Australians at War Film Archive

Kenneth Jorgenson (Ken or Jorgo) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Ken, could you give us quite a brief summary of the major events in your life to date?**

I was born in Naremburn, which is a small suburb between Willoughby and Crows Nest on the 27th of March 1918,

01:00 and for the first 18 years of my life I lived in a home in Tulloh Street, Willoughby. I attended the Naremburn State School and left. On completing the primary education there, I then attended the Central Technical School at Ultimo up to the Leaving Certificate, to

01:30 the Intermediate Certificate. I had two sisters, one older than me and the other younger of course, and the youngest of the family was my brother. My brother died of leukaemia when he was 58, but the other two members of the family are still alive.

02:00 My early days, school days were quite happy in one sense. I wasn't a very studious person but I still seemed to be able to get through my exams quite satisfactorily. In fact, at the end of the primary schooling, my parents were advised by the teachers to have me repeat the last year in the higher-grade class,

02:30 with the object of attending the North Sydney Boys' High School, but I missed my – after the first term I missed my friends – and I asked to advance into the trade school with them, which did happen. One of my very close friends at the school joined the militia when he

03:00 was a couple of years older than me – and so after I turned 15, I thought I'd put my age up one year and I joined the cadets in the militia at the 7th Field Brigade at Warrane Road, Willoughby, and had quite an enjoyable time. That was in 1933. When I was 15 I left school. Money

03:30 was scarce then. My father had been employed during the Depression, but did have a period of rationing, where with one week in four idle, and no money coming in, so the money was important. So I took a job by introduction of a friend of mine in a small factory at North Sydney, but

04:00 after being there for a couple of years I realised that there was no future in that. So I shopped around and eventually I got a job as a draftsman in the city with a small engineering firm. When I was 18, my father, who was in the Maritime Services Board, was transferred to Goat Island where the fire floats that

04:30 were used for fires on the waterfront or on ships moored in the Harbour were moored, to act as fire fighting duties. He was a watch officer in the brigade and the family moved over to Goat Island, on number 3. The cottages are still standing, and as a matter of fact when they were filming the Water Rats, the TV [television] show [about water police], they used our house as one of the main

05:00 offices for the production people. That was a very pleasant interlude. We had to travel by ferry, of course, to get to the island, and some school children who were living on the island were taken ashore by launches that were provided for them to go to school, and then they were picked up in the afternoon, and then on Saturday mornings, launches were provided for

05:30 the womenfolk to go shopping at the Quay. When the situation in Europe started to decline when Hitler first started to move in the Saar and then the – where was it – the Rhine Valley, the question of a war coming seemed to be fairly

06:00 clear. I had dropped out of the militia for a while because of the travelling problems from the island, but I realised then with this likelihood of a war eventuating I rejoined, but at that time they were up to full strength and because they were due to be mechanised, they said they would only be prepared to take me on because of my engineering background.

06:30 They would accept me if I went into the field of mechanisation. I did this, and although we had no vehicles at that time, I was giving lectures and instructions to the recruits on how to maintain their vehicles and how to drive. I

07:00 wasn't a particularly good driver myself at that stage, but I did have a good understanding of the mechanics of the vehicles. Of course, in 1938 it was quite clear that a war was to come and when war was declared

07:30 in 1939, the militia first went to a month's camp up at west of Newcastle, in the valley, and we were given initial training there using vehicles. These were private cars and light trucks that had been hired for the purpose.

08:00 **Now Ken, if I can just stop you there because the bulk of the interview will concern the war years, could we just very briefly summarise the war years, and then we'll come back for the detail later and I'll have you give a summary of your post-war life because what you've given us so far is terrific, it's just I can sense you starting to go into the sort of details that we'll pick up later.**

Right.

So if you can give us quite a brief summary of the war years and then your post-war life.

Right. Well in November 1939, I

08:30 joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces] and was posted to the 2/1st Field Regiment, which was an artillery regiment, to the camp at Ingleburn, which was still being built when we occupied it. After the early training, it was decided to send the AIF overseas and then January we sailed for, we thought at first we were going to England,

09:00 but it turned out we went to the Middle East and initially camped in Palestine for training. When Italy entered the war, we were trained for anti-aircraft duty and stationed at Haifa in Palestine, and witnessed the first Italian air raid on the oil depot, which was about 400 yards from the building we were camped

09:30 in. We were then moved out of that for safety up into Mount Carmel, and we were stationed in a nunnery called Stella Maris, which had a magnificent view out over the water. We then were moved to Alexandria for further anti-aircraft duty there until the 6th Division was reformed

10:00 towards the end of 1940, and then in December 1940, we were moved then into the first attack of Libya, where the first campaign was at Bardia then followed by Tobruk and Benghazi, and our regiment was the only unit in the 6th Division, and went through the whole campaign without being relieved, because we had a

10:30 pretty aggressive CO [commanding officer] who wanted to be involved in all the action. In the middle of March, we were relieved by an English unit, and we went back to Alexandria and prepared to go to Greece. The headquarters and 1st Battery were shipped out in April, and it was Friday the 13th

11:00 if I remember rightly, which wasn't a good omen, and after some, the guns and the vehicles had been sent separately on another ship and it took us a few days travelling around in a goods train to eventually link up with our vehicles. It then became a steady withdrawal from Greece, and most of our unit was

11:30 shipped out, but I was in a party engaged in salvaging our gun sites and handing them out to the troops as they boarded the destroyer, but the destroyer was fully loaded and we were left there. Eventually we escaped from Greece, got to Crete, which I'll mention in some detail later,

12:00 and then finally we were evacuated from Crete back to Egypt and then to Palestine for further training and reforming. When Japan entered the war, the Australian Government demanded the return of the troops from the Middle East back to Australia. We were amongst the last of the 6th Division to leave, and when we reached

12:30 Colombo, Churchill wanted us to go to Burma to try and save Rangoon, but the Australian Prime Minister, Curtin, demanded that we come back to Australia, and as a compromise they decided to leave us there for a few months, because there was a Japanese invasion likelihood first on

13:00 Ceylon and then on to India. It did happen that a task force did come into the area. We were bombed by Japanese planes, but no invasion took place, luckily for us, but while we were there we did learn some elements of jungle warfare, which of course had a bearing on some of our later activities. After three

13:30 months we then returned to Australia. We were given some leave, and because we'd had this jungle training, our regiment and the 16th Brigade were given notice to go north and we went up to New Guinea, when the Japanese were about the furthest advanced over the Owen Stanley Mountains on the Kokoda Track. They were pushed back, fortunately. Our 16th

14:00 Brigade was heavily involved in all the fighting that took place. When the Japanese were pushed over the mountains, one of our batteries, 51 Battery, had been taught how to dismantle the artillery pieces,

load them into aeroplanes and then unload them and reassemble them. Well, a troop was flown over the Owen Stanley mountains to makeshift

14:30 airfields there, and they were the first artillery to go into action in the Buna-Sanananda campaign. The 51st Battery was reinforced by a second battery later on, and they stayed on right through to the end of the campaign in January. We were taken back to Port Moresby. One battery went

15:00 to Wau, and then at the end of that campaign, we were finally brought back to Sydney. We were in pretty bad shape then. A lot of people were suffering from malaria and being treated for that, so we spent a few months recuperating and resting back in Australia, and then at the end of 1943, we were then ordered for embarkation to go

15:30 to New Guinea again, which resulted in us going to Aitape and then from Aitape to the Wewak campaign, which we were still involved in at the end of the war in 1945. We were shipped back home, and finally discharged from the army and went back to civilian

16:00 life.

I was going to say that's an excellent summary of your service life. It's actually quite compelling. You're a very good storyteller as well as summariser, 'cause you're emphasising the main points very well. Could you now just give us a brief summary of your post-war life with an emphasis on the work that you did in civilian life, as well as marriage and children?

Yes. Well,

16:30 during my service in the army, I had become involved in a lot of technical work and I realised then that my limited knowledge of engineering that I gained at school and the few years after school was really not sufficient for me to go into a full profession. So I decided to devote a couple of years, and I went back to school

17:00 and I sat for the diploma entrance examination at the Sydney Technical College, and I'd had some private tutoring and I gained a scholarship from that to enter the diploma mechanical engineering course. That took five years of my life. I had

17:30 married in 1948, which was at the beginning of the course, and my wife was very understanding and me being away at night time on lectures and the time I had to devote to study at home, but I finally completed the course and in the daytime activity, I

18:00 was initially employed with a small engineering company. First of all, I started off in the workshop to get some practical experience, but after a year or so they asked me to go into the office and be their draftsman, which I did, and I was acting as a designing draftsman for the time I was studying for my diploma. A year or two after I completed that, the

18:30 firm I was with decided to sell up. They incidentally had made me a shareholder in the company to make sure I stayed there I guess, and there was a bit of a depression or a recession on at that time, 1953, and/or 1954, and so the firm sold up and I left there,

19:00 and finally I joined the firm of James and Kirby, who were manufacturing engineers, as a project engineer initially, and then after a few years I eventually became the assistant engineering manager, and then finally on his retirement, I then assumed the duties of engineering manager,

19:30 spent a short time as assistant general manager of one division, and then finally reverted back to engineering manager in the refrigeration section, and then I stayed in that post until my retirement at the age of 62. I then settled down

20:00 to – I did a couple of years of consulting work – and then settled down to retirement and learned how to look after the garden. Do you want any more detail than that?

No, that's fine. Of course along the way you had children as well?

Yes. One child only.

20:30 I had a wife, a daughter and a female cat, but luckily a male dog. That was the family.

Sounds a very good combination actually.

Yes.

Ken, thank you so much for quite a compelling summary. The detail and the now listen on factor is quite good, so that's a very good basis to start the interview. Now you've mentioned when and where you were born of course. What are

21:00 **some of your earliest memories of Naremburn?**

It was a quiet suburb. Of course, the tram line from McMahon's Point and Milson's Point ran through Willoughby Road to Chatswood and where we were living at Willoughby was near the beginning of a

21:30 valley that went through to the bay where the suspension bridge is. That was all bushland then, and my father bought a block of ground, it was a double block of ground with a two storey wooden house built on of course both blocks. He decided to partly demolish

22:00 the two storey building, and had the framework turned around on to a single block, and he sold the other block and from the money then he rebuilt the house on the single block. That was in the '20s, the early '20s. And it was almost a rural atmosphere

22:30 then. There was a dairy farm down on, just off the main road in the valley, and you'd get fresh milk from that. The block of ground next to the house we were living on, the big house, the original big house, was vacant. That was owned by my father and there was a lady up the road who had a cow, and she

23:00 used to bring the cow down onto our vacant block of ground to feed on the grass there, and for that service we got a couple of billy cans of milk, fresh milk per day. We used to go up the lane and collect the milk and bring it down. I remember one time falling over and having to go back crying to get fresh supplies, but during the school holidays, we used to play down in the bushland. There was an

23:30 agistment paddock there that had been used in earlier days. It had a big shed in it for the cattle to shelter in in the wintertime, and we used to play cops and robbers and so on and cowboys and indians down in the bushland. So it was almost a semi rural atmosphere in Willoughby in

24:00 those early '20s.

I believe you had some memorable bushwalks down to the head of the bay there, near the suspension bridge?

Yes, that's right, and of course the suspension bridge existed in those days. I remember once we went to the bridge and I walked across one of the cross girders, which I wouldn't attempt these days.

Now, I think the suspension

24:30 **bridge was converted into a cement bridge, a stone bridge in the '30s.**

Yes, that had happened during the war years.

So what was it like prior to that?

There was a tram service – the main termination was on the southern side of the bridge, but there was an extension service, a single line service that went across the bridge, up Strathallan Avenue and then along Sailors Bay

25:00 Road to what is now Bond's Corner, and the bridge actually did sway a bit when the trams crossed it. They had a safety device of a key in a post and when a tram was going over, he took the key out and kept it with him until he came back, so that the next tram found if the key was missing he knew there was a tram on the track and he had

25:30 to wait there until it came back.

So I presume it was a tram only bridge at that time? It wasn't a traffic bridge?

Oh yes. The motor vehicles, which were fairly rare, this was in 1920s, I'm talking about to the '26 – '27 period, there weren't very many motor vehicles around.

26:00 Willoughby Road was a dirt road, and every time a car went along, a cloud of dust followed it.

So the suspension bridge was a true suspension bridge at that time?

Yeah, it was a true suspension bridge, with the towers supported the cables, and actual roadway was wooden slats, and when the trams went across you could actually feel and see

26:30 the bridge swaying slightly. It was quite an experience, in a way, to go across the bridge.

It must've been quite incredible, actually. I believe you have memories of seeing Al Jolson in The Jazz Singer [American singer and his first film] as a child?

Yes. I would've been about 13 at that stage and there

27:00 were a couple of, there were three picture shows at Chatswood and my mother took me to see Al Jolson in The Jazz Singer, which was the first picture show recorded I think in Hollywood and certainly the first picture show that was shown here in Sydney.

What do you recall of the impact of seeing your first sound film?

Well I was perhaps a bit young to fully appreciate

27:30 the technical aspects of it, but it was a highlight really to know that that was the first talking picture. We'd seen numerous films before, with the overacting of the cast and the captions come up to describe what was happening, but I suppose the full impact was lost on me to some extent,

28:00 because of my age, but it was still a memorable event.

Now, what can you tell me about your schooling? You mentioned your schooling in the summary before but could you give me a bit more detail on that?

Well the Naremburn School was what was called a trade school. In those days schools were, education was in three layers, you might say. There was

28:30 the primary school, which was common to all. After that you'd go off into what was called a trade school and this was designed mainly for students who were likely to enter into trades. There was a commercial school. There was only one of those at Crows Nest, and then there were the high schools and the high schools were intended for the students who were more like to go on

29:00 at a higher level of education and go to university. The nearest high school was at North Sydney, North Sydney Boys' High School. I started off there in the infants' school. I can still remember the first day I entered the class and was quite amazed at all the other children singing out C A T cat, D O G dog, and the

29:30 infants' school was – seemed to go through quickly – and we progressed then into the primary school where we started to get more advanced education in reading, writing and arithmetic, and at the end of the primary school, the pupils had moved on

30:00 either to a high school, and they were only a select group from one special class, or to the trade school where they learned woodwork, metalwork and technical drawing. I wasn't a particularly good scholar you might – or when I say good scholar I didn't work very hard at

30:30 my school work, but I still managed to keep up in the top ten of the class, and I was also one of the youngest in the class. My parents were advised that I stay on and repeat the year in the select group, with the idea of going to the North Sydney Boys' High School, but some of the close friends I'd made had gone onto the trade school

31:00 and after the first term I was missing them so much I asked to go over, forgo the high school side, and go over to the trade school to be with my friends. I didn't regret doing that in a way, and on completion of there I was then sent to the Central Technical

31:30 College in Ultimo, which was leading then up to the Intermediate Certificate. One of my friends at that school who was two years older than me had joined the militia and that was the 7th Field Brigade at Warrane Road at Willoughby. It was an artillery training unit and

32:00 when I turned 15, I thought I'd put my age up a year to 16 and I joined the cadets to be with him, but shortly after he left but I did stay on. At the end of the year, I left school at 15, because money was tight in those days, and

32:30 took a job as a factory hand in a small factory at North Sydney.

Now, just before we move into talking a little bit about that job, can you tell us about your parents? I mean, first of all your father. Can you give us a bit of a description of what sort of person he was, his personality?

Well, my father was a somewhat reserved person really, and he came from a large family. My grandfather was a Dane,

33:00 born in Denmark, and he came to Australia when he was about 18 years old, and he jumped ship from when he was in, the English ship he was serving on then was in Fremantle, and he and another man came on another ship which was bound for Sydney, and it put into Adelaide and while they were moored there, he woke up one

33:30 morning to find his old ship was moored alongside. So he and this other man took off. Of course, they would've been arrested for jumping ship. He and his companion, they took off from Adelaide and they got on the small boats going up the Murray River and they were occupied for a while on these small boats travelling up the

34:00 river, and then they decided to go overland to Sydney. They lived on the river for a few weeks, living mainly off the fish they were catching. If they had a good catch that day they used to punch a hole through the jaw of the fish, and tie him up with a piece of string and put him back in the river again to keep him fresh for a couple of days later. They walked overland and

34:30 from the Murray to Sydney it took them two years. They spent a lot of time on farms, working on farms on the way, and eventually they reached Sydney. He, as a seaman, he worked on the ferry service going from Sydney to Manly. He was acting as a

35:00 skipper then. He had sufficient experience in seamanship and navigation to do so, and finally he settled down and married and had a large family at North Sydney. Well, my father was the second eldest son from the family and he had a very hard life and my grandfather was a pretty stern sort of a person, and

35:30 my father perhaps took after him to some extent.

So he was a fairly stern and fairly reserved sort of individual, was he?

Yes, yeah, and he worked for my grandfather. He started as a boy of 12 and when he and his younger brother got to the age of 17, my father was

36:00 17 and his brother was 16, they took, my grandfather was in business by himself at this stage. He had a lighter and a small tugboat and he left them in charge of the boat, and he set up office on shore looking after the business side, and there was an unfortunate incident one day. It was a Saturday,

36:30 and my father had joined the football club at North Sydney. He was playing football with the North Sydney club and my grandfather told him he had to take the boat and go back to the depot, which was along Darling Harbour to pick up some papers and also tow one of the punts back to the anchorage at North Sydney. On his way back, he

37:00 was racing against time to get back to the football and he cut close in past a liner that had just sailed past Goat Island and suddenly he found he was heading straight for a rowing boat with a man and a boy in it. Well the punt he was towing ran over the boat, tipped the boat over and the father, the man in the boat was able to swim free, but the boy

37:30 who was washed underneath the punt, and my father ran to the end of the punt and was able to grab the boy as he emerged from the other end and get him out half drowned and quite frightened with his experience, and he settled them in and got them back and left, and of course he was frightened to tell his father about it. Well a few months later, there was a writ

38:00 issued against my father for damages, and of course when that arrived, my grandfather was so incensed that he told my father that he was no longer working for him and my father took a job and eventually he joined the Maritime Services Board and he had gained his harbourmaster's

38:30 ticket for navigation of small river and coastal craft, and also a third engineer's ticket as well. So he immediately got a fairly good position in the Maritime, what was the Sydney Harbour Trust then.

39:00 My mother came from a North Sydney family, and they had met during one of the organised picnics and they eventually were married in 1916 and my father, because of his position, was in a declared position as far as service. The war was raging then, but he was restricted against

39:30 enlisting, because of his position he was involved in.

Tape 2

00:33 **What can you tell us about your mother's personality and your mother as a mother for the family?**

Well, she came from a family that was established in North Sydney. Her grandfather was a man named Hipwood. He came to Australia as a free settler and he had a men's outfitter business in Bond Street, what was then Bond Street, or

01:00 still is Bond Street, in the city. He was quite an active person and he was very interested in real estate and he started buying up property on North Sydney, bought up quite a fair amount of land that was in High Street and he was on the North Sydney Council. In fact, one small street in North Sydney is named after him, Hipwood Street.

Now if we could

01:30 **just move this forward to look at your mother as a person, as an individual because when we interview people it's always good to get a sense of the personalities that formed you as an individual.**

Yeah, yeah.

Can you tell us a bit about your mother as a person?

Well, she was the second eldest of her family of four, and of course she met my father in the social field in North Sydney, and they were married in 1916.

02:00 My boyhood recollection of her was a jolly person, always laughing and happy. She was a marvellous cook and provider for us, and I can remember her taking me to the first day of school and leaving me at school, and then being at the gate when the school came out that afternoon and taking me home.

02:30 We had a very happy life. My father worked long hours. In the early days, we didn't see much of him because he left about 6.00 o'clock in the morning and didn't get home until after 6.00 at night, and by that time most of us were in bed, but he often used to tell us he wouldn't be as hard on us as his father was on him,

03:00 and he'd try and give us an easier upbringing, but he was a bit on the strict side with us, and I think we tended to be perhaps a little frightened of him at times because of this, but later on he did open up, but as I say my mother was a jolly person. She was very much interested in building up the family.

It sounds like she was very much the heart and soul of the

03:30 **family.**

Yes, yeah.

In terms of gregariousness and the ability to…

And she was musically minded. She self taught to play the piano. Her father was a singer of some merit. He was in the chorus with Dame Nellie Melba when she was here in Sydney at one stage, and he was quite musical but, and she inherited some of his talent,

04:00 and she was a good singer and could play the piano in rather sort of a rough way, but still she got the tune out, and so she was sort of heart and soul of the family.

And when you were growing up, how important was the whole notion of Anzac Day?

Well, when I was in the militia we used to go in, I used to go in

04:30 with some of the other fellows in uniform to watch the Anzac parade, and when I was about 17, we used to talk to some of the men after the march, and I remember once speaking to one man, and I said, "Well, what was it like?" I said, "We looked at you men and you're all sort of got a set

05:00 firm look on your face when you're marching and you've obviously got a strong bond of friendship there." I said, "What was it like, what brought that about?" And this man said, "Well you had to be there to really know", and so that was the only answer we got, but of course…

It must've intrigued you though?

But later on,

05:30 of course we did. I'll tell you later on about the four Anzac Days I experienced during the war service.

And at this time in the 1930s, did many people talk about their experiences in World War I?

Some did. One man we used to, a couple of my friends from the militia used to sometimes go there on a Saturday night and we'd play cards

06:00 with him, he served in the infantry in the First World War, and was badly wounded and he occasionally would talk a little bit about it, but a lot of them were not too keen on talking too much about it, the ones that had really been heavily involved in the fighting, so.

So what impression were you able to form of World War I?

Well,

06:30 we were fascinated by it. Some of the men that were in the militia had served, a few of the officers had served, and because of our training we were naturally interested in what the service was like during the war, and took every opportunity to speak to people who had

07:00 served and were prepared to talk. So in a sense, I suppose the First World War was some measure of fascination or of keen interest to us, because we thought their knowledge or experience would help us in our training.

Can you talk about your militia training? Tell us what form your militia training actually took?

Well, initially I started off in the cadets in the first two years, but

07:30 that was devoted solely to the drill at the drill hall. We weren't allowed to go to the annual camps, but I was trained to be a member of a gun crew and somehow or other I must've shown good adaptation to that, because I finished up I became the number 2 of the gun crew. That was the gun layer, and then when I

08:00 turned 18, I then qualified as a gun layer and I was given a special emblem to put on the sleeve of my uniform, and so at the first camp I attended, I was of course the gun layer on number 1 gun and did all the ranging and so on on these 18-pounders [field artillery guns].

Can you describe for us what a gun layer actually did?

Well, the

08:30 number 1 was the sergeant in charge of the gun, and gave the orders which came from the command post to the gun crew. Now, number 2 elevated the gun to the range - that had a disk marked off for the range - and the number 3 who did load the gun had a dial sight, which was a telescopic sight, which you

aimed onto a particular aiming

09:00 point, and set an angle to that to put the gun on the line it was to fire on, and as the orders came down to change range and change line, that was transferred to us and then we put those on the instruments concerned, and I then had to re-lay the gun and adjust it for the angle of sight with a bubble, and then had a firing lever and on the order

09:30 of 'Fire!', I'd pull the firing lever and the gun would fire, and they were very loud sharp cracks, very hard on the ear drums, the 25-pounders [field artillery guns], the 18-pounders.

Did you have any kind of ear protection?

No. There was no protection. We were taught to open our mouth and put our head down so that the brim of our hat would shelter us somewhat from the blast, and to then fire

10:00 the gun, but the ears were ringing afterwards.

I expect they were. I can almost hear the crack now.

Yeah, and these were 18-pounders or 0.5 inch howitzers. They were relics of the First World War and then after a couple of years of gun laying, I then switched over to the signallers and I then qualified as a signaller.

10:30 That involved sending messages by Morse code, semaphore or heliograph, and of course by laying wire and establishing communications by phone and through a small switchboard. Then, at one stage, I did a course of training at Holsworthy for technical assistants, and this was for the people in the command posts

11:00 who established the detail for the guns to fire on when they were firing on set targets derived from maps, reading from maps or direct observation, and so after five years of that, I had a fairly broad experience in artillery work on the guns and signalling and in command, some command

11:30 post duties.

Sounds like it was excellent preparation for what you then encountered.

Yes, and then of course, and later on the mechanisation side of it, so I then also had experience like in the transport of the guns and equipment and also the maintenance.

And that was still within the militia?

Yes, yes. So when the war came I felt, I was only 21

12:00 then, although my age in the army was 22, I'd put my age up a year, I was qualified. I felt I was qualified, I had no steady girlfriend, my work wasn't really essential, and so I felt I was in a position where I should give my service to the country. It wasn't out of a strong sense of patriotism or anything like that. It was just I felt that

12:30 it was the Germans who were overreacting, and had to be stopped and the thought of them trying for world domination was fairly real, and so I felt that it was a duty you might say that I should join.

Apart from the fact that a friend had persuaded you that it would be a good idea, what had attracted you to joining

13:00 **the militia in the first place?**

Well, only because my school friend had joined. He had joined because some of his friends had joined, you see. For a number of years after the First World War, it was compulsory training for people when they were 18. They had to do three years service in the militia, or the Citizens' Forces, and that was abolished in 1932, I think

13:30 or thereabouts, and it was voluntary from then on, and of course it was voluntary when I joined, but it was friendship: because someone else was there, I followed on.

Sounds like friendship and mateship was very important to you from quite early on in life?

Yes, yes.

Particularly if you're talking about following friends from one school to another.

Yes.

Obviously there was a good bond there from early…

That's right, yes, and of course that became a very

14:00 important factor during the war service.

Now where were you when you heard that World War II had broken out?

I was at home in bed in Goat Island when Menzies [R. G. Menzies, then Prime Minister of Australia], I'd just gone to bed. It was Sunday night and of course the Germans had advanced into Poland at this stage, and we were fully aware of the treaty that

14:30 England had with Poland, and it appeared inevitable that England and France would declare war, but I'd just gone to bed when it was announced, but I told my mother and father beforehand that I considered that a war was looming and I would be involved.

What was their attitude to that?

Well, they were unhappy about it of course, but

15:00 accepted it as inevitable. My father didn't serve in the First World War because of his position that he held prevented him from doing so, and of course my grandfather was a foreign national, well no, I'm wrong, he was naturalised and of course he was overage too

15:30 at the First World War.

Now, you were recalling being home in bed at Goat Island on a Sunday night. You used the word Menzies, did you actually hear Menzies' broadcast?

Yes, the wireless, my parents were in the lounge room, and they had the wireless on and I could hear it. So I went to sleep knowing that Australia was at war. Well, shortly after that the militia went into a camp

16:00 for a month, 28 days training and the parade before we went to camp, they had announced that they were going to call for volunteers, and I was a bit late in arriving at that parade. I got there just in time to go on parade

16:30 and at the break, I went over and I submitted my name as a volunteer, but then on talking to some of the other fellows they said, "No, we're going to hold back and join as a unit. I'll keep my hands down", and they wanted to hold back and join as a unit and I said, "Oh well, I've put my name down." So, at the end of the

17:00 28 days camp, I was staying there as rear guard to help them close up the camp, I was advised that I'd been accepted for the AIF, and I was to undergo a medical examination, which was done there, and a Captain Vickery was the medical officer who examined me, and I was passed

17:30 A1 fit for service and when I then came home, I had a few days at home and then marched into Ingleburn.

What happened at Ingleburn?

Well, because of my work on the transport side, I was posted to regimental headquarters to be in charge of the drivers. There was no sort of clear-cut establishment

18:00 then, and so I gave a few lectures and talks to the people that were classified as drivers and then when the classification came out at the establishment, allowed for what they called a mechanic, which is a trade grouping, and they

18:30 classified me as this. Well, since it had more money, I thought I'd take it. So I took this and then became what they called the MT [motor transport] mechanic for the headquarters group.

What were the responsibilities of the MT mechanic?

Well, they weren't very clear. In fact, I drew up a list of what I considered the duties of the drivers

19:00 would be in maintaining their vehicle, and also what the limit of the repair that would be done, say by the mechanics. Of course, there was going to be a detachment from the engineers would be attached to the unit, which would do the more advanced engineering and artificer work on the vehicles and the guns. So the duties were

19:30 pretty vague at that stage and so I did have the battery clerk type up some of the things that I thought would be right, but of course it didn't quite turn out that way in the long run. Eventually printed books came out.

Now you've mentioned training other people. Were you yourself having to do any training at this stage or were you fairly (UNCLEAR)?

No.

20:00 I was more or less on my own in that early stage. This was at Ingleburn, and we were given recruit training, marching and parade ground work and some lectures, but it was very rudimentary. In fact, the camp was still being built; there was no furniture.

20:30 We were give a palliasse – which is a big bag – which we put some straw in and we slept on that, and

the dust from the straw gave everyone what we called Ingleburn Throat, a very sore throat which we had to have swabbed, and even the medical officer was not very well equipped. He had an orderly from the ranks, taken from the ranks,

21:00 someone that wanted to do it, and he, the orderly used to do the throat swabbing when the people reported sick with their sore throats and the MO [medical officer] found that he was using the disinfectant for feet, and he said, “Oh well, it won’t hurt them”.

And did it?

No, no. It was, the foot bath was mainly methylated spirits and

21:30 some disinfectant in it.

So did it cure the throats?

Hmm?

Did it cure the throats?

To some extent it did, yes, but I had quite a bad attack of it, and plus inoculations for smallpox. That made everyone feel a bit sick too. So I was very unhappy for about a week.

There’s a recruiting film of that period called A Hundred Thousand Cobbers which emphasises how

22:00 **many people from how many backgrounds were expected to merge together and get on.**

Yeah.

Were you aware of this melting pot of people from (UNCLEAR)?

Very much so. The very first group recruited were civilians who had had no army experience, and they were taken in two weeks earlier, and they were trained at Holsworthy on elementary drill, marching and so on, and

22:30 they were the first group. Then the militia, the people from the militia with some training came in, and they were all melded together at Ingleburn. The civilians came from – the ex-civilians came from Holsworthy. It was fairly obvious then that some were people that were out of work and looked

23:00 on the army as a chance of three meals a day and a bed and some money to spend. There were some that were criminals. There were a few criminals, and some were very young. The youngest was 16 in my group, and some were old. The age for them was 35, and some were over 35. One man,

23:30 a gold miner from New Guinea came down – he was over 35 and he joined at the Holsworthy group and when he went in and he filled the form in, he put his correct date of birth in, but the recruiting officer said, “You’re over 35,” he said. So the man told him all the trouble he’d gone to come down from New Guinea and he said, “Well, you’re pretty keen.” He said, “Go outside and get another form and fill it

24:00 in and give some thought to it, and then come back and see me.” So he came back, and he was under 35, and he was amongst the older ones. There was one man who had served in the First World War in the infantry in our group.

You mentioned criminals? What sort of criminal activity had they been involved in?

Petty thieving and so on,

24:30 and of course some of them reverted to that, and were quickly caught. The police came and arrested a couple of them, and some of the others that were really absolutely no good at all were boarded out [discharged as a result of a medical or review board] because everyone went through a further medical and dental examination, and a number were boarded out for that. Some did escape through. One man I served with

25:00 for quite some time he had TB [tuberculosis] when he joined, but he worked a racket with another man for the X-ray, he swapped or got another X-ray, and submitted that and he got through and he served for three years before he was eventually found out.

I mean that’s a pretty dire sort of situation

Yes.

because he’s obviously a contagious person?

Yes, he was a very athletic

25:30 person. He drove himself very hard. In fact, he was finally boarded out of the army and he died after about three years, and so he had a hard time.

By the sound of it, yeah. Now I just need to check something here. Now, how strong was the

mateship among the men at this (UNCLEAR) station?

Well it started to form fairly early in the piece. Of course, the

26:00 unit was divided up into, there was two batteries and the regimental headquarters. The 1st Battery, the battery commander was a Duntroon [Royal Military College] officer, and he was determined to make that the best battery in the army, and of course he was also determined that the men were going to be the best in the army too, and he was very tough on them, and he

26:30 almost made them a select group. They didn't have much to do with anyone else. They didn't tolerate anyone else visiting their lines. But the overall friendship and bond in the regiment was starting to grow as people were living together.

27:00 We were 32 in a hut sleeping on the floor, and that's a good leveller and so we quickly all became – I lost the two stripes I had in the militia, which I thought I'd carry through into the AIF, when I became this trade grouping I lost those stripes, but I was still getting the same

27:30 money, so I was quite happy about, I didn't worry about it at that stage.

So you were a private at this stage, were you?

Yes, I was back now as a gunner, and so.

And you referred to training other men. What sort of ways were you training them?

To some extent, training them to drive and training them in maintenance of their vehicles, and

28:00 I found that fulfilling to a certain extent, and at that stage I was happy to go along with it. Later on, of course, I found I wanted to do other things.

Now when did you first hear that you'd be travelling abroad?

That was in December, when Prime Minister Menzies announced

28:30 that the AIF were going into service abroad. So we were given then two weeks' leave, home leave, and were warned of course to be prepared to move when we came back.

And what did you do during that home leave?

My family were holidaying at Narrabeen [northern Sydney beach] over the Christmas period, so

29:00 I went there. I joined them there. My father was still working, but my mother and a friend of hers with her family were together in this cottage that they were renting at Narrabeen, and it was a very pleasant stay there. I really enjoyed that two weeks leave.

Did they give you any particular

29:30 **farewell, knowing that you'd be going abroad?**

Not really, because when we came back from Narrabeen, I was going straight onto camp and the family were going home, and of course I think I and my mother realised that that would be the last time we would be meeting. I

30:00 felt that rather deeply.

When you say felt it rather deeply, what sort of feelings were there?

Well, not to the point of breaking down, but we were both a bit emotional, and of course I'd left, I was on the train that was going on to Ingleburn and they were leaving the train to then go home.

Can you remember what your mother and you said to each other?

30:30 No, we just said goodbye but nothing, no, there was no prolonged farewell at that stage. I didn't know whether I would get another weekend at home before we left, but it was fairly obvious that we would be going pretty soon.

So there seems to have been a fairly, almost palpable emotion at play there, as you were farewelling your mother?

Yes. I think we both knew it was probably

31:00 the last time we would see each other before we sailed.

How long could you see the war lasting at that stage?

Well, I thought about two years. That was my feeling. I thought there'd been so much talked about the Maginot Line [fortifications along the eastern frontier of France] that the French had that, the thought was that Germany would have no chance at all of invading

31:30 France and that they'd be impregnable, and that the French Army and the British Army combined would outnumber the German Army. The British and French Army were well established, they had good tanks, the French had good tanks, good aircraft and the British of course had made a lot of

32:00 how good their bombers were, and of course the Spitfire fighter and the Hurricane fighter were renowned for their excellence. So the thought was about two years.

It sounds like you were very well informed about the war and the background to the war by that time?

Yes. Well, in the militia we were kept fairly well up to date

32:30 and also naturally it was listed in the general war news and also being in the headquarters unit, perhaps we got a bit more information there than the other rank and file did.

That's quite a profound insight, because many people that we've spoken to didn't have that level of knowledge.

No, no.

Yeah. Now what can you tell us about your departure from Australia?

Well,

33:00 we were advised on the 9th of January, we were advised that we'd be leaving the next day and we had to march with all our kit from Ingleburn camp to Narellan. No, it wasn't Narellan, the nearest station any rate. It was about a two-mile march,

33:30 and we got on the train which took us to a railway pier at Walsh Bay and we boarded the Orford. The artillery of course, they were the senior, apart from the cavalry, they were the senior members of the army and had what they call the right of way. They were the

34:00 first and there were going to be two units on board the Orford, the 2/1st Battalion and the 2/1st Field Regiment. Well when we got to the wharf, our CO was told to form the regiment up, and the 2/1st Battalion would go on board and he said, "Oh no, the artillery have the right of

34:30 way, we go first." Well, unbeknown to him, the first group were going to be loaded into the bowels of the boat and the last group were going into the cabins, and so being headquarters we marched in and we finished we were in the steerage section of the boat and of course thought, "Well, this is not very good quarters". So

35:00 luckily it was realised then what the intention was, so we were taken out of there and by this time a lot of the 2/1st Battalion had claimed the best of the cabins and so instead of going up on the boat deck, we finished up down in C deck under the main deck, but it, the cabin had a porthole

35:30 and that was the best accommodation, army accommodation I had in the whole war.

Sounds great. Now this was supposed to be a secret departure, wasn't it?

Yes. We were told not to discuss departure with any of the civilians or outside the unit, but somehow everyone seemed to have known, because when the ship sailed

36:00 there were people lining all the foreshores and my [father] was able to – I don't know whether he did it officially or unofficially - but he took a crowd of people on his boat, the boat he was in command of and he followed us, followed our ship all the way down the Harbour right out to the Heads and I was able to wave to them. I don't know whether they could see me at that stage, but

36:30 the foreshores were lined with people and waving to us, and even when we went outside the Heads and going down up around the Gap area [just south of South Head], there were crowds of people there waving and cheering.

Were there boats out on the Harbour to farewell you as well?

Oh yes, there was a lot of small craft around the ships going down the Harbour. It was quite a spectacular sight.

37:00 There was this row of ships, all top class passenger ships that had been given a very quick conversion to take more troops. We had an extra bunk established in the cabin that we were in, or there was four of us in a bunk, what was normally a three birth bunk. So, but we were quite comfortable.

It sounds like it. So you

37:30 **were living in comfortable conditions?**

Yes.

What were conditions like aboard the ship generally?

Pretty good. The weather was calm. In fact the trip down the south coast was beautiful there. The sea was very clear and blue. The sky was clear of clouds and we had a wonderful trip down the coast. Off Melbourne, there was more ships joined the

38:00 convoy, and also one ship from New Zealand joined us there and then we sailed, we didn't call into Port Phillip, we sailed on then. The first stop was Fremantle, and also going across the Bight, which was notorious for its rough conditions, was fairly pleasant. The seas were big and the ship was rolling about quite a fair bit and

38:30 moving around or marching as we did was sometimes a bit difficult to maintain your footing with the rolling of the ship, but it was almost like a cruise you might say in going from Sydney to Fremantle and then of course from Fremantle, then on to Colombo.

What was the mood aboard the ship?

Well,

39:00 very good. We were given a lot of physical training. The food was good and so any threat of being attacked by submarine was very remote. We didn't feel we were in any danger at all, and as I say it was almost like a cruise atmosphere

39:30 and the time was taken up mostly with lectures. I gave a few on the same subject, vehicle maintenance and other aspects of mechanical work.

Tape 3

00:32 **Great, so Ken if we can continue your story from when you arrived at Colombo?**

On arrival at Colombo, we were given one afternoon leave to go ashore and it was quite an experience. For most of us, it was the first overseas country we had visited and of course being tropical, the general

01:00 atmosphere was different and of course the local people were different – appearance and custom. So we had quite an enjoyable break there. We were given the equivalent of a couple of pounds Australian in local money to spend, so we were able to buy a few little souvenirs which most of us then sent home.

01:30 Leaving Colombo of course we had an uneventful voyage, then up through of course the Indian Ocean and through the Red Sea up to Suez, and on arrival at Suez, Sir Anthony Eden came aboard to welcome us. Of course, we were the first Australian troops or first body of Australian

02:00 troops to visit the area. Of course, at that stage, it was fairly obvious that we were destined to go ashore in the Middle East and not go on to England. After the ships were marshalled in the Bitter Lakes for a day or so, and slowly went then up the canal for discharge

02:30 of troops. We went ashore at a place called Cantara [or El Qantara], which was a fairly major landing spot and when we were ashore we were given our first meal there, which the initial experience was Spinney's sausages. These were long thin sausages reputedly made from camel meat, but of course there was very

03:00 few livestock in the area, but they tasted quite nice, and of course we had them on numerous occasions thereafter. We then boarded trains and were accommodated in carriages with wooden slat seats, which were reasonably comfortable, and then went up the coast track, railway track toward

03:30 Palestine. We went through many areas that had featured prominently with the Light Horse in the First World War, and of course also Gaza, which we passed through was a major battle, had been fought there involving the Light Horsemen.

What was it like to visit these places that you'd heard and read about?

Well,

04:00 we were just passing through, but it was bringing back sort of, not memories, but recall of history and it was sort of a strange feeling to think that we were going through land that probably some of our kinsmen had visited and even some had died in

04:30 action in these areas, particularly at Gaza, because there was a big cemetery there that had graves of quite a few Australian servicemen.

So what happened next?

Well, then we went to a place called Castina. A camp had been set up there for us already by

05:00 an English unit and we saw our first time in these what we called EPIP tents; they were English pattern,

Indian production tents. They were made of cotton, very finely made. They'd accommodate eight people, four on each side sleeping on the ground – or on bed boards as we were given then – and they were laid out

05:30 in orderly rows, with the headquarters buildings in wooden structure. So we were quite comfortable, but this was in early February 1940 and it was their winter there, and of course coming from the tropics and the Australian summer, it was a sudden change in the climate for us and we started to feel the cold a little

06:00 bit, particularly at night time. Once the sun went down, there were no trees there. The heat was very quickly lost from the soil and the nights were very cold. We were slowly equipped. Our guns, which we brought over from Australia, were the old 18-pounders, the World War I vintage, but the vehicles we were supplied with came

06:30 from English production. They were mostly Morris vans and tractors for hauling the guns, and we saw our first lot of motorcycles. I was given a motorcycle to ride. I'd never ridden one before, but I quickly learned to ride on it, and it was a bit hairy though, riding around the countryside on one of the bikes, and quite a few other people

07:00 were injured, some quite badly, by falls from these bikes riding over the rough countryside. The training was then fairly intense, of course, and continued on from what we had done at Ingleburn in the first few months, and around March, we started to get our first rain

07:30 there and that caused quite a lot of trouble. The soil was somewhat clay-ey type of soil and when it rained that very quickly formed a sheet of mud on the top surface, but the penetration of the rain was very poor, because of the clay-ey type of soil, and when a vehicle went over it, the mud would build up on the wheels, and particularly on a motorbike. It was impossible to drive in some areas, because the mud

08:00 would build up and lock the front wheel. The mud would foul the forks, and you couldn't steer and you just went where the bike took you, which was very often not where you wanted to go to.

It sounds very dangerous.

It was, and on one trip we went out, quite an extensive drive through the open countryside and passed through a number of villages

08:30 and we had the RSM, the Regimental Sergeant Major, was trailing along in a vehicle, and they stalled and got caught up in this mud situation, and unbeknown to us, they had been on the end, they were left behind. When we got back to camp, we realised that they were missing and it was starting to get late in the afternoon and towards dusk and it wasn't until it was getting dark that

09:00 a search party was formed to go and look for them, but this was in the charge of an officer who hadn't been there and I was, because I had been on that nice trip I was taken, but we were all put in the back of the truck with a canopy over it, so we couldn't see where we were going or where we were, and he went down the main road that we eventually came back on, and he went down the main road and

09:30 tried to find out the point where we'd joined, but he finished up getting lost and I tried to help him. I had a bit of knowledge of the stars in the northern hemisphere at that stage. We'd been given some lessons in astronomy, and I tried to point out from my knowledge of the direction to take, where to go, but he wasn't particularly keen on leaving

10:00 the main road, so we went back to camp and the RSM and his companion struggled in about 11.00 o'clock that night most upset because we didn't come and rescue them.

What had happened to them?

They had to abandon the vehicle. They of course got bogged. They got out of control in this mud situation, and then they ran the battery flat trying to get it out. So they had to abandon the vehicle and

10:30 walk back, which took them quite a few hours. So, but generally speaking, the training was very good and we finished up then going for our first shoot, which was on the edge of the Sinai Desert and out through – past –through Gaza out to Beersheba, which is a notable

11:00 town and scene of the charge of the cavalry or the Light Horse, the attack on Beersheba in the First World War, and it was, the camp was somewhat south of that. There was an English unit there as well. They had gone in before us and we sent a forward party down to

11:30 help establish our lines, and the English unit were already there, and they were permanent soldiers and they of course were very strict and their RSM, he was a bit of a tartar, and of course he came along and found some of our fellows just lounging around, and of course he demanded what they were doing there and started to give them strong instructions on what to do and of course he was very quickly told off, and as

12:00 a result he put them under close arrest under guard and sent them to the guard house. Well, when our main body arrived down, our RSM who was a permanent army man, found out the situation and he went

to see the English RSM and pacified him and told him, “You can’t treat AIF troops like regular soldiers”, and he had them released.

12:30 So one of the men who was a bit of a character went searching, and in the desert areas there’s a growth which we call camel thorn and they grew in clumps scattered around the desert area, and there was found there was a little type of snake that used to be in these clumps. So this chap collected about half a dozen of these snakes and put them in the RSM’s bed, and of course that

13:00 night when he went to bed there was a great scream, and there was a great how-to-do about it, but he never found out who put them there, but we felt that we’d got back at him at some degree.

I take it that was the British RSM?

Yes.

Yes.

Yeah, so I don’t think he had a very high opinion of Australian soldiers.

So, generally, what was the relationship like between the British and the Australians?

Excellent, really.

13:30 We found them very efficient. Of course being permanent soldiers, they were. They were well disciplined and we weren’t in a way, but their comradeship was very good, very good indeed, and of course a number of our troops were given on loan to the British troops for experience,

14:00 and came back better trained and had a better understanding what it was about. There were still some conflicts going on between the Arabs and the Jew settlers and as it turned out, our intelligence officer went off with a crew of mainly air force people in armoured cars to put down

14:30 an Arab uprising that occurred at the wireless station at Beersheba, and he was the machine gunner on this armoured car. That was his job, and they were ambushed, or the ambush was prepared by the Arabs on the road going to there, but they were able to shoot, crash through the

15:00 vehicles that had been draped across the road, and shot up some of the Arabs that were there, and then when they arrived at Beersheba they were able to quell the uprising and get rid of the troops that were holding the wireless station, and then they continued down there, tore down into the desert area south of Beersheba into what was an old Roman

15:30 settlement in the foothills, and there’d been a group of American archaeologists there, and they’d all been killed by the Arabs and they put them on this tomb. They didn’t find any Arabs there, and then he came back to camp, but we didn’t find, he was sworn to secrecy about this, and we didn’t find this out until some time later.

So what, you mentioned that you went to Beersheba to do you first

16:00 **shoot. What was involved in that? What were you doing at that point?**

Well I was still this MT mechanic looking after the vehicles at that stage, but some of my friends, people I’d establish friendship, were in this survey party and they started telling me of some of the work they’d been doing, and I started to become intrigued with this and I thought, “Well”,

16:30 you know, “perhaps I should get out of this and do something more closely associated with the fighting aspect of the regiment”, but I talked to them but the party was full strength, and there was no point in trying to get in then, but when these…

17:00 **Sorry, what sort of things were they coming back and telling you that they’d done?**

Well, they were responsible for establishing the exact map position where the guns were located and also to survey in any points of interest in their coordinates on the map, so that the exact range and bearing to that

17:30 area could be determined by calculation, by trigonometry, and the…

It sounds like you were a little bit bored

18:00 **with your job?**

Well, of course every branch of the unit considered they were the most important ones. See, the gunners considered they were the best, because they actually fired the shells that were aimed at the enemy, and the drivers considered they were essential, because they had to get the guns there in the first place, and then the signallers thought well, nothing happens

18:30 until the orders are given. So each group had their own sense of importance, and of course they seemed to have a better spirit than offshoots like I was at that time. I still had plenty of things to occupy

19:00 my mind, and then when Italy came into the war in June and the 17th Brigade had arrived in the Middle East, they had no guns. So we handed our guns over to them, and we amalgamated with the 2/4th Battalion and we formed two anti-aircraft units, which were established at

19:30 Haifa where we were given instruction by the English troops that were there on the anti-aircraft guns, and it was while we were there one day, an officer was giving a lecture on aircraft identification and while the lecture was in process, a flight of aircraft flew over and

20:00 it was realised then that they were Italian bombers, and they bombed the oil depot that was about 400 yards from where our building was, and we were in a disused army hospital, and so it was realised then that aircraft identification wasn't as good as it should be, and secondly, we were in a rather

20:30 awkward spot, because we were near an aerodrome and also the oil refinery. So the troops were moved out from there onto Mount Carmel, which is at the back of Haifa and quite a lot of buildings were on Mount Carmel itself.

Just going back to when the oil refinery was bombed…

The first attack was on the oil storage depot, which was big storage

21:00 tanks near the water where they had pipelines there going out to load the oil tankers that took the oil to export areas.

I mean, I imagine there must've been a huge explosion if there was oil.

Yes.

Could you talk us through what actually happened when that bombing occurred?

Yes, well the aircraft flew over, more or less float over our position. We thought at first that they were going to bomb

21:30 the building. Of course, we were the largest building in that area, but they flew over us and we could see the bombs falling from the plane but they were going to miss the area where we were, and they landed on these oil tanks.

And what happened to the oil tanks?

Well, most of them caught alight of course, and they couldn't put them out. They just had to let them burn until the oil was exhausted.

22:00 Well, then when we moved to Mount Carmel and headquarters unit was in this nunnery, in Stella Maris, which had a very nice view out over the ocean. There were no nuns there, of course. Anyhow and then there was another attack came over, but this time they were prepared for them, and the guns did fire, and so this time they

22:30 bombed the refinery and caused quite a lot of damage to the refinery and also to the surrounding homes the Arabs were living in, which was a bit distressing for some – our troops went down to help clear the wreckage –and of course there were quite a few bodies in the wreckage that they had to dig out.

When you say that they were distressed, how did they show this distress?

Well there were

23:00 women and children killed in the wreckage.

Was that something that you were a part of?

I personally wasn't involved in it, but I knew the people, some of the people who had been there.

And what did they say that they saw?

Well, they were a bit horrified at first when they came back and disclosed what they'd seen. You know, shattered bodies and children, babies and so on.

23:30 So it was really like our first real taste of war, and so after initial training we were then set up into two groups. One group went to Port Fuad [close to Port Said] at the end of the canal, and the other went to Alexandria and I was in the group that went to Alexandria.

Well just before we do move on to Alexandria, I'd like to explore this

24:00 **when you first realised that you were at war, that when you first experienced.**

Well the first time I suppose we realised was when they bombed the tanks close by, and we actually saw the planes and could see the bombs coming down, but that was more of an adventure you might say, excitement. No one was hurt and that, and it was our first brush

24:30 with the enemy.

I mean, with that experience and the subsequent experience of the township being – civilians being bombed – what impact did those initial experiences of war have on you?

Well, they were making you starting to realise that people do get killed and some of them in quite a nasty way,

25:00 but it also was a preparation too for realising that bombing from the air looked worse than it really was. They almost had to drop the bomb on you to kill you, and so although it was a big impact, visual impact,

25:30 the danger wasn't quite as bad as you'd think it would be, particularly if you had a bit of cover. It was while we were there that we had our first casualty, someone being killed in the unit. Two of the men had been on leave and they were up at Mount Carmel, and they got a taxi to come back to where we were camped at that stage. This was just before

26:00 we went to the nunnery, and they went through a British area and the sentry challenged the taxi, but the taxi just drove through. The sentry was a bit conscientious and they were protecting an area that held some very valuable stores. So he fired at the taxi and the bullet went through the back of the taxi, and hit one of the men

26:30 in the chest, in the back and chest and he died from that wound. So that was our first, plus the bombing, that was our first loss and it made us perhaps further realise that, you know, we were in a war.

What impact did that first loss have on you?

Well, it was a realisation that

27:00 things were in earnest, and people were going to get killed. We were then moved to Alexandria, and of course there were quite frequent air raids, frequent air raids occurred at Alexandria. Some fell fairly close to where the guns were, and they were firing and of course

27:30 attracted attention from the pilots, and fortunately no one in the unit was injured in those activities.

Could you describe Alexandria?

Well it was a beautiful city. It was right on the coast of the Mediterranean. There were quite a large number of fairly modern buildings.

28:00 There was a strong French influence there. In fact, most of the signs were in French, and we'd see a lot of these signs, 'à louer', and it took a little while to realise they were 'For Rent' signs of houses that were vacant. I think it was 'à louer', something like that, and the French was spoken a lot there.

28:30 The Italian, although we were at war with Italy, Egypt wasn't, and the Italian embassy was still active in the city. We weren't allowed to go near that, but it was a beautiful city and the concourse drove along the water's edge was quite spectacular.

29:00 There was a big English barracks there, Abu Qir Barracks, and while we were there, they lent us their teaching areas there that they had for teaching mechanised troops the skills that were necessary for maintenance and so on. So we set up school there,

29:30 in premises that they allowed us to use and the sergeant that was looking after the group that I was in, he wasn't particularly good, so it finished up I took over his role of instructor and enjoyed that for – we were there for a couple of weeks – and it was quite pleasant.

Why wasn't he good?

Well, he was a good driver, but he wasn't a good instructor, and although he

30:00 had the knowledge, he didn't know how to pass it on. So I enjoyed instruction, giving instruction to a certain extent and I think the men that I taught learnt something of benefit. So well, this was getting towards the end of 1940,

30:30 and it was decided then to marshal all the units of us, the 6th Division. We were more or less attached to the 16th Brigade. There were three divisions [brigades], the 16th 17th and 19th Brigade as it turned out, but this was done on the outskirts

31:00 of Cairo. There was place called, an area called Helwan. It was reached by a narrow gauge railway line running from Cairo to this area and finally the whole of the 6th Division was marshalled there, and we were re-established then as a field artillery unit. We got a new CO,

31:30 Colonel Barker, who was a First World War officer in artillery and was a permanent soldier.

What was Colonel Barker like?

Well, he was our first taste of really strong discipline. Our first CO had been a, was a civilian soldier. He came from Newcastle. He was a headmaster of a school in private

32:00 life, and although he was a good officer and a good CO, he wasn't the same type as Colonel Barker and I think when Barker arrived even the blades of grass stood to attention, and you know, he created a big impact and he decided on a very rigorous training program. Out for

32:30 a two mile gallop with full kit and things like that to get the troops in good condition, and he was also strong on the people attending church parade. On Sunday mornings, there was church parade held, and those that wished to go to church went to church, and those who didn't want to go to church went back to their tents. So he said, "That's not on, if you don't go to church, you go for a run", and so he had the nickname of 'Holy Joe' for

33:00 a while after that, but he very quickly whipped everyone into shape, including the officers, and then we were removed from that up to near Alexandria again. This was getting towards the end of 1940.

Now, what did the men think about this new discipline?

Well, they

33:30 admired him for his discipline in some ways, but as I say, they called him Holy Joe because he interfered with our Sunday break, but it certainly improved attendance at the church parades.

How good a leader was he?

Excellent, and I'll expound a bit more on him later on, but we moved

34:00 to this camp out at Ikingi Maryut west of Alexandria and then we were reissued with the 25-pounder guns. Now these were the latest, the most modern artillery pieces in the world. They'd been designed by the British Ordnance people, and they were extremely accurate, and the shells that they fired were of a new design. They were called streamline

34:30 shells. They were actually more streamlined than the previous shells and they were a sort of a mix between a gun and a howitzer, and the 18-pounders used fixed ammunition. The cartridge case were attached to the shell, and the whole lot was loaded as one unit, whereas with the 18-pounders, the shell was separate and rammed in and then the cartridge case held a series of coloured

35:00 bags of cordite and you left them all in for what they call supercharge, and that was for maximum range, and then for the various reductions in charge for charge 3, charge 2 or charge 1, you took various bags out of the cartridge case until for charge 1 there was only one left.

So was that for the 25-pounder or the 18-pounder?

No, that was for the 25-pounder.

The 25-pounder, right.

Yes, well this reduced them,

35:30 by reducing the charge, you reduced the range and lowered the muzzle velocity, but it gave the gun more accuracy and also it meant that the shell was lifted higher and the angle of descent was steeper, and therefore there was less chance of hitting obstructions like trees or buildings and it was more – it gave more accurate fire. So they were the most modern artillery pieces in the world and we were very pleased to see them.

36:00 There was no books or gun drill available, so we had to establish our own gun drill.

I'd like to explore this a bit more. What did the 25-pounder look like?

Well, unfortunately I didn't bring an illustration. The 18-pounder was an iron tyred gun with

36:30 quite large wheels and wooden spokes and was with a shield to minimise the blast from the crew and a rather sleek, long sleek barrel. The 25-pounder had, the barrel was probably as long, but it was heavier construction.

37:00 It was made of a maraging, what they call a maraging steel, which started off being comparatively soft and malleable, but as it aged after a few months of aging, it became quite a hard strong steel, and there was a different breach mechanism. The 18-pounder had like a

37:30 hinge breach swing out. The 25-pounder had a breach that dropped down to expose the breach of the gun for loading. The wheel had pneumatic tyres on it, with very large tread on the pneumatic tyres, and then later on they had a circular platform that could be raised up under the trail,

38:00 and then in action, you dropped the platform down and collapsible arms came back and allowed the gun to be drawn back with the wheels on this circular platform, so it became very easy to manoeuvre around, particularly for anti-tank work and also for general firing. It was a much more stable platform. So all in all, they were quite a modern weapon

38:30 and much admired by the gunners.

Now, you mentioned that you had to – there was no established drill for the 25-pounder.

Yeah.

What drill was come up with?

Well, it was based on the established drill for the 18-pounders, but adapted of course to certain peculiarities of the, it was somewhere between the 18-pounder and the

39:00 4.5 howitzer gun drill, ‘cause the breach of the 25-pounder was similar to a howitzer, and also the howitzer had different charges as well, you see. So it was just a combination of the two, but later on we received printed books with the established gun drill and other procedures on it.

Tape 4

00:33 **So Ken, can we move onto the Libyan Campaign?**

We’re now at the end of, getting towards the end of December and at this stage, the Italians had attacked Egypt across the border and went as far as a well-established English base called Sidi Barrani. We were given

01:00 an impromptu Christmas dinner on the 20th of December and then marched out towards the Italians who had been attacked by the British and rolled back, back towards Libya. Our first

01:30 move took us to, we went as far as Sidi Barrani and we could see there some of the evidence of the fighting that had gone on. There were a lot of Italian wrecked vehicles and guns in the area, and then the next day we moved on towards the escarpment. There was this large or high escarpment

02:00 on the border of Egypt and Libya, and to get up into Libya, we had to go up this long winding track going up the escarpment which was quite an effort with the vehicles. So when we crossed over the border into Cyrenaica, I suppose we realised then that

02:30 we were in a battle zone. We were approaching a battle zone. We could hear some distant artillery fire and as, when we got to the top of the escarpment there was an Italian fort there that had been abandoned by them, Fort Capuzzo, and that was our first sight of Italian fortification. We went down a long straight road. Well, I suppose I don’t think anyone was really

03:00 scared, but there was a sort of a feeling of trepidation, you know, this is it, and it was getting late in the day, and of course by the time we got into the forward area, it was dark. So the gun positions were established, and in the morning when they woke up, they found that they were far more forward than they expected to be

03:30 and we were in front of the infantry instead of behind. In fact, some of the guns were fired on by our own troops, because they thought we were Italians until they were put wise. The gun positions were established and once again I was talking to my friends in the survey party who were very active in having to do this. There was

04:00 what they call a bearing picket had been established by the survey regiment. That was the people who were there for that purpose only, and from this bearing picket, which was an exact known point on the map, the survey party then carried out traverses to establish the position of each gun or each pivot gun, what they called the pivot gun,

04:30 in the various troops that were scattered around, and then permission was given for our guns to fire and very shortly after they started firing we got some return fire back from the Italians who apparently had a pretty good sound ranging and spotting

05:00 equipment, but their return fire was actually fairly close, but not close enough to do any damage. There were also two medium artillery guns established just behind the position where I was. They were manned by English people, and they started firing, and of course they started to get return fire too, which fell between their guns and our position. So

05:30 that was really the regiment’s first experience of hostile fire. When the first – our first guns fired, shortly after the return shells came – one of the fellows said, “Look what you’ve done, you’ve started a bloody war”, but any rate there was no damage done, although some of the shells did land close, but we found then that the

06:00 Italian ammunition was pretty poor. They didn’t get good fragmentation of the gun when it exploded and they always had to hit it to do any damage, or you had to be pretty close to the blast. Some vehicles were fairly extensively damaged by the shrapnel from the guns and I was involved in

06:30 some of the repair work in getting them back into action again, but at this stage this is where I thought, “Well, I wanted to be involved in something more active,” and I made application to transfer from what I was doing to join the survey party. Well that took some time to go through, but in the meantime, the

attack was made on Bardia.

07:00 That was very heavily defended as far as numbers were concerned, and armament and their anti-aircraft fire at nighttime was quite spectacular. Their ammunition was what we called flaming onions. They had green and red lights in it, and it was almost like a fireworks display when all these anti-aircraft guns would open up at night time on the bombers coming over,

07:30 and they'd light up the sky with these brilliant coloured lights, but the attack on Bardia was well organised. The positions that we were in started to be well recorded by the Italians, so prior to the attack, our guns were moved out and down into the left flank of the Bardia defences, which

08:00 was quite open ground, and at that stage the survey party I was interested in had to go out and survey in the positions where there was none of our troops at all in front of them. They were exposed, so they had to do some of their work at night time with shielded lights and up till just on sunrise, and

08:30 start again at dusk. So they had to lie low during the daytime, so that they weren't observed, but the new position was set up, surveyed in and then the fire tasks were given, where they were put down a barrage for the infantry that were going to attack, and when the attack went, the barrage landed where it should have and the infantry

09:00 then came in. Some of them were behind us and they went through the gun positions to make the attack.

Now, were you a part of the survey team at this point?

No. I was still in the repair group, but we were all in close proximity though. With our guns firing the barrage, that brought return fire from the Italian artillery

09:30 and some of troops that were moving through our position were killed. In fact, that's where the first two casualties I think I saw were there, were two men, one was Scott and the other one was Seymour. They were both killed by artillery shells coming back. We were really searching for our position, but fortunately for us they didn't land any on our guns.

So those were the two first casualties that you…

Yeah, they…

10:00 **saw?**

were in the 2/5th Battalion, and they were only about 100 yards in front of one of our troop positions when they were both killed by the one shell.

What had happened to them?

Well, later on, the next day our padre came up and we formed a burial party and we buried them and he

10:30 delivered the burial service.

How important was it to perform this burial and this ritual of death?

Well, the same once again, it just made a realisation the war was on and well, everyone was on the firing line, but as I say, there was some degree of safety in the fact that we

11:00 started to realise that the Italian artillery wasn't as bad as what we knew ours was, because we knew that our guns, the shells from our guns, gave a very daisy-cutting type of explosion. They scattered shrapnel far and wide, and were very effective in causing casualties.

11:30 **So what happened next?**

Well, the attack on Bardia was very successful and it was over the next day. It finished in the afternoon and as I mentioned, our CO was a very forceful man, so he made us ready for advance and it so happened that two days after the attack on Bardia,

12:00 we never ever got to see the town itself, we were on the move again towards Tobruk. We found that the Italian roads were very good. They were not sealed roads, but they were well made and it was a fairly rough ride but not as bad as the desert

12:30 area, because that camel thorn that I mentioned earlier provided these clumps on the ground and they made it very hard going for the vehicles, because they were quite a severe bump when a wheel went over one of these camel thorn clumps, so much so that some of the vehicles started to break springs and this

13:00 repair group I was in, we started to find a lot of our time was taken up in replacing broken springs in vehicles that had been happy to drive over these very rough patches, but the Italian roads were in pretty good condition. They'd built, there were very substantial culverts and small bridges over the wadis and creek beds that

13:30 cut the road. In fact, at one spot when we were moving, we were halted there for traffic delay and there was one large culvert almost like a small bridge nearby, and a group of us went over to see what was there and when we got there we found some bodies of Italian soldiers on the floor and it was like a small room built

14:00 under the road, cement room. There were further bodies in there. We wondered why, how they came to be, thought, “Well they must’ve been killed by our advancing troops” and I went over to one and sort of kicked the shoe, the sole of his shoe to see if there was any response and he seemed to be quite inert, and another member of our group started to examine

14:30 the body to see if there was anything worth salvaging ,and he got an enormous shock when suddenly this body jumped up and started to scream at him, and of course he grabbed the hand gun and he started to menace this, I think he was about to shoot him. I could see the Italian soldier was more frightened of us than we were frightened of him, so I pacified this fellow, and he was very pleased, very thankful to me, for

15:00 the fellow that thought he was going to be shot. I was then approached by…turned out to be one of their officers. I had – it was very cold – and I had a blanket around me, and you couldn’t see any insignia on me and he came over and he thought I was an officer, and he wanted to surrender to me personally, and I said, “No, no,” and I just – he couldn’t speak English and I couldn’t speak Italian - but I just pointed

15:30 down the road and told them to get moving back towards Bardia to be taken in with the prisoners that had come from there. So that was our first really close contact with the enemy, but we found that they were unarmed and they were stragglers that had apparently got overrun, or could hear our troops advancing so they’d taken cover but were found. So anyway, we…

How

16:00 **did you regard the Italians as an enemy?**

Well, I don’t know. For a long while the Australians soldiers, they were quite strong in their attack, but when they surrendered well they were treated casually, given cigarettes, something to eat and drink and so on, and of course the Italians’ hearts weren’t really in fighting.

16:30 They gave up very readily, and of course they were quite happy to become friends, but so, it was an interesting episode, but then we pressed on of course to Tobruk, and that was very heavily defended and at this stage the wind storms started to come up which came in just before spring and

17:00 the dust in the area was almost like flour, and so the dust storms were very easily established and you couldn’t see more than about 10 yards in front of you in any detail. So the traffic was severely hindered because of this and even the movement by foot had to be done quite carefully and we

17:30 eventually finished up into areas that had been established, fortification areas that had been dug by the Italians which gave us a ready-made defensive area, and the attack on Tobruk went along similar lines as the Bardia one. They first established gun positions.

18:00 Fortunately these were made on rocky spurs of ground. The ground went from a sort of flattish desert type area to these rocky spurs that came in from the coastline, and with the guns established on the reverse slope of that spur, they were very hard to hit, because either the forward shells fell down the valley in front of the spur and couldn’t

18:30 be seen by the observers, and the shells that were over went in the spur down the valley in the back of the spur. So it was a pretty safe position, and although the Italians tried to engage our guns, they didn’t have any success because of this advantage that was given, hindered their observation. So although we were fired at a lot, there were no

19:00 hits and no casualties at all, and the second phase of the attack was once again to move around to the left flank and then attack, re-establish new gun positions on the map but not fire until the main barrage went in and then the attack went in through there and Tobruk was a bit, certainly a lot harder to capture than Bardia was.

19:30 **Now during this time what were you doing, what was your role?**

Well, we were largely repairing vehicles. There were so many with these broken springs, and eventually we ran out of replacement springs and some of the vehicles then had to be set back on wooden blocks. We had large wooden blocks given to us, which took the place of – made up the gap between the

20:00 axle and the chassis of the vehicle, and of course that gave a very rough ride to the people in the vehicles, but at least it got them going. Also, of course, we were capturing quite a large number of Italian vehicles, which were very, very good. They were bigger, the big trucks were larger than ours, and would carry more load. They were big diesel

20:30 trucks, and some of their smaller vehicles were very well adapted to artillery work. So we were kept pretty busy in repairing and keeping our vehicles going.

And how close were you to the front line during the siege of Tobruk?

We were in areas where we would occasionally come under shellfire, but we were probably a couple of thousand yards back from where

21:00 the infantry were and their main danger then was some shell fire plus air raids. The bombers would come in over looking for the guns in particular, and once again we found that the Italian bombs weren't as bad as they sounded, and luckily none of our gun positions or

21:30 any of our establishments were damaged at all from either the shell fire or from the bombing.

So what happened to you next?

Well, after Tobruk fell, as I was saying before, one of the drivers, the driver of the adjutant's truck was at a loose end. The adjutant

22:00 had gone to some conference to establish forward plans, so he and I made an unofficial visit down to Tobruk. The roads were sealed by the MPs [military police] but we were able to bluff our way through them and drove through the city. There was quite a lot of ransacking of the shops going on by the infantry that were in the area and I went out, we could see

22:30 these oil tanks burning on one of the arms of the harbour, and we drove out there and we saw Frank Hurley [famous expedition and war photographer (Antarctic, New Guinea, World War II, etc)] with his camera or with a cameraman taking shots of these burning oil wells. Then we returned back to our position.

Did you actually speak to Frank?

Yes, yes.

What was he like?

He was,

23:00 you could see he was a much older man than we were, but he seemed very fit, but just in briefing, he warned us not to go too close to the burning wells because of the likelihood that the edge might crumble away. So we just said hello and that in passing conversation and then hello as we went back.

Were you aware of who he was and his…

Oh yes.

23:30 **significance? Yeah, well that must've made quite an impression to see?**

It did, yes, because he was a very notable photographer, and we had seen him at a distance a couple of times when we were on leave in Jerusalem. He was there taking photographs. In fact, he took a photograph of some of our men that were on leave. They finished up in the archives.

24:00 So after Tobruk once again, as I said, our CO was a very forceful soldier, and he kept on volunteering us to go forward. So once again we went forward, whereas some of the other artillery units rested up for a while and had a bit of a recreation, well, not recreation but a bit of rest and refitting. So we went forward

24:30 from there to Derna. Now, Derna was a smaller town but it was more stoutly defended than either Bardia or Tobruk. The Italians there put up a much stronger fight and they seemed to have better equipment there and it was, the

25:00 battle lasted about four days at Derna. This is where we suffered our first casualty. There was one officer who had a group of seven men with him, was sent out on patrol. The officer, his name was Forrest Lord, he was also a bit of a gung ho man,

25:30 and they went off on this forward patrol to see if they could find any enemy targets to be engaged, and he got into what was called Wadi Derna. This was a very deep watercourse. It was dry in the summertime, and as it turned out, it was quite heavily fortified. Well, he and this group of

26:00 seven men went along the wadi, they went around the corner and they walked straight into an ambush of Italian soldiers who didn't fire on them, but came out and demanded their surrender. Well, of course there were hundreds of them there and of course they had no recourse but to surrender and they just had to pass over any documents they had. Well, when Forrest Lord

26:30 handed in his passbook, his bank book, or pay book I should say, the usual practise of course was to put the surname in capitals and the Christian names in small letters, so it was Lord Forrest, and of course the Italian officer in charge thought, ah, he's captured an English lord with his

27:00 entourage and of course so Forrest Lord was given very good treatment, until eventually they sorted out just what his true situation was.

Now, what were you doing during this time?

Well, I was still back on the repair activities, but of course we were fully aware, we were hearing about what was happening and

27:30 this group of course they were taken away as prisoners of war and they finished up in Italy eventually, but our CO, as I say, he was a very thrusting person, so he finished up trying to keep up with the retreating Italians and we finished up the regiment was in front of the infantry, and he'd come along and he'd say, "Get

28:00 those guns up another thousand yards!" You know, so for a while he was called 'Up A Thousand Yards', and so much so that the guns finished up they were firing on supercharge, which was the maximum to get the maximum range to try and engage the retreating Italians, but he was up in the forefront and of course,

28:30 his vehicle was seen, and a shell burst alongside it and shattered the glass in the door of the station wagon he was in, and he got badly cut around the face and got some glass in his eyes, and I saw the vehicle and went over. Of course, his driver was a close friend of mine and I went over to see mainly how the driver was and of course Barker said, "Who's that?" You know,

29:00 to me when he heard my voice. I told him who I was. So I sympathised with him about him being injured and he said, "I'll be back soon, I'll be back soon," and sure enough in about a week's time he came back with two lovely black eyes, which made everyone smile and he was still pushing us forward. If the vehicle stopped for a hold up, we were supposed to keep

29:30 100 yards separation between each vehicle for safety against air attack and if the vehicle stopped after a while Barker would come back along the line to see what's happening and the troops would be sitting there in the seats. He'd say, "Do something, do something," you know, he'd say, "Don't just sit there, get out and do something!" I don't know what we were supposed to do, but everyone did get out and move around, and as we pushed

30:00 further on, there was a small town called Barce on the coast and our forward guns positioned, saw them, and the gun position officer fired a shell over the town and then another shell under the town to see what had happened. Nothing happened. So he very carefully sighted out the town square and he lobbed a shell

30:30 right in the town square: and then a white flag went up and our troops went in and they surrendered to the artillery, which was some satisfaction to us when the infantry came along later on and took over, but I think that was the first time, in that campaign at any rate, that a town had been captured by the artillery.

I mean, your CO sounds like he was an incredible man.

Yes. Most of the

31:00 action then had been on the coast, coastal area and the group I was in then we went inland through a place called Giovanni Birti, and it was different country altogether. Instead of the sand and rock and it was green grass and low hills and some trees, which we hadn't seen a tree since we left Egypt,

31:30 but the rain started again then, and movement was fairly difficult. Luckily, when we were in Tobruk we'd overrun a storage area there, which had a lot of Italian equipment there, and I was able to get, like amongst others, some extra blankets. Of course we only had three blankets and a ground sheet, two blankets and a ground sheet: was

32:00 barely enough on the cold wet nights. I got some extra blankets from the Italians, had been using, and they had a very good, it was like, it served as a ground sheet and also it could be converted into a cape. It was a linen or light canvas construction and it had flaps that could be unbuttoned and you could make it into a cape

32:30 or you could join them up and make a little tent. So they had Italian piping in the pocket to act as a tent post. It was a really good idea, and they were camouflaged coloured. So luckily I had one of these and with another chap we were able to rig a tent up and kept fairly

33:00 dry when in this rainy condition. There the leading element was two armoured cars, was on a well made road and the leading car was ambushed by Italian anti-tank gun and shot up and all the crew were killed and the car was set alight and

33:30 after the fire went out, I looked in and every piece, every article in that armoured car had been struck by metal from the projectile that hit them, plus the metal had scattered off the armour from the tank when the shell went through the armour on the inside, it broke off small pieces.

34:00 It was like a shotgun effect and every piece of equipment that was in that tank, in that car was damaged in some way, but that was the only action that we struck on that back road and then eventually we came out at a place called Ar Rajmah, which is a small railway terminus leading into

34:30 Benghazi and then we went down from Benghazi down to the airport, Ar Rajmah Airport, no, Benini Airport, where the Italians had a well-established airbase and our headquarters was set up in what was the officers' mess of this

35:00 place on the main drive going in, and then later afternoon I had just come out of the headquarters. I was walking down the steps and a vehicle pulled up and out came a group of Italian generals in resplendent uniform and the mayor from Benghazi, and I'm standing on the steps when they came out of the car to make their official surrender.

35:30 So it was quite a sight, quite interesting.

What did you see when they surrendered?

Hmm?

What did you see when they surrendered?

Well, I was on the steps as they walked past, and they went in, and our CO came out, and of course he was very happy to take them in. Of course we then – they got our formation commander – the brigadier, to come down to take the surrender,

36:00 because that was done inside and I wasn't privy to that. So we had the privilege of seeing the official party come out, but we were accommodated in cement buildings that the aircrew had used, but of course that night we had our first brush with the Germans, when a fighter-bomber came over, and of course thinking we were air force they concentrated

36:30 on the aerodrome and they bombed and strafed the (UNCLEAR) where we were and we lost a couple of men there with severe wounds from the strafing. So that was our first attack, our first brush with Rommel or the Germans. Up till then, it had been Italians.

Now what was your

37:00 **opinion of Rommel and the Germans at this time?**

Well, it was unknown at that stage. All we knew, we'd been hearing of reports of Germans being landed in Tripoli and was expected eventually that we'd come in contact with them. The Italians had been very severely damaged. The 7th Armoured Division, the English armoured division, after Tobruk

37:30 had detoured out deep into the desert and they'd taken a cut across to come in on the road leading south of Benghazi, so they cut the road, and of course caught the Italian armour there and of course they destroyed the Italian armoured division at a place called Beda Fomm and there were burnt-out Italian tanks and armoured cars all over the place when

38:00 we went there.

So what happened when, you mentioned that you experienced the first air strikes by the Germans, what was different about these air strikes?

Well only that we suffered damage from them, that was the first time, and I had overlooked the point that [in] the attack

38:30 at Derna one of our guns had been hit. They'd just gone into position, and there was a troop of Italian guns set up about 1,000 yards away, and they opened fire on our guns going into position and eventually

39:00 they secured a direct hit on one gun and two men were killed. That was our first battle casualties and of course the next ones were the prisoners of war, and then the wounded at the airfield. So up till that stage, we'd led a charmed life really, because although the troops had been pretty well in the thick of

39:30 some of the fighting, not so much the hand-to-hand side but with the artillery shelling and bombing – this was the first time we'd had direct casualties on a gun crew.

Tape 5

00:35 **Alright, if we can continue the story on.**

After two nights of bombing on the airport, it was decided to move out to a less dangerous position and the regiment was moved then back to Regima up on the escarpment where we rested there for about a week.

01:00 At this time, we were able to send people into Benghazi where they could purchase some fresh food for us, mainly eggs and some small supply of vegetables. So our diet was a little better at this stage, although it had been broken to some extent by some of the Italian food that we had captured along the way.

01:30 This proved to be more tasty, perhaps, than our bully beef, which we'd been living on for nearly two months, but after a while the garlic food started to get not so tasty, and we were happy to go back to

bully beef.

02:00 News had come through that the Germans were now starting to move in some force into Tripoli so a force of Australian troops were moved down in towards the Gulf of Sirte [or Sidra], a place called El Agheila, and a number of

02:30 trips were made by armoured groups, which we supplied some troops, to see if contact could be made with the Italians, but it appeared that they had evacuated the area completely: and there were no plans at that stage for any further advance for us, because it was proving difficult to keep up the supplies, particularly petrol, which

03:00 was coming in light wooden boxes and kerosene tins, containers, many of which developed leaks because of the bumpy transport and finished up either empty or half empty by the time they reached our position. Also food was difficult to get through to the

03:30 forward position. So we had many attacks coming through now, particularly on the transport on the road, from German aircraft but at that stage we hadn't seen any signs of ground forces. Our gun positions were attacked on a few occasions and the worse damage was an exploded tyre on one gun, but otherwise once

04:00 again we seemed to be escaping any serious damage. About the middle of March, we were relieved by an English artillery unit and we started on our way back to Egypt. We made a fairly good coverage during day runs and there were two stops before we

04:30 reached the Tobruk area again, and then we proceeded on back into Egypt where we then stayed at Mersa Matruh. This was quite an interesting place. There was a lake near the camp, or there were quite substantial building there and

05:00 there was a boat, a sailing boat available for us for sailing on the lake which we made good use of that, and the repair work was done to guns and vehicles. By this time, my transfer to the survey party had come through and I was quite happy with the new arrangements. We spent some time in practicing

05:30 aircraft engagement with rifles. We had plenty of ammunition made at our disposal so it was quite a relaxing and interesting rest. We then moved back to Alexandria, and of course informed then that we would be going to Greece. So after one day's leave in Alexandria, our vehicles

06:00 and guns were loaded on one ship and despatched. It sailed two days before the first body of troops, which consisted of headquarters and 1st Battery, were loaded on a Dutch liner that had been built for the Atlantic trade and

06:30 we were in very cramped conditions. Most of the troops, or the troops that I was with, were sleeping on the open deck, but the weather was quite good and we had an uneventful voyage, two-day voyage to Athens. When we reached there, the port was out of action because a ship loaded with

07:00 ammunition had been bombed and in the explosion, it destroyed the port and the facilities there. So the troops were taken off the ship by private small craft and some of them were quite beautiful yachts, which probably the decks, the nice clean decks were scored and damaged by our hobnail boots, but at least we got ashore without any interference from the

07:30 Germans, who had been bombing the area quite frequently.

I'm sorry, we'll just have to stop it there briefly. Hit to record.

We were taken off without any hindrance from the Germans to a nearby camping area, and some of the troops were given an afternoon, a few hours leave to go into Athens which of course was quite – I was able to get into the first group and there were quite some

08:00 interesting sights to be seen there ranging from the Acropolis through to quite many other historical buildings. That afternoon, the camp was overflown by a German bomber but only had a few machine gun shots fired at us, one of which went through a tent but didn't do any damage to

08:30 equipment or men.

Whereabouts was your camp?

It's a place called Glyfada, which is about two or three kilometres south of Athens, the outskirts of Athens, or Piraeus really. It was nearer the coast.

So the Germans just shot up a tent basically and that was the only impact?

Yeah, yeah.

What happened after that?

Well the next day,

09:00 they had bombed the port area, and we could see plenty of dust and smoke coming up from the

demolished houses, but we were clear of that, but the next morning we were taken down to the railway marshalling area and loaded into a train. They were cattle trucks, and we were fairly crowded, but there was enough room for everyone to lie down and sleep, and then we started

09:30 off on the train voyage, which of course was quite spectacular. We had to go over a mountain range and there were many times when you'd get a really magnificent view of the valley below with the little villages nested in the green grass, and it was such a change after Egypt and the dust in the desert from there.

10:00 The earliest shipment of our guns and vehicles had gone further north. They'd gone up to a port called Volos on the northeastern coast of Greece. Of course the activity at that stage was in the mountains across the border from Yugoslavia, where the German 12th Army under

10:30 General von Paulus had crossed the border from Yugoslavia, and they were starting to pour down through the mountain passes. And the initial contact was made there by some of our infantry battalions and the New Zealand troops. The force that was in Greece at this time consisted of the 2nd New

11:00 Zealand Division under General Freyberg and the 6th Division, which was under the command of General Blamey, and of course it was interesting in a way that both Blamey and Freyberg had been in the landing of Gallipoli, and now were back only about 100 miles from Gallipoli and sort of shoulder to shoulder with the New Zealanders again

11:30 fighting in the Levant. It was decided to call us the Anzac Corps, so in effect we really became Anzacs and under, as I say, two notable generals.

I think this was the only time during World War II the Anzac Corps had actually been

12:00 **formed and operated?**

That's right, yes.

I mean knowing of your interest in the Anzac spirit this must've given you some pride?

Oh yes, it felt a great honour to be named as such because, as I say, we were only about 100 kilometres from the Anzac Cove to where we were at one stage. It was only just across the horizon of the sea, and

12:30 as I say, the guns and vehicles were delivered in a northern port, and we started off in more the southern end of Greece in the train with the object of course of going to Volos to meet up with the vehicles, but of course, the retreat had already started and it was decided we'd try and meet up at a place called Larissa.

13:00 Well our train was halted just before Larissa and stopped for some time and it was found then that the Greek train drivers and crew had abandoned us. So they'd had enough and they reckoned they were going the wrong way, so they left. So our own troops had to learn how to take over and drive the train.

You mentioned retreat a moment ago. The Allies were by now retreating from Greece?

Yes.

13:30 **When did you realise that this was happening?**

Well, when we left Athens to go north, the retreat was started then and we knew we'd have to pick up our guns and vehicles at some point along the railway line.

So the object of travelling north was to pick up the guns and vehicles?

Yes, and of course establish some defensive line to try and halt the

14:00 German advance, because the main thoroughfare through Greece was constricted to only a few definite roads because there were only a small number of passes over the series of mountain ranges that ran almost coast to coast in northern Greece.

So the train crew abandoned the train?

Yeah.

What happened after that?

Well, some

14:30 of our men who had some experience in that field took over, and we learnt how to put the water in the kettle and light the fires, and in the meantime the adjutant and intelligence officer had taken off to try and found out what was happening, and they went to Larissa to army headquarters and they were told that the Germans

15:00 were only the other side of Larissa at this stage, but our vehicles and guns were coming through. So the train was taken back some distance, and then we offloaded, and then we were able to join up with our guns and vehicles. At this time of course, air attacks were becoming quite frequent and we

15:30 reformed on Dhomokos Pass area, and the first morning we started moving off a flight of German bombers, there was about 60 bombers and about 80 fighters in block formation, flew over. They were only a few thousand feet above where we were and that was our first really

16:00 idea of how strong the Germans were in the air. We hadn't seen an allied plane at all at this stage, although there were a few about. The earlier ones, the Number 3 Squadron was there with the old two-seater, two-winged fighters.

Bi-planes in other words?

Yeah,

16:30 the old bi-planes. They were quickly shot down, of course, the German Messerschmitt fighters were extremely good aircraft.

So you're saying that a dogfight was happening above you?

Oh yes, yes.

So the Germans were fighting who at this point?

They were fighting Australian and British aircraft that were established. Number 3 Squadron was the main one.

I'll just get you back to describing

17:00 **what you saw. I mean it sounds quite an awe-inspiring kind of spectacle.**

Oh yes. Well the noise and the sight, these bombers were only a few thousand, we were on a mountain ridge at the top of the pass at the time so we were up probably 3,000 or 4,000 feet, and they came over probably at around about 8,000, 10,000 feet. Well it wouldn't be 10,000.

Can we just, you know, dwell on this for a moment.

17:30 **If you could recreate for me what you actually saw there, and maybe talk of some of the impression you had as you watched?**

It was a bit, well, almost frightening you might say at first, although most of our troops having had experience with the Italian bombers and their being rather ineffective weren't that greatly worried about them to start with. Some of the troops

18:00 ducked for cover very quickly although we were quite safe because they weren't after us. They were after the transport, including our guns and vehicles that were on the main road, and then of course within a few minutes, we could see the bombers starting to wheel around then, and then we could hear the bombs being despatched. Of course

18:30 many of the bombs had sirens on them, which created quite a scream as they came down, which was quite effective as a demoralising device because of not only the noise of the aircraft but to have these screaming bombs coming down and exploding. Of course, the tactics was for the dive bombers to come in first and attack vehicles on the road and

19:00 establish a road block, and then the rest of the vehicles be halted and then the main bombing fleet would just come along and sort of systematically bomb the vehicles on the road, and the fighters would come down and machine gun.

Now you were still involved in vehicles at this point, weren't you?

Hmm?

You were still involved in…

No, I was with the survey party.

OK. Now you told us earlier, I was going to ask you about this, you told us earlier about applying

19:30 **for the survey party. At what point had you made that (UNCLEAR)?**

Just after Benghazi, I was transferred then to the survey party.

Alright, could you give us a bit more of a self-contained statement on that because it's not something we've covered before? We left that when we suddenly headed north to Greece, so could you just tell me, you mentioned it, you mentioned it in passing but I don't think we dealt with it in any detail.

No, perhaps I skipped that, yes.

20:00 When we were in El Agheila, our furthest point in Libya, we were given a liquor supply. We got a couple of bottles of beer and there was some scotch whisky available, and one afternoon I visited some of my friends on one the trucks and took my two bottles of beer up and joined in. We were having

20:30 some drinks, and our RSM who was more or less in charge of administration came along and joined us. Now I had purchased a bottle of whisky and I knew our RSM was very partial to whisky, so I went and got the bottle and sort of put it there for all to take part in, and of course he really enjoyed his share, and of course the next day the transfer

21:00 went through. So I think maybe that might've greased the pathway a little bit.

So what were your first activities (UNCLEAR)?

Well at this point, of course, we were relieved and we were on our way back, so it wasn't until we got back to Mersa Matruh that we actually started some retraining and we had classes and exercises, mainly in

21:30 computing from an established exercise to determine distances and bearings and so on, and some ground work in traversing. You know, this was done with a metal chain for measuring distances on the ground and the bearings were done with an artillery, what they call an artillery director, which is like a simplified

22:00 theodolite for the measurement of the angles to determine the bearing, what they call the true bearing as distinct from the magnetic bearing on the map so that we could establish coordinates from one point to another.

Did you have a chance to put any of this into further practise before you went to Greece?

No, no,

22:30 because when we moved back to Alexandria, we were given a day's leave and then we were loaded on the boat so we did no training at all except for that short stay at Mersa Matruh.

So in your journey up Greece, I don't suppose there was a chance then to do (UNCLEAR)?

Not at that stage, but after this first, once we'd rejoined with the vehicles

23:00 and after the bombing, we moved to Brallos Pass, with the idea of setting up defences area there, because the pass was very narrow and steep with a winding dirt, winding road leading up to the pass at the top and it could be an easily

23:30 defended area. Of course, the ancient Greeks found this out when they were defending Greece against the incoming Persians: that they could hold them up at the passes. When we arrived at Brallos, it was decided then to establish gun positions with the object of engaging the Germans coming along the main road, and we

24:00 started off one morning to establish our position on the map. We'd no sooner got started and there was a lot of consternation on the road, which was fairly heavy traffic on it and it was winding around the hillside, and suddenly around the corner came a Storch German observation plane. The pilot was a bit foolhardy, he was

24:30 flying at only about 100 feet above the road, but it was causing quite a lot of consternation and scattering of people, but he eventually ran into trouble because about a quarter of a mile further on from where he passed us, one of the engineering sappers stood his ground with a Bren gun. He aimed it from his shoulder and shot the plane down.

That's amazing.

Yeah.

This is an Australian sapper?

Yeah, yeah,

25:00 so any rate, we started off this traverse, but then abandoned it, because the decision was made to move and we were sent back another, back to Thermopylae Pass.

Now just before we get to Thermopylae Pass, I just wanted to find out a little bit, just one or two more details about this air raid that you were talking about earlier.

Yeah.

This quite large scale impressive event, if I can call it impressive.

25:30 **Were there casualties as a result of that?**

Oh yes, but luckily at that stage we didn't suffer any, but the next day which I'm coming to now, that we were moving, we moved from Brallos, we were subject to a similar attack then.

This was the journey to Thermopylae was it?

No, we were at Thermopylae, and the idea was to hold them up there because

26:00 it was a very difficult area to get through and there was a good chance that they'd be able to halt the advance along only just one single road, but the next day when the guns were moving along, they were heavily attacked again by a similar bomber force, and one officer jumped out of

26:30 his vehicle and took shelter, and the other troops went into the other side and they went into a ploughed field area. Well, the officer was killed with a bomb fragment, and two of the troops were wounded. One was severely wounded by bombs that fell close to them and close near them.

Did you see this happen?

No, I was further along. We'd been sent to a crossroad

27:00 to make sure that no vehicles took the wrong turning there. The crossroads led on one side going towards the coast. Across the river, there's a small bridge there and our liaison officer had taken our party into this position, but on the way down we witnessed

27:30 the destruction of what was left of our planes on a landing field when a group of German fighters came over and shot up the planes that were on the ground. They were probably unserviceable, but they very quickly shot them up and set them afire on the ground, and we were taking cover under a tree, shade of a tree in our vehicle when we were

28:00 able to watch this happening.

So what did you actually see happen?

Hmm?

Could you describe for us what you saw there?

Well, the fighters would wheel around the airport and they'd take turns, they'd come in line and dive down to a low height and then they had, the Messerschmitt fighters had cannons on them, 20 millimetre cannon which had an explosive charge, and of

28:30 course they really stirred things up when they fired on anything, and of course they, there were about four or five Hurricanes, British Hurricanes on the airstrip parked, and they were quickly shot up and set alight.

Now you mention going to Thermopylae, or the pass at Thermopylae.

Yeah.

For how long did you remain there?

Well, we were there on

29:00 the 24th of April, day before Anzac Day we arrived there.

This is 1941?

'41, yeah, and it was there that we were told that we were the Anzac Corps and that was quite a memorable occasion, but as it did turn out, our

29:30 troops were – the gun fire was able to halt the Germans as they came on the long approach road to the pass. They came out into the open, and our guns engaged them and halted the advance.

Now what were your day-to-day duties as a member of the survey party at this point?

Well we were supposed to carry out surveys using trig

30:00 stations [trigonometric stations or points, usually on prominent hills]. These are trigonometric stations that were established and we had lists of those and we could see them marked on the mountains, and it was our intention that when the guns were established, we would then do a survey using the sights to these trig stations to come in and accurately position, record the position of the guns so that they could then fire in unison, although they were perhaps scattered

30:30 over the countryside with different regiments, once they were all linked on what they call the regimental grid, they could be fired accurately on any given target.

What sort of guns were these?

These were 25-pounders.

The same 25–?

Oh yes.

The same gauge [calibre] that you'd trained with obviously?

Yes.

Yeah.

And so at this stage, we were a

31:00 pretty competent regiment, well experienced and well trained and some of the artillery fire was effective in halting the Germans during the day, but of course they continued pressing forward at nighttime, and it was decided of course then to evacuate the troops from Thermopylae and we were

31:30 told then that a decision had been taken that Greece was to be evacuated.

What impact did that have on the morale of the troops?

Well, it was very damaging in a way, because we had thought that although our numbers were much smaller than the Germans and our equipment was nowhere near as effective as theirs, we did have a hope that perhaps we would be able to stop them at some of these

32:00 mountain passes, but their complete air superiority at this stage was so heavy, and the damage of the bombing of the vehicles on the road was so severe, that it was realised it was hopeless. We realised that we didn't have a hope of doing it, and of course we were all pretty dismayed having just got there, and we found the Greeks were very lovely people and

32:30 they'd been fighting quite extensively against the Italians who had attacked them through Albania, and they'd been able to hold the Italians but they had no, so we only had a scattered Greek division, the New Zealand division and part of the 6th Division there to stop the whole German Army.

So you've used the terms damaging and dismayed.

33:00 **How did that reflect itself in the feelings of individual soldiers such as yourself?**

Well, personally I felt quite confident, because although Blamey did receive a lot of criticism in some directions, I considered him a very capable general and I also considered our own officers were quite capable and we had every confidence in the British Royal Navy

33:30 as far as – after Dunkirk and the way they performed there. I personally felt quite confident they would be able to do this quite successfully. Also it did reconcile a rumour that we'd heard earlier in the piece that had many of us puzzled, is that when Blamey arrived in Greece he didn't go straight to the forward area but he cruised, he

34:00 went on a cruise on all the southern beaches and some people thought, "That's strange, he's sightseeing", but he knew at that stage that there was no hope and he was out reconnoitring the escape routes at that point of time. And of course, when we heard the evacuation was on, well, we realised then that we were going to be in pretty good hands. So personally, I felt quite confident, although we

34:30 were dismayed that we were being kicked out. We realised that there was an overwhelming force against us and some of the actions that had been taken were quite strong and heroic. We had no alternative but to go.

What happened once you received this news? What was the next step for you?

Well, we just took cover during the day and then all movement was at

35:00 night time, which was pretty hazardous in itself. Of course, we didn't show any lights, it was driving without lights and some nights were overcast and no moon and with going up these steep inclines in the mountain passes was a pretty hazardous occupation, but our drivers were first class, and they had a really hard time because, you know,

35:30 this was in the end of April and we were starting to get into the Spring, the wet weather in Europe, and the days were short – the days were getting longer and the nights were getting shorter, but it was still a very hazardous time for the drivers who were magnificent in the effort that they did. Of

36:00 course, although they were driving all night, they still had to be alert and on the job during the day, so they didn't get much sleep.

And I was going to say, if there was rain, the roads were obviously a bit slithery as well?

Yes, yes and of course every now and then, you'd come across damaged vehicles that were restricting the road and pass and of course in the daytime there was continual

36:30 bombing going on. At one stage our troop got warning of the bombs coming, so they diverted off the road and into a clump of olive trees that were nearby for cover, but the Germans spotted them and they bombed them heavily and we lost a number of vehicles and damaged guns in that

37:00 and that's where there were further casualties with the bombing. So that place got the nickname of the Petrified Forest, and because it was a pretty rough time for those that were there.

From that point on, could you describe the process of evacuation including some of the key events that happened?

Well it was night moves,

37:30 and we covered fair distances each night and it was not long before we were on the outskirts of Athens and then we went, of course, on the ocean drive across the Corinth Canal and into the southwestern part of Greece. Our destination was a town called Kalamata,

38:00 which was in the last gulf, like the southern coast of Greece was a series of gulfs. The first one was Argos, that was the main evacuation area for some of the earlier troops and New Zealanders, but the facilities there were overcrowded by the time we arrived. Of course, in effect we were what they call the rearguard

38:30 to have a delaying action on the advancing Germans whereas the evacuation had actually started the day before Anzac Day, and had been underway for some time.

So you crossed the Gulf of Corinth?

Yeah, the…no, the canal at Corinth. There was a little neck of land that joined northern Greece to this southern portion and

39:00 a canal – a shipping canal had been dug there. There was a bridge over that, and the roads were subject to constant bombing during the day. Some vehicles were damaged. The usual practise was during the day, anyone moving during the day would go as far as he could until the bombers arrived, and then they'd dive off and take cover, but after a while they started to get a

39:30 bit tired of this, so some of them decided to make a break for it and keep going, but one of our vehicles…

Tape 6

00:32 **Now you were just about to continue the story on.**

Yes. At one of these runs along the road, one plane came down low and strafed the column, and put four or five bullets through the vehicle, one of which hit the petrol tank, and of course they quickly lost all their petrol,

01:00 but one of the men who was a very good mechanic, he got a petrol tin from a nearby disabled vehicle and took some of the piping off that and rigged up a gravity feed to the engine and that enabled them to get away. Others had very narrow escapes from bombing but once again we seemed to have

01:30 led a charmed life, and aside from one officer being killed and a number wounded, we got through with very little casualties.

How confident were you that you would be properly evacuated?

Well, there were times there when the bombing attack was so strong, it was getting to be a wonder whether

02:00 we'd be able to all get through safely, but eventually we did reach the evacuation area intact, and then we were told that we could expect a naval vessel to come through to us the next day, or the following evening. So we sheltered there

02:30 on the first night, and then the next day we just remained under cover. There were planes constantly in the area but we kept under cover and the afternoon that we were intended to be evacuated, the adjutant detailed me and two other soldiers to take charge of

03:00 all the optical equipment, the gun sights and levels and range finders and binoculars and things like that that were very valuable and hard to replace. They were all, what had been available were collected and stored in a utility truck, and he told me to take charge of this and take it to the loading point or the boarding point and hand

03:30 these items of equipment out to the soldiers as they boarded the ship. Well, we were supposed to be the first to board the ship, but the orders were delayed getting to us for three hours, and it was very late at night before we were told to move from the position where we were and by the time we got to the pier where the destroyer was that was loading,

04:00 it was just about full. Well, we pulled the truck up and we started doling out this equipment, but there was still quite a fair bit of it left by the time the destroyer decided it was full up and it pulled out, and so they said that they'd come back, they'd come back for us, so we went back to the detour area and the next day,

04:30 but the following night there was no vessel turned up, and of course this time the Germans were getting closer and closer, and then on the third night when we decided to go down to the pier, and of course

we'd been advised there would be ships coming in, we came under fire from the Germans who then started to occupy the township, but were being held up

05:00 particularly by New Zealand troops and some of our own troops.

This was the township of Kalamata, was it?

Kalamata, yes. So the navy had seen that we were under hostile fire from artillery and mortars and could see there was some fighting going on, were hesitant about coming into the pier and they wanted to be assured that the area hadn't been mined. Of course, that was the usual

05:30 practice, and so there was a fight, fire fight first to get the pier cleared and that was accomplished and the New Zealand group – troops – and some of our own men attacked the field guns and captured those, so that pushed the Germans back out of the town a bit.

And where were you in relation to all

06:00 **this activity?**

I was in the vehicle, no, there was a lot more. We were about a quarter of a mile from the pier, approaching the pier when we came under fire.

And you were in a truck at this point?

No, we were on foot, and we had no arms with ourselves. We weren't armed at that stage, but

06:30 when the pier was cleared, then I moved up onto the pier.

Now you came under attack, what actually happened when you came under attack?

Well, the first attack was by artillery fire and mortars, and they started to bombard the pier area and they had troops starting to come through the town. Now there was a group of our troops and New Zealanders defended that, and that's where

07:00 John Sachs played a very prominent part. He was – we had all our Bren guns in one vehicle, so they called up this vehicle, they handed out the guns and ammunition and John Sachs and a number of the others took off with Bren guns and they got into the shops in the main street going through the town. They were boarded up shops. They got into one of those and established a fire point,

07:30 and he was so accurate that actually he was stopping the advance in that area, and the New Zealanders were so impressed with his performance that one of the sergeant majors there wrote him up for a VC, but because of other circumstances this didn't go through.

Why didn't it go through?

Well, eventually the Germans

08:00 moved through on the area that he was in and one of them was able to get close enough to throw a grenade into the shop front where he was and he was hit on the head with a piece of, from the exploding grenade and the man that was there saw him and he was covered in blood and he came back and reported that he was dead, and of course when we got the news back at the pier, we were quite dismayed because John was a very

08:30 popular figure and as it turned out of course he was only wounded and he was unconscious when the Germans finally captured the place and they took him unconscious to one of their casualty clearing stations. He woke up in a German hospital, but later on he was able to escape from the train

09:00 when he was being taken back as a prisoner of war. He escaped from that, and then he spent about three weeks in Greece going around with sabotage group, and he was able to blow up one fighter on an airfield, and this actually was recorded by the British intelligence that they became aware of this action. He, John did have

09:30 his pilot's certificate for light aircraft from Sydney, but when it was discovered he was colour blind, of course they curtailed his licence to some extent and he was only allowed to fly at day time. His licence was restricted to day time flying, but he thought, well, there might be a chance of stealing one of the fighters that was on this

10:00 airfield. The airfield of course was under guard and he attacked one guard and killed him with a knife and he got to the plane but when he looked into the cockpit he couldn't understand the controls, and he realised he couldn't retract the undercarriage, so he reckoned he wouldn't have any chance of avoiding capture of being caught up with by any

10:30 following planes, so he blew the plane up with a grenade and then took back to the woods again, and after about two weeks he got a small craft and he sailed over to Turkey from the east coast of Greece over to Turkey. Of course, at this stage, he was up in the northern part of Greece

11:00 and it wasn't that far across to Turkey and he was evacuated through there.

Of course, this is the same John Sachs who later died under the Japanese when he was a member of Z Special Unit?

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah. Quite an extraordinary character by all accounts.

Yes.

He did receive an award, didn't he?

No. When he, everyone thought he was dead and it was known that this New Zealander was

11:30 recommending him for a VC, but that was upset a little bit because he lost the papers or the report that he'd written on that, and it got a bit garbled by the time it got to headquarters, so it was in a sort of a doubtful area, but then he turned up alive. So that sort of really put doubts on a lot that was said about him, but because of his

12:00 exploit in blowing up the aircraft which had been reported by British intelligence agents who were there in that area, he was awarded a Military Medal for that.

Well thanks for telling us the John Sachs story because I'd been quite impressed by his story within the context of the Z unit and I think it's really interesting to hear that earlier part of his service career.

Yeah.

Now to continue

12:30 **your story from this particular town.**

Kalamata.

Kalamata, what happened for you?

Well, as the night progressed and the Germans of course were there in force, the CO, commanding officer who was on the beach near the pier, called us down onto the beach and he said, he told us then that they were sending one of the German prisoners that we had back

13:00 with advice that we would surrender at 5.00am in the morning, and he said that any of those who wished to take off should do so now. So when the ships didn't arrive on the second night we were there, I'd already started to make some plans for escape some other way, and I'd collected some cordage and

13:30 extra tin, water tin for water and any light cordage and string and things like that that perhaps would be useful in fitting up a boat. So I was pretty prepared in a way and when we were told that we could take off, I grabbed two of my close friends and said, "Let's go." I said, "But we won't go down the coast road because that'll be chock a block with troops

14:00 trying to get away and they're sure to be followed up. We'll go up into the mountains for a couple of days and let things quieten down a bit and then we'll take off." So we did this.

How many of you were doing this?

Three of us, myself and two others.

Who were the two others?

One's name was Fyfe Donald who was a bit older than most of us, and the other one was Reg Hammond. He was one of two brothers who were in our

14:30 regiment, and so we went inland. Instead of going down the coast, we went back inland up into the mountains and we got fairly high up by daybreak and from our position there we could see of course the Germans spreading out from the town. They had vehicles that they'd restored from our abandoned vehicles and

15:00 they had these identified with the German flag over the bonnet of the truck, because the air force was still active against our escaping troops that were going down the coast trying to take over some of the larger sailing vessels that were moored along there, and the planes were shooting

15:30 up any troops that they saw and did in effect sink a number of these vessels that could've been captured or used for escaping. So we stayed up in these mountains for two days.

What were you carrying with you at this time?

Well, we shed a lot of gear at this stage. Of course, we didn't know how far we'd have to go and we cut ourselves down to a blanket and

16:00 our overcoats, but all our other service gear, we just abandoned that.

What about food?

Well, we had enough for about three days with us in the form of tinned food and packaged biscuits, and on the first day, we met up with a young Greek man. He couldn't speak English and we couldn't speak Greek, but I had a little

16:30 Greek-Italian dictionary and I was getting through to him for a few words, and we were able to him that we wanted to get a boat, so he pointed down the coast away, and he took us to one spot where we could see down, although we were fairly high up, we could see a house on the roadside or near the – more or less on the beach –and there was a small boat

17:00 at that, near the house on the beach. So we thought oh well, we'll have a go for that.

What sort of boat was it?

It was just an open boat, rowing boat and no sails or that, and people, Fyfe Donald thought they were Germans had gone out during the daytime in the boat rowing and moored out, because they were fishing

17:30 for a while, but the bay at Kalamata there I suppose was about three or four miles wide, and the town was right up at the top end of the gulf really, and the other side of the bay seemed to be unoccupied and it was covered with a light growth of fir trees. So I thought, "We

18:00 can get the boat." There was plenty of driftwood around that we could use as paddles and we'd paddle across the bay and then rig it up as best we could for sailing. At this time, it was a full moon and the moon was up until just on midnight and it was very clear. Visibility was very good, so we had to wait. We got down to the beach about

18:30 half a mile from where the house was, and while it was full moon, we just laid up until the moon set and then we advanced onto the boat and we were able to examine it and found it didn't have any holes in it. Usually craft like that have a hole at the back to drain out any water with a cork in it, and the practice very often was take the cork away so that the boat wouldn't be

19:00 immediately serviceable, but I'd had a fair bit of experience in small craft when we were young from our weekender on Middle Harbour, so I examined the boat and found out there were no holes in it, and we had to lift it, because the beach was more cobblestones rather than sand, and any attempt to move it was quite noisy, so we had to lift the boat and carry it into the water

19:30 and then we floated it along to where we'd left what we had of our gear piled up, and then collected this driftwood for paddles, and then we set off across the bay, but when sunrise came we were still about a quarter of a mile short and I was worried then that we'd be seen by the Germans in the port and they'd wonder what we were doing, or even

20:00 the owner of the boat might come out and be able to see us, although being a couple of miles away we would've been hard to see, only been close to the waterline.

Didn't you improvise some sails at one point?

Yes. Well, when we got to the other side we had to haul the boat up a bit and out of sight in case any craft came around.

So in the meantime, you hadn't been seen at all?

No, and so we had to make a mast,

20:30 a mast and boom and oars, fashion oars of some sort and a tiller to steer by. So we were able to cut down some small fir trees. We had to use a table knife and a big pebble as a hammer to do this, and this took quite some time to get down three or four small trees and then strip them of the branches and then with the cordage that I'd saved up, we were able to establish a mast

21:00 and a boom, and then we cut our blankets up and then sewed them together with our bootlaces to form a sail. Well, fortunately on the first night we were ready to go, a strong northerly wind came up which was blowing straight down the gulf and this would've been ideal. So as soon as it got dark we decided to take off. Just before we

21:30 did so, Fyfe and Reg decided to reconnoitre the area where we were just to see if there was any inhabitation or any open roads where we could be seen, and they found a small farmhouse occupied by an elderly Greek couple, and they gave them about half a dozen small bantam size eggs which were gratefully received, and then as I say

22:00 when it became dark, we shoved off and with this strong wind that was blowing we actually started off at quite a fair clip down the bay. In fact, I estimated we were travelling at around about eight or nine knots and the loose metal strip on the underside of the boat, the wear strip, started to vibrate, you know, so I thought we must be moving along fairly well. Well the gulf would've

22:30 been about – I suppose 10 miles long – and in the morning we found ourselves, we were out in open sea. We could tell we were in open sea by the swell effect and then when daylight broke, we could see Cape

Mattapan. That was on the eastern side of the gulf we were in, so we had a very good idea of where we were. Now our only aid at that stage

23:00 was a page out of the Sphere magazine, about a quarto size page, which had a sketch of the Greece area including the isle of Crete, and it was not to any definite scale, but having a bit of knowledge of the local area I was able to work out a rough idea of the distances and the course we had to take, and

23:30 luckily for us, the first night out was clear sky and we were able to see stars and I could recognise them and we could steer by these stars and keep clear of the mainland. So when daybreak came, we could see Cape Mattapan. We realised we'd made good ground, but all we could see was open sea because our horizon from a

24:00 low level in a small boat like that was only about five miles.

I believe you caught sight of an Italian seaplane at one stage?

Yes, well sunrise would've been around about 5.00 o'clock in the morning. I imagine around about 7.00 or 8.00 o'clock we heard a droning. We had been told that our Sunderland flying boats had been coming through the area, and rescuing some of the people. So our first thought was, "Ah, it's

24:30 a Sunderland". Suddenly, this shape appeared and as it got closer we could see it wasn't a Sunderland but it was an Italian flying boat and he was manoeuvring, zigzagging around the area so he was looking for something. Suddenly he wheeled around, he'd seen us, and he came over and he was only about less than 100 feet above the water. We could see the pilot and co-pilot or navigator quite clearly through the

25:00 Perspex, and as he passed, the gunner in the turret in the back he flung his guns around on us and I thought, well, we all thought we'd had it, you know, but he didn't fire.

So what did you do? Did you lie low or anything?

No. We decided that since we'd heard that the troops from Argos, the other main evacuation area, the troops that were trying to get away on small craft had been shot up

25:30 badly by the Germans, we decided that we were pressing our luck a bit, so we decided to land at Cape Mattapan which we did, and it was an isolated area and we knew there wouldn't be any Germans there at that stage. Some of the family, the younger children came down to see what was happening and were quite amazed at our

26:00 set up. In fact, they were quite dismayed that we'd been cutting up blankets to make sails. They thought that was sacrilege.

I mean, you must've felt a bit vulnerable knowing that the enemy wasn't too far away?

Yes. Well, we thought we'd stay there for that day and just see what air activity there was, and since we didn't see any further planes

26:30 around at all, we thought we'd chance it, we'd still keep going. So the next morning bright and early we shoved off, and the breeze was favourable and we took off in what I considered was the right direction for Crete and by about mid morning we could start to see the higher ground of an island which we knew we could see on the track, an island called Kithira, and by midday we

27:00 passed that. We kept fairly well clear of the eastern side of the island, and headed off towards the second island called Andikithira, which was about another 10 miles or so further, 20 miles further on, and around about midday, the wind started to drop and we were more or less becalmed for a while and in the distance of course on our starboard bow we could see

27:30 the island of Andikithira. That was a much smaller island, and it was too far for us to row and then on the horizon then, it must've come from the south east, we could see black clouds coming up and we realised we were in for a storm so there was no chance with a limited sailing capacity of the boat we were in, we couldn't tack in the

28:00 right direction so we decided to make a run back to Kithira and perhaps take shelter there - although when the storm did come up, the wind was blowing us in the right direction quite fast. It was dusk when we reached Kithira and rather than go around on the lee side on the sheltered side, I thought, well, if we went there and we couldn't get in, we'd

28:30 finish up being blown further inland towards the mainland and perhaps would be spotted. So I decided to take a risk and come in on the windward side of the island looking for cover, which we fortunately found a little inlet with, and there was a big pillar of rock on the outer side of this inlet, which gave us cover or shelter from the wind. So we spent the rest of the night there just

29:00 backwards and forwards behind this rock, until it got light enough to see where we were. When daylight came we could see there was a little pebbly beach there, and also saw a figure of a man clambering down onto this beach and he was beckoning us in. So we sailed onto this beach and it turned out he was a Greek policeman. He was dressed up in,

29:30 he had a uniform and I remember he had leather leggings and boots and I don't know why he had leggings because there were no horses around, but perhaps that was the regular police uniform, and he had breaches and a tan jacket and a peaked cap, something like after the style that the New Zealanders wore, and he couldn't

30:00 speak English, but he beckoned us in and he had some eggs. The eggs that we'd had, we'd already eaten. We cooked them in a fashion in the boat. So he had a satchel and he had some food in that, including eggs, which he handed out to us. They were leftovers from the Easter celebration, because they were covered in red and blue wax, bees' wax,

30:30 you know, decorations, but the eggs were tasty so we were happy to have them, and so he beckoned us back up. We climbed up this rocky pathway up to the top and there was a village there.

Now is this on Kithira?

Mmm?

Was this on Kithira or Crete?

This was on Kithira, and apparently they had seen us sailing past on the previous day and

31:00 also had seen us coming back, so that's why the policeman was aware where we were and he came down, and we were taken up to the head man's cottage. I don't know whether he was the mayor or that, but he seemed to be in control, and he could speak English quite well as could quite a number of others that were there, one eventually who we found out had lived in Australia and had

31:30 at one time had a café at Taree, and the bulk of the people that were in the village were elderly people, and their livelihood was coming from money that people from the village had gone to America and Australia, and who were sending money back to them to compensate them for the expense that they'd incurred in getting them to

32:00 these countries where they could earn money and do so, and of course they were a bit apprehensive about what was going to happen to them because, as I say, that was their main source of income and they knew that was going to dry up once the Germans moved in. So I felt sorry for them of course. It was pretty obvious they had very little agriculture there, and certainly no

32:30 industry and they were going to be in for some pretty hard times, and I often wondered afterwards and after the war just how they did survive.

They must've given you quite a warm welcome though?

Oh yes. They were wonderful to us and of course the ones that could speak English were anxious to hear the news from the mainland, what had happened, and where the Germans were and how the various towns had fared,

33:00 and we filled them in as best we could and they were, I had some Greek money and they wouldn't take any money for the food that they, they gave us food during the day, and they told us that in a couple of nights time there'd be a launch going from Kithira to

33:30 Andikithira, and they would be prepared to take us over there, which they thought would be best for us to go there because it would be further away from the mainland and less important to the Germans. So we decided to do this, and so we abandoned our own little craft, and the policeman then took us over to the other side of the island at nighttime. They didn't want to move around during the day just in case we were observed.

I just wanted to ask you how many

34:00 **days had you been travelling by now from the time you put out?**

We spent two days up in the mountains and then two days across the bay rigging up the boat, so, and this was two days after we sailed so this was the sixth, the sixth and seventh day.

How was your collective morale by this point?

We felt pretty cocky about it. We'd got that far and we thought, well at least they were going to give us

34:30 motorised passage. We felt pretty good, and so the policeman guided us over the mountains. It was a pretty fair height, and we got to a village on the other side in the early morning and they took us to a farm area. It was a wooden, there was a stone structure there, and there was about

35:00 ten other troops there that had already reached that point, so we joined in with them and that made a party of about 15 all told, but by this time we were getting short of food. So we pooled our resources. I still had some Greek money in my possession, and a few of the others had, and we pooled it all together and we bought a sheep from the farmer. So one of them, who was expert at this, just

35:30 slaughtered the sheep and we cooked it all up. We'd borrowed a big boiler from the farmer and built a big fire and cooked the thing, all the whole sheep up in one big pot as a, like a stew or sort of a mixture of soup and meat, and then doled it out. So the first night we had a good meal, but we decided we'd be

frugal

36:00 so we threw all the bones back into the pot again and of course the next day we had soup.

Now you mentioned other troops. Were these Australian troops?

Some Australian, but mostly New Zealand. The bulk of them were New Zealand troops. They were the remnants of the ones who were being evacuated from Argos.

And how many troops, how many additional troops were here?

Well, there was about 12 or 13 of those and

36:30 with we three, it made up about 15 all told.

So that brings us up to the second night. What happened after that?

Well then, on the third night they told us the launch would take us off. So at probably around about 8.00 o'clock that night, we were loaded onto the launch. It was a small trading vessel, really, because it had a ballast of

37:00 gravel or pebbles in the hold to give it stability, and the area on top wasn't very large so there could only be a few of us. Quite a few of us were down below deck lying on these pebbles. So the voyage took us about, I think it was only around about two or three

37:30 hours to get to the other island and we were unloaded there and of course similar circumstances provided there. We were there for two nights and then another vessel then took us from there to Crete. That took about four hours. So he landed at a small fishing village and

38:00 we were immediately taken into custody by the MPs, and taken off into under surveillance because there were at this stage a few Greek civilians had joined us too, and of course the fifth column [Nazi sympathisers] activity was rife in, or they thought there were a number of fifth columnists around.

38:30 These were people that were dressed in civilian clothes, or Germans dressed in civilian clothes or even allied uniforms who give false directions and acted as spies.

So Greece had fallen to the Germans?

Yeah.

Crete was still in Allied hands, was it?

Hmm?

Crete was still in Allied hands?

Yes. Crete was, had been used as a storage area to some

39:00 extent but there was no very well defined force there. It was mainly sort of a scratch force and General Freyberg, the New Zealander general who was in charge, and there were scatterings of Australians and New Zealand troops in the area and very few Greek people.

Tape 7

00:31 **OK Ken, so we got up to the point where you were taken into custody.**

Yes. Well, eventually we were cleared by the Military Police and some of the 2/1st Field Regiment, our unit, had been in Crete but they all had been previously evacuated back to Egypt so we were on our own

01:00 and it was decided to have us attached to the 2/2nd Field Regiment, which was a Victorian unit, and like a sister regiment to us, but they had to be abandoned in Greece and we were more or less at a loose end, but at this stage, all evacuation from Greece

01:30 had ceased, and the island was starting to become under regular attack from the German air force. We joined the 2/2nd Field Regiment and we were camped in an area not far from the little township of Canea at the head of the Suda Bay, and

02:00 Suda Bay had been a strong naval stronghold, and there were a number of ships there that had been beached because they'd been severely damaged in air raids. One of them was a British, the HMS York was a British cruiser, and there were a number of merchant ships that were anchored that had been

02:30 damaged so that the engines were no longer useful and were damaged in the fairway, and just around the bay from where we were, there was a British corvette also up on the rocks that had been all damaged by bombing. One of the ships that was in the bay was known to be loaded with ammunition, so

everyone kept a bit clear

03:00 of that, but where we were on the bay was a very pleasant spot, but we had (UNCLEAR) only a few yards away was sort of a grim reminder of what was going on. There was a full-length piece of casing of probably a 500-pound bomb, German bomb, and it was very poor explosive,

03:30 because it hadn't properly shattered up into small particle shrapnel as it should, as it was intended to do, but this quite a large piece, it was long, almost as long as that table. So every time I looked at that, I knew there was still a war on, but the planes were coming over in greater frequency each day. There were a number of...

Which planes were these?

The German planes.

04:00 Bombers and fighters were coming over and we could see it was building up, and the word percolated through to expect an invasion. Now, I didn't find this out until after the war, but actually the British were then breaking the Enigma Code and they were reading the German air force signals

04:30 almost as quickly as the recipient was, and there was a build-up of air force and parachutists in Greece, and we were able to determine there was a definite attack going to be launched by naval ships and airborne troops onto Crete, quite some time before it happened. So

05:00 we were told an invasion was to be expected, and we were to become infantry in reserve and we were given an American LR1 rifle, 'cause armaments were scarce, and 30 rounds of ammunition in a cloth bandolier and that was it. We were then infantry. So, but as I say, the early days

05:30 except for the air raids were quite pleasant there. The area where we were was close to Maleme Airport. There were three airstrips in Crete. Maleme was the most important, that was the biggest one, and this was largely defended by New Zealand troops. There were some British troops there but they were mostly non-combatant people, like stores and service personnel,

06:00 and they were camped in the peninsula leading out from where Canea was.

Were you ever required to fire your weapon?

Yes. We did fire at aircraft in Greece, but when we were in Crete, we were warned not to readily fire because they didn't want to disclose our position.

06:30 But any rate, we got these rifles and then of course there was increased air activity, and General Freyberg, who was in command, thought that the main attack was going to come from the sea, so he put most of the defenders close to the beach and

Where were you defending?

a limited number near the airport, because there was also the possibility of

07:00 landings there.

So, where were you situated at this point?

We were the other side of that. We were some miles clear of that at Suda Bay. Well, when the airborne invasion did start of course we could hear the planes coming in there were so many of them, and see them in the distance, but we were quite some distance away from the main

07:30 landing area, and during the day there was very strong bomber action. They bombed Canea quite severely. There was a number of anti-aircraft guns situated near us and the fighter planes that were strafing the village area would come in fairly low and their escape

08:00 was down the bay and the Beaufort anti-aircraft guns were firing on them. They had tracer shells and we could see the shells being fired at the planes, and as they came down the bay and where we were approaching, they were almost down to water level, because they were dodging the fire by slowing, decreasing their flight, and it was annoying to see the well directed shells going where they should've been,

08:30 just passing over the top of the plane. You know, just only feet above the top of the plane, and one plane came in obviously with some engine trouble and just skimmed the little ridge we were on and crashed in the bay next to us, much to the delight of everyone there, and otherwise we weren't directly attacked. We were told that night to move up, to move up into the

09:00 Maleme area. So we marched all that night, and it was a long march too, and at daylight we got into an olive grove alongside a local church of some sort, and either, we were there for one day and one night and the next morning, we

09:30 were told we were going to move further up, and either our movement had been seen from the air or we had been observed because two Stukas attacked us, and the first bomb landed where we'd just moved

from and the second one landed where we were moving to, and a number of troops were killed in that, and there was a story went around that there were some

10:00 air crew from crashed gliders were in this monastery or this church, and they were directing these bombers down onto us, but I don't know whether that was true or not, or whether it was the fact that as we were starting to move around we were seen, but that was our first serious attack. We were moved further up into an area that had been under strong attack because there was still

10:30 smoke coming from the bullets in the trees that were on the edge of this open field, and at one stage I saw a patrol of German paratroopers moving along the hillside quite some distance away. We could just see them as little black specks moving along, but the main attack was still coming from the aircraft, and

11:00 that night I was on guard duty and I'd just been relieved when there was an alarm given and apparently this was probably a pilot from one of the crashed gliders was wandering around, and he was approaching the area where we were stationed. He was challenged and of course he took off so we were all called out and chased after. Trying to find him

11:30 at night time was a bit of, although there was a good moon, that was a bit of a lost exercise so he got away and we had to go back into camp, and then later on a plane came around flying very low and very slow, almost at stalling speed, and it sounded as though we'd been reported and he was looking for us, but we just kept quiet, and so we

12:00 were ordered not to fire on aircraft if it was going to give our position away, so no one fired at him and he moved off elsewhere and that was the end of that. So on the next day we were advised that the island was going to be evacuated, and we would move back that night. So we started then the long march back to where we'd come from,

12:30 and by daylight we'd just passed through our original camping spot. Since I'd been on the island I'd been suffering from diarrhoea or dysentery either from some of the water I'd drank – more than likely from contaminated water - and I was feeling, I hadn't been eating and I was feeling pretty weak, and just after daylight I couldn't carry on any longer, so I dropped out

13:00 and there was a little bit of a shelter there and I got into that and the troops then had started, they'd rounded a corner and they were then approaching the march up the hillside leading up to the mountains, up to the mountain pass. There was like a long valley, a straight valley. So I rested for about half an hour, and then by this time the body of troops were out of sight and I started off on

13:30 my own and I got about half way down this road and I came across three fellows, two, three men swimming in a little steam that was there and it turned out it was my two mates and one of the officers from our regiment who had been attached to the 2/2nd Field Regiment too. So I joined them, and it was quite refreshed with this icy mountain water coming down the stream,

14:00 and we were all there basking in the sun a little, you know, it was spring weather, and suddenly this flight of Heinkel bombers came in low level along the valley, flying parallel with the road and they were, their aiming point of attacking was where troops were marshalled in the first group of trees leading

14:30 up to the mountains. We stood there helpless and naked and watching these planes fly past us. We could see the crew quite clearly in the plane, but fortunately the turret gunners were looking the other way, because they were expecting any attack on them would've come from the coast area rather than from inland, and of course we were fairly close to the mountain range too. So fortunately

15:00 for us, they were looking the other way. Of course, we had a grandstand view of the area that they were attacking, and then later on in the afternoon when we got dressed and went through we could see the damage that they had done and it was quite severe on the troops that had been in that area.

What did you see?

Well, there were plenty of bodies strewn around the countryside

15:30 and there were a few houses there and they were demolished, but so we were lucky in one way to not have reached the marshalling area, because if we'd got to this first area we would've probably been halted there so we escaped the severe bombing, but it wasn't a very pleasant spot. Well, that night we marched on the road going up the mountains and a lot of the villagers were

16:00 leaving their homes too and joining the march. So the road was really very heavily congested with people and there were little kids there and they were crying and so on, and their mothers were upset. So it wasn't a very pleasant area to be in. So, in the early hours of the morning we were pretty well exhausted and pulled over the side of the road and had a quick sleep, and then

16:30 at daybreak got up and just then a truck came along, an empty truck driven by an English soldier. So he offered us a lift, which we gratefully received and of course that took us over the pass and then down the steep incline onto the other side of the island onto the southern coast of Crete and it was a fair climb. It probably would've been about as high as our Blue Mountains, but much steeper.

17:00 So we arrived in the marshalling area in the early morning. Fortunately, there was no plane activity at that stage, but the Military Police directed the driver to park the vehicle under cover and we, the three

of us, took off.

17:30 The officer that was with us, he went off to see what was happening, and we waited for some time and he never came back. So we took off and started down the road, but we were warned not to move around in daylight, so we had to hole up under cover for the rest of the day and then spent the night around on one point where there were quite a number of other troops

18:00 like ourselves that were stragglers that had moved into the area. Well, the next morning we were advised that there would be an evacuation ship coming in, but in the late afternoon the area was heavily bombed and I was sheltered behind a rock

18:30 that was about as big as that table, and the area was quite rocky where we were leading down into a dry water bed where most of the troops was sheltered, and the plane was really bombing these troops that were down in the creek bed, but one bomb landed just the other side of the rock that I was sheltering behind and either the draught or the rock moved, 'cause I got hit on the side of the face.

19:00 It opened up a wound which bled most profusely and stained all the front of my shirt with blood, and of course when my friends came along they thought I was seriously wounded, and they bandaged me up but I was protesting that I was alright, and a New Zealand medical officer came up to tend to some other people who'd been wounded by this same bomb, and he had a

19:30 look at me and I told him I was alright, and he said, "Look", he gave me a tag to hang on, he said, "There's walking wounded down in the creek bed", he said, "When it's dark, at dusk, go down and join them and then you'll be first on the boat". So I didn't want to leave my friends but they said, "Oh no, you go." They insisted, so I did go down and join this group.

20:00 They were mostly Maoris and they were – Maoris were wonderful fighters. In fact, one stage they captured a number of the German paratroopers and amongst them was Max Baer who was a boxer, at one stage had been world heavyweight champion. He knocked out the American champion in America, much to Hitler's

20:30 happiness, but he did lose the return bout, and he then joined the German air force and he became a paratrooper. So they captured Max Baer, and I think every second Maori soldier I met told me the story about the capture of Max Baer, but finally of course he was released when the Germans took over the area where he was being held.

21:00 **So what happened to you next?**

Hmm?

What happened to you next once you joined the walking wounded?

At dusk, we were moved out onto the beach, and sure enough there was a ship there. It was a strange looking boat. It was not very large as far as liners go but it had, it was rigged up to take landing barges instead of lifeboats and it looked quite modern

21:30 and well kept. So we were taken out in the landing barges onto the boat and I said to the first sailor I met, I said, "What ship is this?" Well, he said, "It's a commando landing ship," he said, "working in reverse. We're taking troops off," he said, "We just have landed a group of commandos who had been put to use in delaying the German advance."

22:00 They were going to be picked up later on. So they loaded us up and took our forward troops that were congregated there and it had been built as a fast merchant ship, but it was very modern and very fast, so the Royal Navy took it over and there were three of them. They were all called Glen something

22:30 and this was the Glengyle, this ship. That was the name of this ship and it was later used to land commandos in the Syria campaign, and to jump ahead a lot, amazing enough the Glengyle was in the same convoy that I was in when the war ended and we came back to Australia and I saw it again there,

23:00 but any rate the Glengyle did a fast trip to Alexandria. When we got half way there, we were having our own fighter escort and we weren't attacked, but that was the last ship out.

Oh.

So we were back in Egypt, and then…

Well let's just take a breather there because what you've just described in an incredible story

23:30 **and I'm just wondering when you did finally leave Crete, what was going through your mind once you left that journey behind you?**

We were feeling a bit downhearted because we were – this was the second time we'd been thrashed badly, and of course, the cost of getting the troops out of Greece and Crete was very severe on the Royal Navy and we were very sorry for

24:00 that, because, as Admiral Cunningham who was leading the fleet in the Mediterranean said, "Well, it's

taken 200 years, no, 400 years to build a tradition in the navy, and we're not going to destroy it by not rescuing troops in this campaign." 'Cause he was ordered to pull his vessels out because they could see the hopelessness of it, but he decided to stay on which he did,

24:30 and they did lose quite a number of ships. In fact, the ships that I was on had a bad record. The Orford was sunk when it left us and went to France and Marseilles. It was bombed and sunk there, that was the first ship. The Penland that took us to Greece when it left us, it was attacked and bombed and it was beached on the shores of Greece,

25:00 and the destroyer, the Hero, that did take troops off, it lasted the whole war. It had a very good record.

Well, getting back to when you were on board the last ship that left Crete, I mean there must've been, you mention that you were all feeling down about the defeat,

Yes.

but there must've been some sense of relief?

Oh yes. Well there was

25:30 great relief, because the paratroopers had landed in three positions at each of the three landing strips on Crete. Each of those was defended by Australian troops and they actually defeated the paratroopers that were there. They denied them the use of the airstrip and they finally had to capitulate when the main force that had landed at Maleme

26:00 came down to rescue the Germans who were actually holed up, because the colonel that was in charge of the Australian troops, one of them, recognised early in the piece that the main thing with the airborne invasion was to attack the landed troops as fast as possible before they could get to their supplies. They came down very lightly armed,

26:30 and their main weapons were in canisters which were on separate parachutes, and he realised that the best way to defeat them was to attack quickly before they could get to their main arms, and that they did, and was quite successful. Whereas at Maleme they were able to establish a well-held area, where they could land quite a large amount of air equipment.

Well, getting back to you and your

27:00 **story and of course we've got to keep this story moving unfortunately, because we've still got a fair way to go. What happened to you next after you left Crete?**

Well, we were taken ashore at Alexandria and we were taken into a camp area and we were completely refitted. We just shed all our dirty unwashed clothes and equipment

27:30 and passed that over to the laundry people and we were given a complete new outfit of clothing and equipment, and then we were sent by train to Palestine to rejoin our unit, and of course that was a great rejoicing when, we were given up as lost because no one knew. They knew that we'd been left behind at Kalamata

28:00 and Reg's brother, Don Hammond, he had escaped and he was at the camp at Kassa in Palestine.

What was the reaction of the men?

Well of course it was quite emotional in a way. Of course we were taken by truck to the camp area and when we got off and we walked into headquarters, they were amazed to see us, and of course they wanted, the

28:30 headquarters officers wanted to know what had happened and what had happened to our commanding officer who was captured and also the battery commander, 1st Battery, he was also captured. They were anxious to know just what exactly had happened to them, and we were able of course to tell them the situation up to the point where he'd told us if we wanted to leave we could go, but we could assure them that he was

29:00 uninjured and was quite OK, and of course the other men from the party I was with, they were quite amazed to see me walk into their tent, because they'd given me up for lost. So it was quite a very welcome homecoming.

Were there tears?

Hmm?

Were there tears?

Oh no, not really, but more amazement,

29:30 and of course, I spent the next two days explaining to everyone what had happened and so, at any rate at this stage, this was in June and the Syrian Campaign had started and 1st Battery of course had lost all the guns and equipment in Greece, but 2nd Battery were still fully equipped,

30:00 but they had to hand over their guns to the 2/5th Field Regiment which was going to Syria. So we finished up with no weapons, no guns and little equipment, and just settled down to sort of routine training until we were further supplied. We were in limbo at that stage. The 7th Division

30:30 were in Syria, campaigning in Syria, and the 9th Division were in Tobruk in the siege of Tobruk and the 8th Division was in Malaya, and the 6th Division of course was badly shattered after the Greece campaign and was being reformed in Palestine. So we went through a period of some months with very little to do and just

31:00 routine exercises and training which is pretty welcome in one way. It enabled us to put on a bit of weight that we'd lost in our – see we'd gone from one campaign in Libya which lasted three months with a very short rest into another campaign which for us only lasted six or eight weeks, but…

Well, it sounds like you deserved to lay low for a bit.

Yeah. So we were given

31:30 some reward for our getting back to the unit. We were given a week's leave in Cairo, which was very pleasant, and went by train back to Egypt and by train to Cairo and because of the demand for the troops in Tobruk, there were very few troops on leave, and we more or less had the leave

32:00 hostel to ourselves for the whole week, and we were given first class attention by the waiters and really well looked after. As a matter of fact, while we were there, I saw Gone With The Wind [famous film of the American Civil War] in a cinema in Cairo and it had just been released. So, any rate, it was back to the unit and this survey party of course settled down to some steady work. We did a number

32:30 of shoots back at Beersheba where we had to go down and survey the area again and so on, and then the powers that be thought the Germans were going to attack down through Turkey and through Syria and come through to the [Suez] Canal that way. So it was decided that our regiment, that our division would go up

33:00 into Syria into the Baalbek Valley, which there was only two possibilities of coming down through Syria. One was by the coast road, which was pretty congested in spots or through a fairly wide valley between two mountain ranges that ran the full length, almost the full length of Syria. So the survey party was sent up there early or it was late in the year, was in

33:30 November, and the weather was getting pretty cold then. We surveyed the whole area where the regiment would occupy, laid out the roads and gun positions and so on, and then in December it was decided that after Pearl Harbour, the attack, decided to bring us back to Palestine and I'd finished up spent Christmas in hospital.

34:00 One of our exercises, one of the drivers came to me, to see if I could help him because his vehicle wouldn't start, and it appears the drain plug in the carburettor had come loose and his petrol had drained out from the carburettor and from frequent trying to start he'd almost run the battery flat. So I made a somewhat foolish move to feed

34:30 petrol through the throat of the carburettor by hand, to get the engine firing over quick enough to start charging the battery, and of course the engine backfired, and the flames set alight to the petrol they had in the container and I was sitting over the engine on top of the radiator and I threw the burning container away from me to get rid of it, but it hit the stay of the hood and it bounced back over and showered me with

35:00 burning petrol on my chest and arms. So I finished up with some rather nasty burns, and was evacuated then to an English Dressing Station where the doctor there was not familiar with the latest treatment of burns and he covered the burns with silver nitrate solution, which set into like a hard shell, or it was a flexible shell

35:30 to keep the air off the burn, or set it.

No, no, you just keep going.

So when I was then transferred to the 7th AGH [Australian General Hospital], Australian hospital, I had to go through the painful process of them stripping all this skin, false skin off me, and it was very unpleasant. So I finished up I was there for a month

36:00 before they healed and then we were sent back through the training regiment back to the unit, and that was in early January.

OK, now Ken, I think we've got to get a bit more time conscious about this because we're still in the Middle East and of course we've still got a lot of, yes, so what we might do is, 'cause I know that you returned back to Australia for a bit, if we just

36:30 **summarise quickly your journey back to Australia, and we'll get up to New Guinea and talk about that.**

Alright. Well, on the way back to Australia we were delayed at Colombo. Churchill wanted us to go to

Rangoon but Curtin, our Premier [actually Prime Minister], decided that was not on, but he agreed to the 16th Brigade and our regiment to stay in Ceylon, just in case there was an attack by a Japanese

37:00 party. While we were there, of course, we had the opportunity of jungle training, and so when we came back to Australia we were the only Australian troops that really had, except that a few who had escaped from Malaya, we were the only Australian troops that had had experience in jungle warfare and as a result of this, although we'd just arrived back, we were then

37:30 detailed to go to New Guinea. The 7th Division were the main troops there. They'd been back for some time. We were detailed to go to Port Moresby when the Japanese were just about over the Owen Stanley Track. We found out why we were selected was because the major-general in charge of artillery was our old friend,

38:00 Brigadier Barker, and of course we were his old regiment. So we once again were volunteered for duty. So we arrived in Port Moresby, and immediately set up our fortress activities there because the Japanese troops were fairly close, but as it turned out, that was the closest they did get, and when they

38:30 were pushed back over the Owen Stanleys onto the coastal strip, we were able to then utilise airborne methods to get our guns over. In the waiting process, the engineering people in the light aid detachment had trained troops how to dismantle the 25-pounder gun, which was too big to be

39:00 loaded into the aircraft, but in a dismantled condition could be accommodated in a DC3 [Douglas Dakota DC3 transport] aircraft. So when they secured two rough airstrips on the coastal strip, the first planes were flown over and landed there, and when they got into the action area, the local brigadier

39:30 in charge of the troops came along and he said, "Have you got any ammunition with you?" And they said, "Oh yes, we've brought our…" "Now," he said, "I want you to put those guns down and fire off every round you've got," and they said, "Oh, but that's all…", we told him that's all we have, and he said, "Well, I don't care," he said, "We want our troops and the Japanese to know that the artillery has arrived". So they selected an area on the track, one of the tracks

40:00 for a target area and fired off all the rounds, which was a great boon to the infantry when they heard them. The first lot that was fired made the infantry think that they were under attack, and they all took cover, but when the shells continued overhead and burst in the Japanese areas, they were delighted and they came running back and it was the 16th

40:30 Brigade reckoned we were their regiment, you know, they were the first brigade in the AIF.

Tape 8

00:32 **OK, so Ken, if you wanted to go from, you mentioned that from Port Moresby you were selected to go to a military course at Holsworthy.**

Yeah.

Could you describe what happened, or describe what happened to you there?

Well, after qualifying at this course, we returned back to our unit, and because of our experience and qualifications, we were recommended for a commission and I was only a bombardier

01:00 at that stage with two stripes. So one day, the battery commander came along and told me I was now a lieutenant and had two pips. So I was attached then to 2nd Battery and while I was there, there was the last big raid on Port Moresby took place when the Japanese bombed a fuel depot, which was just across the road from us, and we were used to unroll as many drums of petrol out of the

01:30 fire area as possible to save them.

So what were you doing at that point?

I was just a section officer in the battery, but we were of course resting then, we were in a camp. Well then after that, I was then transferred to headquarters as the intelligence officer and assistant adjutant and my duties then was to collect any information of enemy activity, which was only in general

02:00 reports and any information that could be obtained, but we had troops active of course, had been active in the Buna-Sanananda campaigns which were successful and there was another battery up at Wau, which had been a great help to the infantry there in stopping the Japanese advance.

So, and

02:30 **what were you doing at this point?**

But I was on headquarters then as the intelligence officer.

And what duties were you doing as the intelligence officer?

Well, largely it was administration. It was collecting information regarding enemy activity and situation reports. It was a sort of an

03:00 office job. It wasn't very active in that sense.

How would you collect the information?

This came to us from our headquarters, New Guinea Headquarters stationed at Port Moresby, and also of course from any troops we had in the field.

Once you got the information, what would you then do with it?

Well it was recorded for the war diary or just for general information to our

03:30 own troops. Of course, there were a lot of lessons learnt from the use of artillery in jungle conditions and these were compiled and made known to everyone concerned. You know, it was very difficult to observe fire in jungle where you could only see about 50 yards away. So the only way to do this, the observing officer had to get as close as he could to the target, which put him in the fire zone.

04:00 Quite a few artillery observation officers were killed or wounded because of this effect.

Now what was it like having an office job, after being out with the men?

Yes, well it was a rest you might say in one way. Of course I was rapidly learning. It was a learning curve for me, but it was sort of away from the direct action.

04:30 We were subject to some nightly air raids, but otherwise we weren't seeing any action at all.

And how long were you in this office job for?

Well, for about almost 12 months, because it continued for the rest of our stay in Moresby and then later in the year, we returned back to Australia and then we were at camping and training conditions there for twelve months.

05:00 **So during that first stint to New Guinea you were primarily the intelligence officer in headquarters?**

Yeah.

OK.

Back in Australia, we went through training. There was one time when we were ordered to send 380 men to work on the wharves, and they worked on the wharves for three months

05:30 loading and unloading ships, and because they were young and vigorous, they established loading records for turnaround of ships, much to the wharf labourers' disgust, and then there was a march through Sydney and when General Blamey heard that that's what we were doing, he was most incensed because he called us his favourite regiment, but then I think he did that to most units.

Why was he incensed?

Well for a regiment of our

06:00 class being wharf labourers. So he arranged to have us sent immediately up to the Atherton Tablelands up in northern Queensland to rejoin the 6th Division, which was then quartered up there, and then in late 1944 we received orders then to go back to New Guinea.

Now, how did you feel about going back to New Guinea?

Oh well, very good because we'd had a good rest in Australia, reformed, and we still considered

06:30 ourselves a pretty good and efficient unit and so we felt, but it was a bit of a backwater in one way. We realised it was more of a political move rather than a really general strategic one, but [General] Douglas MacArthur didn't want us in the Philippines, because it would only complicate his supply problems, but at least it was something to do.

07:00 **So what did you do once you arrived back in New Guinea?**

Well, initially, when I landed there I was still with headquarters, but then I was posted to one of the batteries then as a battery position officer, that was in charge of a troop of four guns. Well this was an opportunity then

07:30 to get back into the fighting.

How happy were you to be back on the ground?

We were a bit annoyed in one way that it was a backwater really. The Japanese troops were bottled up. They couldn't go anywhere, they couldn't do any serious harm, and yet we were given orders to attack them.

But how happy were you to be out of the office job back on with the men?

Oh, I was very pleased to have an active role, but

08:00 for some reason I think our CO either liked me or preferred to have me in that position when we were in the camping area and, although I wanted to get into one of the batteries, even though we were in training, I was kept in headquarters. So I was pleased to get out into an active role as a gun position officer. Of course, I was senior to

08:30 most of the officers that were in the troop, at their level.

Now where were you situated?

This was at Aitape on the north coast, and we were given orders then to push the Japanese back towards Wewak, which was one of the main Japanese fortified areas. So after some months of slow movement down the coast

09:00 area, finally we got down to the Wewak area, the main area where the strongest opposition existed, and although a lot of the troops were second grade, because most of their first grade infantry troops had been killed off in the previous campaigns, they still put up a fanatical fight.

09:30 **You say second grade, why were they regarded second grade?**

A lot of them were ground air force people. There were artillery and there were– artillery was fairly good - and there was still quite a good sprinkling of their combat troops, but they were all fanatical. They would not surrender, they'd fight until they were killed, and that was pretty hard to accomplish.

10:00 **Now, what were your duties at this time?**

Well, I was in charge of the four guns and then the observation officer was on a phone link to me through my signaller, and he would send the fire orders down and I would then convert that, what he had, information that he sent down, into fire orders to the guns, which was a very set and rigorous routine

10:30 and then report back that the guns had fired, and then of course when the corrections came through, that was then also transferred through to the guns. So I was really responsible for that group of guns and the men, the gun crews attached to it. It was a fairly responsible position, but as we

11:00 got closer to Wewak, the resistance increased and finally when we got over into the Wewak area, our gun position was on the end of the airstrip and we were amongst a lot of wrecked Japanese aircraft, many with skeletons still in them of crew that had been killed by the attacks on

11:30 the aircraft, and the Japanese didn't bury their dead. As far as possible they cremated them, and it was amazing the number of bodies they would leave lying around. Well then, after a short stay at this gun position, I was then told to relieve one of the forward observation officers,

12:00 which is on Mission Hill at Wewak, and I went up there and took over from the officer that had been with them previously.

Just before we do move on to that, that new position that you took over, what was your opinion of the Japanese as an enemy?

Well, they were fanatics. We admired them in one sense, they were you might consider first class soldiers because they were – though they were

12:30 hardly people - they, contrary to first early stories, they were good marksmen and they were good soldiers, but because of their brutality, and they were brutal, they'd kill wounded. Well, unfortunately of course we finished up the same way. Places where you couldn't escort prisoners back, they had to be despatched, but it was a tough,

13:00 brutal slogging match, and I think it was the first time that we really got to hate someone. Before then, the enemy were sort of human beings, but I think the Japanese were considered to be very brutal people and the only way was to exterminate them.

Now, getting back to your role as the battery

13:30 **position officer, you mentioned that there was a very refined routine that you went through once you received your orders. Can you describe that routine for us?**

Well, the gun crews were told what the nature of the target was. It might be leading from just a zone registration to a fortified

14:00 position, and or it might be in support of some, what we called a fire plan, to support some attack. They were told then what the line was, the bearing, which sort of gave them the bearing to the target, and the range, the way they had to fire. We had different methods of firing, rate of firing,

14:30 and then the order to fire, and this was given in a very definite and controlled sequence and it was very

effective. It was far superior to the American system that was rather slap-dash, and it was a discipline that had to be learnt and followed strictly.

So was that definite sequence what you just described?

Yes, yes.

And so what would you be

15:00 **doing at this point?**

I would be shouting these orders, and…

Could you give an example of what that would sound like or what you would be doing?

The OP [observation post] would describe a target. For example, he'd say, "Machine gun post, zero lines." This was a direction that we originally had the guns pointed. Say, "zero lines",

15:30 or, "zero 10", 10 degrees which would be 10 degrees to the right of zero lines. Or he'd say, "Zero lines, 7,400," which was the yards, the range, "Fire", and then my orders would be, "Take post", if the troops weren't already on the gun, in their positions on the gun. "Take post, zero

16:00 10 degrees", or no – I'm sorry – ammunition was first, 117 or whatever the ammunition. If we were going to fire, it would be high explosive mostly, and the charge for 7,000 yards would be charge 3. So it would be, "Zero lines, 207",

16:30 would be the shell type, "charge 3, 7400 hundred, fire!" And so just the essentials could come down, which would, and they'd know what ammunition to use, what bearing and what range and then fire. There were further other details, where you wanted a different rate of fire

17:00 such as section fire, which is every 20 seconds, or troop fire or gun fire, which is as fast as you could go.

Well thank you for that description. That was, yeah, it's amazing that that sequence is still with you.

Yeah, it's a little vague. I think it was quite right, but we were very keen on that, and that was drummed into us very strongly by the senior officers in the training, that we had

17:30 to stick to this rigidly, because in times of stress it's easier to do things that you've learnt by rote, rather than having to sort of rely on what comes next.

How stressed were you at this time?

Hmm?

How stressed were you at this time?

How what?

How stressed.

Oh no, we were in pretty good condition, because we weren't being subject to much return fire until we got

18:00 to Wewak, so it was all give and no take in the early stages, except for the forward observing officers who were with the infantry and they were right up in the front, and sometimes in front of the infantry.

So what happened once you arrived, once you got to Wewak?

Well, I was relieved from my post as gun position officer and given the duty of being the forward

18:30 observing officer to go with the infantry.

Why was that?

Hmm?

Why were you given that new role?

Well, to relieve the men who had been doing it. There was rotation of duties, so that the men that were in the forward positions and under the most stress were given some relief, and the first one was with the platoon of the 2/4th Battalion.

So what was the role that you were

19:00 **doing? It was an observation…**

Observation officer.

What does an observation officer do?

Well, from the company position or platoon position you're in, you may be able to see targets, what we call targets of opportunity, some enemy movement, or you might disclose some position. Very often you had to do this by climbing trees, because the canopy of the jungle was quite heavy

19:30 and the vision was limited sometimes to only 50 to 100 yards. So quite often, you had to get either on a high commanding spot or climb a tree to be able to see what targets there may be, and then you'd have a signaller with a phone line, sometimes wireless, but the wireless was not very good in the jungle areas, and

20:00 then wait for targets of opportunity. Well I was on Mission Hill, one of my signallers saw on the crest line, which was along a valley running from the gun position, a Japanese climb a tree. It was about 2,000 – 3,000 yards from where I was, and he happened to be on the crest line. He saw this movement,

20:30 and with binoculars, he saw this figure climbing the tree. Now, we knew there was a gun up there that used to fire on our troops when they were on mess parade, when they were lining up for their lunch. So we knew there was a gun in the area, and I immediately realised that he was an observing officer. Of course it was getting on to late morning when they were about due for their time to

21:00 fire, and also I was very interested in the area trying to see if I could pick up any gun flashes. Well, when he spotted this tree climber, I put the guns into action against that. I had to use smoke first, fire smoke, which bursts in the air and leaves a trail of smoke before the canister hits the ground. Well that gave me a very good idea of the range and the line there, because being on a crest, I couldn't see any shells that fell over the

21:30 crest, and it was hard sometimes to see any that fell short. So after getting the range, I then used air burst. We were very severely rationed for that though, clockwork fuses from Switzerland, and they were very scarce and we were told generally speaking we weren't to use them, but I thought this would be an ideal opportunity, because if I could get the air burst

22:00 put down onto the tree position, they'd be better than the shells hitting the ground and exploding on the ground and losing a lot of their force. So I think I was the first officer in the regiment there in that campaign to use air burst shells. So I got one, I did get one shell right on the tree, and the signaller said he saw the figure fall out.

22:30 So I think I finished that, the gun didn't fire so that was a success. Later on they did, the advancing troops found that gun and… But then after, we had a few raids at nighttime. The Japanese came raiding into the position and throwing our hand grenades, which were set up as booby traps. They took

23:00 those grenades and threw them back at us which wounded a few people, but otherwise we were alright, and I was then transferred from that position to another more forward position called Koiken, which was further up in the mountains and also with the 2/4th Battalion and the officer had been with them for a month or so and he was due for relief, and

23:30 it was a very difficult area, because we were getting into the steep gorges and valleys and hills and it was difficult to move around, and the jungle was fairly thick in spots, and some of the targets were quite close to our position. So my first experience was we went out, there was a river

24:00 crossing or a creek crossing that was fairly strongly defended, and every time our troops went there, they were repelled by the fire from this position. So I went out with a patrol that skirted around the back of them and came in from the back with the intent to attack this position, but as we got near the track,

24:30 leading into it, the Japanese had make this track, we were following it in into this prepared position, one of the –the signaller - no, one of the infantry privates, spotted two Japanese running further away out of the way from the track, and then just as he sung out, he was fired on and he was hit in the hand alongside me, and I pulled him down and sort of tried to stop the blood

25:00 flow until he could get a bandage on it, and then the infantry officer in charge of the patrol decided to pull out. I thought what I thought was a burst of machine gun fire which indicated it was a fairly heavily defended position. So the infantry officer decided to pull out. Of course he already had one

25:30 wounded soldier, and then as he was going back the first soldier going back was fired on by a Japanese that was hiding in the grass, and lucky for him, the bullet hit the backside of his Owen gun and knocked the backside of his Owen gun into his arm and wounded him, but otherwise he was alright, and then we all took cover of course when he was fired on, and then the platoon sergeant spotted this Japanese

26:00 coming forward. He was bobbing up and down in the grass with his rifle. Well, he shot him in the head and we reckoned he nicked him, but the platoon officer got some hand grenades and threw them over to where he was and then we went back to our position. So we then tried another ruse, to go from the frontal area and once again, we were fired on again,

26:30 and someone was wounded. So after three goes, every time we attempted to get to this position, we were fired on, and it was a very difficult one, because it was down in this deep gully and I was not happy about engaging it from our troop, because the tall trees that were there were going to be hit and we'd get explosions back which would be in our own area,

27:00 the area where our own troops were collected. So I'd heard some guns firing further up the coast, and I made inquiries and found out that they belonged to the 2nd and 3rd Field Regiment. So I asked for permission if I could use them. So we relayed the orders through them and I then took up a position as close as I could get to the target area, but the hill was on the other side and it

27:30 was pretty exposed and it was really in the worst position, because the shells then would be coming in across, instead of behind me and over they were coming in across, cross ways, but of course it was safer for our own troops, but it was not so good for me because the worst area is the side burst from the shells, but that was sort of considered par for the course. So I

28:00 engaged this target for a fire plan, which is register the target and then at a set time they fire off 100 shells, 200 shells or 300 shells depending on how strong the position is held and then the infantry move in while the position is sort of destabilised. So I got permission to engage this target with 300 shells from the other battery and they were ranged in each gun.

28:30 The idea was you bring them in. When you're a close target, you bring them in fairly slowly until you bracketed the target and got a confirm, what they call a confirmed short bracket, that was a 50 yard bracket. One went over the target and the other one went minus of the target, and with me it was left and right. I could get the range exactly, because I could see, and so I ranged the four guns

29:00 in one by one, and got them on the target. I could actually see the shells exploding and then on the last shell I copped a piece in the arm so that put me out of action.

How bad was your injury?

Hmm?

How bad was your injury?

It was nasty at first. It felt like a whiplash. I don't know whether you've been hit by a whip but it really stings, you know,

29:30 and when I looked there was hole gaping about that size in my arm, but lucky for me it was largely superficial, and it didn't affect any tendons or nerves. So after I went to the, I was evacuated to the Dressing Station and they operated on it and dressed it, cleaned it up and cut away any of the dead flesh and sewed it up.

So was that from an

30:00 **enemy shell or one of ours?**

One of ours.

One of yours.

Yes. I was evacuated then.

Sorry, I'm a little bit confused. So this was an empty shell cartridge?

No, this was a splinter off the bursting shell from the ranging onto the target and as I said, it was the last one. It just happened to escape the others. So

30:30 I recorded the target, and ranged and gave them the fire plan orders, the clock time of when they were to engage after I consulted the platoon commander, and then I was relieved. Our battery commander was there with the infantry troops and he came down and took over the position.

So what happened to you, once

31:00 **you were sent off to hospital?**

Well the CO then came up to see me. He could come up some distance in a jeep and then I was given a dressing there at the time and I was mobile, I could get around and I collected my gear and when I picked up my haversack which I was using as a pillow I got the biggest shock of my life. There was a spider there, he was bigger than my fist and his legs were thicker than my fingers, sleeping under my

31:30 haversack, and so I didn't kill him. I thought, "Oh well, he hasn't done me any harm." So I walked away and left him, and then I was taken back and the CO drove me in his jeep to the Forward Dressing Station, where they dressed my wound and stitched me up, and then the next day I was evacuated to the Casualty Clearing Station. I was there for a month. Well, after that, I went back to the troop,

32:00 and then I was then moved, I had expressed the desire when we were asked questions that I would consider going and doing a staff course and I was even thinking of perhaps continuing with my career in the army after the war, and so I was then posted to Headquarters RAA [Royal Australian Artillery]. They were headquarters for the whole division, the artillery,

32:30 as a sort of a junior staff officer there, and so I spent one month there and then finished that duty, went back to the regiment and at this stage they were then being relieved. So went to a resting area, and then for some reason or other, I was directed again back to headquarters, Headquarters RAA.

Where were headquarters based?

No, this was

33:00 in Wewak, in the Wewak area, but while we were in this resting camp, they dropped the first atom bomb, and of course we realised then that it looked as though…we were thinking the war was going to last another two years.

So what did you understand, what did you know about the atom bomb?

Well only what was broadcast from the American news broadcast and we were just told it was

33:30 a highly developed atom bomb which had the energy of the sun behind it, you know, and of course I was, from a semi-technical point of view from my understanding, I was amazed that it could be done, and realised that if they've got something that powerful the end of the war is in sight because Japan was really being heavily pounded at that stage by bombing. In fact, there were more people killed in Japan by

34:00 the other conventional bombing than there were by the two atom bombs that were dropped. In Tokyo alone one night with the incendiaries, they killed over 100,000 people.

So what were your feelings in regards to the fact that this bomb had devastated lots of civilians?

Well, we thought they're getting their just desserts. You know,

34:30 although I personally was very unhappy about the way the English were bombing Germany, bombing, deliberately terror attacks on civilians to demoralise them, but as far as the Japanese were concerned I didn't care what happened to them.

So why was there a difference between what your feelings were about German civilians as opposed to Japanese civilians?

Well,

35:00 as I say, I think for the first time the Australian troops developed a real hatred for an enemy, it was the Japanese. I mean we'd seen, or I personally hadn't seen, but many of them had seen evidence of cannibalism where they had been cutting flesh from dead Australian soldiers, and of course there was plenty of evidence of them killing wounded people, but as I say there were times when we had to resort to that, and in fact at one

35:30 stage we were guilty of shelling what was a Casualty Clearing Station of theirs where they were evacuating wounded.

That was you?

We didn't know, yes, our regiment, one of our troops did.

OK, so well that's interesting. When you did realise that this was a Casualty Clearing Station that you bombed, what went through your mind?

We didn't realise that until afterwards. This was at Buna,

36:00 Sanananda and it was on Sanananda Point, and a lot of the direction of artillery fire was done by aircraft, the Wirraways, and they reported this area as a concentration area, because they could see huts and tents and quite a lot of troops moving around and they thought it was like a main concentration area and they reported it as such, and so it was engaged as an area. Well in retaliation

36:30 they, the Japanese, then bombed our Medical Dressing Station which was only 400 yards from the gun position, and there was very heavy casualties of that and strangely enough the officer in command, Colonel Vickery, was the MO who gave me my medical examination when I joined the

37:00 AIF. He was killed in that attack.

So once you had realised afterwards that you had bombed a Japanese clearing station, what if any affect did that have on you?

Well, we were unhappy about that, that thought, but they did it deliberately. Also, we felt that perhaps in some way, our artillery fire on the beaches when the Japanese were evacuating

37:30 wounded and bringing in fresh troops too, on the beaches of Buna and Sanananda were partly responsible for the sinking of the Centaur, the hospital ship, because that happened not long after those events took place.

I mean it sounds like the Australians and the Japanese were in a perpetual cycle of revenge for various attacks.

Yeah, yes. So, of course they

38:00 became quite respectful of our ability, because we finished up better jungle fighters than they did, particularly in the Buna-Sanananda and Wau Campaigns and the other campaigns conducted by the 7th and 9th Division, but initially everyone was frightened of the jungle but it came to realise that your jungle's your friend. It gives you cover when you want it

38:30 and in some emergencies you can get food, useful food from the jungle.

What sort of food?

Well, some berries. In the coastal area there were sago palms, but in the lowlands in the mountains where the native gardens were, there were fruit and vegetables obtainable from there. In fact the Japanese were largely towards the end of the campaign, were largely

39:00 living off native gardens which made the natives very unhappy of course.

What interaction did you have with the natives?

Very good, excellent. Of course the reputation that the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels [New Guineans who aided Australian troops on the Kokoda Track] built up at the Owen Stanley Track or Kokoda Track was the start of it, but otherwise they were extremely, our troops were

39:30 steadfast, they were quite brave too and steadfast, but if our troops showed any stress or moved back they scuttled back very quick too.

Tape 9

00:32 **Ken, can you just tell us a little more about the art of jungle warfare?**

When the 8th Division were sent to Malaya, it was considered then that in many cases the

01:00 jungle was impassable, and the general thought was that Singapore could be only attacked from the sea and they had ample defence, guns in position and some naval craft, but the Japanese surprised everyone including the Australian Army at that stage, at how readily they could move through the jungle areas and how quickly they could go around strong points

01:30 and attack from the rear and cut off the escape of those strong points. Now these lessons were quickly assimilated by the Australian Army, and we did adopt some of those features in our training in jungle warfare when we were in Ceylon. So as I mentioned earlier, the 16th Brigade and the 2/1st Field Regiment

02:00 were at that early stage somewhat experienced in jungle warfare. Now, when the battle on the Kokoda Track was taking place, of course the Japanese tactics were clearly revealed there and we then followed up by our own troops when they started attacking. They did the same thing by encircling

02:30 when they came up against resistance and circling, cutting off the supply, and by the time they'd reached the coastal plains of Buna and Sanananda, we'd become quite expert in this activity and the Japanese were taken by surprise on a number of occasions how quickly the Australian troops moved around them and came from unexpected sources.

03:00 Well first of all, it was learnt that the swamps were passable, because usually the water was no more than waist deep, but it was a very difficult area and uncomfortable area to go through. There was slimy green foul-smelling mud and dark water with probably, with strong decays of bodies that had

03:30 been dumped in there, but the troops learnt to endure this and actually make use of it. In many cases they surprised the Japanese by suddenly appearing into what they consider were safe areas.

How much did the Australian troops learn from the Japanese style of jungle warfare?

Well first of all the jungle is not impenetrable. You can move through the

04:00 jungle, you can fight in the jungle, and of course you can use that to your advantage. Somewhat new tactics had to be developed in the artillery. You had to get right up, pretty well right up on top of the target yourself before you could see what you were engaging, otherwise you could be just blasting away at a bunch of trees,

04:30 and also the direction of fire. Because our own troops were so close to the target, the control of fire had to be very carefully done and perhaps sometimes instead of using a single observer, you used two astride of the line of fire, each making their own compass observation. Although they may not be able to see the target, they could hear where the shells were bursting, and from

05:00 those compass bearings they could then make reasonable corrections. It wasn't a good way of directing fire, but it was a way. The other method of course was to climb trees. Of course, the Japanese were adept at this too, and they often in the early stages of the fighting in Malaya, and they climbed trees

and were able to get good observations of our troop positions before they attacked them.

We've had some of our other interviewees talk

05:30 **about the psychological stress of jungle warfare, particularly people that we've spoken to who'd spent time in the Western Desert and other open spaces and were quite used to a different type of warfare.**

Yes.

What were your observations on the psychological pressures that fighting in the jungle could impose on a soldier?

You felt at all times you were under threat, because you didn't know what the jungle was hiding, and of course the Japanese were

06:00 pretty active in sending out raiding parties and they did quite effectively raid some of our forward positions and they weren't, I won't say unafraid, but they did carry out night engagements, where mostly speaking our troops didn't, because

06:30 of the danger of firing on your own troops in the confusion in the jungle at nighttime, and very often the presence of someone is only given away by movement. Well, it would be very easy then to perhaps finish up firing on your own troops. So mostly our troops did not move around at nighttime but in daytime they were very effective.

07:00 **In the various theatres of war that you moved through, did you ever see examples of troops suffering from war related stress?**

Yeah. I've seen individuals, yes. When we were in Crete and we took up the final position, the last advance position, as we moved in there were two Australian infantrymen that were obviously severely shocked. Their faces

07:30 were pasty and white and starey eyes. They came running through, they'd been subject to some very severe conditions. I don't know whether it was personal attack or bombing, but they were really distressed people.

They'd actually been, sorry, you ran a couple of words together. They'd been subjected to what? What had they been subjected to do you think?

Severely stressed, and they

08:00 called it shell shock in the First World War which many senior officers from the rear didn't believe it was a genuine thing, but people that are subject to severe attacks when it's sustained for some length of time, and you see people getting killed and dismembered and that sort of thing, it can

08:30 be a pretty severe blow to your confidence and physical shock is a definite medical condition, but it seriously affects the blood supply, and in fact dogs will die of shock because of the change in their blood supply.

We've also heard people talk about examples of what can be defined as lack of moral

09:00 **fibre. Did you ever encounter anything like that?**

Yes, well that happened too unfortunately. In cases, some of our officers just couldn't carry on and they just deserted their post.

Did you actually ever see anyone in a situation like that yourself, from your observations?

No, not any direct. There were a few in our unit that suffered from that.

09:30 **And what would happen to those people?**

Well they were, officers were discharged as, we called it 'snarlered' [SNLR-ed] or bowler-hatted [i.e., sent back to civilian life, wearing a bowler hat (British term)]. Snarlered was 'Services No Longer Required', and they were discharged from the army. With other ranks, if they deserted the field, they could be court martialled and punished for that. Of course it was,

10:00 I think the aim of the British Army and their discipline was to make the men more frightened of their NCOs than they were of the enemy.

How would they do that?

By strict discipline and very effective punishment when they strayed from the path.

Just moving back to your own wartime experience, now you've described a

10:30 **sequence of events which are quite amazing and extraordinary that you kept going, and obviously you had a very strong will and a strong spirit to get you through all of that. Was there ever an occasion across the other side of the world, or up in New Guinea, where you**

yourself felt fear?

Yeah, oh yeah. I think anyone that said that they didn't feel fear was not telling the truth. There were many occasions when

11:00 you felt fear and you sort of wondered, "Well, why did I get myself into this position?"

Can you give us an example of where you might've felt that?

Well, in some of the severe bombing raids or shelling, heavy shelling and fortunately for me I suppose I never really got involved in sort of hand to hand fighting although some of our troops did. They,

11:30 the ones that were raided had to repel the Japanese by almost hand to hand combat, and close up fire with Tommy guns and rifles and hand grenades, but no, I think everyone had their share of fear and unhappiness and discomfort at times, but when, after you settle down and

12:00 realise, well, for all the noise and thunder it wasn't that dangerous. I mean sure, it was very dangerous and fatal for some people, but at least you got through it, and then you felt perhaps a little more confident in perhaps being able to stand up to anything similar later on. In fact, what made us frightened in the early stages of the war were considered as just passable things later on, you know. It was

12:30 all a matter of degree.

So if you were talking about fear and being frightened, where would you say you felt that sense of fear more strongly than anywhere else?

I think probably the first bombing attack in Haifa was the most disturbing, because it was the first time we

13:00 came under fire and we could actually see the planes and see the bombs coming down, and knew they were going to be close.

So what personal impact did that have on you at the time?

Well only just to get closer to the ground. Try and get under cover. Some of the troops were very good. We had a few of them who even when they were being strafed by aircraft, stood up

13:30 with rifles and fired back. In fact, one bombardier was credited with shooting down a plane in doing that, whether he did or not, we were never sure, but it looked, there was a good possibility that he did so. But sometimes things like that happened when people were severely stressed, and they suddenly got to the stage where they said, "I'm not gonna take any more of this," and then they just stood up and fought.

Sounds like

14:00 **a very strong will to live and to retaliate which is obviously very healthy.**

Yeah.

And I mean the situations you went through, especially the circumstances of your escape from Greece, obviously your own determination to live and to live on to fight another day played a strong part, but did you ever have occasion to think about the role of fate and a higher power and what might guide us in this universe?

No. No,

14:30 I was never very religious in that sense. I was a bit of a fatalist I think in many ways, and had been most of my life.

So what does being a fatalist mean to you?

Well in effect that if it's going to happen, it will happen and there's nothing you can do about it, so make the best of what you can while you can.

Did you ever have any...

15:00 **people have spoken about certain superstitions for instance, you know. We've spoken to flyers about regularly sticking a bit of chewing gum under the wing of a plane before they took off (UNCLEAR).**

No, never had any phobias or fads at all of that nature and I think I accepted the fact that there was a fair chance I wouldn't survive the war. After

15:30 I'd seen a fair bit I thought, "Well, if this is going on much longer, there's more than a 50 percent chance I'm not going to make it, because my luck's going to run out one day." But as I say, you become fatalistic about it, and there's also then the thought, "Well OK, I might still make it."

At what point of the war did you think you might not make it?

I think,

16:00 well Greece was, at one stage in Greece I think when we started to get really severe bombing, there was a period then, but it was still, even then when we were in training in camp there was still that thought in the back of your mind all along is that there's no guarantee that we're going to get through this.

16:30 **There's no guarantee that we're going to get through this, even while you were training?**

Yeah.

Why?

Well, we realised the war was still on and we were going to be involved in further fighting. So just because we were safe, reasonably safe at this stage, doesn't say life was assured, and I think most serving people that did see any length of service

17:00 probably felt the same way.

What do you think makes an effective leader?

Well, we had one troop commander, Norman Vickery, who was a very able commander. He was the first member of the regiment to be decorated, because in the battle of Bardia he was acting as the forward observation officer and they went

17:30 forward in a Bren gun carrier, that was like an open tank, and he had advanced as far as they were to go and he was watching the engagement conducted by one of our other troops of an enemy target, and he could see that this was a battery of Italian guns, so he thought, well,

18:00 if he had the opportunity of getting around the back of them and if he charged them, they would probably think that he was the forerunner of an armed attack and he'd frighten them into submission. Well he did this, and there was a number of infantry there and this battery of Italian guns. He charged in and at first they started to fire on him, and he told the Bren gun

18:30 operator to fire a burst at them, so they packed up. So he got an MC [military cross], immediate MC for that. Our CO, Colonel Barker who won an MC in the First World War, handed over his ribbon to him for that. Now he was inspired leader.

This was Vickery or Barker?

Well Vickery and Barker, but as I say

19:00 he was one of the inspired leaders. He was a gentleman and a very pleasant nature, but he was fearless, or appeared to be fearless, let's put it that way.

Can you be more specific about what makes a good leader? What makes a good leader of men?

I suppose it's the ability first of all to get things done. Now you can do this, of course, by coercion or bullying,

19:30 and making people frightened of the consequences if they don't do it, or you can do it by making them feel that you're not frightened, you're quite confident and you have ability in what you are able to do, what they want you to do because of their confidence in you, and

20:00 so it's a lot of things I guess.

Obviously they have to believe that you would be willing to share that experience?

Yes, yeah.

They'd be willing, you would be willing to put yourself on the line.

Yeah. I mean there were other cases where there were drivers, when the troops were wavering, they had to then actually drive them to do what they wanted to be done, and it became a form of bullying, but it also had to

20:30 be a case of, "Well I'm here and I'm standing up, you can do it to".

Leading by example basically?

Yeah.

Yeah. Returning us to the end of the war, did you know what your role was going to be once you heard about the atomic bombing of Japan?

Yeah. Well I had always had thoughts of being an engineer. Even when I was a child, engineering attracted me,

21:00 but with my experience in the army – when I realised I had to be taught so much to get somewhere – I

came to realise that my rather elementary experience of schooling in that field was not enough and that I'd have to go back to school and be further educated. So I came back with that understanding, and I thought, "Well I've

21:30 just given six years of my life to the army, I can give up five years in doing a course in a technical college or the university".

Which, of course we covered earlier when we were speaking. I suppose that's a good statement and that's a good bridging statement between your army and your civilian life, but what I'm also referring to here is that time between hearing of the Japanese surrender and returning to Australia. I mean, was there a long delay in your returning

22:00 **to Australia?**

No, we came back, were repatriated very quickly. We came by ship on the Katoomba from Wewak to Brisbane and then by passenger train to Sydney and then we were given immediate leave.

Can you be more specific in describing your home coming back to Sydney?

22:30 The best homecoming I had was actually during the war when I came down from Moresby to the artillery school. We came down direct from Moresby non-stop to Sydney and we sailed into Sydney Heads on a beautiful sunny morning, which was the thing that we often talking about during the war, the day that we come back and sail through the Heads just as we sailed out, and that was

23:00 perhaps the best experience I had, and that day that I sailed in, and then when I got ashore I was able to ring home and of course my family knew I had been, or was in New Guinea, and my father was a bit surprised to realise it was me on the phone speaking to him. That was a good homecoming.

Why, you say the experience of coming through the Heads

23:30 **was the best, why was that the best?**

Well perhaps we'd talked about it a lot, because those of us that sailed out through the Heads on that bright day remembered how vivid it was. We thought, "What a great feeling it would be to know the war's over and here we are now, we're sailing back into the Heads, into the Harbour and back to home, and so".

So it sounds like this trip down from New Guinea, the weather conditions were

24:00 **perfect, everything kind of fell into place?**

Yeah. That was, although the war was still on, but then on our final return home of course there was a great sense of relief. There was still that sort of element of danger, being on a ship with mines, there were still lots of mines about. We thought, well the last straw would be to be sunk by a mine and drowned at sea on the way home, but then,

24:30 once we got to the mainland and Brisbane of course, it was sort of elation at being back and a great sense of relief and looking forward then to getting back home with the family and then back into civilian life.

Tell us about this end of war homecoming and meeting up with your family again. Could you describe for us what happened then?

25:00 Well, frankly, I really can't pinpoint the moment as it were. I know I was able to ring before we were actually discharged or given leave to go home. I was able to ring home and speak to my mother and father, and of course they were greatly overjoyed I was back

25:30 in one piece. So it was sort of a gradual thing. It wasn't like a sort of sudden walking in, fully laden with packs and saying, you know, "The war's over and I'm home", but it was a sort of a gradual introduction back into home life.

So it wasn't a big Hollywood moment by any means?

No. It was, there'd been so many things happen that

26:00 it was sort of a, I don't know how you could describe it, but it was certainly a big sense of relief but there was still that tightness there.

Where did that tightness come from?

Well, the fact that for years we'd been, as I said, I got to the stage where I believed that I only had,

26:30 I thought I had a 50/50 chance of surviving and so that's with you all the time and it doesn't go away. In fact, I was like that for about six months although there was no logical immediate threat and that, but it was still that tight feeling as though, you know, you were living from day to day.

And how would that affect your outlook and your

27:00 **actions on a day to day basis?**

Well, at one stage I was even tempted to go back into the army and when the Korean War started, I thought, "I'm going back into this because this is something I know and I could live with," because civilian life was, after six years away from it and living, mostly sleeping on the ground very seldom in beds, in tents,

27:30 and very seldom with a roof over your head, it develops a different line of thought altogether. You become a different person.

So you were fully programmed basically as a soldier?

Yes.

How did, so how different did civilian life seem when you came back?

Well, disappointing in some ways because well, rationing was still on in those days and when you had to queue up in long lines

28:00 to get some cigarettes, things that we were readily supplied with, and the slowness of civilian life getting back to normal was tedious. Going from – to a 9.00 to 5.00 or an 8.00 to 5.00 job was also different to army life, where you had many breaks during the day and probably more idle time than you were active.

28:30 That became a bit tedious at first, until you sort of got into the work ethic and started to feel what you were doing was something worthwhile. So I think it was a good six months before I really started to settle down and as I say, when they started recruiting for Korea, I was tempted at one stage

29:00 to rejoin. I had thoughts at the end of the war of staying on in the army, but there was no possibility of that. They were glad to get rid of us, discharged us. So, but finally of course I gave up the idea, and our last commanding officer went on in the civilian forces and he was most anxious to get me to come back with him

29:30 but he said he'd get me immediate promotion to captain and so on, but at this stage I was starting to get involved in study, and I felt I'd seen, then I started to realise I'd seen enough of the army.

It sounds like studying and preparing for your future civilian life helped to, you know, remove that sense of always being on edge?

Yes, yeah. Yes, well when you start to

30:00 see a definite goal and a chance of progress, it took on a new value.

Now we've spoken to other people who've talked about dreaming about the war or aspects of the war or episodes of the war for years afterwards. Did this ever happen to you?

Well as I say, initially I went back to, I got through a

30:30 peacetime friend I was able to get into a small engineering company, and I decided I'd do some work on the shop floor for some hand to hand experience, which I did for twelve months and then I went into the office as a draftsman, and then finished up more or less their planning and designing engineer until they folded up in

31:00 1953 and then I joined, or 1954 it was.

Well these of course are aspects of your post-war career that we covered earlier, but I'm just wondering how strongly episodes of the war have stayed in your mind over the years.

Well for years and years afterwards, I used to have nightmares, being bombed and shelled and attacked by soldiers and so on. That was

31:30 a trauma that lasted a long while. Otherwise, you know, I quickly settled down and I had a sort of a scattered social life in a way. I perhaps sought the company of the men I knew in the army more than I did the civilians that I was coming back to, and perhaps that went on longer than

32:00 it should have.

How long did it go on?

Well I was discharged in '45 and all through 1946 I'd say, and then in 1947 I started to think seriously then of settling down somewhere. Many of my friends then had married and settled down, starting to have families, and then in 1948,

32:30 no, in '47, I met the girl I finally married and then just settled down then to steady family life, although much of that early life was spent in education.

Now as your early married years unfolded and to your child, did you ever talk much about the war to them as the years went on?

No, no.

33:00 There were some instances my wife was interested in, but I didn't talk about the fighting activities to them, and well I thought they wouldn't really understand and it would sound, some of it would sound very callous to them, and perhaps given a

33:30 wrong impression of what I really was. So it wasn't discussed a great deal at home, but of course we had our army association going then and of course we had fairly regular meetings, and of course then when we were amongst the boys, it was, "Oh, remember so and so" and "Remember when this happened when such and such a person got into trouble over something or other". So it was a lot of reminiscing

34:00 went on at the gatherings on Anzac Day and at other times when we met.

Sounds like that's been very important for you?

Yes. Well, when I was studying I didn't have time to go to the activities, but in 1953 when I finished, I then joined the committee and I've been on the committee

34:30 ever since. So it started off as a club and there was a women's auxiliary, and they used to have Christmas parties for children and picnics and so on, but after a while as we got older that fizzled out and it just came down to more or less an association. We have two committee meetings a year and a reunion on Anzac Day, and we build up fairly good funds and are able to have

35:00 a good reunion, which we only make a very nominal charge for the people going to it, but supplied most of it out of our funds, which we built up out of donations really.

So it sounds like that mateship that we spoke of early on has continued to be very important?

Oh yes. It will last for our lifetime. That was the bond that I tried to discover in talking to the First World War

35:30 people in the Anzac Day, because you could see that there was a great mateship between people that obviously came from different walks of life. Some were dressed in nice business suits, others were in working clothes, but there was that comradeship and bond between them. Well, that was established with us too, and is still there with those that are still with us.

36:00 They've dwindled very rapidly now, and at our age group the probability of dying is 0.2 or in other words, one in five will die in one year. So we are starting to lose at a fairly steady rate now.

Well Ken, we're coming towards the – well we are actually at the end of the interview now and I'm just wondering if there are any

36:30 **aspects that we haven't covered so far that you'd also like to mention before we finish?**

Well nothing of any great significance. I've glossed over much of the action in New Guinea, and much of the technical aspects of artillery, which is very interesting as a science, and I became very interested in that

37:00 field, and did spend a lot of time and study on it. There were other aspects of army life of course that were interesting.

It would be fantastic if we could have these interviews do justice to all these fields and I suppose to a certain extent, we're guided by both the material that we inherit before we start the interview and also by what emerges in the

37:30 **pathways of what we follow as interviewers, but it really has been just a fantastic interview with a lot of energy put into it by you.**

Of course the type of control that we exercised over artillery is well and truly outmoded these days. I mean you don't need a survey party now, you can have a GPS [global positioning system] recorder and you know exactly where you are to within a few yards of the earth's surface, and

38:00 of course with these smart bombs, and they've even got smart artillery shells too which haven't been used to any great extent, but speaking to some of the people who stayed on in the regular army, I've had it explained to me that we do have shells that are fired by guns that will seek out a specified target.

A totally new world.

Yes, it is a new world, yeah,

38:30 and of course artillery as we know it is pretty well outmoded now, particularly in the Gulf War it was demonstrated that static artillery is the most dangerous place to be in, because with radar now, the enemy can track the shell, not only where it's coming to, but where it came from, and they can do that with very high accuracy, and of course if you're in a static position and stay there, you're going to cop a lot of

39:00 return fire. In the Gulf War, of course, the artillery there was mobilised [self-propelled], and after they fired a heavy burst of fire, they would move very smartly out of that position.

Well Ken, we're almost out of tape on this and it's very clear that you've kept up with the technology of warfare as well as the human interaction side, and on behalf of Rebecca [interviewer] and myself, and of course on behalf of the Australians At War Film

39:30 **Archive, I'd like to thank you very much for a wonderful interview.**

Well, thank you, I was hoping I would be able to make out and satisfy the time available, but as it turned out it could've been more.

I'm sure we could probably record for another half day on this, but from our point of view it's really been superb and very, very good. Thank you very much.

Yeah, right, thank you, thank you.