

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Keith Chrystal - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 2nd May 2003**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/96>

### Tape 1

00:38 **Robert, thank you very much. Oh Sorry Robert, Keith.**

Keith, Robert. It doesn't matter

**You have so many names?**

Robert is my army name.

**Thank you for joining us here and for giving us a chance to interview you. Start firstly with an emphasis,**

01:00 **sort of like a life arc if you like. On some introductory statements from yourself. Where you were born essentially, where you grew up, which school you attended, how you came to join the armed forces, what you did in the war, like in terms of where you travelled, and what you did in the post war period? If you can start from where you were born and move from there. That would be great.**

01:30 Ok. Well I was born in east Melbourne in 1914, which was the start of the First World War. Although I wasn't a war baby the war was proceeding when I was born. I lived in east Melbourne as far as I know, perhaps one or two years and I was a, my people were

02:00 Presbyterian and we were at a church there called Cairns Memorial and they used to attend there and that's where I was christened but unfortunately that church was burned down several years ago and all the records were destroyed, so that finished that sort of chapter. My father was born on the land, actually, his father was a

02:30 woolgrower from up near Echuca and he lost the property and they came back to Melbourne where my father was working with a company called Goldsbrough Mort, a wool broker. And the reason they stayed on there, was actually to start up, his father, my grandfather, sent him down to learn the other side of wool growing.

03:00 That is the selling side. And he was getting on all right until the old chap lost his property, so they lost interest in him and sent him into the office where he sat at accountancy and became an accountant. Anyway whilst he was working there he bought a property in Gardenvale, a suburb of Melbourne, now part of Brighton,

03:30 which is a well known suburb and I was brought up there. I went there when I was four years old. And then I attended the local state school. It was at Elsternwick. I walked a mile or so everyday to school, there and back. There were no cars in those days of course, to transport students and we seemed to either walk or run or both to school and home each day.

**What was**

04:00 **the name of the state school you attended?**

Elsternwick State, I think it's since closed some years now. Oh, I got what they called the merit certificate in those days when I was about thirteen. Anyway, when I was fourteen years old I went to Brighton Technical School. In those days they had a lot of technical schools. In nearly every suburb there was a

04:30 Technical school and a high school. They differentiated the...if you went to a high school you more or less did a professional side like and become a clerk or perhaps go on to university and become. The technical side used to provide all the plumbers and the carpenters and all that. Anyway, I went to the tech for some years and I studied building construction.

05:00 And I stayed there rather late. I was seventeen when I did the first year diploma course. They've now changed the diploma courses into first year degrees.

## This is at Brighton Tech?

Brighton Tech, yeah. There were some interesting people there. One chap I know fairly well was George Johnston. He was a famous writer

- 05:30 and his wife Carmen, I think it was Carmen [Charmian Clift], Anyway, they were famous. We had several teachers who played league football, at the time Australian Rules, and an English teacher. He used to teach me building construction, he was a tutor, and he played for England. I played soccer one year, at the school.
- 06:00 Anyway at seventeen I started to play Australian Rules and I went to the local Brighton side, amateur side, and I played there for about nine years. In the meantime a depression had caught up. That's the Great Depression as they called it and in thirty-two my father said "We can't keep you at school any longer, you'd better start work." So he was able to get me a job
- 06:30 where he was in Goldsbrough Mort, the wool brokers. I started as an office boy and at that time I started playing football, senior football, and that was my main interest. I loved football and I played cricket too. Ross Gregory used to play in the team I played for. He became a test cricketer. But I was just fill-in man.
- 07:00 You know, twelfth man type. But I enjoyed cricket too but mainly I enjoyed swimming and football I was quite a good swimmer. I finished up life saving. I got the bronze medallion for life saving in those days. I carried on. Life went along pretty well even though we didn't have any money really.
- 07:30 We weren't poor. But it was an interesting life and we made our own fun really. Anyway, war started up. The team I was playing for, Brighton, disbanded in 1939. In 1940 I went down to the Sandringham, theirs was still going in the association but I was playing with the amateurs. They had two sides in those days.
- 08:00 A professional side and an amateur side. But then I went away in June and that finished the football. I didn't play again, which was a disappointment. I had a very interesting life. I don't know what prompted me to join up but there was a funny story I can tell you. When war broke out and
- 08:30 Robert Menzies was Prime Minister; it was the 3rd of September 1939. It was a Sunday afternoon when he announced that we were at war. I was with a few mates. We were having a few drinks and we had all decided to join up so we wrote to the Minister for Air, I can't think of his name now, you know offering our services
- 09:00 in the air force and we didn't hear anything for a few weeks and then we got this beautiful letter written back saying that you know that they weren't doing anything. Almost as though they hadn't considered that there was a war on. Thanking us for our loyalty to Australia but that they let us know in due course. But of course nothing happened.
- 09:30 We just gave up then and went on with our business. You know, enjoying ourselves as much as we could. I think it might have been just before the fall of France that things got pretty serious overseas; getting pushed back, the services. I think then we decided it was getting
- 10:00 serious. But I suppose underneath it all it was just a feeling of there's a chance to really get somewhere. Hoping we'd get overseas and really see the rest of the world. And you know it was like a spirit of adventure, a bit of loyalty and perhaps we were bored with our jobs. It's hard to say. I joined up the
- 10:30 army in the finish with another chap. He'd also written to the air force on this day and we went through in the Caulfield Town Hall and we were called up sometime later. On the 24th June 1940 I was drafted into the services. Then we went
- 11:00 out to Royal Park. They had a camp there and, where the inductees went and then distributed all over the place to different units that were being formed. And I trained a bit there and then I went up to Bendigo and camped on the Bendigo Racecourse. And the old horse stores and the stray and anything and
- 11:30 a flu epidemic, something like this thing that's going on now, though probably less serious, and it really struck everybody down. Everyone had sore throats, flu, but there were no injections or anything in those days. You just got over it the best you could. We had a good time in Bendigo. The local people looked after us fairly well. It was mainly
- 12:00 training, route marching and all that sort of thing and from then they started to really form the units. For instance I was transferred to the 2/22nd Battalion. The 'Second' [AIF - Australian Imperial Force] battalions were volunteers of course, they had what
- 12:30 you call a VX number and they could be sent anywhere in the world. I was with the 2/22nd Battalion and was transferred to a camp in Barley, which was just out from Bacchus Marsh in Melbourne, and we trained pretty intensively there. Still with very little equipment. Just a rifle and bayonet mainly.
- 13:00 All the mechanised stuff came along much later. Anyway I was due to go to the 2/22nd but fortunately I didn't because the unit I eventually finished up with had already gone to the Middle East, they had quite

a lot of casualties in the first siege of Tobruk

13:30 And they transferred me onto their list for reinforcements. So I, then I....

**Which unit was this?**

This was the 2/23rd. I was in their reinforcements.

**These are infantry battalions?**

Yes.

**And you enlisted as a private?**

Yes.

**A rifleman, essentially.**

Yes, Well I was drafted into that. I really wanted to go into the navy in the finish.

14:00 Because I had done a bit of sailing when I was a youngster, coming from Brighton, you know, it's on the sea. A lot of those kids in those days learned to sail dinghies. You know, 14 foot dinghies. I got pretty professional. I thought I'd have a go at the navy. Not that that makes any difference, I found out afterward that half the navy couldn't swim anyway so it didn't make any difference.

14:30 No, I was drafted into the infantry actually. You didn't have much choice. I can remember the strange things they used to do. There were twins with me. Can't remember their name now. They were timber jinker drivers. You know, those big timber jinkers that used to pull logs down from the mountains.

15:00 They were most experienced, these two boys and they applied to actually, to go into the transport. And you would think they'd grab these two men because they had this special licence and they put them in the infantry and some fellow who had never driven a truck in his life was put in the transport. Another fellow that was with us had an A and B class flying licence and he was put into the infantry. He didn't get into the air force.

15:30 It seemed strange to us but I suppose they wanted to train people their way rather than bringing in people who were already trained. Anyway, we were shipped off to the Middle East. I went from Melbourne to Sydney. Out in the harbour was the Queen Mary. She couldn't come

16:00 under the bridge, too tall in the masts, so she stood out in the harbour. So we went out in barges and got on. Quite an experience it was about eighty-two, eighty-six thousand tons, the Queen Mary. It was one of the biggest ships that ever sailed.

**So that was a troopship that was taking you to the Middle East?**

No, no, that was part of the Cunard Line. It was the flagship of the Cunard passenger line.

16:30 She used to be a passenger ship running between England and America.

**Which ship did you travel on going to the Middle East?**

Queen Mary.

**Oh Queen Mary, Sorry.**

And we went in a convoy of several other big liners. So off we went. But you could get lost on that ship. It was an incredible journey.

**So where was it docked? Where did you disembark? Embark, sorry.**

17:00 In Sydney Harbour. We went out in barges. We had to climb up the sides, which was quite an experience.

**So you served in...you were immediately taken to Palestine, was it?**

Yes, the Mary went to Suez. That's the port of Suez. And we immediately got on a little, I'll never forget this little tramp steamer called the City of London.

17:30 She had come out from England and I think she had been bombed and strafed all the way out to Suez. The decks had two or three feet of spent cartridges, you know. They were just shovelling them into the sea. It was an incredible sight. How those fellows put up with it, it's hard to imagine. And that was my first inkling of what would go on. You know, in the war. All this spent ammunition from firing constantly up at these planes.

18:00 And that took us up the Suez Canal.

**Where was your next stop after the Suez Canal?**

We went up to a place called [El] Kantara. And then on to, cattle trucks, up to Palestine. Now Israel. It

was called Palestine in those days.

**You were then transferred to Tobruk?**

Yes, Later on.

**18:30 You were training and being refitted in Palestine?**

That's right, yes; we were doing intensive training then. And that's when we came across the automatic weapons and things, you know, because they couldn't send us up untrained into a unit that had been, you know, had been in action two or three months already.

**How long was your training in Palestine for?**

Well mine was a bit prolonged because I went to a school.

**19:00 They were always having schools for this, that, and the other. So I didn't go up immediately, some of the others did. I went up in the 2/23rd Battalion to Tobruk on the fifteenth of August 1941. And I went up there by destroyer from a place called Mersa Matruh which was up the Mediterranean,**

**19:30 the other side of El Alamein actually. Of course this was all in British hands at the time. We got on the destroyer at Mersa Matruh and went up into Tobruk Harbour. Of course we were bombed and strafed all the way up and that was my first initiation into the serious fighting really.**

**Ok, so you got stationed in Tobruk. How long did you stay in Tobruk?**

I came out with a unit in October, Late October. They pulled the whole division out and we went back to Palestine again.

**20:00 I came out on another ship. She was a minelaying ship. A British cruiser and she was sunk later with all hands. Most of the destroyers and ships supplying us all the time. That's the only way we could**

**20:30 get supplies, ammunition, oil and petrol by sea. We couldn't get it in any other way and they'd take out the wounded on the way back. It was very strict, their timing.**

**Did you also partake in combat operations in El Alamein?**

Yes, afterwards. But Tobruk was the first and we had lots of experiences there.

**21:00 I'm going to be a bit brief on some of the information. I'll go into greater depth a little bit later.**

OK.

**So you went to El Alamein in 1942, which month in 1942.**

Well I was, again in hospital. I was fortunate. We were attached to the Eighth Army, 9th Division by this time; I was fortunate, well fortunate I had a serious

**21:30 hand injury when I was up at the commando school. I was sent to a commando school, up on the Turkish border while we were in Syria. We'd moved from Palestine up to Syria. Whilst I injured my hand I was sent into a New Zealand hospital, a lot of trouble with the hand. In the mean time the unit went to El Alamein and I missed**

**22:00 that because I didn't join them till October. See they had a unit that had a lot of trouble on the sixteenth of July and then again in October. They were twice in very big attacks. Oh but of course that's when they defeated the German and Italian forces and they pulled out and that was the finish of it all.**

**You were involved in the fighting that took place?**

**22:30 The tail end of it, yes.**

**Was it heavy fighting?**

Well it was tailing off a bit. They were mostly on the run up the desert and we chased them for a while but then, I don't know, they should have chased them right up and taken them all prisoner.

**23:00 Where was your next theatre of operation?**

Well, then we came home. That was the first time we'd had leave for, since, you know, we'd been in the Middle East. And then late '42 came back to Melbourne, had leave, and then we went up to Queensland. Training up there at the Atherton Tablelands.

**23:30 A place called Ravenshoe.**

**What sort of training were you doing in Queensland?**

Forgotten the Middle East. Into jungle training. Totally different. Close up fighting. You can imagine the difference with the desert, with the long range artillery and bombing and so forth and then you get into the jungle. There bombing by plane is almost useless if you can't see the targets

24:00 you know they just go everywhere. They can't pinpoint things. Artillery, it's just almost impossible to get it anywhere. Up hill and down dale. It's just so steep in place. To get a gun it had to be man handled, a heavy gun had to be manhandled for days into positions. So mostly hand fighting. We were training for all this.

24:30 The other side of it was we were being trained to attack from the sea. Beach assault. And that's when we first met the Yanks [Americans]. They knew all the barges and that sort of equipment.

**Liberty ships?**

They had liberty ships. They, you know, the bulk carriers of troops and things like that. Also small barges and things like that were

25:00 carrying about thirty men, you know, and they'd all go and storm into the beach and get off on the sand and all that sort of training up round Cairns and Townsville. Now after all this training we were put on the [HMAS] Duntroon I think and we were shipped

25:30 to Milne Bay which had been taken by this time. The first time the Japanese had been halted actually. So they cleaned them up in Milne Bay. That was all in Allied hands. We got off there for a few days and we prepared to do a seaboard landing at Lae, which is further up the coast and this we

26:00 accomplished. It went off fairly well except we lost a lot of men unfortunately. Some Jap planes broke through the cover and bombed this landing craft. They were like a small destroyer. Had a ramp which you used to go down. Unfortunately they couldn't get right into the shore line so sometimes you had to dive into about five foot of water

26:30 with a seventy pound pack on. It was a bit hard to manoeuvre. Anyway we seemed to get by. We were dragged out, but a strange thing happened. We still don't know why. Two ships crossed over. And they crossed positions and this one that had crossed over got the bombs

27:00 We lost the colonel. We lost seven officers, two men wounded and about ten killed all in, just like that, and it took one company out of the assault. This was the first time we struck the Japs.

**This is out of the 2/23rd? The one company was knocked out of the battalion?**

Out of the battalion. They didn't even start in the attack. You know.

27:30 **So at Lae, Finschhafen?**

Finschhafen was later on.

**So that was your first experience in New Guinea?**

Yes.

**Ok, after Lae and Finschhafen what was your next experience in New Guinea?**

We came home again to train again in Queensland and our next time

28:00 we went to Morotai and then on to Tarakan, which was off the coast of Borneo.

**So you actually fought in operations in Tarakan and Morotai?**

Well Morotai, No that was just a staging camp. They had taken Morotai by the time we got there.

**When were you in Morotai? About forty...**

That was just staging on the way to Tarakan. We had to get ourselves organized and get all the stores

28:30 and ammunition bought and that sort of thing. And I saw out the war in Tarakan. 1945. By this time Germany had capitulated and at Tarakan we were all packed up ready to. We were going into Singapore Harbour to take the harbour. And I even led a platoon then. I was even commanding

29:00 a platoon then. I was even going to take pier nineteen. If you can imagine Port Philip Bay the enemy were all going into Port Melbourne, if you know Port Melbourne, and taking pier nineteen down there, that's what. Anyway, they dropped the bombs and that was the finish of that.

**Ok. So what happened after that? Where were you....?**

29:30 I stayed there for a while.

**Where were you staying?**

Just in camps there and gradually the fellows went home.

**But you remained at Tarakan?**

Yeah, I was single you see and they brought in what they called a five by two plan. It all started when

'Diver' Derrick [Lieutenant Tom Derrick] was killed on Tarakan. Now

30:00 he was highly decorated in the Middle East and he won a VC [Victoria Cross] in....

**At Tarakan?**

I'm not sure where he got it [Sattelberg, New Guinea]. Anyway he was killed on Tarakan.

**Who is this gentleman again? What was his full name?**

We called him 'Diver'. That was his nickname.

**Was he an officer?**

30:30 Yeah, he was a lieutenant, I think, and he was in the Middle East. And he got killed which prompted a Member of Parliament to say, "Well look, these men have been pushed into battle time and time again we have thousands of men at home who have never seen a shot fired." The reason for that was you had to be a volunteer before they could send you away. These ones were in the militia.

31:00 The only militia who fought were in New Guinea and on the Kokoda Track and those places because New Guinea was under the protectorship of Australia you sea. It was an Australian Territory. But they started this five by two plan. If you had been in the army five years or if you had been overseas two years, home. Then it went down like married men with like fourteen kids and

31:30 then married men with no kids and then single and there was only thirty of us left.

**From there on you were brought back from Tarakan to Australia.**

Yeah, and that was to be discharged. That was all.

**And what took place when you got back? What ended up happening?**

I went back to my job at Goldsbrough Mort. They kept my job open. Well they had to. That was the law.

**What were you doing, sorry?**

32:00 I was inside as a clerk, you know, an accountant type. But then I got sent to branches after that. I got sent up to Ararat. And then they opened a branch in Hamilton in the Western District. I went over there and opened the branch there and I stayed there for a couple of years. My mother died and left my father on his own so I applied to come back to Melbourne, which I did.

32:30 And I had a fair bit of experience in the country.

**How old would you have been when the war ended?**

I started off when I was twenty-six so I would be thirty-two. Just on thirty-two. Well I came out in November. I think I turned thirty-two in November the following year.

**Did you get married when you came back or did you get married in the following year?**

No not straight away. I'd been

33:00 engaged twice. But they all fizzled out.

**You were engaged before the war?**

Yeah, before I went away.

**Twice before the war?**

Yeah.

**I see.**

One married a Yank and the other one. I don't know what happened. It just fizzed out. The Yankee one had gone to America before I got home and the other one had found somebody else.

33:30 I played fast and loose for a few years and then I met Joan. We got married. We've been married fifty years. She's been great. She's looked after me.

**Keith, I'm going to now detail the wartime experience with you. There are some questions I would like to ask you.**

34:00 **You were in the militia before you joined the regular army?**

Yeah.

**So which militia unit were you with?**

Regiment. I was with the Victorian Scottish Regiment.

**Where were they based?**

In Melbourne.

**And when did you join up? What year did you join?**

I joined up in early 1940. I wasn't called up. I joined at the

34:30 town hall. I had had a medical examination passed all that. I was called up on the twenty-fourth of June 1940 and that's when I went into serious, well the only serious..

**1940?**

Yeah, 1940.

**That's where you got into the 9th?**

Well that was on my way and that's where I finished up.

**So what was the 5th Battalion militia like?**

35:00 Pretty good. We were actually called up in 1939. Which was interesting. We went down to Portsea, down on the peninsula at Port Phillip Bay there, digging holes and you know, gun emplacements and all sorts of things. I don't know what they thought was going to happen but we done a lot of training there.

35:30 We wanted to join up as a unit. We were, you know, fairly well trained as training went in those days. They just didn't want us so they picked one, they got the colonel, three officers, about two NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] and about thirty ORs [Other Ranks]. That's you know, ordinary. They formed the 2nd, no 5th Battalion and they

36:00 recruited into that and they went away in the first show with the 6th Division. That was in Greece and Crete.

**OK.**

But the 5th Battalion still existed and still does today but it's been amalgamated with the 6th Division. The University Rifles, I think, but they've been combined now into the...

36:30 **So when war started, that famous speech by Robert Menzies. What was your impression? OK, the war started with Germany. What was going through your mind?**

We'd had a couple of drinks. A lot of bravado. I think underlying I thought we've always known, we've always,

37:00 you fight a war in somebody else's country never on your own so perhaps that was behind it a bit. A bit of adventure, perhaps, at that stage.

**And your friends were also keen?**

Yes, I think so. When it got really serious overseas we thought perhaps it really is time to have a go. I think so.

**Were the people who joined up**

37:30 **with you, when you joined the AIF, were they from Brighton Technical School?**

No.

**Were they any of your mates?**

No.

**Any mates join with you?**

No, but there were a couple in the unit who had joined from the school I struck up with afterwards. After I got into the unit.

**So none of your mates joined up with you?**

Well one did but he wasn't at the technical school. I think he went

38:00 to Trinity Grammar or somewhere like that. The chap I was with.

**But he served in the same unit as you?**

No, another unit.

**So you basically joined up by yourself and**

Yes.

**And made new friends?**

You can soon do that of course.

**And you... another thing I want to emphasise is that you knew that there were... Well the British Empire was still quite**

38:30 **powerful then and the word Empire had a lot of meaning to a lot of people.**

Oh absolutely. People used to speak of "home" and that was England. That was home.

**So what did fighting for empire mean to you?**

You get carried away with the propaganda.

**At the time? And you thought at the time, around the period the war broke out, their**

39:00 **propaganda sort of statements were fighting for empire. What was running through your mind at the time? Could you walk us through that?**

It's a bit difficult to. I think we were pretty loyal. We were encouraged to be that way. You know, we used to raise the flag on Monday morning and all that sort of thing. I know we

39:30 had the British flag and not the Australian flag and that sort of thing. And all because we had radio but there was no television to actually see anything overseas. We'd read it in the paper and what was written would incline you...you were inclined to digest and take as truth. And then you'd think no that was rubbish. It was hard

40:00 to make up your mind. It really was.

**Would you say that empire was important to you at the time?**

I think so, yes. I think you'd have to say that because the whole thing's based on the British Empire... you know.

**Sorry we're going to have to cut now.**

40:20 **End of tape**

## Tape 2

00:34 **Ok, so you were just saying about the term "fighting for empire."**

Yeah.

**Keeping the empire together. That meant something to you.**

Yes, absolutely, yes. We were so tied to it.

01:00 Quite different today. All our exports went that way. Well virtually all of them went to England. Well, you know, to England and Ireland and Scotland. All our wool went there to be spun, you know. There were big ties that way. And all the exports would come out from there. And you know, we didn't have much to do

01:30 with America in those days. Very little. Except films of course. They were the first thing that took over here.

**OK, When you did your training at Bendigo, that was with the 2/22nd, at first, wasn't it?**

I hadn't actually. I was with what they call a training battalion and they would send troops out,

02:00 you know, to reinforce units that were below strength. And they would get below strength for various sickness in those days because there was no fighting in Australia. You know, they might want twenty-five fellows to go out to the so and so battalion and off they'd be marched out. And anyway I was marched out with the 2/22nd Battalion. Although they hadn't left Australia.

02:30 And fortunately for me, at any rate, because they were wiped out at Ambon [actually the 2/22nd was at Rabaul, while the 2/21st was on Ambon]. Those that weren't killed were taken prisoner and I think even those prisoners. They were taken somewhere. The Japanese would have taken them somewhere in ships and I think they were bombed out by our own air force. They didn't know they had prisoners aboard of course and not too many of them survived.

**Was this from the 2/22nd?**

Yeah, I was lucky. That's when I was halted

03:00 from going there and put on the strength of the twenty... 2/23rd Battalion. Training battalion. That was



to reinforce the 2/23rd who were in Tobruk at that stage.

**Was the training very intense? And how long did it go for?**

'Til I went away and

03:30 that was in October when I left Australia and went into Tobruk.. So it went about five or six months.

**Did you feel very confident in your fighting capability after five or six months training?**

Yes. We were always a bit wary of going into action of course.

04:00 But we had experience with light ammunition and all that sort of thing but it was not the same as going into a pitched battle.

**What was your standard gun? What was the gun that you carried?**

I carried a rifle right through everything.

**A 303?**

Yeah. I had the same rifle right through five and a half years. It was the infantryman's best friend. You'd sleep with it. It was true too.

**Did you consider yourself a fairly decent shot?**

04:30 Yes. We all became pretty good shots. Yes. I was fairly good. And some were exceptionally good. You know, some of the country fellows, got jobs as snipers, you know, they would just sit down all day long and wait to get a shot at somebody. You know, they were used to doing it and some of them were very good.

**And did you do the training? When you were doing the training did you do some desert training as well? In preparation for Tobruk?**

05:00 No. Not really. There was dry country up round Bendigo and that. Not like the desert.

**So you did most of that when you got to Palestine.**

Yeah.

**I'm going to skip from there. You went to Palestine. How long did you stay in Palestine for?**

I'm just not sure when I got there but it was about

05:30 It'd be six months about. I got there in August. Fifteenth of August. So prior to that from the time we got into Palestine until I went up to Tobruk we were training all the time really. A lot of these training depots there would have been all sorts of things going

06:00 on. Machine gun training and training for artillery and tanks.

**This is all in Palestine?**

Yeah. Different set-ups, you know. Heavy machine guns. They were a separate unit. We learned to use most of them. Became pretty efficient like that. We could jump onto a heavy machine gun

06:30 and use it.

**Can you give me a description of what specific machine guns you are speaking about?**

Vickers.

**The Vickers?**

Well we called them heavy. I think they are classified as light, or light-heavy or medium or whatever. Pretty heavy guns to carry round. And mortars. Three-inch mortar is heavy. It's got a very heavy base plate. They're

07:00 things you can't carry on your back easily.

**How much would a three inch mortar weigh with a base plate?**

Well the base plate, I can't remember easily, I think eighty-two pounds. Something like that. I can't remember exactly.

**So infantrymen like yourself were trained to operate such weaponry?**

That took some time to get round to doing all that. We learned to do most of this

07:30 in Tobruk.. For instance my mate was firing a 106 mm Italian gun which had been captured. He just learned to do that without any manuals or, you know, supervision or anything. And they used to cause a

lot of trouble by firing at the enemy with their own gun.

**So what happened after Palestine, you were trained there?**

08:00 **You went to Syria, you said?**

No I went to Tobruk in the first instance.

**So from Palestine you went to Tobruk and then on to Syria.**

To Palestine and then on to Syria.

**Yeah, right. I won't skip there. So from Palestine your unit was regrouped, trained.**

The reinforcements were sent up to keep the battalion up to strength. Into Tobruk. That's the first time.

08:30 **You stated before that you were transported on a destroyer convoy. You were in a convoy but in a destroyer, were you?**

The destroyer. There were two of them. They were K class destroyers from the Royal Navy. I went up on the [HMS] Kandahar and the other one was the [HMS] Kimberly her sister ship. They had to make a dash and you had to wait until the moon was down.

09:00 It'd start off in daytime at a place called Bardia. It was a point in the... The coast almost went up to Tobruk. If you look at it on a map. It was a bit like the eastern coast of Australia and then there was this point called Bardia and for some reason you'd have to come in real close there and there were these big guns and they used to fire shells at these ships. When that started up

09:30 you knew what was going to happen. The bombers would come out then and bomb and strafe.

**These are German Luftwaffe bombers?**

Yes, or Italian.

**So, what was your first...you saw the gun firing from the coastline.**

I don't think they fired on us on this trip but they had been know. They, you know, they used to keep out pretty well. The first thing was the orders from the

10:00 skippers to batten down all hatches and the destroyer is about two thirds full of ammunition. You'd see these fellows go down into the ammunition and a fellow comes along and screws them down and they've got no hope if the ship's hit. Of course our blokes, there were only twenty two of us of course. Only twenty-two went up to reinforce.

**Only twenty-two.**

Only twenty two of us on this destroyer. Of course she had

10:30 lots of ammunition and stuff. Taking it up to our troops. And that was the first inkling I got. Of course we all went up on deck and the captain was crazy. He was. I found after he was only twenty-one in charge of this ship and he went crook at our fellows. "Oh, you going to come up on deck, make yourself busy." So we were carting ammunition up to the guns. Some of the guns were

11:00 quite open, you know, the small guns, the anti-aircraft and they get into a harness and they're taking ammunition up to them.

**Do you recall how many aircraft attacked?**

No. I didn't get a look at them. That was the first time I had been in action actually.

**So what was it like?**

Oh horrible. Because you couldn't do anything

11:30 the sailors were doing all of the firing.

**Was it very heavy fire?**

Oh yes. They put up a tremendous scream and destroy. All their ammunition and guns, you know. They were real warships.

**How did the German planes operate in the...**

They had what were called Stukas and they used to dive-bomb almost vertically, they'd dive and they would drop bombs. They had these sirens

12:00 fixed to the wings and they'd make a frightful scream. They'd put the wind up anybody. I don't care who. They'd hear the scream and then the bombs would drop. Bombs come away, you know. We never got hit, you know, and then it got dark and of course they didn't. It's difficult to see but if the moon comes up

12:30 they can see the fire in the wake of the ship, you know because it's belting along a bit and you know, the ship has a wake which is phosphorescent and at night when the moon's up the planes could see this. That's why we couldn't go when the moon was up. Then into the harbour at Tobruk, which was full of sunken ships. I don't

13:00 know how many they'd pull up at a wharf or an old sunken ship that they'd got a bit of a platform on and off you'd go down the side on a rope ladder and a barge would take you. And right on the tick of midnight she'd up anchor and out. It doesn't matter who was on the dock. Procedure, you know. But some funny things

13:30 happened. I know when we pulled up; of course, we didn't know where we were. We knew we were in Tobruk because the crew told us but an old Scottish Engineer, most engineers on ships were Scottish in those days and he started to blow out these flues. It was a diesel burner and all these sparks flew out and the captain blew

14:00 the tar out of him. Oh, you should have heard him come back at the captain. Cerik. The bloke could be in trouble and I said to one of the crew: "Gee, that's no way to talk to the skipper." He said "Oh God, he's an old Scot and he'll get away with it."

**So when did you land in Tobruk, again?**

August.

**Was it August, OK. So when you were coming within eyesight of**

14:30 **the shoreline of Tobruk?**

Well it was all pitch dark, you see, I didn't know where I was.

**So, can you tell us what you did when you disembarked? What was the situation like?**

Well I got ashore, where, I don't know until this day and got into a three ton truck, you know, with a canopy over it. They drove us up to, I've forgotten the name of it. We called it Happy Valley

15:00 Or Bomb Alley. There was a regimental sergeant major there. It was like a camp and he said, "You'll have to sleep anywhere. Get yourself a hole somewhere." which I didn't. You wouldn't read about it. That night he came along and dropped a five-hundred pound bomb in this valley. The German

15:30 air force. It woke me up and blew me out. I didn't know where I was. All on my own, mind you. I thought: "God." you know. It was like getting shoved on the moon. But anyway the next day I reported down to the sergeant and he said, "Oh, no you can't go up in daylight." He said, "You were up on the salient." Now that was the...Tobruk was defended by concrete.

16:00 Beautifully constructed concrete positions. The Italians had done it. It went from coast to coast and the township was in there. Previously the Germans had pushed in and we'd lost some of these posts so we had what was called a salient and we pushed in, further in and dug into the ground and no concrete positions had been and that was a real hotspot there. You were only about, at the nearest point

16:30 400 yards from the Germans, you know. So he said, "Tomorrow night, you'll have to go up." The units, they used to rest, and some would come out. A few blokes would come out for a swim and some would go back the next night.

**So how far inland were you from shore?**

Well we ...I suppose

17:00 fourteen or fifteen miles.

**And this place you call the salient. It was known as 'The Salient'? It was obviously sticking into German territory or the Germans were sticking into yours.**

No. They were sticking into our territory. They had the concrete posts and we'd lost them. We lost a lot of men trying to get those posts back and we couldn't. They always had an advantage of tanks.

**The Germans?**

17:30 Yeah. And you know, we were pretty ill equipped. For instance we got our own artillery, the 2/12th artillery [Field Regiment] and they did a fabulous job with the Huns [Germans], they picked up all round the place. They didn't have any...They were a twenty-five pounder which was a fabulous gun. They didn't have one gun when they got into Tobruk. Imagine sending an artillery unit without their guns.

18:00 You know. Wellington in without any horses.

**So when you first went in what was your first combat experience in Tobruk? Tell us about that.**

Well. They took me up to the salient, to my platoon which was A company, and there was three platoons, four platoons, three

- 18:30 platoons were in those days were in A company and they were in these dug out positions and to make matters worse you couldn't dig down more than about...and you hit solid rock. The only way to get down further was with a hammer and chisel. And you know about that much every night and you know you'd get down about a foot a month digging in. It was horrible. So you used to build these
- 19:00 things up with sand bags and anything you could get hold of. You know, to get them deeper in effect. My first experience. We used to team up two fellows with a dougis[?], they called them and they were holes and if you could get a bit of protection over them they used to do that with a couple of old iron bars and some sand
- 19:30 bags stop shrapnel coming in. And they had one of these in this post. You know, there was almost thirty pillars there and they were all connected with a trench. And this was a sort of. I don't know. It must have had a big gun in it of some sort. It was round, you know.
- 20:00 Ten or twelve feet in the old engine diameter. It was absolutely quiet and there was nothing at all. It was pitch black so this chap, I said, "I'm going to have a smoke." and that's when I started smoking cigarettes. I'm going to have a smoke so we went down to this hole having a smoke and the second
- 20:30 in command of the battalion came round on an inspection and he wasn't challenged. He just walked into the post and we were going to be court martialled of course for not being on duty. My platoon commander talked me out of that. That was my first experience. The next day. I thought, "Gee this is quiet." and I put my head up to take a look and 'zeeee.'

- 21:00 bullet passed. The sniper on the you know, so you couldn't move during the day. If you stood up you would be shot.

**So how long did you put your head up for?**

I just poked up like that. He must have been a poor shot because he should have got me then. And that was the first time I had ever been shot at and I didn't like that very much at all. Anyway we were there and I used to have to patrol every night. We had wire entanglements

- 21:30 in front of us and a mine field and we had to pass through the mine field and go out every night patrolling to find out where they were and so forth.

**So you actually had to go in front of your posts in the mine field.**

Yeah.

**So tell us more about that.**

Horrible experience.

**Tell us about the more trying experiences of patrolling. Where you got into combat with German troops, where you were fired at, where you had to fight back. Can you tell us about the most dangerous**

- 22:00 **experiences that come to mind?**

Well I didn't have many in Tobruk. It had all been done already. They had some terrible experiences prior to that but when I came along it was fairly static but we used to have to go out at night time and mostly we didn't disturb them because one, we couldn't see properly

- 22:30 and two, you'd never get back because they were really strong. They had machine gun units and artillery and we were on the flat and of course they were on the high ground and they could see us. But the first patrol I did we went out and I thought I don't like this because I reckoned they'd get lost, you know. Anyway, the
- 23:00 officer, he was a platoon commander came out. There was another fellow, myself and another corporal. The colonel wanted us to go and look under this water tower which was a feature in Tobruk. Concrete tower on stilts and no one had ever knocked it down because it was valuable to both sides to arrange their artillery on. If you can get a good
- 23:30 point like that it makes their artillery ranging very accurate. He reckoned there were machine guns underneath and there certainly were. Anyway we got up amongst the Germans. This fellow, he had been educated at Oxford. He had a real Oxford accent. In a hoarse whisper, you know, you could hear it a mile away. "Which way do you think we should go back?"
- 24:00 And the corporal he said, he points this way and I said, "I'm going back that way." Because I had a cable in my hand that I'd picked up when we left the post and I thought I'm going to keep this with me all the way. I'm not going to get lost. Then they opened up on us. And they always said.

**The Germans opened up?**

Yes.

**With what?**

Well they first, they put out these magnesium flares

24:30 to light the place up like the Melbourne Cricket Ground at a night game and you feel as if you are standing out. It's like a flat desert. And they said, "No. Just stand still they can't see you." and I never believed that. You know, you had your back to them. They'd fire stuff and all going over your head hopefully.

**Were they actually shooting bullets?**

Yeah. They'd send mortars

25:00 and they'd explode everywhere but you wouldn't move. If you started to move they would see you. They reckoned they couldn't see us but I never really believed it and yet it must have been true or we would have been hit.

**So when a magnesium flare went up you actually stood.**

Stood yeah.

**Or you actually dropped to the ground?**

Hit the ground if you could.

**And stay still.**

But then they'd send another one up you see, and if you weren't on the ground

25:30 you couldn't move. You'd just stand still.

**OK, And then that was followed up by machine gun fire and mortars?**

Yes, Well they'd hear something and they just used to kick something. Especially this fellow because he just had big feet. He was a funny bloke. He was giving us a lecture one day on defensive positions, you know, with wire, barbed

26:00 wire. Warr he'd call it. Barbed warr. And this funny bloke we had. He said, "What are you talking about war? What's warr?" "Warr, that stuff that prickles you know, warr." "Oh you mean wire." He was always known as 'Warr' after that. That's how he got his nickname. But he was a good bloke.

**Did you every...Did you actually get into any instances...any fire fights where you fired your weapon?**

Well yes, we

26:30 did nearly every night but you really couldn't see anybody.

**Any ones where you could see?**

Well occasionally you'd see them move and that but then they'd get down of course and you couldn't see. They had what was called fixed positions and you could pinpoint their positions in the daytime and put two pegs out in the day time and at night time we could fire between them and know we were getting on to hit positions.

27:00 And they used to do the same thing. We never got out and had a go at one another on the flat. It was too dangerous.

**You were never attacked by the Germans?**

Only by artillery and mortars.

**What's an artillery bombardment like?**

Not too clever. They had a creeping barrage that came over about every fifty

27:30 I'm talking in the old...fifty yards. They'd have two or three batteries firing maybe ten or fifteen shells and wham, you know. Way off and then they'd creep up. You could look out then because they don't normally fire their machine guns while this is going on. Anyway, I had a peep out and the next one's coming right into this trench and

28:00 I was out and the next lot went over our position and that would have blown the wall there and that was really solid. But the mortars used to worry us. They had good mortars and they could fire them about three thousand yards. Our range was only about two thousand. So they had a big advantage. We used to have to count them. We had seventeen hundred and fifty strikes in

28:30 one day, you know, around our position. They never got anybody. Incredible. Occasionally someone would get wounded.

**Generally, isn't a heavy barrage always followed by an infantry attack?**

Yeah. We always stood to. We were always waiting for them to come, you know. I don't know why they

did it. Whether they thought they might just blow us up or something. Strange things.

29:00 **So apart from just shots fired here and there you never got involved in the actual battles in Tobruk?**

No. Plenty of patrols. I was very lucky. I was in a hot spot twice while I was there.

**Did you lose a lot of mates? From the same areas as you?**

No, I don't think we had any casualties on the salient while I was there. We had a couple of wounded on

29:30 patrol. Because we used to do daylight patrols too. But not straight out in front of us. In different situations. You know. But it was quite a, it was a very interesting situation.

**Did you ever see enemy tanks?**

Yeah, you could see them moving about and they'd come up and have a look and off they'd go. They never

30:00 attacked again. I think it was the patrolling that kept them out. They did try in May. They attacked. They came through the outer defensive. They had a tank ditch. You know, a big ditch dug so that tanks couldn't manoeuvre. They bridged that in some way and came in. I wasn't there at this stage.

30:30 and our bloke, [Lieutenant General] Morshead the divisional commander, he worked out a plan to let them in and the infantry came in after the tanks. And we were all down in the holes under the...and when they came down we just bobbed up and mowed them down. But the artillery took care of the tanks because they were all dug in waiting for it.

31:00 But that was the first time they had been really beaten. They lost a lot of men, the Germans, at that stage.

**So in Tobruk you were involved in no major combat exercises at all?**

No, No. Patrolling.

**What was the morale of Australians in the 2/23rd like when you were there?**

It was pretty good. We had a lot of funny fellows, you know. Complete cross-section

31:30 of the community.

**Were they confident about fighting against the Germans?**

Oh Yeah. Definitely.

**What did they think about the Germans?**

Oh they respected them. They always reckoned they could beat them. You know, that's a typical Australian. Yes. But then we started to get lethargic and that's when they pulled us out.

32:00 **Ok, so you were basically getting a bit bored there? That was one of the reasons....**

We weren't getting any proper tucker. For instance we never saw any fruit, ever. We never saw any fresh meat. We were living on tinned vegetables and tinned bully beef. You know, which was like a coarse sort of Spam [Spiced Ham], you know, and

**So the food wasn't very good?**

Oh no.

32:30 We only got about a quart of water a day. That's a bottle about that size.

**How often would you bathe?**

Never bathed. I was up on the salient for six weeks and never bathed once.

**Oh really.**

We were all the same. I'll tell you the routine. We'd get these little Nestles milk tins. About that size. Only little ones and we'd cut them around three

33:00 parts bend it back and then bend it over. A sort of handle, you see. Fill that up. We used to work it out. Fill that up with water and clean your teeth. And then we had to shave. Which seems strange but we did. Shave with a safety razor. Then we'd have

33:30 to tip a bit of water and wash as best we could. Then what you had left you'd tip over your head. That was the daily bath. Occasionally when we weren't up on the salient they had what they called the "Blue Line." It was the second line of defence and covered all the gaps in the first line. From there we used to go down and have a swim. Once every

34:00 two or three weeks and that was good. That helped a lot. It was heavily chlorinated. You could always stand a spoon up in it. Strangely enough there with all this vitamin business going on we used to get a ration of vitamin C there. Sixty odd years ago. So I don't know whether, you know. All these

34:30 arguments against it. It must have helped us. Not getting scurvy. That's what we would have got. No fresh fruit of vegetables.

**So what... Did you dislike the desert? Did you find it very uncomfortable?**

I wasn't keen on it. No. Very hot. See get up to forty-one, forty-five degrees Celsius in the daytime and at night, freezing. Down near zero.

35:00 You know, it was hard to take but we got used to it.

**What were the problems you had with insects?**

Rats, well they weren't a problem really but fleas were bad. No mosquitos of course because there was no water lying about but the fleas were very bad.

**Scorpions?**

Yes, a few of those but they weren't worry us really. You were careful, you know.

35:30 **People used to say, I've read accounts, that soldiers had scorpions in their boots.**

Oh, occasionally this would happen. Some fellows got bitten. You know, they exaggerate the bite. They're pretty painful but, you know, they never killed you. I suppose we were pretty fit really so they didn't kill them. The rats used to nibble our ears when we were asleep at night.

36:00 But they weren't these nasty rats. They were desert rats. A different little fellow. You know, almost make it a pet, the old desert rat. And then this English bloke, I've forgotten his name now. He was shot as a traitor. Lord Haw Haw he was christened [German propaganda broadcaster].

36:30 He christened us rats in holes and that's how the name "Rats of Tobruk" started. He was a German. Well he was an Englishman actually. He started it and the association is still going. The Rats of Tobruk Association.

**Now your next... so you were evacuated from Tobruk in what month?**

I think it was October.

**October.**

'41. Somewhere

37:00 about then. Might have been November but round about that time. The whole division went.

**The whole 9th Division?**

That's right.

**You were sent to Syria?**

We went back to Palestine and then we went home.

**Ok, I thought you said you went to Syria.**

Yeah, of course we did. We didn't go home after Tobruk. We went to Palestine and we sorted ourselves out so to speak

37:30 and then up to Syria.

**Why did you go to Syria? Why did your unit go to Syria?**

Well there was trouble, you see. Syria was a bit iffy. It hadn't quite been taken over by the British in those days. There was a little bit of trouble going on then.

**This was after the Vichy French campaign?**

Yeah, at the tail end of it. We struck it. We went into their barracks at

38:00 I've forgotten the name of the barracks. It started with a G. They were proper built barracks and the Vichy-French has occupied those previously. The aftermath of it was they left a lot of people there who were starving, you know. They never left any food for them. I remember these kids. There were about sixty

38:30 or seventy little fellows from us to about eleven, you know. We went on half rations to feed these kids because they were starving and we never forgave the French for that. I don't know Vichy or what they were. To see these kids, you know. Anyway, typically Australian they did something about it. And we had a good time in Syria.

**But you never saw any combat?**

No, no. No combat.

**You were like a**

39:00 **reserve unit?**

Well we were up there. What they were frightened of was Germany coming through Turkey, you see. So we getting up that way and defending the coast part of it and the others were inland and then they went through Syria. But that was full of what we called fifth columnists then. That was a hot bed for spying, Syria.

39:30 You could even see it on old films. It was a bit like that. Not that we struck it really as soldiers but it's a very, very lovely country.

**What did you think of the Vichy French troops? Did you think they were good troops? I understand the Syrian campaign was pretty bloody.**

Yes. It was.

**About three thousand-five hundred Allied troops were killed.**

Yes.

**And about five hundred Australians died as well.**

Yes. They were good soldiers?

**Were they good as far as fighting was concerned?**

Yes. Well of course, they were legionnaires. They would have been in it.

40:00 **Foreign legionnaires.**

Well they'd have to go being professional soldiers.

**So did the Aussies have a healthy respect for the Vichy French?**

No. I don't think so, no.

**They didn't like them.**

No,

**As opposed to the Germans. How did the Aussies view Germans and the Vichy French?**

Germans would be rated higher than the Vichy. For sure. They didn't like them because they

40:30 were turncoats really. You know.

**Did you ever meet any Vichy-French POWs [prisoners of war]?**

No, no. They'd all been cleaned out by the time we got there.

**And lastly what was Syria like when you were there? What were the people like?**

Oh very friendly. Always got on well with the Arabs. We had a bit to do with the Jewish people in Palestine. You know. They were good. In Tel Aviv.

41:00 I got on very well with the Arabs. It was very interesting. In fact while we were up there I became pally with two girls and they were going to the uni. They came from a humble home but they were going to the University of Beirut. Which was American run and it was a beautiful university. We went up there on leave once. While we were there.

41:30 My mate who was killed later at El Alamein. He was a champion runner but he turned professional and we went up to the university and we were looking at their running track. Which they had a beautiful track there. Top cindered track which was very advanced for those days and there was a chap there who was running and my mate said, "Gee this

42:00 bloke can run." He's got a tremendous...

## Tape 3

00:33 **When you went to Syria you were saying before that then you went back to Alamein.**

Yeah.



**From Syria.**

I went into hospital first. I was there in hospital three months.

**Why did you need to go into hospital?**

Well I damaged my hand on a mortar, it started when I was sent to this commando school.

**So you were training to be a commando?**

Yes.

- 01:00 That was with the British commandos up on the Turkish border. Just near the Turkish border. Whilst at the school. I was only there about a week I think. This hand started to swell up and look bad and they had no doctor there. We were up in a village, way up in the hills and there used to be a, what they call a RAP. That's a regimental
- 01:30 aid post which used to go along with the unit. It was like a little portable hospital that every unit had. Well this fellow used to come round about once a week just to check up and see if everything was alright and he said, "I can't do anything for this. You'll have to go to hospital." So they transferred me to a New Zealand field ambulance
- 02:00 and they opened up my thumb and had a bit of trouble there and then they transferred me to their hospital and they were called up to Alamein whilst I was there. I was only there one day and they had to pack up and move and go straight up to Alamein. As a hospital, you know. About eight hundred beds, you know. So I was just given a pass and I wended my way back to Palestine. And
- 02:30 I was in a bit of trouble on the way because my hand didn't get any attention and it was up my arm. I thought I was going to lose my arm at one stage. I got back to our hospital, which was the [2/] 6th Australian General Hospital, and that was in Palestine and Gaza and they looked after me there. They treated it for about three weeks and didn't get anywhere and they finished up taking
- 03:00 part of my thumb off which stopped it then. And then I recuperated and I went out to a convalescent depot. You know, they give you a few days break out of hospital and then straight up to Alamein.

**And you went up the land road to Alamein?**

Yes, went up by truck. By that time they'd pushed them back a fair bit and I joined them when they were at,

- 03:30 just out of a place called Tel el Eisa which was the next rail station to Alamein. And they had a rail line along, which followed the coast mainly, right along, right through to Benghazi or somewhere like that I think, originally. It was all dysfunctional. You know, it had been bombed
- 04:00 and hadn't been looked after and of course the sand moves so much there that it had been covered in feet of sand in places. Anyway, it wasn't operational but our fellows had a pretty severe fight, a week before I got there, in the cutting.

**What, the 2/23rd?**

Yeah. B Company I was with and they really had a lot of trouble.

**Against Germans?**

Yeah.

- 04:30 Anyway I got up the tail end of it and we chased a few of them out and fired a few shots and that was the end of it. We packed up and went then and that was the finish of it in the Middle East.

**Anyway so your first combat engagement around the Alamein area. Can you describe to me what took place? If you...your first combat engagement in that area?**

Yeah. Oh I just went up

- 05:00 and joined a...by this time we had had so many casualties that the battalion was down to, I don't know, only a few hundred. Normally the strength of the battalion was round eight hundred or a thousand but we were down to only a couple of hundred I think.

**The 2/23rd was down to about two hundred fighting men.**

Yes, so we were pretty useless as a fighting force. We were in groups, you know, and we were just picking up stragglers, prisoners and we were taking prisoners and that sort of thing so we didn't

- 05:30 have much fighting then so I was lucky I missed those.

**You said there were some encounters where you had to fire a few shots.**

Oh, yes we fired a few there. Nothing of much import really. No, we got a few I suppose. You don't count them because...

**Tell me the most important one where...or the one most memorable to you the most intense.**

Oh that was to come. I think the most intense day

06:00 I had was on Tarakan.

**No, no no I mean in Alamein.**

Alamein? No, nothing much happened to me there. You see I missed it again being in hospital. It was fortunate, you know.

**Are you happy in retrospect that you missed that? At the time?**

Absolutely. There were a lot of casualties there.

**So at the time you were also happy you weren't involved in the major battle.**

Oh, absolutely!

06:30 You couldn't help but...

**Did most of your fellow soldiers also feel that way? Were they also somewhat averse to being in major combat actions because of the high fatality rate?**

No, no. They used to get anxious before a battle but they never shirked it one bit, ever.

**When you said they got anxious. What would they do?**

07:00 **How would they display this anxiety?**

Oh, you know, they'd be smoking continuously. The night before a dawn attack or something you wouldn't be able to sleep. You might snatch an hour or so. You'd get terribly uptight. Once it started I guess you'd concentrate on saving your own skin, number one, and getting someone in the opposition, number two.

07:30 I think it worked out a bit like that. It's hard to explain your reaction. It happens sometimes so suddenly you don't have time to think about it. Of course there's a dreadful din going on. It's almost unreal, the noise. The smell of cordite from guns, you know, it's almost suffocating, you know, and

08:00 dust, you know, that's churned up from the shells bursting, you know, it's a horrible feeling. It really is. But I missed most of that. Mostly patrolling again. But the Jerries [Germans] I think, they went so far off we ceased chasing them. We wouldn't have been much good. If we'd been attacked I don't think we could have stood more than a day or so.

**Did Australian troops call German troops**

08:30 **"Jerries."**

Yeah,

**The same term that the British used?**

Yeah.

**There was no local term, local Aussie dialect sort of to describe the German troops.**

No, not really. They used to call the Italians "Wops." I don't know what that meant really. I don't know. I've never

09:00 found out what that meant. "Wogs"....the locals were called wogs. That originally was 'Westernised Oriental Gentleman'. It wasn't a you know, nasty term, a racist term. It developed into Wog. You know anything that wasn't an Australian. Very funny blokes.

**What did you think of the Italian Soldiers?**

Oh some of them are good, Yeah.

09:30 People got the idea. . Some of their units were very good. They were first class gunners for a start, you know, heavy artillery. They were very good gunners. You know, they did a good job in the air. You know, their bombers were good. But the average Italian didn't have his heart in it. They fought for a while but our blokes used to get stuck into them, as we say,

10:00 they would give up pretty easily. Except some of the units. I remember the Ariete unit they had a division. They were good fighters and the Bersagliere were good. They were another unit, division like ours was. Generally speaking, though, they were in a lower category. We could take a lot of prisoners.

**So who were your mates in the**

10:30 **2/23rd when you were in El Alamein? What were the mateship...Let me rephrase that. Who were the friends you had made as a result of going to Tobruk and going to El Alamein in the**

2/23rd?

Oh.

**Who were your closest mates?**

My closest mate was a chap named D.K. Oy. He lives down at, out of Geelong.

- 11:00 And he was the first one I ever saw fire a heavy artillery piece. And I'll tell you a funny story about him in Tobruk. He used to use these guns. Anyway this gun was in amongst A Company and the whole company would be 150 men I suppose and all in position. We weren't up on the salient. And this gun was just in front of
- 11:30 them. D. K. as we called him, his Christian name was Donald Keith. He learned to fire this thing and he had a mate named Crummey. And Jack Crummey used to shin up one of those old telegraph poles. Tobruk was full of old telegraph poles and they had no wires stretched on them, anymore, you know, but they had those climbing spikes nailed on them
- 12:00 and he'd get up there with a pair of field glasses and spot for DK but DK would never trust this Italian gun that they'd captured. He used to tie a long rope to the firing mechanism and he dug a big hole. He used to get in the hole and Crummey would be up the pole. He'd be looking round two or three thousand yards or more and he'd say: "Give her a
- 12:30 go" and DK would push a shell in and they'd get in the hole and pull this thing and off she'd go and wham off she'd go and Crummey would shout: "Too short...up another hundred yards." And DK would go back and wind it up and grab another shell and go back and bang and then one day they fired this round and wham, right in amongst the,
- 13:00 I think there they were Italians, right out, and that stirred them up and I think they got the Artillery back and a shell landed in A Company and they were screaming at my mate for firing this gun at... Anyway, this commanding officer who happened...A company in our unit was always commanded by a major and he was always second in command of the battalion. He came next to the,
- 13:30 and he was going to put DK on a charge sheet and DK was a bit outspoken and he said, "I think you'd better go and see the colonel about that." And he said,said, "Don't you talk to me like that." "But I still think you should go and see him." This major bloke. And he said,said, "What are you complaining about. I told them to do it. I'm right behind them. They'll want plenty more of that too." So this went on
- 14:00 for a while and then one day they fired back and this gun had wooden wheels. And the shell landed on it and the wheels caught on fire. Then the whole of A company cheered because they couldn't fire it any more. You could imagine Tobruk had been fought over by the 6th Division and then our crowd coming back when they flopped into Tobruk.
- 14:30 and we sort of went in there for a rest and we sort of had to think out how we were going to stop them. That was how the siege started, you see, the Germans surrounded and that was the end. You couldn't come out. So it was full of burned out trucks, tanks that had been, you know. Some of them weren't badly smashed up.
- 15:00 The tanks might have just had their tracks blown off in a mine and the guns had been left so they sort of gathered up a lot of stuff which virtually provided the defences of Tobruk because we never had the full compliment of stuff all the time we were there. For instance we were supposed to have
- 15:30 a Bren gun for every section, they were about eight men, so you used to have to have at least three for a platoon. We had one for the platoon. We found out afterwards that there were ten thousand of these guns back in Cairo. They had them in storage, you know, waiting for if he ever broke through. They would be issued out then. Things like that went on, you know, they horrified us.

**What did you think of the British troops?**

- 16:00 **They were good but they had trouble like we did and I don't know whether anybody ever got stuck into this. They never seemed to be able to get coordination with their own tanks. The tanks were supposed to support the infantry but they always seemed to be late coming up.**
- 16:30 **They wouldn't come up because it was too heavy and they'd all get knocked down. They could knock them out in various ways. By gunfire or bombing or they could run over a mine and just blow their tracks off and they were immobile then. It never seemed to work out and I think the British were a bit hamstrung by that too. Their tank corps seemed to be a different section of the**
- 17:00 **amenity, you know. All these sort of intrigues would go on and that used to drive our fellows mad.**

**Were there ever Indian troops at Tobruk?**

There was a division of Indians there.

**How did they fight?**

Good. Yeah, very good.

**Were they well respected?**

Oh yes. They were experienced soldiers, these Indians, definitely. We didn't go into anywhere with them but they were with us if you understand.

17:30 Especially at Alamein they played a big part. In the last battle of Alamein. There was the Highland Regiment. The 51st Highland Regiment [actually a Division, not a Regiment] but they hadn't seen any desert warfare. See by this time we were considered the most experienced troops there. We'd been through Tobruk and we'd been through Alamein on the sixteenth of July.

**Your battalion?**

No.

18:00 The whole division.

**Oh, the 9th Division.**

Yes. And then all the kafuffle at the top and Auchinleck was the corps commander [actually Eighth Army commander]. He was sacked. Montgomery came and he got all the credit for it.

**What were the views amongst the Australian Soldiers? Among the chaps you knew. About Montgomery?**

Oh, They respected him.

18:30 He had to prove himself. Australians were a bit wary. They never considered the high-ups had any brains, you know. The soldiers didn't. It was a strange set-up, you know, and officers on the whole. They weren't human beings. Which was a bit of rubbish because they did a great job of course.

**So now**

19:00 **you were doing some mopping up operations.**

Yep.

**Doing patrolling in the El Alamein sort of area. What happened after that once you were basically taken away from that area?**

Well we stayed there for a while because I remember we played a football match against somebody there and I struck my old captain. He was captain of the artillery. I struck my old captain that I had played with in the

19:30 pre-war, you know. It was quite a reunion. And that was a football match after it was all finished on this flat desert, hard desert pan. You know, this flat desert, dried up lake type thing.

**Is it true that you went from Alamein, what was it in forty-two, that you went to Palestine again?**

Yes.

**You went from there to Palestine again?**

Yes, and that's when the Japs came in, of course, in '42 [actually 7 Dec. 1941]

20:00 and that's when the hierarchy said we had to come home. Churchill wanted us to go to Malaysia [Malaya] of course.

**So you were, basically your troops were put together on a ship in the Suez area and sent off back to Australia.**

No. It went from Tewfik which was the other end of the canal. Port Tewfik. And then we didn't go straight home. We called in at a

20:30 small atoll. Well it wasn't that small. It took the whole convoy. All the warships and that. Stuck out in the middle of the ocean. It was incredible to see all those ships go through a little entrance [probably Port 'T' in the Maldives Islands - Addu Atoll].

**How many ships?**

Forty I suppose. All sizes. As far as the eye could see would be ships in this lagoon. We called it a lagoon but it was tremendous. As big as Sydney Harbour inside.

21:00 almost.

**Were you happy to be leaving?**

Oh, yes. Overjoyed.

**So did you stop in Ceylon?**

No, no. The original battalion went to Ceylon on the way to the Middle East.

**The original?**

Twenty - 2/23rd. They went from Albury by ship to Suez though that. But they

21:30 stopped at Ceylon on the way and then went up to the canal.

**So you stopped at this atoll in the ocean. I understand there was some furore between Curtin and Churchill about putting the troops in Rangoon I understand.**

Oh yes.

**So basically which port did you...after that voyage, which port did you disembark in Australia?**

22:00 **We came up on a luxury liner called the New Amsterdam. It was the pride of the Dutch passenger liners. It wasn't stripped for action or anything like that. A big gun on the stern, that was all. They let all the West Australians off at Fremantle. We pulled right into the dock there. We weren't allowed off the ship. The West Australians left. We left. Then it went round**

22:30 **to Melbourne and then we got off. We went up to Seymour. The South Australians got the express ship back to Adelaide and then we went up to Seymour and got our leave passes and went home.**

**The unit, at this stage, was still around the two hundred, three hundred mark, was it?**

Oh. They were gradually filtering back. See in all the whole of the fighting, which included the, we had

23:00 eight hundred killed. No, three hundred and eighty killed I think and about a thousand and eighty wounded. About three thousand two hundred through the unit for various reasons. Sick, wounded, killed, you know. Which included a hundred and seventy-seven officers.

23:30 And three officers and a hundred and twenty-three ORs that is privates, corporals, sergeants went through the whole bit and I was one of a hundred and twenty-three. We were in every campaign, more or less, fighting whatever.

**So you got back to Melbourne, after the 9th Division came, you were dropped off in Melbourne.**

Yeah. I was

24:00 corporal. I had got two stripes. Because when I went into Tobruk I lost all my rank. The commission rank didn't lose theirs.

**So what was your rank before you went to Tobruk.**

Corporal.

**Corporal, so you had to go back to private.**

Yes, because I couldn't take the place of blokes who were senior to me.

**You basically then, when you got off at Melbourne, you mentioned that the unit went to Seymour.**

24:30 Yeah.

**You did some training there.**

No, no. To get our leave passes sort out, all settled down and then we went out on leave then.

**How long was your leave?**

Three weeks.

**Three weeks, and after that...I guess you met your family and spent time. You must have been mighty glad to be back.**

Oh yes.

**Did you want to go to New Guinea? Were you looking forward to it really?**

No, no. There was a funny thing happened.

25:00 A couple of the mates I was with. They came home and I don't know, we went into the pub and we had a few beers and we missed the train anyway. That day that we were meant to report and they thought we were downers. Absent without leave. Anyway we got back the next day and they were able to square off. We made some excuse. We missed the train.

25:30 **Basically after your leave where was the next place you went to?**

Oh, we went up into Queensland

**To Atherton. How long did the jungle training take?**

About five or six months I think, before we went to Lae. We went up there in early '43 and the Lae show was done in September '43 I think.

26:00 Either August or September [4 September 1943]. Then Finschhafen after that. We had one leave.

**Buna?**

We had just one stop there. They called in there to give us a feed on the way to the landing at Lae. I found out afterwards that they couldn't feed us on the Yankee ships we were on. They had no supplies and no cooks to cater for us.

26:30 So they gave us a feed before we got there.

**So I take it that your unit. Ok so let's go back here. You were at the Atherton Tablelands you had some training in Queensland in jungle warfare for five months.**

Yes. And the amphibious training of course. That was part of it.

**So your unit was essentially rebuilt up there.**

Yes. It was pretty near up to strength then. Before we went into Lae.

27:00 **So what took place..... that Lae was first and Finschhafen was next?**

Yes.

**Can you tell us about the Lae operation? Your experience, your personal experience? When you undertook the amphibious assault?**

Yeah. Well

**The day you were coming in. On the barges.**

Well you can imagine. Well they weren't called barges. They were called landing craft infantry [LCI].

27:30 It was a fairly big thing to look at. Like a small destroyer. I don't know how many troops we had on board. They had a ramp down the side. The barges used to have a flat that would sort of go off down the front of it and stuck up like that as it ploughed through the sea. They were the barges but this thing had a steel ramp

28:00 down the side near the front of the craft and you'd plough down this. Anyway, we were on one of those and these bombers came over and hit the craft next to us because I remember shouting "Lookou!" and we all hit the deck. I can remember this too. This day there was a bloke on the deck who

28:30 had his rifle across his neck and we were all piled like sacks of spuds on the deck, you know, and you could hear this faint voice coming. "Get off you so and so, you're breaking my neck." I don't know why that stuck in my mind because then the bomb struck the craft next to us and we had all the casualties then. We didn't get anything. Well we got off the beach and

29:00 Of course we were always trying to get off the beach. Just in a flash. As fast as you can. The Yanks. I don't know their training. They used to linger on the beach. They dug in and they suffered a lot of casualties like that.

**So you didn't meet any resistance when you first landed at the beach.**

No, we had to get in a bit before we struck them.

**Ok, you're walking through the beach and you were going now to the coastline. In the jungle.**

We went straight into the jungle. Yes.

**Right. Did you come under any artillery**

29:30 **fire when you were walking through?**

No. No. No.

**Did you get any gunfire on the way through?**

No. We were lucky to land there. Finschhafen was a different story. I don't know why they let us ashore.

**Was there a bombardment before the landing?**

Yes. The air force bombed, you know and the navy shelled it a bit. So they must have known we were coming and they must have retreated back into the. Anyway, we struck them after that. You know.

- 30:00 **Tell me about where you first fired a shot in the Lae. Ok you walked into the jungle now. Walk us through it. Tell us about it.**
- Well we had a point scout and he was out in front and then you'd be staggered across the track. You'd only go through on the track. If you had to cut your way through the jungle, you know, it was just
- 30:30 hours and hours. You could get through but it would be an incredible journey and it would be impossible to really fight so we'd had to use the tracks to even get anywhere. And the scout. He'd have to have his wits about him so he'd pick them up before they picked us up. Often they surprised us but mainly we surprised them.
- 31:00 The first day.... The scout, he came from Cheltenham. Surname was Lappin. Some of the boys that play football now are related to him I think and he was marvellous. I reckon he could smell them half a mile away. He was just that good. We very rarely got caught.
- 31:30 when Rick was out in front. Well this day we struck them and immediately went off the track of course. And then you'd do an encircling movement if you could. Through the jungle, creeping through and we got a few if we could. There were only a few of them and that was the first time I'd ever.
- You fired your gun?**
- Oh yes, fired alright but I don't think I hit anything.
- You don't think you hit any of the Japanese troops?**
- No, no.
- 32:00 **Did your troops lose any casualties?**
- No, no and then we continued on and the next thing we had to take this sawmill, disused of course, and we got out. The whole section was there with my company out in front with Rick out in front and nobody there except
- 32:30 these three half starving. I thought no, no they can't be Japs but they looked like Japs. Growth on them. They were filthy. What they were after then was prisoners of war so they could get some information. See we barely knew where we were and they'd been there for months. You see, they knew every track and they built in placements.
- 33:00 They were really experienced in moving about the place. They could do it at night. We were hopeless. We didn't know where we were, topographically. Anyway these three ...I thought they were Japanese.
- 33:30 This one, we called him 'Swizzle' because his bottom used to wobble. He was a little short bloke and I said "Take them back to the cage." The cage was a temporary cage, you know, wire cage, where they take prisoners and interrogate them straight away. They don't give them any food or water. They don't even give them a smoke until they get them talking you see. That was the psychology of it.
- 34:00 When they'd spilt their beans they'd give them a feed and they'd give them a cake of soap. They'd be given a, you know, one of those portable shower sort of things with a bucket, you know. Then they'd be finished. They'd be taken away to a POW camp somewhere. Anyway, I said "Take these fellows back to Swizzle" and he said "No, I'll give them a grenade when they get round the corner." He thought they were Japs too. I remember I said, said, "If they don't get back I'm going to shoot you.
- 34:30 Of course I didn't; mean it, you know." Anyway we got a lot of information out of them. And they were, they had been forced into forced labour. Oh they came from way up in North China somewhere. They were starved to death and they were worked like navvies all this time. And they were. I'm glad they escaped. They gave them a lot of information because they had plenty of interpreters. Chinese and Japanese.
- 35:00 **Now what about for instance the first major combat experience you had in Lae. You said your forward units shot dead four Japanese soldiers. Then which was the next combat?**
- There was a series of them and then of course we had to get across these rivers on the way. See we landed about
- 35:30 twenty kilometres, twenty-five kilometres from Lae so there was a lot of country to cover and these rivers they were flowing at 14 knots. They were terribly hard to get across. We had a lot drown one day. The [2/] 24th, you know, they had about thirteen men drowned. They were swept out to sea and drowned.
- This was from your battalion.**
- No it was from another battalion just down from us on our left.
- 36:00 But getting across the rivers the rivers was a thing because they'd be on the other side so we used to fire at them all the time while somebody would be trying to get across. We had casualties like that. Unless you got close up you never knew what casualties you were inflicting.

**Did you ever get close up to a Japanese soldier in combat?**

Oh Yeah. One day. About from here to the cabinet and they were putting in a machine gun nest

36:30 and I threw three grenades and blew them all up. That's as close as I got to them.

**How did you get that close to them?**

Oh, we were there. We were in position. They came down the track. A big attack it was. They came down and unbeknown to me the platoon on the right had got up and pulled out so we were unprotected on one flank. I couldn't understand it because we were only on one side of the track.

37:00 Because they had a machine gun there and it wasn't firing. Anyway, the Japs came down. About five of them putting in this gun. It was right across the side of it. Anyway the grenade got them anyway. Though a lot of mistakes happened. You see that day I was acting Platoon commander and I had been for two or three

37:30 weeks. Officers had been killed or wounded and they had gone out so I'd taken over and I was a corporal I think. And I had a runner. In a battle an officer has a runner, you see, because they didn't have telephones like today. If we had have had those it would have been a different experience.

38:00 You'd have to get a runner physically go back to headquarters and get whatever you wanted. And I wanted some fire brought down on them. But they said we were too close to them and they wouldn't do it. Like gun fire or mortars. They wouldn't do it so I said to Jack: "Get some grenades and we'll stop them that way." He brought up half a sack of grenades and they weren't primed. I don't know how many I threw, but none of them went off.

38:30 Oh, Gee. I've never been so disheartened in all my life. We had to get out then to save our skins. But we got the machine gun. That was non-operative by the time we left. That was as close as I came to a full frontal view.

**Was it frightening for you? What was the emotion?**

Oh, no.

**Were you calm?**

Yeah. Pretty calm.

39:00 I remember Jack Dennis, he didn't have any teeth. He had false teeth but he'd pulled them out and the grenades have a split pin in them which you pull out. But you can't pull them out while they're splayed, you know, it's a split pin so we used to bite them closed you see and then pull them. Well he couldn't bite them. I started to laugh. I couldn't help it you see.

39:30 **This is while you were in the battle?**

Funny things happen. It just seemed so incongruous that he couldn't hurl these grenades because he couldn't get the pin out, you know. Now that's a simple thing that nobody ever thought of you see.

**I'm afraid we're going to have to stop now because tape's running out.**

39:56 **End of tape**

## Tape 4

01:33 **Now last time we were talking about your experience in Lae in New Guinea in 1943 June. I would like to ask you if you would be able to explain to me, if you could tell us what it was like again. When you just got off the boat you said you encountered enemy resistance. Could you tell us about that? Landing on the beach?**

02:00 Resistance was light because the place had been bombed. The beach head had been bombed and shelled too prior to us landing, shelled by the navy. Which allowed us to get ashore without much opposition. There were just a few, perhaps a few, pockets which the battalion cleaned out. Then to a set plan we started off and the plan was of course to get there as

02:30 fast as possible and take the town of Lae. Having in mind we were fifteen to twenty miles on the northern side of Lae when we landed. So we didn't go straight into Lae. So we had a fair amount of country to traverse including a lot of rivers, some of them were flowing very quickly

03:00 and so on. That was the plan of attack. From there we went to ... There were different manoeuvres that were made. I mean the battalion doesn't go in on spec, one company might go to the left and another to the right. They had a lot of experiences on the way. We had a new company commander although he wasn't new to the army. He was just new to the jungle fighting and



03:30 and he set off like a bat out of hell and we got right out in front of the unit. We were lost for a couple of days. They didn't know where we were.

**So this is your company?**

Yes.

**So you were actually lost.**

B Company. We weren't lost but we lost contact with headquarters of our battalion. We had lost contact with the colonel and all his staff who control the battle.

04:00 Anyway we had a lot of patrolling to do. We didn't actually strike any Japs for quite some time but they were there. See, for instance one day, I had a patrol out. I was a section leader, a corporal, I had a section of eight men. Seven men and myself. And we were going along this track and I could see where they'd been along the track because you could see

04:30 the water filtering into their footprints. But we couldn't see them. We looked for them everywhere and they had gone into the jungle and hidden away from us in some way. So this proceeded all the time until we finally made contact with our own unit by going down a river and I was out on a patrol with another corporal, which was unusual

05:00 two corporals out, although they had to do that sort of thing sometimes, so this chap walked down the middle of a river. He said, said, "Give us covering fire." I had a light machine gun with me then.

**What sort of machine gun?**

A Bren.

**A Bren gun.**

To cover him but fortunately there was no Japs on either side. He walked right down the river and he fortunately contacted one of our patrols which was coming up the beach right alongside the

05:30 water. They contacted a heavy patrol of Japanese and they ambushed the lot. There was fifty of them I think.

**They ambushed fifty Japanese?**

Yeah, and the way they did it. One of the forward companies obstructed these Japs and they were pinned down and two fellows were sent to try and make it back to the battalion to advise them of the situation.

06:00 And the way they did it, they went out into the sea, it was calm, and waded along just with their heads above water. Quite an experience it was interesting talking to them because from the shore, and especially when it was dark, they couldn't be seen but in half light, say when dawn was breaking, they'd look like a couple of coconuts

06:30 A Jap had a look and they thought they'd been seen and they popped underneath the water and held their breath, you know. But he hadn't seen them. He got past them and these two fellows warned the next company, which was A company, coming up in strength, coming up the track that these Japs were heading for them. And they formed what they called an ambush and they got off the track into

07:00 various positions and they annihilated the lot of them. And that was really the first big encounter we had at Lae.

**How far outside Lae?**

Oh I suppose in the first eight miles roughly. I couldn't tell you exactly.

**You were telling me that one of your soldiers was actually crossing a river, as a scout to the other side. This was a small river I assume.**

07:30 **So this was a standard strategy, was it? So that if you got shot. So that exposing yourself to get shot was essentially to warn off the platoon.**

Yes. See the normal way of patrolling was you'd have the point scout, what they called the point scout, he'd be way out in front. Three men each side and the corporal would come along, that's the section leader, wherever he saw fit. He might be right

08:00 up the front where he could contact the scout. Now the scout, you depended on him. But often they got shot because they were way out in front. And then you had a getaway man. He was right up the back. If anything happened he shot straight back down the track to warn your company or even your battalion.

**So he was behind the scout. How far behind?**

08:30 About six yards.

**So you're saying behind the entire section.**

He was behind the whole six.

**How far behind?**

Five or six yards.

**Behind the entire section?**

You can imagine a point scout going as far into the jungle without really getting into the jungle on each side of the track and then you would have a getaway man at the back and he'd be, you know, looking out of course.

**Is that also very dangerous?**

Oh, sometimes of course. Sometimes they let us get through and then opened up from behind. They loved to do that if they could do it.

09:00 **And how effective was it? Was it devastating when they opened up from behind?**

Out of sight. That's the first thing that enters your mind. Get out of sight. Down on the ground. You know, and then you'd sort it out.

**And then you were saying beforehand when you were doing the amphibious assault on the beaches in the Lae area you saw an air battle where the Japanese had broken through the allied air defences.**

Yes. There was a fairly

09:30 low cloud cover which distorted any battles that were happening. And you can't hear them really, not when you're concentrating on a landing like that. There's the noise of your ship, you know, and those gang planks coming down and you know, there's all sorts of things. But they sort of dived through the cloud cover but I saw the planes. Very low. Three or four hundred feet when they dived.

**Were these Jap planes?**

10:00 They dropped their bombs and away.

**How many planes attacked?**

Six I think. I saw three.

**So you were in the actual troop carrier so you were exposed?**

We were looking up because we'd hit the deck, you know, out of self preservation. Get as low as you can out of sight.

**So what went through your mind when you saw those plains straight in?**

I thought we were gone actually.

**So you actually thought you were dead?**

Yeah, Yeah. We often felt that. There's always

10:30 something humorous though. With all. Everybody and of course with these narrow LCIs they call it. Landing Craft Infantry they've got a. They're not a big ship. Only fifteen hundred tons or something but they've only got a small leaver. You know, and we were stacked up like potatoes, you know. This cry

11:00 from this fellow: "Get off you so and so's, you're breaking my neck" and someone had his rifle pressing on the back of his neck. Tried to press him into a steel deck. I'll always remember. Funny things you remember you know. Cursing us for trying to kill him before he got into shore.

**Also the bombs were dropped and a few LCIs were destroyed.**

11:30 **One was destroyed?**

Well it was put out of action. It wasn't actually sunk. But they hit it right about midships. There were, I know the colonel was killed and an officer named Reid, and I think there were thirty or forty wounded. That virtually took the company right out you see.

**Which company was this?**

Don Company I think.

12:00 Either C or Don. You have four companies to a battalion.

**So what's the noise of...what sort of feeling is there when you feel so trapped inside and LCI and you hear this explosion next to you and you know that many men died?**

Well you don't know what's happened really. Well you've heard the explosion and it's missed you and that's all you really know. And of course we'd hit the beach by then and off we went.

12:30 We didn't stop to find out what's happened to someone else like that unless it happens to be your mate and then you know, and it's close, handy but you know. But it was a landing where it was so quiet. This was opposed to Tarakan where it was noisy because we had a lot of, well there were six Australian ships, American ships and then there were Liberators

13:00 going over and the whole lot were going off. Incredible noise but this one was a silent landing because we got no opposition from the beach.

**So this was a terrifying noise?**

Sometimes yes.

**Even if it's your own artillery and planes?**

Oh yes. Noise is one of the dreadful things, I think, in battle.

**And why do you say that?**

Well it upsets you, you know. Well it

13:30 stops you thinking clearly, I think. You try to have a bit of sleep in the trenches and a big gun opens up beside you, you know. And then you nearly jump out of your skin, so to speak. But when the whole thing's in action, you know. There's guns, bombs, small arms fire, you know, rifles, the whole bit going, it's

14:00 an incredible noise.

**So it's all very chaotic? You don't know what's happening really.**

Not really. No. Until it settles down but there are moments when you wouldn't know what was going on. It was a horrible...

**Did you ever think about your family when all this was going on?**

Oh, yes.

**What ran through your mind?**

Oh, not while you were in battle.

**What were you thinking of when you were in battle?**

14:30 Just preservation, you know. What you're supposed to be doing. Nothing else. No. The adrenalin really gets going. Afterwards you think about things like that.

**Did you find it exhilarating? Battle?**

I suppose so, Yeah. At times. Yeah. I didn't like it to be quite frank. I didn't like any part of it and I don't think many fellows did.

**Why's that?**

15:00 I don't think. It's not natural for mankind to be trying to kill one another, surely. No matter what.

**You felt sympathy for the Japanese?**

No, never.

**Never. The Germans?**

Yeah.

**Why for the Germans?**

I don't know. Well they fought like we did, you know, with a sort of high moral, I think, on both sides. Now you've got to remember with the Germans we

15:30 struck, they weren't, there might have been a few, but most of them weren't Nazis. The commander wasn't a Nazi. Never belonged to the Nazi party.

**Who's this, Rommel?**

Rommel, No. So you had a different...But Japanese. They were crude.

**What do you mean by crude?**

They didn't have any moral at all much. They were dirty

16:00 they'd leave their own wounded. They wouldn't pick them up. They'd just let them die and that sort of thing. Strange things happened with them. We'd strike some of them tied with their hands behind their back. Now, we hadn't done it. Who else would have done it but their own. Either NCOs or officers or

what.

**So you said you'd found Japanese with their own hands tied behind their back. Why?**

16:30 **Were they dead or alive?**

Dead.

**Ok.**

Whether that was to get sympathy that we'd done it. I remember once, and this was in New Guinea when the patrol had a sergeant named Fox and he'd taken out this patrol and they'd struck the Japanese and they got a prisoner

17:00 which is very, well it's essential. Particularly when you don't know much about the country, which we didn't. I mean the maps were pretty useless. You know, the maps in existence weren't accurate, they weren't reliable and you had to keep altering them as you went along. And they tied this fellow with his hands behind his back so he wouldn't escape because they wanted to bring him in and interrogate him

17:30 and they got attacked again by a party of Japanese and this fellow was shot and they couldn't get to him to untie him because they were frightened the Japanese were going to say we tied him up and then shot him but it was the Japs who shot him. We were a bit worried about that. It was a strange thing that we didn't want to ever be thought of as being that type of

18:00 **So the Japanese were strange to you?**

Very.

**You found them awkward.**

Yes.

**But the Germans. You sort of had an understanding because**

Yes, well for instance in Tobruk every night we had an hour off. Both sides. It was strange like the football. Half time at the football. We'd get up. Shake our blanket out. Wander about and have a bit of exercise. That was what every

18:30 night. I think it went from eleven to twelve from memory. At twelve or whatever it was they'd start opening up on us and we'd be back in our holes.

**Eleven O clock they'd let you get out?**

I think it was eleven to twelve.

**Every day.**

Every night.

**So it was in the night time, was this? Oh that's really strange. So who agreed on this?**

I don't know how it happened. They reckon

19:00 with all the telephone lines that were lying about some Australian got hooked up and a German could speak English and they had a bit of a chat and they thought it would be a good idea.

**Unbelievable isn't it?**

Yeah.

**Did that feel strange to you at the time? You thought that you were fighting against the enemy and here you are resting.**

We enjoyed it so much. We thought it was great.

19:30 **Did you feel that you'd get shot at?**

Oh no. They wouldn't break the truce. You see that's the difference. You couldn't do it with the Japanese. No way known.

**So you said also before, there was a battle where you attacked a Japanese bunker position and lost about eleven friends from your company.**

Oh, Yeah. I've got all their names somewhere. There were twelve.

20:00 One died of wounds afterwards and there were twenty-three wounded.

**So that's a pretty heavy engagement.**

That was just near Sattelberg. That was in the Finschhafen campaign.

**Ok that was later.**

Yeah.

**We'll stick to Lae for now. Going through Lae what were the other battles that you haven't spoken about yet.**

The various rivers. I can't think of their names. Butibum, Buso, you know,

20:30 Song I think. I think they were some of the rivers we had to cross. Some were pretty wide and some flowed pretty fiercely.

**How did you cross the big ones?**

Well it took us a while to work out but eventually our company got across. I had a mate called Bill Gammel. He was a Victorian champion swimmer, and I'd done a lot of swimming

21:00 but the clue we got. Although I wouldn't say we invented how to cross rivers by any means. Well there was a little native village and it was still occupied and they got caught in between us and the Japanese. I don't know why because we always cleared them out first. But we had to get them out before we advanced and Bill Gammel and I

21:30 went down to the bank of this river. I don't remember the name of it and it was flowing very fast, and watched them go across. Now the natives would put bundles and piccaninnies on top of their head and they'd just go into the flow and paddle and they'd finish up about a mile

22:00 down on the other side but they got across without any casualties so we started to do that. But when we were going with a lot of ammunition and rifles and all that you couldn't do it.

**Well you could drown, couldn't you?**

So we used to strip down to minimum and Bill and I would take a line across and put the rope across and attach it to a tree and that would help these fellows too. A lot of them couldn't swim of course.

22:30 **A lot of the Aussie troops couldn't swim?**

Oh no.

**So how were the natives looked at? Were any of them ever forced to help?**

They were never forced to help but they did help. They were a great help at times. They used to get paid for carrying. Bringing up ammunition and stores and that sort of thing and then you had the other fellows who used to take out the wounded. They were very good.

**Have you**

23:00 **seen any natives being treated badly by Australian troops?**

No.

**Never. So they were like, very much like the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels, although that's more like the Kokoda Campaign.**

Yes. We still had these boys. They took out a mate of mine, once. Four of them. Six hour trek down the track to get him back to hospital.

**So when**

23:30 **the natives helped a lot in the Lae campaign.**

Yes.

**And Finschhafen.**

No. We didn't have it so much there. We had Indonesians there. They used to help of course. It was a Dutch possession.

**Were the Dutch helping your operations?**

Well they were mainly in the oil fields looking after the oil.

**Where was that?**

24:00 Tarakan.

**So that was much later.**

Later on.

**But not in the New Guinea campaign of course?**

Not in the New Guinea campaign. No.

**Did you ever come across a unit called the Papuan Infantry Battalion, the PIB.**

Yes. I never fought with them but I saw some of their personnel and they did very well. And a lot of the planters. You know, coconut plantations.

**In New Guinea?**

In New Guinea. They were very helpful.

**Were any of them of German descent?**

Could have been.

24:30 I don't know. The chap, or the captain of the US ship I went to Tarakan on. He was of German descent. He was in the German Navy in the First World War.

**How did that make you feel?**

He was a good fellow. He told me he was fifteen when he was in the German Navy.

**I see.**

He was a good skipper

25:00 too.

**Another thing also is that you were talking about planters. Were they very useful?**

You know, they knew all the tracks from A to B and all that sort of thing and climatic conditions. You know. O lots of stuff you had... You see we were up high, covered in cloud. You couldn't see. You know.

**So you**

25:30 **were going progressively up hill.**

Oh Yeah. It was deep and mountainous country. Down into gorges and up again. You know. While it might be only say a mile from here to there you do about three miles by virtue of the terrain.

**So what was the difference between your experience of Tobruk and New Guinea?**

Chalk and cheese.

26:00 Tobruk was flat. You could see almost as far as the horizon. And New Guinea, in the jungle, you couldn't see more than three or four feet at times. Not that.

**So what did you dislike about Tobruk and what did you dislike about New Guinea?**

Tobruk was I think the discomfort and the food. It was the heavy fight.

26:30 They had pretty heavy sorts of armaments, both sides as compared with New Guinea where you are constantly wet. Boots used to rot off in about six or seven weeks because you were constantly in water. You'd sleep in water at night time and generally the conditions were frightful and

27:00 it was a nervous sort of a war. You couldn't just stroll somewhere or walk somewhere. You had to creep or crawl cautiously all the time because the jungle screened everything. Then we had disease like malaria and dengue fever and scrub typhus.

**What's scrub typhus?**

27:30 That's the bite of a mite. That can kill you and it effects your brain really like MT [Malignant Tertian] malaria which had a similar effect. Then you could get disease from the water. And then there was cholera, which is a frightful disease. So I'd sooner be in the desert I think.

28:00 **Did you find it very difficult to adjust?**

Not after the training we got.

**At the Atherton Tablelands.**

Queensland. It wasn't as bad as New Guinea but similar.

**So the real things worse.**

Absolutely. And the terrains worse too. Mountainous.

28:30 In those days there was no civilization of any sort really. Except the natives. They'd have, you know, a little garden in the mountains and the food was hard to come by and you had to carry everything. And even water. We used to get short of water and it rained every day nearly.

29:00 It was a big problem to supply troops.

**So with the Lae campaign, was there a big battle for Lae, the town?**

No. As you might say it fizzled out. This chap and I, I was telling you about, we went down the river and we were pretty near the outskirts of Lae

29:30 and it had been bombed out. Our air force had decimated Lae and it was a very nice town, I think, before we hopped into it like that. And they buried a lot of Japs who were in their fortifications when they bombed this spur what went alongside the aerodrome and they must have got a lot

30:00 because they put the airstrip out of action and by this time they'd pretty near got the Japs on the run so they'd left Lae and it was almost undefended. But we had a frightful job there. We were cleaning it up. Burying Japs. That's a frightful job.

**They were dead already when you walked in there?**

Yeah.

30:30 **What's it like to see all these dead bodies?**

It's dreadful. There the sort of things that put you off life, you know. Horrible. I had an experience, when we got into Lae, after we forced them out. There were several pockets of resistance, you know. There were battles here, battles there, up to fifty or sixty

31:00 at a time. Those sort of things but we didn't strike very much except just outside Lae. We got a few there. And we walked into Lae. We weren't the first there. Bruce Ruxton's crowd got in before us,

31:30 so there was some rivalry there. Anyway we were left to clean it up and it wasn't very nice at all. While we were there a little plane landed on the strip. Of course it had all been bombed out but they patched it up a bit. Not much bigger than a model plane but out popped this little American colonel

32:00 and major and he was after some gun sights. Well while we were approaching Lae we were being shelled by these huge guns. They had a range of about twelve miles. We couldn't work this out. They were pretty accurate. Anyway we captured the guns and one of the fellows got these big sights. They were like a big telescope.

32:30 That's what he was after. They must have heard about this. I don't know what my blokes going to do to carry them around for the rest of the campaign. That would have been hopeless but they were great souvenir hunters the Australians.

**So what kinds of souvenirs did they take?**

All sorts of things. Watches if they could get them. They would prize watches, you know,

33:00 from the dead or anything with value. Those gun sights. I'll never know but they were probably why these guns were so accurate. And they were naval guns, twelve inch guns and the Japs had brought them ashore and put them in big emplacements. All their great emplacements were as big as this room. Anyway

33:30 the colonel got his gun sights and he said "How are you fellows going?" I said we were out of cigarettes. And that was a dreadful crime because we were all starting to eat one another. We all smoked all the time. And I remember these words and he said,said, "Don't your fellows look after you blokes. It's a disgrace." And I remember he went to

34:00 the stores and he brought back this great stack of Camel. You know, have you seen in the cartons. "There you are." he said. We were as happy as sand boys then. So we couldn't bury the Japs then and there was lots of petrol on the drome so we rolled down all these forty-four gallon drums and pulled the bungs out of them. They were in huts and underneath,

34:30 we rolled all these drums in and dipped a rag in the fuel and lit it and gave them a funeral pyre. That's the best we could do for them. You know, you feel sorry for dead people, no matter what they've done. You can't be bitter

35:00 all the time.

**Were there any other Australian soldiers, you remember, who were very upset about killing the Japanese. Just by their nature?**

No. They were all. We never liked them ever.

**I've come across other accounts from other veterans that Japanese POWs were treated pretty roughly after their capture.**

35:30 **Can you tell me anything about that? Can you tell me anything to shed light?**

No. They were treated alright I think. As far as I know. Out at Cowra they had an escape. They broke

out. I don't know what that was over.

**What about in New Guinea? Were they**

36:00 **treated badly when they were captured?**

No.

**Do you remember Japanese POWs being beaten by Australian troops?**

No.

**You've never seen it?**

No.

**Have you ever heard anything?**

Nup. I'll give you an idea what happened to them as far as I know. I went up to this forward company one day. I had a Jeep. I don't know why I went up there. I had to take something up there or something and they gave me a Jeep

36:30 to go up the road as far as I could and when I was up there they gave me this Jap prisoner to take back, you know. And they, jokingly someone gave me a stick and they said, "Whack him over the head if he gives you any trouble." Anyway, this fellow, by that time we had a lot of equipment and all that sort of thing, and his eyes popped out of his head

37:00 because he'd come up with his own crowd, been up there for months. Anyway I took him back to what we called the cage. That's back behind headquarters, you know, right away from the fighting. It was just a temporary enclosure and a Japanese interpreter had a go at him and they found out

37:30 all they could from him. And I remember the chap in charge of the cage; I think he was a sergeant. He came out with this great big red cake of soap. Like laundry type soap and a towel and he handed it to him. Well you should have seen the look on this chap's face. He probably hadn't had a bath because they were naturally clean people. It was hard to realise the state they left their camps in when they cleared out. It was a disgusting state.

38:00 But you should have seen his face. The shower he had. You couldn't see him for froth. So that's the way he was treated. You couldn't say he was treated badly.

**Their positions when you occupied them were filthy. What did you mean by that?**

Oh they didn't have a proper latrine area or all that sort of thing

38:30 they just tipped everything on the ground. Horrible. Outstandingly dirty.

**Why did you think these soldiers lost the Lae campaign against the Australian soldiers? What do you think as a corporal?**

I think we were better

39:00 than them actually in the finish. Mind you it took a bit of learning. We had to learn too. Having in mind they'd been there for a long, long time. Years. They had all there tracks. They had all their positions dug. They had it all worked out. It was very difficult to get them out of their positions.

**Did you think they fought well? Were they brave?**

Yes

39:30 No doubt about that. They were no pushover.

**I might call it here**

39:43 **End of tape**

## Tape 5

00:34 **Now, with the Jungle warfare, what was it like to be. Put it this way I've heard that insects were one of the biggest curses in jungle warfare. It's a very hard kind of warfare. Probably one of the toughest. I've heard stories where trees**

01:00 **falling in monsoon weather caused quite a stir in casualties. What can you tell me about the environment? What is it about the jungle that makes things difficult?**

Well, it's oppressive. It's a steamy climate for a start. Everything is damp or wet, you know, and after a



few

01:30 days the tracks become terribly sloppy, full of water, muddy, slippery. It rains and you get sopping wet. Your feet are always wet no matter where you go. You go through the jungle and sometimes you have to hack your way through it, because there are no tracks, and these mites get in wherever you perspire. In your belt.

02:00 You have got to have sleeves down and long trousers to keep you away from mosquitos, which will give you malaria. These mites. They bite. They are the ones that carry the typhus. They are terribly annoying. All those sort of things.

**Those mites. How did you....**

Well they had some secret

02:30 and it was secret. It was just a plain bottle about the size of a water bottle, and it was called mosquito repellent, I think, from memory. And that stuff you used to slop all over yourself and it was good but you had to renew it about every two or three hours. And that's about

03:00 all the protection we had. And of course you would put it on your face and ears. But you couldn't prevent the mosquitos biting you. They would bite through your clothes.

**What about leeches?**

Leeches. You used to burn them off with a cigarette. They used to shrivel up and pull off. If you got enough of them they'd start to make you feel a bit weak. You'd be losing enough

03:30 blood if you had a lot of them. They'd just pop on you and you'd be walking along and they'd be on the ground. And all manner of things like that. And that makes it so uncomfortable to be in. You never feel just right. And of course at night time it's difficult to sleep. You might be in water or

04:00 you'd go to sleep and water would be flowing over your legs by the time you'd wake up or it would wake you up. That sort of thing used to happen. And all the time you're not perspiring you are absolutely sweating and losing liquid that way. It becomes a problem.

**Were there other wildlife you came across in the Jungle?**

04:30 Not a great deal. Monkeys. They used to give our position away a lot.

**Oh really. Monkeys. How did that happen?**

They used to swarm through the trees, great colonies of them, and chatter, you know, and of course if you disturbed them the Japs would know you were there. You know, creeping along trying to observe complete silence.

05:00 And some birds. All types of birds. I can't remember what they were now.

**So when they saw your troops they'd make a noise.**

They'd fly up into a tree or something and they'd give our position away. It was hard to avoid.

**So, tell us about an instance where that took place. Where a monkey or a bird caused your position to be given away and as a result**

05:30 **you got into a fire fight with the Japanese.**

There was one day we were going along this track and we came around a corner and the point scout, he was a chap named Mick. I'd been with him nearly all the time and we were very close. He came back and he said, said, "I'm not going any further." He said, said, "I

06:00 don't know about those so and so nips but." What did he call them? "Gorillas" I think. "So what's the matter with you? Have you gone crazy or something?" he said, said, "Come and have a look" and we went round the corner and here's a big chimpanzee. They weren't chimpanzees but they were nasty. I don't know what they were called.

06:30 They were a big monkey. They sat in the middle of the track looking at one another for about a minute. Anyway after this we went on and that gave our position away because we got attacked. Anyway, we overcame them. They shot through, as we called it. I don't know whether we killed any of them but they certainly didn't kill any of our fellows. I don't know

07:00 whether they trained the monkeys to do that or not. We shot the monkey anyway, which was dreadful.

**Did you have to do that a few times?**

No. We had one that we couldn't get and that was a pet and we struck it in a village somewhere. It was on a chain and some good-hearted fellow filed the chain and let it go.

07:30 It got madder and madder as people had shots at it again and again. There were bits out of it where

people had shot it. Anyway it was a real bugger. It would race up and bite people. But we had one in Tobruk, that reminds me, and it used to come round on the water cart.

08:00 We had two or three of them. They were called Furphies. They were manufactured in Maryborough in Victoria and Furphies was the manufacturer and in the First World War a 'furphy' was something someone said when they said we were going home next week. It wasn't a furphy until it was proved. And in Tobruk it wasn't a furphy water cart,

08:30 it was a big tank but carrying around water when we weren't on the front line. But on it was this monkey; this chap that drove the water cart had made a pet of. It's got nothing to do with New Guinea; it's got to do with monkeys you see. Its hearing was so good; it could hear German planes before we could. It would start jumping up and down, getting really agitated.

09:00 We knew what to expect and we'd hop into our holes. But we weren't allowed to bring him home. We left him in Tel Aviv Zoo. But that was monkeys. Then of course we struck them again at New Guinea.

#### **What about birds? You said birds**

There were some lovely looking birds. There was a little bird, a kingfisher; well he was like a kookaburra, a miniature

09:31 kookaburra. But he didn't laugh like a kookaburra. We missed that. Then they had some pythons but they were harmless. I think they were bigger in Queensland, the pythons. You could see them in the trees along a branch. They could be ten or twelve feet long some of them. But I can't remember anyone ever being bitten by one.

10:00 Crocodiles we struck, only once. Just near the end of the New Guinea campaign at a place called Sio. Way up in New Guinea and we had a four day camp and we camped out there in tents.

10:30 The whole company went out and we had all the equipment out. We had a wireless which only worked once. A great big set that two boys carried on a pole. They were crude sorts of things in those days. And mainly didn't work because the battery is always flat, you know. There were crocodile around there

11:00 somewhere because we saw there tracks the next morning but we never saw one. But they came in amongst the tents I think. Probably looking for food or so they said. Probably crocodile tracks, you know.

#### **Just while we are on the topic of wildlife. What about in Tobruk? Did you ever find anything? I suppose it would be difficult to come across something there.**

Nothing much there except

11:30 the monkey and the little rats of course. There were rats there, real rats.

#### **So how big are these rats?**

Just little ones. They had a short tail, not a long tail like the domestic rats. They were quite clean little things really. They used to nibble our ears at night. There were a few donkeys.

12:00 **But that was for the transport?**

I think they had probably gone feral. They had probably got away from their owners, I suppose, earlier on.

#### **Were they ever shot at?**

No. I don't think so. I think I only saw them once.

#### **Just near the front line.**

Yeah. They just ran across. One day they thought they were being attacked by tanks or something,

12:30 I wasn't in that particular position but they said they were being attacked and they looked out and they were donkeys. But that's the only thing I ever heard of them. I don't think there was much there. There was nothing much to live on, of course, being desert. Only little creatures, I suppose. Scorpions.

13:00 One or two bites there in Tobruk but no, the Jungle was quite different. Where you had an extremely dry climate and went into a wet, dank, horrible climate.

#### **So the enemy could be in a few yards of you?**

Yeah. In fact one of our fellows was on the trail one day

13:30 and some Japs came down the track and he lay flat on the ground and a fellow walked over him. He didn't see him because we had a sort of camouflage uniform but he lay quite still. I suppose the Jap was looking somewhere else. I suppose he unconsciously or subconsciously stepped over him.

14:00 Funny things like that happened but they weren't funny. Because he couldn't have done anything. This

fellow could have shot him before he got up. So that would give you some idea what it was like.

**So what about after Lae? What was the next offensive action you were involved in?**

Finschhafen.

**Finschhafen?**

14:30 **Tell us about that. You did another amphibious assault?**

Yes. The other brigade. The 24th Brigade did that but. And we came up afterwards with their stores and so forth.

**So you didn't go across land on the coast?**

We did afterwards. Because we came up after they got ashore. They struck some opposition there.

**Which units were these?**

15:00 **Not the 2/23rd?**

No. We were 23rd, 24th and 28th [actually the 26th Brigade comprised 2/23rd, 2/24th, and 2/48th Battalions].

**So they did an amphibious assault similar to what you did at Lae. So where did you come into it?**

I think a day or two later and we unloaded all the stores onto the beach, naturally.

15:30 Then we went up by barge. No we got more stores and ammunition and then we took over.

**So you were the reserves?**

Yes, the reserves. Finally we took over from them

16:00 and carried on the campaign there.

**So what do you recall from there?**

That was probably the worst experience I had in that battle. When all those chaps were killed and wounded in such a short time. That was real slaughter.

**So that was Sattelberg or Finschhafen?**

Finschhafen was the campaign and Sattelberg was part of it. That was the highest point, Sattelberg. It was a mountain.

16:30 **Finschhafen was a town of course. A coastal town.**

Yes.

**So that had been taken fairly easily.**

That had been taken fairly easily, yes.

**Was there heavy fighting to take that?**

Reasonably heavy, yes. But the other brigade took it and they occupied it and then the Yanks came in. They operated all the coastal stuff, the barges, you know.

**Who did?**

The Americans

17:00 They were a coastal command I think. You know they ferried stores from ships to shore. You know, all that sort of thing. And they operated the LSTs we went up on so that they formed part of the landing.

**What's an LST? I'm sorry.**

Landing ship tank. They were about three thousand or four thousand tons.

17:30 **They'd land?**

They had two big doors that opened up in the front. They'd be full of tanks down below and troops up on the deck. Wherever they could get really.

**Pretty big ships then?**

Fairly big, yes.

**And how did they come into the shore line?**

They'd belt right in onto the beach.

**And they'd open up like that?**

Yeah, and then they had a big steel platform

18:00 that went out and covered my water that they mightn't have been able to get up on. The tanks could roll off and then all the stores, ammunition and stuff they carried. They were

18:30 pretty good those LSTs. They were the biggest craft short of naval ships.

**I see. So now Finschhafen is taken. Tell me about the lead up to Sattelberg.**

Well we were going up the...several companies in the [2/] 23rd. Finally we took over. We were engaged

19:00 in battle and then we took a couple of villages on the way and prior to taking Sattelberg this, it was bigger than a patrol, this company of sixty men.

19:30 We were all hand picked to do this attack. The idea being to engage them. Because they were down all the way on the flat going right up to Sattelberg, which was the high feature. The idea of this attack was to get round behind these particular positions, which were beside a road which went straight up to Sattelberg and clean them out.

20:00 This would leave the way clear for the rest of the brigade to come in and take the rest of Sattelberg proper, which is a township on the mountain. But we had to go out a fair way and we got round behind them alright. There was a track running through. Which

20:30 we knew about and we had that for guidance. Which helps a lot in jungle warfare because you can get lost in direction because you can't see the sky. You can't get any bearings on anything. Except if you use a compass. That's all you can use. But this track. We could go along and follow the track up. This is fate. The going was quiet. They don't even know we're there. We are all getting into position

21:00 to attack them and two of their cooks, you wouldn't read about this, came down the track with a couple of dixies of rice or something and they saw one of our fellows and they give out a great yell. I know that fellow was killed shortly after this. He shot them and of course, then they knew we were there.

21:30 They met us with everything. Machine gun fire, rifle fire, grenades. We just couldn't move. We couldn't get forward. So I remember the first thing that happened. As we were going up, we were just starting off, and one of my chaps actually, said "Gee there's a bloke badly

22:00 injured." To this day I don't know his name and he'd been shot just there and it split his head right open and I thought: "This bloke's gone." I'd never herd of this from that day to this. The night before the doctor called all the NCOs. Issued us with a steel case and in it was a syringe and about two or three

22:30 files of morphia. I mean it would be worth a fortune today, if, you know. He explained how to give an injection and I thought this was strange. I was a sticky beak and I said,said, "About how much?" And he said "About half of the phial."

23:00 He said,said, "Oh God, don't give them too much, you'll kill them, you see." I thought this was another something to worry about. I didn't think I'd ever use this but I saw this fellow and I thought I'll do something for him and I filled this syringe up and gave him a dose of morphine. Anyway it must have saved his life because his skull was fractured and bleeding

23:30 badly but apparently the morphine settled him down. They told me afterwards. And that's the first and only time I've ever given anybody an injection. You're not supposed to do this, you know, you're not supposed to stop. I thought these fellows are going down all around me so I got down behind this log with this fellow, the captain

24:00 in charge of the whole set-up and he said "What do you think?" And I said,said, "We're gone." And one of the rules of an attack like this is if you are held up like this and you can't get through you get out because you are only going to suffer casualty after casualty. We tried them on the left flank and they lost more men and we tried them on the right but we couldn't get up the front and I remember

24:30 a mate of mine stood up. He must have got hit in the shoulder and I can remember saying "Get down. Get down." With that he got a burst in the chest. And a few yards away and he fell all over me and oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. It was a terrible day that day. Anyway, I'd seen this in films and I'd never believed it until the day they went ...with all the

25:00 bullets and they were chipping bits off this log and I was getting lower and lower. They'd have another go but we had to pull out in the finish. We left one chap. He was in a bad way. We couldn't get him and they wouldn't let us go after him anyway. We finally filtered out and got back to our

25:30 battalion headquarters and then we sorted it out and we lost twelve and twenty-four wounded.

**How many of them were close friends of yours?**

Most of them. They were in Tobruk and Alamein and right through the Middle East and Lae, you know.

One of them was

26:00 decorated, a chap called Dunn. He got a military medal at El Alamein. And another chap, Carlson, he was an amazing photographer. We weren't allowed to have cameras but he had one. He had a Zikon you know, a German camera. Beautiful camera. He took some amazing photos and we thought they'll be wonderful after the war and not one of them came out. Not one.

26:30 He had reels of film. I don't know whether there was something wrong with the camera or whether they had put it through an X ray machine sometime or what. But that would have shown up war at its worst. Because he was such a wild...He got killed but we were able to get his camera.

**What's sort of photos did he take?**

Well if it was an air battle they'd be up dropping bombs and he'd catch

27:00 the bombs coming down in the air. He'd pop up and see the enemy machine guns firing at you. All that sort of thing. The sergeant. He went. I knew them all personally, you know. Very good mates. That was the worst day I struck.

27:30 **Was that the worst day you had in the entire war?**

I think so.

**Because you lost so many mates in one battle?**

Yeah. I think it was an ill planned attack. I blame the colonel. I have a lot of trouble with that. I used to argue with him and I reckon that was crazy.

**That attack.**

Oh Yeah. Because they knew we were coming.

28:00 **So what was the difficulty with attacking this position?**

They were all dug in. They'd been there eighteen months.

**By dug in are we talking concrete bunkers?**

Yeah. Concrete at times but if not great logs, you know. They were covered over with earth and just slits. And there were machine guns and one firing one way and one firing that way

28:30 and they'd be crossing and all sorts of things. Right in the ground.

**How did they have such an accurate field of fire?**

They'd cut the trees away but it had been done so long ago that ...to see it like that as a stranger. You just couldn't pick them out until you were right on them, you see.

**How far were they from your forward position?**

They were only a matter of two or three yards. One that was trying to get to me was

29:00 from there to that lamp. I couldn't get any closer to it.

**And where were you?**

Down behind this log.

**Were they like a couple of metres away?**

That's all. Two or three, four. Then of course they went back in depth. There'd be one there, one there and one behind and they'd all cover one another.

**So what sort of weaponry would you use in this sort of attack?**

We only had

29:30 rifles. I don't know whether we had an Owen gun then. We had Thompson machine guns. They were those old American gangster type things.

**Were they good?**

Yes. But they used to foul up though. They weren't built for war and that sort of thing. They used to get fouled up with sand and they were hard to get clean.

30:00 And they had a habit of cocking upwards like that when they were fired. You had to keep the nose down. But they were a good gun when you got used to them.

**What about the Owen gun. What was that like in combat?**

Great.

**Excellent was it.**

Light yes. Like a pea shooter to feel and very, very touchy. They were inclined to go off but they were great for a close war.

30:30 But if you got fifty or a hundred yards away they weren't very effective then. I don't think we had Owen guns that day.

**What about Bren guns? What are they like in jungle combat?**

They're good. Some of those rifles I always reckoned were awkward.

31:00 You have got to be careful with them and yet we were so proficient with them I suppose they were as good as anything. But the shorter automatic weapons were a question of ammunition. You've got to feed them. The rifles only fired one shot at a time. And, you know, your ammunition lasted longer but with these automatic things you'd have,

31:30 carry much more ammunition because you'd fire quite a few in one burst.

**So what sort of weapons did the Japanese use?**

Mostly rifles and they had machine guns like ours. They had a heavy gun like a Vickers gun which was mounted on a tripod. Bit too heavy to carry and fire, although it could be done.

32:00 They had the lighter one. I think it was called a Juki. I'm not sure of the names now.

**Did you ever use captured Japanese weaponry?**

No. I can't remember using it. They used ours though. They used stuff against us they'd picked up in Malaysia {Malaya}. You know, when the 8th Division went off. A lot of that equipment. I remember one attack we did.

32:30 We were in positions and the section on our right. They had a Vickers gun. And they got over run. We didn't know that. The fellow with the Vickers took the lock out. That's the mechanism that does all the reloading and

33:00 extracting the spent cases as the bullets fired. He took that out thinking the gun was useless without that and they were firing back at us within half an hour because they're lock, as we called it, in their machine gun fitted the Lewis.

**So the firing pin is it?**

Yes all that Mechanism. It comes out in what they called a lock. They just slipped one of theirs into it and turned

33:30 it around and

**Where was this?**

Up in a village somewhere.

**So this battle at Sattelberg. I can't possibly. I've never had the experience and I can't imagine what it would feel like to see your friends get killed in front of you. How would you describe that? I mean in your own personal terms.**

Very dejected.

34:00 for days afterwards. To lose so many all at once is unusual. You'd lose one now and again perhaps. And if you were like me, lucky, you'd go right through without being wounded or killed. But to lose so many in such a short time. It was devastating. Anyway, they never

34:30 let up. While you're standing you've got to get going. We filtered back in ones and twos. We got out of it alright, which was good. Then we had this chap singing out at night time and we wanted to go out and get him and the colonel wouldn't let us.

**Was this one of your chaps who was injured?**

Yeah. Chap named Lance Horum.

**When you say singing out what do you mean?**

He was singing out for water

35:00 but he was singing out in Italian. We thought that's no Japanese round here, who'd yell out in Italian? They didn't think he was dead and they bashed him with a rifle and they had stuck bayonets in him. He was badly wounded. Anyhow, the next morning we went out and got him. So he lost his leg. They had to take

35:30 that. But we got him because of this Aqua. He was singing out "Aqua, Aqua." That's water in Italian you

see. That's how we knew he was still alive.

**So this friend of yours, did he have an Italian background at all or was he just Aussie?**

No, no Aussie.

**He was in Tobruk was he?**

Yeah. But he lost his leg.

**So what happened after Sattelberg?**

36:00 **What was the next stop then?**

Then we went on villages. There was I think oh I can't remember the names. Some were not occupied and some were occupied by Japanese, perhaps. The Twenty-fourth did an attack. Up the track and they struck the Jap

36:30 and a whole section was killed. A corporal and eight men.

**The Aussies lost a whole section.**

Yes, the 2/24th Battalion. They were going round this bend and they went round the bend. I don't know why they'd go without having a bit of a look but they were surprised and ambushed and all shot. The captain went up. A chap called McNamara. He came from Wangaratta.

37:00 and they shot him and we had to race up and take over and get these Jap but it got dark before we could get them. They were in this village. Anyway we got the mortars up and we mortared it all until it got dark and then we went in to attack them the next morning and they'd all gone. They retreated.

37:30 **Did you engage in any combat at night? In the jungle?**

Very little. Our attacks weren't very successful.

**At night?**

You see we didn't know where we were. They could walk about because they had been there for years. It makes a big difference when you know where you are.

**Did they do night attacks on you?**

No. They tried a few times but they didn't get very far. Our blokes were pretty good at defending positions.

38:00 They used to booby trap at the front and all that sort of thing. You know, they'd walk into a wire and often it would explode a grenade. So it went on like that. Thrust and parry all the time. And eventually we winkled them out as we used to say.

**So with Sattelberg, after that battle you were describing**

38:30 **where you lost your mates. Were you involved in another thrust to take the town of Sattelberg?**

No.

**You weren't.**

We didn't actually go up into Sattelberg. We scouted around and went on. The [2/] 48th Battalion took Sattelberg but I don't think there was anyone there when they took it.

**The 48th Battalion?**

Yeah. That was our sister battalion. The 23rd, 24th, 48th, that was our brigade.

39:00 **How long did you actually stay after Sattelberg? Which battles were you actually involve in and which campaigns?**

No major battles. A lot of patrolling and you'd strike enemy numbering five up to twenty perhaps. They were retreating all the time.

39:30 Until we got up. I can't remember the name of the place but they sent us on a four day patrol. It was called Sio. It was up on the coast of New Guinea and that was the last campaign we had in New Guinea.

**Where was that?**

It was right north of the coast.

**When you say north of the coast, do you mean north of Finschhafen?**

40:00 **Lae, Finschhafen and up further would be Sio.**

**This is well before Wewak?**

It is further up.

**Past Wewak.**

Yes.

**Is it past Hollandia as well?**

This side of Hollandia, yes.

**So between Wewak and Hollandia.**

40:30 If I've got it right. Yes.

**So you weren't involved in Wewak or Aitape?**

No

**So how big was the campaign in Sao, which you were involved in?**

It was a big patrol the battalion didn't do it. The whole company.

**Which company were you in again?**

B Company. Plus we had native carriers.

41:00 We had a big wireless which didn't work. Yes, it worked once. Anyway, we didn't strike any Japs at all. They had all gone. I don't know where.

**We might break for now.**

41:19 **End of tape**

## Tape 6

00:33 **Alright, so Keith, we were talking before about your next engagement in Sio.**

We didn't actually get to Sio. It was a patrol, because we didn't strike any Japanese and there was no sign of them by then.

01:00 Why I say I think they did it, well you wouldn't read about this but the radio operated the patrol and they requested my return to battalion headquarters. Well, it was a two day march almost. So that was alright.

01:30 So they sent me a chap with a broken arm. He'd fallen over and broken his arm. Another chap with malaria. He had a temperature of 112 or something and two native carriers and a two inch mortar which is particularly heavy. Why they gave me that two inch mortar I'll never know. They just wanted to get rid of it, you see. Well my instructions were

02:00 to go back to battalion headquarters. I had to report back. At that stage I didn't know why. Anyway they said, said, "If you get lost the boys will take you home." So we go up, we're following this trail. We go about three thousand feet down on this track into this,

02:30 well it was more than a gully, ravine with a bit of a stream at the bottom which was quite full. Anyway we got over that. I couldn't see anything on the other side of this stream so I thought oh God we're lost. So it was no good staying down there. I thought we've got to get up high somewhere. So we struggled up again and it took about two hours to get to the top.

03:00 And they left the two inch mortar down in the sand. And I thought: "I'm not going to get court martialled about losing government property." because they were very strict about things like that. So then I had to bargain with the two boys. I wasn't going down to get it and the other two weren't capable. So I bribed

03:30 the two boys with tobacco, all the tobacco I had, and cigarettes to go down and get this mortar and come back. We went up onto the high ground. It was very picturesque. It looked out over the sea. It was very beautiful really. We had time to admire the beauty and we wandered along and by instinct, by this time we used instinct to get around.

04:00 Of course we weren't in jungle. We were up on the high ground. And then I struck a track and it seemed to be going in the right direction and I kept on that, kept walking along, and arrived back in the battalion. So I was lucky but I was lost, absolutely.

**So you faced no engagement in this?**



No.

**Nothing at all?**

And the reason I went back to battalion headquarters was I went to a school.

04:30 We were always doing schools or extensive training in something. This one was in aerial photograph interpretation. It seems like a long word but it was in interpreting aerial photos. That is identifying enemy positions, streams, tracks, you know.

05:00 It was an interesting school because part of the school was to go up in these Lightnings, which was a very fast American fighter aircraft really, the Lightnings and they were equipped for photography, some of them. And we actually took photographs for ourselves. I never got to that stage because, I think I mentioned before, we had to take Atebrin twice a day.

05:30 That suppressed the malaria. So I thought I think I'll find out whether I've got malaria at the school so I stopped taking the Atebrin and that lasted about five days. I was absolutely brown in the eyes. You know, the whites of my eyes were brown, which was the Atebrin business and I went to hospital then. So that finished that campaign

06:00 I was in the hospital for some time. Well a field hospital, not a proper hospital.

**Where were you stationed at this field hospital?**

This was at Moresby, where the school was.

**Were you happy to be in a town and away from it?**

Yeah.

**You developed a key knack to get out of conflict situations.**

Yeah.

**Did you feel exhausted after being in the conflict situations?**

Yeah.

06:30 pretty exhausted. But I remember in this class, they had different subjects. You had to get up and lecture, you know, which is a bit different than out in the field when you're fighting as an infanteer, coming out and doing a lecture, because there were two or three colonels in the course. There were quite a few officers and that and I had to give a lecture on these particular

07:00 guns at Lae. They were most interested in that, so I got through. And that involved a fair bit of maths. They got quite technical these interpretations. The fellow with the blackboard, he'd keep disappearing and I'd shake my head and it'd be alright.

07:30 Anyway, I reported sick. I couldn't stand it any longer and they said, "Oh no, you've got to go to hospital." I'd gone all yellow and they found I had jaundice; they called it, which was a way of covering up for hepatitis. You see, sometimes the army never admitted to certain things you had. You see the sole purpose

08:00 of it was to keep you on your feet and it, hepatitis had appeared on any report sheet any doctor would have said, "Oh no, he'll have to go out." You couldn't have hepatitis but you could have jaundice. I don't know why. I was in hospital for a while and then we went to a convalescent camp. In the meantime they'd pulled the battalion out from Sio, down to the coast

08:30 and they put them on ships and they went home on leave. Home to Australia for the second time. And when I'd finished with all the convalescing and all that they'd all gone and they were almost on their way back so I still got my leave and I came home and then we went back into Queensland after that to train again and that's when

09:00 Tarakan came up.

**So what was in your mind when you came home after another campaign?**

I felt lost.

**What do you mean by that?**

Strangely enough you seem to miss the company of your mates, and that. Everybody seemed to be different. They were all rations, you know and things they had to get

09:30 and I don't know.

**Did you think the civilian population was completely oblivious to what was happening?**

I think most of them were because censorship was terribly strict in those days. It was not like today where you've actually got a photo of something. Then if they didn't want the civilian population to know

about something they were never told.

10:00 It was all censored out of the newspapers and censored on the radio. Of course there was no television then. But I think they always thought we should be home fighting the Japs and now we were so they had to quieten down a bit. When we first got home from the Middle East I think they thought we had been on a holiday, a lot of them.

10:30 It was hard to get anyone to take it seriously but still they used to say that.

**What did you do on leave when you came here?**

Mostly collect and have a few beers with your mates.

**So your whole battalion got leave?**

Yes. But they were before me this time. When we came back from the Middle East the whole battalion were on leave.

**I mean after the Sio patrol?**

They went home on leave. I was still in hospital.

11:00 I followed them. So I was isolated and they'd all gone back by the time I got home. And I felt a bit lost. All your friends were either in the services or they'd moved or whatever.

**Did you want to go back to the front line?**

Not really. No.

11:30 **What about your friends? When you were having a beer with them you would have been talking about the war.**

Well they were mostly blokes from the unit.

**Did they want to go back?**

No. I think a few of them didn't go back. It soon caught up with them. They went AWL, you know. Absent without leave.

**Desertion?**

12:00 **No. You don't get charged with desertion unless you have been away a certain time. There are lots of rules and regulations about this. I don't know when you are classed as a deserter. You are charged with being absent without leave and I think on how many days you were absent depends on what sort of sentence you get.**

12:30 **It was tough too once you were sentenced.**

**So when you got back were you thinking of going AWOL as well?**

No. I knew too much about it. It was no good. They'd soon find you. Where do you hide, you know what I mean. No, it wasn't worthwhile anyway.

**So how did your other mates take the experience in combat?**

Oh various ways.

13:00 **Did some of them handle it very badly?**

I can't say very badly. Some of them were, they were affected badly.

**What do you mean by that?**

Well they had nervous conditions and that. They lost their will to keep going and that sort of thing. We had no counselling

13:30 like there is today. You were declared, we used to call it "bomb happy." You'd be declared that and you'd be put into hospital. A Repat [repatriation] or somewhere like that. I don't know that they got much help there so that there was no one you could talk it out with.

**So you had to bottle it up?**

You had to sort of block it up or let it out, you know.

14:00 **How would it be let out?**

You know. Drinking and that sort of thing. No wild women. But of course that very rarely happened in action. We didn't get, well we very rarely got an issue of alcohol of any sort.

**At the front are you talking?**

At the front. Never at the front.

**Did some people there sneak it in and drink at the front line?**

14:30 Only once did I ever see somebody having a bottle of beer at Alamein. I don't know where they got it from but I saw somebody sitting on the side of a trench drinking a bottle of beer. Where they got it I don't know. Of course when we were out of the line there was a ration. Especially in the Middle East. But New Guinea was difficult because it was too hard to handle bottles of beer. Too heavy.

15:00 **So how did you interact with your family when you came back?**

They were pleased to see me of course.

**Did you have problems trying to communicate to them after experiencing so much?**

No. Not really. I didn't talk much about a few odd things I'd been through but they were more concerned with my health, I think. You know. Having in mind that I'd been through some pretty

15:30 bad experiences but I think they were more worried about my health than anything.

**Have you told them some of the things you have told me about New Guinea?**

No. Not really. I don't remember telling them. My mother and father are both dead of course. I don't think I told my sister. She doesn't know much about it either. Bit inclined to shut up.

**Why's that?**

Forget about it. Didn't want to talk about it. Get away from it.

16:00 **Did they ever ask questions about things?**

Oh yes, of course. And you you'd have to answer sensibly if you were asked a question but I was never inclined to push it. Some fellows would. They were fond of telling a story or whatever.

**What were some of the most probing questions they would ask you?**

You know. What was it like? You know.

16:30 What were the conditions like? Did you kill any Germans or any Japs?

**So what would you say to them if they asked you?**

A few. Like my mate. He struck some young fellows on the train after it was over and they were carrying on a bit in the carriage and he told them to shut up, I think.

17:00 "What's wrong with you Grandpa?" you see. He wasn't that old but he had been an ex pro boxer and a good boxer too. And he said "I'll have you fellows on." he said. "When I was your age." he said. "I had two Germans on the end of my bayonet." He was telling me this story and I said, "What?"

17:30 He said, "You wouldn't read about it. Those kids said, 'They must have been light Germans Grandpa'. That broke me up. I burst out laughing and we got on well after that." He was a good bloke. That was a typical thing.

**With your soldier mates would you talk about your kills?**

No. no. We would try not to talk about that. We might have a discussion about

18:00 you know, that day. What went wrong and so forth. We always did that in any case after everything. Because it had to be recorded because it was all part of a plan and it was either a plan that succeeded or one that didn't succeed and it had to be known by everybody. Particularly the higher ups. I mean the Brigadier or the General.

18:30 They had to know what went wrong even if it was only a minor encounter because it could mean a lot to their overall plan. Something that you might consider just ordinary.

**So when you went to the pubs to have chats with your mates or whatever, what did you talk about? When you were on leave from PNG?**

You'd get back to the war a bit but mostly funny stories.

19:00 Strange enough you remember all the funny stuff and you forget all the grim things.

**So that was pretty much the case most of the time?**

For example we had a captain and he was quite a well trained soldier. He went through Duntroon. Now he reckoned we should use bow and arrows. Now he wasn't joking because he reckoned they'd be easy to use.

19:30 in the jungle, you know. We immediately christened him "Robin Hood" and after that he was known as

nothing else. And that was the sort of thing we'd be screaming with laughter about. Probably childish some of them but that relieved the tension. But you might, and then you'd reencounter whatever happened, you know. That went on a lot amongst friends.

20:00 Not with strangers very much.

**So what about at the front line. When you're not in battle, just lolling around, would you talk about serious stuff?**

No.

**Would you talk more about jokes on the front line than you would on leave?**

Yes, because you would be split up because you're not in a heap if you can understand. You're in two or threes.

20:30 You don't get into a collective type thing at all. So you've got a mate and you talk about all sorts of things. You know. Probably something to do with what you are going to do or what happened or what. You just sort of put your mind into neutral and think about nothing if you can.

**Is that what you tried to do?**

Yes. I became very good at it.

21:00 Hence the fact that you forget where you have been and all that. Incredible.

**So how did you and your mates deal with the absence of women?**

You just had to deal with it. The Atebrin didn't help. Well it did help actually.

**How?**

Well it suppressed everything apart from malaria. So much so that I think the AMA [Australian Medical Association] warned them

21:30 that if we continued taking it would really effect Australia as a nation because we'd all become impotent, I think.

**Can you tell me some examples of soldiers who found it very difficult to handle life without women?**

Yes. I can remember one. He used to, particularly over in Palestine,

22:00 jump camp and spend nights with his girlfriend in Tel Aviv or somewhere. He more or less couldn't do without them. So he said. And he was AWL so much that the colonel made an arrangement with him. This is quite unusual, quite unique I would say. He told him if

22:30 we ever moved, anywhere. It didn't matter where. Either into action or somewhere else. And if he wasn't there to move he was going to have him court martialled and he would have done years in gaol. And it wasn't just like gaol here. It was called the Glass House. It was a frightful place to get incarcerated. They were so strict.

23:00 They all had different instructors and gaolers and warders. They were pretty mean types.

**Where was this?**

In the Middle East.

**Is that for soldiers who were misbehaving?**

Yes. For whatever reason and they would have sentences from six weeks up to six years I suppose.

**Were there a lot of**

23:30 **soldiers there?**

I don't know how many were there. A couple of our fellows were there but only for short periods. Mostly for AWL. I must admit.

**I would like to get back to your chronology of events. Essentially to your leave in Australia. Then you said you went to the Atherton Tablelands to do more jungle training.**

Yes.

**Tell me more about what you did now. I mean you've already got some**

24:00 **experience in jungle campaigning. What new things did they teach you here?**

We came down to Cairns and we started training again with the amphibious landings. Quite intensively this time. We knew there was something going on because they had a ship in. I've forgotten the name of it now.

24:30 She'd been in Britain in the big campaign there. The landing at what's her name. I don't now how she came to Australia but we used to go out on the barges and get on this thing and come back again onto these barges and make shore landings. I can remember one day this barge went straight to the bottom.

25:00 It was full of fellows. We didn't have any casualties. They were inclined to do that.

**What? The barges?**

Well they weren't really barges. They were sort of tanks that could go on land or sea. And various types of craft like that. I don't know how they floated and neither does anybody else because they were all steel with tracks like a tank and this one went straight down. All these blokes

25:30 of course the, had all the equipment on them, ammunition and water bottle, bayonet and rifle. Anyway they grabbed them all. That was the sort of training. We had to get used to all that. That was the sort of training that led up to Tarakan. It was and afterthought I think, and we found out afterwards, we were going into Singapore.

26:00 **So Morotai was taken by then?**

Years before.

**What sort of tactical aspects did they emphasise in the Atherton Tablelands training in jungle warfare? You had learned a lot already. You obviously applied this to try and improve.**

You see you've got to remember that last time we went back to New Guinea,

26:30 there were only two hundred and twenty fellows left in the unit out of eight hundred.

**What? This is the New Guinea campaign?**

This is the second time.

**So you lost that many.**

That was after we came back from leave. For various reasons. So they had to be built by us. Now all those fellows who came in had to be trained again. Now all the old hands, like myself, had to get them trained, you see.

27:00 **What, to build unit cohesion?**

We had to start the whole business again. That's what it amounted to.

**So the unit was brought up to strength again? How long did that take?**

I just can't recall now. We only had Christmas at home twice I think.

27:30 It was early in 1944 I think. Because by about June and July we were pretty near up to strength. And then the training intensified and we had Christmas there. Then the Tarakan landing was made in 1945. So there was a

28:00 fair bit of training in Queensland and that was virtually to build the unit up to full strength again.

**So what was your impression of the war by this state? You took leave and then doing the retraining. Were you feeling the war was being long?**

Yes. The European war had finished sometime in 1944 I think.

**1945. Germany surrendered in 1945.**

28:30 Early forty-five. Yes, well there were signs that it was finishing up over there. And then we were concentrating on the Japanese. Why they did Tarakan, I could never understand.

**Why's that?**

I don't see what importance it had. It had an air strip on it which

29:00 had been bombed out and as it turned out they couldn't get it functional. It was supposed to be supporting the main landing of Borneo proper, which was only a few miles from the island of Tarakan. To put all those troops in and spend so much time and energy was, to my mind, a waste of

29:30 life and ammunition and everything. Because I think the Japs would have died out there because we'd cut off their supplies and they would have capitulated anyway, I think.

**Tell me about your battalion's attack on Tarakan. Did you do an amphibious assault?**

Yes. A real amphibious assault this time. Lae was done on bigger craft. These

30:00 were done from small craft coming out of the LSTs that anchored off with their fronts pointing away from the land and they'd open up and these ducks or whatever, would go into the water, come round,

form up and go into sure.

**So how far out at sea would these LSTs come out?**

I think they were about

30:30 a thousand yards off shore or something like that.

**So the actual tanks could float through the water. Where would the infantry be?**

They're not tanks really. There's a list of six or seven different things. There were landing craft, LCTs, they were landing craft tanks. They could take a big tank. There's landing craft infantry. They take infantry only and they are the bigger ones

31:00 we did the Lae show with. Then there were these things and I've forgotten what they were called. Anyway they were mechanized troop carriers. They would operate in water and on land. They had tracks. They had a propeller as well. They used to propel them to the beach and when they hit the beach they'd start on the tracks and off they'd go.

31:30 But they were quite open so that the personnel could jump out. They'd go in a line to the shore and land on the beach.

**So your unit was a part of the first major assault into Tarakan?**

Yes. It was only our brigade did this, not the whole division, the [2/] 23rd. The [2/] 24ths were on our right and the [2/] 48ths landed a bit further down

32:00 And we all sort of joined up in the attack afterwards.

**Was there Japanese defence at the beach?**

Yes. But it was destroyed by intensive bombing and shelling from the navy. This is the first time I had ever seen a rocket and they had these rocket launchers on the decks of the destroyers and they were going up and down.

32:30 A dozen of these. And they'd through them. Incredible sight to see a dozen of these going through the air, you know. They had a long tail like a miniature rocket that they send up to the moon. They had explosives on them. I'd never seen those before. But I didn't do the actual landing because I stayed on the ship because I had to bring all these stores ashore.

33:00 The colonel put me in charge. He said, "You've had enough infantry. You can't tempt your fate any longer." he said. Which was good of him, I thought. So I was left and that's where I met the commander of the LST we were on. We were sitting up on the rail watching it go ahead. A few shots fired at them but nothing much.

**What, the 2/23rd?**

Yeah.

33:30 Very lucky with the amphibious landings except at Lae. And they got ashore but the most courageous men were the engineers who went in before us. The day before. Went underneath and diffused all these mines they had laid in the approaches to the beach. They had all stakes stuck in the sand and all sorts of things. Barbed

34:00 wire underneath the water to stop people wading ashore. And they blew all this with explosives. I remember seeing one, of course it floated on oil, Tarakan. It was very rich oil. There was a big eight inch pipe that they had where they used to pump it up into tanks.

34:30 It was about three quarters of a mile long. This jetty with the pipe on it. Ships used to pull in and they used to pump this oil straight into their bunkers and use it for fuel without any refining. That's how good it was. I remember watching this engineer. He had been down clearing a few things before the wave

35:00 went in. You know, he attacking wave. And he was walking down this long jetty and he was covered in oil. Everything was covered in oil in Tarakan. It was so close, you see. You'd dig a hole about three or four feet and it would fill up with beautiful, what did they call it, Texas T, oil. And these pumps were going. Grotesque

35:30 Have you ever seen them, those big pumps? They were everywhere and they were working. They got them working quickly.

**Did the Japanese try to destroy them?**

Yes. But our bombing destroyed a lot of them. A wave of three liberators coming over every two minutes. And all those dropped five hundred pound bombs and thousand pound bombs. You wouldn't reckon

36:00 they'd live through that. I think it killed about twelve Japs or something. They all went through. And

then we had to wrinkle them out as we called it. That's what all the fighting was. Getting them out of these positions afterwards because all the oil tanks were destroyed.

**So where did the 2/23rd run into real...Did you go on land?**

Afterwards.

36:30 **After the landing.**

The next day. Yeah.

**What happened your first day there?**

Well there was a road ran up close to the sea. We christened it Anzac Highway. And it was mined and everything so the engineers came up and diffused the mines and we attacked. We were after the aerodrome, you see, so that planes could come in to land. That was the main objective.

37:00 B company went up to Tank Knoll, as this hill was called, with tanks on it. They got up there. There were a few Japs and they cleaned them out and they got up there. They got a good landing and the other landings were unopposed I think. So they got a good beach head

37:30 as we called it. Right off the beach, you know. Because I can remember this German LST. Well it wasn't German we called him American. "So, by God," he said. "I've never seen guys go up a beach so fast." "Where were you?" "Guadalcanal" he said, "And they flopped on the beach and all got slaughtered." And he was telling me about the Guadalcanal landing.

38:00 Because he must have been in that. He was experienced. I said "You'd never stay on the beach." That's where you get all your casualties. That was interesting. Then he told me that he had been in the German Navy as a kid. Fifteen, I think he said he was.

**That guy was an American, was he?**

Yeah. Then after the war he went to America.

38:30 Being a seaman he must have joined their coast guard or something like that. And he became commander of this LST. But he did a good job. He really did.

38:50 End of tape

## Tape 7

00:33 **Tell me your first battle experience in Tarakan?**

Well, as I was saying I was transferred into headquarter company then. We didn't go into the line and battle as such. We were back supporting the troops with ammunition

01:00 and food and all that sort of thing. And then the colonel got me to get some supplies in. Like personal supplies. And then I was able to...because the Americans always had lots of supplies. They landed all sorts of stuff afterwards. They had LSTs full of beer and stuff.

**Did they have ice-cream?**

They had ice-cream on the LST coming up. You'd come up to the side of the bridge and there was a tap

01:30 and you'd put your mug underneath and turn on the tap and you'd get the best cup of coffee you'd ever had in your life and that was on twenty-four hours a day. Amazing. The way they looked after those fellows. They had these big trays. That was the first time I'd ever seen them. You had meat and vegetables. You'd have your meat in that and your vegetables....you know, those little depressions in the trays. And something else and something else and then the other one with ice-cream.

02:00 Always had ice-cream. They love it.

**You took advantage of it I assume.**

Absolutely, yes. Because all we had most of the time was bully beef and biscuits, you know. And one meal a night if we could get it.

**Sounds like the Aussies had it pretty rough.**

Oh, very rough. Yes. Rough in every way, I think. Uniforms too. Well it was made of good wool. Australian wool.

02:30 But there was no style about it what so ever. They had a collar and tie and a nice fitting uniform. They took some pride in the way they looked. They'd just throw stuff at us. If they didn't fit you'd have to make it fit. That sort of thing.

**So we're getting back to your first combat experience in Tarakan.**

Yes, well,

- 03:00 As I say I wasn't up with the forward troops. But then I had to do a lot of patrolling. I didn't sit down. You know. I patrolled every day, you know. Poking about everywhere. Trying to pick up any sign of the enemy. And there was one patrol we did. This was after we had got a bit advanced into Tarakan. It wasn't a big island. It was only
- 03:30 eleven miles, I think, the island. It was fairly hilly. You know. It was very undulating country. Once they'd got established they had a hospital going, the Australians, and there were a lot of huts. They were built out over the
- 04:00 sea on stilts. Quite unusual but very comfortable. Native huts. But in their lounge room there'd be a trapdoor and there'd be a canoe underneath and you'd go out and catch fish. Of course they'd all been taken away. And we used to go down there every day on a patrol and I remember I'd got hold of an American automatic
- 04:30 rifle, a carbine. And it was very accurate so I used to shoot pigeons while we were out on this patrol and take them home and make pigeon pie. Not too many. They couldn't depend on me for feeding the battalion. Anyway, we were down there day after day, week after week and then the 2/24th took over and we moved up further
- 05:00 and the next day, they did the same patrol and I think there were seven of them killed. We couldn't find them. I don't know where they were hidden to this day.

**You were saying seven of them killed. You're talking about the 2/23rd?**

The 2/24th. We'd moved along and they lost seven blokes on their patrol. They had these hedges, out on the land of course. These beautiful

- 05:30 gardenias. They were magnificent blooms. They had hedges of them. We used to pick them and take them up to the sisters in the hospital on the way home from our patrol, we'd call in on our mates in hospital and go and see them and leave the gardenias. We were called the gardenia patrol by all the funny people, you know, we used to get a lot of chiacking about that.
- 06:00 But that was quite good there.

**So what happened after that? Any other combat experience?**

No. I didn't get into action after that at all.

**Did you do more patrolling?**

No. Except one night I shot the cow. That was quite interesting. They used to have these Dyaks. They were little natives from Borneo and they'd bob

- 06:30 straight across with black hair. They were very small. About five foot. They had blowpipes they used to use. Long blowpipes and fire poison darts. They used to come over at night time in a canoe and they'd have to come up this track into our headquarters to be interviewed by our interpreter because they used to give us all sorts of information
- 07:00 from the Japs in Borneo, you see. Send it back to headquarters. And you used to have to go down the track and take up all the booby traps so these little fellows could come up at night time without any casualties. You'd have to send a patrol down to let them up and as soon as they'd gone back again into their canoe, it was only a few miles across to Borneo. We'd put the booby traps
- 07:30 back and then we'd have to stay the rest of the night there. You know. Two hours on and four off and that sort of thing. So I was sick of standing round in the black and nothing to do so I got a chair from one of the huts, it was like a kitchen chair. Anyway this rustling started and this chap I was with, we were always in twos
- 08:00 He said "Come here! It's Nips!" And I said, "Go to sleep. They don't make a noise like that" or something. "No come on." he said and he started shooting into the grass. "Shut up." I said. "You'll wake the whole camp up." He said, "There's Nips there. Give us a hand." So I fired a magazine into the air. There was nothing there of course.
- 08:30 Anyway, that was alright but the camp woke up. "What's going on? Disturbing a man's sleep." They couldn't care whether there were Nips or not coming along. So in the morning the cooks came up, this was unlike cooks. "Why didn't you let us know you'd shot a cow? We could have had fresh meat." I said, "What, half past two in the morning waking you?"
- 09:00 I said, "I'd rather leave a cow there at half past two rather than face you cooks. Wake you up to go out and skin a cow." So that got round the battalion. I never lived that down. I can tell you. The poor old cow. How I hit it I don't know.
- 09:30 So we were camped up fairly high in Samoan Dutch Barracks and then they were out patrolling and



they'd get a few Japs and finally that sort of petered out. The last time I saw any Japs I'd had a party down to the Yankee depot

- 10:00 to pick up a truckload of Australian beer. We were being rationed with beer by this time. I think we had about a hundred cases of it and forty-eight bottles in a case. Big ten ton truck. I was sergeant and I would sit beside the driver of course and the other blokes were up on the load. We got very tired and careless.
- 10:30 We were supposed to be armed whenever we left the camp but we hadn't bothered to take anything. We didn't have a pocket knife amongst us, you know. And we were going up this hill. And he was down to his last gear, about two miles an hour going up this hill with a ten ton truck, back to the camp. And a Jap patrol came along side the road. About fifteen of them. All armed and.
- 11:00 I didn't see them but my old mate Tubby banged on the roof and I thought we were all going to be shot. We didn't even have a chance but they just stood and looked at us. They were carrying rifles and everything. I don't understand it to this day. And we went on
- 11:30 driving.

**How far were you?**

About four or five miles from the camp. But they were just down off the road. They were like, cut into the side of the hill. Strange.

**Did any shoot at you?**

No.

**So why did you think....?**

I thought the last days had come. You know, if we'd had any weapons. Probably it was just as well we didn't have any weapons because we would have

- 12:00 shot into them of course and I don't know what would have happened. It could have wiped us all out. And lost all the beer for the battalion. That would be dreadful. They wouldn't be worried about us. They'd be worrying about the beer.

**This was in the last days of the campaign?**

Oh, yes. Right nearly to the end. And all they had was stragglers, you know. We got one fellow one day and

- 12:30 took him back to the cage and this Anzac Highway. It was just a dirt road and the Japs had mined it with all sorts of things. Naval shells and all sorts of things. We had to shave it off the bulldozer and keep it and it was gradually getting wider as the days went by.
- 13:00 All these buildings went up. Yanks, you know. They put buildings up overnight. They were all prefabricated things. And we took him down this road from way up in the hills and he couldn't believe it. He couldn't speak English of course but he just couldn't believe where he was.
- 13:30 So that was progress. A couple of nasty things happened there. I was down there one day and a Jeep came along and it blew up. It went right up in the air and it had four fellows in it. They were all American correspondence, I found out later. They were all killed. And this shaving with the bulldozer,
- 14:00 hadn't defused this shell and the jeep had gone over it after all that time. So that sort of thing popped up now and again.

**In front of you?**

Yeah. Just across the road where I was standing. The shock of my life to see it go up like that. Unreal because there was so much activity around. They got them straight into hospital

- 14:30 but they all died. It must have been a tremendous shell in size and power. And then the five by two plan came in. You had to serve for five years and two years overseas you were home.

**This is after Tarakan?**

This is while we were on Tarakan. But in the mean time the

- 15:00 brigadier gave us. He was in charge of our brigade. The 26th Brigade, Whitehead and he explained how we were going to attack Singapore Harbour. He had all the details because I knew my platoon was going to take Pier 19. Goodness knows how. It would be like sailing into Port Philip Bay into Port Melbourne and taking one of the piers. That's as best as I can describe it.
- 15:30 Anyway they dropped the bombs and that was the finish of everything.

**You were worried your unit would suffer heavy losses?**

Oh yes. I don't think we would have come through that. Because it would have been defended from all

sides. I don't know what Singapore Harbour is like. I've never been there but I should imagine it would be like that. It would be heavily defended

16:00 and you'd strike everything there. At that time. So the bomb saved my bacon I reckon. After that the five by two plan started and of course the way it worked you'd have five years service and two years overseas and you were married with fourteen children you'd be first. Then it came down to the number of children

16:30 and then married men and then it came to single blokes, you see. So that when I was due to come home, which was in October. War having finished in August, there was only thirty of us left.

**Of the originals?**

17:00 Yeah. Of the originals and reinforcements. That's all was left.

**Only thirty.**

Single blokes and Doc said, "If there's anything wrong with you let us know because if you don't you'll regret it afterwards." It turns out pretty right from a lot of fellows. They wanted to get out you know.

17:30 "Oh I'm alright" and that sort of thing. Because they'd trace everything back to your war service. It had to be the war that caused it if you were after a pension.

**So you must have been pretty relieved when the war ended then?**

Absolutely. Overjoyed. You can't imagine the relief.

**Tell me more.**

I can't explain it. I felt like just lying down and going to sleep for a week.

18:00 You know. It was so wonderful. And I think coming home I was the most anxious I've ever been. I went home on an Australian cargo ship called the River Murrumbidgee and of course the war being finished they had all the lights on. Every light on the whole ship was ablaze and I thought: "Oh no. We can't get home this easy."

18:30 Crazy Japanese submarine commander is going to reckon he's not finished with the war and put one into this ship but it didn't happen. We got into Brisbane and I came home by train from Brisbane. So that was the finish of it. We got leave then and I was discharged in late November 1945.

19:00 **You must have been glad to be out of there I think.**

Yeah. It was an anticlimax. You sort of handed everything and marched out and you were on your own. It was hard to settle down when you got home.

**Did you maintain contact with your mates?**

Through the association. A newspaper, the Battalion

19:30 started publishing just after it started in Albury, called Mud and Blood. That was our original colour patch. Brown over red in a diamond. It was changed to that T shaped one you might have seen. This one, the little T. I don't know why they changed it. They reckoned it wasn't Tobruk. I don't know.

20:00 So it was called Mud and Blood which was the original colour patch and that has been published ever since. It just finished last month. That's how we kept together mainly.

**So what about your family, when you came back? Tell us what you did.**

Well, they were overjoyed. I had a few weeks off and I wandered round. It didn't seem

20:30 to be anybody about I knew. If you can understand. They were away in the services: air force, navy and all that. My family was gone. I had a sister and she's still alive. And then I thought I'd better go back to work or I'll never go back. That was a feeling I had and they took me back to work, which was very good.

21:00 I wasn't long in Melbourne and they asked me to go up to the country, to Ararat. They apologised and said I didn't have to go. I'd been away so long but I thought Ararat's just down the road compared to where I've been so I went away with the company. I had a lot of country experience after that which helped a lot in the job.

**What sort of work were you involved in again?**

Well, I was

21:30 an accountant on the accountancy side but when I was in the country I used to do a lot of physical outside work with sheep. We trucked sheep every Sunday at Hamilton. I opened a branch at Hamilton with another chap. And we used to truck sheep all Sunday afternoon. Take them down and load up these trucks. Then we'd do a bit of accounting and there'd be a sale,

22:00 booking sales and all sorts of real stock work. Good experience. I enjoyed that. That helped a lot, I think.

**When did you get married?**

I didn't get married until 1953.

**Did you have any other girlfriends at the time you came back? Did you maintain contact with any girls?**

Yeah. But she shot through as they say.

**What do you mean shot through?**

22:30 She got married to someone else.

**While you were overseas?**

The first one got married to a Yank. The first one I was engaged to. During the war. She went to America.

**That happened quite a bit.**

Australian bride. Yeah. I never saw her again. Beautiful ring I gave her. And the second time I got engaged. I don't know. It just fizzled out I think.

**What do you think the problem was with keeping**

23:00 **contact with women from the front line. Even if you had very intimate relations with them, what caused problems?**

I think absence. You know. They say it makes the heart grow fonder. I doubt that. I think all sorts of other things come along. Distractions and that sort of thing. I don't blame them. I don't see why anyone should wait for years.

23:30 Hope someone might come back because they mightn't. I think some women's lives were destroyed waiting for blokes who never came back. You know. When you see a show like last night you wouldn't know a fellows story unless you were very intimate with him. That he had a wife and seven kids when he left and another one born after he left. And he never saw

24:00 them again. It's pretty sad that side of it. So it's not a very glamorous business. I don't think.

**Many veterans suffered from all sorts of mental issues after the war. Did you experience any such things at all?**

I didn't think I did but looking back on it I'm sure I did.

24:30 You know I...

**The more severe aspects are known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.**

Yes. I'd probably deny that but someone else might say you're suffering from it, you know. But I'd gone very quiet. I didn't want to talk about it and I was a loner.

25:00 I was disinclined to mix with people I think.

**Just anyone?**

Yes.

**Even other mates?**

Other mates. Yes. Well you'd have two or three mates again, who you'd make and you'd go and have two or three drinks with them. That was it, sort of thing.

**That's not what I meant. Of course you're going to have that sort of bond with your soldier friends. But outside that. Did you have other mates?**

You'd make those from where you're working.

25:30 **Did you find you could connect with them or did you find that there was something missing?**

Well there was. Especially with the fellows who'd never seen any service because we didn't seem to speak the same language for a long time. If you can understand. It's hard to explain but that was so. Then you'd meet somebody who'd been through something and then you'd know on speaking to

26:00 him straight away.

**And you found that to be a relief?**

Yes.

**Did you dream much?**

Yes. I had nightmares. You'd have to ask my wife about that. I had them after we met and got married.

**When did they start? Did they start during the war or after the war?**

Well during the war I had one when we first got into New Guinea.

26:30 It was the first night and we were in our holes and I must have been dreaming and I shouted out. Anyway I started snoring and they woke up and whacked me over the head with a boot. I shut up and I woke up them. That's probably the first time I experienced it. But afterwards I had a

27:00 favourite one. There was these hills and there was this plane in front and I don't know how many Japs had come racing down here. A thousand I should imagine. But I would shout out at the top of my voice. I don't know what I was going to do. I'd wake up but that was a sort of favourite one.

**Did you get it regularly?**

Yeah.

**Japs were attacking you in large numbers?**

Yeah.

27:30 **And you were by yourself?**

Yeah. I think I had a rifle. I'm not sure about that though. I'm not sure what I was going to do. They were charging me and then I'd shout out at the top of my voice apparently and then the wife would shake me awake.

**What did you say? Do you know what you said?**

I wouldn't know.

28:00 No. I don't think I said anything. I just made these loud noises. I was a great one to snore, dreadfully and I found out afterwards that I was suffering from sleep apnoea which means you hold your breath for various periods during your sleep. The snoring used to get everybody down. Terrible.

**Even in New Guinea?**

Yeah.

28:30 Quite often I had a pair of boots thrown at me. I didn't go to sleep much out in the front line. I can tell you. They couldn't stand that. I wear a mast now at night time to stop me snoring.

29:00 To stop this apnoea so they have fixed that up, so to speak.

**How long did these dreams continue for?**

I don't dream very much now. I have an occasional one where I shout out but not about the war. I don't remember much about my dreams. A lot of people can vividly remember what they were doing.

29:30 I don't.

**Even back in the war years and after, you couldn't remember much?**

No, not really.

**When did these dreams about the war stop?**

Stop? They went on I suppose to '56 or '57. Round about then. They didn't stop all together but they were very few and far between. Now I don't dream much at all. Well I

30:00 don't remember. I think everybody dreams but some people don't remember and others do.

**Did your wife play an important role in the healing process?**

Absolutely.

**How did she do that?**

She used to quieten me down at night and she was very good. She looked after me because I became quite ill, you know.

30:30 Twenty years ago but she looked after me wonderfully. Got me through it.

**Did you feel you could tell her your experiences in the war?**

Yes. I probably told her more than anybody else about what happened. But every now and again I'd think about something funny. That's the way I liked to talk about the war. The funny experiences. You know, like

- 31:00 there's a chap we had named Lofty. They always said it would be a short campaign. They didn't see any reason why it should be long. It would be short. He was an iconic sort of person. He said, "The only thing short in this army is cigarettes, beer,
- 31:30 and leave." And he said, "I'm telling you." and this was before we went to Tarakan. "If we get to Tarakan and the Emperor tells those Japs to surrender we'll be there for ages. The same as always." Pretty true I suppose.
- 32:00 **So how do you feel about war now? How old are you now? You must be in your eighties now.**
- Eighty-nine.
- Eighty-nine. So at your age now and having a considerable amount of time to reflect on your participation in war did you feel like it's something you'll never regret doing. Some veterans have said that with some aspects of it they may have guilt or**
- 32:30 **regret. Have you ever felt such emotions at all fifty years down the track?**
- I've never felt guilt but the more I read the more I realise it was so useless. Absolutely senseless in my book.
- Why do you say that?**
- I think there's better ways of solving problems rather than going and shooting one another up. You know, the
- 33:00 older I get the more I can see that. I was all fired up when it happened like everybody else was but the more I, and the more stupidity that you read about that went on the less you think it's worthwhile.
- So. If this sort of mentality if you were back in the Second World War period. I know it's a bit unrealistic but**
- 33:30 **would you fight then?**
- Well look. I wouldn't go and fight overseas.
- Like you did before.**
- For someone else.
- Did you feel like you were fighting for someone else when you were fighting Tobruk?**
- Well I don't think we did in those days. I think we were fighting for the British Empire. We were all fired up but now I think we were being used up.
- 34:00 I don't mean we were being used up because they wanted us instead of their own. Well they were using us because they were available I suppose. But this recent war. I can't see why we were there.
- Which recent war? Iraq?**
- Yeah. I know the SAS [Special Air Service] are top gun. They are better than anybody
- 34:30 else with what they do but why does a little country like this have to rush off and, you know.
- Did you feel the same way about the Korean War and Vietnam?**
- I don't know much about Korea. I don't know what the reason was there.
- What about Vietnam.?**
- I think Vietnam was a farce that we were there. I think like Iraq.
- What about the Malayan insurgency from 1948 to 1960?**
- 35:00 Yeah.
- Did you feel anything?**
- I think they can be all sorted out in another way.
- So you believe in the United Nations.**
- Oh Yeah. I'd have to, wouldn't I? I'd have to. I don't think they're strong enough. I don't think the strongest nations are powerful enough in the United Nations that's what it amounts to.
- 35:30 They've been totally ignored in this set-up, surely.
- What's your view of life now you've reached this age?**
- Well it's a bit changed. I'm lucky to see the sun every morning, I guess.

**Your military uniform is something. I suppose we come from different backgrounds really but having a military uniform, a badge meant**

36:00 **something tremendous to you at the time. I suppose it still does in many ways but how do you view the military now?**

I think they are a fine band of men. Particularly our regiments now. I think they are second to none. You know. Our boys that went to Timor, you know. They went there to do a specific job. They were there to keep the peace. They weren't there to fight.

36:30 And I think they did a good job in that regard and I suppose it's the same in Iraq. But I can't see the idea. You didn't see Russia sending anybody or France sending anybody. You know. Those big countries. Why such a little country like Australia. We lost so many men.

37:00 The Boer War, WW1, WW2, Vietnam, Korea, now this. Why are we always shoving our blokes in to fight other people's battles in my opinion?

**There's another question I want to ask and we are running short of time now. But at this time now if you did have a chance to meet the Japanese soldiers you fought against in Lae or some of the prisoners you spoke to. POWs.**

37:30 **What would you say to them?**

I'd shake hands with them. It's all over. They've done their job. They were told to do it. No problem at all.

**Do you feel any sense of respect for them, looking back?**

I've changed. I don't know that they've got over that military background but they had a very, very

38:00 strange approach to the whole thing. I think, in those days. A very military minded background, the Japanese. I don't know.

38:30 I don't think it was the average, private Japanese soldiers fault any more than it was our fault. We all did what we were told.

**Do you think you'd enjoy meeting the Japanese?**

Well I might go out of my way to meet one just to see what they thought about it all. To be quite honest. But the Rats of Tobruk. We correspond with Manfred's son.

39:00 Manfred Rommel's son. In fact we asked him out, last year, to one of our conferences but he's not too well.

**Rommel's son? Not his grandson? [The WW2 German Field Marshal was Erwin Rommel, his son is Manfred]**

No, his son. He is a man of seventy I suppose. I don't know. But he had to go through his father's

39:30 experience of taking his own life. A general like that. You know.

**That's amazing. It's pretty strange how the 2/22nd had correspondence with Rommel's son who had such bloody fights with you in Tobruk. It's extraordinary.**

Yeah. Well one of our chaps, who is in Geelong, he's actually met one of our opponents from the Afrika Korps. He still

40:00 writes to him. That German chap's come out and they are the best of mates now.

**That's amazing. It makes you think how pointless war is.**

That's right. It's backing up my story.

**It's like that one hour stretch you had at 11 pm.**

Yeah. Waving the flag and out went the ambulance to pick up the wounded and we'd all have a bit of a chat and a smoke.

**I have to thank you.**

40:30 **It's been absolutely marvellous to interview you today. Unfortunately we've run out of time.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**