at the Graphic Arts [Hotel]. We were debating about the fact that we were all having trouble climbing the stairs. Anyway, they settled it for us. They went bankrupt and they closed their place down in Regent

33:00 Street, and they had to amalgamate with somebody out at Botany. Of course then we had to find another place and we found the Town and Country Comfort Hotel in Sydney, in George Street there on the corner of George and Quay Street I think. We’ve been going there for the last four years. It’s cost us a lot more money. It’s a different set up all together. The other one, we had draught

33:30 beer. This place is little stubbies of beer and imported stuff, and all that kind of business. In fact we had a meeting recently about the fact that we’ve had to put the price of our ticket up. Last time we had about 78 or 80 people there. Half of those were visitors. Chaps would bring along their nephews or sons, or whoever it might be and they were drinking us

34:00 out of house and home. We ended up the last Anzac Day, apart from donations of about 1,800 dollars, we had to pay 20 dollars a ticket for the tickets, we ended up losing about 3,000 dollars on the day

because we weren't doing the drinking, the visitors were. The wine bill alone was 800 dollars. Apart from the grog it was about 2,500 dollars and we lost money. So we've never

34:30 put the ticket up for many years, 20 dollars for the whole day and drink what you like, eat what you like the whole time. We've had to put the tickets up to about 30 dollars for our men and we're going to charge the visitors not the same price as we charge our own members now. We're going to charge them 45 dollars. If they don't come we won't lose them. After all the Anzac Day is for our own unit members, not the visitors.

Fair enough!

35:00 **Do you feel the 6th Division has received the recognition that it deserves?**

I don't think they did. Most people who were originally with the 6th Division don't think they received the recognition they should have received in many ways. They were the first in the war. All right, I didn't go up to New Guinea with them in the second part of the war. The 6th Division went twice

35:30 back to New Guinea for short periods. They finished the war in '45 in New Guinea up around Aitape. Many say it was unnecessary. The Japs could have been weathered away on the fine but that's how it happened. They fought – they went to the Middle East, in Greece, Crete. A couple of battalions got wiped

36:00 out completely in Crete. It was the 2/1st Battalion and the 2/11th Battalion. They got capture there because they ran out of food and ammunition, and they had to surrender. They reformed the whole of those units, reformed and rebuilt in Khassa in Palestine. All right, we went to Ceylon. There wasn't any real fighting or anything like that there. We came home

36:30 to Australia, so the 2/5th Battalion and the 2/3rd Battalion fought all the King's enemies; the Italians, the Germans, the Vichy French, and then back home in Australia the Japanese. They didn't receive the recognition that they should have deserved. If you examine the amount of medals and decorations they got, it was nowhere near

37:00 as much as the other divisions. The 9th Div seemed to be the only division that was ever there. One of my brothers was in it. He was part of the 7th Div and they took the whole 20th Brigade, and put them in the 9th Div. Of course I often used to say to him, "We won it, but you blokes lost it." It was only friendly banter between us but that's how it went on. That's how

37:30 I personally and I think a lot of other 6th Division feel the same. We weren't looking for any decorations personally but it didn't seem they gave the 6th Division the accolades they should have.

Well, Ossie, we're coming towards the end of the interview but before we do finish I'm wondering if there's anything else you'd like to add?

I can't think of anything. I'm talked dry!

38:00 I don't think so.

In that case on behalf of Graham [interviewer] and myself, and also the Australians At War Archive we'd like to thank you so much for sharing your story with us today. You've taken us on a remarkable journey and I've learned quite a lot from you today, and I hope you've enjoyed the experience.

Thank you.

I've really enjoyed it. Thank you very much.