



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Title	(WX7151) Hawkes, John Bowbear (Jack) (Private)
Interviewer	Wall, Max
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Description	<p>John Bowbear (Jack) Hawkes, 2/28th Battalion and prisoner of war (POW) Italy, interviewed by Brian Wall for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939–45</p> <p>Discusses employment; enlistment; training; 2/28th Battalion; morale; leisure; casualties; capture, desert operations; health; POWs. Mentions Ceylon; Red Sea, Mersa Matruh; Tobruk, Palestine, El Alamein, Ruin Ridge, Middle East; Italy.</p>

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Identification: This is an interview with Jack Hawkes conducted by Brian Wall on 23 January 1989 at 1330 hours. Jack was a member of B Company, 10 Platoon, 2/28 Battalion who was captured at El Alamein. This is tape No. 1, side A, first side of two.

Jack, could you please tell us a little about your early life?

I was born in Kalgoorlie in 1917 – 20th July 1917 – and from there I came down to Perth. My dad was a grocer and in 1927 he took over a business in Meckering from his brother-in-law which was a bad blue because the depression came in 1929 and even the farmers couldn't pay their way. So poor old dad had to keep them in food and we paid our way. Anyway, then by the time I was fourteen, I left school a month before I was fourteen to help dad because he couldn't keep anybody ... he couldn't pay anybody to help him. So I helped dad in the shop and we battled along during the depression and dad died aged fifty-eight in 1934 and my brother and I kept the shop going until 1936 when we sold it and came down to Perth. Then I couldn't get a job for quite sometime. An uncle of mine had theatres and one was the Princess Theatre in Claremont and they were building the Windsor Theatre in Nedlands. So I was an assistant operator at the Claremont One for six months and in 1936, end of 1936, they opened the Windsor Theatre and I was the operator there for the first night, I was operator there. And I operated there until the war started in 1939 and I was going to the war. That was the big adventure for me as a matter of fact. So I was definitely going to be a pilot. So I went into the air force and I passed the exams and so on and I was an aircrew reserve for so many months – I forget how long. At any rate, I got a letter from the air force saying that to come in and have another interview, so I came and had another interview, and they said, 'We have over-enlisted in the aircrew' – whether this was because I wasn't good enough, I don't know – anyway they said, 'We have over-enlisted and you can now re-' – what do they call that now – 'remuster in the ground staff'. And I said, 'Can I now!', and there was a bloke sitting opposite me, in the sentinel, so I said, 'This badge here is an aircrew badge; if you don't want me in the aircrew, you're not going to get me, mate'.

(5.00) So I threw it back at him. 'Oh', he said, 'Is that the way you feel?'. I said, 'Yes, I'm going to the war, mate, not as ground staff'. He said, 'Righto, we'll give you your discharge and you can do what you please'. So another fellow, at the same time, a bloke named Ray Cross, he'd got the same thing and we were very upset, so we went straight down to the army and joined the army and then I kept in touch with Ray – and everybody was joining the army at time, of course – this was in 1940. So Ray got in before I did and kept in touch with him. And another mate of mine, Les Thompson, he had been in the navy reserve and they said they couldn't take him so he joined the army. So we all joined; but we all got split up. Ray left in ... before Christmas of 1940. I got in in thirteen weeks and Les got in in fifteen weeks, I think it was, from the time we enlisted. So I got in on the ... in almost July I think of '40 and we went in at the camp at Claremont and then went to Melbourne and then we were ... there was Brigadier ... not Brigadier Lloyd, he was Colonel Lloyd, he picked all of the fellahs out to go into this

2/28th Battalion. He wanted all young fellahs. At any rate, we got all picked into that and I got into B Company and that's when I was going to be ... somebody said, 'Oh, you've got to go in the sigs; you're an operator of the pictures'. So I said, 'No, no I'm not. So I'm going to be in infantry with a mate of mine, Peter' – not Gullefer – 'Peter Haggett'. So he and I got mates and we went up to Northam and we did our training up there which was ... well, I didn't mind the training but the, you know, the red tape and such, I wouldn't take that very well, but I did well and I was pretty physically fit and I could do things. I could always remember there was a Sergeant Potter with the bayonet training and you had to 'on guard' then you had to point your bayonet at the other bloke and you would stand that still. At any rate, I won it because he fell over (laughs). You had to stand that still and I remember that was one good thing in the ones. At any rate, I finished up there and we came down. We had our embarkation leave ... no, before the embarkation leave, I beg your pardon. I was going with a girlfriend that I had been going with for some time; my wife now, and when she was ... we had a pretty sort of a quiet courtship because I was an operator at the pictures and I used to work six nights a week and a matinee on Saturday. So I used to work and she used to have to come and pick me up at the pictures and I used to take her home on me motorbike. So ... and there was no drinking at all, of course, because you couldn't drink of a night time or going to parties and things like that. So I became just about a teetotaller. So, at any rate, just before ... in August or something ... any rate we decided we would get married before I went, which we did. And we got married when I was still down at Melville then we got changed up to Northam and we were at Northam then and I used to come home on my leave on my motorbike and so on, and bring somebody back with me – I went flat out home, you know.

At any rate, that went fairly quickly but we didn't leave until ... we left on January 2nd, 1941, we left. And we came down to Fremantle and the *Queen Mary* was in. And I said, 'You beauty, I'm going on the *Queen Mary*', but we didn't. We went on the *Aquitania*, another big boat, but the *Mary* was the one I wanted to go to. At any rate, on the way over it was pretty ... we were drive down, because of the Eastern Staters coming over, we were the last on so we got right down below decks. And 'hot': Holy mackerel, going across to Ceylon it was incredibly hot down there. You used to just be a pool of sweat and you could go to ... you were allowed to sleep on deck, but by the time we had to have ... you weren't allowed up before the certain whistle went and by the time we got our gear up on the deck – you used to take your rugs and so on – oh, bad luck, it's full. So we had to go back again. Every time. We never slept on deck all the way over to Ceylon. Any rate, we got to Ceylon.

(10.00) Just getting back to basic training for a little while, Jack, how did you find basic training? Did you fit in or did you miss being a civilian?

Oh no, I didn't mind doing basic training. I always liked being fairly fit and I did quite well at it, I think. There was too much repetition of course and, you know, games and how you ... they would say, 'Go to ground', and they'd have a rattle or something to say. 'You're under fire; go to ground'. But that we used to not really ... you used to think, 'Ah, silly', but you knew damn well that once you did, or we found out once we did get under fire, you didn't have to be told to go ground, mate, you hit it. It was all that. That was ... they reiterate on that a bit too much about going to ground because that is the sense of

survival straight away. You went to ground if you're under fire. So that part of it ... the rest of the training wasn't bad and you didn't realise how fit you did get by running over hills and around Northam. We went all these distant hills, Northam Hill 60, and all these hills we used to have to go and attack and play around; running up this and running up that. But, oh, it wasn't bad but that was the thing I was going for. I was going for the adventure in this war that I was going to. That was a great adventure as far as I was concerned. So ...

Did you find that basic training equipped you for war?

Oh, I think reasonably so, but there is no ... just ordinary training is nothing like the real thing. You just think you know it but it is somewhat different, but, well, there's – what will I call it – I think it just comes naturally to you to save your life or something or take cover or things like that when things there and find out what's going on when you think you've got the right of way, you might say. But ...

Jack, what was the feeling of the troops in the weeks prior to sailing?

Oh well, we were all in a hurry to get going and there used to be all the latrine rooms around the place, they used to ... they said they came from there, I don't know whether they did or not, but everybody was saying, 'Oh, we're going' or 'We're not going' and so on. And the morale was good; I mean, we were going, that was the point. There was no thing ... I didn't know anybody that didn't want to go. All my friends, Jimmy Bone, Mick Mears, Arthur Curtis, Phil Loffman, quite a few of the fellahs, you know, but we were all dead keen on going. On embarkation leave I went home, I lived in Claremont with my wife at her parents' place and we spent most of our time on the beach. By the time I got back to Northam I was pretty brown. I always go pretty dark, I always have done, I could tan up very quickly, and there was different ones, they reckon I was definitely one of the, in those days, it was one of the Abos. (laughs) It wasn't a bad word then. But, as far as morale went, I mean, we were on top of the world.

The last few days, how were they spent?

Oh. Trying to ... there was hair raids going on at that time. Because some fellows had had their hair shaven completely off they wanted everybody to have it off and I wasn't going to have my hair, just in case I got home on leave just before I went, and I wasn't going home with a bald head like I saw some of those fellahs going. So, I used to sleep out in the bush. I didn't sleep in the huts of a night time, I used to sleep out in the bush and I didn't get my hair cut off. Because there was some of the fellahs, incredible, what shape their heads were when they had 'em all taken off. So, that was ... and then, of course, we went and the morning we went, we travelled down by train from Northam, went on the embarkation train and every place we went to – every town we went through, station we went through – they'd speed up so you couldn't see anyone out of the train. I don't know whether so nobody would hop off or something or other.

(15.00) But, any rate, when we got down to Perth it sped up through the main station and my friend, Jimmy Bone, he saw his girlfriend on the station and, of course, they couldn't see who we were because everybody was out waving so he was really

broken hearted, you know, that she didn't see him on the way through. Then, when we got down to Claremont, the same thing happened to me. My wife was on the station and I could see her and I was yelling out, you know, 'Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye', and she was just glaring at a haze of faces going past, flat out on the train. The train definitely went too fast, the miserable cows, you know. Any rate, then we went down to Fremantle and we hopped on a lighter and lighted out to the *Aquitania* and that is where we went on and that was the hot ship

And then the first night on, I got picked for guard duty, and they said, 'Righto, you're on guard'. On this boat there was like a casino going on there. There was one part there and they had all the games going: two-up and every sort of card game going and all this thing and I'm on guard on this place and there was fellahs going past coming from the canteen – and you could get from the canteen, you could take up your dixie and you'd get a dixie full of beer – so they would come up to me and they'd, 'Oh, this poor bugger, he's on guard. Have a drink mate', and I finished up staggering on there and they came up and took me off guard and made me go and sleep it off down in the bowels of the ship (laughs). So that was my first night on board and I wasn't very happy when I woke up in the morning. I'd been very hung. But no worry about it, I wasn't court-martialled or anything like that for being drunk on duty or anything like that. They just took me off the guard duty. So that was my first night on board that *Aquitania*. Then the next day we were out there for a couple of days looking at home and we were stopped there for two days. That was one the nastier things there the adjusting. There was home straight away from there and you couldn't get there. See I lived at Claremont which is not very far from the coast. So that was our start of our journey.

The trip over was, oh, quite reasonable. We had the *Queen Mary* in the convoy. The – one of the biggest ships that we had had coming out here on the ... oh, dear, I've forgotten the name of the damn thing now [*Dominion Monarch*] – any rate, this boat was quite close to us and on the way over we did all sorts of things; a bit of PT on the deck, there was boxing matches by the way. There was boxing championships on the way over and quite a few things to make troops at home. The main thing was knowing that we were going fairly slowly. We had the *Katoomba* was in front of us and that was our armoured – I don't know whether it was supposed to be for a destroyer or not, but I think if they'd have fired a shot I would have fallen to bits – any rate, that was our escort. And the main thing that I noticed, I was on deck just before we got to Ceylon and the *Queen Mary* was too big to go into Ceylon Harbour so it had to go up to Trincomalee, the other port, and I was on deck and I heard this, the great big siren of the *Mary* go 'Rouf, Rouf', and it heeled over as though a bloke had trodden on the accelerator and away it went. And this great big ship, a colossal thing, heeled over and in seconds, it seemed to me, there was a squall of rain came over and when that rain had gone, which was not very long, the *Mary* was nowhere in sight. So, incredible the speed to what we were doing that boat had. That was great. And then we just came into Ceylon then. And we got in there and transhipped to a Dutch ship called the *Nieuw Zeeland* and that, that was when our food was not good. The food wasn't bad on the other boat but when we got onto this, and this boat had been, this *Nieuw Zeeland*, had been just going round the world, I think, or doing something from the time the war started and they had some meat on board and every time they would bring up the meat out of the holds to give to the cooks you could smell the damn stuff. Well,

nobody ate the meat, they just chucked it out. It was rotten; it would stink at any rate. And that was a horrible place, that one, and I got – What did I get? – little, like pustules, heat pustules on my arms and shoulders. And we were down in the hold, it was hot down there, and I wasn't very happy going across there from Ceylon. Oh, we did our leave in Ceylon by the way. I got a couple of day leave out there and we went off a couple of times and saw Ceylon and what Ceylon was like and travelled around on rickshaws and so on and, oh well, saw what the life was like there. Some of it is pretty sordid, I can tell you that. I was a newly married bloke so I didn't go into the sordid stuff; I must admit that. (20.00)

Then we took off from there and we came up the, came across up the Red Sea. The *Dominion Monarch* was that big ship by the way that was alongside us and that was still in the convoy and I was on guard one night and I heard this siren go and the *Dominion Monarch* was on our right and I was on this guard and I saw this, a heap of sparks and everything, fly right alongside the *Dominion Monarch* and I didn't know what the devil it was. Any rate, they had hit an Arab ship going along there and nobody stops for a convoy. Even if we, if any of us were told as we went up the Red Sea, that if you fell in, 'Well, bad luck mate.' What you should do is drink water – drink the sea water – so you die quick because nobody stops for you. At any rate, this ship that they hit, nobody stopped for it and next morning I could see they'd knocked the paravane off – they'd had the paravanes off for minesweepers on the way – they had knocked that off and there was a great big scar all the way along the side of this where this ship had hit it, and that was it. So that was really something.

Then we got to Port Said it was, and we went up the canal – and we started in the canal – and we got up to the Bitter Lakes and we had to stop in the Bitter Lakes because they had dropped down in the canal, they had dropped magnetic mines and they had planes going up over. I don't think I should tell you what the planes were called but they had a ring on them and this was for acoustically setting off these mines. The mines would go over one tick per ship that went over or they might be set for five, ten, any number at all. So these planes were going up and down exploding these mines until they had exploded them all or unless they thought they would. They wouldn't let us go and we were in the Bitter Lakes for, I think it was, two or three weeks, until the mines were cleared. And we could see the Italian prisoner of war camps blazing with light and we had no lights at all and no smokes of a night time. It was a horrible place that especially when we thought where we were going. Then when we did go we got up as far as Qantara and that was Qantara where we got off the ship and we joined a train there. We got a train there and then we got cattle trucks. They were just like cattle trucks as we knew them and we got, I forget how many fellahs went in them, but you couldn't all lay down so you had to sort of squat down and things like that and we went right across the Sinai Desert on these cattle trucks until we got to Palestine and then we went to a place called Julis and that was our camp that we started. And the 2/16th Battalion were there to husband us into our camps and they showed us how to get into our tents and they put our tents up for us and we stopped there for some time.

In Julis we did train – desert train or some sort of training, it would be desert. I can always remember the first day or two, I got guard again, and we were on the back of our camp and it was as dark as anything and black as pitch and another mate and I had, oh, 200 yards, I think, and we had to meet – go up and come back 100 yards and meet each

other and go back the other way – and on the way down to my second lot I heard this scream and I thought 'Holy mackerel', I thought it was a woman screaming, but they were jackals and I had never heard of them before. And we raced back to each other and damn near fell over. We found out later that it was ... 'What the hell was that?'. It frightened the hell out of us. But, mainly, it was nothing as we found out later. These jackals make a horrible sort of a scream. They just sound like a woman screaming.

At any rate, that was some of the things we went on there. Then a little later after doing some training there we went up to do some advanced desert training and we were going on our way up to Tobruk. But we went up to Mersa Matruh for a start and we were there for a few days and that was where the ... Prince Teddy had been out there and having a bit of a holiday out at Mersa Matruh, but, oh gee, I didn't like that place very much. At any rate, we went up past there but by that time there was a ... it had all been mined and so on. You couldn't take ... you couldn't walk around the place without being very careful and so on. Then we went up by truck and we went up – I can always remember we went up Halfaya Pass and everybody called it Hell Fire Pass. We went up this pass, it was quite a big pass into Libya, and we just slept there the night and Phil Loffman, one of my friends, I can always remember him getting up and he says, 'Gee, isn't it so-and-so cold?'.
(25.00)

And our captain, Captain Buntine, he'd been an ex-Hale School master and he thought we were still his little boys around the place. He came up and he said, 'Loffman, you are polluting the air' and ever since that it became one of our sayings that if anybody swore or any bad language, 'Oh, you are polluting the air'. So, really funny this bloke, because he was quite a good bloke but – I don't suppose it matters what I say because I think he is dead now at any rate – he just thought we were boys and we were men. Well, we were getting onto men at any rate. We were in our twenties, early twenties, and he treated us as boys all the time. So, at any rate, from there we went up, up this desert and, oh, gee, what a place it was. We had no idea that Libya was like this. It was no vegetation much at all bar a little scrub about a foot high and they are called a camel bush and nothing. It wasn't the desert as I thought it was going to be – rolling sand dunes and things like that – it was just this sort of ... if the trucks had gone over it many times it broke the top soil – although it wasn't top soil; it was top mud – and that just made dust. Incredible the dust. It was just like powder. And this dust, you got it everywhere. You got it in your food; you got it in your eyes and you had to have ... tried to have goggles on. Any rate, we got up from there and we got to Tobruk and this was where we were going to stop for advanced desert training. And we were there, I remember we had to park and one of the things we did we parked and they said, 'Righto, you've got to dig in here'. So we dug in quite a decent sort of a camp and there was fellahs, Jimmy Bone, Sid Holts was another one, and he was there, and we dug this great big sort of a dug out and it was quite good. It was like a rather reasonable room and we found some asbestos sheets on top – and by the way, we dug into this mound as we dug in because it was sandy, because a lot of it wasn't much stone – and we found we had dug into a burial ground. It must have been an Arabs' burial ground, I suppose so. It might have been the Egyptians, or who it was ... at any rate, we got out backbones out of the side of the wall, you know, sticking out. You'd hang your hat on a backbone and things like that. It was incredible how we just got onto this.

At any rate, we'd only got into that beautifully and we had it all nicely set up and Sid

Holts was away from somewhere and he came back in the dark, trod on the asbestos and came straight through on the top of us and filled the damn thing just about. So they were the sort of things we had there; oh, it was great. Then Bruce Hill, he was our ... I think Bruce was a corporal at that time, we had very short of food and we had at that time bully beef and margarine and hard biscuits, and the margarine was shocking. We reckon it had been made out of whale oil and you'd put it on – we didn't realise you'd just ... we put it on too thick of course – we put it on our biscuits and you'd finish up with a coating of grease in your mouth. It was shocking (mumbles), especially the blokes with false teeth; they had this all round their mouth. It was a shocking taste though.

Just over the road, the main road going to Derna, there was an ammunition and food dump over there so there was Pommy trucks going past there with trucks of stuff. So we'd go across in an afternoon, we did this several times, and Bruce would – that's right he had corporal stripes on – he'd stop this driver you see and the driver would open for air and he'd say, 'Oh, by the way, driver, which is the way to so-and-so?'. And this driver he'd be telling us and we'd be at the back and hopping onto his truck and chucking cases of stuff off, you see. (laughs) And this bloke would suddenly see us taking his stock off and he'd go like the clappers. At any rate, we had quite a few cases, and we got cases of nails and bully beef and God knows, stuff that we didn't want, that sort of stuff, but we did get ... I think we got a case of ... New Zealand bully beef and the dirty dogs they'd put it in a round tin and we didn't think it was bully beef, we thought it was something else. It was blooming New Zealand bully beef, we didn't want that at all. We were trying to get the cases of condensed milk and such like that that we could make tea with and so on. At any rate, we did some more things. And then we had, there, our first initial baptism to getting ammunition.

END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B

Identification: This is side B, first tape of two, an interview conducted with Jack Hawkes by Brian Wall on 23rd January 1989 at Jack's home, 7 John Place, Mullaloo.

Jack, you mentioned you received your first issue of ammunition, what happened then?

Actually, it wasn't ammunition that we received. We found an ammunition dump for the Italians and the Italians had, I think there was fifty grenades in a little box, about a couple of feet long by nine inches wide and they were aluminium grenades and they were about four inches and round ones, about an inch and a half round and they were percussion types. You used to just pick them up and throw them and they were pretty harmless if you didn't hit anybody. So everybody's got a carton of grenades. They're going around and saying, 'Hey, Charlie, come here', and you'd throw one and just drop it behind him, you know, and it was absolutely incredible and everybody from other companies, they thought the war had started again – started still. B Company, we must have thrown hundreds of these grenades until we were stopped very smartly because these were things that we happened to later on really get ... didn't like them much at all because, the Italians, when

they left they used to pull the pin out of this thing – you only pulled the pin out and then it became a percussion type, there was no fuse on it – and they would pull the pin out and put it on the ground and in the subsequent days you'd find, with the dust storms and that, these would be covered, and a fellow would come along and he'd kick it and he'd blow his blasted toes off. Quite a lot of our fellows blew ... that's why you had to wear boots all the time. Who was it? Hughie O'Meagher, that's right, he was one of our chaps, he went along and he kicked it. As he came up like that, his heel got it and it blew his heel off. So he was retired out of Tobruk and went home – Hughie O'Meagher, one of my friends. But it is incredible what we did with those things. We had our first baptism of fire, you might as well say, and it was only us to each other. Well, that was it any rate and after a little while we were doing bits of training around and we got word that ... oh, an aeroplane came over, that's right – a Hurricane came over – and dropped messages and we had nothing at all as far as transport or anything like that. The whole battalion was there with no transport. I think we had the padre's car was the only thing that was there as far as transport was concerned.

At any rate, we had to ... this plane dropped a message that the Germans were coming down. Rommel's mob were coming down from Benghazi and we called it the 'Benghazi Derby' at that time because the rest of our division which was not a division at all at that time were up towards Derna – I don't know whether they got up to Benghazi or not up there – but they were pushed all the way down and a hell of a lot of casualties and so on and prisoners got caught on the way down. And they rushed back and they were coming back towards Tobruk and this is what we heard. So we had to do all sorts of things.

(5.00) The first thing, one of the jobs we had, was to go out to the front-line and we had to go out to the front-line and this front-line of Tobruk was a great big circle and where the Italians had tank ... they had a great big tank trap there of barbed wire and that and behind them they had dugouts and so on – and big ones. A machine gun post in the middle. An anti-tank gun there and a bombproof shelter up there and fifty blokes could go up there. Well, we held that with five or seven blokes – that's how many we had – might be up to a section of nine would hold those posts and we were out on the front with those. Well, we got up to those and we had to take hold of those. Then out in the front there they had pulled up all these big mines and they had truck loads of them – big Italian trucks – we had got a few Italian trucks by that time, and these big Italian diesel trucks by the way – we'd never seen diesel trucks much. And then our job was to go and lay these mines and they were a metre long and with great big blocks of amatol in each end and big springs in them that would hold 300 pounds, I think they were, and they were tank mines. So we had to go and lay these – dig these in the ground; lay them – and then fuse them up because they were not fused. And we had to go out on these trucks to where we were going to lay the mines and I often thought when we were going out, 'I hope nobody has left any of these fused at the bottom of the mines' because we had a complete truck load of mines – probably 1,000 mines in this blooming great truck load – incredibly big truck they were. Any rate, we laid mines and laid mines from ... and that was our main job. You had to lay these mines because the Germans were coming. And at any rate, it came that we were there for a while and then the first night that they were coming we had our lieutenant, Tom, not Tom Hannah, Hannah his name was – but not Tom, there was another Tom Hannah – and Lieutenant Hannah he took us out on this Derna road and we had to patrol

this road and make sure that the Germans didn't get past us. Incredible how it was that night. I think we were going up one wadi and they were going down the other wadi and we didn't meet, thank God.

At any rate, that was the start of the seige of Tobruk. And we came in again next morning and we took up positions and from then on we were just patrol, patrol, patrol. We used to go out on patrols of a night time and do all these things. We were in there for six months. In that six months, towards the finish of the six months – that's right, yes – oh, we made the 9th Division, by the way, when we were up there too. General Morshead came up one night and he ... we were 10 Platoon – I think it was ... I don't know whether it was all the company – it must have been all the company, I think, we did this raid on White Knoll it was called and we had to go out and raid this knoll where there some Italians out there and not too many Germans at that time I don't think. No. At any rate, we went out on this raid that night and it was, oh, sort of a what'd call it thing, but this was one of the nights that we did strike the enemy – the enemy as we called them, they were Italians at the time. We got out there and I can remember going out, it was incredible, going out in the day – you can't go out on moonlight nights because that is too dangerous – you go out on dark nights and of course you can't see anything of a night time. The first thing, one of the things that I found and I was ... you have your bayonet fixed and I was going across and I tripped over a little roll of stones. Little did I know, I don't know what it was for, but this bloke must have been hiding behind it, this fella. At any rate, I fell right on an Italian and I was up and had him bayoneted in about a split second and then I found he was very, very dead. He'd been there for ages. But did he frighten me, that bloke; that was a real fright that night. At any rate, we went out further and then we got challenged and you could hear these Italians, 'Durra, durra' challenging us as we get passed and there was these grenades and water bombs and all that falling round and, at any rate, we got right in amongst their dugouts and, well, we caused a bit of strife there. We chucked grenades in amongst them and so on and just as we were getting ready to come back a mortar bomb lobbed in between my legs. (laughs)

(10.00) I finished up I didn't know where I was as a matter of fact. I finished up flat on me back, backside, and, puff, that was funny. And there was some hot stuff running down my arm and also my both legs. And I thought, 'Gees, bloody hell, he's hit me'. Anyway, Percy Weller was our stretcher bearer and I yelled out, 'Hey Percy', in between, you know, went across, there was a hell of a lot of noise going on, 'I copped one'. So he said, 'Oh, gee, righto' – he was a real funny man Percy Weller – so he got a dressing out and he put it on that one and then I had another one on there and another one down here and all little bits all down me arms. So he bandaged me up and at any rate, while he bandaged me up he said, 'Oh, God, we'll get in this trench and bandage me up' because there was a bit of everything flying around the place – bullets and whatnots – so we hopped in this thing and he said, 'I can't see down here'. So we got up on top and as we got up on top another bomb lobbed in where we had just got. So I said, 'Oh gee, Percy'. At any rate, from then on it was back to base and our captain – I won't mention his name – fired some Very lights for the withdrawal – us to withdraw – and where he fired his Very lights was right above our heads. So we had to stand up like statues in the desert and if you stand still they don't see you so much. See, we all had khaki uniforms on and all covered in brown mud – our tin hats and all that were covered in brown mud and our

faces and all things like that, so you all look like that – so if you stand up you don't see you. So, any rate, the Very lights died and we came back again, came back through mine fields, and I went in an ambulance to the hospital, the cave hospital back in Tobruk hospital. And on the way in the ambulance there was in one of the stretchers there there was an Italian and the poor bugger he'd got – it's the first time I'd seen a bayonet wound – and he had it in the stomach and all of his decayed stomach had poked out like that. It really come up in a great big ... big bump and I thought 'You poor bugger'. And he saw me looking at him and he shut his eyes, and the poor cow, and the other one was one of the English commandos and – I don't know who they were. I don't know whether that was one of Churchill's sons or something or other was out with that mob – but that was in another story. I remember one Churchill's mob out there, but he was out there, this commando don, they'd come out with us on this raid. And, any rate, we all got back again. We didn't have many casualties. I think I was the only one that really went to hospital of the blokes. The other blokes had superficial wounds and so on. Oh, two blokes got killed in an accident on the way up to the line ... on their way up to this raid and Morshead congratulated us you know and so and so and so. And I was the only bloke that finished up in hospital. My two mates that were going up there, they were killed with a stray bullet that came from us.

At any rate I finished up five weeks in a caves hospital. Firstly, I was in Tobruk, got into it and got an operation and they'd cleaned things up and they weren't that bad. And that piece in my leg, on my left leg there, there was a piece of shrapnel in there and I didn't get it out until I got home. That was in there for four or five years. And ... so that was our White Knoll show and after that it wasn't a great deal. We'd shifted around. We used to shift around from places to place. We used to go in the El Adem road and the Derna road and different other places where they were and there were some pretty blooming horrible spots. The Derna road was a real horrible spot because you had to keep your head down all day and even the other places, in the morning – I have often told this story, this is a funny one – if you wanted to go to the toilet we had a box out in front of our line and if you wanted to go in the toilet before nine or ten o'clock in the morning you had to go across – you'd run across – take your pants off; sit on the thing and then you'd invariably hear 'boom, boom, boom, boom' and we all knew our batteries that we used to fire. The Italians used to fire a battery at one bloke and the battery would be seventy-five millimetres which weren't particularly dangerous shells. And you'd hear this, and if that was our battery, you'd just 'whiss', and race back and everybody in the post went 'Hey, come on Jack; come on Jack', you know, if one of these shells. Any rate, that was one of the funny things that used to happen but, invariably, a bloke got back without being hit, you know, but it wasn't very good. After ten o'clock in the morning, the haze would come on and you could walk out anywhere and they couldn't see us and we couldn't see them. And they were, you know, hundreds of yards away. But, of course, the shells – the batteries – were a mile or two away. But it was an incredible place this Tobruk, there is no doubt about it.

(15.00) So while we were in that post which was on the El Adem sector Damien Parer, the newsreel photographer, came to our post and he stopped overnight and he took a few bits of us firing – we had some fixed fire we had to use of a night time; fixed fire at the Italian lines – and in the morning he took some photos of some of us and because I

had been in the film business more or less myself and the operating business of picture shows, he took my photo and Jimmy Bone and several of us. And I wrote home and told my friends that were in the ... and told my wife and my friends that we were going to be in a newsreel. And there was a newsreel came out, a Fox newsreel came out, and it was called *Tobruk for Valour* and there was a full screen photo of myself and two or three others. I think Jimmy Bone was in one of them. At any rate, but my photo, one of the operators at the theatre in town cut a frame out and they got them redeveloped and sent these photos straight over to me which I have now, of Damien Parer. Of course, we didn't hear of Damien Parer again but he got killed later on over when he came back and he was over with the Yanks, that is right. So that was really some of the highlights of that but that post was an incredible place.

One night we were there and we could hear the planes coming over from El Adem airport and they were coming over from the El Adem to bomb Tobruk harbour and this night one plane came over and we could hear this and the ack-ack used to go off of course – and they had some pretty big ack-ack in the harbour – and we heard this plane, it was coming over. And it was incredible, of a night time you cannot see any planes at all. You can't see anything at all even though the plane, the plane is coming down and down and it seems to be coming and it is going to lob right on us. At any rate, it didn't lob on us but it lobbed on an Italian ammunition depot with a full ... and it had a full bomb load on and it lobbed on this. And, incredible, the noise that that made. This was, oh, probably a mile from where we were and this came and afterwards it was just as though it was raining. There was sand coming down for quite a long time after from this plane coming down. But on the way down these Italians, they knew they were going to come down and they bailed out and a few ... one or two got caught, but some bloke he jumped out and his chute didn't open and I believe, when they picked him up, he was almost all in his boots. You know, he had these flying boots on and he was quite a little bloke, it is incredible how these things happen. But that was that, and then later on, not very much long after that we were relieved and we came out of Tobruk and we had, oh, it was a great show, you know, and we all came up with ... you had to have your packs and all things like that. And we had to go down to the Tobruk harbour and that used to be shelled every hour. They had Bardiyah Bill and big guns way out from those and they used to shell this and the harbour was full of wrecks – incredible how many wrecks there was. Well, the destroyers used to come in and they used to come in with no lights or they had ... when we were, the night we were coming out they had this – we were on the harbour waiting for this destroyer to come in, we had our packs on, and you could see nothing but a black shape came in with tiny little blue lights just on the waters and it was this destroyer coming in. Absolutely quiet, incredible how it came in. And it tied up alongside a burnt out tanker and we had to go across this tanker on planks and go across them and you thought, 'God, if I fall in here I'll drown' because we had heavy packs on and we took a lot of souvenirs out too – shell cases and God knows what – we were taking out from there. So at any rate, we got on this destroyer and no sooner had we ... oh, and as they were there they just threw off all the stores that they had brought up – they'd just chuck them off as quick as possible and half of them would go in the harbour – and then out. And this destroyer got out of the harbour just before dawn and away it went; it was incredible we got out there. And I wanted to see the bow wave of this destroyer so I was stopped right up close to the bows of the boat. At

any rate, we had no sooner got out of the harbour – it was just slightly gone dawn – and the Stukas came over and, holy mackerel, this destroyer, it just went `woosh'. And the speed that that damn thing went and there was a great big bow, incredible the size of this bow wave. I'm leaning over the side to have a look at this bow wave and this destroyer would go `zig', `zag'. And I was hoping this bloody Stuka out there didn't `zag' when we `zigged' or something or other. At any rate, it didn't hit us but they ... you could see them dropping these bombs and that, and any rate, away we went and we got back to Alexandria unscathed, thank God. But that was one of the most incredible trips I've ever had on a destroyer and with somebody up ... They tell me ... oh, I don't know what they were on a destroyer; commander or something or other.

(20.00) He'd lay on the deck and look up at the Stukas with glasses and he'd see the bombs coming and he could tell the ... I don't know who, the coxswain or whoever it is to steer the boat, you know, so and so. So that was how they used to get out of that. But that was highly dangerous, but at any rate, we got out of it. We got landed back down at Alexandria and then taken back into Palestine and that is where we stopped there for a while.

We were at a camp called Kilo 89 and we was there doing a bit of training and so on, having a bit of leave and so on after our six months in Tobruk. I didn't have enough money to go to Cairo. You had to have twenty-five pounds in your pay book to be allowed to go to Cairo and I didn't. I was a married man on two bob a day; my wife got the other three bob. So I couldn't get ... but some of my mates went to Cairo. Any rate, we went all round Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. I went to all those trips and things like that. I was ... actually, I blotted my copy book a couple of times. We used to go on these trips around the Holy places. One of them, we went up to the Hill of Ascension and there was an Arab – a Christian Arab – was on this bus load of us and he took us to this hill and he said, `Now this is the place, the actual place, where Jesus Christ left this earth' and he said, `There's the place there; there's his footprint'. So I, being a bit of a philistine, I said, `How do you know that?'. And he said, `Oh, you put your hand there and you can feel where the ball of his foot was – there', and I said, `Bullshit'. (laughs) So I was ostracized by all the rest of the mob from then on. (laughs) They weren't very happy with me. So, any rate, but that was one of the things perhaps I blotted my copy book as I said. But we went around trips and things like – round Palestine. I saw all the Holy City but all these ... where we were, there was everything. We went down to the manger and you couldn't go – our boots, of course, had hob nails and so on on them and you had to go down on your hands and knees down there because you would slide on the glassy steps from countless people going down there. We went down to there, and all that. Well, that was great but everywhere you went there was some priest of all sorts of denominations asking for money – money, money, money. And on my two bob a day, I was not very enamoured on that.

So, oh well, I got over it all right and, at any rate, my brother came over – while I met my brother over there; while I was over there – and he came over in the 2/16th reinforcements. And around about this time the Japs came into the war and there was all talk about us going home. Oh, wait a minute, before that we went up the Lebanon and we were in the Lebanon for a while and while I was in the Lebanon – it was pretty dull there, we were getting up towards the Turkish border and things like that and away from that –

and finished up down in Tripoli and while I was in there I had a change of heart about infantry work. So there was another ... oh, it came out that they wanted volunteers for a ski company and it was like a commando unit. So I said, 'Oh well' – and they wanted stocky blokes with brown eyes – so I said, 'Oh well, why not?'. So Bruce Hill, a mate of mine, he was a bigger man than I was – Bruce and I, we were the only ones from B Company I think but there might have been a few others from other companies but there was three others from the 2/28th at any rate – but Bruce and I, we joined and so we went to the ski company. We went up to a place called Becharre and there's a hotel up past Becharre and that's the Grand Hotel at the Cedars and these cedars are the sole remaining cedars – so they say – of the cedars that built King Solomon's Temple which I went to in Palestine by the way. And we were learning to ski there and holy mackerel, that was hard work. We really had to ski and this hotel where we stopped at they fed us like lords there because you had to because you really worked hard on this and you used to go out on this ski and go up and we used to think – there were no ski lifts, we had to walk up all these mountains – we used to walk up from say 6,000 to 10,000 feet. You know, 4,000 feet and we had to walk up on skis when we'd learnt out how to handle them and so on, which we learnt fairly well. And it was pretty good and we were going pretty well and by the time we finished up getting classed out of ... we had pale green uniforms for a start and we used to have a pack on our back with rugs in it and your rifle. They didn't have carbines for us – they were supposed to have carbines – and the rifle with our ordinary army sling wasn't very comfortable and it would come back and every time you would fall over your rifle would hit you in the back of the head. That wasn't very good. And the things we did and came down; and hell, how we didn't break legs. There were a lot of blokes will, there was a lot of broken legs and God knows what.

(25.00) Any rate, I got through it reasonably well and when we were just going to pass out of this school and we got our white uniforms – we got our white uniforms – passing out, General Morshead came up and said, 'Oh, you're going back to your units'. So we are not going to be a commando. At that time we thought, 'Gee, I wonder if we're going to help Joe Stalin', and I thought that would be too bloody dangerous, to meet Joe Stalin in the snow because we did a certain amount of living out in the snow but that would have been really hard work like living out on the snow on skis. So, at any rate, so, we were sent back to our units. What we did from then we went to the Homs Desert and that was up near Homs, it was the Furqlus Desert, I beg your pardon, and up near Homs and that was towards the Turkish border and it was as hot as bloody hell and we were doing manoeuvres with trucks. And there were so many blokes in the truck and we used to do this in a box formation we used to do this, and then we would have to run out and run over the desert. At times we ran over the desert and there was no bloody water there and it was shocking. You know, and we didn't have any water, hardly had any water – a bottle a day – and I can remember running along past, we found a water truck, when the water truck came along we drank two full water bottles and then was running along behind the truck because he'd come to the wrong place.

One night we went across a wadi – came along a wadi – and we pinched the truck and went along that wadi and dug holes and we found ... got water in the bottom of that wadi. And another night we went along further and there was an Arab watering his sheep and he put this on a weight, lifted a counterweight down fill it up with water and he'd bring up

this water and it had sheep's manure – it was a good job I said manure wasn't it – and we got it in our mugs and we were just about ... and I had a moustache at that time strangely enough and you'd be straining the sheep manure out of it. You'd still drink that bloody water; it was magnificent. But they were some of the funny things that happened up there in that Furqlus Desert.

But then we came back from there and came back to ... oh, we were getting out of the Lebanon so that we weren't allowed to be told there was Australians leaving Lebanon so we had to keep our boots inside the truck. We went up passed, from the Tripoli, we went around the place and we went up ... some of the names I have forgotten, it is quite a well known place ... at any rate, we went around the back of the Lebanon and came down to Haifa in these trucks and they were driving day and night. And we had blokes driving and some of our fellows drove as well to save these blokes and everywhere we'd go – we weren't allowed to have your hat on; Australian hat or boots showing out – and the Australians'd say 'Saida Aussie, saida Aussie', they knew who we were. Anyway, we got back to Haifa station and there we met the 2/43rd Battalion. And on the way along there I got a letter from one of my cousins from here and she said that your cousin is in the 2/43rd. So somebody said, 'Oh, the 43rd's there in this train here' and we were going in another train over there. So, I just went along the corridor – along the platform – saying, 'Anybody know Sergeant Hawkes of the 43rd?' and a bloke said, 'Yes' – and he said – 'Here he is here'. He said, 'Sergeant Hawkes there's a bloke wants you' and I said, 'Oh, here, Sergeant' – I said – 'I'm your cousin Jack'. Shook his hand and that is the last I ever saw of him. Never saw him again so I don't know what happened to him after that.

At any rate, from there we went down by these trains and we went down to ... went across the Sinai Desert and came to Qantara. Hopped on trains there and when we hopped on trains there there was one of our mates, he was a bright boy, he saw some Arabs there with turkeys ... no, big geese, that's right, big geese and he said to them, 'How much these geese?'. The bloke said, 'Oh nothing', he was a nasty bloke this bloke and he just pushed the Arab away, grabbed his geese and jumped on the train and we had these geese – we had 'em when we got down to Alexandria. So we went right across, going right down past along the canal and we didn't ... we thought we were going home. That was the serious thing, the Japs had started the war – I don't whether I mentioned that before – but they started the war and we were on the way home as we thought. So we went down and there was one way we went; one way we went to Suez and one way we went to Alexandria. We went the bloody wrong way and, oh gee, that was a sad show. That is how we went to El Alamein, towards Alamein.

END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2 – SIDE A

Identification: This is an interview with Jack Hawkes conducted by Brian Wall on 23rd January, 1989 at 7 John Place in Mullaloo. The time is approximately 1530 hours. Jack was a member of B Company, 10 Platoon, 2/28th Battalion who was captured at El Alamein. This is side A, tape number two of two.

On the way from Alamein we stopped outside Alexandria for a few days just getting ourselves ready and so on and while we were there we camped at ... I have forgotten the name of the place now so I'd better not mention it, I nearly said the wrong one. Also, we had a bit of leave ... we didn't have any leave in Alexandria of course, but we did, that is the first time and really good AWL leave I had. We went in Alex of a night time. I think there was Jimmy Bone, myself – about half a dozen of us – went in and went to Alex and incredible. We'd just come down from Palestine and all the other trains were going out and they were going back to Palestine and the people in some of the restaurants we went to – we were privates, we would get thrown out of some of these high class restaurants – and we went straight into these restaurants and where they'd be officers only and we went straight in. And there was people, they'd look at us with our Aussie hats on 'Oh' and they'd tip the waiter, 'Give them a drink'. And we were drinking all sorts of stuff that these people were giving us and we were absolutely ... the first time in the Middle East that we, as privates, had been really treated like royalty. I think they thought that we were there to save their souls.

Well, at any rate, we went out and we had a great time and a Pommy officer who had had a pretty tough time in England I think, he got onto us in the finish up and when we were getting thrown out of some other pub and he said, 'Don't you throw them out there' – so any rate, he said – 'Where are you blokes going after you're finished here?'. We said, 'Oh, we've got to get back to our camp'. And he said, 'How are you going to get back?' and we said, 'Oh, we don't know'. 'Oh well' he said, 'You come to my barracks for the night'. So we went to this bloke's barracks and we got gharries – we were yelling out, 'Gharries' – and getting gharries to take 'em back to this ... I forget the name of the camp now but it was a great big English camp in Alexandria. At any rate, we got to there, and we got to his office and he'd there and he's got a mug and a great big white bottle and its full of brandy. And he's say, 'Now have a nightcap chaps; have a nightcap chaps' and he's trying to fill us up with a big mug of brandy. And I said, 'No way' and I wasn't a great drinker even then, I wasn't game, not after the beer I had drunk that night. So, at any rate, we fobbed him off and, any rate, next morning, we got up very much to the worse wear – worse of wear – and we ... he sent us round for breakfast and we got breakfast and then he gave us a truck and sent us back to our camp. And when we got there they said, 'Where the hell have you blokes been?'. I said, 'I don't know', 'Oh', he said, 'We've been in Alex'. 'Oh'. You know what we had done ... Bruce Hill ... we had a little bit of a bad feeling with the NAAFI, the navy and army stores and things, from coming down from Benghazi. They'd dumped all the stuff and wouldn't give us anything. So Bruce Hill – he didn't come with us – he'd gone over to buy some beer for the boys. So, he went across with a truck and with a – and they had a chit – and they'd go and pay what they want and they'd take this chit to Arabs and they'd go and get their beer and so on.

(5.00) So he put one case of beer and, I don't know what else – at any rate there was something else with it – but on the way over to the other place he put ten cases of beer on his chit and got away with it. So he had ten cases of beer for the price of one and also they pinched a case of gin on the way out. And so they had this and all these other mob, where we were in Alex drinking, all these blokes were in there; they had cases of beer all over the place. It was Canadian beer. I can remember White Horse beer it was and all different brands that we had never heard of before all in white bottles. We'd never seen

beer in white bottles before that and these great big cases of beer. Any rate, we got back on the NAAFI that night.

And from then we went down a little bit further down the line and we came almost down to Alamein and you could hear the guns going and you thought 'Oh, gee. This is a horrible bloody place. I'm not that fussy about going down there'. At any rate, we gradually worked our way up to Alamein and we had several things and then B Company was put on the reserve list, we were the reserve company, and we had a bit of a show on some tanks. I don't know whether this had been done before but this is my version of it. I don't know how many of us went but we were supposed to go on these tanks, go to Ruin Ridge, on these fifty tanks that were supplied to us and four men would sit on the rear of the tank and they would go in waves these tanks, and the waves went in, I forget how many – about thirteen at a time, you know, a rate like this. They followed white tape through that they had taken the mines out and so on which was a load of bull, thus they hadn't. At any rate, we were there to go at first light and we were there all day under these tanks, we were laying in the shade under these tanks, and they didn't go all day, so there was a bit of a fluff or something or other. Any rate, some of the tanks had no batteries on so they had to keep on filling them up with petrol and they were ... not Matildas ... I– tanks, they called them, infantry tanks they were. There was another name for them too. Any rate, old tanks, and they had, oh, two pound guns on them. So, we stood there all day and then towards evening they said, 'It's on'. So we grabbed onto these tanks. By the time – I'd had a pair of long pants on, long khaki pants, and I'd got too hot so I'd cut the legs out of them and I had shorts and they were very short shorts too. And I was sitting on the back of this bloody tank and it was all hot. And oh God, and at that time I was a Tommy gunner – a Thompson machine gun – and you had to be very careful with those because they got dusty and I had to look after that like a mother. I had it all wrapped up and things like that and I gave my rifle to Lieutenant Buller Beames, his name was, and because at that time snipers would go for the officers without a rifle. So, like if they'd see a bloke without a rifle, so they say he's an officer, they only had side guns. So he took my gun, my number – I still remember my number by the way – and so we got on these tanks and there was a balls-up altogether because some went and some didn't and there was – I don't know how many tanks – about fifty tanks went out and we lost twenty or thirty. And what was going on, it was incredible. We didn't know for a starter but, you know, we're just sitting on the back of the tank and I thought, 'Oh well, this is not bad, you know, you're sitting on the back of a tank', and then we passed through our lines and blokes saying, 'Hey, g'day. How are you?' – they are some of our blokes, you know, that we knew and we were going up into this thing. We didn't really know how dangerous it was until all of a sudden things started to go and our tank bloke had the top of his tank up, you know, the what'd you call it on and all of a sudden some bullets went jung and ripped off the side of the tank and that and I thought, 'Bloody hell, we're out here and he's inside'. And he just tipped it down and he's inside and we're out. It was highly blooming disturbing you might say. Anyway, we went up and the further we went, hell, it was shocking. And there was these ... we didn't know but they were eighty-eight millimetre guns they had at that time and, bloody hell, we saw a tank just over from us and one of these eighty-eight millimetres hit it and it hit the turret and it blew it straight off. And, oh God, I thought, 'Some of our blokes might have been on that'. But there weren't fellahs on every tank. So,

any rate, by the time we ... It was incredible what you didn't do and didn't know what was going on. Any rate we got up and we ran over blokes and God knows what.

(10.00) Then we finished up getting to what we were supposedly told was Ruin Ridge. And we got there and we hopped off the tanks and our main thing was to consolidate – that is what we had been told – 'When you get there you've got to consolidate'. See, we were going round like and we were trying to find our blokes, you know, and on the way up we found some of our blokes, you know, because the tanks were split up apart and tanks burning and there's all this blooming machine gun fire and these eighty-eight millimetres they sound like an express train going through a tunnel at about 100 miles an hour; incredible things.

Any rate, we were there and we were looking out for things and we were saying, 'Righto, what are we going to do now?' and we found three or four blokes that we knew. 'Oh righto, we're going to do this and we're going to do that'. So we're marching and going along in lines and picking up blokes as we went through and sending them back, you see. Well, this – oh, a bit rude – but this is a bloke, a little Italian bloke, and see I'm a Tommy gunner and so I wasn't going to use that until I really had to because of the thing. So with this little Italian bloke is there and I say, 'Out. Come out' and he's going 'Wa, wa, wa'. He's saying something to me in Italian and he's going like that and smiling all over his face. So I said, 'Go on; get out', I poked the gun in his guts and pulled him out. And he started saying, 'Want to do'. 'Bloody hell, what's wrong with you? Go on, get off that way', at any rate, he couldn't last any longer. He just dropped his tweeds and did his business and then laughed, 'Thank you, thank you, gracias, gracias' he said to me which I found out later and away he went. He was really frightened that man; so was I too.

Any rate, when we went on and there was blokes pulling up here and there and shells flying everywhere and we finished up ... I finished up with some Germans – we were chasing ... pulling some Germans out. And I can remember this. A German was in front of me and he was a great big, blonde Aryan type, you know, and he was just walking in front of me. We were sending prisoners back you see. And these shells and they shelled us like the clappers, bloody hell. Any rate, a shell lobbed in front of him and he saved my life. The shell hit him and a great big shell splinter about a foot long or more come out of his back and it was coming straight to me and I was just behind him and I thought, 'Thank you mate', and he screamed and, oh Jesus, so it was a very nasty bit of a thing that one.

Any rate, that went on for a while and we didn't know where the hell we were and we didn't know where the fellows were. There was all, strife and things like that. Any rate, it started to get dark and we wended our way ... we came backwards and all this was going on and then we found our own mob and we didn't find our own mob, but I'd been out on that before on this place and, oh, it was a horrible place. At any rate, we found our own mob and they got up there and they thought we were lost or dead or something or other; Jimmy Bone and I, it was. Any rate, we got there and that was Alamein Ruin Ridge for a start. So that was the tank attack which wasn't very successful. There is a lot more to it but, at any rate, from then we came back and then we came up to another place and then we had to get new reinforcements and things like that you see, and blokes like that you see and I can always remember Arthur Curtis, Phil Loffy [Loffman]'s mate, we've got another officer up there hey. And the first thing he said to me, 'G'day mate; how long do you reckon you're going to last?' because that was our ... oh, gee, that's right, we'd done

another officer before that. So that wasn't really good, you know. He was our third officer; there was Colin Bird, Buller Beames, and he. Any rate, we were there for a few days and then they said, 'Oh, the show's on again to Alamein' – I've left out a bit from the following few days I was there and – 'show's on; we're going into Alamein, we're going into Ruin Ridge tonight. That's Ruin Ridge and we've got to get there and we're going up and there's going to be the 2/43rd will be on our left. We're going up in the centre; we're going to take Ruin Ridge. When we get there the 2/43rd will come up – that's our brigade, just a battalion – and the 2/43rd and the 32nd will come up alongside us and then in front of us will come a Pommy brigade and that will be ... we'll be set, we're on a box then'.

And so, that was it. We were going up there.

So that night, we're still reserved company, so the rest of the companies went up through when they – the start line went and they had ... they were going through this minefield, they had a tape going through, well, whether they didn't do the mines properly or not, but on the way up we had some six pounder anti-tank guns and the ... somebody hit a mine – one of the tanks, this tank trucks and the trucks and hit this mine – and it blew the thing up and it burnt and that was on the tape. And everybody had to go past.

(15.00) We were the last company up, you see, and we had to go to the tape, so we had to go left from that and we had to go through this blasted minefield and which hadn't been done.

So I was the right-hand flanker seeing I was the Tommy gunner and they all went to the left of me and I went on the right so I could just see where the tape was, you see. Bloody hell, I went through this tape, through this minefield like – who was the bloke that had the seven-league boots on? Somebody it was, any rate – and I went through on toes. I had practically no shorts on 'cause they were that cut off, those blooming shorts, and I went through and I reckoned I had ten-league boots or something or other and I went through straight across that minefield. Now they were only the ten pound mines, these ones, so they were highly dangerous and I went just behind that – you couldn't see them because of the night time, dark, and flashes and flames and so on – any rate, I went through there and got over. I knew I was over the minefield and I thought, 'God, struth, I'm over there and all the other blokes came through and we came through and then all the casualties we copped on the way up there. Blokes saying, you know, 'Give us a hand mate?' and all you could do was, a wounded man, you stick his rifle in the ground – right along side him, just stick a bayonet in the ground if it will hold – stick it up like that so the stretcher-bearers will see him. And we got up there and I saw some blokes that had been hit ... I saw some bloke that had been hit with this thing and it hit him in the head and knocked his head straight off and, oh, it was a horrible place, that one. Any rate, we got up to this Ruin Ridge and we were there. So ... and what do we do? When we'd say we'd consolidate and the funny this was when we went up there we had to take eight empty sandbags underneath your equipment belt, and you had that, and I had a thermos flask bomb on my shoulder and that was a nitroglycerine one. I had a sticky bomb hanging on my belt and I had grenades, Mills bombs and what's comp grenades on that and my Tommy gun ammunition in my other pannier and I was really set ... oh, and a shovel and a pick shoved down the back of that. And that's on the back of my doovah and me tin hat, of course, naturally. And we were loaded down, you know. Any rate, so got up there and the first thing you do, you dig yourself a hole and then you put your sandbags inverted up

the top, like that, across the tops so they are high up because they were using this eighty-eight milli[metre] guns as aerial burst. So they'd burst them up and the shrapnel would come out of them, see. Bloody hell; highly dangerous. Round shrapnel not the shrapnel which we call ... not shell splinters but real dinkum shrapnel. So we were in digging these holes and flat out digging these holes, any rate, we got that and you would only have enough to cover your body – your torso – your legs were out, so if your legs got shot off or something, well, that was bad luck.

Any rate, we were there and during the night it was all great blooming things. There was bits of fire going on now and again and so on. At any rate, we got through the night and in the morning I get out and have a look around the place and there's me gear there and I thought I'd ... I had my haversack taken off and my Tommy gun stuck on top of that so it wouldn't get any dirt on it and I was just out there having a little bit of a look around and there was tanks in front of us. And I thought, 'You bloody beauties that's fine'. Then I thought, 'Bloody hell, they've got black crosses on them' and then there was some anti-tank guns in front of us – six pounder anti-tank guns in front of us – and they're ... what I first noticed, these were – before I noticed the black crosses – these blokes were shooting at these tanks, you see. They were engaging on them. Then I thought, 'Bloody hell, holy mackerel' and then from behind me a blooming machine gun comes up and it shot all those blooming ... all the anti-tank gunners and I look back and there's tanks behind me with black crosses on them too. Bloody hell, then it was on.

The tanks came up and if you didn't get out of your hole they dug you in. Anyhow, the tanks on that and they just came out and they said, 'Out, out' and it looked like a blooming ... the gun they pointed at you, it looked as though it was a foot round, this great big gunner just said, 'You out' and I got out and I thought, 'If I bend down and pick up that Tommy gun would he reckon I'm going to have a shot at him?' and I thought, 'Oh my God, I don't know. These Germans might know that'. So I didn't and I left me pack behind and I had nothing. I had my tin hat; I had my first field aid dressing in me jacket – no, shirt it was, only a shirt, that's right, a shirt – and these shorts that I had cut right off there and boots and socks, that's all I had – nothing. No water bottle, not a bloody thing did I have and, by gee, I was a poor prisoner. And we got caught up, and on the way up there to where we were getting marched, you know, where these tanks march up and then some troops came out, some Germans came out, and they all looked nice and smart and blooming well dressed up and we looked a bit scruffy. And on the way up there there was another bloke named Phil Ryniker – he was a stretcher-bearer bloke that I'd known before and he'd ... when I was wounded in Tobruk he laughed a great old song and dance about me because when I came into the first aid place there the doctor thought, it was a new doctor, and he thought I was an Italian so he used to call me 'the ding bastard', this bloke – at any rate, Ryniker and I, we heard this and our ... we had a great big lot of twenty-five pounders that came up to Alamein then and they ... somebody must have sent back for some defensive fire while we were underneath it and all this fire came up and, oh, God, the twenty-five pounders came and they came right in amongst us you see.

(20.00) So Ryniker and I just go 'whoop' and we're diving to see in a hole there and he beat me to it and I said, 'You bastard, Ryniker' and I just hopped over the edge of it and there was just a little dip in the ground, about that big, and the twenty-five pounder lobbed in with him – blew him to smithereens. So that was the last of him, you know. The

luck that you can have is incredible.

Any rate, from then on we went up and we went to a place ... they took us to a place called El Daba and we stopped at El Daba overnight and there they had an ... an old tent was there and I tore a bit off this tent to make a towel for myself or something so I could put around me, something – and I had that towel all the time I was a prisoner of war, that bit of canvas I got at El Daba because I didn't have anything else. And isn't it funny, when you haven't got anything a little thing like that is really something. It was one of my possessions. Any rate, and then I tried to get a place, an ammo blooming, made out of cardboard sort of thing, and I got that to see if I could cart some water in. That was the only thing, there was no water you see. And they'd give you some water and I had this and the bloody thing was made out of cardboard and it used to leak away so had to drink it all so I didn't have any water. Any rate, things were tough and on the way they took us then from ... in trucks and they got these big Italian diesels and they were ... I think they had a big truck and a big trailer, the same size as the back of the truck and there would have been seventy to 100 blokes in these and they would – you couldn't all sit down, you couldn't sit down or anything like that, most would stand up or do something – and used to go along these rough roads. Well, then we used to stop of a night time and blooming well ... they didn't bother about guarding you too much because there was nowhere you could go. There was all this miles and miles of desert and you had no water, you had nothing, no food or anything like that. They used to give you a bit of food. So that was it. You couldn't blooming well go anywhere or anything like that. If you thought of escaping, you might as well just have gone and shot yourself – oh, you didn't have anything to shoot yourself either – so that was it and that was all the way up to Benghazi we were like that. But on the way up there there were these little Senousi guards and they were nasty little blokes – they were Arabs. And at any rate, this little bloke, one day we were down there and we were up in our truck and there was another truck along there – there was, oh, dozens of trucks all around the place, you know, because there was quite a lot of us; the whole battalion got caught, all with what didn't get wounded and killed – so we were on this place this day and this bloke wanted to swap over from one truck to another and the little Senousi was going to hit him with a rifle, you see, and I said, 'Oh God, you rotten little bastard, leave him alone' like this and, you know, he turned around to me and of course I had my big mouth open, you see, and he put his rifle up and he cocked it and he pointed it at me face. And I thought, 'Jesus, I'm gone', and I – smiling before you fall dead, fell dead, you know – I laughed at him and his finger didn't tighten on the trigger and I just about fainted and I sat down and I didn't say 'Boo' for hours after that. My God, that was close. And of course, these blokes ... this little bloke, the same bloke, on the way up further he would see some Arabs – there was Arabs on the desert – and see this Arab with his wife and a couple camels and kids and things like that just going along, walking along the road and he'd just lift up his rifle and fire at them. He was an absolute bloody animal that bugger you know and he's the bloke who shot me, so I didn't say 'Boo' to that bloke any more, by gee.

So that's it and we got ... I don't know how long it took us to get to Benghazi. I forget what time we got to Benghazi, I don't think I've got it down there. Any rate, we were all quite some time we were in Benghazi. By the way, before we got to Benghazi, while we were at Ruin Ridge and that, I was trying to live through my birthday. I had me birthday

was on 20th July and I'd go out on a fighting patrol or a raid or something like happen and we had some pretty fast ones that one because we went out one night and we had to get a ... a forward observation officer had been killed out there, Lieutenant Bird, he was a new officer – a reinforcement officer – he wasn't in Tobruk with us. He hadn't had any action. So he said we'll go out and pick up this body and I said, 'Oh come off it, he's been out there a couple of days'. He said, 'Oh yeh'. I said, 'He'd be dead; he's stinking now – he's dead and stinking' – I said – 'You wouldn't pick him up'. So he said, 'Oh, yeh. We'll see'. Any rate, we went out on this raid and, oh, it was a blooming time. We went out, and they'd given us some of these desert boots – that's where the desert boots come from by the way – we were given some of these desert boots because our boots use to make too much noise on the stones. And we went past, and we went past Italian working parties and hear them and going past theirs and getting past this and, oh, dear, it was highly dangerous going out there.

(25.00) At any rate, at the finish up we ran into a heap of Germans and they put us on and at any rate, the shot short that Colin Bird, sorry about him, but he should have said, 'Into them and go and shoot em and go grenades' and he put us to ground – he put us to ground a couple of times before we went into them – and we could hear them pulling their bolts back and things like that and Germans shouting and things like that. Any rate, on the sum total of it was, as we went in I got the machine gunner – there was a machine gun at it – and I had my ... I put me fifty round magazine on and I gave him the full works on the way in and his gun finished up pointing up like that. So I got him but there was other blokes. And then we said, 'Right, we'll have to go back now because there's nothing there' and then somebody said to me – this was a strange thing – 'Where's Pete?' and that's what we called, 'Tweet' they said, 'Where's Tweet?' and I thought they'd said, 'Where's Tweet?', 'Where's Pete?' and there was this Pete Gullefer was near me and a ricocheted bullet had hit his bayonet scabbard and hit him in the backside and I'd put my first field ... his first field aid dressing on his backside. So when they said, 'Where's Tweet?', I thought they said Pete and I said, 'He's right, he's with me', so away we go and we get along about 100 yards and somebody said, 'Hey, I thought you said Tweet was there?'. I said, 'Oh, you said Pete' and they said, 'Oh, that's Lieutenant Birdie, we've left him behind there'. So we had to go back again. Oh, and there was hell fire going on that time. So we went back and we found him laying down and put him on the stretcher and we brought him back again but I was on the stretcher, it was on my left shoulder and I could feel his face up here. So I felt his face and his face got cold and, oh, his hand fell down for a start, and I'd feel no pulse in his hand and I thought, 'Oh gee, he's dead'. So there was no hurry to get back again but there was a hurry because it was highly dangerous out there. And we had to get ... I remember I'd been a scout on the night, a couple of nights before that, and I knew that if I got the North Star on my left shoulder out that way and go straight back like the clappers, we'd hit our lines. So that's what I did and I was the bloke that said that, not claimed that, but I said, 'The North Star on that and we go straight back' and there was several blokes there and, any rate, we hit our lines and we got back with Colin Bird and he was dead. So that was before Alamein, of course, but that was some of the little things that happened at Alamein.

And then this lot when we got caught, oh dear, that was it and when we got to Benghazi, they chopped it off at Benghazi and we got there ... I forget when we got there, at any rate,

we got there and we were there and they gave you groups of 100. And the South Africans were there already because the South Africans had lost Tobruk that we'd held for six months before that; they lost it in four days. So we weren't very happy with the South Africans but they were great big blokes so you couldn't say too much. Any rate, we got there and the Italians were taking the troops over – taking the prisoners over – and we were changing our groups because we reckoned we were going to get recaptured which ... and we thought we were going to win. So we changed our groups and we were doing a starve, you know, by the time, it was incredible, by the time we left Benghazi, if you stood up quickly – you only had ... you were laying on the ground and you had little Italian groundsheet things that you made a bit of a shelter for yourself over the top and there was practically no food and, oh well, then you got weaker and weaker all the time and you found out ... the first bloke, Ernie Masden found out for a start, he got up one day, he just got up like that and he got up like that and he went flat on his back and, 'Bloody hell, what's wrong with you Ernie?'. 'God', he said, 'It just felt as though something hit me' and he blacked out. And that was ... you had to find ... after you had been there for a while with lack of food and so on you found out that if you stood up quickly, bang, flat on your back, and, oh, you knew what it was. So you used to get up on your hands and knees and things like that.

Well, we changed our group that many times that – we got captured on 27th July, so it was November 12th that we sailed from Benghazi and Benghazi was recaptured on November 16th. We missed it by four bloody days. It was incredible.

END OF TAPE 2 – SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2 – SIDE B

Identification: This is side B, tape 2 of 2. An interview with Jack Hawkes conducted by Brian Wall on 23 January 1989 at Jack's home, 7 John Place in Mullaloo. Jack was a member of 10 Platoon, B Company, 2/28th Battalion who was captured at Ruin Ridge.

Jack could you tell us about the trip over the Mediterranean please?

Well, our trip was incredible over the Mediterranean. We got on this ship and I was one of the first down into the hold – we were in a hold – and we were in the rear hold of the ship and I suppose there must have been four or five hundred down the hold. There wasn't enough room for everybody to lay down so you just got down to the bottom. But seeing that I was one of the first down there – you had to have a look around for a start – and I saw some cases of stuff on there. So on this case – several of us rushed across to this case and got the lid off it and found out it was tins of stuff. We didn't know what they were. Any rate, I grabbed mine and I think Jimmy Boyd got his, any rate, we got that and all these fellows came down. There was, as I say, hundreds of blokes. It was incredible how many was down there and the whole place got filled up. Any rate we found out that this ... these tins were tins of peas, a kilo of tinned peas, and we hadn't had anything to eat for ages, you see, naturally, not much to eat. So we got these open by some way, I forget how we got them open, and we got stuck straight into a tin of peas and then we found out that underneath us was another hold and underneath that hold there was lots of cases of all

sorts of stuff. And a lot of food parcels that had come over for Germans, a lot of parcels with German clothes and things in it. As a matter of fact, one bloke found a German officer's uniform and the silly bugger put it on.

And any rate, on the way they didn't go straight across from Benghazi to Italy. They went away from ... they crossed and they went right down around Crete to get out ... there were English destroyers making a ... having a bit of a field day amongst these ships, you see, going across. So they wasn't favouring us, they was trying to save their ship. So we went down and we went around Crete. Any rate, on the way down there we were underneath this blooming hold and we were getting all sorts of food: and we got caraway seed biscuits – little blokes about that big; we got tins of liverwurst and they were great big kilo tins of them; tins of all sorts of blooming stuff and most of it, blooming what ... and you can imagine what was going on up there. We were just eating these tins and we had ... we were right next to ... the only place down into this hold was a little ladder, just right where Jimmy Boyd and I were parked, and we were getting stuck into these biscuits and tinned peas and sauerkraut and all sorts of German food. And you can imagine, as a matter of fact, we were that close together that I just belched and Jimmy says, 'Jesus, Jack, what are you doing?' and I said, 'Oh, just did a bit of a belch Jim', and he said, 'Oh God, was that very rough' and then it started.

(5.00) We started to get sick. We vomited it up and still ate more. And we blooming got the diarrhoea and we still ate more. And there was all these tins we chucked over in this place here and there were hundreds of tins there by this time. And the blokes would have to relieve themselves and they'd say, right over across there and you'd see these blokes, 'Oh, use two tins would you mate, for God's sake' – with these big tins. So, any rate, it was incredible, and how the Italians, I don't know, they didn't sort of wake up. But any rate, on the way it had to be cleaned up and so we cleaned it up – we chucked it down below, down the next hold I think. And then, there were no toilets of course. So there were some South Africans on board and they had some – what the hell do they call the people that look after toilets and things, there's some name for them – any rate, they had these blokes and these blokes got 44-gallon drums and they cut a 'V' in it and that was the toilet. So, they did have around the place a bit of an aisle all the way round. So the toilet was twenty-four hours a day it had queues and the queues used to go right back. Well, before I got to the toilet, I had been to the toilet four times before I even got to the toilet. So you could imagine what it was like down here; it was shocking. And there was blooming ... oh, everywhere it stunk and we ate and we were still eating and belching and having diarrhoea. Any rate, this went on for days and all of a sudden the Italians woke up there was something going wrong. And they were giving us a biscuit per day and a little bit of tin of bully beef – they were still giving us their rations, you see – and they woke up what was going on. Any rate, oh, they put guards down there and we used to talk to the guards and still go down the bottom and still getting this stuff up.

Any rate, they went right round Crete and we came towards Greece and we went through the Corinth Canal and in the middle of the Corinth Canal they stopped the ship and said to us, 'We are going to unload you blokes and don't ever try to escape' and they had a battalion or a brigade of Italians all the way round this parade ground and, of course, we were still not strong you know by the time ... we'd picked up a little bit but not much. And, you know, we were not allowed to escape. Any rate, we went out there and some of

these blokes cleaned up the hold and things like that and they said, 'Right, any man that goes down that hold again will be shot'. So they loaded us on again and the poor blokes up in the other hold, they hadn't got any. Now, it is incredible how those poor sods didn't get any food at all and we were stuffing ourselves, you know, and stuffing it and vomiting it up and stuffing it and vomiting it up; we were doing this all the time. So, any rate, we took off again after this and we were going across the heel of Italy from Greece – to the heel of Italy. Is the Adriatic on that side or the other side? I forget, but any rate, across to the heel of Italy we were going. But first time out, been down there, some bloke said, 'Oh, better go down again' and they had put South African sergeants on top of this place where we used to get down the hole. And they said, 'You can't go down here'. 'Get out of it', so the blokes still went down there. Any rate, they said anybody that goes down there will get shot. So, that was it. And they put a raid on and ... oh, by the way, as far as the toilet was concerned, if you wanted to urinate you went across to this ladder and you climbed up the ladder, one at a time, and you'd go across to the rail and urinate over the rail, you see. That was to save the toilets. So, any rate, these blokes would be going up there – there'd be a queue going up there – it was very nice, you could have a look at the sea going past and the canal and so on. Any rate, so they sent this raid down and they got six blokes down and two of them were mates of mine – Brian Christensen and Arthur Kelson – and they went up and I've never seen blokes look so blooming, so white, as they went up there, you know. Well, the first bloke in the line was cool, calm, blooming commonsense – I don't know – this first bloke that was in that line to get out and get shot, he went straight across to the rail, the gunwale, and urinated over there and walked back and went back through the blokes and he got away with it. I mean, that was incredible, this bloke. He died later in prison the poor bugger. Any rate, so all these blokes and we were down there saying – eating biscuits and saying – 'Gee, we'll hear the guns going and there's poor old Chris gone', you know, 'bang, bang, bang' and all of a sudden down they come again; they didn't shoot them. And were they very happy? But they were down the hold again after that.

(10.00) So we went right across to Brindisi and we landed at Brindisi. And then, by this time, of course, we had been in prison from July to November so we were all bearded. The only thing you used to borrow scissors for so you could cut a bit around your mouth so you could eat, you know, without blooming what'd call it, so, not to joke that much. Any rate, so everybody is bearded. So they take us to this Italian delousing station it was because, oh, we had lice – I forgot to tell you about the lice – and we had lice everywhere – God damn it. Lice are wicked things to have and you get 'em underneath your arms, you get 'em all on your body – not on your beard strangely enough or in your head of hair – but all your body hair – lice – and you got these bloody things all the time. As well as lice you got fleas. And you had lice ... they ... eggs every day and you had to undo out your shirt and things like that and they'd get ... they were incredible things those lice. So any rate, they got us to this delousing station and the first thing you did, you went through a barber, and the barber just got you with the clippers and he just went straight up under your chin, right up over the top of your head and over the top and you finished up a bald-headed bloke. And of the fellows that we had been in ... that we knew, that were in our sections and that and we knew, but all the New Zealanders and that that we'd been friendly with, you know, we didn't know 'em – didn't know 'em until they spoke. They

were that thin; everybody was that bloody thin because ... well, I had been ... when I was in that commando unit I got over twelve stone and when we got out to Italy and we got out on a working job, I got over, I was between – we had to go into kilos then, of course – and we reckoned I was only between seven–six and, well, around about seven stone. Any rate, we were skinny fellahs, my God we were. Any rate, we got this and we had to put all your clothes in a piece of rag and they'd go through this heating stuff – it was supposed to be steam heated stuff – and you got out and you got round the other side and you put your clothes on again and had a hot shower and you were supposed to be deloused. But by the time we got over there the blooming steam wasn't hot enough so the lice were still there. So ... and then we had to march to a place called Tukurano and this was a camp and that is where we went, to this camp and we were there for so many months and there we gradually picked up. Jimmy Bone and I got a job. We used to say we'd go up the cookhouse and cut wood and we'd go up there and the cooks – were a lot of our cooks, you know – and they would have cabbage and stuff; cabbage and macaroni and rice, very little of anything but some of the cabbage used to be rotten and they all go ... it goes rotten and all slimy, well, they'd chuck that out. Well, Jimmy and I would get that and we'd take all the slime off it and we'd cook it in some straw that they had out there because they made us go and delouse again and we used to cook it and I reckon that saved our lives because you couldn't get into hospital because there was somebody dying all the time there. That was how tough things were at that time because we were in the south of Italy and Christmas was coming up; it was cold. Any rate, we stopped there and we gradually gained up a bit and then we took a job as a carpenter outside and we got treble rations. And we had macaroni, and we got treble rations of macaroni, so all you did was get a big fat belly – incredible – I was fit as anything and we didn't do any work. Any rate, then we went out to a working camp and we stopped out there for some months and we were on a factory that used to – How are we going? – a factory that used to have grape seeds and grape skins and it used to get alcohol out of these by taking it through lots of different sorts of water. We worked like a slave gang there, it was definitely like a gang that was just – in a chain-gang it was, yes, just up and down all the day and by the time that ... and we finished up gradually, we gradually got a bit thin again but a bit fat again but a bit of water. But actually we were that thin when we got out there. You used to fall over and do all sorts of stupid things, you know, but we gradually got ourselves back into form again. Oh, and we used to get English food parcels and New Zealand and Australian and they weren't enough for them. So we used to get one food parcel to fourteen blokes per week, you see, or sometimes it was per fortnight. That was supposed to be one food parcel per bloke per week and so you used to have fourteen blokes having it like this and you used to whack everything up. And some of them would have a little packet of sultanas in it, so every sultana was counted out: one for you, one for me, and like that and you never got ... and the bloke that had to share anything, he was the last pick. If he shared up a bit of cheese or anything like that, if he cut it up into so many pieces, he was the last pick so he had to be pretty careful in doing that. And it was ... that was tough, that was tough then and, of course, a lot of blokes died down there. And Victor Emanuel, the king, he gave us for a Christmas present he gave us an orange about that big and I was that bloody hungry I ate the lot, skin and all and spewed it all up again. (laughs) But that was an incredible place down there – the South Africans and all that.

(15.00) And any rate, we stopped down there. Several blokes tried to escape down there and didn't do. The ... oh, we could hear, we knew how the war was going by ... we used to get news and so on and then they landed on Sicily and, boom, they took us up to a place called Udine right up the top and that's where we went from there. We were there in Italy about eighteen months and we shifted from there. We got a little bit ... we should have got out that time but there was a padre, he wasn't a bad sort of a bloke until he told everybody to stop there, and we did stop there this night and the Germans were there the next day and so we missed out getting out for that one, so we didn't get there. And that was, I don't know whether I ...

At the south camp we did almost what we liked. We had to be counted once a day and we used to just go out in the summer which was ... when we could see, this was getting on towards the middle of the year. It was quite all right and I used to have my little bit of canvas that I'd had from my ... and I used to put that round my waist and go out to the parade ground with that. And you used to go out there and you stood there. One thing on the parade ground, they were terrible counters the Italians, they used to be on the parade ... we used to be on with 3,000 or so prisoners it used to take them three or four hours to count us so we'd be out there for ages. So any rate, we were there and that was what it was like there. And then when they landed on Sicily, whack, we was taken straight up to this other ... Udine, up there and when we got there we'd wondered what we'd struck. We had to salute officers and, oh, stand at attention if an officer went past, even a blooming sergeant and they used to come and search your place. Oh, we didn't know what we'd struck and the blokes were getting twenty-eight days and seven days for not doing this and not doing that and we thought this was shocking because down there we didn't do anything much at all. Any rate, there had been ... oh, some of the blokes had got all sorts of things there.

Any rate, things went and it wasn't that long before the Italians capitulated and then that's when we didn't get out when we should have got out. This New Zealand officer, he was a padre, he just said, 'Well, you should stop' and we, silly dopes, we took notice and the Austrians were there, the Germans were there next morning and they took us over to Austria and they took us across to Spittal and we arrived in Spittal on 14th September, 1943. Spittal an der Drau, that is what it was called. And we left on 1st November and we went out to a working camp called Pols, Pols bei Judenberg, Pols, and we went and we lobbed there on 1st November and we worked there on this paper factory for ... till April 1945 and all that time we used to see all the raids coming over. We were on the direct route to Vienna and the Yanks used to raid them and they used to have their fortresses and they used to come across and we'd be sent out – when the alarm went – we'd be sent out to the air-raid shelters and we used to watch these planes coming over. And they'd come over in sevens, fourteens, twenty-eights and so on, and that must have been what they had, you know, their squadrons or what, and these would come over and on the cold days we would see them coming and you'd see these black spots with white trails behind them. And the white trails by the time a thousand bombers had gone over us, the whole sky was clouded over and this used to happen day after day. They were incredible these things. And then, some Yank, his plane wouldn't go properly, so he'd drop his bombs the rotten sod. Sometimes it was very close to us. Any rate, while we were there a place down ... oh, it must have been about thirty kilometres away. It was a place something like

Northam, a sort of a marshalling yard place, any rate, this day, we heard these planes and we heard the bombs drop. I don't know how many planes they put in it but they put in hundreds of bombs and they blew this blooming place to the smithereens and next day it comes up that they said, 'Righto' – they had us out and they said – 'Righto, we are going down to Knittelfeld it was called, they always keep their Ks on the front end of the word Knittelfeld and this place has been badly bombed, so you are going down to bury the dead and such like, and help them out. So we thought, 'Oh', and they told us under no conditions are you to smile or talk to the Germans or do anything at all to the people – the Austrians they were. Any rate, we got on a train – and these trains, you ought to have seen their trains. Their trains at that time were shocking; all the windows were shot out of them because the Yanks used to get along them with their Lockheed Lightnings or the Mustangs and that and they'd shoot all these trains up.

(20.00) So any rate, we went down on this train and, oh, very draughty and cold and we got down there and where they'd throw us out us and we had this fifty of us out there and all the Germans were coming up and, oh gee, they'd come up and look at us and you could see them and they'd say 'Schweinhund' and they'd spit and they didn't spit quite at you but they spit at, you know, so on. Oh, and if you thought you'd blooming well said something, they'd would have been at you. Any rate, we didn't and in three days we were asking for cigarettes and things like that. And we buried, how many of their dead, I don't know; but there was hundreds of them. And we had to dig graves, these great big graves outside their graveyard and their church and that and we used to carry the coffins up and these Germans, the poor buggers, you know, they used to come up and they would give you something for carrying their daughter or their son or something like that, and we used to carry these coffins up. They put them in boxes, you know, sort of thing and we got absolutely used to it. We used have to jump in the graves when the Yanks came over and they put another twenty-eight bombers in every second day, or something like that. The only thing ... you know, you got very hardened doing this sort of thing. The only thing that really got me was the verger he was the bloke who was of the church and he was – I call him the verger any rate – he came up one day with us, walking with us, we are carrying a coffin and he's got a baby's coffin under each arm and he came up to the graves and he just went boomp, like that, and dropped them and I thought ... and it really upset me, you know, that. Just dropping that like that and I really was upset and I wasn't very happy for quite a long time. Any rate, got over that but it's funny how things like that, and you've got all these people around you that are dead and dying. It is incredible what some things ... how some things will upset at you. But, any rate, we did that for some months.

Jack, what was life like in the working camps?

Well, when we were at Pils we were at a paper factory and they used to chop up logs – the pine logs – and then have acid and that and make it down into pulp and make pulp and paper and we used to do all the sorts of jobs round there but, as far as I was concerned, I didn't on to any one that was too hard. We used to do outside jobs and we used to get the logs piled up to go sawn up into metre lengths and they used to go in and then get chopped up with big choppers. And we used to sabotage those every now and again. You had a big sort of a pick to look after these logs as they were going along their conveyor

belts and sometimes somebody would inadvertently get a pick stuck in a log and it would go down into these great big cutters and there would be a hell of a din and, bang, they'd have to stop the thing and sharpen all the blades – cut all the blades up. The blades were great big things and they used to cut all these up 'cause it would chop this pick into bits, you know, things like that, you know, and things like that. So there was all little bits of sabotage we used to do now and then but you couldn't do it too often naturally or they'd shoot you.

But there was a ... the factory wasn't bad because at that time we were getting food parcels fairly regularly and we used to get a bit of mail now and again and so on and we were able to write letters, oh, some sort of letters. We used to be able to write, you know, not too much and so on. And we used to get a bit of news. We had our friends at court that used to have ... we used to have some people who were more or less slave labourers.

Where we worked there was Russian girls and they used to try and work us out on the Russian girls and think that we would help them out so that they'd get more work out of us but we soon woke up to that one because the Russian girls were big strong girls and they could work as hard as we could. Then there were French people, Pole people, Poles, oh, Russian chaps and all sorts of people. Everybody was slave labourers there, and we used to have, oh, a reasonable sort of time. We used to be able to play a bit of soccer now against another camp which was down a couple of miles away which was another camp for logs that used to come up and they used to come up on a flying fox these logs and we used to go down there on Sundays and play a bit of soccer. The only time ... the main time I was going to escape in Austria, I went down and played soccer and trod in a hole and sprained my ankle so I didn't escape that time. Any rate, the whole lot got caught straight away as soon as they got out. So, we were too far away from anywhere to escape there. Any rate, but a lot of the ... oh, it was very boring at times but, you know, oh, well, you had fellahs you used to muck around and we used to do all sorts of things with the Germans such as change their language around a bit. We'd say 'fish paste' and their language is wiespaite and every time we'd ask them how late it was or what time it was, 'fish paste' and then we'd say 'donkey's ears' instead of 'dankeschoen' and all things like ... we used to really play with their language and we used get a hell of a racket out of that. (25.00)

That and we used to play a lot of crib was one of our things we played in there and that's in our time off. We used to work six days a week and Sundays off. And, but, oh, there was all sorts of things. We had different ... oh, of course, being a prisoner is a boring life there's no doubt about that but from when the war ... to the close of the war we knew the Russians were getting close to us and a fellow that we had met before, he belonged to a commando, an English commando unit, he was being marched across Austria towards Switzerland as was all the prisoners over in there and he just took off from his place and came into our place and they didn't notice about fifty-one fellahs instead of fifty until we were marched out and Joe told us a lot of the news that had been going on. And we found out that all these camps of different ones that were closer to the Russians were being marched across and I think a lot of it was to get the prisoners away from the environment they had been in and if they had been badly treated, well, they were away from the people that had badly treated them. I think that was one of their ideas. So we started off and we went across from Poles and we went right across Austria as far as ... at that time, I've got all the names down in a sheet, but we went across to Austria to a

place called Markt Pongau and that was another Stalag, it was Stalag 18V, I think it was. And from there – we were there when the war ended – and the Yanks and all the Poms ... oh, firstly, we went up to this Markt Pongau place and get a radio and a bag of flour and a bag of sugar and we made ourselves tea and damper and all the things that there were. `How do you like your tea?' `Sickly sweet, please', that used to be the answer for that and we had damper and tea and all sorts of things and blokes went up to a pool. A bloke had trout in it or some sort of fish in it, any rate, they caught all the fish and knocked a bullock off and all sorts of things like that and we had a lot of food and then the Yanks came in. And they were saying to us all the time on this radio `Stay put, stay put'. A lot of fellahs didn't, they buzzed off. Some went down to Italy and some went all over the place but I was mainly interested in getting home. So we stopped put at this place and we weren't there that long when the Yanks came in with trucks and we were taken to Salzburg and we were at Salzburg for three days, three to five days I think, but while the time we were there I was in group number 103 and that meant there was 103 Dakotas were taking us to France. So while we were in Salzburg, we went in and saw all the statues of all the Mozart and all those people – now, I've forgotten who they are now, that's good – any rate, it is quite a well known place Salzburg in Austria and also Berchtesgaden was right there too but we didn't get up to Berchtesgaden. Any rate, we flew out from there and went across to Rheims in France and we got there and the Yanks treated us like royalty and so on and we were taken food and so on and Yankee uniforms and taken there. And we had to go out there and get our boots clean and the Germans were there and all cleaning your boots and all things like that for you. Some fellahs buzzed off from there and went to Paris but I didn't, I was waiting for my plane. And we came back in Lancaster bombers and I worked my position in the plane that I could see over the navigator's shoulder the White Cliffs of Dover – that was my aim. We landed at Oxford and we were taken down to Eastbourne pretty quickly. And we had six weeks or so in London and in England and did London and went up as far as Scotland and then caught the Mauritania home.

Jack, how did it feel to be home?

Great. I arrived home on VP day and met my wife and daughter who I hadn't seen, who was now four years old. So any rate, that's it.

END OF TAPE 2 – SIDE B

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