Australians at War Film Archive

Olof Isaksson - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **Remember how I asked you to give us a brief summary of your life?**

I was born in Semaphore a suburb of Adelaide. We lived in South Australia for

01:00 23 years, which was my age when I enlisted. We went to a place called Ocean Island in 1917, soon after my birth. A German raider had shelled the phosphate works on Ocean Island owned by the British-Australian Phosphate Company. And my father was sent up there to rebuild the crushers. We came back in '20. Lived in Gawler until I was 8, 1925. And then we

01:30 moved to Adelaide where I stayed until I joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] in 1940. My mother's family were early migrants in South Australia. People called Abbot, their great-grands. And they came from Yorkshire and arrived on a ship called Eden in 1838. So on both sides of my family we've got this Swedish intrusion: my mother's

02:00 father and my own father. It's interesting we've never discovered where they met because my maternal grandfather had nine children, one of whom died young. And we know that he went to Broken Hill as a miner and we know that my father went to Broken Hill. So we always guessed that they met in Broken Hill, and that's how my father met my mother. It's all guesswork but it's a reasonable assumption.

02:30 So nothing much important about Adelaide. When we went there, we went into a War Service home owned by my uncle. I'd had three uncles who were in the First World War. All commissioned. But none of them got wounded, it was a good record. So one of them went to Paris to be the London representative of The Times in Paris and we took over his house in a suburb called

03:00 St Morris, where we lived until 1932. We went bust in the Depression. My father had died when I was 10 and we were hopelessly broke. We had to get clothing from our relatives and we used to go down the shop with ration tickets. And we had a difficult period then, in my life, after my father died. I was 10; my sisters were 12 and 14.

03:30 And we sort of got along. We had to leave the house. And over the next few years we went through a period of a number of various places. We got rooms and we let a flat and let a house here and there. And we all went to a school called Norwood High School, two sisters and I. And because we were bust, I used to go up in the morning and go to work for the baker's cart. I'd walk a couple of miles to the baker's shop and would

04:00 spend the morning earning two or three shillings on the baker's cart. In the afternoon, I carted a tray around the football oval selling chocolates and ice creams. In the evenings, my sisters were usherettes in the local picture theatre. So we spent quite a busy Saturday. But that was necessary. At the age of 15, when I was doing the Leaving at Norwood High School, we had to leave school. My sisters had got a job, Mother hadn't been well.

04:30 So I left school at the age of 15, about a month before my 16th birthday. We went to work for a company called J. Craven and Co. in Adelaide, one of the smaller department stores, where my two sisters worked. I suspected they took pity on them. Anyhow the three of us worked there. And I worked there until I went to the war in 1940. The intervening period was an interesting one from my point of view because

05:00 we didn't have any money. I couldn't afford to buy cricket bats and tennis racquets and so on and so forth and we did a lot of walking. And I became interested in amateur theatre in the Playbox in Adelaide. And I answered an advertisement from a man looking for people who might join the chorus of a musical show. So he accepted me and then I began to be interested in singing. He was a singing and music teacher. And I spent many years fooling around with them. It

05:30 was great fun and I met a lot of new people, and it somewhat relieved the boredom from my point of view. I used to go up the River Murray with my friends, shooting rabbits, friends I'd met in Cravens. And

that was great fun. About once a quarter, we'd go up and fish and shoot along the River Murray. And then in 1935, when things

06:00 got desperate on the world stage, like many other young men I thought I'd better join the army. So for no other reason I decided to join the Light Horse, the 18th/23rd Light Horse. I knew absolutely nothing about horses. Anyhow I hired a broken down old horse and took it for a ride on a couple of weekends and went and enrolled in the 18th/23rd and they accepted me, which is quite extraordinary. Anyhow in the first year, we went to a place called

06:30 Salisbury, which is now the city north of Adelaide, the Salisbury level. I managed to fall off the horse once or twice so they banished me to the hay tent and that was my experience in the first year of camp. I learnt a lot. And luckily the next year they got rid of the horses and we were mechanised, we went into trucks. And we switched then from what was the standard gun, the Lewis gun to the Vickers and I became the number one Vickers gunner. It seemed to suit me. I liked the weapon.

07:00 And I was one of the leading gunners in the squadron. Then in the year 1938 we went over to a place called Goolwa for a camp, down near Mount Gambier in South Australia. And I found myself teaching all these old country boys who'd slung off on me and my horse riding, I found myself teaching them Vickers gun, which is quite amusing. So at the end of 1938 I pulled out of the militia because I'd

07:30 started taking singing lessons at the Adelaide Conservatorium and it wasn't possible to do the militia and the Playbox and the Conservatorium at once. So I had to buy a piano. But at this stage, we didn't have a home left. Both my sisters were married and I was boarding with some people in the city. So I used to go to singing lessons from Craven and Co., near North Terrace in Adelaide at the Conservatorium,

08:00 only about 400 yards away either at extended lunch or in the afternoon. And then go to a place called the Grange, a beach, where I was boarding with friends. And I did a lot of singing then, as much as I could. I sung at a few weddings and did a lot of choir work. I was very keen on it. At that stage I got a bit restless.

08:30 All my early contacts had been broken because I'd been moving around so much, and I'd enjoyed the Light Horse, so I thought, "Gee I might as well join up". So I went down and enlisted on my 23rd birthday and they sent me away. They said, "Come back on the 22nd of July", which I did. In the meantime I went to Melbourne to visit my sister who was married to a permanent air force man. I came back and I went down to Wayville.

09:00 And it was chockablock full of people like me who had just enlisted. And they put us up in pigpens over night and we all barked like dogs. There was a thing called Dog's Disease [virus] running around, the most awful noise, and all of us were infected. That didn't last long. We found ourselves allocated to a battalion called the 2/28th Battalion. It was the last one raised in the 2nd AIF. And we all trooped out and were allocated to companies. And on about

09:30 day three somebody said, "Hands up anybody who knows anything about Vickers guns?" So I put my hand up. "Hands up anybody who's been an instructor or an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer]?" so I put my hand up. I hadn't been an NCO. So anyhow, "Righto, you're a corporal". So that day I became a corporal and I was put in charge of doing a bit of training of the Vickers gun. And then to my absolute surprise I was called up one day by the adjutant, a man called Keith Bishop. And he said,

10:00 "The CO [Commanding Officer] wants to see you." And the CO was later Sir Victor Windeyer, but anyway Victor was a marvellous man. He was a High Court judge. A very austere man, rather hesitant in his speaking. And I was scared stiff. I had no background, I was very naive and was unsophisticated. Anyhow he said to me, "Look, we like what we've seen of you. We're going to send you to a school." So then to my surprise I was sent off to the Officer

10:30 Training Course here at Randwick in New South Wales to be a Vickers gunner. Total surprise. I'd never imagined this would happen to me, but there I was. So we came across to Randwick and I stayed there on the course until October when I was recalled to the battalion, because the battalion was in a brigade of the 8th Division. We had the 8th Division colour patches on and we'd been warned for overseas.

11:00 So I arrived back to the battalion. And on arrival I was told that I'd been commissioned but I had no uniform, I had no badges of rank and they put some pips on my battledress for me. And there I was. And then I found myself commanding a platoon of infantry about which I knew less then nothing. And so for a few weeks we went to Woodside Camp. I was

11:30 put in as a sort of learner I suppose, a deputy platoon commander of the carrier platoon. We didn't have any Bren carriers. We used to run around holding flags pretending we were vehicles. But it was great fun. So then we got warned for overseas movement, early November. We had two weeks leave and sent back. And the fellow that had been commanding the carrier platoon, a man called Le Mesurier from Adelaide, didn't go to the Middle East. He stayed home for some reason

12:00 and I found myself commanding the Bren carrier platoon. Never having driven a vehicle, having no carriers and knowing absolutely nothing about carrier tactics, there I was. And so we left Adelaide on the 17th of November on the Stratheden and got to Perth, where we were off for six days. A German raider was flying around the Indian Ocean so the convoy, which was the Stratheden,

12:30 Strathmore, the Aquitania and a Polish ship called the Batori, we had six wonderful days in Perth. And then we went to Ceylon, Colombo, escorted by the Royal Navy Far East Fleet. We had long enough in Colombo to have a few lightweight uniforms made, 48 hours, and then again took off for Egypt and arrived at Aden I suppose

13:00 on the 15th of November. And we sailed along the [Suez] Canal to a placed called Kantara, where we stopped overnight. And we got off the ship on the 17th of November, caught a train and went to Palestine, where we got one of our early lessons from Victor Windeyer. We had one carriage at the end of the train that was for the officers and the rest for the troops. And we sort of happily unloaded our gear and reported to him. And he said,

13:30 "Gentlemen, during the rosters we'll ride with the troops. I'll see you in the morning." So off we went and we rode in cattle trucks with the troops. It was a very good experience and taught us a rather nice lesson. Anyhow, that was Palestine. We stayed in Palestine training, doing nothing very important. I saw as much as I could. I went to Jerusalem once, Tel Aviv once, and we stayed near Gaza, a place called Dimorah, and it had been occupied by the Light Horse in the attack

14:00 on Gaza in 1917, I think it was. It was full of relics and interesting bits and pieces. Anyhow come early January, we were again told we were on the move. And I think it was about the 13th or 14th of February we got on the train. And we went to a place called Amariya, which is outside Alexandria. Here we spent a couple of days. And then

14:30 we went by truck up the coast road through Derna, Tobruk, to a place called Gazala, which is on the western side of Tobruk, where we spent two or three weeks training. I had another very interesting personal lesson there. It was three weeks at Gazala, then up to the way to Benghazi, which we never made, we stopped at a place called Tocra Pass.

15:00 We got there on the 2nd of April. And I was, with my machine guns to guard the pass, Maddalena Pass, to stop the Germans coming up. Anyhow on the early morning of the 4th we had to get out. So we rushed back to Tobruk. It was an absolute shambles. We got back without any air attack. Stopped at a place called Mechili on the 8th. Then on the 10th we had our first contact there. We were strafed and bombed. On the 10th we got back into Tobruk with the last battalion in.

15:30 So there we were. The next few days we were getting busy. We were digging holes and getting ammunition out. And I had no carriers. But on the 13th I got three carriers and that afternoon we went out on patrol to see what was happening. That day there was a big attack down in the south. The first German attack. We weren't involved. But gradually I got hold of a whole platoon of carriers and we went every day

16:00 to see what was happening, to try and keep in touch with them. There were a lot of battalions to the west of us and German gunners and German tanks. It was about the 21st or the 22nd I took a patrol out and we surprised a lot of Italians in trucks, Bersalieri [Italian mountain light infantry] regiment. And they didn't want to fight so we shot them up as well as we could and they stood up and they wanted to come in. So I sent two carriers to the back

16:30 and I put one at the back and one on each side. And we brought 770 Italians in that day. Anyhow it was a marvellous day for us. The Germans eventually chased us in with some tanks. But we got them inside. And then two or three days later, there was a company attack also in the same area that I accompanied with a section of carriers and that was very successful. We got another three or 400 Germans that day.

17:00 That almost finished the time we were, this is a place called Point 209, Ras el Medauuar. Until I think it was the 27th and Italian tanks came through, they were little tiny tanks and my platoon shot one up with an anti-tank rifle. And then General Morshead ordered the laying of the minefield between us and the hill. We were then in reserve and we pulled out Then on the

17:30 1st of May the battalion that took over from us the 2/24th, they were over-run by the Germans. We woke up in the morning, there were about 50 tanks. The hills were a long slope. On the other side of the minefield, there were about three tanks in the minefield, about these 50 tanks. And that was a pretty distressing morning for us. Anyhow the garrison artillery put them off and they never broke through. Then the battalion had to do a counter-attack a couple of days later. We didn't have much time and my carriers

18:00 were supposed to right flank. It was a night attack. We were bombed on the start line. Anyhow the attack wasn't successful. It was called off after about three hours. What it did do was to hold the Germans off. So after that, the battalion moved around the various parts of the perimeter, either in the front line or in reserve. We patrolled every day. Had a bit of success. We cut a few vehicles up and captured some people.

18:30 And we used to keep an eye on the infantry patrols that went out. And that was (UNCLEAR) until mid-June there was to be an 8th Army attack. And I with my vehicles took all people of 18th Brigade out on reconnaissance, the brigadier, the battalion commanders and their people. But the attack never came off because it died on the frontier so we never went outside. Anyhow

19:00 I left Tobruk with jaundice in August and the battalion came out I think in October. I spent a couple of weeks in hospital at Kantara, then I rejoined the battalion in Palestine, a place called Julis. The battalion

then went to Syria. I didn't. I was posted at the training battalion because their reinforcements were not a very good standard. So I spent some time there. So when the battalion, the division, moved back to the desert in

19:30 June-July, I was still in Palestine and I rejoined them in early August. Then we did a lot of training prior to that, in preparing for the big battle. The only thing of interest to happen before then is that the corps artillery had done all its survey and it had used telegraph poles, which was about 1,000 yards outside us, the last one of the old telegraph line. One

20:00 of our chaps must have pinched it one night, the head cover, and there was a tremendous fuss. All the corps gunners in the artillery, the arms gunners were sent out three times on patrol to find the pole. They never found it but they had to do some more survey. El Alamein itself was interesting because on the 31st night we were under a battery of 5.5 guns, pretty noisy when it started. The first night was quite easy from our point of view. I had

20:30 the carriers loaded up with the supplies and we did a resupply run once the battalion was settled down. It was a reasonably easy attack from our point of view. We didn't suffer many casualties. The rifle companies got through without a great deal of difficulty. In the morning though, we saw across to our right about a mile away a hill, which absolutely dominated the place. And our CO, this time a man called Hammer, have I skipped something?

21:00 **No, no. Just keep pushing through.**

Victor Windeyer had left you see. Victor had gone; Hammer came. And Hammer said to us, "Look, it's got to be captured. We can't stay here." He drew up a plan of attack and that evening was called into the brigade and the battalion was told, it was captured the next night. So the night of the 25th/26th we took off. The plan was that two rifle companies would go forward

21:30 and I and my carriers plus a few I'd borrowed would take an infantry company and go through them and drop them short of the objective and they would then take over and fight their way to the objective. All went very well actually. And the company commander, a fellow called Mick Bryant said to me, "Why don't we go right on the hill?" So we went straight on and we actually debussed the troops on the top of the objectives. It was a very successful and rather difficult fight. But

22:00 it was fascinating, one of the best soldiers we had was called Tom Derrick or 'Diver' Derrick.

Yeah we'll get to him so…

Yeah, well this important thing happened this night. He came to me and said, "Look, my platoon commander is not functioning. What do I do?" I said, "I don't know what to do, Tom. What I suggest is this. Go and do what you want to do and tell him. But don't do it without telling him." That's the sort of man that Derrick was. Anyhow the next few days were pretty rough. We had lots and lots of attacks. Air attacks and I forget how many attacks

22:30 the Germans made but the artillery were marvellous. And it was agreed we'd be relieved by the 2/17th Battalion. And we were then to do an attack the following night. We came up, we had a night's rest. The following night the brigade had to do that right hook up to the coast. Led by the 2/23rd Battalion on tanks. They decided to copy our deal. And we were in trucks waiting behind, the 2/24th and ourselves.

23:00 And we knew about 1o'clock it had gone bad. There was a tremendous noise and all of a sudden everything went quiet. So we knew the whole thing had gone bad. And around about 1oclock in the morning we got called to a brigade conference. Torpy Whitehead was the brigadier and there's some senior people from division there. I was there because the idea was because the night attack had gone wrong, the 24th and the 48th would do a daylight attack across to a place called Thompson's Post,

23:30 which had been a thorn in our side for months. Anyhow the brigadier didn't like it much and the battalion commanders didn't like it much and I liked it even less. So in the middle of the night there was a great powwow. The division commander came down, the man from corps headquarters came down and they decided then that it couldn't go on without tanks, and the tanks couldn't make it in time so the whole thing was called off. Now I don't know anywhere in the military history that meeting's recorded but it was a

24:00 fascinating experience. We all drew a deep breath and about five in the morning we got the hell out of it before the daylight came. So that's the way that particular encounter was called off. Oh look, on the night of the 25th we had an awful thing happen. A German shell hit one of the trucks,

24:30 our supply trucks, and five of them went up, company supply trucks with ammunition and mines. So my carriers and I spent all the night running a shuttle service. And we finally got enough and the soldiers got some head cover but it was a pretty awful night for us. And we were lucky that we managed to get enough stuff for them all by morning in time for them to counter-attack. So on the last night, we only had 200 and 30 odd people in the four companies. About half strength.

25:00 We got off to a bad start. We had to fight to secure the start line. And they turned right, went along the railway line going to the rear of the German position. And it was desperate and it had to be called off. In the end, we had only one officer left of the four companies, a Lieutenant Gregory from Sydney, and the 2/24th were in a similar way. They, on the way back, trod on an aerial bomb, a

25:30 booby-trap. And we finished up in the morning with very few of us left and I did a head count. We had 41 of us in our battalion. The 24th had about 70. And we were stuck across the railway line. And we didn't know what was going to happen. And so the CO said to me, "Get on the blower to brigade and division and get some tanks up." So I spoke to brigade and asked them to bring some artillery fire down. They didn't

26:00 believe we were there but I convinced them we were. So then division promised to send some tanks. So regiment of tanks came up, the RTR [Royal Tank Regiment], about 45 of them, and they stayed with us all day. They walked out with six tanks and they saved the day for us. And then that night of course the brigade was relieved. We were relieved by an Adelaide battalion called the 2/43rd and they said to me, "How many trucks do you need?" I said, "We only want two trucks" and that gave them a

26:30 shock. We pulled out then, back to our original position, where I commanded a composite company of about 80 people, and we stayed there until the battle was over. But Trig 29 was very important because the whole outcome of the Battle of El Alamein depended on the retention of that hill. It gave us wonderful observation. So then of course we went to Palestine. We got the wounded back. We

27:00 came back to Australia. We got back to Australia early February. Disembarked some troops at Perth. The rest was at Adelaide. We went on three weeks leave and then went back to the Atherton Tablelands where we trained. At this stage I was a captain. I was a company second in command. We did amphibious training and jungle training up there. We walked ourselves into the ankles and we worked very hard indeed.

27:30 And finally, in August I think it was, we embarked. We did a lot of amphibious training at Cairns. And we embarked on a ship called the Henry T Allen – it used to be the President Hoover, one of the American President Line – where we sailed to Port Moresby. And we got dumped in Moresby on a plantation. It was terrible. It was a coconut plantation. Up to our ankles in water. We did a

28:00 trial landing on Goodenough Island, one of the Trobriands, which was great fun, but we got as wet as shags and we learnt a lot though about amphibious landing. Then we went to Buna and Gona where we sorted ourselves out. And then we loaded on landing ships, LSTs [Landing Ship Tanks] American-provided landing ships, heading for Lae. And we learnt on the water that Lae was to be our target. We were not involved in the landing.

28:30 We were reserve brigade, so Lae was not very important for us. We tagged along. The only thing we did, I was 2IC [Second in Command] of B Company, we moved through a batch of bamboo that nearly killed us. Otherwise Lae was unimportant from a 48th Battalion point of view. The next job was Finschhafen, and in Finschhafen there was a breakdown of intelligence. They believed there were only 1,500 Japs. There were about

29:00 8,000 there. And so we were second brigade in. I was sent back to Buna to bring back resupply for the 20th Brigade that did the landing. So I came, the night I landed back at Scarlet Beach at Finschhafen, there was a hell of a fuss going on, because all of a sudden all of the machine guns out on the sea seemed to be firing at once, plus some 40 millimetre stuff. And it transpired that a

29:30 raiding party of Japanese had come in a landing craft intending to land on the beach at Lae. It was a fascinating night. I got all the troops down below and watched it myself. So we then went ashore at Finschhafen and we fooled around for some days around Finsch itself getting ready. And then on the 16th of November, I think it was, we went up to a place called Sattelberg, took over from the 2/17th Battalion.

30:00 (UNCLEAR) Our job was to capture Sattelberg. So after several days' reconnaissance and preparation and patrolling we set off for Sattelberg. And we went along the road for a little way and we came to a place known as Green Hill and my company was told to capture it. So the first move on the battle was A Company would capture Green Hill. Little but successful operation.

30:30 Not too many casualties. Killed about 30 Japs, I suppose all together. And then one of the other companies, I think it was C Company, attacked the next day. Ultimately I think it was on day four, my A Company then set off up the track, again up towards Sattelberg. We were accompanied by a man named Sam Hordern. Sam had been the ringmaster at the Royal Sydney Show and the Hordern [Pavilion], a well-known New South Wales family.

31:00 Sam had a squadron of tanks supporting us and we got held up along the way. And the CO, then a man called Ainslie, of Ainslie's Solicitors in Perth, told me on no account was I to go until the tanks got up and the engineers did some work for us, so we sat on the edge of a bamboo thicket. And the engineers said they were going to blow a thing called a fougasse; it was a firebomb of some sort. So in

31:30 the meantime another company, Don Company came up and the CO put me in command of the two company attack. The tanks had got bogged. Anyhow one of them came up. I was standing with Sam Hordern and Brocksopp, the other company commander, we were discussing what was happening and some bullets started to fly off the tank. There were some Japanese snipers. So we did a bit of a crouch behind the tank and finished our conference, made a plan of attack and the engineers set the fougasse off. Well it was the greatest disaster

32:00 because it was a barrel, I think a 20 litre barrel of oil with some petrol in it and explosive inside. Well it

went, jumped 20 feet in the end and went off and nothing happened. Anyhow it was a start, so off we went and we captured that hill. It was quite a difficult fight but we got it. After two or three hours we got control of it. We lost about six people from my company. We killed about 50 Japanese.

32:30 And then the next day we started off again in the front and we were, then we relieved another company and we got to the foot of Sattelberg, which was taken and captured by B Company, and that's when Tom Derrick did so well. The company had stopped short of the hill. Sattelberg was an exposed hill and there was a long slope. There were about 8 or 9 Japanese machine-gun posts. And I can't think why but he got permission to stay overnight and Tom said, "Look

33:00 I'd like another go."

We need to try to stick to your summary. We will get to that action. We need to keep moving through your life.

So we got to Sattelberg and then we stayed there: Sattelberg and down at the coast. We had Christmas there. Then they had reason to move us along the coast to a place called Sio, unimportant. And we returned home I think in February of 1944,

33:30 where the division stayed until the middle of next year. In the meantime, I got posted to Canungra as an instructor in the first half of 1945, training young officers out of Duntroon. It was an interesting experience. So I missed the landing at Tarakan. I caught up with Tarakan in August. We got caught in Morotai because there were no ships, no aeroplanes. Anyhow I finally caught up with the battalion at Tarakan

34:00 and that campaign of course finished mid-August and I was then a major. I didn't have a job really. The war was over. We were all going home. We had what you call a five by two: if you had five years, two years overseas, married you got points for going home. I was single. I'd been five and two. No I didn't want to go home at the time, I was happy to stay. And somebody offered us the option of going to Japan or Germany in the Occupation Force, so I opted for

34:30 Japan. I went to Japan as the second-in-command of the 66th Battalion, commanded by a fellow, a Lieutenant-Colonel George Colvin. And I went up to Japan with the 34th where I stayed for three years. The first year I stayed with the battalion. I sat on a War Crimes Commission in Yokohama in that month trying camp commandants. 1946 I was the second in command

35:00 and ran the technics school at a place called Matsuyama, a British Army training school. 1948 I was a Senior British officer on Shikoku, with nothing to do. Marvellous. So I used to go down to Kure once a month for brigade. So I managed to see all of Shikoku and I went to the places where the prisons had been. So then in 1948, I came home. The brigadier had said to me, "Look, why don't you sit for Staff College Exam?" And I did.

35:30 I didn't know whether I wanted to stay in the army or not. I transferred to the regular army or was given the option in April. Anyhow I got home and I was asked if I wanted to go to Staff College and I said, "Why not?" So I went to Staff College at Queenscliff. After six months I graduated there. I was sent to America to do the American Command and General Staff College. Coming back, I expected to go to Korea but finished up doing teaching at Staff College for two years. So

36:00 I had four-and-a-half years, I was glad to get away from it. I then went to Army Headquarters where I was Secretary of the Defence Planning Committee, Administrative Planning Committee, and pro-tem Assistant Secretary to the Chiefs of Staff. Chiefs of Staff were running Korea for all administration and I was the executive officer for that operation. I had a lot of fun. I was there for three years. I stayed a year longer than normal. Defence wanted me in the wind-up. Went to Korea

36:30 in the end of 1954 to help organise the withdrawal of the base from Korea back to Japan. And after those three years, I went over there to Sydney as a GSO1 [General Staff Officer Grade 1] of the 2nd Infantry Division. From there I went to Bangkok as the administrative planner of the SEATO [South East Asia Treaty Organisation] Headquarters in Bangkok for 1969 or '59, '60. Went to Melbourne

37:00 in '59 and got married and took my wife back to Bangkok. 1961-63 I became commandant of the training centre at Canungra. And the general at Bangkok said to me that he'd like to get me for his director of military intelligence, John Wilton, who later on became Chief of Defence Staff. So after Canungra, I was posted to DMI [Director of Military Intelligence] in Canberra

37:30 and it was in the days of confrontation and Sukarno. An interesting period. I was on the National Intelligence Committee. I collapsed one night after a long meeting and I was carted off to hospital, a survivor for overworking a bit. So the next two years I spent at a thing called the Joint Planning Group, Colonel level. We were planning force structure for the years ahead. And Australia made one of its great mistakes. It was offered, asked, if we'd provide 500,000

38:00 pounds to help build an airport at Honiara and Treasury turned us down. We could have had a wonderful in on the, never mind. Anyhow after that, I was posted as Deputy Adjutant General and then in consultation with John Wilton we formed, we planned the structure of the Joint Intelligence Structure. And so from 1969, I became the Deputy Director Military of the Joint Intelligence Structure the provider

38:30 for all service intelligence. That was of course when Vietnam was on. That was a fascinating time. I visited there two or three times, and I'd made a number of visits overseas during my period as DMI, but Vietnam was interesting and it was a marvellous period. So then in 1971, I was offered, the Swiss offered me a job with a company called Ciba-Geigy – it was one of the

39:00 major chemical companies of the world. So I resigned from the army and joined Ciba-Geigy and stayed with them for 8 years. We had an agricultural division. And we bought a block of land in Queensland as a retirement ploy, for fun. And then a block next door became available so I found myself running a commercial operation and growing avocadoes, quite against the plan, against the clock.

39:30 That was fun. We stayed there until two years ago; sold at the end of 2002. In the meantime, I'd run an organisation called the 9th Division in Queensland RSL [Returned and Services League]. I'd also run a thing to save the Blackall Range from development. We had a thing called the Blackall Range

40:00 Development Group. We saved it from massive development. So that really, that was it. One or two interesting things happened that I'll talk about perhaps in detail later. So I now became a civilian. I stopped working at 85. I laugh when I read things about people stopping work at 65.

Tape 2

00:33 **It sounds like things were pretty tough for you as a family during the Depression. Can you tell us how you coped?**

Yes. My father had died. And my father got a load of phosphate dust on his lungs at Ocean Island and of course there was no such thing as payment by the company then. And he came home and he went to

01:00 Whyalla to try and overcome this. Anyhow he died when I was 10. And my grandfather was living in the house and I suppose we never learnt very much from my mother. She wasn't bothered with us much really. We were getting a payment from her family, paying for his board. And with her, she did a little

01:30 odd jobs. She did some dressmaking and she worked in a local library part-time. And I used to go and sell chocolates and work and my sisters did the same. Between us, we managed to get by until my grandfather died. And then of course all that stopped and we had no money left at all. My maternal grandmother died a long while before. I never knew her. She said to her children, there were

02:00 8 survivors, "What you must do. Each of you must look after another one." So each of her four senior children were told to look after the four junior ones. And we had a woman called Osmond, my aunt Ada Osmond who lived at Unley who was told to watch over us. And they were marvellous. They'd give you some hand-down clothes. They used to help Mother financially and she was a widow but well provided for, and

02:30 we got by. Mother and I used to take a collapsible stall out to one of the parks, Wattle Park, on the weekends and sell chocolates and ice creams and make a few bob. And we got by until we could no longer pay the rent. It was a War Service house. So then we managed to get a flat near the Norwood High School. A big, old, bluestone building where we lived and we got ration tickets.

03:00 And my job was to go down generally to the greengrocer's or the baker's or the grocer's shop and get the rations. And we all did what we could. In fact that's why we had to leave school. My older sister Elise, who's on the way to 91, I'm the baby of the family, was the first to leave. And she got a job at this company J. Craven and Co. And then Joan, who's the clever one of the family, got a scholarship to teachers'

03:30 college but we couldn't afford to send her, so she left. And that left me at school. And so I left, it must have been 1932, when I was 15. So the three of us were working. Then Mother got sick. And my middle sister Joan had married an airman and she went to

04:00 Melbourne to live. And then I had to board. My other sister and I boarded with a friend in Adelaide in Wakeville Street for a while. And then we were all working. I had a few bob. I was working for Cravens and got my first suit at the age of 19 on part-time. And once we were working we were all right. Mother had got a job as the companion, somewhere near St Peters, and so we

04:30 all went our own way. It wasn't very pleasant. Joan, my middle sister, got married in1937, went to Victoria, to Melbourne, in 1938 and came back to visit us in 1939 and went back by train to Melbourne on Black Friday, the 13th. All those bush fires came. So then

05:00 my other sister Elise got married next year, which left me sort of floating around. So I had a friend I'd made at Cravens, a man called Kelly, who lived at the Grange. I went up and…

You were telling us about your friend at Cravens?

Oh, yes. Jack Kelly. So I went over there to board with them. All the time this stage of course I'd started at the Conservatorium. I had to cart a piano around. I bought a little old piano and I was studying

theory as well as singing. But I had a lot of fun.

05:30 The Playbox Theatre, I made a lot of friends there and we used to travel around the country a bit. My friend Sable Grivelle, who was a very well known music teacher in Adelaide at the time, used to teach in the country and I sometimes went with him up to Burra and Clare. Managed to make a bit of fun. But things were pretty desperate during the Depression. Weren't the only ones of course. Other people. Our situation was probably worse for

06:00 not having a father and it cost us a great deal of money to keep him going. There wasn't much in the way of help in those days. In fact the doctor was a man called Dawkins from Gawler and oddly enough his son was the first medical officer in the battalion I was with. A guy called John Dawkins. So we were glad when the Depression... My grandfather

06:30 was getting ancient and doddery. I had to keep the vegetable garden going and cut the firewood. I didn't have much time for pleasure during that period. But I suppose we survived. I didn't object too much and my sisters kept out of the way. Mainly they had boyfriends and I was kept on my own. We used to play cribbage with my grandfather while he was still alive. Mother taught me how to play bridge. We played three-handed bridge.

07:00 You know, in those circumstances you amuse yourself. You make your own fun. We walked a lot. We went prospecting up in the hills.

Tell me about that. Prospecting in the hills.

Oh yes. Up in the Adelaide Hills there was always a bit of gold up there. My grandfather had managed a goldmine up there in the early years. So we used over there go prospecting around the creeks. Never found much but it was great fun.

What equipment did you use to do that?

Oh just a small bowl. We used to

07:30 wash the gold in the creek beds. Never had any great finds but it's an amusing way, a nice way to spend a weekend. We did a lot of exploring then, which I suppose in a way suited me. Suited my temperament. I liked that. I read a lot of course. Mainly rubbish but I read everything I could lay my hands on. I loved reading about the Middle East and about Central Europe in particular. I'd been

08:00 fascinated by the stories of the Light Horse in Palestine. And one of my great joys was to visit the places they had been. I loved the Middle East. My time in Palestine was rather wonderful for me. Anyhow, that's got rid of the Depression. Many other families had worse times than we did. We had family support. When I was 13 I wanted to join the navy. And we had a friend who was a

08:30 first mate of a ship and he persuaded me I should try. And so I took some time off from school and studied for the Naval entrance exam, which I obviously passed. I had to borrow a suit from a chap down the street for the interview. Anyhow the interview was obviously successful but they closed the college down that year. 1930 the Naval College was closed and it moved to Paddington Barracks in New South Wales.

09:00 And there was no intake. So we were advised of that. And the next year I got a letter asking me am I still interested in joining the navy and I said, "No", which was just as well because of that year of people that were called up, Jim Ramsey was the last one on. Jim became Governor of Queensland. He was living in Perth for some time. He was a naval commodore. He was the last one to

09:30 survive. The rest of them went down in the Sunda Straits or the Mediterranean. So it was a lucky draw not joining up at the Naval College.

Tell us about joining the militia. How did you get involved in that?

I really don't know. Except that people of my age who were interested in what was happening thought it was high time to get prepared in case there was another war, and I had read all about these Light Horse things.

10:00 So I just ambled down and said, "Here I am. Would you like to have me?" And they were keen for recruits. They didn't try me out on a horse. They said, "Yes." So they enrolled me. And we used to go down to Keswick Barracks. And that was always a trial for me because these old, remount horses knew the ropes. They had mouths like iron. Wouldn't do a damn thing I asked them to do. But it was a fun weekend. And I became very interested

10:30 in machine guns. I became a number one gunner fairly quickly with the Vickers guns. I loved the Vickers guns and I didn't bother about doing anything else. I concentrated on being a good Vickers gunner. And then in 1938 I simply had to give up, I didn't have time. Also there was

11:00 some conscription. Everybody had to do militia from 1938 onwards. But as I had done it, I was exempted from that.

Where did you do your training for the militia?

At the drill hall in Unley. That was our city base. And then we went over to the Keswick Barracks on odd weekends. And we would take trips out to the country for say, two weekends a year. Mainly up to levels at Salisbury, where our annual camp was. It was a

11:30 6-day camp or 7-day camp, and that was in 1936. In 1937 we camped I think again at the levels. 1938 at Goolwa, down near Mount Gambier.

What were the other boys like in the militia?

Oh they were pretty tolerant. I thought they were very tolerant with me. By-and-large in Adelaide the Light Horse was a different social strata, you know,

12:00 I was like a fish out of water when I joined. I wasn't in that social stratum at all. But they were pretty kind and understanding. They were a good bunch of fellows. Mainly the Light Horse was filled up with countrymen who had their own horses or people in Adelaide who could afford their own horses. They were a good bunch. Fellows like Porter who later on became Lord Mayor. Blackburns, who

12:30 else? The Rymills, Anguses, that mob were all Light Horse. A sort of new dimension for me.

What did you do about your lack of horse?

I hired one.

Tell us about that?

Yes. Then we were living near Maylands in Adelaide. There was a riding school nearby and I hired a broken-down horse from that. And took it out on a couple of weekends to get a feel of it.

13:00 Then when the camp came, I hired it for the camp. And my first camp we had to ride through the city. I wasn't very comfortable. We went to Jets Cross Hotel where I caught up with the rest of the troop. And from there we trotted on up to Salisbury. After that we didn't need horses. It was much easier for me not having to hire a horse.

What sort of exercises and training did you do on horseback?

13:30 Mainly trying to hang on. We used to do charging across open fields and mounting machine guns and little tactical exercises. Mainly to get people used to working with a troop of the squadron of whatever it was.

And you said earlier that you fell off.

Oh I did my best to. I managed to stay on but I found myself hanging around the horse's neck once and my troop

14:00 leader wasn't very pleased with that. So that night I found myself in the hay tent and I spent the next two days dishing out hay to the horses.

How did it come about that the horses fell by the wayside?

Oh, everything was becoming mechanised. The horse had finished its day. The only horses left worldwide were the horses the Brits had in Syria. The Thais had horses and the Indians

14:30 did too. But we didn't want to go through the process. And of course we were fighting a modern war against tanks and horses had no place. So we had to become mechanised or not survive.

You said that you became very fond of the Vickers gun. How much contact did you have with them in the militia?

That was our main armament. After 1937,

15:00 we were armed with Vickers guns. Then we were training on it all the time. On weekends and on night training it was nearly all machine-gun training.

Can you describe a Vickers gun for us?

A Vickers gun is a water-cooled weapon. It sits on a tripod. And it has a barrel about ye round, which contains water. It's a jacket with water.

15:30 And it has on the bottom there's a water can with a rubber hose so as the water boiled it got cooled down again in the can. And it was mounted on a tripod. Two men ran it. The number one gunner sat at the tripod and he held the gun like this. Two handles and the trigger worked with the thumbs. And the number two was on the side. It was a belt-fed weapon. The number two

16:00 was feeding the belt through the gun. And there were a series of sights on the gun. It was essentially an indirect fire weapon. You could off lay it and use indirect fire about 1,500 yards. So we used to set it at night on fixed lines and we used to hide it behind hills and things of that sort. But it's a wonderful weapon. If I might divert.

16:30 The best example of the Vickers gun was at El Alamein when the 2/2nd Machine Gunners, we had

captured a hill called Trig 33, and they killed 600 Germans that day with a troop of Vickers guns. They had six on the ground. And those guns alone stopped the German attack. Immensely effective weapon if you sited them properly. They had a rate of fire of about, I think from memory, four or 500 rounds a minute,

17:00 something like that. No, not as much as that. Say 200 rounds a minute.

How long did you serve in the militia for?

3 years. ’35 until ’38.

It seems quite unusual that on the brink of war you weren’t called up immediately?

No, there was no conscription. But I had already done my militia training so I wasn’t required to stay on. And the fact that I was also doing work at the Conservatorium

17:30 they probably took into account.

Can you tell us about that?

Yes, well I learnt that I could sing at about 17 or 18. I’d always had a good voice and these people with whom I’d made contact convinced me I should go and get it trained. And so I scouted around and I found this woman who was teaching at the Conservatorium. And I used to sing whenever I could. I used to go in church choirs and if friends

18:00 got married or sisters or cousins, I used to go and warble away for them. I loved it. I wasn’t bad actually. I had a good voice. And I discovered of course I didn’t know anything about theory so I had to buy a piano and study the theory as well. I bought a piano in 1939, bought an old upright piano and used to cart it around with me. My hostess where I was living were

18:30 very tolerant. They put up with my practicing in the morning and evening. But I loved it. One never knows what the end result would have been, except in 1940 when I enlisted, my teacher was going to make arrangements for me to be auditioned by the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation]. Wasn’t very happy when I told her that I had joined the army.

At this time that you were at the

19:00 **Conservatorium, how were you making ends meet?**

I was working. Not earning very much. I was earning about 6 or 7 pounds a week and paying a bit of board. And I managed to get enough money to pay for it. I didn’t have that much to spare but I didn’t want it. That was what I was interested in doing. And the bulk of my activities were related towards that. I had intended to make it a career.

19:30 I got by.

How was you mother doing at this stage?

Mother was doing a job as a companion with somebody who needed a companion housekeeper. She’d been doing that since 1937, I think. She was coping. But we saw her. I used to see her once a week. One sister

20:00 was married and living at Enfield, so I used to go there at least once a week and catch up with my mother and my sister. I’d come from the Grange and go there. But if you commit yourself, whatever you’re doing commit yourself to something, it takes up a great deal of your life doesn’t it? And that’s what happened to me.

So what then made you

20:30 **decide to enlist in 1940?**

I don’t really know. But so many people of my generation decided we should because things looked pretty desperate in Europe and we didn’t like the thought of Europe…in fact it was after the over-running of France. That was in May. So we all joined up in June. The bulk of my battalion joined up during the months of June and July. And that was the thing that really tipped the

21:00 decision making, the over-running of France. Anybody with any connection to Europe, of any idea of how the world ought to live was not very happy about the over-running of France by the Germans. That was actually, I suppose, what caused it.

What did you think of the Germans?

In what way?

When you enlisted?

21:30 Oh, I knew a lot of Germans. South Australia is full of them. They’re a tremendously efficient people. We were pretty scared of them. They were marvellous. Great soldiers. If anybody had to fight a war then you might as well fight Germans as anybody else. We fought the war according to the game. So there

were no underhand events as far as we were concerned. I didn't mind. Just that we didn't want them over-running France that's all.

22:00 We thought that wasn't fair.

There are a lot of Germans in South Australia. Were they interned to your knowledge?

Yes. Both wars. We had quite a number in the battalion. In the first war, a lot of German South Australians were interned and some of the same were put away in the second too. And they changed the name places. There were lots of German towns up in the hills, which were given Australian names. They changed them back after the second war, very sensibly.

22:30 So I've nothing against the Germans. I just think they're people who one shouldn't allow to be top dog too often. They worry about the European Union and the influence on that.

What did you do about enlisting? Do you remember where you went?

Yes. I went to Wayville on my 23rd birthday. I don't know why I waited until that day but I did. I enlisted

23:00 at Wayville and they sent me off on three weeks leave, said, "Come back on the 22nd of July", which I did. I enrolled on that day and we were then in our hundreds lining up in the Wayville Showgrounds, with doctors there with needles, injecting us all. Strong men were fainting. It was quite extraordinary. People who didn't like having needles stuck into them.

What injections did you have?

Well we had a thing called TAB, which is Triple Antigen.

23:30 And we had also, were inoculated against smallpox. They were standard for anybody going overseas and we got a sore arm but that was all. Then we spent some days being sorted out in Wayville. They sorted us out into various units. I finished up in the 2/48th Battalion. That was formed I think on around about the 23rd of July

24:00 that year. So I was there in the original recruits of the battalion and I don't remember the actual day I joined. I suppose it would be towards the end of July by the time I was taken across to the battalion. In the meantime, we'd been out in the parklands doing rifle drill.

What did that involve?

Just rifle drill and marching. One of the great

24:30 things about the army people don't always understand is that we have a thing called 'battle drill'. This is digressing a bit. But the aim of that is to make sure that when you start to get into an action you're not killed, you do something automatically. So that if somebody shoots at you, you get out of the way and get on the ground. So the early induction in the army of marching is the first step in a way of indoctrinating, particularly

25:00 the infantry, in these drills that will save their lives later. Gets a bit boring. The other thing of course, we do get a gang of recruits who have had no discipline. You've got to instil in them the need to respond to an order, so the easiest way the army has always found to do that is to do drills. So that you know what you're going to do and you respond to the order of "Go right" or "Go left". It

25:30 becomes automatic to do something when the order comes down to do it. It's as simple as that really.

What other early training did you do?

In what. The army?

When you first enlisted?

None. No, it was all cavalry training or machine-gun training. I didn't bother about NCO training. I wasn't interested in that. Anyhow I didn't know, I was only a kid.

26:00 I was naïve and very inexperience d. I had no idea that I'd be able to do it.

At 23 you must have been a bit older than a lot of the other new recruits?

No, the enlisting age was mainly 21 to 23. We had a lot of people at 15. In fact one of my chums in Adelaide was 15 when he went up. And we had one young

26:30 company commander who was killed at Alamein at the age of 21. So yes, I might have been a year older than some of them.

Where were you sent for your first army training camp?

Once I enlisted? Woodville. I mean Woodside. The battalion moved to Woodside training camp. That's up in the Adelaide Hills and there were mainly some huts that had been there in the First World War and a lot of tents.

27:00 And there we embarked on the first series of what we call battalion, company training. You know, you learn to train in a group of 30 or a group of 100 people. Elementary tactical training that we did, because the CO obviously knew we were about to go overseas. We all knew that we'd be going without too much time, so basic unit training. But none of these fellows had any experience at all. They'd come in off the streets

27:30 and 95 percent of them had never even held an army rifle before. They had a long way to go.

It must have been cold in Woodside.

No it wasn't. It was October. October, November. In a typical bit of army call it what you like, when we wanted to catch a ship in Port Adelaide, what did they do? They don't put us on a train. They make us march

28:00 4 and a half miles to catch a train. We could have caught a train in the camp. But I think they were just showing us who was the boss. Typical army ploy.

What did the people who were training you tell you about what to expect?

Well that's a bit hard to describe because, you know, I've spent much of my life in the army training people. You just give them an outline of what they're likely to meet. An outline of what we'd call section and minor unit tactics. In other words,

28:30 you tell them how to move, how to use ground and how to respond if somebody shoots at you. How to respond to that and what action you should take. Really what you're teaching them at that stage is how to use the weapon and how to use ground. That's the infantryman's two main things: a good weapons man and the use of ground. So the basic training depends around that. And then you get onto minor

29:00 tactics. The basic unit is the section of the infantry: 10 men. A corporal and 9. So the basic unit is a section, so you train a section to start with. You teach it how work together and how to support each other. The main thing in armies of all sorts is that everybody must learn to support the man on his right and left. That's the way it all works. In other words, you cover the guy next to you and that's very important

29:30 in basic training to make them understand that.

So how long did you spend at Woodside?

Until the 16th of November. The battalion went there in August but I didn't join it until I came back from Sydney. I came back from Sydney in October. And I found myself in command of a platoon of soldiers. The platoon sergeant was a man called Bill Kibby. We'll come to Kibby later on in the story.

30:00 He was my first one.

So you plucked out of training camp to become an officer?

Yes.

Can you tell us about the officer training in Sydney?

Yes it was mainly at what we call a small arms school, which was a Randwick. There was a small arms range there. And it was the main small arms training camp in New South Wales. And right from the start we learnt how to

30:30 fight and manage the Vickers gun. Each of us had to do the same training and then the best of us, that is, those of us who were better shots than the others, found ourselves the number one of the gun. The gun team is three really. You've got an ammunition carrier who comes back as well. Two man the gun and a third one who carries the spare ammunition. So we learned to work in teams. And we learned how to maintain the

31:00 gun and how to repair it if it broke down. We learned how to site it in certain circumstances. But basically it was a small arms course. Didn't teach us much in the way of infantry tactics. They were reserved for when I got back to the battalion. So they intended to make us efficient machine gunners so we could go away and command a platoon of machine guns. And a platoon,

31:30 I think then, had six guns in it.

How had the equipment improved since your experience in the militia?

Well we got new equipment. The stuff we were using in the militia was pretty old and worn out. We were using a gun called the Lewis gun, which was an odd beast. It had a round magazine on the top. It had been used in the Boer War; it was as old as that. And it was always stopping.

32:00 And we were glad, and so the Vickers that we got were training guns. They got pretty well worn out in training. Then of course when we went overseas, we didn't get any when we went to Palestine. I managed to pinch some when we got up in the desert. I found 3. We salvaged them off some broken down vehicles. But the purpose therefore of Randwick was to make us very efficient

32:30 machine gunners.

What were the other men like on the course?

Oh marvellous. I made lifetime friends. Of course most of them are dead now. But we met in 9th Division. Some of them came to Syria. Some of them went to Bali and we picked them up there. But they were a wonderful team of chaps.

How long was that course in Randwick?

We went there in August.

33:00 It was supposed to be 12 weeks. I only lasted nine or 10 because I got recalled to the battalion.

How did you slot back into the battalion after your time away?

Well I found myself very busy. I found myself commanding a platoon of troops I had to train. I knew nothing about infantry training. I knew how to train them on a Vickers gun and on a rifle; that was all I knew. But I wasn't

33:30 the only one. We had six of us in that company, all platoon commanders who had just been trained. We spent our time teaching and learning. Years ago I spoke to one of my chaps and I said, "You don't know how little I knew when I came." He said, "Whatever you knew was a lot more than we knew." So that was the situation of everybody. Most of us knew very little. We had a company commander

34:00 who tried to teach us a bit..

Did you ever feel just unbelievably in over your head?

Couldn't afford to. No, no. You had a job to do and you had to get on with it. I felt pretty worried about not having driven a motorcar when I was told I was commanding some tracked vehicles. That's the life of the army. You're given a job and, confident or not, you've got to face up to it and do the best. If you get too worried

34:30 you won't get anywhere. You've just got to do the job you're handed and hope you can do it well. If not you do something else.

So on the 17th of November, where did you go?

We got to ship and out of harbour. Our ship was the Stratheden. And then we sailed across the Bight to Perth. We joined the convoy out in the Bight. The convoy was the

35:00 Aquitania, the Strathmore, the Stratheden and the Bartori, with a couple of Australian destroyers escorting us, and my first time at sea. I didn't like it much. The Bight was quite rough. And we had six days in Perth because of the German raider running around the Indian Ocean. Then to Colombo where we had two days. A little bit of acclimatisation and time to run to the local tailors to make some clothes for us.

35:30 Then to Suez, where we got off the ship. No, we anchored overnight in Suez and then the next day sailed up the Suez Canal to Kantara, which was the cross point between Palestine and Egypt. And we got off the ship at Kantara. And loaded onto a troop train mainly of cattle trucks.

36:00 The first time we heard the Muezzin calling, of course, a Muslim village on the Canal.

I want to go back a bit. Did you have pre-embarkation leave in Adelaide?

Yes, I had two weeks.

What did you do with those two weeks?

I don't remember much. I went up country with my friend Grivelle. He was teaching some students. And I visited my family. See it was an odd situation.

36:30 I didn't have many friends because the schools I had gone to were miles and miles away and we'd lost contact with so many of the people we knew. And my cousins were mainly getting ready to go to the war too. I saw them. But mainly I spent the time with my sisters and my mother and travelling around the country.

What were your thoughts about going and fighting so far from home?

37:00 I'm not sure that any of us thought that much about it. Most of us had relatives that had been in the First World War. There was wondering what it was going to be, you know, what was going to happen and what we'd do when we got there. I don't think any of worried too greatly about it, otherwise we wouldn't have joined up. It's a strange situation. You sort of put yourself in limbo. You say, "Well, we're going to do this." And you just hope it all turns out well.

37:30 It's a strange life, army life, sorry any armed service in time of war. You've just got to live from day to day and hope the best. I think the worst ones were pilots. They could only live from day to day. At least we had a longer vision in front of us. None of us discussed it a great deal. What we did discuss a great

deal was the beginning of the German invasion of Russia. We all talked about that a great deal.

38:00 We were concerned about it. I think most of thought that if the Germans didn't have an early win that the war might go our way. Always hopeful.

Was there a military tradition in your family?

My father left Sweden I suspect because he didn't like it.

38:30 I've got a photograph of him in uniform with his brothers and cousins. I had three uncles who were in the First World War, all commissioned. All Infantry. All machine gunners in France. They got away, none of them were wounded. The Second World War my brother-in-law's a regular airman. I had two cousins who enlisted: one in the navy, one in the army. A brother-in-law who wasn't fit, he was in the army.

39:00 So we've got no tradition but a lot of us went over there to the war. One of my nephews was a Duntroon [Military College] graduate. But there's no traditions. It was just the way it worked out.

What was the farewell like in Adelaide?

That was pretty good. A lot of people, well they weren't supposed to know of course, but everybody knew. They saw us marching down to the station.

39:30 And they lined the route and waved us.

What did you take with you?

Nothing. We took no civilian clothes. All our army clothes. We weren't supposed to take photographs. I didn't have a camera. I bought one in the Middle East. And I never kept a diary. A lot of people did but I didn't. I was too naïve. I was told not to keep a diary so I didn't. We were told that we didn't

40:00 take photographs so I didn't. I didn't know much in those days. But I wasn't the only one. So for me it's all memory. I'd like to be able to refer but I never… It's interesting if you don't have a diary and you don't have photographs you're forced to lean on memory and recall things. In a way it's probably easier not having one,

40:30 because you recall the important points of your life. You've got a diary you tend to look at the inconsequential matters, it seems to me. Might be wrong. But that's how it's always struck me.

Tape 3

00:31 **I just need to fill in a couple of gaps and then we'll proceed. I believe you nearly had a naval career as a young man?**

Yes. One of our friends in Adelaide was the first mate of a ship. I had a cousin who was as captain and his ship used to come out now and again, my father's cousin. Anyhow this man was introduced to us

01:00 and he used to come and see us now and again. He thought I should join the navy. So I was then in intermediate year at Norwood High School. So I said all right. So I got some time off from school and studied for the naval exam, which I apparently passed. And then had to go for an interview. Well I didn't have any clothes fit to wear to an interview with a

01:30 great naval chief so I went down the road and borrowed a suit. Turned the cuffs up and fronted up to the interview. Anyhow, apparently they didn't think I was too impossible. And we didn't get an offer to go to the college that year because the government closed the college down in 1930 and the 1930 intake was never admitted to the college. That was a disappointment.

02:00 Next year, sometime in the middle of the year I got a letter from the Naval Board asking if I was still interested in pursuing this application and I had lost interest by then. I don't know why but I just did. I just said, "Hell. It's not worth it." So that's the end of my naval career. But as I said earlier, I'm very lucky because the people of that year nearly all died during the war.

When you were commissioned, I take it

02:30 **you were being groomed to take over a machine gun platoon?**

The Bren Carrier Platoon.

This was the point you said you had no carriers.

Yep. We didn't get any carriers until we got to Tobruk. I had 1 one-ton truck from my headquarters. And I had three three-ton trucks, each for a

03:00 section. That was my equipment.

So at the point you were commissioned to do the carriers you had neither carriers or guns to

be carried upon them?

That's right yep.

What did you learn from your brother officers about commanding men as you moved over to Palestine?

Oh just about everything. I had so little experience. All one

03:30 could do was watch and listen. No, they were a great help. My company commander, a fellow called Geoff Edmonds – he still lives in Perth – he really took me in hand and showed me a thing or two. One of the others was a man from Adelaide by the name of Hurtle Morphett and Hurtle was 34. He was far and away the oldest lieutenant in the battalion. He was a great help. He saw how useless and green I was.

04:00 **Was it at this point that you were made to ride in the back of a train with your troops?**

No, that was when we got to the Middle East, when we got to Kantara. All the platoon commanders were lined up and sent to ride with the soldiers.

You said that taught you a lesson. What was that?

Oh, that the officer can't separate himself from his troops and that the welfare of the soldiers is his job or our job: to see the soldiers were being properly looked

04:30 after on the trip.

Ideally, what was supposed to be the establishment of carriers in numbers and how they were integrated?

We had a carrier platoon of 30 people, 10 vehicles, three sections each of three and my own command vehicle. And we had a commander, a gunner and a driver, and a total of 30. And we had of course one or two administrative vehicles. We had a Bren gun in each carrier.

05:00 So we had a complement of 10 Bren guns. And we had three things called Boyes anti-tank rifles, which were pretty useless, which we never had for months.

Did you ever reach that full establishment of vehicles?

Oh yes. Ultimately in Tobruk, yes. You see the division was ill-equipped. The division was sent up to do a training job and all of a sudden the Germans arrived.

05:30 **When you reached Palestine that first time, what sort of facilities were there for you?**

Well the army of course has a practice of people who sponsor you in. So we arrived in the middle of the night about 8 or 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock. And there's a hot meal waiting for us. So we had a hot meal and we found our tents and just bedded down for the night. Then over the next few weeks we

06:00 sorted ourselves out. We got some equipment at some point. The British ordnance people issued us with our basic weapons, like Bren guns, and we just started training again. We walked around the country. Walked over the hills. Walked over the sand hills and cursed the commanding officer but it's what all green troops do. But I must say, Victor Windeyer was a remarkable man and he took us through

06:30 a walk across the sand hills near Gaza. We'd had a month on the ship and we were pretty soft, and we walked all the way through the sand hills to the beach. The cooks brought along a meal. No time to have a swim. And we walked back again. It was a tough day and quite a lot of fellas dropped out. And here was Victor Windeyer at the age of 36, leading a portion. He never faltered. I had great admiration for him then. He really,

07:00 he must have suffered like mad but he led the way. That was a great object lesson for the rest of us. If you have to do something you can whether you want to or not.

What sort of interactions did you have with locals in that camp?

Almost none. We had some Arabs who would come and clean. We had to guard our rifles at night. We had a donkey race and things. But we had very little interaction.

07:30 Only in the role of cleaners and general helpers.

What could you as an officer do to keep the men occupied in camp?

We had a canteen. And the battalions always organised things for the troops to do at night. We had a Red Cross hut and we had a church hut and we had the canteen, and we worked very hard. Nobody

08:00 wanted to stay up very late at night. And there were open-air theatres. So we were pretty well provided for. And the only thing that we did with our own troops at night was perhaps to talk to our NCOs and plan the next day's training. But by and large the battalion took that over.

Was there a rotation of leave for the men?

Yes. All of us got leave in turn. Some lucky people got to Jerusalem that Christmas. It rained and

08:30 snowed. I think they were held up for two days because of the snow. Some of us got to Tel Aviv. I would say that before we went away, probably the great bulk of the battalion had at least one or two days leave. We used to organise busloads of people for, say, a day or two days in Jerusalem. Nobody wanted to go elsewhere. Down south there was nothing. There was Gaza, Beersheba and the Sinai Desert.

09:00 And it's a long walk to the beach.

Coming from that militia background and the Light Horse, was it interesting to be in that region near Beersheba and so forth?

Absolutely wonderful, because I visited Beersheba. And around us, there were trenches around the battalion camp because the Light Horse had camped there and you could pick up all sorts of things. You could pick up old bullets and cartridge cases and so on. It was a very interesting period.

09:30 And there were also lots of shards. It's a centre point of history, that part of Palestine. And you could walk around on the beach and in the valleys and pick up little bits of pottery and all sorts of less interesting pieces.

Were there any discipline problems with the troops on leave in the cities?

Very few. Very few. The odd one. Had more trouble, they used to something sneak out and pinch a watermelon from the Arab fields. They didn't like that much. No, there was surprisingly little.

10:00 One or two went AWOL [AWL – Absent Without Leave] but what could you do? They didn't know the country. It was more prevalent when we got back from Tobruk because they knew their way around by then.

There were no issues say with venereal disease?

At that stage no. No, there wasn't.

As you were in camp there, what had you been hearing about the exploits of the 6th Division?

A great deal. We got regular

10:30 briefings and regular news sheets, not only the local newspapers but the Army Headquarters put out general… We had a pretty good run down on what the 6th Division was doing. All held them in a tremendously high regard. They were quite an organisation.

How was morale in your battalion?

Oh, quite high, because so much depends, in early days, on the character of the man who's

11:00 running it. Another little thing that Victor Windeyer did, which was quite remarkable, we had a canteen. One of the signals regiments of the 7th Division had been in the desert and come back to Palestine alongside us. They had no canteen, so we opened our canteen up to them and I was the guard picket commander with about seven guys, with muskets in the guard tent. And there was a fight on in the middle of the night.

11:30 So I rushed down with my picket to try to separate them. There'd been uncomplimentary remarks made about our commanding officer by somebody else. In the middle of the night, suddenly there's a shout and out through the lines came a figure in pyjamas and a greatcoat: commanding officer. Just stopped to pull on his boots. He'd put a hat on too. And he plus the adjutant came down to the canteen.

12:00 They saw me in the middle and he said in his strange way, "Now stop this" and by God the whole thing went like that. He had quite a commanding presence when he wanted to and he stopped that in it's tracks. And the fellas got an enormously high regard for him after that because he was protecting their interests you see, and that's the sort of fulcrum point in many ways. They loved him because of it.

At what point did you move down into North Africa?

12:30 Early February. I don't remember the exact date. We caught a train near Gaza and we went across the Canal into Amariya, which is a camp outside Alexandria, and caught another train. Then we caught trucks and we drove up through the Western Desert, up over the border through Derna through Tobruk.

13:00 And we had odd nights off. At a place called Sidi Barrani we spent a night or two. That's where Antony and Cleopatra used to go to swim and it's renowned. If you look at it from the air you can see the remnants of houses and streets. It was once known as the granary of Europe. Anyhow at a place beyond Tobruk, a place called, I'll tell you in a minute, we dropped

13:30 and we stayed there for three weeks, and we were training, getting accustomed to the desert and getting more equipment. And that's where the big battle took place later on in that year where the Brits lost the desert. Rommel broke through.

What sort of equipment were you taking on board at this point?

Everything. Everything. I had, I think, three Bren guns, three Boyes anti-tank rifles, no carriers. Had

nothing.

14:00 All we had were some trucks. We had rifles. But I managed to salvage three Vickers. I don't know where from, I don't remember. Somebody got them. So we were able to take three Vickers with us as well as the Brens. Otherwise, you know, the whole division was under-equipped. We had little artillery and the rest of the battalions were grossly ill-equipped.

A lot of the Australian units seemed to have done quite well at

14:30 **finding equipment at this point.**

There was a lot lying around – I got a motorbike at one stage – because in a battle when an army disappears they leave all sorts of stuff around and we had to salvage otherwise we'd never have been on the road. We got 10-ton diesel trucks, Fiat trucks, and we found big stocks of petrol, otherwise we'd never have moved.

15:00 **Were you using any enemy equipment at this stage?**

Enemy trucks galore. Yes. We weren't using any enemy weapons at that stage. We didn't know enough about them to be certain of them. So we were really relying on our own.

From Sidi Barrani, you moved west?

Yes. We went to a place called Tocra. It was on the way to Benghazi.

15:30 We got there on the 2nd of July and my platoon was attached to our C Company, and our job was to guard a thing called the Maddalena Pass. There was an escarpment on the coast there, which is quite high, and a narrow ledge into the sea, and the Maddalena Pass was the track from the coast up into the top of the escarpment and we were told off

16:00 to guard that. And because I had these Bren guns or Vickers guns, I had a section, two Vickers guns set up at the head of the pass. And we spent Thursday or the second day getting sited. And then we heard the Germans had come. And there was a bit of panic in the British Army. They had got cut off and their tanks ran west and left us. So we had to get out in the early hours of the morning.

16:30 So we were the last people out of the position because my Vickers gun was the last one to be pulled up. We got into trucks and we drove down towards Tobruk to a place called Mechili, which is a desert road coming in from the south and it was crammed head to toe. We never got attacked by a German aircraft. We went through Derna, where we had one of our companies on guard duty, and then

17:00 we went on, we got to Mechili. The first time we stopped, I saw our brigadier on the side of the road. We didn't know where we were going. The brigadier told us where to go, a man called Tovell who later on became Minister for Education in the Bolte Government in Victoria. Anyhow we stopped there for a day and our first battalion were attacked by machine guns and bombs at Mechili. The only one hurt was one of the sergeant-majors of one of the companies.

How would you describe the level of

17:30 **organisation of this withdrawal?**

Well it was virtually non-existent until Morshead took it over. Morshead saved the day. He merely took over command. The British commanders had all been captured. The general commanding and two of the others had all been captured by the Germans at Mechili. There's a man called Ken Shave who was interesting. He used to run the head of the whaling operation in Australia. And Ken was the Intelligence

18:00 Officer in 90th Headquarters and he pulled a Bren gun out and saw them off, so the bulk of 90th Headquarters escaped. But Leslie Morshead just took command and controlled the withdrawal.

And when you were bombed there that was obviously your first time under fire?

Yes it was.

How did it feel?

Not very nice. We didn't like being shot at from the air. The night before we'd

18:30 settled down the previous night and the desert had a thing called camel bush, which grows about 18 inches high. We beat the daylights out of camel bush the first night, we thought they were Germans. So we stayed there two nights. Then we pulled out and we were the last battalion to leave Mechili. And we went back to Tobruk and by the morning of the tenth day we were all inside the perimeter. And the perimeter was closed.

19:00 And we were the last battalion back. We spent that day and night sorting ourselves out. We had to find out where we were going to go. The Italian positions, a lot of them were concrete dugouts, full of fleas. We had to do a lot of digging. We always dug extra. And we spent the next two or three getting equipped, getting our mortars. We didn't have any mortars and they came and more Brens.

How was morale regarding that basically the

19:30 **first time you'd been moved up, you were sent packing?**

We didn't like having to run back. Morale was great. We weren't at all concerned. Morale was extraordinarily high and Morshead said to us, "We don't move. Here we are. Here we stay." And we just accepted that and faced what we had to do. He's the guy who's supposed to know what he's talking about.

And you were saying you didn't have you proper

20:00 **establishment of mortars?**

No we didn't. The battalion got its first mortars back in Tobruk. And we only had about half our Bren guns and not much transport. And the first day we were there, the 11th, the second day, we got three carriers from one of the other battalions. And then they became operative on the 13th of April. We did our first patrol on that day.

20:30 **I guess you had to learn how to drive them first?**

Oh, we had good drivers. Wonderful drivers. I was the only one who couldn't drive. Oh, no, my own driver had been, a man called Harold Cool, had come from northwest in New South Wales. Used to drive trucks. And he used to, these are all crash type gearbox, used to never use a clutch at all, just went straight through. If the rest of us tried it, we'd strip the gears but we had some wonderful drivers.

21:00 **In those first couple of days how did you endeavour to settle yourselves in?**

We had a position. We were in reserve. We dug some in supporting the rear company. We always had three companies up and one back. And we dug a position somewhere I think left of the reserve company. And we just equipped ourselves getting our weapons cleaned up and collecting all the new weapons and the

21:30 Bren guns we needed. Getting ready for the carriers. We were pretty busy digging holes.

Was there any shelling or fire in those early couple of days?

Yes there was. You'd see the Germans coming in, the German tanks were patrolling around the front. They were shelling us. We didn't get bombed. There was a lot of gunfire going on around to our left, on the adjoining brigade, the 20th Brigade.

22:00 And on the 13th the first major attack. The Germans. We could hear the kafuffle. They kept us busy with a bit of shelling, a bit of machine gunning. We kept our heads down but we weren't involved in that. One of the problems was there was a water point. They were holding a place called Point 209 or Ras el Medauuar, the highest point of the perimeter on the western border. And there was a water

22:30 point outside. So if we wanted water, my platoon used to go out and bring some water back until we got our carriers, and then when the Italians closed in, we lost our water. But the first two or three days were a bit of a blur for all of us. We were so busy digging and putting some wire up and putting some extra mines down. There wasn't time to think of much else.

Were the German tanks attempting to

23:00 **probe into the perimeter?**

Not on our side. They were further south, yes. They tried on the 13th. Yes.

The laying of mines and the gathering of water and so forth, was that taking place in daylight?

Yeah. The mines were mainly laid at, yes, we couldn't go out at night, we couldn't find the place because the enemy hadn't closed in then. We still had enough room to manoeuvre. Wasn't until some days later that he closed in and stopped us.

23:30 **Describe to me the sort of patrols you were doing with your carrier platoon?**

Well we'd go out on a daily basis. Out beyond us, beyond this hill Point 209, was a lot of what we call dead ground, stuff we couldn't see. It was quite clear that the enemy were going to concentrate there and we were expecting an attack to come at some stage, so we used to go out to the west. We couldn't go out to the

24:00 right of it because there was a big wadi on the road to Derna. So we had to go on the left hand side. So we used to go out early morning and we'd like to patrol if we could into the late morning because by then the sun had come up and you'd get the shimmer, the mirage shimmer, and be a bit hard to hit so we'd get home safer. So we used to go out as far as we could to try and get an eye on what the enemy was doing. And every

24:30 day I had at least one section of the platoon out on. We'd try and do a patrol, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Our work was by day, never by night, and occasionally we'd play guide dog to one of the infantry patrols. We'd hear a bit of machine-gun fire, we might run out and pick them up, if they'd

run into some sort of trouble.

Wasn't it risky going out in daylight

25:00 **in a tin box?**

Of course it was but it had to be done. Not as easy as that to hit them. You see, the desert is not sand, it's powdered dirt and the vehicles threw up an amazing amount of dust. You'd come back and there'd be dust that deep on the back of the vehicles, so we were a hard target to hit, and if there were any enemy tanks or trucks you could see them at some distance off.

25:30 And we never went in a straight line we used to zigzag a bit to make ourselves a harder target. But our trouble was we occasionally got shelled home. Occasionally they'd drive us in with a tank or shelling but I don't think it was as bad as the infantry patrol in a way. We had some protection.

I'm just trying to get an idea of why the enemy let you get away with it?

No. Mainly because he was

26:00 engaged elsewhere and they let us get away with it until we made that raid. I made a raid one day, just a routine, and I found a regiment of bersalieri down in the dead ground with no guns, no tanks. They were in trucks. So I said, "Let's beat them up." So we ran up to them and started to shoot them up and they put their hands up and the whole regiment came in. And I lined them up. They lined up in about six deep,

26:30 and these whole lines of battalions moved back to the perimeter. And half way in, the Germans caught up with us and they started to shell us. So I took my carriers back inside the fence and they came in on their own after that. We sent an infantry patrol out and brought them in. They didn't want to go back. After that they got a bit more concerned about it. Then

27:00 we had a company attack one morning, C Company, I had four of my carriers out with them. We attacked the Italians who re-occupied that area. and we had a successful raid happen early that morning. We had an aeroplane called a Lysander making a bit of noise. We had Cruiser tanks on the left of us. And that was successful. We caught another 305 odd people that day. After that they closed in.

27:30 So the carriers' patrolling virtually finished after that attack because the Germans had closed in. They were all within sighting distance of the wire.

When you captured that Italian regiment, how many carriers and men did you have with you?

Only three. Nobody was more surprised than we were. They didn't want to fight in the war. They hated it.

How did you go about rounding them up?

28:00 Well I sent two carriers around the flank and one around the back of the team. We were firing the Bren guns all the time and they decided it was time to give in, so we sort of sheep dogged them in. I had a carrier on either side and one at the back.

Obviously there was no way you could have searched and disarmed 800 men…

We didn't try to. They threw them down. They came in without arms. They dropped everything and came

28:30 in. They just wanted to get out of the way.

What sort of condition were they in?

Good condition. They were all right. It was their first contact. They'd never had a real battle before. Nobody was more surprised then we were.

Did you make any attempt to recover the vehicles?

We recovered quite a lot. Yeah. We sent infantry patrols out and recovered some vehicles and some guns.

You must have felt quite

29:00 **triumphant returning to the wire with that many prisoners.**

Oh yes, it was. It was great fun. Nobody wanted to believe it. Yes it was an extraordinary experience. There you are. These things happen.

You mentioned that sometimes you would go and rescue infantry patrols with your carriers?

Yes.

How many riflemen could you fit on a carrier?

With a pinch, four or five. About four, all standing up.

29:30 You see, occasionally they'd run into trouble as the Germans closed and we had patrols going all day and all night out, and as they closed in sometimes the patrols would… One day for example, we had a lot of Germans and a couple of tanks moving around the flanks. So we changed direction and picked our foot patrol up and brought it back. We were always on stand-by for that sort of action, that sort of ad hoc business.

30:00 **That dead ground that you were often patrolling, roughly what distance was that from your front line?**

1,000 yards. A place we called Carrier Hill because there was a derelict Bren carrier from an earlier attack that was there. You could hide a lot of people. You could hide two or 3,000 people down there. It became quite a nasty problem right throughout the siege.

Was it possible to cover that dead ground with your

30:30 **Vickers?**

No, no. There was too much intervening ground. It was like a fold of ground out ahead of us. We were on a high point but this thing went out, it was more than a ridge, it was like a great fold. Like a small plateau and then it disappeared about 1,000 yards out. We had to constantly patrol to see what was happening there.

How did the carriers cope with the dust and the general conditions?

Horrible. The

31:00 average life of an engine was 1,500 miles. We used Ford V8s and the filters weren't terribly effective. We used oil filters. Air filters to start and then we changed them. Maintenance was an enormous problem because the engines got chock-a-block full of dust. Yes. It was the biggest problem we had with the carriers because they're so low and they weren't in any way dust proofed.

31:30 Because the tanks had pretty dust proof engine mountings, we didn't.

Given there's no roof on a Bren carrier you must have been pretty dusty yourselves when you came back in?

Oh, we were. We ate dust. Oh yes.

How did that affect the weaponry as well?

We always kept the muzzle of the Bren guns covered. And we had to use a rifle or two on the carrier. We always kept the muzzle covered until we needed it.

32:00 It was a constant problem. Every day of course every weapon had to be cleaned and oiled.

What sort of austerity measures were you under as far as food and water?

Individuals had one water bottle a day. That's all we got. And we had to clean our teeth and shave with that. Tea came up. I think the ration…

32:30 The water all came from water points. It was all desalinated water and a place called the Wadi Giaida where the water point was. And I think that the daily ration was about a gallon per man for the garrison. It might have been a gallon and a half. So, you know, we were filthy. I only had one shower in all the months I was there. I only got one visit to the beach. We learnt economy washing. Crutch and armpits were the only things that got washed, plus your face.

33:00 **As an officer, were you expected to make a special effort as an example?**

Well, we were told to clean our boots every day, which is not a bad morale measure. We were told to shave and clean our boots every day. Otherwise, we were all, we were pretty strict on it. We made our fellows do that as well. Everybody had to.

As the German

33:30 **noose tightened around Tobruk, how did that change your daily routine?**

Well, you see, after the attack. After what we called the Salient went bad, I think I said, the 24th Battalion took over from us. And on the 28th I think of April they took over from us. We had one breakthrough by some Italian tanks. We knocked one out

34:00 with a Boyes anti-tank rifle, a little light tank. And the general ordered a big minefield put in. So there was a great minefield in front of us and then on that morning we saw this whole line; 50 or 60 tanks looking at us from the front of the hill. And some had been caught in the minefield because they hadn't expected it. And they just sat there all day. And the artillery beat the daylights out of them.

34:30 So we just sat there hoping, wondering what would happen. That was on the first day, the morning of I think the 1st of May.

Were they German or Italian tanks?

Both. Both German Mark Three and light Italian ones. I think a couple of the German Mark Fours, the lighter ones, got blown up in the minefield.

Surely an artillery barrage wouldn't have made much impression on a Mark Three or Four tank?

Oh yes, it blinds them and thus keeps them out of the way. And a direct

35:00 hit will knock them out. And most of the guns in the garrison, at least half the guns could fire on the fort. There wasn't much room inside. The guns had to constantly move to avoid being knocked out. And the minefield of course is what saved the day.

Were they anti-tank or anti-personnel mines?

Anti-tank. Didn't have time for anything else. And they put about three rows of

35:30 anti-tank mines in. As a matter of fact, the fellow that did it was called Gerhmann, who just died. Colonel Gus Gerhmann. He was the Engineer Squadron commander at the time.

And knocking the Italian tank out with the Boyes rifle must have been quite an unusual victory for that type of weapon?

Oh, God yes. It was a half, a fifty-mil [millimetre] calibre. Useless thing. But the Italian light tanks were tin cans anyhow. They were no better than carriers.

36:00 They were just carriers with a hood over the top. They weren't much use. The Italians didn't fight with the same ferocity that the Germans did. They were badly armed to start with. Their weapons were pretty poor compared to the Germans. Their hand-grenades were almost useless and they had a tough time. They were being bullied by the Germans and by their own command. They had lots of supply of

36:30 Ricaro water and if you were lucky a bit of red wine.

So when that tank attack was thwarted by the minefields and artillery fire, your battalion was in the front line there?

No we were in reserve. That night we did a counter-attack. It was the first major counter-attack and what we had to do was to line up and go straight for the hill. And

37:00 it was unfortunate that there wasn't enough time for a proper reconnaissance because the battalions had drawn back to prepare for it. We got bombed on the start line and so there was a bit of mayhem, and we got away late and so the artillery wasn't as effective as it might have been.

Were you in carriers or dismounted?

Dismounted. This is infantry. I was supposed to do the right flank. But we came to realise it was pointless because

37:30 we went in after dark. The carriers were no use after dark, so we didn't try. But the British tanks were supposed to come up on the left of us and support us. Well when the attack got going the company on the left saw some tanks and I thought; beaut. Happened to be German tanks and so they shot the company up there. British tanks never arrived. So the attack was a failure. It didn't get very far. But it lasted three hours and we lost a company commander and quite a few fellas.

38:00 But what it did do was to stop the Germans. It stopped the advance. And although it was a major failure as an attack it achieved its broader objective by holding the Germans off. They never tried again from that position.

And how did you like leading your first infantry attack?

Oh, it wasn't very nice. But like anything else, if you plan it properly you always live in hope that you're

38:30 going to win the fight, don't you?

In darkness and with an uncertain start line, how do you go about proceeding?

We learnt later, before Alamein, how to do it. You lay start lines out; white tape. And we laid lines of advance. We had kerosene lamps in tins cut back with a pattern on them. For Alamein, we used sun, moon,

39:00 star and so on. So we could see the line of advance we were supposed to be following was say, moon so we would follow the moon tins. And you took compasses. You had guiding parties who led the middle of each company and each platoon would have them. And you had pacers as well. So you had people that would march on the compass and people who would pace so you knew how far you'd gone. And that's the way we did it. And when you got there,

39:30 you had a pre-planned arrangement of dispersing out and taking up defensive positions.

And this wasn't in practice the time you had your counter-attack at Tobruk?

No. We'd never practiced that at all. It was just up and go.

How do keep command of your men in conditions of confused fighting and darkness?

You just try and keep in touch with the fella on either side. Everybody has to contact everybody else and

40:00 the platoon commander, who's the key to it all, has a platoon runner and he makes certain that his sections are in touch. And the section's job is to keep in touch with the ones in front.

What personal weapons would you carry in such a move?

The average soldier of course carried one of two things: a rifle and bayonet.…

I'm asking about you, personally.

A rifle and bayonet, or a pistol. You see we didn't do much. We weren't attacking at night. We were in the

40:30 vehicles. Later on we did, of course. But as far as I was concerned I carried a rifle and bayonet. You can't be picked at then as a local commander.

So you did take steps to minimise your obviousness as a commander?

Oh yes. Later on in the jungle, we always did as a matter of course. Oh yes. Always.

What about in the desert?

Yep. You know, you see some ridiculous pictures of attacks with some silly officer with a pistol. Well that never happened.

41:00 There's a famous one in the war museum I took exception to.

What about your epaulettes and so on? Would you remove them?

No, because I couldn't be seen. They were the black stars or else you had cloth ones but they couldn't be seen, particularly at night. And if it got too bad, you put a white patch on the back of the man in front of you so you could see him.

Tape 4

00:31 **Can you tell us the conditions that you were living under at this point?**

In the front line, there were a series of Italian concrete posts and they were about 8 feet deep. One of them was used for ammunition storage and sleeping and the rest were sort of concrete trenches. The trouble about that is that if you live in concrete, and the French found this in the Maginot Line,

01:00 if you live in concrete you get a bit scared about putting your head out in the open. And we had minimum people. We dug slit trenches out in the open between the concrete posts. The concrete were used for ammunition and food and things of that sort. But they were full of fleas. Desert fleas were there in great numbers. And when one was at what we call the Salient, where the Germans had broken in on the western

01:30 sector, the lines were only two or 300 yards apart. You could see each other. And nobody did that. You didn't put your head up. By day you were likely to get it shot off. It was a sniper's paradise and the Germans didn't like our snipers much. So by day you kept your head under cover. You had dry biscuits for lunch. In the evening, the cooks would bring a hot meal up and

02:00 we'd eat a hot meal down in the dugouts, you know, in our slit trenches and at night we could get up and move around. But in the Salient, it was very dangerous. We only really got out to do essential things like go to the loo or go out on patrol. We always had listening posts at night. Every front line had a series of listening posts. It might be 30, 50, 200 yards out to catch any enemy movement.

02:30 For breakfast we got tea. Sometimes we got a hot breakfast, not always. In the Salient, we only got one hot meal a day. Further back in the line we got hot breakfast and a hot evening meal. And we made out own lunch, we made our own tea, mainly biscuits and cheese, very horrible food. We did get hot tea two or three times a day.

What kind of physical shape were you in?

03:00 Pretty poor by the time it finished. A lot of people had jaundice. The fleas carried jaundice. And we in fact, the Division was pulled out because there was concern about our… So we'd been there for six months and we got no exercise and desert sores were prevalent. It took a long while, you got ulcers and they took a long while to heal. But we would probably have survived had we stayed but I think they were wise to pull us out.

03:30 **What are desert sores?**

Just you knock a bit of skin off, it ulcerates and doesn't heal, and they were quite common.

And aside from the jaundice, what other effects did the fleas have upon you?

Frustration. They used to get in the waistband. You'd de-flea each night. Strip our clothes off and de-flea. But they'd get in the hemlines

04:00 and the waistlines. Often had a string of fleabites around the tum [stomach]. You get used to that of course. There wasn't any other flea-borne disease to my knowledge. But there were a lot of, how would I describe it? I suppose stomach troubles because we were ingesting sand all the time. People quite

04:30 often had difficulty. And of course the other problem was, it wasn't always possible to get to the latrines, so a lot of people tended to develop pretty serious haemorrhoid problems, which developed later because so infrequent visits to the lavatory we got bound up. The was quite a problem, to

05:00 make sure people could get regular visits to the latrines because it was damaging if they could go for too long. Later on of course, that developed in quite a lot of people when we got out of the fortress. But boredom was the thing. It was terribly boring. It got terribly hot during the day and we got a mirage come in the middle of the day; one would get a mirage. You couldn't see very well. You could see a dust spiral in the background, guess it was a truck or tank but

05:30 you couldn't see it and it was always a good time to patrol. Infantry patrols out in that mirage. And patrolling at night was a problem. You couldn't see anything. so you always had to march out on a compass and come back on compass, so easy to get lost. There were no defining features. Only these little camel bushes about 18 inches high.

How many men would go out on an evening patrol?

Oh, it depends whether it's reconnaissance or fighting. And if it is

06:00 fighting, you might get 12 to 15, in other words, a re-enforced section. You can't control too many. If there was a raid on a specific target, we might get more. But generally a fighting patrol about 12 to 15 men. Reconnaissance patrol perhaps three. Just having a look. Seeing what's happening.

What was the mood like when you'd embark on a fighting patrol at night? It must have been terrifying.

06:30 Well it's just another job to be done. We did pretty well at patrolling. The Australians were renowned patrollers, better than the Germans and the Italians. And the Italians often used to talk amongst each other at night. If they'd go on a digging party, they were easy to find. They didn't like silence. It's a hazardous profession but our fellas became very good at it indeed. A fighting patrol might last four or five hours. Go out 9 or 10 o'clock at night and come in mid morning.

07:00 Always had to be in at least an hour before dawn, which was 'stand to' time. Everybody 'stood to' on their weapons an hour before dawn and an hour before dusk in the evening.

When did you get your sleep in?

During the day and at night of course unless you were in the Salient or on the front line. Not more than 10 percent of the troops were out on patrol at night.

07:30 You couldn't afford to leave the place too undermanned. I suppose that the average soldier would have gone on one or two patrols a week, up in the front line. And when you were in the reserve of course that didn't happen. But when you're in the front line, one or two a week would be the average. Some were quite distant. Some would only go out two or 300 yards on the southern side of the perimeter. But in the north it might be a couple of hundred yards at the most.

08:00 **What did you think of the desert? Did you find it beautiful?**

It can be. We had rain, interesting in Tobruk. I think it might have been in June. We had quite a heavy rainstorm and our dugouts got flooded. And the flowers came later and the birds came around. You remember that episode in Christmas 1914 where the troops called an armistice for Christmas? We had a little armistice in Tobruk when we got

08:30 out, when our things got flooded, we put our blankets out to dry and the Italians did the same. And we called off hostilities while the blankets dried off. We weren't very far apart. We'd see each other quite comfortably. It was very interesting. It was on the edge of the Salient, on the southern end of the Salient when we were about four or 500 yards apart.

What did that armistice or

09:00 **ceasefire make you think about the war you were fighting?**

Oh, of course it does. You wonder what it's all about. There we were. We had to do it. But the war started again as soon as it was over. Yes it does make you think a bit. Not as bad as the 1914 one where so many people were involved. The generals didn't like that of course, but nobody minded with us. It

was a local affair.

09:30 As I say, the Germans played the war by the rules. There was no unnecessary nastiness involved. If our fellows got wounded, they would pick them up and look after them if they were outside. We'd do the same with them, which is the only way to, if you have to fight that's the way to do it. The desert as a place to fight was wonderful. Nobody was being hurt. There were no buildings being demolished. There were no crops being spoilt. And you learned to live with it.

10:00 You learned to hide yourself when circumstances. If you have to fight a war it's the place to be.

How closely did you come into contact with Germans?

Well of course all the time with them. In the Salient, we were right alongside them. We were 200 yards apart perhaps, otherwise we didn't have much contact. With my job with the carriers we didn't have much contact.

10:30 They used to shoot us up with their tanks but we tried to avoid close contact with them.

How did you learn to lead men in these early days?

Oh I don't know. You just had to. It was my job so one had to do what was necessary. Of course I've always believed that the first principle in leading troops is to keep them in the picture and tell them what's happening. If you tell people what's happening then you've got a much better

11:00 chance of having it done. I made it a practice of mine all through the army keeping the troops properly briefed, properly informed, so they don't have any questions about what they're being asked to do. Any decent commander does that.

Did you have any problems with any particular troops?

No. Not my troops. No. No. I've never had either as a platoon or company commander. I

11:30 never had any problems.

Did you witness men who couldn't handle the stress of battle?

Yes. I felt rather ashamed about that in a way. We all felt the same about people we used to call bomb happy. That's not fair. Remember they were all volunteers; we forgot that they were all volunteers. And there are some people that are psychologically incapable of taking the stresses of war. And they cracked

12:00 up. And they were sent back. They were psychiatric cases. But I felt afterwards, we'd dealt pretty harshly with some of them. But later on we started to learn what the truth of the matter was and we just took it as part of the deal. Some people couldn't face up and so you had to send them back, out of the way, because they'd be a nuisance up at the front. The best example I know was a man I worked with and we joined

12:30 up about the same time. He'd been an athlete of some significance. And he became a senior NCO. He's a great, big man and he'd done very well in his line of sport, and he couldn't cope. He cracked up very early. And I thought at the time how interesting it was because here was this great big strong man, very confident and very capable in his own line of sport, simply couldn't take the pressures of war.

13:00 I changed my mind about it. Every army has this and commanders have to learn to cope with it.

How did relocating a soldier affect the morale of the troops?

They were glad to get rid of them. They didn't want them. You know, one man who's uneasy in a section can upset the entire section and they knew if they went out on operation he

13:30 would probably let them down, so they couldn't wait to get rid of him. So we didn't fool around. The moment a man showed any indication of having this, he would be sent backwards. Had a chance of recovering there but he wouldn't have a chance of recovering if we kept him up with us.

So for six months you were in the fortress?

Yeah. I came out in August with jaundice.

Tell us about that?

Well, because we'd

14:00 had nothing to do, the carrier patrols had stopped. We got driven in and had to stop patrolling. We used to go out quite a long way. I used to go out 1,500, 2,000 yards in some places and gradually the enemy closed in and he stopped that long distance, so I had nothing to do. And one of the other battalions in our brigade, the 2/24th, which had been attacked in the big German attack on the end of April early May, they'd lost about

14:30 three or 400 people in their battalion. And so in July we got a lot of reinforcements and they were sent to the 2/24th Battalion and they'd lost most of their officers. They were being re-formed. So I and

another platoon commander were posted to the 2/24th Battalion to reinforce them, because I had nothing to do in the meantime. My troops were given to a defensive position in the line. So I stayed

15:00 with them for some weeks. I became an honorary member of the 2/24th Battalion and I picked up jaundice there, Hepatitis B, thank God it wasn't C. You get it, you go a beautiful yellow colour all over and your urine was a beau claret colour. Wonderful stuff. And there was no doubt when you had jaundice you had it. And you became very tired and jaded.

15:30 And so those of us who developed bad cases were shipped out. The first move was to the hospital in the Tobruk harbour. And that was an uncomfortable place because it used to be bombed and shelled regularly. I think I had two days or three days in the hospital in the harbour and then the destroyers came in. We went out by night. It was quite a rush. Had to

16:00 leave the hospital and walk as fast as you could to the pontoon dock, get on the ship, and it wouldn't stayed moored for more than about an hour. And then we hied back to Alexandria and we had a good ride because we weren't attacked. But many of the destroyers going back came under air attack. It was wonderful after months and months and months of awful food to be given steak and egg for breakfast and a glass of cold beer, both of which, you know, absolutely worst thing in

16:30 the world for jaundice, but they were beautiful. And so we arrived back and I spent two weeks in the 2/11th Australian Hospital at Kantara on the Canal. And back to Amiriya, where we spent another two weeks on leave mainly, and to get to Alexandria on leave was wonderful.

How were you treated in the hospital for your illness?

Nothing much. All alcohol, all fats were banned.

17:00 And I don't remember what medication they gave us. They must have given us some, I don't remember. The ward was chock-a-block full of yellow people and I think it was mainly a matter of just cleaning the system out and letting nature do its own. Of course I didn't suffer any liver complaints. The worst cases had a serious liver and they were sent back home because some people never recovered. And the liver's

17:30 very badly affected with those who suffered longest. The nasty part of the disease. We just got little twinges, that's all. But I fully recovered.

What did you do in those two weeks of leave in Alexandria?

Well, Amiriya. It was about 60 miles out. We were training and I got to Alex about three times a week. It was marvellous. Used to go around

18:00 Bizinet and I went out into the desert. I got myself as far as Cairo once. And went and saw the pyramids. And we just waited to be picked up by the battalion when they came out of Tobruk. So I picked it up on the way back to Palestine. We weren't going to be sent back anyhow. The battalion was coming out. There was no point in us going back to Tobruk because at that stage Tobruk was being

18:30 relieved and all the capacity was used to bring the relieving troops in, British division and some Poles. So we just sat and waited. The best three weeks I had in the army.

What did you do to pass the time?

Visited all the museums and I used to go to the great hotels and drink and have lunch, get a nice meal. Oh yes. And it was great fun. We met other people. And we did what most troops do on leave:

19:00 enjoy themselves as much as they could. I found the museums wonderful.

Were many of the men at that stage visiting the brothels in Cairo or anywhere else?

Well I would think so. I wasn't a great brothel-goer myself. I didn't bother. But oh, yes, of course they did. For the first time, I think venereal disease became a problem when people were visiting Alexandria and Cairo. Famous one of course was

19:30 the Rosetta one where they got a bomb lobbed on it one night. South Africans were killed in action. Oh, yes, the troops some of them liked that, others didn't.

What was the treatment like for venereal disease?

I don't know. Never had it.

Did you have to be informed when your troops fell

20:00 **ill?**

The battalions issued a statement every day on manpower strength, which included all the people that had been wounded or killed or those that had been evacuated. So you always knew. So that if a soldier got attached to somebody else or somebody got sick or wounded or killed, his home particulars and subunit always had to be advised. Yeah. So we knew on a day-to-day basis

20:30 how many people we had on the ground in the battalion.

At this stage after having had six months in serious battle, how well equipped do you think you were?

We became pretty efficient desert fighters. We knew all about it. We knew how to cope with it. We didn't know much about night fighting. We knew a great deal about patrolling. We knew about daylight raiding. We knew

21:00 a lot about carrier tactics. It wasn't until we got to Alamein that we really learnt to study night fighting. And when we got back to Palestine, we devoted quite a deal of time to that too, learning the basics of night tactics. But of course we had a big job. We had quite a lot of reinforcements coming in had to be retrained. They knew nothing about the desert. So I found myself in a training battalion, training all these new recruits to

21:30 teach them something about the desert.

What did you tell them?

Oh, we'd learn how to survive, how to keep your weapons clean, how to patrol, how to defend, how to dig defences, all the basic elements of desert fighting. Because when they came from Australia, they didn't know much. Some of them weren't even efficient in small arms training, which worried us. There was something wrong with the system back in Australia that hadn't trained them

22:00 properly. We had to start from scratch, start off with basic weapon training, and I think from memory we kept them at the training battalion for about a month altogether; pretty intensive stuff. Then we'd send them out to the battalions and get in a new lot.

What did you enjoy about this work?

Well, a lot of my army time was spent in teaching. I like teaching. I enjoyed it very much because after all you're teaching a guy

22:30 how to survive aren't you? Teaching them how to live and how to fight and how to survive. So it's a very important part of army activity. I always enjoyed it.

You had three weeks while waiting to be re-posted and what happened after that time?

Well, we went back to Palestine. And we got back to Palestine in November all together. So our second Christmas was spent

23:00 in Palestine. I think from memory the camp was called Deir Suneid. We loved it. We got new equipment, we got new clothes, cleaned our weapons, got old equipment replaced and we started retraining again. We got a lot of new people that had to be absorbed. Every section, platoon and company has to retrain. If you've got five new people in they don't know the old methods so the old guys

23:30 have to go through it again and teach the new ones how it works as a team. And then we had Christmas of course. The officers and NCOs always fed the troops. It's a custom. And so Christmas Day is always a big day. We had a pretty good meal that year, turkeys and Christmas pud. A lot of parcels from home, the Red Cross. And then the next day we had a

24:00 tremendous storm on Boxing Day and all our tents blew away. All of them took off. Oh, yes, an enormous thunderstorm and that took a couple of days to clean up. The lucky people were in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv; they missed it. But, you see, one of the features of the army, when you're losing a lot of people, is this constant process of reforming the team. It's easy when you've got three people in a tank or a carrier but it's not easy when you've got 120 people or

24:30 a battalion of 900 men. You've got to go through the whole process again to make sure everybody understands. It becomes tiresome but a necessary part of fighting war.

In what way is it tiresome?

Because you're doing the same thing over and over and over again every time you get a new batch of reinforcements. You're going through the same process.

What was it like when reinforcements would be incorporated into the battalion? How did that affect

25:00 **everybody?**

Well we used to spend the first few days of course, trying to teach them what to do. They came out of our battalion training hands but the real training happens when they get back to the battalion. So they're incorporated into the section, taken out on patrol, under short patrols, under special guidance, because there wasn't much time. When you are in the line there was not much time for training. Only when you were in reserve could you do much. Otherwise you were in the position of

25:30 defending the position and doing these fighting or listening patrols, so they'd always go out with say, one new man in every four or five would be the most you could afford to take. Had to break them in slowly. Must get used to the noise and the night movement. It just takes a while to absorb an entirely

new lifestyle for them. We'd been there for six months. It was second nature to a trained soldier.

26:00 But it doesn't take long. You're being shot at. It doesn't take long to learn the lessons.

How long were you in Palestine for?

I stayed in Palestine until early August. I did a course of motor vehicle maintenance and carrier driving and maintenance. I did a trip around Palestine. I went from Beersheba up to the Syrian border. I went to Acre and I had a few leaves

26:30 in Tel Aviv. I used to go and listen to the Tel Aviv Youth Orchestra playing. They were fun. They heard me called Isaksson and invited me in. So that was nice. And I had a particular hotel that I stayed at. Jerusalem was marvellous because the Old City was there and it was full of the most wonderful things. And one could trace the Biblical history, the Mount of Olives and all these interesting places around.

27:00 The churches and the Nativity. Jerusalem was a wonderful place to spend a few days in. And it became a period of exploration. We used to stay at the King David Hotel, which was the one we could least afford but liked best. It was a great place. That's the one the Arabs blew up later on.

You mentioned off camera that your letters were opened, that you

27:30 **received? Your mail was opened?**

Oh yes. Censorship was always a pretty important part of the army. And almost every letter of mine had been opened. Would be sealed with 'has been opened by the censor'. Not that there was anything important in it.

Who did you correspond with?

Oh, home. My mother and my sisters and a girl I was writing to. And my friends the Grivelles, the music teacher. We used to mainly write in

28:00 pencil. We didn't have any inks. And they were the comforts one gave us; air letters. And we'd occasionally be able to send a telegram home through the system. And we got the odd comforts parcel and parcels from home. They'd come on a fairly regular basis. We didn't do too badly.

Where did you move from Palestine?

The division moved to Syria. I didn't go. I stayed

28:30 in training, so that wasn't part of my experience. Then back in June the division was moved back to the desert because the (UNCLEAR) 8th Army had collapsed. The big battles west of Tobruk, the army had been soundly defeated and Rommel had captured Tobruk again. So 9th Division rushed down from Syria. And they fought the early

29:00 battles in July. And they were very successful battles indeed. The Germans were stopped on the coast. And my brigade, the 26th Brigade held the coast from then on until the big battles. And that's when we learnt that daylight battles just didn't work. The casualties were so high on both sides, and the Germans lost enormous numbers of people. And the tanks used to break through, there was no time to put decent

29:30 minefields down, and the fellas had a lot of victories. They killed a lot of tanks by a thing we called a sticky grenade. It was a thing with a handle on it. It was a glass bowl. It was full of treacle or something with a bit of gunpowder inside and that would stick onto the German tanks and blow a hole in them. And then I rejoined in the first week in August and I was replaced in the training battalion

30:00 just in time to go up to the front line at El Alamein and pick up my platoon. There'd been a few casualties and we had quite a few new people in it. We couldn't do much patrolling there. But at the end of August I had a very interesting job. They gave me a jeep to try out. It was the first jeep and I used to drive that across the desert trying it out. And then at the end of August the Germans had another bigger attack

30:30 in the middle of the line. And I was sent across with a section of carriers on a daily basis to what we call Ruweisat Ridge. My job there was to watch out and see if there was any break through by the Germans so I could report back on wireless and let the division know. That lasted for four or five days. It was quite interesting. We had a good view of what was happening down to the south of us. And that was a break from routine.

31:00 Then we used to do odd, being used as infantry, they'd send me and my fellows out on night patrols. And we'd go out, one patrol for example that we did, we took the mortars out, about a kilometre out on night patrol, and put a protective guard around them while they fired some mortars back into the German lines, because our mortars had a pretty short range. That was interesting. So

31:30 we got a little more standard infantry work in that period.

Tell us about the close range... You were just telling us then about the mortars?

Oh, our mortars were awful. They had only a 1,500-yard range. The German mortars had about 3,000 yards. They were an 81-millimetre. Our bombs they used to rattle as they went down the barrel. And

they were a nice bomb, but they were a lousy instrument. They just weren't good enough. So we used to love capturing it,

32:00 German 81-millimetres. And so because we couldn't reach them, we had to take them out at night and go out in No-man's-land and try and reach them that way. Interesting exercise. We didn't stay out for long. The mortars would fire about 10 or 20 rounds each and then we'd come back home, and we just had to rear-guard them and see them back in safe and then go back out ourselves. That was a nice break.

32:30 Then we went back into reserve. A place called Shamamaholt where we trained for the big battles. And we did simulated attacks on same distance we were to do on the first night. We had to go something like 5,700 yards, the longest of any battalion. We had an approach march and then we had the actual attack was something like 3,000 yards.

33:00 So we used to practice this at night, pacing out the distance and keeping direction. And we're doing it both by day and by night to get a feel for the operation.

What did you know of the plans for the operation at this point?

Oh, nothing. I didn't know anything. Only the division set these series of set exercises. As far as we were concerned we guessed what it was. But we knew only it was training in night attack. So we learned how to pace, we

33:30 learned how to keep control, we learned how to march down a centre line, and we got pretty adept at it because when you got there, you see, you couldn't see anything. and if you were on a hill you still couldn't see much at night. We had to be finished by the early hours of the morning because this was October and so it was a full moon night. We attacked the day after full moon.

34:00 And we had to be settled in by about two or three in the morning, which gave us time to get all the stores up, for the fellas to get dispersed and take up a rough defensive position. To dig some holes, get some head cover up and get some mines down. They were pretty busy nights. So our attacks had to start well before midnight. What we wanted to achieve was to be on the objective as soon after midnight as we could. By 1 o'clock on the morning if we could, which gave us

34:30 time for, that is, we are mainly infantry companies, which gave time for me in the carriers to run up with all the stores and engineers' supplies. We were the people who carted up the head cover and the mines and the extra ammunition. And once we had carted up the first lot then the company trucks would come up and we'd do a second run, so that we were in effect sort of carrying parties on tracks.

35:00 So we got pretty expert by the time the actual attacks came on.

What particular skills did you learn during this specialised training for the big battles?

The real skills were direction finding, both in terms on compass marching and of position finding, so that we would know exactly where we were in the ground. If you can't see any features it's hard to know. So you

35:30 must develop these skills of pacing. We knew exactly how many paces we had to go to do a mile if we had to go 1,000 yards. We knew that a pace was roughly 30 inches. So we'd have to take 1,000 yards divided by 30, what? Is say is 1,200 yards. We had to move 1,200 paces. And then we had to know also, how to deploy at night and how to dig in at night to try and get a field of fire. So that if you got attacked you're

36:00 able to see somebody. And the other thing of course was the art of the quick digging of holes. One had to dig a slit trench in very quick time indeed and so all the troops carried sandbags. And we would come up with say, some sheets of galvanised iron and say, some pickets and they'd fill the sandbags. You'd try and get at least one sandbag of cover over your head at night before first light. They

36:30 were the skills we had to learn. Not to get lost and how to be ready to fight in the morning. And then when the actual battle started we had other aims. The anti-aircraft people would fire lines of tracer for us so that the battalion centre line was marked by a 40-millimetre Bofors gun firing a tracer fire. And the centre line of each company was also marked. So we had

37:00 3 lines of fire going out. We could keep in general terms along the rough line of advance. So also in the companies' case, it gave the companies the space. The platoons would know they had to be either side of that centre line, and the battalion headquarters moved along the battalion centre line. It had a battalion guiding party, the battalion intelligence officer with a reserve, with compasses.

37:30 Each company had a guiding and pacing party. Each platoon had a guiding party, so that we were all counting the same number of paces. So we knew exactly where we were the whole time. So if there was a sudden stop we knew that we'd gone 980 paces and still had, say, 1,500 to go. That was the element to control the direction you were going in. It was so easy over there to get lost. It happened more than once. So

38:00 we became very reliant on these other guides. We had the centre lines marked with tins, shining

backwards; moon, star and whatever it was. The guide people would put a stake down with a lamp on it. And when the engineers came through later to clear the minefield they would clear along this line that had been laid.

38:30 So a line of moon lights, the engineers would clear the mines either side of it, so it was pretty close co-operation.

How prepared do you think you were to go into a bigger battle?

As prepared as we could be. We had a lot of training. And we were very experienced. We'd had all this other… We were pretty well prepared. I would say that there'd be nobody better prepared than the 9th Division.

How much interaction did you have with the British Army?

39:00 All the time. We were part of the British Army. We had the Scots alongside us in the El Alamein Battle. The Scottish Division was there. They crossed our path once or twice. Before the battle they were new, the 51st Highland Division, they came and lived with us, and we had in each company, in each section a Scotsman, and each platoon would probably have four Scotsmen, one in each section, one in the platoon headquarters. This would have appeared throughout the whole battalion.

39:30 So for about a week or two we had Scotsmen living with us and we tried to brief them in the rigours of desert fighting. It paid off of course. We got on very well. They also liked our chaps and they enjoyed being with us. We'd send them out on patrol. We'd send them out on listening posts. And we did all the things with them that we were doing ourselves. The tanks

40:00 we had troubles with. We had great troubles in Tobruk. We could never talk to the tanks and they never turned up. And we were never told earlier if a tank had a telephone on the back we could talk to. And the division had several unhappy experiences with the tanks not turning up on time. But Montgomery understood this. So we trained with the tanks everywhere, learned how to move with them. We learned how to talk to

40:30 them and they learned how to talk to us. By the time the battle came along, we were much better able to work in cohorts with the tanks themselves. It was pretty bad before. We often got let down.

Can you give us an example of that?

Well, the first attack on Tobruk. We were supposed to have tanks and they never turned up. The Germans turned up instead. So we instead of having some British tanks on the left, they didn't. Later on, other attacks,

41:00 other brigades, the British tanks didn't perform very well. They weren't trained either to work with us. They'd been trained really as huntsmen. They'd been trained, you know, run across the desert, like chasing foxes. And they weren't really trained at… So they were on a learning curve too. And it wasn't until prior to the big Alamein battles that really got…. The early July battles, the battalion

41:30 also had some problems with the tanks but they were improving. But by October, we'd learned how to cope with them.

Tape 5

00:31 **Back to El Alamein, I'll just ask you about how you felt about hearing of the loss of Tobruk after your hard work there?**

We were pretty shattered by it all because there hadn't been any real fighting for it. You wouldn't have minded if there'd been a tough fight but there was very little fighting. Yes, we were pretty upset by it.

01:00 **In the preparation for El Alamein, did you ever encounter Montgomery?**

He came to see us before the battle and he briefed everybody. Briefed all the battalions. He came around the battalions and said hello, yes.

What were your impressions of him?

Oh, like a little fox terrier. All squeaky and perky

01:30 and very confident with himself. So we were just hoping because we had been let down before. And we didn't make any judgements. We just thought, "Well, we hope he does what he says he'll do". But it was clear from all that had been going on that the preparations were much better than they had been in the past. It was also clear that the army was better prepared for a battle than it ever had been before. That

02:00 was good for morale.

The level of explanation you were given from Montgomery, was that different to what you had

previously experienced?

We'd never had any before from anybody at that level of command. He showed himself as a man of morale. He just said, "We're going to beat these guys. You'll be a part of it." And it was just a morale booster for the soldiers and went down well. You see, the difficulty was before,

02:30 and when the division went down to El Alamein in July they were burning papers in Cairo. They were preparing to go the other side of the Canal and he said, "Stop this nonsense. We're not going on the other side of the Canal" and there was a pretty dramatic change in outlook. People were thinking about staying and not about retreating.

As front line infantrymen, what did you feel about the people back in Cairo running around and burning papers?

03:00 Unprintable, most of it. We felt pretty awful about it. We thought it was ridiculous. None of us thought that we were about to lose Egypt. We had enough confidence in ourselves that somebody would stop the gate before it was opened. We felt that there were too many people in Cairo anyhow. We always think that, of course, about

03:30 headquarters, don't we?

You mentioned that there was a telegraph pole that was a vital landmark near your positions…

Yes. The corps artillery had done its surveying. It was one of the datum points in our area and it disappeared. Of course we weren't told. We didn't know what was happening when all these survey vehicles came around. And I suspect that somebody

04:00 had wanted to build some head cover; either the Germans or ourselves. I suspect that it was our people. Anyhow when the gunners came and found out there was quite a hoo-ha about it and we sent out three patrols to convince them the pole wasn't there any more. So they had to resurvey that part of the plan.

So the souveniring of that pole would have affected their theatre grid for the area I imagine?

Yes it would.

04:30 Yes it was one of the datum points opposite our position.

You also mentioned that you encamped next to a battery of 5.5 inches?

In the preparation of the battle we all moved forward. The day before we'd dug weapon pits, we'd dug foxholes and we were laid up there the night before. And we discovered, because they weren't there when we went in, they'd moved up, we were in front of a battery of 5.5s, and that was a bit tough on the eardrums.

05:00 But we couldn't have been more than 100 yards away from the guns.

Did you see anything in the lead-up to the attack of the camouflaging or misdirection measures that were undertaken?

We didn't see the misdirection. We saw the camouflaging. We saw dummy trucks being built and we saw real trucks being taken out and the night before, we saw real trucks coming up. But the main deception plan was south of us. There wasn't

05:30 much movement on our side. Most of the tanks, and there were a hell of a lot of tanks that were to be engaged, were kept further back. Some of them under cover of these dummy vehicles. They were trying of course not to disclose the tank tracks, where they could.

Were there minefields in front of you?

There turned out to be 1,600 yards of minefields.

At what point was that discovered?

During the battle. We knew that the first lot were about three or 400

06:00 yards deep. But there was a series of them and no one had quite understood how deep they were. And that's why one of the battalions on our left, the 2/13th got badly held up. They simply couldn't get through the minefields. No tank got through. Anyhow that's a little later in the story. But yeah, it was surprising how many deep the minefields were.

In what role in the battalion were you acting in this point?

Carrier platoon commander.

06:30 **What were to be your initial objectives?**

My objectives weren't on the ground. My objectives were to see that the urgent supplies got up each night of the battle and that we take any early casualties out. So my job really was ferrying supplies. We were a stand-by group of 10 Bren guns in case they were needed anywhere to fill up a hole in the battalion line,

07:00 because our battalion was the right-hand one of the army. We had to face two ways. We had to face west and north. So we had a difficult job. And it might well have been that there would be a hole somewhere in the line that we could have filled up.

So the night that the battle opened, what did you see of the opening barrage?

All of it. You see we

07:30 were the second battalion to go in the brigade. And so we…the 24th started off and we passed through them so we saw the whole thing from the start. It was a marvellous sight and it went on for about 20 minutes altogether. First of all it was mainly the heavier guns on counter-battery and we couldn't see much what was happening. But when it shortened down we could see the impact. Even at night we could see the

08:00 impact of shells bursting on the enemy position. They were a long way off. See in that part of it, they were, I forget how deep they were. It depends, the line sort of ran like this and the nearest line was probably well over 1,000 yards away. Much more open there than at Tobruk.

And the infantry was advancing over that on foot?

Oh yes. The plan of attack for us was the 24th Battalion went through

08:30 first and it then propped [stopped and reorganised]. And we'd had an advance march of about close to 3,000 yards and then we were to go through the 24th and go for about another 2,700 yards I think it was, in two phases. The forward companies would go and prop and the other companies would pass through them to get to the final objectives.

09:00 It wasn't a very heavy fight that night. The 24th had a bit of trouble but we didn't have too much. We only had 40 or 50 casualties for the night, from memory.

So your start lines were all laid out?

Start lines were all marked and laid out. We had lamps at the end of each of them. And we had guide parties ready to take us into the start line. My fellas were out of the way. We were further back. I was up

09:30 seeing what was happening so we could go when ready but my chaps were probably 1,000 yards behind the start line. Just waiting for our starter's gun.

So how did that night progress then for you?

Almost copy book. No problems. The companies got to their position on time and they dug in. And we, our supplies got up there. I think we made two runs that night. Everything

10:00 went absolutely like clockwork. They'd made some minefield gaps on our side. On our left, the gaps hadn't been made so there was a hold-up. But our battle of course was a beautiful one. It was almost technical. (UNCLEAR) In the morning we struck out on our own though, because we had nothing between us and the coast. We had this great hill sitting over there and the battalion on the left wasn't in sight, and there were burning tanks all over the place.

10:30 The tanks had tried to get through. Montgomery's plan was to get the tanks through on night one. They'd underestimated the problem of the minefields. I think also they didn't realise how many engineers they really needed. They had things called flails. Now a flail is a tank with a big steel drum in front and steel chain with blobs of metal on the end. And it would beat its way through the minefield. Well it

11:00 did all that but some of the things blew off and some of the flail tanks got caught in the minefield. But by and large they were an extraordinary success. Scared the hell out of the Germans. They'd never seen them before. Of course, nor had we. But it was quite successful. On our side all the lanes got through in time. There was no hold up. The 24th Battalion on our right had its lanes put through in time. So we were lucky in that sense.

How far behind the infantry did you

11:30 **move in the carriers?**

We stayed right behind to the battalion start line until the first objective was taken. And when the second companies went through, I moved up to a position in the rear of the original company and was waiting for the call forward.

What did you see of casualties in the move up?

I didn't see many because we didn't suffer that many. I didn't see them because the stretcher-bearers were operating well ahead of us.

12:00 We saw a few coming out. The ambulances were there ready, but we didn't see much of that. It was so busy doing what we were supposed to be doing. We were getting a bit of shelling. We were just sitting

there just waiting for the order to run up. So you get in that sort of situation, you don't have too much time to see what's happening on that flanks.

Were you receiving any fire coming across and up to the company?

Oh, we got the odd shellfire, yes. Nothing much,

12:30 because most of the enemy shellfire was ahead of us on the infantry and we didn't get a great deal. It was in fact the most peaceful night of the whole battle.

In a Bren carrier, how well protected are you from shellfire?

Oh, you're not. The armour plate is only about, the thickest about 18 to 20 mil thick. Armour piercing bullets go through it. It's a morale builder rather than anything else. It's got tracks therefore it can move across

13:00 country. But oh, no, no, it was no protection at all. We were frightened of air burst; we didn't like that.

When dawn broke, you said the company was probably not in the best position.

No, they were. They were in a very good position, because our objectives were flat. So that pre-planning was pretty good. There were only minor adjustments made in the morning. The people on the left had trouble. They had to mount another attack

13:30 to get through the last lot of minefields.

Sorry, as dawn broke after that first night, describe the positions you were in.

Yes. See, in a battle it is very compartmented. Each little sub-unit thinks the whole battle is going on around it. So we knew it had been a successful attack. We knew there was some problem on our left. We'd seen a lot of burning tanks up in the left. There were probably 10 or 12

14:00 British tanks that were burning. Some of the tanks were Sherman tanks that were produced. Most of them had diesel engines but some of them had aircraft engines and they had high-octane fuel. They burnt beautifully. And so there was a shambles with the tanks. They never did get through until later and the whole battle plan was changed. But for us, it was marvellous. We knew our right flank was secure. A fellow called Macarthur-Onslow, Lieutenant-,

14:30 commander of the 2/2nd Machine Gunners, and he under divisional cavalry had put a shield out to guard our right flank. We were concerned about this hill, which was Trig 29, which was about a mile away. Everything we did was under view from there. So we had a very quiet day. Some tanks ran across the front two or three times, half a dozen or a dozen tanks trying to draw fire. You know, what you do in war is draw the opposition's fire

15:00 so that you can locate them. So anyhow we held our fire. Nobody fired unless they had to. We shot a couple of trucks up, got a couple of prisoners, but really waited for what was developing. It was quite clear that Trig 29 had to be captured. We couldn't sit there under that. So somebody was going to have to do it.

Why do you think it was that Trig 29 and its commanding position wasn't taken into account in the initial objectives?

Too deep. We didn't have

15:30 enough troops. The whole 8th Army front was on a very broad front; four divisions on about a 30-odd mile front, and we didn't have a reserve battalion in the brigade. It was divisional reserve. So there was nothing available. It would have been a very complex operation. I don't believe we could have done it that night. There simply wasn't time. You'd have to make another

16:00 reconnaissance. You can't do it without reconnaissance. New start lines and no, it wouldn't have worked.

You mention that the British tanks had a pretty hard time of it in the minefield. Just as an aside, what are your impressions of the serviceability of the Commonwealth equipment in North Africa as far as the quality of our tanks, our artillery etcetera, compared with the Germans?

Up until the

16:30 arrival of the later tanks, the tanks weren't very good. Our maintenance system didn't compete with the German. The Germans had a wonderful maintenance and recovery system. Quite often we'd have tanks damaged and we'd lose them. The Germans always brought up transporters overnight and pulled them out. They were very effective. And the German Mark IIIs and Mark IVs were very good tanks. But the Sherman was a great tank. It changed the picture in a

17:00 year. They were pretty reliable. Of course they all had to work hard. None of them had really been designed to cope with this awful grinding sand on the sprockets of the tracks. So prior to Alamein we weren't very happy about the tanks. But at Alamein, as far as we were concerned, they performed very well.

Can you now tell us of how that day unfolded and the establishment of Trig 29 as an

17:30 **immediate objective from your point of view?**

Yes, well I was up in battalion headquarters earlier in the day, keeping in touch with what was happening. And there were, as I say, one or two forays. A dozen tanks drove across our front. Really, apart from drawing our fire they were seeing what was happening on the battalion next, on the left flank we'd had to swing a company around to make contact with them. So really, as far as we were concerned, the first day

18:00 was commiserating with the wounded tank crews and watching the 13th Battalion catch up with us, and planning to do something about Trig 29. Because although nobody had told us, it was a pretty fair bet that they'd pick on us because the battalion had a pretty good reputation and had not been damaged to the extent the 2/24th had. If anybody had to do it, it was

18:30 going to be us. So our CO went to brigade that day and he said to brigade, "Look, it's got to go. We must do it tonight." As it turned out in the overall planning, there had been a plan to attack one or two nights later to capture Trig 29, once the front line had been settled. So the first two days were really designed to straightening up the line and getting ready for the attack that night. We were lucky because the

19:00 afternoon of the second day, which is now the 25th of October and we're due to attack that night. We didn't quite know where the minefields were, having had the problem of all these minefields. We knew there was a minefield across our front. We didn't know if there was one across to the right for the 2/24th Battalion. During the afternoon, a German vehicle drove in and on our front we shot it up, and we captured two people. One was the

19:30 German regimental commander, one was a German Italian commander and they had maps on them. They had just arrived and they showed us there was no minefield in front of our advance, the 48th; there was no minefield and that's what decided our CO, Hammer, to do it by carriers at night, because there were no minefields to clear. That is a tremendously lucky thing. So the whole plan because simplified once that was known. On the right,

20:00 the 2/24th had some trouble with minefields. But it showed the gaps. So the 2/24th actually knew also the gaps in the minefield they had to negotiate.

These high ranking German officers had just gotten lost or…?

They'd got lost, yes. It's very difficult in the desert. Nobody knew how far the penetration had gone. Remember Rommel himself was away; his headquarters had been disrupted. The alternate Commander-in-Chief had dropped off his jeep dead

20:30 and the night had just finished. I don't think the Germans had any idea of where we were. Other than on the left flank where the tanks are burning. On the right I don't think they had the faintest idea of how far the front lines were. But we had people coming along all day. Driving in.

So you realised at this point there were no minefields obstructing your advance…

Yep. So the plan was changed. And the

21:00 plan of attack was quite simple. The first two companies went 1,000 yards and the next two companies, one of them C Company on my vehicles and A Company on foot.

So you were carrying riflemen aboard your carriers?

We had a company full of them. I had 10. We borrowed six from the mortar platoon; we borrowed four from somebody else. We had 20 carriers I think. And we also used the line marking of the light ack-ack [anti-aircraft].

21:30 That saved me from any worry of getting lost. And so when the two companies stopped, I had the company mounted aboard them, we just discharged them off. We didn't wait. And A Company, the other company, came on foot afterwards. And I had 10 carriers each side of me, or 9 and 10. I was running a centre line. I had Bryant the company commander with me. We'd been old chums. So we decided instead of dropping off short of the hill,

22:00 we'd go right on top of it.

You made that decision yourself did you?

Two of us made that decision, yes. It was his company doing the battle. And so we decided, let's go. It would save a 300-yard battle so we actually went to the top of the hill. I did that on times. We knew our speed was roughly about eight miles an hour so we timed it that after X minutes we'd be on top of the hill. And the company debussed there. It was a brilliant stroke by Mick Bryant as the

22:30 company commander, to jump off on the top of the hill.

So the initial plan was to stop short of the crest and fight…?

About two or 300 [yards] short and fight our way up, yes.

And what prompted you to make the decision to go all the way?

Because we'd struck no opposition and it seemed silly to keep on going when there was no opposition. Go as far as we could. We got a bit of opposition as we went to the, what has turned out to be our objective.

Carrying

23:00 **infantry in lightly armoured vehicles was a fairly new and innovative tactic for the Commonwealth forces at that time?**

I think it was the first time. As far as I know it was the first. Particularly, there'd never been a night attack of that sort before.

How do you keep station in that sort of advance with your vehicles?

Well, it's easy to see with the dust. And we've got a start line centre. I'm centring on the guideline, on the tracer. And the vehicles

23:30 are spaced out about 10 yards apart. So we can see each other. And the second line of vehicles with the other platoons is about 30 yards apart so it's not getting covered in the dust.

What signals capacity do you have to keep in touch with your battalion?

At night? Oh, we had a wireless that nobody could use. The company had the wireless; we didn't have one. We do it by hand. You just had to use, I forget the arrangement we used.

24:00 We just gave hand signals so that it was passed on to all the vehicles. What I'd done before though, when we didn't know about the minefields, was to get all the carriers in and stack the floors with two layers of tightly packed sandbags. If we struck a mine it would reduce the casualties. That turned out to be a good thing because it made the fellas a little happier and it added a bit of weight to the tracks. And I think probably

24:30 caused less dust because of that. But we weren't going very fast. We were going fast enough to see the vehicles on either flank.

Tell us your version of events once you hit the summit of the hill and the infantry disembarked.

Well Mick Bryant and C Company went across to the right flank and had some heavy fighting straightaway. It was quite clear that that was going to be quite a tussle, so I kept the carriers there. The

25:00 mortar carriers went back to pick up their mortars and the others. And I kept my 10 carriers there in case they were needed to reserve fire. And then A Company came up on foot on the other flank and they joined battle there. They had quite a nasty fight. But when it became clear that the companies were going to get their objectives, I ran my carriers back because we had to pick stores up. And as I mentioned before,

25:30 earlier when I spoke, this fellow Derrick was an amazing man, Tom, the best soldier I have ever seen and I expect the best soldier Australia has ever had. Very cold, calculating. And he said to me, "What do I do? What can I do?" I said, "God, the only thing you can do, Tom, is do what you know has to be done. Tell your platoon commander. Don't ask him. Go and do it and tell him", which is what he did. They had quite a successful fight. The platoon commander was not quite up to it

26:00 that night. And then once it became clear that the objective was taken, I hied back. No, on the way back there was a tremendous explosion and trucks were burning. And what had happened was that either a German shell or a German bomb, there was an aircraft about, it hit one of the company supply trucks. Now each company had I think two three-tonners full of ammunition and mines and overhead cover and you know what and some packs, and

26:30 five of those blew up. They went just like a string of crackers. All the drivers were killed except one and into the thin air go two companys' worth of consolidation supplies. It was an horrendous position. So I had my vehicles, had been loaded up. Raced up, dumped those with the companies.

Loaded with what?

Oh, head cover, ammunition, things of that sort.

27:00 Pickets, sandbags so they could dig in. The first things I covered were the important ones: digging in and ammunition. So then I raced back, avoiding all this shambles and in the meantime the organisation had been busy. They got a new set of supplies. I don't know where they came from but they got a new set of stores, so I ran those up and by the time dawn had come we'd placed supplies to about 80 percent.

27:30 But it was a dicey night. Luckily again the German was confused. We had an enormous support of artillery. The battalion on the right, the 2/24th had run into some trouble. They'd struck severe fighting and we had to support their attack. And there was something like 250 guns, two battalions, the whole of

the corps artillery gave us.

28:00 And it was so severe that this is why we managed to get our objective without an enormous trouble because they were stunned by it. And that enabled us, actually by the time they were getting onto the objective, only the first of the defenders had their heads above the ground. It was a rare experience to get that sort of support.

From your position in the carrier when you initially gained the summit, what did you see of the defence and what sort of supporting fire were you able to

28:30 **give?**

I wasn't giving any. Too close for that, you see, they were hand-to-hand fighting. We would have just been shooting up our own troops. We were just standing there waiting to support if we were called for. And once you get involved in hand-to-hand, you know, fire support is out of the question. Using the bayonet and the hand grenade.

It must have been fairly desperate stuff up there?

Oh, yeah. It was. It was quite a fight. Yes. And of course it was a critical hill for the

29:00 Germans, they knew that. Of course as soon as Rommel got back, he ordered it had to be retaken at once. So from both sides, it gave us a view of about 4,000 yards in every direction, which meant that the whole of the right flank of the 8th Army attack was under direct observation. So we simply couldn't stay there under those circumstances.

Can you explain for the benefit of the tape what the advantage of having that field of

29:30 **observation is?**

Well it means you can't move by day because you can see everything that happens. Vehicle movement, tank movement, troop movement can all be sighted and you can bring direct artillery fire on it. You get a decent artillery direction on the top of the hill, no advance would be possible. It would be impossible to go forward by day while he held that feature.

And it's your personal opinion that

30:00 **the capturing of that feature was instrumental in the success of the further battle as it developed?**

Yes I do, because it prevented the Germans from gathering under cover. He was ever able once, in the next few days, to consolidate under cover. We could see him all the time. So we could get the air force and the artillery onto him. And in the end, of course, the break-through on the 3rd of

30:30 November was around the flank of Trig 29. And they all together in the period repelled 25 counter-attacks. We had about six or eight against us until we were relieved and the last battalion, I think, had 15 counter-attacks against it. No, the Germans were desperate. Rommel knew that if he couldn't get that back then he wasn't going to win the battle.

What did you see of the counterattacks that developed over the next few days?

Not a great

31:00 deal. You see the carriers went back each day. The first night I was stuck up there with a section but nobody wanted us. We were good targets. They wanted us to get the hell out of it. We didn't see a great deal. We saw the artillery and we saw the air attack. I got up there because my place was to find out what was happening. And my platoon saw very little of it. We saw these German attacks stopped in their tracks, five or 600 metres out

31:30 from our front line. It was very interesting.

You had forward observers obviously up there by that time?

Oh they always went with us. They went with the companies. Yes. We had the FRO [artillery control] with the battalion headquarters and we also had mortar observers up at the same time.

And they were I imagine quite instrumental in supporting counter attacks?

Oh yes. They were quite busy yes. You see, we had the whole of the corps artillery at call. The division has got

32:00 three field regiments and a medium regiment. And the corps had about 10 field regiments and three or four medium regiments, all on call. And we had the air force on call. The air force used to fly squadrons of 18 bombers and the Germans hated them because they would get stuck into the German mobilisation areas. So the normal pattern if you saw an attack developing

32:30 was to call up the air force and then the gunners would wait until the dust cleared and the gunners would take over.

So how long did the 2/48th hold out on top of Trig 29 before it was relieved?

We were there for three nights, three days and three nights. We were relieved on the night of the 28th, I think it was, by the

33:00 2/17th Battalion. We were late getting out. There was a counter-attack and the 2/17th were late getting in to us. In any case we were a reserve battalion for the next brigade operation that night, so it didn't matter that much. We got out before dawn and then we were to do an attack the following night. So we had three days and three nights there. And it was nice to get away from it, but we knew there was something worse to come.

And what was

33:30 **that?**

It was this attack to the north. The army had decided we should cut off to the north. The Germans had hung on at this place called Thompson's Post, which was a big strongpoint, and part of the German 125th Regiment was there. And as long as they held that, then the 8th Army couldn't get across to the coast and open up the roads. The original position. So they hung on. So our idea, we cut across the coast, then

34:00 turn right and the two battalions attacked astride the road, backwards through the German positions. It really was a ridiculous plan and I complained about it always.

Why was it a ridiculous plan?

Well because it's too hard to ask in the middle of a battle to do those manoeuvres. I thought it was putting too much on the battalions. Fine in theory. Before we went in another battalion, the Pioneers, had gone through to the coast, but they'd got into trouble. They'd lost their supporting weapons and they had to come

34:30 back, so we had an open flank. We had to commit the whole company to clear the start line before we could get on the start line, and the whole thing was pretty tough. And we never made it. We got to the wire, to the German final objective. The last people there were the company commander; three of his staff were dead on the wire and they were the last people to get to the German wire. It was too long. It was about 2,000 yards in the middle of the night.

35:00 **Under fire obviously.**

Yes. Yes. But it was a tough ask.

Was this the point where you said there was a last minute meeting that aborted the further attack?

No. In the inter-regnum on the night of the 29th, we were to go. The 2/23rd were to go on tanks and do the same sort of thing we'd done. And we, the 24th and 48th were to follow through and then infantry turn right. Well,

35:30 that went bad because the minefield was never cleared, and the 23rd went in on tanks and the tanks were not used to this before. They'd never had anybody and of course the Germans saw it coming and they just swept the tanks with machine guns and the 23rd lost about half its strength by getting hit while they were on the tanks. It's another story the 23rd. It's a remarkable recovery. But never mind, as far as we were concerned,

36:00 we were waiting back in trucks to go. And around about 2o'clock there'd been a direct hit or artillery damage to one of our trucks. We had some casualties. In the morning we got called to a brigade conference. The brigade was about a mile away. I was there only because I was a junior officer commanding in the carriers, and my job was to command the carriers of two battalions as a right flank across to Thompson's Post by day. We didn't like that much.

36:30 So our battalion commanders and our brigadier, our general didn't like it at all and despite direct orders from corps, they managed to persuade corps and army that it really wasn't on. And so we had this long discussion in the middle of the night in the brigade tent. There was the brigadier and the brigade major and one or two of his staff, the two COs, Hammer from ours and Charles Weir from the 24th, the gunners,

37:00 a tank man and myself because of the carrier role. It was a very interesting night. And we were all none of us wanting to do it because it would have been mayhem. I met in Saigon, in the year 1964, the German attaché to Saigon and Bangkok, and he'd been in Thompson's Post. And he told me, "Boy, we were waiting for you." So we were lucky to escape that. But it's just one of the little things that happens in battle.

37:30 People back at the big headquarters don't see it in the same way that people at the front do. They didn't see the danger. We'd all learnt not to attack by day.

Do you think that's a common problem in higher command, big hands on little maps?

Yes, of course it is. It's also a question of this is a critical element during the battle, that 9th Division cut

across to the coast.

38:00 And what they were frightened of was if we didn't do that, then Rommel would be able to concentrate his tanks and beat the daylights out of us. So the fact that we didn't make it made it a little more dangerous, because Rommel was then able to concentrate more of his forces against this particular thing, throughout the railway line.

In that meeting it must have been hard not to think that you were being cowardly

38:30 **by refusing… well not refusing…**

Not at all. Not at all. No, these are battle-hardened commanding officers and brigadiers and they saw that it simply wouldn't work. What's the point of committing a brigade to a daylight attack? We're certain to get beaten up. Troops are needed. So we had to have another go. So it was decided to put it off for a couple of nights.

I guess in the case of national rivalry,

39:00 **a lot of British historians have disparaged 9th Division's efforts in the Alamein campaign. What's your story? View on that?**

I don't think so. Where did you get that view?

Well, I guess some writing's been done to say that the 9th Division didn't progress that well at the beginning. And then it became the anvil or the pivot point. And some British writers have belittled…

I think it's jealousy. There

39:30 was a problem with Liddell Hart that I've pointed out. Liddell Hart said the main battle, and this might be some of the reason, was a place called Point 29 and this was many miles south of us. It was in the middle of the line. And Liddell Hart wrote that that was the scene of the battle and that we weren't involved in it. Now it may be his mistake that led others to the wrong conclusion.

I think that's also amplified by Rommel's own advice. There was some confusion over what point he was referring to.

40:00 No, no. Rommel always knew that one we were on because he wrote especially about it. He talked about rivers of blood flowing over useless bits of sand. And he knew where we were, but it was the British historians that made the mistake. I find it interesting. Obviously the Scottish Division. Because they're using Italian maps.

Tape 6

00:31 **Right, can you continue on that last battle?**

Well, we were told on the next day what the plan for that battle was. And it was easy for us because we'd had a time to reorganise and make a decent plan. And the 23rd had got themselves in a defensive position and another battalion from another brigade had also taken up a defensive spot. And so the plan was very much as it had been before. We were to

01:00 go to the railway line and turn right and go backwards up to the German lines. And this was the trouble; the battalion who had occupied it before had not cleared all the enemy out. We had to fight to mark our start line out. So we got away, the battalion the 24th on the right and us on the left. And it went pretty well until about halfway through the battle when the German resistance became pretty fierce.

01:30 And there was some doubt about how far we could continue. The 24th Battalion was roughly keeping up with us on the right hand side and then ultimately the fire became so bad that our attack just collapsed. And as I was saying earlier the last people behind were the company commander and three of his men, dead on the enemy wire. They actually got through on the left to the wire. There were no troops left. So the CO is with them,

02:00 he'd been shot in the cheek, he ordered them back. And he told Charles Weir from the next battalion, we were going back and they came back too. So we pulled back. And I was up at the headquarters because I was wanting to find out when the carriers were coming up and they settled on this position beside the railway line, on a big mound, and the Germans were in force not very far ahead. We had no tanks.

02:30 It had been planned to attack without the tanks. And so I was in there talking to the CO. There were so few troops that everyone had to go and man a weapon, and the adjutant and the regimental sergeant major were out in the slit trenches. And he said to me: "Go and ring up brigade and get some artillery fire at this point", which I did. They didn't believe me at brigade, they said, "You're not there." I said, you know, "Just bring it down." So they did. And then we asked for some tanks.

03:00 So division promised to send us some tanks and after two or three hours a regiment of tanks came up. They were not heavy battle tanks at all. They were things called cruiser tanks: light, fast vehicles. Anyhow they sat all day with us. At this stage I was out with the companies. And we had a slit trench like a 'V'. And in one side was the adjutant,

03:30 a fellow called Bill Reid, a Captain Reid, and in the middle was a fellow called Frank Legge, a great ABC man who was later on a war correspondent, he was a regimental sergeant major and I was there. And a shell lobbed right in the top of the 'V' and it killed Reid and it half buried Legge. I got a few scratches and I wasn't hurt and buried, so I managed to get Legge out and we knew that Reid was dead. So I went back

04:00 to tell the CO what had happened. And next he sent me out on a head count. So I did a head count. That's where the famous figure of 41 comes from. That was a head count I did in the morning, some time mid-morning, and I must have been a bit shaken by this because when I got back there was Hammer sitting with a shell dressing around his face, blood dripping, and he said, "Zacka, go back to your dugout and we'll have a cup of tea. I'll be there in 10 minutes". So he sent me off to my dugout,

04:30 got my batman or my driver to make a cup of tea. Then he sat down and had a cup of tea with tea pouring out of the hole in his cheek, and I think he'd picked that I was getting a bit shaky. Anyhow that's history. We overcame that. So we hung on all day and the tanks were absolutely marvellous. I think they went up – they were the Royal Tank Regiment, I think they were the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment – and they went up with 45 tanks

05:00 and came out with 6. They lost that supporting us. Without them of course, we'd have been overrun, because the Germans had concentrated all their force to try and get in the back side of Trig 29. It was quite a day and we were under heavy fire all the time and ultimately, in the evening, they decided to pull us out. So the 24th Brigade, another brigade of the division, came up to relieve us.

05:30 And my carriers were never involved because we couldn't get them up. There was too much hill and tank fire. So they stayed back all the time. I was the only one there, I think, with my batman. Anyhow when the 48th came up, the 43rd, they said, "How many trucks?" I said, "Two troop carriers will do." And the 24th only had about 70 people left. They'd trodden on a booby trap. An aerial bomb had been booby-trapped and

06:00 they lost a lot of people. So we only had about 120 of us. And then we sort of formed around this thing called a blockhouse, which turned out into the Regimental Aid Post chockablock full of our wounded and the German wounded, and we stayed there all day helped by the tanks. The most wonderful thing that had happened that day was the troop of South African 6-pounder anti-tank guns. It was a wonderful weapon. It was new to us.

06:30 Prior to that we had two-pounders that had to get in very close. Anyhow these South African or Rhodesian troop came in. Open, flat country, in full sight of the Germans, they raced up and they put the guns in place. They were all killed by the end of the day but they knocked out about 20 tanks. They were all dead at the end of the day, but it was a wonderfully brave act. I've never seen anything quite as brave before and these things saved us, the other battalions.

07:00 So we were pulled out that night and we went back to our original position, which was called the Cutting or Hill of Jesus. And there we stayed until the battle was over. We regrouped and reformed one company from the battalion. So that was the end of the war for us. And afterwards I was put on a court of inquiry, had to find out the missing, so I travelled all over the desert in search of the missing people. We didn't miss many. One of our officers I had seen been

07:30 hit through the stomach. And I put him in a slit trench with a rifle and the, you know somebody's there; you put a rifle in the ground with a helmet on top. It means you've got a wounded man. Anyway we never found Henry. I think he was run over by the tanks. But it was a wonderful time. I spent four days wandering around the desert looking for people and looking for equipment, and got a wonderful view of the aftermath of a big battle. Interesting experience.

You mentioned,

08:00 **just a few minutes ago, that perhaps the shell got to you, that it emotionally…**

It was a big shell. Yes. I'm sure it upset me. You do get upset at some things.

When you spent those few days looking for the dead and the wounded was that extremely traumatic?

Oh no, this was before that. Oh no. You can't afford to be traumatic. You've got to be…you see bodies all over the place, that's fine, part of the deal in war.

08:30 If you get too wound up, they'll take you away. It's a brutal affair. But it was wonderful. I had a whole real look at the scale of the battle. The only thing that wasn't of interest then was the South Africans and we had pulled back and on the 3rd of November I was strafed by a squadron of South African fighters. They'd mistaken us. They were five miles out and they beat up a couple

09:00 of my trucks. And they went back and beat up division headquarters. They had a pretty nasty reception

when they got home. It was not a nice way to end a battle, to be strafed by our own aeroplanes. So we stayed there and we got a lot of wounded back. And we stayed there until late November. 8th Army wanted us to go up on the chase but we weren't allowed to.

Can you describe the scene that you saw after the battle?

Well the battleground

09:30 was strewn with trucks, bodies and tanks and guns. Take one little example, the Germans had a gun they called an 88-millimetre, which was an anti-aircraft gun, and it was the most effective anti-tank they had in the whole war, in all the campaigns. It was a rapid fire, always pop-bang. A flat trajectory. A very high trajectory and you'd hear the shot and then you'd get a whiz, and normally there's a gap between the gun and the

10:00 shell arrival; and these was almost no gap. Anyhow, there's one little cameo, it had been attacked by a squadron of…a troop of three of them I think there, were attacked by a squadron of German tanks. All of the 88's were dead. All the crews were dead. And 10 Shermans were dead. You know, it was a little battle, all on its own, three anti-tank guns and 12 tanks attacking them and the whole lot destroyed,

10:30 all the crews were dead. Quite fascinating. This is how the battle is fought in the desert. Little lots. You don't get sort of hundreds charging at each other. It happens in these little pockets that in the end dictate the outcome of what's happening. That was very interesting.

What was the smell like?

Terrible. Oh, this was some days afterwards. But again you get used to that. You have to, of course.

You mentioned the aerial bomb that had been

11:00 **booby-trapped. What other booby traps did you come across?**

Oh, lots of them. The worst thing we had, it wasn't a booby trap but it was the anti-personnel mine and it had three little prongs, and they would bury it under the soil and just the prongs would poke out. And it was a jumping jack. It had a small charge underneath that blew it out of the ground to about three or four feet high and it was filled with steel balls,

11:30 and that exploded at about that level and that would be devastating. And the minefields were peppered with those. So to get through the minefields, the engineers had to actually feel with their fingers on the ground to find if these jumping jacks were there, then you had to put a nail in under the prongs to stop it going off. But that's a very hazardous business. The engineers were really quite suburb. They did a most wonderful, wonderful job.

12:00 **What wound were you most afraid of in the desert?**

Wounds? Oh, these anti-personnel mines.

They were the worst things?

Oh yes, you know, they could get you right across the belly and you wouldn't exist. They were really nasty. They had a spread of about 10, 15 yards.

You said that you were told about this final battle the day before it took place?

Yep.

What was the night before the battle like?

12:30 I don't know. I wouldn't know how to describe it. I suppose it was full of tension. We all spent it with our troops. All the company and platoon commanders spent the night with their troops explaining as much as they could and trying to produce an air of reasonable calm. You can't really be calm in those circumstances, with an enormous battle coming up. One never knows what's happening in the next five minutes.

13:00 So there's always an air of tension and unrest. But the troops were marvellous. They were very confident. It was quite surprising. I think it surprised all of us. One of the reasons were I think they'd been fighting the Germans and the Italians for some time and often under difficult circumstances and they were looking forward to having a go and the weight being on our side. I'm sure that had a big effect.

Those days that you spent clearing the

13:30 **battlefield, did you loot anything? Did you keep anything for yourself?**

No.

What happened to all of the armaments?

Oh, the Arabs got them in the end and melted them down. You know, the desert is full of stuff. The Arabs recovered most of it. All the useable stuff was recovered. The armies have recovery organisations and

pick them up. So any trucks that could be repaired and any tanks that could be repaired,

14:00 ammunition that could be used and guns that could be used, they were all salvaged. The rest were just left to rust.

You were awarded a Military Cross for your actions in El Alamein. What can you tell us about that?

That was at the Battle of Trig 29. That's what I got it for. I got a commander-in-chief's card too in Tobruk, earlier. But yeah, I got it for the Trig 29 battle. It was interesting.

14:30 I'm always surprised of course, when these things happen.

How was it awarded? What was the process?

Well, there's a notice in the paper. All the awards are printed in the daily press, so there was a notice in the Adelaide Post, and I was advised from battalion headquarters, my commanding officer called me in and told me.

15:00 And in fact it was announced that night in the mess. We had a few drinks on it.

Does that memory inspire emotion in you now?

I don't think so. I'm not all together that sort of an emotional person. I'm very pragmatic. Things that happen to me happen and you've got to accept in this life that things happen over which you have little or no control.

15:30 Of course it was an emotional time but didn't make too much of it. I feel my troops are the main ones concerned. I think they were as pleased as anybody.

After that battle, how were your troops? What shape were they in?

Oh, mine were fine. I didn't lose anybody at all. None of my platoon were wounded because generally speaking our work was in the rear of the battle and supply afterwards.

16:00 We never hit any mines. I must say I looked death in the face one day. It was fascinating. On the first morning after Trig 29, I was sitting in a hole and I just happened to look upwards and I saw a black dot in the sky. And I thought, "My God that's a shell". He had a big shell, a 210-millimetre, eight-and-a-half inch shell, and this thing's coming straight at me so I took a dive into the bottom of my pit, grovelled as far as I could on the ground, and it hit about 10 yards away.

16:30 And I of course got covered in dirt. But boy, talk about an odd experience; I just happened to look up at that time. I'd seen shells leaving guns but I'd never seen one coming before. So I wasn't too brave; I grovelled.

How long do you have between seeing that and...

Oh, certainly just a few seconds. And normally if you hear a gun fire, depending on, it might take

17:00 20, 30 seconds for a shell to arrive. On this occasion it was on the way down so it was only about, I suppose, a matter of four or five seconds between seeing the thing and getting down the bottom of my slit trench. But you don't see the things that kill, as a rule. You don't see the bullet and a lot of people don't see the grenade that goes off. It just suddenly happens. It's rare

17:30 that you see what is coming, other than a hand-to-hand bayonet fight.

Are there any images from the battle of El Alamein that have stayed with you? That you found difficult to deal with afterwards?

None at all. No. Because I was lucky. I was lucky and my troops were lucky. I didn't lose any troops there. So I was one of the few commands in the battalion not to lose any soldiers,

18:00 because of the circumstances.

How long did you remain in the Middle East and North Africa before you went back to Australia?

We left the Middle East in February 1943. We drove across the Sinai and went down to Port Taufiq where we went to a staging camp for a day and then we caught a convoy out of Suez.

18:30 And we sailed across the Indian Ocean to a place called Abu Atoll, which is a small group of islands off the northwest of India, which was the secret refuelling base for the Royal Navy in the war. And we spent a couple of days there. We were refuelling. And then we were escorted by the Royal Navy Far East Fleet; a couple of battleships and cruisers and

19:00 destroyers. So we went straight to Perth then. And our Western Australian people disembarked at Perth. We got off at Adelaide, had three weeks leave and then back up to Queensland.

What was that atoll like off the coast of India?

Tiny little islands. It was just full of oil tanks. It was a coral atoll with deep anchorage. We had the Queen Mary, the Aquitania, the Queen Elizabeth, enormous convoy.

19:30 We had something like twenty-odd thousand troops on it. It was a pretty important convoy.

How perilous was that trip?

It was once the Japanese came in. When the Germans were there, it wasn't so bad but once the Japanese came in there were lots of Japanese submarines operating there. But by 1943, the Japanese Fleet had taken a bit of a hiding and there weren't as many submarines. There were more around the Australian

20:00 coast. Did you know that there were 65 ships torpedoed off the Australian coast in the war? Shelled? Yeah, 64, so there were quite a lot operating around Australia and New Guinea where the fighting was going on and not so many in the Pacific.

Speaking of the Japanese during the war, how did that affect you while you were in North Africa?

We were concerned about it of course but we didn't have time to worry much.

20:30 We wondered what would happen when we saw Singapore falling and Malaya falling, because the Brits [British] had wanted us to go to Burma and luckily the government had refused. And we were very concerned when we saw that the 8th Division had disappeared, particularly me because I might have been in the machine gun battalion that went to Malaya but didn't. So we were very concerned and we wondered what was going to happen. Then we

21:00 couldn't wait to get home once the main battle was over. None of us wanted to go any further, we all wanted to come home. We had been hearing the stories about the Kokoda Track and the battles in New Guinea so we were pretty anxious to get back home to become involved in that. We were kept well supplied; we had good news services and the army headquarters via the embassies

21:30 gave us daily news sheets. But again, you get isolated in wartime. You cannot spend too much time worrying about other things. But of course once the battle was over, you've got time to think about it and wonder what's going to happen. But when its on, there's no time to think of anything else.

Had Adelaide changed in the time you'd been away?

No. No it hadn't.

22:00 What we were surprised of was that it had a brownout. We couldn't understand why lights were turned off in Adelaide at night, but we accepted that as part of the deal. And Adelaide hadn't changed.

You called it a brownout?

Yeah. They had blinds down. They didn't turn all the lights out but the blinds were supposed to be pulled down at night. See, there had been a couple of ships sunk off the Gulf. They had one load of tail shafts of the

22:30 corvettes out at Whyalla had been sunk by a German submarine off the bottom of the Gulf of St Vincent, so they thought they should keep their lights down.

What was your reception like upon your arrival in Adelaide?

Absolutely wonderful. We had elements of the division march through the city. The whole city turned out. Oh, it was great. They waved and cheered and gave us a great homecoming.

23:00 **And what did you do on that leave?**

Saw my family, went up country and went out with friends. Generally what one does on leave. I stayed at a hotel opposite the railway station, which people called O'Brien owned, and I've stayed there several times since. I had no home to go to and no

23:30 girlfriends that I knew of, and no intention of getting married. I just filled in the time going to the theatre and enjoying myself.

You said you had no intention of getting married. I know that on leave back home a lot of men did marry. While you were away was there concern about infidelity among the troops?

When they knew about it, but there wasn't too much of it. Most of the wives at home

24:00 were just as anxious as their husbands were. Of course there was some. It was inevitable when people were away for three years. You see, we were away for over two-and-a-half years. Of course there'll be some amongst the weaker members but generally no.

In those times when the 'Dear John letter' [letter advising that relationship is over] was written, how did you notice that it affected the

24:30 **unit?**

Oh, the individuals were very upset of course. One of the roles of the unit padre and his friend was to talk to the man who got news that his wife had run off with somebody. Everybody hopped in to try and help. It was an interesting experience in mutual support by people. I found it quite fascinating. Nobody that I know of was left to deal with it on his own. The other

25:00 thing that interested me was the number of people that we had who hadn't been to school. I didn't realise that there were so many loopholes in the education system. I had several people who had never been to school, couldn't read, couldn't write. So we had to write their letters and read their letters for them. One of them, a fellow called Sam Supple, became chief groundsman at the Kooyong tennis courts in Melbourne. Never been to school.

25:30 **So you were telling us about the reading and writing classes.**

Yes, so we ran regular classes. We probably had a dozen people in the battalion who were inadequate or practically unable to read or write and we managed to improve them a bit. But there were always two or three people who would get their mail and read their mail to them and would write home for them. I found that extremely interesting.

26:00 **How did you get to the Atherton Tablelands from Adelaide?**

By train. Can't tell you how awful it was. We travelled from Adelaide to Melbourne, where we had a day. And of course we then went Melbourne to Albury so we had to change gauge there. Albury was a terrible place and it was a long station. We got off one train and got onto another. It was then Albury to Brisbane, where we had a couple of days in the staging camp. And then we got

26:30 on local Brisbane trains without a loo, these boxcars that we travelled up to Cairns, four-and-a-half days to go from Brisbane to Cairns. No beds, we all slept on the floor and every day the Country Women's Association or somebody would turn up with meals for us. Midday. And we stopped the engine in the morning. They had an engine called a Ghat, a steam engine of course. It had water tanks fore and aft. We stopped in the morning for an hour, we shaved, so

27:00 we ran the engine out of hot water and shaved. And usually in the evening we stopped at an army camp, somewhere. Some army camp would bring food to us, but midday was always done by the women. They were very good indeed. All the way up the line. Then we stopped at Townsville and then we spent a couple of days there getting ourselves sorted out. And we caught the train to Cairns. We caught the train to Atherton and then went by truck to our

27:30 camps, which we had to make ourselves, hack out of the forest.

After two-and-a-half years in the desert this must have been an awful shock: to have jungle?

Well it was. We did a lot of work around those jungles in the Atherton Tablelands. We walked our feet off and we trained very hard. But looking back on it there are many things about fighting in the jungle

28:00 that had an advantage over the desert. The desert, you couldn't hide; if you were caught out in the open, there you were. In the jungle you could hide behind a tree or a patch of bamboo. It was more difficult to find people but easier to hide yourself. And it wasn't the scale of fighting. The nature of the country was such you couldn't have huge armies opposing each other. You had much smaller operations.

What were you taught in jungle training camp?

28:30 Well, first thing we taught the people was how to live in the environment. That's the first and most important lesson. The next lesson is, and that includes how to prevent disease. Also shows you how you can improvise to make a bed for yourself; how you can improvise some sort of cover. There was never any dry wood around but lots of small...

29:00 It's easier to make a bed to get yourself off the ground, out of the water. And then you're taught weapon maintenance in the jungle. This is what I had to teach at Canungra when I was teaching. I was the army expert. You taught them how to move; so that they can move along a track or off a track so as to been seen as little as possible. And then we had to teach them

29:30 observation. This became very important. We used to walk people along tracks and things would move and dolls would pop up. So people had to learn quick response. So if a model popped out in front of you on the track, unless you shot him first you were dead. So you had to teach them very, very quick responses of targets that came for just short moments. And then you had to teach them how to go around,

30:00 navigate. If you've done this, you're on the way to start unit training. These are the basic elements that you have to understand.

What's different about weapon maintenance in the jungle?

Rust. And you have to keep the muzzle of the weapon always covered so that the water doesn't get down. And you've got to keep the action of the weapon oiled all the time because

30:30 the best blueing of a rifle will rust very quickly if it's left for too long. But that was the main thing and to keep all your equipment dry. Very difficult. You had to always carry extra pairs of socks, spare shirts, because if your feet were wet too often, the feet flared up and you got sick. You got athlete's foot and all sorts of things. So it's important to have enough socks to keep your feet dry.

31:00 And you have to learn to keep your sleeves down. Mosquito caution was the most important thing. So everybody had to roll their sleeves down at night, wear long trousers. And every night you had to smother yourself with mosquito repellent.

Which came in what form?

Liquid in bottles. And also there was a tick repellent, which lasted about two weeks, because a lot of leeches and ticks would get on your clothes. And if one rubbed

31:30 this into the trousers, of course we used to do all our own washing in the nearest creek, that would last about two weeks and it would keep the leeches away and keep the ticks and things of that sort away, because if you allow them to get on, they'll get infected and in no time you get a tropical ulcer. So these are the basic skills that everybody has to learn if they're going to survive. There's not much you can do about living off the jungle unless you're in an area where natives live. But generally speaking there isn't

32:00 a great amount of food. There's some but not… You take coconuts. They call it millionaire's salad. You take the top off a coconut palm and take it out and eat it. But of course every coconut palm that's killed has to be paid for later, so chopping the tops off coconuts was banned. But there are bits of food like that, you see. You've got to be careful of the berries. I used to teach them how to avoid poisonous foods, anything

32:30 purple or dark blue in colour. And then you had a series of tasting foods, of touching the tip of the tongue. You'd touch it on your lip, then your tongue, on the tip of your tongue and then touch it on your tongue at large and then take a tiny bit and chew it. And if none of those creates too much discomfort there's a chance it might be edible. So you've got a whole series of tests to go through. And people had to be aware that eating exotic-coloured fruit in the jungle was likely

33:00 to make them very sick.

Who taught you this?

Well when we were at Canungra we had a man called Arthur Groom. And Arthur was the man who ran the camp up on the top of the McPherson Ranges, Binna Burra, and we got him down as an expert. He lived in the jungle and he taught us all about it, and we trained all our soldiers in

33:30 that. Because in the wartime we also trained the air force because the airmen who got shot down also had to learn how to survive. So Canungra in the wartime was a very important training centre. And people did about six weeks or 8 weeks training there, each of them as they came through. Made them work. They used to work until they dropped because if you're going to go operations across steep country

34:00 you've got to be fit. So it was a whole change of emphasis, a change of outlook, of tactics. Change of approach over there fighting. You become more concerned on individual clashes than on big battalion and brigade and division clashes. And you learn to be quick.

What about amphibious landings up in the Atherton Tablelands area?

We trained at Cairns. At the American

34:30 5/32nd Boat and Shore Regiment. They were an American army engineer regiment. They manned things called little landing craft and so we trained with them at Cairns and they were with us right through the Pacific. They would come into the division at Lae, Finschhafen, Tarakan, Borneo; the same regiment was with us. We got to know them very well and they were tremendous people, they really were. Wonderful.

35:00 **Was this your first contact with Americans during the Second World War?**

Yes. Yes it was.

How did the other troops respond to the Americans, because they were blamed for stealing Australian women?

Oh yeah, well of course there was jealousy. They had more money than we did. We had a couple of fights. There was a big battle in Brisbane if you remember. And one of our soldiers got into trouble in Sydney beating up three or four of them. But that's inevitable. After all the Australian troops in England were in a similar

35:30 position. Our troops had more money than the local British soldiers did. It's inevitable really with a different pay rate. And of course our fellows were jealous. Of course they saw the Americans, the ones they saw in the base units, weren't they, back in Australia. But the engineer boat and shore people and the American aircraft people were very highly regarded. In fact, my battalion still has a link with the Americans in that particular unit. We still keep in touch with each other.

36:00 **What did you find the toughest about this jungle training?**

Getting fit. It's very hard to get yourself fit enough over there to cope with it. It's very hard when you just keep on plugging away and you just get tired every day. If you've got any brains at all, it's easy enough to learn new techniques and to learn how to move quietly,

36:30 rather than stamp in a big pair of boots. That's mechanical. It's the approach to jungle fighting that's important. You've got to make yourself invisible and that really is it. Everybody tries to hide. You've got to learn to camouflage. You got to learn also to pick out objects, which differ from the background. For example, a square tin will stick out in a tree.

37:00 A round ball might stick out. So you have to teach people observation. And I used to do it by not teaching them to look for a football or a tin. I used to try and teach them by saying, "Anything which doesn't fit into the environment you should look at." In other words you teach them to look at the unusual not the usual. I found that quite effective.

And in finding the unusual, what were they looking for behind it?

Anything. Might be a rifle. Might be a Japanese.

37:30 It might be a bomb. But it wasn't something that fitted in with the background. So you've got to learn to pick up alien objects.

What about the amphibious landing? Can you describe the training you did for that?

Well, these things called LCVPs [landing craft, vehicle/personnel] carried about 30 people each, which means about a platoon. So we learned how to load on them and how to

38:00 get ashore with them in a high tide and a low tide. We learned how to stack our equipment so that it wouldn't get lost. And that part was quite mechanical. We learnt how to clamber up the side of a ship on nets and how to get down from a ship on nets. We learned how to get ashore in water, which might be anything from one to two to three feet deep. We learned how to get off the beach very quickly.

Did anyone drown during this training

38:30 **to your knowledge?**

Not from our battalion. We had some people drown at Finschhafen in the attack because they landed at the wrong beach. There are always some. You get one, not many. We had one man in my company who drowned, our company clerk. But of course there's always a risk in any sort of training. It's hard work and it's often dangerous but it has to be done.

39:00 But amphibious landing, we were the first to do a major one in the Pacific, though; the first Australians. See, we did four all together. We did Lae, Finschhafen, Tarakan Island and Borneo.

Did you have leave before you left for Lae?

No, we'd had leave. None of us had leave. We left in

39:30 August of 1943 after about five months up in the Tablelands. Then we went up to New Guinea, up to Milne Bay. It was a dreadful place. I was ship's adjutant and my job was to supervise the unloading of all the battalion's stores, and the captain of this ship was as timid as they come. They'd been bombed once so there was a bomb on the funnel of the ship.

40:00 And he wouldn't keep the ship in the dock. And all my beautiful planning went by the board because they just got… Have you seen stevedores with those great big nets? And that's what they use to unload. And there it was. And so they just emptied it out onto the docks and I had an awful problem sorting it out. And they steamed out after three hours. We weren't very pleased about that.

What was the trip like to Milne Bay?

Through the

40:30 Coral Sea it was hot. And we had a beam-on swell up in the forward of the ship. We rolled quite a lot. A lot of the troops were sick. But it was very hot. And then later on of course we travelled in those dreadful rust-buckets, Liberty ships that had been converted into troop carriers. And the beds were bits of five-ply and lumps of wood down in the hold. Those ships were terrible. But that's all we had.

41:00 But I was lucky. I was also anti-aircraft defence officer on the ship. I was the company second-in-command. So I could sleep up on deck. I felt pretty privileged.

Tape 7

00:35 **Obviously going up into the jungle, your beloved Bren carriers were no longer part of the equation?**

Yes, they were disbanded. We lost those.

So what were you doing?

Well I was second-in-command of a company then.

Which company?

B Company when we first went up there. So we got a machine gun platoon. Instead of the carriers, they gave us

01:00 four Vickers guns.

As an organic element of the battalion?

An organic element of the battalion, yes. They were the most useful things because the Japs had a habit of putting snipers up in the trees. You could sweep the trees with a Vickers and tumbling down they used to come.

I imagine you could cut the tree down with a Vickers gun.

You can of course.

So the landings on Lae. You were brigade reserve, your battalion?

01:30 Yes, we were reserve brigade. And the only thing that happened was that one of the landing ships, one of the battalions, got hit by a bomb. Their CO and a few people were killed. We were all watching that. But Lae was sort of a non-event for us. We didn't do any actual fighting. We probably killed a couple of pigs at night in the jungle with the noise. We worked our way up the river. And we were heading for Lae but the 7th Division beat us there.

02:00 So we didn't do any fighting with the battalion on the way to Lae.

Did you in the 9th Division sometimes feel like you were always following on the coat tails of the 6th and 7th?

No we didn't in New Guinea. Yes I suppose in the desert we did, but we were never anywhere near the 7th. They were in Syria and we were fighting in Tobruk and Alamein. And of course we

02:30 trailed them both in New Guinea, 6 and 7. There was an element of that. When we were catching the train there was a bit of jealousy involved too. 6th Division thought it was pretty tough to be stuck in Tobruk when they'd captured Tobruk, but they all got picked up in Greece. But when we were going up north in the train somebody called out from the neighbouring passage, " Oh, you pawpaws." "What do you mean?" "Oh, you're green outside and yellow inside."

03:00 That was the sort of thing we used to throw at each other. We thought they were friends.

What was your impression of militia units?

I didn't see them. First ones we saw were after Finschhafen. You've got to read the histories. They did very well on the Kokoda Track untrained and not well equipped.

So after the damp

03:30 **squib of Lae, where you didn't get much involved, it was a fairly quick turn around to Finschhafen?**

Yes it was. Not long. You see the estimate of the Japanese was quite wrong. MacArthur's intelligence chief made a lot of mistakes and this was an awful one he made. They suggested there were only a few hundred, perhaps 1,500, Japanese at Lae. In fact there were about 8,000. A whole division. And so they wouldn't provide shipping.

04:00 So the best the division was sent was one brigade, the 24th Brigade, and they got into trouble because the Japs did some major attacks against the beach. And then they had to send the whole division there. We were the last brigade to arrive. Anyhow, moving back a bit. We went back to Buna and Gona to get the landing ships. And we

04:30 loaded all our equipment and stores there and then set off for Lae. And the 20th Brigade was the assaulting brigade, the one that went first. And we were resupply. So my battalion became resupply. And I had command of two LSTs, you know these great big 4,000 ton things full of overseas supplies. And so I had two companies; my own and one other company.

05:00 By then I was commanding a company, A Company. So we plodded off and we got to Lae behind the assault battalions about two nights later. There was quite a kafuffle going on there: guns going off everywhere; searchlights on; cannon going off; and the Japanese had tried to do a seaborne landing on the beach to take the beach away. We copped it. And we were right in the middle of it. It was a fascinating experience.

05:30 I thought how lucky we were to be in it at the time. If we hadn't been there with the resupply and its escort they might well have got onto the beach and done some damage.

So the Japs were trying to land on the beach to basically come in the rear of what would have already…?

Yes, the 20th Brigade, to try and kick them off. They had the rest of the division up in the mountains and the Americans were very ill equipped. We thought we were but gee, they were. From Lae we wanted to move a troop of 25-pounders up the

06:00 coast to a village, in preparation for the march onto Finschhafen, and they didn't have any charts. And they had a thing that they called an LCM [Landing Craft Mechanised], which was a big flat-bottomed beast you could carry a tank and a couple of guns. And I was sent up as a guide to take them over there this beach. Well, they had no charts and we scraped them across rocks. And they told me then that they had the LSTs, there'd been a convoy of six of them.

06:30 They had been manufactured on the east coast or the west coast [of the USA] I forget which. But the crews had come from America in yachts and they'd had a short training. And this guy was told, "Take your LSTs to Sydney." He'd never done any long navigation or anything in his life. That's the sort of equipment… They were short too, same as we were. We never knew who had what.

So what was your role in the Finschhafen

07:00 **escapade?**

My resupply. To get the supplies ashore. We got two loads ashore and then I took the vessels back to Buna and we caught up with the battalion. And then our brigade was the last one in. And there'd been a big battle around Finschhafen and Dreger Harbour, which only just succeeded in beating the Japanese off.

07:30 They had two brigades there at this stage, the 20th and 24th, and we came in after that had settled down. And our role was to take over from the 20th Brigade halfway on the track between Finschhafen and Sattelberg; a place called Javevaneng. So we got ourselves prepared for that. And I think on about the 16th of November we took over from the 17th at Javevaneng. We spent some days…

08:00 It could have been earlier. It might have been say the 6th or 7th. We spent some days on reconnaissance, finding out what was happening and what the routes were. And then it might well have been later in November the attack started, when we'd had a good reconnaissance. Had some extra jeeps. And we headed off. The first company I think was C Company, went up the track and captured Green Hill. My company then did an

08:30 attack on Day 2. Day three another company. Day four my company went off again in the lead and we went up the road and we ran into a bunch of very heavy bamboo manned by quite a number of Japanese. And the tanks were slipping off the track. The track was very muddy and one of them got stuck. And so then my CO, then our

09:00 CO was a man called Bob Ainslie from Perth, and Bob came up. I told him we were stuck. He said, "Oh, look, stay here. Whatever you do you mustn't go forward until we've got the engineers up to get the tanks up. The engineers will do a blow for you." So I said, "Righto." We hung around. We waited. And I think I said earlier, Sam Horden was there with his tanks.

09:30 He commanded A Squadron of the tanks and they were supporting 9th Division. So Sam came up and we talked. And we were standing behind one of the tanks being shot at by Japanese snipers, so we got the Vickers guns further back to sweep the trees for us. But then when the thing started, the fougasse didn't work. It's a device full of oil and explosives. And it's supposed to come down and burn the bamboo. Well, it burnt up there and never got down. So anyhow, we started off,

10:00 the two companies attacked and we had a successful operation, my company on the right and D Company on the left. We captured the feature with not many casualties. 15 or 20. We caught about 50 or 60 Japanese. And so that was another successful operation we had.

How do you maintain cohesion in that sort of vegetation?

Very difficult. You've got to have contact men between sub-units. Normally you try to get one around the flank.

10:30 The first attack I did I had one platoon attacked and I sent a second one around the flank to cut in behind the Japanese. That's a tactic we like – and it's a tactic they like as well – if you could. But on this one we couldn't do it. The bamboo was too extensive and they were dug in the bottom of it. So in the end the tanks blew some of them apart and we got into the bamboo. But it's difficult stuff to fight through. So thick and it's very hard to push apart.

11:00 **As a company commander, it must be easy to lose contact with some of your elements?**

Yes it is. We had walkie-talkies. They weren't terribly good. We managed to keep in touch though. I always had two or three runners so if somebody was stuck you'd know where they were. Of course the company commander's job itself is to get up and have a look. So if one of the platoons is held up, his job

is to get up and see what's happening. My forward

11:30 platoon was run by a man called Farquhar of great fame. He was the Chief Magistrate in Sydney. Brushy Farquhar, Murray. Bloody good platoon commander but he got into trouble. He was my left forward platoon commander.

In that position of company commander or even platoon commander, what's it like giving orders that you know will cause the deaths of some men inevitably?

12:00 Always difficult. It has to be done if the place is to be captured or the enemy… you've got to accept that you'll take a proportion of casualties. If it's going to be too high, you don't do it. But you've just got to inure yourself to that. That's part of the job. If you didn't do that, you'd never get anywhere so you just have to accept the fact that you'll have casualties. You do all you can in your planning and fire support to keep them to an absolute minimum. And that's all you can do.

12:30 There comes a point when you've got to stop. It' clear that you're not getting anywhere and you've got to call it off.

It must be a burden though?

It is. Yes. I don't think any commander ever loses the awful feeling of having some of his men killed or seriously maimed. It lives with you all your life. You can't avoid it, but then again it's part of war isn't it?

Did you ever have to write letters to the families of?

Oh, yes.

13:00 **What sort of things would you try and say in those letters?**

Oh, I'd just tell them the circumstances under which the fellow was killed. And always say something nice about him, 'good soldier', most of them were, and you expressed your regrets. And if you were to get around near the chap's hometown on leave, you'd try to see his parents and just meet them. That was standard form. Any good unit does that.

I imagine you wouldn't be

13:30 **always entirely truthful and graphic in explaining the way that they died?**

No, of course not. Just that he was killed in action in a battle in So-and-so. Avoid the nasty bits. Occasionally one of your soldiers gets into trouble and goes into jail. You try not to tell the parents that and keep the nasty things away from them so he comes home a hero. It's all part of the drill too.

14:00 And an essential part surely. After all any man who volunteers to go and fight for his country deserves a bit of consideration, doesn't he?

What about the organisation of burial services and parties?

Yes well, battalion headquarters always did that. We tried to avoid burying people on the track. Sometimes we did. If we were isolated we would. We always put a cross and

14:30 would mark the trees nearby and let the battalion or the division know as soon as they could where they were. So there was always an attempt to recover the bodies as soon as possible after the outcome. It's no good sending people up if there's still fighting there. But we tried to avoid… We'd rather carry them back than bury them out in the bush.

What do you think makes a good company

15:00 **commander?**

Mainly common sense, a bit of intelligence and a capacity to talk to his people. After all, it's human relations that are the most important thing in any command isn't it? If you can do that then you can learn unless you're a complete idiot. In that case, you wouldn't be a company commander I hope. No, it's a question of getting your men to trust you. In other words, as much as you

15:30 can look after their interests, try and help them if they're in trouble, know all about their families and what their likes and dislikes are. Very much a human relationship job.

A common cliché about junior officers is 'young, green, not much between the ears, good family background'. Do you think that is a fair picture of your battalion or Australian forces?

It has been. Not in Australian, more likely to be in

16:00 British forces than ours, because most of our young officers, apart from people like myself who were commissioned early in the war, most of them… then later on there weren't that many Duntroon graduates. And a question of family wasn't very important. We're a fairly egalitarian crowd in this country. In Britain of course the members of the upper class always commissioned.

16:30 And some of them were pretty poor. In general, my assessment of the young officers I commanded in my life, with one or two exceptions they were all pretty good. They knew what they were about and they'd

been promoted from the ranks. I never had a Duntroon graduate in my company and so all my soldiers had come up through the ranks. They knew the game. They were experienced soldiers.

17:00 Of course it's inevitable when you get young people that you're going to have inexperience, isn't it? Take my own case. I was immensely inexperienced when I started. So you can't be too concerned if it's necessary to put inexperienced people in because of a shortage of experienced ones. Just try to avoid it. But they learn pretty quickly or else they get sacked.

In the case of an officer that you felt

17:30 **wasn't up to scratch, what could you have done to minimise the harm that he could do?**

Send him to a job in the rear. Sometimes you couldn't get rid of them. But generally speaking, if the commanding officer felt that the man wasn't up to it over there, he'd be posted to a rear job or sent home if it was bad enough. Some of them can be rehabilitated of course. You can send them to a training course and teach them a bit more. But

18:00 you can't afford to have them around if they're not doing their job. There are no spares in a battalion, so if one doesn't perform then that's a platoon without a commander. The sergeants became very expert at commanding platoons because the young officer has a high casualty rate. In the British Army in World War I, the average life of a young…was six weeks, of a newly-commissioned officer. Ours were longer than that.

18:30 **Again you've pre-empted my question. I was going to say it's very dangerous to be a junior officer in an infantry battalion.**

Of course it is.

To what do you attribute your survival?

Oh, luck, and the fact that I was running Bren carriers for the first few years. So in those very nasty battles around El Alamein in July, I wasn't there. I was still in Palestine. It was just sheer luck on my part.

After

19:00 **the battalion had been basically used up in the El Alamein defensive and you had such horrific casualties, how did you go about rebuilding the battalion with reinforcements?**

Well, you see, a lot of the wounded men came back. I forget what we had in the war; we had 250 killed and about 1,300 wounded. Well a lot of those wounded came back. So they'd be away for some weeks

19:30 and then you had to go through this awful, boring stage of retraining. You've got to re-establish the entity of the sub-unit, whether it's a section or a company. If it has too many new people then you've got to start again from scratch to make sure that they're aware of the things you want them to do. So it's a recurring process, the life of a fighting unit, not so much the gunners, but the infantry and the engineers and so on,

20:00 it's a question of fighting and training, and this is the cycle they pass through. They don't have time for much else.

We'll move back to Sattelberg. The companies of the battalion were more or less leap-frogging each other?

Leap-frogging yes. The last attack I did was at a place called Steeple Hill and then after that another D Company passed through me. And then B Company, the one that's going to do the attack on Sattelberg,

20:30 took the lead. My company had stopped at the bottom. Actually we were the lead company again and we propped at the foot of Sattelberg where the path got too steep. And then B Company took it through. There was a creek running off to the right and they decided to outflank them and go there. And that's when the battle for the hill itself took place.

How did you rate the Jap as a fighter?

21:00 **As an opponent?**

He was very hardy. He was tough, skilful. And he put up with conditions that we wouldn't like to put up with. He was starving a lot of the time. His supply went down. Very inflexible. When they attacked they would attack in lumps and they didn't change their tactics. They used to come in blowing whistles. So he was over-disciplined and inflexible but immensely brave.

21:30 **In the North African Campaign, you and your battalion took a lot of prisoners. How often did you take prisoners in the Sattelberg region?**

Not many. The Japanese didn't give themselves up. I don't think we had any. I don't remember. We took one down near the kitchen. We didn't take many prisoners. The Japanese either quit, they cut across country, or else they killed themselves. Most of them would rather kill

22:00 themselves than be taken prisoner.

How would you describe the level of savagery of the fighting compared to the Germans and Italians?

From our point of view, not as savage. The battles of El Alamein were much, much tougher than anything we put up with in New Guinea. But of course that doesn't talk about 6th and 7th Divisions who had awful, up on the coast; Buna, Gona, Sanananda, it was much worse than

22:30 ours. We never struck anything as bad as that. Tarakan, yes, but not in New Guinea.

It sounds like as you got towards Sattelberg you were cleaning up pockets as you went?

Yes we were. Yes.

And then how did the actual battle for the feature itself unfold from your perspective?

Well I was watching of course. We were on the track and this was happening across the way. We could hear it going on. And it was very difficult to

23:00 supply them. There was a very, very steep line up. We could hear their progress up and then we'd stop. You could hear that the shooting had stopped and we knew that the company advance had stopped. Then after quite a gap again the firing started again in a much lower scale of fighting and it became clear, if you could understand the nature of the battle, that there were individual posts being cleaned out along the way. And this was an act of considerable bravery by Tom Derrick,

23:30 who took them on. Took some people with him and he got some Bren gunners to fire on a post while he crept up to it and put a grenade into it. Then they'd repeat it with another one. The ground was what we call convex. With a convex surface it's very hard to fire a straight line. You can hide yourself quite easily. So the forward slope of Sattelberg was convex. So they could take out a post without being exposed to the next two or three.

24:00 This is what he did. And he worked his way up to just the foot of the hill before and they propped there. In the morning, the Japanese had gone. He was a wonderful, wonderful soldier, was Derrick. Very clever. He had all the right ideas how this sort of fighting should go on.

Did you see him in action there?

No Tom had been commanding a platoon of mine only two weeks before. When we were at Javevaneng,

24:30 he was minding one of my platoons. He did a bit of patrolling for me. But he then went across to this other company before the actual battle started so I didn't see him during the battle.

While we're on the subject of Derrick, we may as well talk about commendations. As a company commander, what was your role in recommending awards for bravery?

Anybody who did an outstanding job would automatically…

25:00 We spoke to the CO first then wrote a written recommendation. If somebody did something unusual and out of the ordinary, one put in a written recommendation.

It must be a fairly hard line to judge?

I think it is. After all, you all do you job and somebody has to decide whether that job is worth, is done to a degree greater than it would normally be. That's a hard judgement.

25:30 Let me talk about Tom. I'm a great admirer of Tom. Not well educated but a man of great perception. He thought deeply. He wrote a very nice diary. Thought quite deeply about individual things under war. And we had a reputation in the battalion of throwing Victoria Crosses around too lightly. Grossly unfair. They were all marvellous men. Bill Kibby was my first sergeant. And these guys

26:00 all really earned it. Tom had got a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] for this thing I spoke of at Trig 29, when the platoon commander was bothering him. He got a DCM for that. And after Sattelberg thing, the CO recommended him for a bar to his DCM. And my company was sitting on, I'll show you a beautiful photograph later, of the top of Sattelberg, and we had a conference, and the

26:30 people came. General Herring who was the army commander, General Morshead the corps commander, General George Wootten the division commander, our brigade commander Whitehead and an old acquaintance of mine Gavin Long, the war historian. I was there because they were in my area and I was listening in on it. And of course Bob Ainsley our commanding officer. And they came up and they talked about the

27:00 campaign and he told them what Tom Derrick had done and his recommendation. The generals got together and talked and they talked to Gavin, who'd seen a lot of it, and they said, "Look, that's worth a Victoria Cross, worth more than a DCM". And so they recommended Tom for a Victoria Cross. Talk about battalions wanting to do it for their own. We had a whole gaggle of generals who took the decision on our behalf. It's very interesting. That's not

written in history either.

You actually witnessed the conference that decided to award that VC [Victoria Cross]?

Yes I was a witness to this other conference at El Alamein; the only one in the battalion who witnessed both events. I was lucky. I saw things some of the others didn't see. But that was interesting. And he then was sent off to an officer-training course. And unhappily the army sent him back.

He wanted to come back to the battalion. He should never have come. And he would have been an inspiration to training young soldiers. Anyhow he got killed on Tarakan. But he was the coolest and best soldier I have ever known and without a doubt he must rate as one of Australia's finest soldiers because he never did anything in a precipitous way. Always thought about it. He was never a 'rush of blood to the head' man. He never ever did that.

He was an inspiration to all the other soldiers in the battalion.

Do you think that maybe some people are just born as perfect soldiers?

Yes I do. Some people are born to certain activities, aren't they? They have the capacity to think things through. He would have made quite a brilliant man academically if he'd been trained because he had the capacity to look into the middle of a problem. I'd loved to have trained him in

that sense as a problem solver. He would have done well.

And you're saying in battle his courage wasn't some sort of berserk fury?

Never. Never, never. No. Great tactician. Always calculated and never, never took any unnecessary risks. When he was killed, it was bad luck. His platoon was being shot up and he stood up to tell them to get under cover and

that wasn't a rash act. It was an act of a normal junior commander.

You talked about in Tobruk how you had the dangers and annoyances of dust, of vermin and of the heat and so on. What were the jungle conditions that were acting against you?

Malaria was the main problem. And the number of battle casualties was infinitely smaller than the

medical casualties. And we didn't suffer as many as some of the other units. We were quite strict on sleeves down and no shorts. But malaria, cerebral malaria, black-water fever was very nasty. Also we had scrub typhus. Scrub typhus was almost incurable. The only way they could treat it was to nurse it. They didn't have a cure for it. But that was

defeated because they made us this insect repellent. And we used to have regular parades in the battalion: we saw the people put their insect repellent on. And we had Atebrin parades. Nobody was allowed to take Atebrin unless it was on parade. So we knew everybody took it every day. Disease was the worst enemy that we had.

Do you think your battalion was atypical in its discipline regarding hygiene and

medication then?

No, a lot of them were like that.

What about the mud and the temperature, weather, water?

Water of course was never a problem. Temperatures were but of course it was never as hot in the jungle as it was out of it. They did some tests in Malaya about soldiers carrying full gear working

out in the open. And they discovered in the British Army that a man lost 7 pints of water a day through sweat or six pints through sweat, working out in the open. And so we took that as gospel. We increased the water supply. Later on we had our Australian instructors in the British Jungle Training School in Malaya. That was a very, very important…surprised everybody. And after the

capture of Sattelberg we sat just above Finschhafen and then walked up the coast to a place called Sio. And we walked through long kikuyu [kunai] grass six, seven feet high. The long, horrible grass, and it was hot as demons inside. And we thought we were pretty tough. We lost half the battalion that day in a march of about six hours, through dehydration. We'd never had it before.

Fellas simply got dried out. Another lesson we learnt.

After the capture of Sattelberg, how did you proceed with the battalion then?

We went down the coast. We stayed on Sattelberg until someone else took over. The battle went on to the northeast of us. We went down to the coast. We had Christmas and New Year.

How did you celebrate that?

With turkey

33:00 and a bottle of beer each. And we sat on a beach called North Hill, just to the east of Sattelberg, no, the east of Finschhafen Harbour. And then we took this awful march up the coast to Sio. The idea was to clear the coast. Some of the other people in the region were cutting across, through the Finisterre Ranges. We took the coast strip. So we all met at the far point and there were no Japs left in the Huon Peninsula after that.

33:30 Then we came home. The Americans took over and we came home to the Tablelands again.

And that is where you parted company with the battalion after a while isn't it?

For six months I went to Canungra. After Christmas in '44, I went to Canungra for the first six months of 1945, yeah. Got promoted there to a major. And then went back to the battalion and got caught up on Morotai.

34:00 Met up with a cousin of mine who was up there and we were stuck waiting four weeks for an aeroplane. There were no aeroplanes available. The war was going on in the Pacific and, you know, we were in a backwater. So we were just stuck there and got frustrated.

You did talk a little about some of the things you used to try and teach at Canungra. How on earth can you prepare men for fighting in the jungle against an enemy like the Japanese?

34:30 All you can do is make them as fit as possible and as aware as possible of the difficulties and the factors that they're facing. That's all. All you can do is prepare them. They've got to learn themselves. You teach them the Japanese is not a superman and you give them something on facts and figures of casualties. And also teach them that the Japanese are very inflexible people and if you're flexible enough you can get around them. You also teach them that

35:00 they never think a Japanese dead if he's not. You inculcate these things so they'll learn how to cope.

By that last point do you mean that they would put some rounds into any Japanese body that they saw?

No. But they never assumed he was dead until they found he was dead. In other words the Japanese didn't give up in these defensive positions. They stayed there until they were killed.

35:30 If there was no escape they just stayed because it was just the culture of the Japanese not to give up, not to be taken prisoner.

When you had done your jungle training prior to going to New Guinea, how well do you think that training prepared you?

Not as well as later because we hadn't developed all the techniques then. We developed better techniques by the time I went to Canungra as a trainer

36:00 and we'd learnt a lot more things to tell them. We'd learned a lot more about living. A lot more a disease control and the way the Japanese fought. So those things we gradually picked up. We were able to pass those on more adequately. You always do this don't you? Learn as you go along.

How can you try and impart that level of vigilance and fear's not the right word. How do you make it realistic when you're training people?

Oh, we used to have realistic methods. We would

36:30 put them through assault courses where there were explosions and bullets firing over their head. And put them on these special courses along the jungle trail where we'd record their scores. If they'd didn't get the right scores we'd say, "Righto, you're dead." A model popped out behind a tree and so we made them aware they had to respond quickly. That's all you can do. Bring it to their attention and practice them until they are able to move quickly. The most important job

37:00 is the forward scout and he died in great numbers. You know, the leading man of the battalion. Awful job. Only the very finest troops could cope with it. Had to try and teach them to survive. If you teach them to survive then all the rest would live. But if you'd have your forward scout by the end of the day then you'd done well.

And in making the men fit I guess you weren't endearing yourselves to them?

37:30 No. They marched until they dropped. So did we. Nothing that they did that we didn't do. We did exactly the same thing all the time. Oh, yeah. Fitness is the key to any essence anyhow in a battle, but a long, drawn out one; only fit people survive because you can do away with wounds and sickness better if you're fit can't you?

How do you think the Australian equipment had improved over the year or so?

38:00 Oh, we had a very good gun called a Sten gun. It was developed here in Australia. It was a quick firing, hold at the waist, automatic gun. And that was an enormous improvement. But the American and the British weapons didn't do any good in the jungle. They were a bit cumbersome. The Sten gun was a remarkable invention. It had always been policy to have a positive locking on a weapon. That means any weapon that

38:30 fired multiple rounds, it had to be able to lock and stop the bolt working. That was accepted doctrine in all these years. And all these Tommy guns and all these things had positive locking until the man called Sten, Aus Sten came up and he made a gun that had no positive locking. Made it out of steel tubing. It was like a fairy tale. It fired like mad and never stopped. But it was dangerous. If you bumped it on the ground it would go off. So we had to teach people to be careful.

39:00 But by doing that, it means we could turn out a lot of weapons very quickly. It's more complicated to produce a weapon that has a positive locking than it is one without a positive locking. They can churn them out in great numbers. If they didn't work, throw them away and get another one.

Did you have accidents, injuries, deaths at Canungra in training?

Oh yes, now and again you did, but no many. We were very careful not to. More likely to have them out in the battalion then in Canungra,

39:30 because we were so careful about safety. I don't know how many but there wouldn't have been very many.

What sort of injuries were typical things to happen at Canungra?

Oh, sliding down a hill. We used to climb steep hills and people would lose their footing and fall down a hill and get bashed on a rock. I don't know of any… I don't think we drowned any. We had a pool. You used to jump off a tower into deep water and have people on board that would pull the non-swimmers out. But we lost a few

40:00 falling down the hill.

You just mentioned there that in real operations there was an incidence of injury and death accidentally in operations.

Of course there was. There was always. They'd fall out of trucks. And when the Busu River was being crossed going into Lae, there were a lot of people swept away. It was a big river and it was too deep and they put them across on ropes and the ropes got (UNCLEAR out of hand) and there were a number of people drowned.

40:30 It's always likely to happen. There are always… People get killed by weapons, you know. The rifle goes off or a grenade is thrown carelessly. These are always on the cards. But you hope not too many.

Seems almost more tragic to die that way when there are so many other people trying to kill you.

I think so, yeah. I think it's awful. If it's due to poor safety training then I think it's unforgivable, so one always had to be terribly careful about teaching weapons safety.

Tape 8

00:32 **Where were you when you heard about the end of the war?**

I was on Tarakan Island. First of all I was still in Canungra when the European war finished. We were out on exercise somewhere, and I must be the only fellow in the world who's been through the end of two world wars and never been near a city to party. So we were out in the bush at

01:00 Canungra when the European War ended. And I'd just been promoted to a major then and I was on my way, trying to get back to Tarakan where the battalion was. And two other majors, whom I'd not known before, we were given the most extraordinary job. We were given a bunch of tram tickets each and told to hold a Court of Enquiry on the man, the soldier who had died. And we tracked all over Brisbane with a book of twopenny tram tickets each. What a waste of time.

01:30 There were no motorcars available then. That was in June of 1945. But I just want to correct one impression. I might have given the wrong impression in answer to one question. We didn't find the Japanese as bad as the Germans. Had you asked this question of somebody who had fought in the battle or the defence of Finschhafen, they might have given you a different answer. The 24th Brigade had a very tough time there indeed.

02:00 I was only referring to our own experience.

I want to hear about what you knew about the end of the war coming. How much information were you getting towards the end?

We knew that the European War was coming to an end because we could read maps and we were getting the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] News. We also

02:30 thought the Japanese War could be coming to a conclusion but we had the spectre laying on our heads of an invasion of Japan. It had been planned. I learned of this when I was working in Defence

[Department] with nothing to do for six months. We were going in. The Australian troops were being involved in the invasion of Japan on Honshu Island and that wasn't pleasing anybody very much. So we were pretty glad when the first bomb went off at

03:00 Hiroshima. We were saved from what would have been an absolutely bloody affair: the invasion of the mainland of Japan. And that would have taken place some time in 1946. But it was a great relief for us when the bomb went off.

How did you celebrate that?

Somebody shot at us. We were at an open-air theatre seeing a film

03:30 on Tarakan and on the 15th of August a whole burst of machine gun fire went across the top of it. I don't know whether the Japanese had heard or whether it was just for fun. But it was an interesting way for us to end the war. We all ducked for cover. But Europe was predictable. The thing was collapsing. It should have ended before it did. And it was clear also

04:00 that Japan was being forced back to the mainland. There had been these enormous American raids. The whole of Japan, from every capital of every prefecture other than Kyoto was bombed, every one, and the whole area between Tokyo and Yokohama had been bombed out. That was the Bay of Tokyo is the cradle of Japanese industry. So from Kure all the way around, everything was bombed out. They took an enormous beating. And

04:30 there was no way they could have lasted for long. They would have made a desperate resistance but all their backup industry had disappeared. But the Japanese ideology was to die on the spot so it would have been very nasty. We were very glad when it was over.

And how long did you stay on Tarakan?

All the battalions started to disband in August. And

05:00 in September or was it October, some people came around from Army Headquarters wanting to know if any of us would like to go on the Occupation Force in Germany or Japan, otherwise we'd go home for discharge. As I had nothing to do and, as I was saying, I couldn't get back to the Conservatorium because it was too long – I'd been away 8 years – I decided I'd go to Japan. I was always interested in Japan, so I opted to go to Japan and there I stayed for

05:30 three years. Quite unplanned. So my career sort of unfolded: from that. One thing led to another.

Before we go to Japan, your mother died in 1944. How did she die?

Heart attack. She'd been worn out looking after us in the Depression years, and I managed to get a flight down from Queensland but not until after the funeral, and I went

06:00 back again. Oh yes, she was just a worn out body.

And how did you get to Japan in the Occupying Forces?

Sailed on a ship called the Passau Victory. It was one of the American… they made a whole lot of ships, Liberty and Victory ships. The Liberties used to split in half sometimes. The Victories are a better version. They were freighters and they turned them into troopers by putting 5ply in the bottom

06:30 with lumps of wood. And they were the bunks. And we caught a ship to Tarakan from, no, from Tarakan to Morotai, where we stayed for quite some time and the soldiers got very restive – we'd all volunteered to go to Japan – because all our friends were going home. We got no news. It really did get restive. And around about Christmas

07:00 we had a mutiny. And the soldiers, there were three brigades, three battalions rather. Each of the three divisions made a battalion. 66th Battalion came from the 9th Division. I'd raised a lot of the troops on Tarakan for that. 65th [Battalion] came from 6th [Division] and 67th [Battalion] came from 7th Division. And so we were all on Tarakan awaiting orders and nobody told us. And the fellas were getting pretty browned off.

07:30 Christmas came and nothing. So one morning when the brigadier was away, the senior NCOs paraded the whole brigade on the parade ground and sent a message to my CO, a fellow called Colvin, that could they have a word with him. So he met them and they told him their grievances. So he told them to go home and he'd do what he could. It happened very peacefully. We sent the ringleaders home by aeroplane during the week.

08:00 It was strange. A very difficult situation. They had also mutinied in New Britain: they wanted to go home. You see the Americans owned the ships and they weren't available. All the Americans had to go home and we had a force going to Japan and there was simply no transport available. The aeroplanes we used were mainly American. And the Government didn't explain it properly. Anyhow, after Christmas, Chifley came out to see us. And a man called Forde, who was the Minister for Army. He was an insignificant little man if

08:30 ever I saw one. They came and told us something would happen and then in late January we got orders

that we were going to Japan. And I discovered later, when I did some research in Defence, the Americans wanted us, the BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Forces] – there was a British, Indian, New Zealand army, navy and air force called BCOF – the Americans wanted us to go in the middle of Honshu and to have Americans on both sides of us

09:00 and our joint governments refused to accept. They said, “No, we’re not going to have that. We want an area of our own that we can control. We don’t want to have Americans on both sides. We have different cultures and different techniques.” So in the end MacArthur and the American Government gave way, and so early in January we got the OK to go to Japan. And we would have Honshu roughly from Yokohama right down to the Strait between

09:30 Honshu and Kyushu or Shikoku would be a British territory. So then the question was resolved. So we sailed for Japan in February on the Pachaug Victory and went through a cyclone, which was rather interesting, in the Philippine Sea. And we arrived at Japan in early February and we sailed up the coast and we saw snow on the mountains. Some of us

10:00 had not seen snow in our lives and we’d been in the jungle for years. It was very cold. We got out on the deck with our greatcoats and we watched it snow and we came to Kure harbour. And the navy were already there and we had an advance party and the first thing they did was quite wonderful, they tied us up and they brought a load of beer aboard and so the fellows got a bit happy. And we spent I think two days on the ship at Kure. That’s the great Japanese naval base.

10:30 Japanese Naval Headquarters was there and their main naval construction shipyards were in Kure harbour. And then they took us by truck to a place called Kitachi, which had been an ordnance depot for the Japanese navy on the edge of the water and half way to Hiroshima. And these great big wooden things. I had the advance party from the battalion, so we went up on about day three and put ourselves up in these wooden huts and there was no heating.

11:00 The Americans had been there and they’d closed everything off. They’d filled the latrines in. Not a thing for us. So I got my chaps digging holes for latrines. And there was no coal either. We had a 44-gallon drum in each of these big barrack blocks. No coal for us. So I scouted around and we found some coal dumps down on the sea front and we found a handcart. So we got a few loads of coal up and we lit this great big 44-gallon drum heater and got to work getting ready for the

11:30 battalion, which arrived about a week later. So the arrival in Japan was not very elegant. But there was never any threat. I never had a bullet in the rifle when we arrived. We were told by the Americans that there would be no difficulty and we accepted that, and the Japanese accepted it without demur, they had to. And the Emperor had said, “Get on with it”, so we never had any security threat. But it took us a few weeks to get settled down in the Kitachi.

12:00 Then we used to take trips to Hiroshima every day. We were searching the district for weapons and stores. We found all the caves and we pulled weapons and things out, and we went crawling through Hiroshima. We stood on Ground Zero. The Japanese were making little humpies out of galvanised iron. Nobody told us it might have been radioactive.

Can you describe Ground Zero for us?

You’ve seen a photograph of it. It’s a post office. It’s a round building with the skeleton of

12:30 iron frame poking out. Now at Ground Zero, the weapon exploded about five or six hundred feet up, it might have been 1,500 feet, and the city was completely flattened. And that was the point where it happened, where the bomb went off, and that’s become a shrine for Japan. There’s a garden of remembrance around it. It was remarkable how they were surviving. I don’t know what they were eating but they were building little humpies and it was very cold. Still winter.

13:00 But they were all struggling back to where they’d come from. So Hiroshima was an interesting place. I made about four trips there. But all we’d heard about of course was confirmed. The place was absolute devastation. Nothing was standing in the middle except these odd cast-iron frames. They were the only thing that stood. And we got to work. It was a strange life. Really nothing.

13:30 No wives up there. And we did a little bit of all arms practice. Mainly the act at that stage was for security and to make sure that the Japanese didn’t play up. And we made a plan for some new barracks. These horrible old wooden huts were finally disposed of and we moved into some new barracks. And then I was called away to Yokohama to sit

14:00 on this War Crimes Tribunal and it was the first B Class trials held in Japan. And so we tried the camp commandants of Kanchanaburi, or Kanburi as it is known, up on the River Kwai and the camp beyond that. And the camp commandant of Zensugi, which is in the [UNCLEAR] who were in a coal mine in the bottom of Shikoku and we tried about 23 or 24 of their staff. And we heard an enormous

14:30 amount of evidence and the most awful things. We got some medical evidence. Not sure whether Albert Coates gave us any evidence. Dunlop certainly gave us some. And we had a lot of the survivors who stayed on and gave us the evidence. And I was able later to visit all these camps when I went to Thailand. And later on I visited Zensugi where they worked in a

15:00 coal mine. They had a lot of beriberi there and they used to make these fellas go to work on a little

trolley thing that they had to go along with their arms and work in the coal mine with beriberi so bad that they couldn't stand up. It really was absolutely awful. And Kanburi of course was worse in a way, Kanchanaburi, because they lost about 16,000 up there building the railway. And you know, most atrocious. Unbelievable that

15:30 people would do things to other people. But again when you look at that, you're not surprised at the prisoner thing in Iraq. But it was a terrifying experience for us to learn of the extent of the torture and the maltreatment and absolutely wonderful to get the stories of those who survived and those who

16:00 helped the sick and dying to survive. It really was quite a heart-rending story. A tremendous example of the goodness of man over there man under those awful conditions.

Can you describe for us how these trials worked? How many people were present?

We had the president of the board, Colonel Moss, we three Australians: Doctor Eric Laver

16:30 from Sydney, Wing Commander James 'Jumbo' Davidson and myself. And we had a British officer come in and we had an American legal officer for defence and of course we had Japanese interpreters. So there were probably a dozen of us there including interpreters and the scriptwriters. And we arraigned them all one by one.

17:00 Each one, the charges were laid out one by one, and we never tried more than one at a time. It was a long, drawn out procedure. I think there were 23 or 24 people who were charged and from memory four or perhaps five were hanged. Some got sentences as long as 15 or 20 years.

Where were they held in prison?

In Japan. They had a prison in Tokyo.

17:30 A Class trials of course were going on in Tokyo at the same time, the heads of government.

Were there Japanese translators at the trials?

Oh yes. There were indeed.

And how long would a typical trial take you to get through?

I was there for six weeks. I had to leave just before the end of it. So it was very thorough and every one defendant

18:00 was allowed to ask as many questions as he wished and there was no limit on the amount of questioning that a defendant might put up. Nor was there any great limit on the amount of questions or the number of questions we asked. But there were some funny things turned out. Nothing's ever as it looks. There was always a criticism of how the Japanese were beastly and how awfully they would treat their prisoners, and so they were. But they

18:30 used to do it to themselves! The recruit training battalion, a senior private was able to have a servant amongst the recruits and could beat him if he didn't do what he was told, and morale became pretty bad. And we were told that the Emperor had actually issued an edict to prevent this sort of behaviour going on. So it's understandable how that can progress to something more difficult

19:00 when they regarded somebody, a prisoner, as a non-person and not fit to talk to. Because their culture says, 'You shall not become a prisoner'. So if you add the two and two together, it's not difficult to understand this awful behaviour that gradually took place. It doesn't excuse it but I think one can see how it happened.

19:30 The worst were the Koreans. The Korean guards were far and away the worst. In the Thailand camp at Kanchanaburi, some of the locals tried to help and occasionally Thais would slip some vegetables under the fence. They would try and help. But the Koreans were awful. They were by far and away the worst.

Can you think of an example that distinguished the Koreans as the worst?

No, I can't think of specific examples. But if you had to take all the guards,

20:00 the worst and the most vicious were invariably the Koreans. I never understood that but they were. They were renegades anyhow, in the first case.

It's interesting because that's not the popularly-known perception of the way it went.

No it isn't. But there's very little common knowledge of how the prison camp staff worked. There's an awful lot known about what happened to the prisoners but

20:30 not a great deal about how the staffs were organised or they functioned. But of course it was only in Japan you got Korean guards. You didn't get them in the Pacific. They wouldn't have any idea of what was happening in Japan.

Were there ever any instances during your experiences at the War Crimes Tribunal when you felt that justice wasn't served?

We

21:00 tried to make sure that it was. But I can tell you one in New Guinea where a gross injustice was inflicted. A very famous case. A man called Newton, an airman, was executed by the Japanese up near Wewak somewhere. Now the war crimes were Australian/American, the tribunals. And Newton was tried, taken

21:30 and tried by a senior Japanese officer, and for the sake of local consumption they declared he was a spy – this is not at all unusual – and so Newton was sentenced to death. Now a battalion commander there was told off to provide a firing squad so he told one of his company commanders and he told a young lieutenant, a one-pip lieutenant, who took X number, 8 or 9 riflemen, and was

22:00 told this man had been tried as a spy, he should be executed. The War Crimes Tribunal executed that young man. A gross miscarriage of justice. It wasn't his fault. He was told there had been a proper trial and the man was convicted. So there were instances. That's the only direct one I know. But that's a horrible one. And so people got pretty steamed up after the war. A friend of mine called John Brock was a lawyer in Melbourne. He left the commission because of the attitude of some of them.

22:30 He resigned from it because of some of the Australian commissions in the Pacific.

Did you have direct experience of distasteful behaviour from Australians in the war crimes tribunal?

No.

What caused you to leave early, before they finished?

Had to come back to Australia for a course, and it was all over

23:00 and only what was left was the writing. Interesting, there's not a copy of the report in Australia. It's in Washington. I tried to get a copy. They wanted to charge me 35 dollars so I didn't bother. It's fascinating. It ought to be in the Australian war histories. Because the Americans ran it, they've kept the only copies. I got a letter from a man in Darwin wanting to know about it and I said, "I'm sorry, I can't tell you."

23:30 But there were so many reports of ill and bad Japanese behaviour to the prisoners that it rubbed off on some of the people and we got a reaction, which became in my view quite wrong in some cases. In other words, you can't listen to other people's stories. You can only judge a man or a person on the evidence given to you. You can't listen to other people's

24:00 evidence. But I think after Brock left, some of it was cleared up. When you see like Kuching, for example, when all the people were killed on the march to Kuching. And people who are sitting on a War Crimes Tribunal are told about the horrors that have been inflicted on the prisoners walking to Kuching, you can understand how they get emotionally involved and might make decisions they wouldn't make at other times.

24:30 But that was a pretty horrible affair.

When you were given evidence in the war Crimes Tribunal how shocked were you initially? How much had you known?

We knew almost nothing about it. We heard from the prisoners who came back from Singapore but remember this is only in the middle of 1946 and a lot of the prisoners didn't want to talk about it. And the

25:00 stories were only just filtering through then about the brutality of it all. And so apart from the stories we'd heard of the prisoners who had returned home, we knew practically nothing of the detail. You know, people used to be hit on the shoulder with kendo sticks. A kendo stick is about six feet long and it's made of bamboo strips and it bulges a bit in the middle and they fight with them. It's like fighting with staves. And some of these fellows had done something

25:30 so they were beaten with kendo sticks on their shoulders and they'd ripped bits of flesh off. And they were made to stand outside in the cold. Down in Zensugi a fellow was put in a bucket of water in the winter and it was snowing. And many people died while they were being tortured. They were forced to work with beriberi when they couldn't walk or they had enormous ulcers. They really were the most extraordinary

26:00 brutal things they were subjected to. It's a wonder anybody survived. They were deprived of food. They used to eat white rice and of course, you know, white rice has been stripped of all the good elements. So beriberi was the first thing to come because all the Vitamin B is taken away. So they get this awful fattening of the gut and they get dropsy. They were all affected by this. Ulcers wouldn't heal because they were sick.

26:30 And they really had a tough time.

What lines of defence did the defendants offer?

That they were told to do it. We didn't accept that as a line of defence. Because Japan had never signed the Geneva Convention. Even so, straight rules of humanity should have prevented them from doing this,

27:00 particularly in the case of the senior men, the camp commandants. They should have known better. In fact, we let one or two of the guards off because we thought they didn't know. Apart from that, we wanted to show that we understood what was happening. It was probably good publicity to let two or three off on the grounds that they were young and inexperienced men who were new to the camp and didn't know any better. You can

27:30 make your own opinion of that, but that's the view we took. And there's no excuse for the senior people. Absolutely none. But I was going to tell you about the treatment of Japanese who became prisoners. This document, the Eleven Heroes of Pearl Harbor, beautifully presented document by the Japanese navy, photographs of these 11 young naval ensigns, each of whom had commanded a miniature

28:00 submarine. The 12th one went ashore and the man was captured. He shouldn't have allowed himself to be captured. And these were the heroes of the Japanese navy and they had a monument put up to them. The 12th one never existed. There never was a 12th man, never. Name was expunged. His family became non-citizens and had to scratch for food. This is how they treated their own people. They had a naval college at Kure

28:30 and in order to toughen their people up, they used to take them away about five miles and make them swim home when the tide was running. A few of them would drown because they weren't tough enough to make it. So if people treat their own like that, it's not surprising you can extend that behaviour. One's got to be aware that this is in the Japanese psyche. Always will be I suppose. But of course, Shinto was the thing.

29:00 These are the precepts that Shinto demanded, that this attitude should be taken.

From your experience in the war crimes tribunals, what can you say about human nature?

Human nature seems to me as infinitely corruptible. There's nothing that people won't descend to given the right circumstances. And I don't know that any behaviour

29:30 can be ruled out when you see people, apparently ordinary human beings, behaving in this way. And human nature, people can rise to great feats of self-denial and bravery under the most unlikely circumstances. So I don't know. I never understood why a Japanese man would so brutalise himself and a prisoner and yet come the Spring

30:00 would walk along holding up a sprig of Almond blossom, you know, enraptured by the beautiful. Japan is very artistic; the most beautiful things are there. I saw some exhibitions of artwork and Japanese carvings that were quite exquisite. And yet here we are, the other side of their nature is unexplainable. A very interesting character indeed, the Japanese. I've never worked it out.

30:30 **After working on the war crimes you returned to Australia to do a course…?**

Yes, I went to do an aerial and land warfare school at Laverton. We flew down in a DC3. We got to Morotai beautifully. Took off in the dawn on Morotai and got about an hour and a half out when we lost an engine. And there was some doubt as to whether we could get back. There was no landing ground within cooee [anywhere close] so we turned around and went back

31:00 towards Morotai. And the pilot, the captain, said, "We're going to have to lighten the aeroplane." So I was the senior army officer on board so I stood at the door of that damned aeroplane and I watched every case thrown out. All our personal effects. I had lovely things that I'd brought back from Japan for my sisters, a lot of photographs, which I deplored the loss of. And

31:30 anyhow they finally said, "We might have to ditch. The other engine's started to overheat." We got back to Morotai with 30 feet to spare. We just cleared the palm trees. That was an interesting experience. So then we had to find our way down to Laverton. Another man, a George Maclean, a friend of mine. George is a grazier up at Armidale and his family come from Maclean, you know the township on the Clarence River.

32:00 Anyhow George and I were there. We took a couple of days off in Darwin to buy some civilian clothes. We had nothing else. All the uniforms had gone. So went and got some issue of uniforms from the army at Darwin. All our good uniforms had gone too. We bought some sports clothes and hied down to Laverton. Went shopping again. Got some uniforms made and spent, I think, three or four weeks at

32:30 Laverton. Then by the time we went back I had a week's leave in Adelaide. This is 1946. By the time we got back, Qantas had taken over the air flight back to Japan. They were using World War II bombers called, oh, gosh what's the name of them? Big 4-engine bombers and you sat sideways, had seats on the side and you could stretch out across the fuselage. Qantas did use these on the England to Australia run.

33:00 You remember, the Lancaster, they were called Lancastrians, in the war museum in Canberra? The Lancastrians are the bigger brother to that. And we had about 12 passengers so that was fine. And we had a good trip back. We caught the aeroplane in Adelaide, dropped another engine over Okinawa. So

we flew back to Japan on three. So the rest of the year I spent at Kure. I never did get to Tokyo. And we

33:30 did some (UNCLEAR mixed race) and a bit of training. Then I was told in 1947 that I was to become the second-in-command of a training school being set up in Japan in the town of Matsuyama, which is on Shikoku Island. Shikoku and Honshu are divided by the Straits of Onda. It's a small strait. It runs from Kure around. So I spent the next year there as

34:00 the chief instructor to the tactical wing and I lived with the boss of the school, a Scottish lieutenant colonel. We pinched a banker's house. Lived in great luxury. A house-girl each and a cook and a housekeeper and a jock [Scottish] driver and a gardener. It's nice for a year. We got something out of it.

In this time that you spent in Japan, roughly three years, is that right?

Yes.

What improvement did you see in

34:30 **infrastructure and society?**

Very little. It didn't come until later. It came as the result of the Korean War. They used to build a lot of big ships. Kure harbour was full of broken battleships. They were aircraft carriers and battleships. The biggest they made turned turtle as soon as it was launched, Yamamoto I think it was called. All superstructure, nothing underneath.

35:00 Japan was so beaten up and there was very little work. We had a lot of people who worked for us. All the labourers and the housekeepers and the house-girls were Japanese. Fraternisation was banned but of course it went on anyhow. There was a great black-market in chocolates and cigarettes. And by and large we kept a fairly close look on major fraternisation, but it's impossible to stop it all.

35:30 And so we got to know the Japanese and they got to know us. We saw more and more that the Japanese woman was a much different creature from the Japanese man. And the women were very highly regarded. In fact it is quite a matriarchal society in many ways. The Japanese men were big and tough and they had warriors, but the mums kept the place going. And so we got to learn quite a lot about the

36:00 Japanese. I travelled around a lot. I visited little workshops, village workshops and houses where they made furniture and lacquer work and so on. It was very interesting. Had time to do it. And we supported a monastery. There was a German-run monastery in Takamatsu with some German nuns and some Japanese nuns, run by a German parson. We used to

36:30 give them food and they were of course very grateful for that. We lived in an old palace that had been half burned out. And there we trained our troops in the usual kind of tactics and other things. And it was there we had a lot of Indians. An Indian brigade in Japan. And this was when independence was formed, at the end of whatever it was, the end of 1947. We had lots of talks with the Indians and they

37:00 were hopeful that it might work out. They must have been shocked when they got home and found out what had happened because we had both Hindu and Muslim people on staff. I've got a nice picture of some of the Indian staff in there. And at the end of '47 we closed the school down. The British and Indian elements went home. The Australians and New Zealanders stayed in Japan. We were there for the long haul. And so we closed the school down. And then I was

37:30 sent to the northern part of Shikoku to a city called Takamatsu. And there I lived in even greater luxury in a flat in the top of a palace owned by a Count Isanatsu. The rest of the room was occupied by the American Military Government who actually ran the island and I was the liaison between BCOF headquarters and the American Military Government. I really had nothing to do, except I used to go in and visit our own people if we had some intelligence staff on the island.

38:00 And I visited all the camps where the prisons had been. That was a fascinating experience. Well that lasted until 1948. I used to go down to Kure once every two weeks to see brigade headquarters. And there was a big ferry that ran from Takamatsu to a city called Okayama. And I got on well with the captain. As soon as I got on board, I got green tea and had a special place. I used to enjoy talking to him through an interpreter. That was an interesting

38:30 year because I got a good look at the Japanese at home. The Japanese villages and the Japanese people away from the awful aspect of army. We used to go out on the beaches and I used to go out with the fishermen in the Inland Sea and catching little fish and eating raw fish. Catching whitebait and having a feed of whitebait on the beach. A lovely period for me. I literally had nothing to do other than study for the Staff College exam. So I studied for Staff College entry exam.

39:00 I'd attended a course for regular army in the middle of 1948 and been accepted as a captain. And so the brigadier decided I should go and do the Staff College entrance exam, which I did. I did very well at that. So I didn't know what to do. Whether I'd stay. I still wasn't certain. We arrived at Brisbane and I was met by a man, who said, "Do you want to go to Staff College? Well, you've passed the exam, would you like to go?" So one of my friends said to me,

39:30 "You're mad not to go. It's a wonderful course. A year's training. It will be invaluable after the war." So I said, "Yes, I'll go." So I became a student at Queenscliff, the Army Staff College at Queenscliff and I

passed that. Then I had six months, again as a tactics instructor, in the Army Tactics School.

What was involved in the Staff College?

Oh, it's army tertiary training. They teach all the elements, from army organisation, tactics, administration.

40:00 It's the first tertiary level education the army does. It's a year's course and it's attended normally by majors and captains. People with a future. So then somebody told me, the brigadier, the Director of Military Training, I knew because I used to take his daughter out in Japan, said that the war had started in Korea. He said, "We're not going to break this school up." In 1939 the

40:30 Army Training School was broken up because of the war. He said, "We're not going to do that. You'll be here and you'll stay here." So we saw him off, back to Melbourne. Got a telephone call that night at about half past seven to say, "Sir, can you be ready to go to America in two weeks?" I said, "What for?" He said, "I want you to go to the American Army Staff College." So there, out of the blue. So I had to get myself to Canberra and arrange for allowances and all sorts of things. And so I flew off to America two weeks later.

41:00 I spent another year at Staff College at a place called Fort Leavenworth, near Kansas City in the middle of the States, which is a college at a much higher level. You know, you're dealing with senior formations. That was great fun because one got to hear about the American activities in Europe.

At this stage with all this tripping around and having spent three years in Japan, where felt like home?

Where I was. I didn't have a home. Both sisters were married, living

41:30 in their own houses. I didn't have anywhere to live. So I was a nomad. Nomad of the first order and I was content wherever I was. I had nothing over there to look forward to, to go home to, so I might as well stay in the army.

Tape 9

00:32 **Just a couple more questions about Japan, the War Crimes Tribunals. How effective was the legal defence for those defendants?**

I think it was pretty good. He made every effort to defend them. Yes, I had no complaints about their defence.

You had no

01:00 **feelings that this was a kind of kangaroo court arrangement?**

No it wasn't. It was done totally in conjunction with military law, British military law, which we all knew about. No, it was properly conducted and they were given a very fair hearing.

As professional soldiers yourself, how could you ignore that defence of 'I was only following orders'?

There were some things in which

01:30 a person ought to deviate from orders. And if they were young and inexperienced, you could…they might be… But we believed and we believe still, as people, that there's a level at which you've got to protest if you're being made to do things, which aren't normal in the way you live. So rightly or wrongly, that's the point of view we took. That these commandants had taken

02:00 unto themselves to treat people this way. There was no directive as such that we ever found from Japanese army headquarters.

So you were trying the commandants in kind of command responsibility?

Yes.

In that you felt that some of these orders had issued from them personally?

Yes.

You mentioned off camera before the

02:30 **case of withholding medication from prisoners and how you tried to use a value judgement on that. Can you explain that for us please?**

The Japanese hospitals were in very bad shape indeed and they had almost no medicines of any consequence. They had very little food. All the birds had been killed. The bird flyways had been netted and there was hardly a bird in sight when we got there. They survived on fish and they had no cattle.

Only

03:00 15 percent of the land was arable. Much of that had been reclaimed and was occupied by big factories. So they had nothing to live on. So they really lived on starvation rations. Rice mainly, that they brought in from China. And there weren't proper hospitals. The hospitals were, because of this sickness, the (UNCLEAR or so over man). And if you went into hospital your family had to provide the food for you.

03:30 Now you had people under these circumstances who were trying to keep their families alive. And they saw piles of medicine coming in through the Red Cross, supposed to be distributed to the prisoner-of-war camps. Now some of that medicine was pinched. You don't condone it. But I believe that you can understand why it happened seeing the circumstances that they themselves lived under. I couldn't

04:00 condemn them too much for pinching a bit of medicine now and again. It wasn't endemic. It was in some parts but not all places.

If Japan wasn't a signatory to the Geneva Convention, what letter of what law were you trying them under?

That's a good question isn't it? We tried them under Geneva Convention law, as indeed the Germans were tried after the 2nd

04:30 World War.

As a tribunal member in this court, you have a portion of the life or death of a man in your decision.

Yes.

How was that responsibility different from that similar power that you had in the field?

That's a good question isn't it? In the field, you had power over life and

05:00 death because we were seeking an objective to win the war and to kill as many of the enemy as we could in order that we might win the war. In the case of the Japanese, there was no such thing involved. What we were thinking of was the mistreatment and maltreatment of the people that were unable to look after themselves, i.e., prisoners under duress. You can't compare the two,

05:30 because the prisoners were totally hemmed in. They weren't allowed to move. They couldn't talk to each other. The slightest provocation they'd be punished. So the circumstances were quite different in my mind.

What about that burden on you? You had a burden of command where you could send men to their deaths in battle. Now you had a burden where more cold-bloodedly I guess you were deciding a man's fate.

That's the nature of the game isn't it?

06:00 You face these responsibilities. You're given a job and you just have to do the best you can within the rules as you see it. And it never bothered me any. I don't know anybody who refused to sit on the tribunals. They might have but I'm not aware of any.

How did it feel to be face to face with these men?

Pretty devastating to start with. And the more

06:30 evidence we had of the awful behaviour, the more difficult it became to try and keep reason as the main response. The more concerned we became, the more angry we became with the behaviour of some of these people.

It must have been hard to keep objective?

It was. Yes it was. I think we succeeded as well as we could with the circumstances. The fact that

07:00 we let some of the people off proves that we were trying to be objective anyhow. It's very hard to be objective when you're talking about a man who's been responsible for the deaths of five out of 10,000 prisoners through maltreatment and torture. It's very hard to be objective if you're faced with that.

Do you think in your trials in Yokohama that justice was done?

Yes I do. I've

07:30 always thought that.

One of the unusual aspects of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force was an incredibly high level of venereal disease amongst the troops.

Very. Yes it was a problem. It was the worst problem that we ever faced. The problem was the Japanese navy. The Japanese navy would all come

08:00 in from overseas when… and so the Japanese navy was rife with venereal disease. They'd taken prostitutes into the field and anywhere where the Japanese navy had been, and we were in the Japanese navy headquarters, was a great problem. And at no stage of the war or afterwards were we ever faced with the same problem.

It must have been quite debilitating in terms of the ranks you had

08:30 **to command?**

Yes it was. A lot of people were sent home. But we had a hospital there that dealt with it and minor cases could be cured but severe cases we always sent home for treatment. But it was very difficult to control. We didn't mount guards on our camps. We had curfews. We allowed people to go out walking and visiting. So you can't say, "Thou shalt stay behind a wire fence". So you can't stop contact with them.

09:00 And I've no doubt that some of the little house-girls who came into the camp carried VD [venereal disease] with them too. And the soldiers would walk out of the camp at night with a packet of cigarettes and in hospital a week later.

Were you in any way shocked by the condition of the Japanese people and the damage that had been done?

Shocked no but astonished yes. We had no idea that there'd been

09:30 so much damage. We'd heard about the raid but had no idea of the extent of it, and the people living in Nagasaki and Hiroshima were in the most pitiful conditions. That surprises, yes. I don't know whether I was shocked. I suppose I was shocked to see how little food there was and how little comfort

10:00 there was. And one of the purposes of the Occupation Force was to restore this and to remind the Japanese that there were a people who were originally civilised and prepared to help them. We often went out of our way to give them food. And we had our doctors used to look at the worst cases. We tried to help them to recover. After all, an occupation is not there to keep them in subjugation is it? It's to make them back to normal and try and convince them they shouldn't

10:30 do it again.

What level of compassion or pity did you have for the Japanese?

For the women and the children a great deal. One couldn't do otherwise. I had very little pity for the… wait a minute, let's put that another way. I felt sorry for the Japanese who had to give their lives

11:00 in a hopeless cause to me in the field. Like we saw in Japan and in Burma. They died on the spot. I thought that was awful and it was typical of the approach of the Japanese military. I felt very sorry that they didn't have a chance to give themselves up and we could do something about rehabilitating them. That I did feel badly about. I think most of us feel badly about that. They themselves were acting like beasts and the

11:30 Japanese Government shouldn't have been forgiven for that.

Garrison and security missions are notoriously hard on morale of troops. How did you see that in the BCOF?

Of course it became boring. That's why we turned them over once a year. See, once the families got there it was better. They built some houses at a place called Hiro, where our new barracks were built. So once wives and families came, life became

12:00 more normal and some of the longer-term people were much happier. They started to live a normal life. But we had to turn them over quite quickly. You get bored, you get into trouble don't you? And most of the people who got venereal disease or got into trouble with Black Market were mainly driven to it because they were bored stiff. There was nothing positive to do.

Did you see those morale problems in the battalions in your area?

We didn't have many.

12:30 We had some but not many. We didn't have too many bad hats amongst us. Of course I left them at the end of the first year when they were still quite keen about it.

We'll move forward to the US Army Staff College.

Just one other thing. The most beautiful thing I saw in Japan, two things, which really made an enormous impression. First was an exhibition of Japanese watercolour paintings in Yokohama. 300 of the

13:00 finest Japanese watercolours, which was an eye-opener to me. I'd had no idea of the beauty of some of this Japanese art. The second was a second-hand store up in Nikka, up in the mountains. The people who lived in Yokohama, the rich, had houses up in the mountains and when they were bombed out they had to sell stuff in order to survive. And there was the most wonderful display. A store,

13:30 which I suppose might have been the size of this room and the big sitting room, chockablock full of the most beautiful, beautiful works of art. All had been flogged for survival. And then the first time I saw a display of Japanese art in its finest form. And they're very, very artistic people. That's what's always worried me. They were so artistic and so brutal at the one time. And I thought that was interesting.

14:00 **Talk to us about your time in the USA at Staff College there.**

Oh, it was just a typical course. I was the only Australian of course. I was the first Australian officer to have done a full course and it was hard work. They work on a different basis from ours. They work on the concept of these little exams and you have 'yes' 'no', the typical box exam and always being passed with the spot exam. But they were

14:30 very kind to me and they didn't press me too much. They let me get away with a bit. I don't think that I always got the right tactical answers that they wanted but they put up with mine and I managed to graduate. Had a lot of fun because I sang at the wedding of the commanding general's daughter. That put me in good nick, and I used to take his secretary out as well. I had a few things going for

15:00 me.

How would you compare the army culture between Australia and America at the time you were there?

Very hard to compare. Let's put it this way. There are the things, which we call an appreciation of the situation. We look at all the factors and we decide on the possible courses that the enemy can do so that we can then make a decision. He can do this or that. He is likely to do that. And so you will try and counter all the major courses

15:30 open to him. Americans go for a single course so they become less flexible. They make a big…what he's going to do. Now I found that rather peculiar and rather too inflexible. Once they'd made their minds up, their options are closed off. And of course they had a different form of warfare to us. They had huge numbers of men and huge equipment, hundreds of tanks, and we were fighting a little war with little equipment and small people.

16:00 And so they used to win all the exams on great big mobile tank wars. We did better on the other sort of activities. But they were very kind. And I lived in a bachelor officer quarter and was taken in hand by some of the American bachelors of half-colonel rank. It was very interesting. That course was taught by a woman. In other words, their courses were more academic than ours.

16:30 **I take it you were a lieutenant colonel?**

I was a major then.

You were only a major?

Yes. But I came back…I didn't have any money; I was broke. They didn't give me enough money. They only gave me four dollars a day to live on. And I had a friend who became the Chief of Staff to the Danish army who befriended me. I drove around the States with him for a week or two.

So there were a lot of foreign officers there on exchange?

Enormous number. About 100, yeah, all over the place.

17:00 From every little dog's body country in [South] America, yes, and from Europe.

What was your appointment when you returned to Australia?

I got off a ship in Brisbane expecting to go to Korea. Instead of which I was met by another man on the wharf who said, "You're going to Staff College." So I got posted as a teacher at our staff college.

So you were only a recent graduate of Staff College yourself?

Well I'd done two staff colleges.

And now you

17:30 **were a teacher at Staff College.**

A teacher. Yes. I'd taught tactics before and I'd taught jungle training. I then went to Melbourne where I became, or rather to Queenscliff, where I taught for over two years, and I became the coordinator of instruction there. So I left there in 1953. I went to Melbourne. I became the Secretary of the Joint Administration and Planning Committee of the Defence Department. That comprised of myself as the

18:00 executive member, a member of the Defence Department, a civilian, and a colonel equivalent from each of the Services. And I think I told you the Australian Chiefs of Staff were responsible for the administration of the British Commonwealth Forces both in Japan and Korea, and I became in effect the Executive Staff Officer of that. Everything was processed through my office.

What

18:30 **lessons could you impart to young would-be staff officers?**

Well I suppose the first question is what the hell are you supposed to be doing? Because there's often a great deal of doubt about the parameters of what you're doing. So try and get the parameters clear. And then do a lot of reading. The major mistake of a staff officer is

19:00 to be caught out on a detail. It's a job where you must study detail. And study the nature of the people you're reporting to because your relationship with them will often be the major determinant in whether you succeed or not in what you're trying to do. And make yourself a staff officer. Make yourself number two and not number one. Don't get in the way of your commander. And back him up. But let him have a free run. Don't attempt to take over any responsibility of his.

19:30 That's one of the major lessons. To be on the staff and don't try to assume any responsibility because you get trampled on.

I guess in the Australian Army, the staff has a certain reputation gained in the First World War not so much as a school for gifted children as a sheltered workshop for the people that shouldn't be anywhere near the front.

I think that's the case in every war. We always…

20:00 The further you get nearer the fighting end of the army, the less regard you have for people back in the back. Some of that's due to the fact and some of that's due to jealousy and lack of knowledge of what's happening. But there is a tendency for people who fail up in the fighting end to find themselves back in staff jobs. Very important that the people who are doing the staff jobs most in touch with the people in the front should be the best available.

20:30 And the principle is absolutely inviolate that the staff go forward, the units never go back to the staff. The thing has got to work forward. So there the staff must support the people who he's working for.

It would have been interesting for you having been around at that time of the abortive Thompson's Post mission, which would have been decided back at staff level. And here you are back in staff and you could be responsible for those same things.

That's a command responsibility.

21:00 Never staff. Only the command makes a responsibility about moves and what a unit does. Staff will advise, ultimately the commander makes the decision. But that's a lesson that some staff officers never seem to learn, that you're subjected always to the whim of your boss. You try and persuade him but in the end you've got to do what he tells you. But you know in the First World War there were some great hacks. And there's

21:30 no doubt about that. In the British Army they had a lot of them. I suppose we had too. There was some criticism, you know, of the Australian people in the prisoner-of-war camps. In Singapore some of them criticised very seriously some of the officers who were in the camp with them. I suppose some of it was justified. Some of it would be justified. The more difficult the circumstances are the more important it is for the officer

22:00 to be there in the middle of it.

Step us through some of the appointments you then had at this time.

Well I then went to Defence [Department]. I spent three years. And I had to stay another year because we were closing down Korea. Now I mention Korea. The Korean War started in 1951.

22:30 The Americans had no base in Japan in which to repair the equipment. All the equipment, their tanks, had to go back to Hawaii or Guam or somewhere. Now this was a long haul and it would never work and if the war was going to go on, they had to get some workshops forward. Now the Japanese workshops had been knocked out. Japan was full of people who'd been in manufacturing, engineers and maintenance men. The Americans decided that they should have the

23:00 Japanese take on much of the maintenance of the army; tanks and ships and weapons and so on. So to do that, they had a nasty problem in front of them. As the occupying power that told them to do that, the [United Nations] Security Council would have said, "Uh-uh, you can't do that. You're bullying the Japanese. You've no right to make them do that." So the decision was taken in 1951 to have a Japanese Treaty, a peace treaty

23:30 with the Japanese, masterminded by the Americans and followed by us I think in 1951 or '52, so that there would be an equal basis between the Americans and the Japanese on giving the Japanese the tasks of doing the maintenance for the army. So the Japanese re-established their workshops and that helped them in their worldwide recovery. They established enough facilities to be able to maintain

24:00 and serve the American forces in Korea. That's how that Japanese Peace Treaty was signed so early.

What were you doing in the Department of Defence?

Well we were planning the administration of the Services. It was a big job, the maintenance of the

Koreans, the Korean War and Japan. And we were planning things ahead. In 1956 I went to Malaya.

24:30 We were planning post-war independence in Malaya. Singapore had become independent, given it the year before. In ’56 we took a team up. There was a man from England called Sir Harold Barton, who was the secretary of the Ministry of Defence and he had a brigadier with him whose name I forget. We took a fellow called Irvine, Sir Murdoch, later Chief of Air Staff. Myself, the Secretary of the Joint Administrative Planners, a man

25:00 called Major, a civilian secretary of the Joint Planners, and a lawyer. And we then connected up with the New Zealand team; a colonel and an airman. And we negotiated with the Malayans post-independence defence arrangements and we made suggestions where the forces ought to go. The Malayans asked us to keep

25:30 say, two squadrons of aircraft up at a place called Butterworth. We agreed to battalions there to help them to clean up the final thing of the [Malayan] Emergency. And so at the end of it we walked out of Malaya having agreements with Tunku Abdul Rahman and his henchman, a man called Henry Lee, and more difficult people like that man who just retired. You must have known about it? But we were

26:00 requested by the Malays to leave forces there, which we did. And we cemented in a very good relationship. Two battalions and some ships. And there was a Joint Headquarters established at Singapore in which we were part. And Britain was to pull out of the Far East in, started in the late ’50s and early ’60s, but they were interfered with by Sukarno and his Konfrontasi,

26:30 so we stayed there for years. The idea was we would all pull out and leave the Malayans, and we would leave the aircraft and the navy and the army until they felt capable of doing it for themselves. It was an interesting intercourse. We negotiated for six weeks and came home. All the governments agreed to it.

So you encountered Doctor Mahathir at that time did you?

I didn’t meet Mahathir. No, we dealt with the Tunku and Henry Lee, who were the bosses. The Tunku was the head of

27:00 the United Malay Party and Lee was the head of the Chinese Malay. They were closely associated.

How did you feel about having left the sharp end of the army and moved into more bureaucratic and diplomatic levels?

Part of the job isn’t it? You do what they send you to. I was too old anyhow to go back in the field. I didn’t want to go and lead a battalion

27:30 in the jungles of Malaya. I’d done that. But of course there was an increasing interest in it. You’ve got new things to deal with all the time. You’re dealing at national level, preparing briefs for the Prime Minister’s conference and things of that sort, which are always fascinating. And dealing with future force structure. Trying to resolve what the future of the forces will be. It’s always interesting. And anybody who didn’t find it interesting must have had rocks in his head.

28:00 So I was that for three years. Then I was posted to Sydney. I became Chief Staff Officer of the Second Division here in Paddington. I travelled around New South Wales for two years training people. Then in 1959, I was posted to Bangkok on the SEATO Planning Staff as an Administrative Half-Colonel, where I stayed for two years. Got married and took my wife back with me.

What was the

28:30 **Bangkok of those days like?**

Beautiful. There were no plush hotels. The klongs were open. It was a marvellous place to live and we did a lot of travelling. I saw a lot of the country. I got tied up with a half-Thai, half-journalist journalist who was a historian. He took me all over the country. I had a wonderful time. We were planning for the defence of Thailand and the Middle East and that’s why we were concerned about Vietnam, because it was thought at the time

29:00 that the Chinese had just won in China. Remember? They’d just taken control. The North Vietnamese were making all sorts of noises. We still had the remnants of the Communist thing in Malaya and there’d been a meeting of the Communist Party in India and also one in Indonesia in which they’d determined to infiltrate all South East Asia and Australia and New Zealand.

29:30 And they were determining where they’d go in the waterfront, the education and so on. So we were aware of all this and we thought it was a possibility that South East Asia might be overrun by the Communists and the Russians. But what I didn’t like, we were planning nuclear defence. We were drawing little circles on…that’s the way the Americans were planning the war at the time. I didn’t like that because nobody worried about the

30:00 people who lived there. We were trying to kill the invading North Vietnamese or Chinese but nobody worried about the local civilians. It was part of the planning of the allied Western countries at the time to use nuclear weapons. I found it quite unrealistic. I didn’t believe you could ever fire a tactical nuclear weapon and not have a strategic response.

So these were American nuclear devices that were being planned to be

30:30 **used?**

Yes.

Can you remember in what sort of areas and what sort of…?

Along the Mekong River. Defending the Mekong. (UNCLEAR) would come through the Mekong, through North Vietnam and Laos. So they were the areas we had to defend, there being an invasion.

And these were…?

Oh, they were only paper plans of course. But they took them seriously. The Americans

31:00 determined never again to put a soldier on the ground in South East Asia. And so they committed navy and air force but no troops. So SEATO powers, which were Australia, England, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand had to produce the troops on he ground. The Americans would produce the air force and the navy. So it was funny sort of planning.

31:30 And in the end of course they had to change their minds through the intervention of the North Vietnamese forced them to deploy troops. Otherwise they wouldn't have ever put troops back into Asia. That was their philosophy in 1960.

How were they planning to deliver those tactical nuclear devices?

Well by aircraft and by long-range artillery. We were always constrained

32:00 in our planning with the Americans because they always failed to want to commit soldiers. The C-in-C [Commander-in-Chief] Pacific from Honolulu ran the whole thing. It was his responsibility.

It seems ironic considering the number of soldiers that were tipped into there a few years later.

Oh, yes. It was indeed. But in a sense it proved their own theories. It was ridiculous getting tangled up in the morass of South East Asia.

What did the other South

32:30 **East Asian nations feel about a nuclear tactical response?**

Oh, they drew circles because that was the thing to do. They didn't mind as long as they weren't going to be hit. None of them had any nuclear capacity. It was a theoretical exercise for them. But they were concerned about, we were defending them as well. One of the biggest problems was Pakistan wanted us to defend them against the Indians' attack. And that's a problem we never resolved. We never wanted to do that. So the

33:00 Paks [Pakistanis] dropped out in the end. The situation of SEATO beating up India was beyond belief. Anyhow I came back from Bangkok in 1960 and I then went straight up to Canungra. For three years, I ran the Jungle Training Centre.

How had that changed in the time since you were there in the Second World War?

It changed a great deal. We'd introduced new tactics.

33:30 And they'd started to build a nice camp for me and it was quite a comfortable camp in the end. All our soldiers in the army had to do a course. It was obligatory for every soldier in the army to do one. We also ran a school of tactics. We taught tactics. And we also did promotions. We taught, we promoted people from the ranks. We put them through a promotion course. It was quite a big establishment. It was the key, in my view, the key training establishment in the army for many years after.

34:00 I think in 1958 it was reopened.

What sort of tactical changes and innovations had come about since the time of the Japanese as an enemy?

Oh, we'd learnt more about bypassing. We learnt more to bypass positions. We'd learnt more about the used of airdrops. Drop troops in by parachute. And we'd learnt to try

34:30 and isolate the people if we could instead of getting up and beating the hell out them, try and go around them and make them pull out. One of the great lessons of the Pacific War was to isolate people and bypass them so you didn't have to fight them.

And how did you put your personal stamp on Canungra in the three years you were there as commandant?

Oh well, I hope I did. I did my best.

What innovations did you seek to make?

One would always try to innovate the training

35:00 methods. We tried to increase our realistic training. We built a little Vietnamese village. We'd learned about that. So we'd have some idea of how the Vietnamese used to fight. I trained the first team of Vietnamese Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam. A man named Ted Serong commanded. So they came to me and I trained them in the ways…and from then on

35:30 we trained every soldier who went to Vietnam and also to Malaya. Every soldier who went over there to South East Asia went through Canungra.

How was the army changing at his time from the massed formations, divisions of the Second World War?

Oh look, that's not a question I'll answer. There's nothing worse than an out of date expert they say. I really don't know. We're much more mobile. We use helicopters

36:00 more. There are dangers in that. We don't have enough sea-borne capacity. But there's a better tie up between air force and army. But we're deficient in lots of ways. I think we've become more mobile. We try and avoid big, enormous conflicts and do it on a smaller mobile scale.

I was actually asking about when you were there in 1961 how things had changed.

36:30 **As far as, was it a case of smaller scale training and engagement?**

Well of course we weren't training… we were only training at battalion level. The bigger picture never came in. My charter was to train the battalions ready for operations in the jungle.

How sure were you of the looming involvement in Vietnam?

We didn't know then.

37:00 We really did think that it was the training team. Did you see a picture about Kennedy the other night? Well, it became clear from Robert McNamara, Fog of War it was called. He was Secretary of Defence. And he said that he and Kennedy had wanted to pull the advisers out in 1961, '62; that they had planned to pull them all out and not to commit large American forces. Kennedy got killed and Johnson became president.

37:30 And Johnson committed the army in huge numbers abetted by a man for whom I have absolutely no regard called Westmoreland, who was the American general. He had half a million troops in the end. Fought quite the wrong war. You know, it was a war of subversion. But I'm digressing. It's easy to fight the wrong war under those circumstances.

38:00 **So you finished up at Canungra in '64?**

'64 I went to Canberra to be Director of Military Intelligence and a member of Joint Intelligence, National Intelligence Committee. I stayed there until late in 1965, where there was concern about the Indonesian Konfrontasi, and we were getting some good information on the

38:30 Indonesians. A lot of good signals intelligence. But then I probably worked too hard. I had a busted duodenal ulcer one night and I was carted out on a stretcher. So they took me off that and gave me a planning job for a couple of years.

What sort of level of intelligence were you getting back from Indonesia and Vietnam and elsewhere?

Top level downwards, all levels, because we used to co-ordinate not only military but also national,

39:00 political intelligence, and it all came under the aegis…we were the top intelligence-creating body in the country. We made assessments for the government. Passed them on to other governments. Fed our people in the field. And on an individual basis it was never good enough for me. We didn't have a joint operation. We were working on single service. Quite effective. We got a lot of information. One of the

39:30 prime examples was when the Indonesians had two C130 loads of soldiers they were dropping into Kota Bahru down the bottom, in the bottom state of Malaysia to try and create… Well they all disappeared. We learned that they both flew into a mountain and we knew that before the Indons [Indonesians] did. And it was fascinating listening to the traffic. They were wondering where their troops had gone. And so

40:00 occasionally we'd get the drop on them. But we had to careful the way we disseminated that, because the Indonesians didn't then know the extent of our capacity of signals intelligence.

So a lot of this intelligence was coming through electronic intercept?

A lot of it was. We had to synthesise it. We made it look like ground level intelligence. We had some good contacts also on the ground. Not much in Indonesia. Had some good contacts in Malaysia though who kept

40:30 in touch with the Indons.

So there was ground level, human assets as well?

As much as we could, yes. The Indonesians never knew or Sukarno never knew that our troops had gone into Borneo. We sent some troops into Sarawak/Sabah. When they crossed the border they beat up some Indonesian patrols in the rivers. They never knew that at the time. They knew after the war. But they didn't know at the time it was going on.

Tape 10

00:32 **I wanted you to tell us about your involvement in Joint Intelligence.**

Well after I collapsed I was carted out into hospital. I had some time off. They took me out of that and I came to a group in Defence. We were planning force structures ahead. And after that I became Deputy Adjutant General. I got promoted to brigadier and I found myself as Deputy Adjutant General.

01:00 One thing that happened there was that I was asked to join a group of people: the Deputy Solicitor General, the Defence Legal Officer and myself. There'd been a fuss made in Vietnam during the war about people going to the army detention barracks at Holsworthy. A great big fuss made saying how brutal it was. We were told to investigate military law of the

01:30 three services and to come up with some recommendations and to look at the conditions of imprisonment of all the Services, all the Service establishments. So I took this team up to Vietnam. I took them to Singapore, I took them up into Malaysia, I took them to Darwin and I tracked around Australia looking at all these detention facilities.

02:00 Vietnam was fascinating because the field hospital there was full of people with head wounds when I visited and they were nearly all Negroes, and they had a lot of head wounds. And the conditions under which they kept their prisoners were pretty fierce. It's a hot climate you know in Vietnam and they had some steel containers, they had people in those. And that's pretty brutal too. I'm not surprised.

02:30 I mustn't say this. It's not surprising how people can go from there to mistreating prisoners. Anyhow I showed them all that and I showed them how the Brits in Singapore kept their prisoners. And we went to every prison in this country. And then as a result of that, there was a rewrite of the military law, edited by my old friend Sir Victor Windeyer, who was then a general and on the High Court. The leading

03:00 CMF [Citizens' Military Force] general in the country. So there was a major rewrite of military law. We changed a few things. The navy, for example, used to pretend that everything had to be like Nelson was and that a naval captain or a naval commander of an establishment on shore could give the same treatment to a sailor as he could on board ship. Now in the army we were not allowed to put, a commanding officer couldn't put a man in detention where he lost his pay.

03:30 He could give him seven days or 14 days confined to barracks, but he didn't lose his money and his wife didn't lose her allowance. The navy put a guy in for 28 days in prison on shore, in training and we thought this was absolutely ludicrous. We made a big fuss about that and we made the navy change its…they were pretending it was still Nelson. You know, all sorts of little things like that. Because they'd always been done, nobody had bothered to

04:00 change it. So I felt that was a worthwhile exercise. We managed to make some reasonable changes. And the whole of the manual of military law was rewritten under Victor Windeyer's direction. That was very interesting. And other than that we did some studies on the provision of officers for the New Guinea army post war. And we were concerned about the practice of getting all the

04:30 brightest people in New Guinea into the army because we had high standards. We had to make certain that all the cleverest ones didn't find themselves in the services and running the country. That was another thing we did in A [Adjutant-General's] Branch. And then I got posted. We started this Joint Defence Structure. I did a lot of work with General Wilton who was the Chief of Defence Staff. I'd had many contacts with him during the years. And so we sat down and we created a Joint Intelligence Structure

05:00 we put to the Chiefs of Staff. We got that approved in 1969, I think, and we took most of the strategic intelligence elements from the three Services and put them in a joint structure. We took civilian people and put them, so we had a structure that comprised of all of the national level strategic intelligence both military and non-military under the one headquarters.

05:30 And it was a great improvement. So we established that in 1969. And I did a lot of travelling. I went to Vietnam several times. And we went to Singapore. We had conferences in Singapore on a regular basis, in Hawaii, and we had a big conference in Washington with the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] on what we were going to do about our intelligence from China. We had an agreement there, our joint intelligence people, my chairman

06:00 and I represented the services, went across and we did a deal with the Americans that if we provided them intelligence for South East Asia, particularly Indonesia, they would give us more information on China. So for the first time we found ourselves looking at these very top-secret photographs that had

been taken over China from the satellites. They are now common knowledge but they weren't then.

06:30 We had a good deal. We had a nice quid pro quo from that. It was successful from our point of view and we also got a lot more intelligence from Vietnam as a result of this conferencing in Washington. We got feted by the Chief of the CIA and we got fed in what they call Blair House, where they put up all the important visitors, and we had a rather nice time. We came home through

07:00 Hawaii and did some more dealing on a lower level with the people in Hawaii. That was a very interesting trip. And some time in London looking at the London things like MI5 and MI6 and the London Intercept Units. It was all in all a very interesting trip we made. We got a much better view of what was happening worldwide, only because we'd become joint. If we'd been single [service],we wouldn't have been able to do that.

07:30 We made several visits to Vietnam. We were very concerned about Vietnam. Of course we were then engaged in it and I'd been asked as an intelligence officer back in 1965 whether I thought it was possible we could win the war in Vietnam. And I said, "I don't know." I thought so because what was happening was that after Dien Biên Phu,

08:00 one and a quarter million people had walked out of North Vietnam into South Vietnam because they didn't want to be under a communist government. We thought that there was some justification in this, that that number of Vietnamese was worth supporting. And so our opinion was rightly or wrongly, that the war was winnable. It was worthwhile intervening. We were only one voice of course. But

08:30 it didn't turn out that way because in a way the wrong war was fought. The Americans, if I can be critical, tried to fight a second Korean War. They had massed tanks and armour, aircraft in a mass battle. Vietnam was never going to be like that. And they tried to train the Vietnamese army, South Vietnamese Army, to fight a Korean War. So the South Vietnamese never

09:00 really learned to cope with an insurgent war. Had no police force. The country had only just been formed after the Paris Conference. And they had a difficult time. I was sorry for them. It didn't work out. So we had a great involvement in that. We had daily briefings of the Prime Minister and the Defence Department and odd briefings of Cabinet.

09:30 I think we made a pretty good organisation in the end. It was my proposal to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. Everywhere had a thing called the Joint Intelligence Staff. Their job was to take the information and to do a draft study and produce a paper for those of us who were in the National Committee to examine. They did the donkey work [research and preparation].

10:00 So I suggested to Malcolm, whom I knew quite well, that we should move that out of Defence into the Prime Minister's Department. And so a year or two later, you get the National Intelligence Staff moving from Defence into the Prime Minister's Department, where in my view they were better able to take an objective

10:30 national view away from the pressures of purely defence. It hasn't worked out because you know that there's been some difficulty. Lately they've been complaining that the DIO, the Defence Intelligence Organisation, gets it wrong. I don't know if they do or not. I thought we had a good organisation. It worked fairly well. So in 1971, Ciba-Geigy offered me a nice job and I resigned from the army. I got let off.

11:00 I worked for them for eight and a half years.

What was it like joining civvy street [civilian life]?

A good question. I wasn't very… I was pretty uneasy. And the managing director of Ciba was a rather sophisticated Swiss called Marcel Gautier and he was a great help. He took me by the hand. I was interviewed by the senior people.

11:30 Came out from Basel to interview me. The two companies, Ciba and Geigy, were merging and they wanted help in that with the people. So I was interviewed by some of the principals out from Switzerland and then I was introduced to all of the senior people in the company by Marcel, who took me by the hand. So I got away to a reasonable start. But I must say I was pretty nervous at the beginning of it. They wondered what they had got having a senior army man.

12:00 They were terrified that I wanted to take the job over. I had some difficulty convincing some of the senior managers that I wasn't after their jobs. But in the end they came to accept me.

Where in the world did you do this work?

What work?

For the Swiss company?

Oh, Lane Cove. Ciba had a headquarters there and a manufacturing division. Geigy had an operation out at Pendle Hill.

12:30 Different operations. Ciba, you see, had been the inventors of Araldite, to hold aeroplanes together, and

Geigy had made DDT [dichlor-diphenyl-trichlorethane, insecticide] and they were a magnificent chemical company. They became one of the biggest in the world and they had lots of products. Four divisions had chemical, dyestuffs, agricultural and

13:00 photographic. Ciba-chrome was a very high quality coloured photographic thing that they later sold to Japan I think, to one of the great Japanese companies. And they also started Ciba-vision. So they ultimately moved out of Lane Cove and they moved out to Pendle Hill and Smithfield. So I worked with them for eight years and then I decided I'd had enough. I'd done as much as I could and they seemed to be pretty content with what I'd done. So I resigned and

13:30 we bought this little block of land in Queensland and we went to Queensland to grow avocadoes. And we commuted. We lived at Lindfield at the time. And then in 1983, we sold Lindfield and moved into here, when our children moved out. We spent 27 years running up and down between Queensland and Sydney. It was great fun. We learnt to love avocadoes. We grow very nice ones.

14:00 **What did you miss about army life?**

I don't know truly that I missed a great deal. I told you I'm a pragmatist at heart. If you change your vocation, it's no good worrying about what you had. I missed the intellectual challenge of many of the jobs I had. I suppose that's what I missed most and not being in touch with the information and what's happening. The difference between operating on a national level,

14:30 writing briefs for the Prime Minister and growing avocadoes in Queensland. So gradually you become used to it.

From your experience since the Second World War, both in the army and out of it, do you think Australia has succeeded in creating a more peaceful, post-war World?

No. We have an immensely efficient

15:00 group of armed services. No question. There's no better trained troops, army, air force or navy than the Australian. And with a small force we do an enormous amount. We've done a great deal to help people in South East Asia. We helped defeat the Communist terrorists there. Vietnam of course was a failure wasn't it? I don't think one can attribute anything to Vietnam. Had it succeeded it might have been different. And one has to take an

15:30 ambivalent view of Iraq. I thought in the first case, Saddam was worth knocking off. The things had gone so bad and they'd been so badly managed that one's got to assume that the Americans had no post-war plan at all. They don't know how to cope with it and they let it get out of hand. They should have been as tough as can be with the behaviour of their own troops. If we're to invade a country, say because they're being tortured

16:00 by their dictator then we've got to make sure that our behaviour is beyond comparison. They've failed in that, haven't they? So in answer to your question, I don't think we've done that much. We've helped in New Guinea and we've helped in the Solomons. I think we'll do more in the Pacific. Certainly I think we helped in the Solomons. And I hope this Pacific venture will be successful. We'll sort of be in the middle of a Pacific forum. I think we should devote

16:30 a lot of time to that and I'm glad to see that the government is talking about doing that. We've got to get onside again with Malaysia. We're onside with Thailand but not with Malaysia. We have to get back onside. And I don't know about Indonesia. Anybody who thought that we could go into East Timor without engaging the Indonesian army must have been mad. In the days of Sukarno, the TNI [Tentara Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian army] was charged with defending the

17:00 nation, the nation of over 1,000 islands. But as far as the army was concerned, East Timor was part of Indonesia. We could have expected that the locals would be aided and abetted by the TNI. Nobody should have been surprised when it happened. But I think it was the right thing to do. I think Australia failed under the Whitlam era in not complaining about Indonesia and the invasion of East Timor. I think we should have

17:30 made a stand. But as a rule we've always wanted to be onside with the Indons. We don't want to have an anti, angry neighbour of that size on our flank. Might create trouble in New Guinea for us and in places like Christmas Island. It's a difficult position for the Government to be in, I think.

You mentioned earlier your love of the desert.

18:00 **Have you ever been back to any of the places you fought?**

No. Had the chance but didn't go. Don't particularly want to go back either. A lot of people do. I'd rather go to England or Sweden or Italy as we always have done. No, I don't want to go to Egypt again or to Tobruk. Filthy enough place when we were there without revisiting it. In any case it's all gone. The places that we were have been…

18:30 around Alamein they've built villages there. The whole place has disappeared. There's no point going back. It's like saying there was a fight in Rooty Hill. Well Rooty Hill's disappeared now, hasn't it? No point in going back to look. The whole thing has disappeared into history. So I found no virtue in going back to either place.

How involved have you been in Anzac Day?

19:00 Well in Queensland, I sometimes led the World War II army. I always led the 9th Division march in Queensland. I ran the 9th Division Association for something like 17 or 18 years. I started it back in 1981, I think it was, so I've been very involved in Queensland. Not here. I go to Adelaide because I'm the patron of my battalion association.

19:30 So I go to Adelaide when I can. I marched there this year. They expect me to go of course. Want to or not, it's not the question, I should be there.

Looking back on your service, have you any regrets?

None at all. I was a very contented soldier. I liked doing most of the things I did. I did it with a reasonable degree of success and enjoyed it.

20:00 **You spent quite a lot of your professional life serving your country. What message would you have for Australians watching this tape in 50 or 100 years about serving one's country?**

I wish we could get the message out. I'm not certain that the young of this country wouldn't do likewise. But there's a generation where they're not being taught to give. They're being taught to ask for stuff.

20:30 And if we do that then the country will come to a sticky end ultimately. I think that we've got to teach them. We've got to publicise more the need to make a contribution to the public. A lot of them will. Two or three times lately young people have helped me carry a parcel. I found that nice. 18, 19 year old children. And I suspect that the generation that has been wrongly or otherwise regarded as

21:00 the X Generation or the baby boomers will disappear from our culture. I think that as the young children understand that the more they want to get, the less they want to give, the more unpleasant life is. Life only really works if you're prepared to give something to it, doesn't it? You've got to make a contribution. Australia's a nice country. I love it. Most of its people are great.

21:30 But I think we're having trouble with the teachers. Teachers have been hamstrung by bad laws. We're not supporting them as much as we might. We still have a lot of problems to solve, haven't we?

Are there any other stories that you haven't told us today?

No. I don't know.

22:00 One of the most amusing things that happened to me, it wasn't to the people. I mentioned in June 1940, '41 there was to be a big attack by the 8th Army up in… the relief of Tobruk was the aim of it. And the people who do the attack were called the 18th Brigade. They came from another division, 7th Division, commanded by a man called George Wootten. He became a general later, commander of our division. There were three battalions: one from Adelaide, the

22:30 2/10th; one from Victoria, the 2/12th; and one from Queensland, the 2/9th. And before this attack I took them all out on reconnaissance. I took the brigadier and his staff, I took the battalion commanders and their staff and their adjutants and their planners all out on individual patrols as far as we could go to show them the ground they would have to capture when the attack came in. And we were to follow it up,

23:00 the 2/48th. That was fine except we had a big anti-tank ditch on the southern side of the perimeter. It was about 28-odd feet wide and about 9, 10 feet deep in parts, and all the rock that had been cut out had been piled up on the enemy side. And there's been an approach made, a sort of twisty approach, so that when we came in with the carriers we had to careful that we got along this twisty track.

23:30 And for a bridge we had some huge H-girders, big iron H-girders and some railway sleepers across the top and if we hit them right it was beautiful. But this day we got shelled coming in. I had a fellow called Eric Martin, who was Colonel Eric Martin who commanded the 2/9th Battalion from Queensland. And as we came in, my own vehicle, my driver,

24:00 swung the wheel rather hard. We got onto the bridge and the sleepers gradually slipped. And I thought, "God, here we go". And here's my crew and the battalion commander gradually slipping into the anti-tank. So we finished up at the bottom of the ditch with the tail of the carrier stuck up in the air. Much swearing and unhappiness by Eric Martin. Anyhow nobody was hurt but it was a very embarrassing situation for me.

24:30 So we got some carriers and we pulled it out. That's probably one of the worst things that happened to me. When you're supposed to do something well and you make a mess of it, it's always embarrassing isn't it?

What did you learn about friendship during your time in the army?

Well I do suggest that there are no friendships quite like

25:00 those where men and women have to put their lives on the line and act together. You form friendships that last you all your life. If you completely trust someone then that friendship will last forever. So the

essence for me in friendship is mutual trust. You mightn't always agree with what people do but you're prepared to trust them and let them do things for you that you can't do yourself. So that's a big lesson

25:30 I learnt about war; to learn to trust someone else to look after you when… and you have to do the same with them of course, don't you? And if you do that, friendships will last forever. It doesn't matter when it starts. But if you're in the army, you're walking alongside a man who's got a rifle to stop someone from shooting you, you're going to be a mate of his for life aren't you?

26:00 **I've got no more questions for you. Thank you very much, Brigadier.**

I've enjoyed it. It's nice pulling things out of the memory, isn't it? So many people say memory fails. It doesn't fail if you work it. It doesn't apply in terms of Alzheimer's of course. But in normal terms,

26:30 if people try and recall things it's astonishing what you can recall. I find that absolutely enthralling at how much you can recall back when the need really comes.

INTERVIEW ENDS