TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Title	(TX48) Hope, Paul Douglas (Craftsman)
Interviewer	Sprod, Michael
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Description	Paul Douglas Hope, 2/12th Battalion and prisoner of war (POW), interviewed by Michael Sprod for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939–45 Discusses entlistment; training; embarkation for Middle East via England; action at Tobruk; health; treatment of Italian prisoners of war (POWs); posted to Turkish border; good relationship with Turkish border guards; 2/12 Battalion sent home via Colombo; advance party reached Sumatra and subsequently made POWs.

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Transcript methodology

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Readers of this transcript of interview should bear in mind that it is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects the informal conversational style that is inherent in oral records. Unless indicated, the names of places and people are as spoken, regardless of whether this is formally correct or not – e.g. 'world war two' (as spoken) would not be changed in transcription to 'second world war' (the official conflict term).

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Identification: This is interview No. 1 in a series of interviews concerning the 2/12th Battalion of the second AIF. The interview is being recorded at Newtown in Hobart on 14th February 1989. The interviewer is Michael Sprod and I am talking to Paul Hope, formerly a lance corporal in the 2/12th Battalion.

For a starter, I wonder if you could give me some details about your family background, for a start, where and when you were born?

I was born in Hobart in 1917 – 25th November 1917. I was one of six children. My family were ... my grandfather came from Scotland, in fact, my grandfather and both my maternal and paternal parents came from Scotland. My father was Australian-born. I was one of six children – four brothers, one sister. I was the middle pin really; two brothers older, two brothers younger.

What part of Hobart?

I was born in Bathurst Street where the secondary school now stands. I lived my early life there, I would say to the age of about ten, then we moved to Cornelian Bay and stayed in the Cornelian Bay–New Town area, virtually, for the rest of my life except for periods when I was away.

Right and what sort of employment was your father in?

What sort of a position?

Yes.

Well, he started work with one of the banks – the old Commercial Bank – he rose to be a bank teller. But he left the bank to become a real estate agent and he was a real estate agent for quite an amount of time. Eventually, gravitating to the motor car business where he became a car salesman. He was a car salesman right up to the time of the war when cars were no longer imported and he then went to work as a clerk with the Agricultural Bank.

And which school did you attend?

I attended St Joseph's Primary School and graduated on to St Virgil's College where I attended until the grade of sub-intermediate. I don't think there's such a grade now but it was sub-intermediate then.

Yes, and you left ... you went from school to be a farmhand?

I went from school at the age of fourteen – that was right in the middle of the depression – jobs were not available in the city so I went to work for a farmer in the Brighton district. And I was with him until I was eighteen, I think.

Was that a paid job or was it an unemployment ...

Well, it was paid, if you could call it paid. I received, initially, five shillings a week and my keep. Eventually I was earning ten shillings a week and my keep. So ... that was the going rate for a farmhand. You'd be called a jackeroo today I would think.

Yes. Now, you then came back to the city?

I came back to the city because it was obvious that I was never going to be able to – in a position on ten shillings a week – to afford my own farm so I had to look elsewhere. Also, the depression was starting to ease and there were some jobs about and my father actually got me a job at a motor car assembly plant. And I think I was – at eighteen there – I was too old to be apprentice. They dubbed me an improver, whatever that might be, and I stayed there until I think I was twenty.

(5.00) Were you being, more or less, trained in the same fashion as an apprentice?

Oh yes. Yes, I did engine overhauls. Finally, after a couple of years working with the journeymen I became reasonably competent as a motor mechanic and, although I had no indenture papers, they weren't all that vital in those days. I was virtually doing car repairs like any ... in fact, I was working with other indentured ... people who had their indenture papers, and I don't think there was any differentiation between us.

And that had some influence on your position in the armed services when you joined?

Well it did, yes. Yes, because, although we started off with horse transport, we eventually ... they were replaced by motor vehicles and then there was a very big demand for people with mechanical experience and I, at that stage, gravitated into the transport platoon and it wasn't very long before I was a lance corporal in charge of a group of vehicles and that group was the company vehicles.

Now, your family then was reasonably okay during the depression, I take it?

Yes, well, my dad was never out of work and we did have a great backstop in my maternal grandfather who was a butcher in the city and, actually, quite a wealthy man. He owned all the land where the technical school now stands, where he bred racehorses. He also owned a lot of other city property that today would be worth millions.

Was religion important in your family?

Very much so. My mother was a very devout catholic. My father was a presbyterian – being Scottish I suppose that was inevitable. He didn't follow his religion. He certainly didn't interfere with us following ours. In fact, he would get us out of bed to go to mass as my mother did. So there was no conflict there at all.

How about politics? As a young man were you at all interested in politics?

No, I was never interested in politics, particularly at that age, no.

Or your father?

Dad was a little interested I think but not vocal enough to have any impact on the political scene.

No. But I was just wondering, for example, with depression there, was there any sense of something that ought to be done by the politicians?

Well, if there was I didn't detect it because I was just too young to be looking for those things, I guess. I don't recall it.

Had you done much travelling around, either in the State or beyond in those days?

Oh, prior to the war? I'd been to Melbourne and Sydney, only just the once, and hadn't travelled very much even in Tasmania. No. Not travel ... people didn't travel much in those days.

And other later activities?

Well, I have always been a keen yachtsman and even at twelve years of age I had my own boat which we sailed at Cornelian Bay. We had a little Cornelian Bay sailing squad and it was quite active and I got a very good grounding in small ships as a youngster. I should have been in the navy with that background but, well, the army seemed to be the first cab off the rank.

Did you consider joining the navy?

Not really, simply because there was no call for naval recruits, not in the same way as there were for army recruits. The first 20,000 contribution by Australia to the war that was ... I remember, you always talked about and I was very keen to be one of those 20,000.

(10.00) You were in the first wave of enlistments.

Well, I certainly was. As far as Tasmania is concerned my number is forty-eight; I was the forty-eighth man off the ... on the job, you may as well say.

Okay. As far as personal matters go, you weren't married, but were you engaged or courting at the time of the war?

No. No, I had a few girlfriends but nothing serious.

Right. So when enlistment came up, as you say, you were in very early. Why did you enlist?

Well, I guess I wanted to get away and see the world. I am sure that motivated me more than any desire to fight for the country or King and country. I just wanted to travel and adventure is what I was looking for.

On the question of King and country, I mean, was there a strong sense of King and country?

Well, I guess there was an underlying one without thinking very much about it. I was reading the news of the time and what was happening in Europe and the German atrocities that were played up at that time. I guess – influenced me, probably more than I thought at the time.

Had you had any military background up till then?

None whatever.

No cadet training?

No, no military training whatsoever. When I first went into Brighton I saw a sergeant major of the Australian Structural Corps with red tabs on and I thought he was a general and I was very awe-struck in his presence. When I found out he was only a WO2, well, I didn't feel anywhere near as over-awed.

Was there cadets at St Virgil's?

I don't think so. I don't recall them. In any case I would probably have been a little young.

The business in the First World War with conscription and the ... some people say there's a sort of catholic anti-war thing. Was that a sort of an influence do you think in your family? Did you feel less inclined to be British patriotic than, perhaps, a protestant-minded or ...?

No. Not really, no. No, as I said earlier I had very little thoughts about politics and I don't recall any reluctance to fight for Britain because I was a catholic. Of course, you must remember I'm also Scotch. So, no, I don't recall any thoughts of that nature at that time.

Did anyone in your family – father, uncles – serve in the first AIF?

No. But they served in the Boer War. I had two uncles serve in the Boer. I think they possibly missed out on the First World War because they would have been a little old perhaps.

Yes. You were aware of the traditions of ANZAC and so forth?

Yes.

That was strongly stressed at school, for example?

Yes, yes. I am well aware of the tradition. In fact, I used to be quite an avid reader and I read all the war stories and the history books. I was probably as well aware of those traditions as anybody.

Now ... before we start on the enlistment. Mr Menzies came on the radio and announced `It was his melancholy duty ...', et cetera, et cetera.

Yes.

Do you remember that?

I do. Yes, yes, I do remember it. I remember listening to the radio at home and hearing those ... that pronouncement that we were at war with Germany.

Was it expected?

Oh, I'd say it was, yes. And, I think, welcomed. At least we knew where we stood.

Yes. And you decided there and then to enlist?

Yes. Yes, I got into the army just as quickly as I could.

Did you go in by yourself or with friends?

No. Went in by myself. Went up to the recruiting office at the barracks and I think I was given a form to fill in and told ... and then I received a notification by mail to report to the barracks a few days later – it could have been a few weeks later – but later. And when I reported I had instructions to go to Brighton; to go into camp together with 1,000 other chaps in the drill hall at Brighton. We were allocated our numbers. The significance of the numbers didn't appear to me then because there was 1,000 of us, well, about 1,000 of us in the drill hall. And the recruiting officer said, `This group here, go to that table,' `This group here, go to that table' and depending on which table you went to you got a number from that table because each of the tables had a block of numbers to issue out.

(15.00) Now, your family, what was their reaction to your decision to enlist?

Mother was a little upset; father, I think, was pleased. He, himself, had tried to go to the First World War but he was talked out of it by my mother because they were married and there were probably three of us elder children alive during the war. And he often said that he tried to go but mum wouldn't let him and I think he was possibly pleased to see me go.

Would you say your mother's reluctance to see you go was just sort of maternal ...

Well, reluctant, as any mother would be to see one of her sons go away. But she really didn't object strongly. But, I think, she also was possibly proud of the fact that one of her sons was going ... was joining up.

How about your employment, did you just resign?

Yes, I handed in my notice and the ... my employer didn't seem to be concerned about it. In fact, on the day that I actually left he called the staff together, wished me luck, the staff had put in some money and made a presentation, and I was using a car belonging to the firm. The boss said, `You can use the car until you go away'. So, I think, that possibly tells something about his attitude.

Was there any ... did he say, `When you come back come and see me and you can have your job back.'?

Well, I can't recall that he did but it was an obligation, possibly a statutory one, that the boys that joined up were to be given their jobs back and there could have been a penalty or a case made if they weren't given back. I had no problem getting my job back.

Did you think about it at the time? Did you think about: what I will do when I return or ...?

No. No, one day at a time there.

Yes. Now, the enlistment procedure itself. You just turned up, got the form, sent it in, et cetera.

Yes. Pretty ... pretty simple procedure. Of course there were medical examinations which I've forgotten temporarily. But somewhere before acceptance, possibly in between the time that I applied for enlistment and when I was actually called up there would have been a medical examination. So I had no problem with that, I was a pretty fit young man. But there would have been an examination. I do remember vaguely stepping off in front of a MO and being weighed and measured and so on, so I'm pretty sure that would have been before I was actually sent to camp.

Do you know of any people that you knew who were rejected for medical or other reasons?

Oh, yes. Yes, quite a few people were rejected. They wanted pretty fit people in the first 20,000 and they rejected people ... eyesight, teeth – they counted your teeth, there was a formula, you needed a certain number of teeth of your own because I recall somebody saying, `We're going to fight the Germans, we're not going to bite them'.

And then you were taken in to the Brighton army camp. What were the living conditions like there?

Well, first of all, Brighton was only just started to be made into a camp. It had been a camp in the First World War I understand but all the buildings, et cetera, had all been long disappeared because it was private property, it was just acquired for the war period – the First World War period I'm talking about. So it was just open farmland when we went there but there were contractors working to build huts at Brighton. We weren't lucky enough to get into the huts; we were allocated tents which we erected ourselves. So ...

(20.00) Did you sleep on the ground?

On the ground on straw palliasses, yes.

Did you know many of the other recruits?

Oh yes, a sprinkling of, not all that many because they came from right round the State. There was a contingent from the north; there was a contingent from the west. Amongst the local ... I knew a handful, yes.

How did the men fit in at first to the service life – discipline and so forth?

Well, it wasn't all that easy considering that seventy-five percent of us had never seen an army camp or been in one. We did have a sprinkling of chaps who'd served sometime in the Militia but that was only about twenty-five per cent. So seventy-five per cent had no previous experience of an organised camp and it took the NCOs, who first took us over, quite some time to get the message through to us that there was three ways of doing a thing: the right way, the wrong way and the only way. So we had to go through that. When anything was going on – a mess parade, roll call – it all meant lining up in threes or fours and this was something you had to learn. Quite a few of them would just stroll over and take it very casually – hands in the pockets – and, of course, we did not have uniforms in the first month. Our first parades were in civilian clothes. I have a photograph of our first mess parade and everbody's just in civilian clothes and various types and style of dress. Eventually we did get an issue of khaki clothing, they called giggle suits, and then from then on we had to wear them at all parades but, of course, they weren't suitable to go out on leave or anything like that. So we still went back into our civilian clothes if we went to town.

Where there occasions when men back answered and ignored commands and things?

Oh yes, yes. Yes, it required quite a bit of skill on the part of the NCOs who were mainly in control of the men to handle some rough types. We had miners from the west and fishermen. The occupations in calling the men covered almost all the spectrum of jobs in the State. A lot of people who put themselves down as labourers, when, in effect, they were possibly skilled technicians, even university students. And, of course, there was a manpower problem and it was decided by the powers that be that they didn't want to send away to the other side of the world anybody who was likely to be useful in the Australian war effort. Consequently, we had a lot of people who were down as labourers but could have been technicians of some sort, possibly even university degree men.

How about the other end of the scale, were there many unemployed?

Ah, yes, there would be some, there would be some who joined because it was a job. It was the end of the depression you might remember and work was reasonably plentiful. Had the war happened a few years earlier I think a bigger percentage would have been coming straight off the dole and into the army.

(25.00) Yes. The officers and NCOs, were they regular army officers?

No. Just a few key people were regular army, the RSM and the adjutant, I think, were regular army – I'm talking of our particular battalion – the rest of the officers were ex-Militia. They had obtained the ranks in the Militia and that was the set up. Part-time officers except possibly for one or two.

How did you feel about the NCOs and officers, were they competent?

Well, I really didn't know ...

At this stage?

I didn't know enough to judge really. When they told us to do a thing, well, I was prepared to be a good soldier and do as I was told so I had no problem with them. And, really, to judge an NCO on the basis of his actions in a training camp ... well, it's a totally different thing to the real thing.

> Yes. It has been said that the Australian army is more democratic than other armies. Was that at all apparent perhaps in the way that the men and officers and NCOs, say, talked to them?

Yeah. I would say that would certainly be so. I did have a little bit to do with the British army while we were in England and the Middle East and the obvious attitudes between men and the officers was quite different to that observed in the Australian army. A lot of our officers had started off as ... I'm talking about later in the war – a lot of people who started off just a I did as an ordinary private soldier in the fullness of time received commissions and our relationships were quite different to those that I'd seen in the British army. You didn't sort of regard them as officers and in any group of men somebody generally graduates to being a leader and it would usually be that officer who worked his way through the ranks – through possibly corporal, sergeant and lieutenant – he was just a natural leader. That's the way he was probably appointed.

> Now the training itself that you did, what was the training that you undertook there?

Well I think the first objective was to get us physically fit because there was very little in the way of equipment available. We didn't have rifles for a few weeks. The rifle was the first piece of equipment we were issued with. So in the first two or three weeks was mostly boot marches, BT and just physical exercise in order to get us as fit as they could. After that, when some equipment became available such as rifles and machine guns and so on, that would be ... there would be a session on handling the rifle, handling the Lewis gun – we didn't have Bren guns that early – Vickers guns, in other words, becoming familiar with what arms an infantry battalion would use and then, together with that, a certain amount of physical training.

END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B

> How about unarmed combat? Were you trained in unarmed combat?

Well, I don't recall any specific training in unarmed combat. That was something that seemed to me to be introduced much later in the war. Most of our training was with the rifle – bayonet, bayonet training to help you get – bags of straw – and that sort of thing. I don't recall any unarmed combat, in fact, I don't think I ever had a single lesson in unarmed combat in all my time.

> Leave from the camp: you were given leave?

Yes, leave in the early days was very easy to get. In fact, I think they were pleased to have you leave the camp. Probably more food for those that remained. But I don't recall any

reluctance to be granted leave and I came into Hobart ... home, or wherever, every night while we were at Brighton.

Right. You'd been living at home before the war?

Yes, yes.

Yes. Were people late returning from leave?

Yes, frequently. Some didn't even come back at all. They decided to give it away but there ... yes, there were late arrivals and there was generally a deadline when you were supposed to be back in camp and not too many bothered about sticking to that. Discipline wasn't all that well established in the early days. They didn't have the machinery or the men to enforce it.

Right and it didn't bother them that much as long as you ...

Not really. I think that these things which are all part of discipline were introduced gradually. But people get used to the idea of saying ... of being told they've got to be here at a certain time.

When you were home on leave, even at this stage, would you say that you had gained some status in the eyes of other people, perhaps girls?

I think so, yes. Yes, I think so. But, mind you, it wasn't until we were issued with uniforms, and we weren't issued with uniforms until we'd gone to the mainland, was there any difference between, we went on leave in civilian clothes. But when we left Brighton we went to Rutherford in New South Wales, just outside Newcastle and I think it was there we were issued with our first uniforms. Well, then it was obvious that we were in the second AIF because the clothing was different – the uniforms were different – to those worn by the Militia. They were just a very plain uniform.

And did you feel yourself superior to the Militia?

I guess I did in a way. There was certainly a degree of animosity between the `chockos', as we called them, and the AIF and there used to be quite a few ructions in the city on leave.

Actual fights you mean?

Oh yes. Yes. There was that animosity. We considered they were chocolate soldiers and they considered we were rebel, I suppose. But there was, particularly in the early stages, ructions between the ... but eventually it was sorted out by us being sent to different areas to where the Militia were training. But at Rutherford there was a Militia camp almost side-by-side with the AIF but we both went on leave into either Newcastle or Greta or Rutherford itself – only tiny places, very limited facilities like pubs and so on. It was inevitable there would be clashes there. But after we moved, our next camp was Ingleburn, and when we moved there there were no Militia anywhere near our camp. We were just adjacent to Sydney, a much bigger setting, it wasn't necessary to go where they were and it was noticed, or notable, that there was less Militia and AIF clashes in that area.

(5.00) You mentioned pubs, would you say your friends or the people in your section were hard drinkers?

Well some certainly were. Yes. And I think we all made a bee-line for the pub when we got out of the camp. But it had to be done hurriedly in New South Wales because they closed at six o'clock.

Would you say drinking was increased by being in the army or did people ...

Well, I'd have to say yes because you've – hard training – work up a very big thirst – only leave, at this stage incidentally, leave was not all that freely available. By the time we had uniforms and getting more organised the discipline was starting to be tougher and leave was on a rotational basis. You possibly got to town twice a week and one day at the weekend as distinct from being able to go in every night as it was when we were at Brighton.

So it was more or less binge drinking like the stockmen or something.

Well, you could say that, yes.

Yes. Now when you ... was it at the stage when you were sent to Rutherford that you were formed into the 2/12th Battalion with, I believe, Queensland?

No. Actually, the 2/12th was ... we were formed, the 2/12th, at Brighton. Well, Tasmania was to furnish Battalion Headquarters – Headquarter Company, A Company and, I think, B Company and they were formed fairly soon after we were in Brighton, possibly within a week. The first 2/12th Battalion roll call of those companies was made at Brighton. So, from there on we were 2/12th Battalion.

And the rest of the battalion was added from Queensland?

Ah, yes. And something similar was going on up in Queensland.

And you came together at Rutherford?

Came together at Rutherford.

How long would you say it took for you to develop a battalion loyalty, if you like, that you felt that you really belonged to the 2/12th?

Yes. Well, not very long I would say. I think it is natural for people to want to be part of something and be proud of it and I'm sure from what I can recall that from the day we got our uniforms and particularly when our colour patches were sewn on, we were 2/12th Battalion, we were proud of it and we didn't care who knew it.

How did you get on with the Queenslanders? Was there any antagonism there?

Ah no. No, on the contrary. We got together very quickly, except when we arrived in Rutherford the Queenslanders had been there a day or two before us and they ... an outbreak of, I think it was meningitis had occurred so they didn't want us to fraternise with the Queenslanders for fear we got the meningitis germ. So they did swing a wire which separated the Queenslanders from the Tasmanians and the first couple of days we didn't actually mix with them. But they subsequently found that this virus was not the meningitis they thought and the restrictions were lifted and we just fraternised and became very, very friendly.

No cracks about two-headed Tasmanians?

Oh, there was plenty of chiacking – oh yes, yes, indeed. But it was very good natured and I don't recall any, in the whole of my five years in the 2/12th Battalion, I don't recall any conflict between Queensland and Tasmania. There may have been but I can't recall it. It can't be ... it couldn't have been very evident.

Right. Now, was there more advanced training at this camp?

Oh, yes. The training was gradually being stepped up and becoming more technical. I think about this stage we were introduced to the new British Bren gun and then there was mortars and all the other arms that infantry battalions were using and we all received training in these things. So that everybody had a smattering or had a knowledge of all arms but later on we became specialised with the specialised platoons in those particular weapons.

(10.00) And you had not yet been drafted into the transport section?

No. At that stage I personally was a signaller. I don't know how I become to be a signaller but I was a signaller. It wasn't really until the advent of motor vehicles, of course, transport up to that point was horse drawn. It's probably a little peculiar to believe that we started off the war with horse drawn transport but that actually happened. That's how well prepared Australia was for the war. At any rate, with the advent of motor vehicles they were looking for people with some mechanical experience and I had told several people that I knew a little about motor vehicles and I eventually transferred to the transport – I can't remember the details but I seem to remember something about it. The CO's motor car broke down and they were looking for somebody to fix it and there's all the transport people were recruited more for their knowledge of horses and their horsemanship than their knowledge of motor vehicles. There was nobody in the ... well, I don't think there was anyone in transport that had much to do with motor vehicles at all. And I think I got a guernsey in the transport because I got the CO's motor car going.

I suppose he remembered you there after, do you think?

Well, I don't know. He's a stern old chap and I don't know that he did. I should tell you the story perhaps about what happened to the CO's motor car. Now he was issued with a new car. It was a 1938 model V8 – quite a good car in those days – and he couldn't understand why its performance was so poor. That he had ... his driver had to go down the gears to get up even the smallest hill. So he got me to have a look at it. I immediately

noticed that there was a plate between the carburettor and the manifold, a baffle plate – not a governor – just a plate that restricted the flow of petrol there and made the engine performance just dismal. So, all I did was took that plate out and he went away like a bomb and it was a good performing car and I got the name of being a whiz mechanic, the CO got his car operating at full capacity, and that was about the start of ... I ... We had a similar problem with nearly all of the vehicles that were issued to the battalion but by that time it was made known to me that they were put there for a purpose – to keep the speed down – so we compromised. We didn't take the plate out; we opened the hole in the baffle a little wider, I think, to give them an acceptable performance.

That was to save fuel, I suppose?

Not really, no. They didn't want people rushing around too fast in army vehicles. It wouldn't have saved fuel; I think it would have added to the fuel.

Just for the training, generally, by the time you got around to leaving Australia did you consider that you were well trained when you left and, in retrospect, do you think you were actually well trained?

No. Well, I don't know that we thought we were well trained because we'd only been ... we'd been in the army less than about six months. If we thought about it at all, and I don't recall thinking about it, I don't think we would have considered we weren't trained. We were certainly much more disciplined than when we started. But, no, I really can't answer that because I don't really know.

Did you do large scale exercises like recreating battlefield conditions and things?

Yes, yes. We started off in the usual way of platoon exercises – this is over the six months – then company exercises, then battalion exercises and by the time we went to go overseas we had been doing brigade exercises. So we were trained to the extent that we could take part in a brigade exercise which, I suppose, being on the way to being trained.

Was there anything in the training that stands out in your memory either as, perhaps, dangerous, horrifying or funny?

It was jolly hard going. Long marches – they gradually increased our march ... our route march distances until we were probably doing a twenty-five mile route march which was not that unusual. We'd also do some overnight bivouacs and that sort of thing. I lost the question now ... the question was ...

(15.00) Oh, were there any incidents that stand out as either being, you know, particularly amusing or even horrifying?

Nothing horrifying; I think it was all done certainly in good humour and I don't recall any dangerous practices in our training at that stage. Sure, we went to the rifle range but they were well conducted shooting exercises. I don't recall that we did a live ... did an exercise with live ammunition or even dud ammunition. I don't think up to that stage we'd actually done any ... exercises would be considered to have a dangerous element. We did later on,

in England, where we exercised with tanks and so on. But up to that stage, no, I don't recall any dangerous ... any dangerous situations. Naturally there'd be an occasional car crash and that sort of thing but I don't recall anybody being injured. Certainly no deaths in accidents – there may have been, I never recall them.

Right. And you were sent to England in May 1940.

Yes. We boarded the *Queen Mary* in Sydney Harbour on 5th May 1940 and the *Queen Mary* was part of a big convoy; the biggest convoy of the war up to that stage in terms of ship tonnage. We had all the big names of the British merchant marine: the *Queen Mary*, the *New Amsterdam*, ... oh, all the ships that were well known even at Hobart coming to collect apples and that sort of thing were pressed in. There was a brigade of Australians and a brigade of New Zealanders in the convoy and we weren't in the normal troop ship accommodation. For instance, we on the *Queen Mary*, they'd simply put in a couple of extra bunks in each cabin and there were 3,000. I was on the *Queen Mary* when we left Sydney and later in the war she was carting 16,000 from America to England. That will give you some idea of the luxury that we travelled in. And we all ate in three sittings in the dining room. We had a very pleasant voyage.

How did people feel at the time, you know, through feeling about where they were going, was there excitement, apprehension, ...?

Well, I guess there was. Ah, soldiers, I think, are inclined to the state of time and not think too much of the future. But we had training; mostly lectures and perhaps a bit of PT – there was ample room on the ship for this – also weapons training and stripping the weapons and assembling them and so on. That went on every day and we were kept reasonably busy. At night there was a wet canteen and reasonable quantities of beer and we used to have concerts and that sort of thing for entertainment. The life on the *Queen Mary* was pretty good compared to what we had later on.

And you called into South Africa on the way?

Yes. Well, actually we were destined for the Middle East and we got almost into the Red Sea when Italy came into the war, or showed signs she was coming into the war, and the naval people weren't too sure what to expect from the Italians and decided not to risk us going into the Middle East. So we came back round South Africa and stopped at Durban. In the meantime, I think, that ... I don't think even at that stage that they were too sure what they wanted to do with us. The records say that they wanted to send us to India to complete our training which would have kept us away from the Italian areas of influence. I think the British were keen to have us in England because things were at a pretty low ebb then and they won out and I understand the Australian Government weren't keen on us going to England. It was they who suggested India – I wouldn't be sure about that – but I think this is the situation. Anyway, we had about a week in South Africa while they assembled the required escorts and so on for us to go onto ... up into the Atlantic which was a pretty hot spot in that time and that was it.

(20.00) What were your impressions of South Africa?

Well, we played up a bit there. ... I don't recall any animosity or anything like that from the local people, even those that were obvious of a Dutch descent. But, I believe, there was a little bit of ill feeling against us and we didn't ...

Going back to the Boer War, do you think ...

I think so, yes. I'm no student of those scenes but I do recall some of the chaps saying that they got the cold shoulder from some of the civilians there. But I certainly never saw that and we relished the opportunity for a little time ashore. ... Together with two or three of my mates, we were invited to a couple's place for a meal and, you know, we enjoyed it thoroughly. But the boys did play up a bit in Capetown, so much so that on the way back they didn't want us to land there.

The drinking, fighting and that sort of thing, or ...?

No, I don't recall any actual fighting, no. No, more rowdiness than anything else. I recall one chap who jumped onto a horse drawn lorry. He pushed the poor black driver off and started to whip the horses up to speed and it was a brewery waggon I think and the jolly barrells were – empty or full I don't know – were jumping off as he went along. But things like that didn't endear us to the people of Capetown. In fact, I think they closed the town up; the shops closed up early in the afternoon because they were getting a bit rowdy.

How did you react to the South African system with the whites and the blacks?

Yes, well, I think that was partly, or one of the reasons, why they weren't very keen on us because we did tend to fraternise with the blacks and not keep the distance that they ... the white people of South Africa do keep with the blacks. I'm not talking about myself personally but the average Australian doesn't have a lot of prejudice, really, against ... he'll fraternise with anybody. I didn't ... I was not aware of any racial feelings or anything in South Africa – not personally – and I did mix with black; I mixed with white. If there was any there it went over my head, that's all I can say.

What then, perhaps, were the attitude of the Australians towards the white South Africans? Did they ... particularly as regards to the racial question?

I think at some levels there was a little bit of a feeling of perhaps the blacks were being treated not as well as they might have been. It was obvious in the corners in which they lived. Whites, all very well housed: the blacks, pitifully housed. And I think this did, perhaps, affect some of the chaps who saw that and they couldn't help ... that just came through in their attitude to the whites.

Okay. Now, when you got to Britain you went into camp in Wiltshire, was it?

Yes. We landed in northern ... in Gourock, which is just adjacent to Glasgow, and on the west coast and they immediately put us into trains as quick as they could and we set off for Salisbury Plains which was something like ... Brighton is here. There was a suitable area where troops to be encamped. It was used during the First World War, Australian

troops were at Salisbury Plains and we were allocated a position on Salisbury Plains called Lopcombe Corner, it's between Salisbury and Andover and we were very close to a RAF aerodrome – fighter aerodrome.

(25.00) Were you just by yourselves or with other ...?

Oh no, the whole brigade, yes. The brigade work ... when I say outside I mean the brigade because the other two battalions of the brigade which is the 9th and 10th were never very far away from us.

But not with British troops?

Ah, not with British troops. No, not at Salisbury Plains but, of course, there were British troops not very far away being the south of England and an invasion is expected, there were just thousands and thousands of troops. We ... our position was a defensive one. We were to defend the aerodrome in the event of a fascist landing, that sort of thing. So we did have a defensive role, not just a camp. It was a ... we were part of the defences of England.

And you say there was, at that time, a real fear of an invasion?

Well, they didn't know. See Dunkirk was ... stragglers were still coming over from Dunkirk but when we entrained at Garroch we were virtually getting into the trains that the evacuees from Dunkirk had been brought north. They brought them north because they were without equipment and not organised and they brought the Dunkirk evacuees north and we went back down south. It posed a few questions in the mind of our blokes to see trainload after trainload of all nationalities – British, French, Belgium – coming this way and we're going that way. We didn't quite know what to think.

And it made you apprehensive that, you know ... we weren't doing too well.

Well, I don't think there was any fear and that sort of thing but naturally the exercise our mind with they're all going that way and we're going that way. But the fact of the matter is that we were a equipped, organised and possibly one of the few complete brigades available in England at that time.

Either English or Australian.

Yes, probably.

How did you regard England, you wouldn't have been there but, you know, with the Australian education system ...

England was a lovely place for us all because we landed there in the beginning of summer – or it would have been the spring, I guess – the place looked lovely and with the proximity to the big cities, you know, the leave and so on everybody was delighted to be there. I don't think anybody was complaining about the location.

END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2 – SIDE A

In England were you doing more ... further training or, you said you were more or less on defensive combat?

Yes, we were certainly training, yes. In fact, we probably were training harder in England than we had before.

British instructors or ...?

Occasionally, but not generally. No, it was more exercises and the physical fitness aspect was being kept up. And, of course, we were then very quickly fully equipped with the full battle order because, as far as we knew, we could have had to battle the Germans so naturally the brigades that were in that defensive area in the south of England probably received all the equipment that they could possibly get. I think we were within a few weeks of landing in Lopcombe Corner equipped with our full war establishment in case we had to go to battle.

So there wasn't any sense that you might be posted overseas or something, you were quite busy ...?

Not from there, no. No, I don't know that anybody thought beyond we're here and that we might have a battle on our hands any tick of the clock and I don't really think that we cared much. I reckoned a lot of the boys would have welcomed a try out. When you train for something the culmination of the training is to try yourself out.

Yes. And there was a sense of wanting to get in ....

I think that it would have been welcomed by some of us.

Yes. And there were a couple of smaller engagements with enemy aircraft in Britain?

Yes, yes. We ... a Dornier, having dropped some bombs on the Wallop aerodrome, flew over our camp and sprayed us with machine gun fire. We did cop a little bit of damage in our lines, in the 12th Battalion lines, but no casualties. But in the other brigades, in the 10th Battalion, somebody did get wounded and that was probably the first casualty – non-fatal casualty – in the war as far as the second AIFs were concerned because that was around about July 1940.

I notice in the summary I've got here that you were visited by Menzies and by Wavell, how did ...

Not Menzies. Churchill.

Churchill, oh.

Churchill and, I don't recall ... the VIPs who visited us in England were the King – King George VI, Churchill. There was a couple of other British Army generals and chief of the general staff, I think. If you want it I would have it if you wanted to know who they were,

but some high ranking British Army people visited us in addition to the King and Churchill.

(5.00) How did you react to visits from such notable people as the King and Churchill?

I think we were quite pleased about it. The King and ... these are all the, of course – in our book, there's Churchill – they were the two most notable people. I think we were very pleased to see them. Churchill gave us quite a rousing talk. Not so much a pep talk as a welcome – a welcoming talk – and I think everybody was pleased to have him talk to them because he was an outstanding world figure even at that stage of the war.

Right oh. And you were in that position in Britain for about four or five months?

Oh, about that, yes. And we had plenty of leave. As time went on it became evident that the Germans were not going to follow through. One little interesting thing about our situation there was they would take groups of us into various parts of the country just to parade round and make it look as if there were more Australians than actually were there. And I believe it had an effect on the Germans' thinking because their spies – of which, of course, there were plenty of them about – reported considerably more colonial troops and British troops than actually were there. In fact, from the post ... the writings we've had access to, the Germans thought there were just double the number of divisions available for the defence of Britain to what there actually were. So it must have had some effect.

Was that also to boost the morale of the home population?

I would say, yes, also.

So then, the embarkation for the Middle East, did you know it was coming?

Ah, oh, I think so, yes. We were pretty sure the war in Europe was sort of winding down that we knew we'd be going off somewhere else.

And you didn't ... when you actually embarked, did you know where you were going?

I don't think for sure, no. No, I don't think we knew. Eventually, I think we knew or we were told.

Well, Egypt it was, wasn't it?

Egypt, yes.

What was it like when you disembarked in Egypt?

Well, quite a different thing to Britain or Australia for that matter. Still different and I think everybody was pretty pleased to be getting close to the scene of action. By this time we had been training for over twelve months and we thought it was time that we, you

know, tried ourselves out. I think by and large they were fairly keen to get into an action of some sort.

Mmm. It was sometime before you did ...?

Well, not as long as – I'm not too sure of the actual time – but I don't think it was much more than a month, two months at the outside between the time we landed in Egypt to when we were up in Tobruk. I don't think it was much more than a couple of months.

Right. There is a note here about the men being fed up with exercises and so forth?

Yes, well, that would be right too. The climate and the condition – dust and heat – weren't conducive to happy soldiering, not after the pleasant countryside of England where we did our exercises. So there's bound to be a few grizzles there. That, coupled with the fact, I think, everybody was getting a little bit sick of the continual exercises and no action.

And when you went to Tobruk, you know, you knew you were going into the thick of it, didn't you?

Oh yes, we did. In actual fact we were packed up ready to go to Greece. At that stage the 6th Division were in Greece and, I think, already in action. And we had been warned not ... our CO had been warned that we were to be ready to embark for Greece and, in fact, we were packed up to go to Greece when the orders were changed and we were told to ... we're heading for Tobruk, we were still on that sea voyage for the bulk of the battalions but road transport went up by road and I went into Tobruk by road.

(10.00) But this was because Greece was falling or had fallen?

I think partly that but also the Germans had started to come down from the west, you see. And I think it held the 9th Division up in their far outposts and they just wanted support for the 9th Division. A combination of both, I suppose. There just wasn't enough troops to go round so they just had to ... um, put it where they thought to do the most good.

And your duties themselves, by now you're firmly on with the motorised transport and perhaps, you know, in Egypt and moving up to Tobruk, what exactly were your duties?

Well, I was as a lance corporal was in charge of the four vehicles that were allocated to a rifle company and every other company had a similar set up. A lance corporal, who was firstly a driver mechanic, he was responsible for the maintenance of the vehicles and also to a certain extent for the drivers. So that the OC of the company, instead of having to deal with four or five people, he simply dealt with the lance corporal in charge of the transport of that company. And that was my job virtually ... or had been for some time.

Did you have problems because of the sand and the ... so forth in these ... conditions?

Yes, well, it was a continuing problem: our vehicles were certainly not designed to operate in those dusty conditions. Air cleaning equipment for the engine was practically

useless. All right possibly for England or Australia for that matter. But in the dust storms, well, to give you some idea, we were lucky to get 3,000 miles out of a new V8 or Ford – a Ford V8 – or a Chev six-cylinder engine. Three thousand miles and it was clapped out and we were ...

Presumably the new parts weren't all that easy to find?

Well, at the battalion position we weren't aware of, because if a vehicle went on the blink it went further back. We did nothing except running repairs. So, if there was a problem, we didn't know about it.

But you always got replacement vehicles?

Yes. We were never short of vehicles in the Middle East, I think mainly because we had a surfeit of captured Italian trucks and so on. It took a lot of the load off our own vehicles, not so much in the battalion but in the whole battle area. Every enemy truck that was used made it so much easier for our transport.

Oh. But you didn't have any Italian trucks yourselves?

No, no. Mainly because they were far bigger than the ... we needed.

Yes.

But it would be rear echelons, the ASE, and that sort of thing, they used a lot of Italian vehicles and, of course, it meant that there were more vehicles available to be allocated to us. And whichever way you look at it, an Italian vehicle was an extra vehicle for the whole Australian Army or the whole Middle East Army.

Now, upon arriving in Tobruk, were you aware of the dire situation that Tobruk was to be in?

Well, yes and no. We knew the Germans were coming down because a similar situation existed to that in which we arrived in England. We were going up towards Tobruk and there was truck load after truck load of other troops coming back towards Egypt and we were asking ourselves the same question, that, you know, `What's going on here? We're going up and they're coming back'. There were all sorts of British Army, a lot of Libyans and all sorts of people and some Australian troops too were going back, usually in disarray and usually singing out, `There's millions of them. They're coming'. It didn't help our morale very much. And within ... when we were within a day's travel of Tobruk it was obvious the Gerries were around because they were out in the desert with some of their armoured fighting vehicles and having a few shots at us. And we had some troops of the Horse R2 – the Royal Horse Artillery – travelling with our convoy and they used to unlimber and fire a few shots to keep them at a distance otherwise they would come in and start peppering us. They kept 'em back out of range of their guns simply by dropping a few shells around and they'd clear off back. But for the last day you could see away on the horizon the dust kicked up by armoured vehicles and we knew that they were Gerries because we were firing at them – they had to be.

(15.00) And when you reached Tobruk itself, what sort of position did ...?

Well, things were in a little bit of a stew there because the 9th Division hadn't arrived back at Tobruk where they were retired to. The orders were to retire to Tobruk and make a stand there. In the meantime just sort of slowing the advancing Germans and Italians up. And they were about fifteen or twenty miles beyond Tobruk so we were in Tobruk virtually the only organised defenders for the first twenty-four hours anyway. And they had us in, I'd say, half a dozen different positions in Tobruk where they thought an attack was coming from and they'd rush us there and that attack would either not happen and we'd be moved somewhere else. But we didn't actually get into holts with the Germans fortunately until the 9th Division had come back within the fortress of Tobruk and had manned the defences of Tobruk. It was luckily for us, at that stage before the Germans actually put on a big attack. They could have taken Tobruk much earlier had they known the situation. All they needed would be enough to have rolled our 80th Brigade over.

And, again, your actual duties in Tobruk were continuing to operate the vehicles?

Except that we weren't with the company. Our job changed a little in as much as, although we still serviced our company, we weren't with the company. Our job was to keep ammunition up to them, take their food – food and ammunition – and we'd do practically nothing during the day. All this had to be done at night and that ... say our position changed a little. We just weren't with the company. We were back at the echelon waiting to get loaded up and then we'd out to the company, which was, of course, under the observation of the enemy and take the food, ammunition, whatever – whatever was needed – things like mines, barbed wire – anything that was needed by the troops in the front-line or the second line of defence. There were two lines of defence in Tobruk: the red line and the blue line. But, wherever they were, the same situation prevailed. Our job was to get what they needed and get it there in the hours of darkness.

And how did the ... your friends, the men you worked with, did their feelings change now towards ... with the prospect of battle imminent?

Yes, I guess they did. We soon got heartily sick of that. I think everybody was still anxious to try themselves out in an action situation but once having tried yourself out and proved to yourself that you weren't going to run when things were hot, you thought, `Well, I've been there and done that and I'd sooner be out of this'.

The ... so, being on the transport you were never actually on the front-lines of the defences?

Well, only to the extent ... at night time.

If you went there, yes.

But, we were still called, well, not actually called, we were entitled to volunteer for fighting patrols and that sort of thing and our transport platoon – it had at least two tours of duty – I think three tours of duty – on fighting patrols and we did, in fact, for a period hold a section of the line. So we weren't entirely remote from the actual battle areas or

action. But as far as fighting patrols were concerned, this was a voluntary thing. But when the ... at one stage it was compulsory because the Italians broke through our lines and everybody was ordered into the front-line as a candidate to remove the Italians. And having removed them, we were kept there for three weeks to ensure they didn't come back again. Now, there were cooks, storemen, transport drivers – all sorts, in that group that made up the counter-attacking force that drove the Italians back out and then held the line for, I think, three weeks I think was the time we were there. We dug new positions and just held on until things quietened down a bit.

(20.00) Can you tell me some details about the actual counter-attack?

Um ... Yes, well, ah, B Echelon, which is virtually the service portion of an infantry battalion where all the stores and the food and cooks are, that was in a wadi not so very far from the salient where our rifle companies held a position. And during a fairly hectic night – we were not actually at the cannon's mouth you may as well say – but even in our wadi we were getting shelled. The word came that the Italians had broken through our defences and had taken up position inside the perimeter and as it was our area it was our responsibility to get rid of them. So I don't know whose idea it would be but the transport officer was told by the CO to get men together and get rid of the Italians, which he did do and in a very able manner. It was in the dark and we were very quickly divided up into, I think, four sections – four platoons – and we had all sorts with us. We'd never actually worked together as a team – as a fighting team – but then this is the test of training – you can do your job no matter where you are if you're properly trained. So, egged on by the transport officer, we made our attack on the Italian position who, by this time, were consolidating – they'd broken through – consolidating and my first knowledge of where they were ... all we were told, `Up there. Get stuck into it' sort of thing. My first knowledge of where they were is a machine gun started firing right at my feet. I got such a shock I didn't realise that they were so close. And I went to ground to gather my wits and to work out who was who and where they were. And I did think of a grenade which I had in my pouch and I popped it over ... I was right up against – when I went to ground – I was right up against a stone wall about that high from which the machine gun was firing and it still continued to fire even though I'm down here.

He hadn't seen you, probably?

Well, probably hadn't seen me and if they had they'd have a job to get ... they'd have to stand up to get their machine gun down. I was fortunate to that extent, I suppose, and I threw a grenade. As soon as it exploded I knew that I'd thrown it too far but the next one I just popped it over the thing. That was the end of that machine gun. Then by that time we were all sort of on a face; we were attacking and we had about a couple of hundred Ities rounded up and it was just beginning to get daylight and we sent them back and we virtually took over the position that they'd started to dig – except we turned them round the other way. Over in about half an hour. No time to think whether you're scared or not. The job was done and we were all pretty happy about it. We had a few casualties but considering the unprepared nature of our attack, we were lucky that we didn't cop more. I don't think the Italians were too sure who we were anyway until we were on top of them

because I don't recall any shots or shells or anything going near me until we were actually amongst the Italians.

Mmm. And then you took a number prisoner?

Yes, I don't know the number. There was quite ... I'd say maybe a couple of hundred. There was also several hundred who cleared out and in the daylight – as it was just coming dark – you could see them – quite a heap of them – heading back towards their own lines. So our attacks virtually scattered them. We gave a ... took a few prisoners and the rest just split out and got back to their own lines.

(25.00) Did you come face to face with the Germans or was it Italians facing you?

No, not on that occasion, nor on any occasion did I come in face to face with the Germans. With the Italians on that occasion. We certainly had Germans firing at us when we were in that position. Over the three weeks they'd – the Germans – had a position up on the rise and they sort of held a line that the battalions, from what I can make out, were brought in just to make a break through, you see, and they weren't actually the troops holding the Salient. They were Germans up there, and we used to snipe at one another ... a little bit during the day, not too much.

What was the attitude of the Australians towards the Germans and the Italians? Was it different?

Oh, yes. It would be a little different, yes. They respected the Germans; rather despised the Italians because the Italians weren't anything like the soldiers that the Germans were and, for that reason, I think the Italians were despised. Also, the Italians were inclined to be a bit on the sneaky side. The group that surrendered with white flags going everywhere, one of them came out with a revolver and shot one of our section leaders, you know, under the cover of his white flag – well, the Germans would never do that.

What happened to that Italian?

That Italian?

Mmm.

Well, I don't think he ... he was jobbed, that's for sure. And I didn't see it happen. I saw [McCulloch], the section leader, fall and I spoke to him after it. But one of the chaps who was with me, he saw the Italian who fired the ... it was only a revolver he had, you see. And he went over and he knocked him down and he was about to shoot him and I stopped him, because I was section leader too, you see. And I stopped him and I didn't know the reason he was going to shoot him. He was obviously going to shoot him. He knocked him down and he got his rifle and, you know, about to shoot him and I stopped him. And I didn't know at that stage that that was the Italian that had shot Jack [McCulloch], otherwise I may not have interfered. Having interfered then, sort of the Italians got up and being hustled back, so I'd say he got away Scot free that day – I'd say he did.

McCulloch wasn't killed though?

Yes, he didn't die there and then but he was shot through the ... there with a pistol and apparently it penetrated his bowel and, you know, in those conditions, he ended up dying through that. Probably septicaemia or something like that. The wound itself in today's ... with good medical treatment would have been fixed very smartly, which it wasn't in that case.

> Generally, was there ... were wounds well treated or was there a problem in Tobruk with it?

Oh I think once they got them back to the casualty clearing stations, from there on I think the medical side of things was pretty competent – not near as good as it is today, but pretty competent.

END OF TAPE 2 – SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2 – SIDE B

> So this might be a slightly unfair question but if you had known that that bloke had shot your fellow you say you might not have interfered, what, do you think you would've?

No, I wouldn't have. No. If I had known ... I thought that Kelly was just taking out his fight on the Italian; I thought he was going to shoot the lot of them. But, no, I wouldn't have. I think in the circumstance he deserved to be shot because he had surrendered and from ... he pulled out a weapon under the cover of the group that was around him. That, in our books, is not fair play.

> Are you aware of any other incidents where prisoners were mistreated or shot there or perhaps even later on in ...?

No, not prisoners. See, he really wasn't a prisoner at that stage. He was just coming in to be taken prisoner. So any act that he did – he did it still not as a prisoner. He's not a prisoner until he's virtually in our charge.

> Yes.

Yes, you're probably referring to, like, on the fighting patrol about ... an Italian being bayonetted. Did you read that?

> No, no.

No. On the fighting patrol that we were on, we were a mile outside Tobruk, and we had roused some Italians out of their position and as they were running a couple of them were brought down by rifle fire and when we got up to them, one of them was bayonetted. Our objective in going out there was to put the fear of God ... the Lord into them and, you know, we were virtually told to bayonet them. That may not have been ...

> When you were saying you were told to by your ...

Only by our immediate commander who was a lieutenant. He said, `Bayonet the bastards'. And you've got to bear in mind that this was an attack to put the fear of the Lord into – I've said this before, I know – put the fear of the Lord into the attackers or whoever we happened to strike. And maybe it was just right in the light of the attitudes today, maybe it's not. But ... and we were told to bayonet. I didn't bayonet, I couldn't. But the chap coming behind me did ... drove the bayonet into his throat whether or not it killed him or not, I don't know. But the possibility is that he was killed.

Was there any discussion amongst the men about this?

No, I don't recall any discussion at all about it. It was just one of the things that was done on a fighting patrol. I don't recall any criticism nor am I criticising the chap who did it because he did what he was told to do and it was done with an objective. And it was done by both sides, don't worry about that. In those circumstances where the objective is to make them fear us, or, vice versa, to put the boots on the other foot. Things are done in the heat of battle that are not supposed to be done under the Geneva Convention.

Now you were withdrawn from Tobruk. Was that while the seige was still under way?

Yes, the seige was still going. We ... there was a complete division of Australians in Tobruk, the 9th Division, plus the 18th Brigade, our brigade. Now the 18th Brigade was part – at that time – part of the 7th Division which was in Syria. Now, Blamey wanted to get the troops virtually organised, say, one division here and one division there, not spread all over the Middle East and that was what the reason we came out first so that we could join with the rest of the 7th Division.
(5.00) The other two brigades of the 7th Division and we were the first to come out of Tobruk. The 9th Division did ... was withdrawn also but possibly not for the same reason that we were. We were withdrawn to join our division. All but one battalion of the 9th Division were withdrawn while the seige was still on and that battalion actually came out – or fought its way out – when the seige was temporarily lifted. In one of the attacks from Egypt there was a small corridor opened and the 13th Battalion got out through that. They came out by land. The rest of us, of course, came out by sea.

Was there a sense of relief because you were ...?

Yes, oh, yes. We'd had enough of there. We didn't ... I didn't see any objectors ... no.

Sorry.

No objectors to coming out. No, we were looking forward to putting a bit of time in the flesh spots. We were there for almost six months and, a long time on hard rations and practically no water. It was pretty tough living.

Was hygiene, disease, a problem?

Not really because we had a very ... a very knowledgeable medical officer who was a Tasmanian, Peter Braithwaite. The Braithwaite family is well known in the medical world here and he was most insistent you know – ridged rules of hygiene and I think that we

profited from his attitude to it. He was fanatical about it. Nothing uncovered. I don't think that our health was all that bad in that time. In fact, given the condition, I think we were pretty good. But a lot of it is due to Peter Braithwaite's urging that hygiene be so strictly observed.

Right. Now you were withdrawn to Turkish–Syrian border?

Yes. Initially we came out to Alexandria and we were accorded something that is rarely given army units. We were accorded a sail past by the Royal Navy as we came into Alexandria Harbour. They dressed ship and cheered us as we came through and I believe it is possibly the first time, certainly the first time that Australian troops had received such a distinction and I don't think too many British Troops have had the same. So we were very proud of the fact that we received a full dress sail past by the Mediterranean fleet.

Did you have anything to do with Polish troops at Tobruk?

Oh, only for a little. They relieved us and they came in first of all an advanced party and quite a bit of speculation was rife as to who these gentlemen were with their British Army outfits and talking a strange language but, eventually, of course, everybody knew that they were Polish troops. And eventually the bulk of the Polish troops came and they simply came ... a platoon would come to a platoon and they'd be shown around our position, what we were doing, then we just left them to it.

There are many Poles in Hobart, of course.

Yes, oh yes. And we have a great rapport with the Polish members.

Okay, we're starting to talk about ... um ... the time in Turkey.

Yes.

After Tobruk.

Yes, well, the whole division of which we were a member by this time we had joined up with the other two brigades of the division and we were ... and allocated a defensive position in the event of the Turks joining with the Germans, with the Axis and either attacked us themselves or landed and attacked down through Turkey. This was a possibly at that time, I understand. So we simply took up defensive positions for most of the whole border between Syria and Turkey.

(10.00) We travelled up there in motor transport from Palestine – only about three ... three or four days journey, I think – up through Lebanon and into Syria. Our first ... there were other troops had been there before us, other allied troops – some British ... a British division and I think a three Czech division was there before us, but I didn't see anything of them – we just were sent to take up a position right on the border, a place called Djerablous, that is on the Euphrates River where it runs out of Turkey. The place ... an ancient place, possibly even back to bible times.

And our first contact with the Turks was made when members of our company just sauntered over towards the guard posts. Well, the Turks turned out the guard complete

with a machine gun and so on because they weren't too sure of our intentions. Anyway, we were unarmed as it happened – I wasn't in the group but I was an observer from way back – but they sent a few gifts over to the sergeant of the guard and it wasn't very long before we were on very good terms and we used to play football across the Turkish border. Kick the football over to them and they kick it back to us. We got ... we used to practically feed them because we were on good rations; they were on very poor rations. Their main staple were beans and they used to have bean curds for breakfast and chopped beans for lunch and whole beans for their evening meal – that sort of thing. So they relished a tin of bully and we weren't all that mad about it. No ... we ended up on very good terms. And, I'm only talking about that particular post. But, of course, this is going on all the way along the Turkish border, probably right out to the sea. But I don't know of any of the post that didn't get on well with the Turks.

And you said they were aware of the ANZAC business?

Yes, yes. Yes, obviously were, yes.

Was it discussed between you?

Well, communication wasn't all that good because there was practically no English on their side but through interpreters we gathered that they knew about the Australians, yes. And, in fact, one Turkish gentleman – elderly – who came up on a crutch, very proudly informed us that the ANZAC had shot his leg off. And he was ... `Very good, Australia very good' and he pointed where his leg was shot off. I couldn't quite see how he could be so pleased but ... there was no animosity there at all.

Right, and it was from there that you were recalled back to ...?

To Australia, yes.

Now that was Prime Minister Curtin was it, withdrawing troops for the defence of Australia?

Actually we left the Middle East to go to ... to fight ... to possibly go to Burma or ... I'm not to sure when we left the Middle East whether our destination had been fixed or whether we were simply being withdrawn to a more strategic position in which to engage the Japanese. The fact remains that we did – the battalion – did go to India and we spent six weeks at Colombo before we actually set sail for Australia. And although I certainly wasn't privy to what was going on, reading history it appears that Curtin wanted us to come back to Australia; Churchill wanted us to go to Burma or to engage the Japanese ... or to help protect India in other words, but Curtin apparently won out and to our joy we set sail for Australia.

Did the men know what was likely to happen to them or ...?

No. No, except at the highest level, I would say, there was really no knowledge as to what was going to happen to us. I wasn't ... we didn't influence it one way or the other, I don't think. It was a case that we just do whatever was told.

What were the rumours if there were rumours?

Well, I really wasn't with the bulk of the battalion and I was in India on the ... at a place called Cochin on the east ... on the west coast. Whereas the battalion, or the brigade really, or, in fact, I think nearly all of the division were in Colombo. So I wasn't really on the spot to remember what the rumours were. I was with the boats loaded with the division's transports and we were simply marking time on the west coast of India to see which way we went. So, apparently, it was a bit of a toss-up as to which ... nobody seemed to be sure. I would say at that stage the strategic position was being monitored and we would be sent wherever we were needed.

(15.00) How aware were you of this strategic position?

I don't recall having any clue as to what it was about. I knew we were off somewhere to fight the Japanese but I had no idea of where we were going.

You knew the Japanese had come right down?

Oh yes, we knew. But, the news, we had the up-to-date news. There is no question at all about that. So ... and, sure, we knew we were going to fight the Japanese but just where I don't think anybody, at army level anyway, would know where we were likely to end up because the Japanese were still advancing and I don't suppose plans could be made to send us to a specific spot.
I have heard it said at one stage we were to go to Sumatra where a stand was going to be made and, in fact, a few of our ... an advanced party from our brigade was gathered up and sent to Sumatra and they subsequently became prisoners of the Japanese. So, I suppose it is fair guesswork to say that at one stage we were expecting to go to Sumatra. Maybe events, you know, overtook the decision and it was no good sending us to Sumatra if Sumatra was already lost.

Mmm. And when you returned to Australia you came to where?

Well, we landed in Adelaide and they sent us home on leave. We had a few weeks leave and then we travelled back to various camps in Australia, gradually working our way north. Our first camp was in Tenterfield just on the border of Queensland and New South Wales, then Kilcoy in Queensland, and then we left from Kilcoy to go to New Guinea. All this over a period, I suppose, of ... about five or six months. We arrived back in 1942, early in the year, and we were in New Guinea about September.
We, of course, were training and being equipped for jungle warfare and that sort of thing. It wasn't just a matter of waiting around as is usual with a home battalion, you are training all the time. You are all the time getting ready for whatever crops up. And we embarked at Brisbane on a ship and we knew we were going to New Guinea but we didn't really know where until we were almost in New Guinea waters and then some of the locals had been to New Guinea ... some of our boys who had been to New Guinea, recognised a few landmarks and were able to tell us that we were ... Somebody recognised Samarai Island when we were about a day out. He said, `Oh, we're going into Milne Bay' and that's where we headed.

And what was the feeling at home when you were on leave and within the battalion about the Japanese advance? Did people really expect them to come all the way to Australia?

I didn't. I didn't get that impression. I don't think us troops were very worried about it. We were fairly confident we'd stop them. I just can't recall even thinking about the attitude of the civilian population. That's what you are referring to?

Mmm.

Because bearing in mind that I came home to Tasmania where the war had been so remote down here that you wouldn't know there was a war on. The feelings of the battalion who came from Queensland might have been a little different, particularly north Queensland. But I have no recollection of anybody – any of the civilian people – even appearing to be apprehensive of what the Japs were going to do. Because, bear in mind, that they were only just in New Britain. They ... at that stage New Guinea, the whole island of New Guinea, was between us – between Australia – and where the Japs were. It wasn't until later on that they effected a landing on the mainland... on New Guinea.

(20.00) Well, could you tell me about the activities that you were involved in in Milne Bay?

Yes, well, we knew we were going up there to ... as a garrison, we did finally know that we were going to be landed somewhere and it turned out to be Milne Bay and we landed right in Milne Bay. And conditions there were so different to what we'd been used to. You know, desert, even India was dry, and so this was just continuously wet and mud and we just were not, really, equipped or experienced in handling this sort of situation. It was an incredibly wet place: possibly the wettest place in New Guinea. And you couldn't ... motor transport – we just had to forget about motor transport. The transport drivers and all transport personnel were converted into a commando platoon simply because there was no role at all for motor transport. The transport was either on your own back or there were some native carriers that helped with the, you know, portage and stuff. But the roads were in such shocking conditions that we never had anything to handle it. Bren gun carriers, two-wheel drive vehicles were absolutely useless. They might just as well have been left back in Australia. There were a few four-wheel drive vehicles that could get around after a fashion, usually pushing great waves of mud in front of them. And we got there and the American construction people were there building an airstrip. They had completed one airstrip which was operational, luckily, and were working on two more. We were there, I don't think it was much more than a week, and the Japanese landed too. We were right in the bay and they landed along the shore a little bit and they were met ... Oh, preceding us, before we were there, there was a brigade of Militia, the 7th Brigade, and they had been there possibly two or three weeks before us. So when the Japanese landed they would first make contact with them and the strategy was that the Militia were to slow up the Japanese. Let them retire under pressure to a prepared defensive position at one of the airstrips. When they reached that it was our role to stage a counter-attack. The 18th Brigade were to attack through the 7th Brigade lines. They had a defensive position on one side of the airstrip, the Japanese were on the other side of the airstrip.

Inland, it was so wet, it was either steep mountains like that or bogs which they didn't think they could get anything round at all, certainly no transport. As it happens some parties of Japs did get round through that morass. Anyway, the battle at Milne Bay was nearly a classic battle. The enemy lands; made contact with ... by elements ... advanced elements of the defenders; the enemy gradually push those elements back to the main defensive position where they are virtually stopped; and before they've got time to organise a greater pressure on the defenders, the reserve troops make a counter-attack. And that's virtually what happened. That was Cyril Close, the general commanding the place, that was his strategy, and that's virtually what happened. It was, as I say, almost a classic case of a defence strategy working according to the book.
So we passed through the 7th Brigade; crossed over the strip under the fire from the Japanese; and met them, routed them; they scattered, and from then on it was a mopping up operation. We were just chasing them. They made two or three stands before they eventually evacuated. But we, the 12th Battalion, had led the counter-attack and we sort of got the Japs moving then the 9th Battalion came on behind us and they kept them moving. And I think it was seven days by the time the Japs landed to ... when they accepted the fate and evacuated.
Well, that's the broad outline of what happened at Milne Bay. But, of course, personal experiences go into a little more detail than that.

(25.00) Well, would you like to go into some more detail?

Well, I'll tell what happened to me personally without any regard to what the battalion was doing. Well, I would have come over the strip with my company –Headquarter Company. We were with the 3rd Company over because Don Company were first over then A and B Company then Headquarter Company. The Commando Platoon was virtually attached to Headquarter Company – it was just a sort of a loose platoon. And our job, once we got over the strip, was to do scrub bashes, they called it, on each side of the track. We'd go through looking for parties of Japanese you see and a few were encountered. When we came over the strip my first impression was a lot of dead Japanese, which they were, and I was very keen to get myself a few Japanese souvenirs. So I grabbed myself a classy looking sword and stuck it in my pack; a Luger type Japanese pistol, so I put it in my pack; the biggest pair of field-glasses I could, and I got all these hanging over me and within half an hour word came back that people were being sniped by the Japanese and they were paying particular attention to people with swords sticking out of their packs or things hanging, obvious Japanese, probably hanging around. So I got rid of them. I did hang onto the pistol but I got rid of the binoculars. Anyway, we were scrub bashing up all that day and striking a few Japanese stranglers. At the end of the day we took up a position with our backs to the sea, right alongside a little river – the Gama River – and we were going to spend the night there in a bivouac situation, like a boxed defence. The sea was there; we had a line up there; line there, and a line there – a company on each one: Headquarter Company, C Company, B Company; the road is here. Getting on towards dark and everybody is settling in knowing they are going to have to spend the night in a sort of resting defensive position with your weapons handy and it started to drizzle. So one chap, fortunately, thought he'd get a few fronds off that tree, this coconut tree. So he got up the coconut tree and he gets up round about, I suppose, twenty

feet and he looks down the track and he says, he says, `There's a whole lot of boongs coming up here'. And there was another chap who's on an elevated position across the other side of the road, a listening post, and he says, `Boongs be buggered' – he said – `They're Japanese'.

END OF TAPE 2 – SIDE B

START OF TAPE 3 – SIDE A

Are you right?

Yes. So, from his vantage point, he saw the Japanese at a distance of maybe, oh, fifty to 100 yards. But we were warned they were coming. And he slid down, in fact, he dropped the machete he had cutting the frond, dropped it on top of a bloke and nearly skittled him. But he slid down the tree himself, he said, `Japs coming; Japs coming'. That went down the line like wildfire. Everybody was as quiet as a mouse. And the Japs come up, not suspecting anything, their rifles slung over their shoulders – they were laughing and joking. And they come right along in front of us and when their leading ..., there was about 400 there – we estimated 400, could have been more – when they reached the river which they had to ford they sort of bunch up. The leading blokes, you know, a bit reluctant to get their feet wet I suppose and at that moment somebody ... no order was given to fire, but everybody had a ... drawn a beat on them and they just poured fire into that mob of Japs who were so close they couldn't miss them. There were 110 Japanese were counted by our [I–sergeant] next morning, dead. Lord knows how many of them were wounded. By this time it was practically dark.
Well, I think, that ambush in my opinion was what knocked the Japanese souls right in. They received such a thrashing in that one hit that they never had the heart to go on any more. They tried several times during the night to break into our bivouac. In fact, they did get through our lines once and they bayonetted a couple of our chaps but they paid with their lives because they were dispatched inside our perimeter. Anyway, we were stood to all night and I think they either tried three or four charges to get through us but without success and when daylight came they cleared out all making back towards where they had first landed.
As far as I can see, that was the start. They certainly weren't defeated until that actually happened. That's my personal experience up to that point.

How ... the jungle warfares must have been completely different to the ...?

Oh, yes, yes.

Was it more nerve-racking?

I'd say so, yes. Yes, particularly when you're walking along and you don't whether the next tree ... a Jap could come out as close as four or five feet from you and if he's waiting for you, you know, he certainly has the advantage. Oh no, that was a very sticky time. I can ... I was fortunate that I got out after Milne Bay because I was getting malaria every once and a while and they didn't reckon I'd be much of a ... I'd be a liability to them getting malaria about every three weeks. In many respects I'm sorry I missed out on the

best of the campaign but on the other hand I may not have survived because things got much stickier later on.

(5.00) Did people's nerve crack ...?

Well, I think we were all certainly affected by the nervous strain and there was things happening in the jungle that weren't noticeably so in the desert. I mean, a lot of our men were shot by our own people because of the trigger-itchy aspect and, you know, it couldn't be helped. You had to be very, very careful, particularly after dark, where you went. The best thing was to just stay put. But patrols going out and coming back in a different section to where they went out, were fired on, and in some cases we had casualties.

And what was the attitude of the men towards the Japanese compared with, say, the Germans?

Well, I think that we absolutely hated the Japanese. 'Cause on our walk up to that bivouac area I was telling you about we saw the result of their treatment of some of the Militia boys they'd caught and some natives. There were some of the 7th Brigade members who had been tied to a tree with single – I saw this with my own eyes – and they had obviously been bayonetted, all ... marked all over their body – dead, of course. There was a native women there with her breast cut off ... there was a ... dead. There was a native boy with his hair – I never learnt until later that it had been cut off ... been burnt off with a flame thrower. I thought he had just been shaved, that's what it looked like, but his hair had been burnt off with a flame thrower. Well, those things didn't endear the Japanese to our boys. And everybody was seeing that because they ... it was right alongside the track and everybody that had been along the track had a full view of it – the Japanese treatment of prisoners of war and civilians.

Were there reciprocations made by the Australian troops?

Well, there was only one Japanese taken prisoner at Milne Bay to my knowledge and he only survived because they needed a Japanese to question. I don't think there was any question about taking prisoners. A few ... I didn't see them myself but some wounded Japanese were put on stretchers to be taken back to a clearing station and as soon as they got out of sight they were simply tipped off the stretchers.

And you were sent back to Australia after ...?

Yes, and ... at Milne Bay. I came back in the hospital ship and I went to hospital for ... and recuperation depot, I can't think what they call it now and I went back again – even though my papers were marked not to be sent back to the tropics again – I found my way ... on my way back to New Guinea but not for quite sometime after that. I was sent home on leave and I had quite a stay at home on leave and I was pretty fit and I went back through the army system and they put me on a draft to join the battalion which had been home, had been refitted and sent back to a different part of New Guinea – to the Finisterre Ranges. And I was on my way to join them in the Finisterre Ranges but I never got there. I got as far as ... I went up the Ramu Valley by plane, two or three landing grounds there

and ended up at the base of Shaggy Ridge ready to join the battalion and I was delirious again with a temperature of 106 – it is only possible to get a temperature that high in New Guinea and not die – next thing I know I'm on the plane and on my way back. So I just went up for the ride; I never ever joined the battalion again.

Mmm. They should have payed attention to your papers, don't you think? So did you see the war out in a ...?

Well, the war by that time ... let me see. The Finisterre Ranges' camp they were still on. Because Buna and Gona, all those sort of things, had been cleaned up. This was virtually a mopping up of the remnants of the Japanese happened for the Australian after that and apparently the powers that be decided that as far as Australia in the war was concerned the effort could be wound down. So they looked round for people with the longer service to give them priority for discharge and I came out in 1945 under that scheme.

(10.00) This is before the surrender?

Before the surrender, yes. Yes, I was a civilian before the surrender as were many others. Not ... the army was simply wound down. Once the Yanks had made their landings the role for the Australian Army had been reduced considerably. The didn't need the numbers that were in the forces. In fact, the emphasis now was on preparing a, you know, civilian production sort of thing back home.

Yes.

So, I think it was September '45 that I was finally discharged. It wasn't quite as simple as that because they held me round in the reinforcement depots and that sort of thing for a while and they very slowly made up their mind that they could afford to discharge a percentage of the forces.

Were you keen to get out by then?

I was keen to get out, yes – oh, yes. Yes, I'd ... although my health wasn't too bad I was still getting malaria occasionally but once I left the battalion it never had the same ... and my mates ... it never had the same appeal to me. Just being a number in a reinforcement depot wasn't my idea and I played up a bit in those days.

In what way?

Oh, well, when I'd come home on leave I'd ... they had to come and get me. I didn't go back voluntarily. No, war fatigue I think you'd call it.

And can you remember about the news of the atomic bomb?

Yes. I remember the ... but I don't think it dawned on me the real significance of the atomic bomb. I only thought in terms of the super bomb – a big, big ... I didn't realise the fall–out of this ... the effect on the ... I never thought that. We weren't told the real details of it only that an atomic bomb which they say was a – in my mind – just a huge bomb, an extra big bomb.

Yes. And I don't suppose the idea of the large number of Japanese being killed would have bothered you at the time?

Not really, no. No. Well, they started it and they'd have done the same to us given the same chance. No, I have no sympathy at all for the Japanese at that time. I've possibly, you know, changed a little bit since realising that not every Japanese is responsible for the Japanese actions; the nation's actions. But at that time I didn't have any sympathy.

What about Hirohito? What's your view of that business?

Well, if we are to believe what history tells us that he was, if not one of the master minds of the Japanese attempt to conquer South East Asia, at least he was ... went along with it. He was very pleased when they were winning. So I don't see that we can do anything else than regard him as one of the prime people – Japanese people – responsible for what happened. So, in that light, I don't think too many of us are sorry to see him go. In fact, I think we would have applauded any action that would have sent him on his way earlier.

Why do you think the Allies kept him in power?

Well, I never thought anything about it at the time but it seems obvious that they kept him because it would help them a little bit in the handling of the Japanese nation. That is what I read from, you know, the writers on the subject and I certainly think it would be right.

Now, in the post-war years I know that many ex-soldiers bore a grudge, if you like, to the Japanese to the extent of refusing to buy Japanese cars and so on for many years – not so much any more – but were you aware of that, either in yourself, or in your friends?

Oh, yes. I was aware of it but I didn't see any need or any point in not ... in refusing to take anything that was of value and of use to Australia from the Japanese. On the contrary, I think we should take them for all we can get and I still think that. I'd ... I'd ... If your next question is ... well, you'd better ask me the next question.

Well, what did ...

I was going to say that it stops short of letting them buy Australian land and assets.

(15.00) Now after discharge did you go straight back to working straight away or did you have a break?

I did. No, oh, I may have had a week ... a few weeks. I had a few weeks leave, yes. But my job was open and they were quite glad to have me back because they had manpower problems and I went just back and took up where I left off.

What changes were there in the country, if any?

Well, of course, there was shortages then. You had to ... the petrol and food and clothing coupons were necessary, you know, to get anything really. A little bit of a black market functioning. But I don't recall any real ... any real shortages, you know. There was enough of everything to go round but it did have to be rationalised, I suppose, to ensure that there

was something available to everybody. I do recall that I was unable to buy a suit for quite a while and I had to wear one of my father's old suits until I either had enough ration coupons or the cloth was available or something of that sort. And there were shortages but not shortages that we were unused to.

Was there any feeling against the men who had not been on active service?

I think, personally, there was a little bit of that there. I didn't harbour any in myself. I believe that if a man can't join the services that was sufficient. Where he was sent was not, you know, within his ambit to influence. So, I certainly didn't regard somebody who spent the war up in Darwin because that's where he was sent. Ah, I personally had no ... I had a lot of friends that didn't ... for one reason or another didn't join any of the services and I certainly had no reaction against them. I just thought, oh, well, that's what they wanted. I did what I wanted; I joined the army and I was glad I did.

Now, government assistance to ex-servicemen in various ways – things like rehabilitation training, low interest loans, soldier settlement, things like that – did you have any ... did you get anything from those schemes?

Well, I certainly got a war service home loan which I used but that was paid off many years ago not ... simply because I, you know, changed houses and you could only get one loan and that sort of thing. I have no complaints personally about the treatment I got from repatriation or the Government generally. I thought we got pretty generous treatment, really. And I developed a few complaints in me older age and I get a sixty per cent disability pension and I think that that is, you know, quite generous. No, I know there is a tendency to complain about the treatment they've got but personally I've been quite happy with the treatment I got. I've been in the repat for treatment several times and I couldn't be better treated. So, that's my experience.

Has your malaria cropped up?

Well, strangely enough the malaria after a few years left me completely and I don't think I got any ... even though it was graded as malignant malaria and would stay with me for the rest of my life, I don't get malaria attacks. At least, I don't think I do without ... they sort of change their form. Some of the days when I don't feel so good it's the effect of malaria – that could well be. No, I count myself pretty lucky really.

Now you've been involved with your battalion association.

Yes.

Was that something that began soon after the war or later ...?

No, not really. No. It's only since my retirement that I've taken a real active interest. Never contemplated ... I've been a member but not an active one and certainly haven't held office like I have since I retired but in the last ten years I've been secretary and I've more or less been the prime mover, I suppose, in the writing of this history. And I've enjoyed doing it. It's not ... it hasn't been a chore as far as that's concerned.

What would you say that the members of the association get from the membership? Is it just memories?

I think so. They get very little in a tangible way. There's no hand-outs of money or benefits or anything like that. I think it's just the companionship of, you know, the old mates and we do, even though we probably come from a whole spectrum, you know, of occupations, we do have that in common where we all served in the one battalion and if you're even a battalion of 800 men, if you're in it long enough you get to know nearly everybody. All the people that I meet today I knew and lived with years ago for, you know, quite a period.

(20.00) What about the RSL?

Yes, well, I've never been a ... they get my financial and moral support but I've never been active in any way. For one thing, the 12th Battalion association sort of takes all the time that I have. But I have ... believe that all returned servicemen should support the – well, I did believe – should support the RSL if for no other reason than that they can speak in a unified way and speak for every member. And I think it is important that we do have a, on some questions, a unified voice.

Well on ... because the RSL, the main function of the RSL, I suppose, is to look after the welfare of ex-servicemen but it does comment on wider issues; defence and immigration in particular. Do you support the way the RSL does get involved in those things or the particular ...?

Well, I think that they have a right to speak about all those issues but I'm not always in agreement with what comes out of the top echelon of the RSL which is, I know, is probably a policy arrived at in a democratic way through the State conferences and the national conference. I'm not always in agreement. I've never taken it on myself to object. For one thing, I've never been a party to the opinions that make up the policy. As I say, I give them moral and financial support but I don't attend the meetings so I don't have no input into the making of the policies. So I'm really not in a position to criticise it because I've not tried to influence it. On many things I agree; a couple of things I disagree with and ... but I've made no effort to make my voice heard.

Just as a sort of a general wrap up, how would you say that the war ... or would you say that the war sort of changed your outlook on life, religion and politics – any of that sort of thing, you know? Did it change you as a person?

I don't really think so. I don't really think so. It certainly broadened my experience and views of humanity generally because you do observe, you know, your fellow man in circumstances you'd never see him in in the normal course of living. Like in action situations where some people are virtually unaffected, other people are just ... react in a different way. People do react in different ways. Not everybody is a brave bronze ANZAC. Some are; some are not, some are just the opposite. But it doesn't ... So you do store those things in your mind and people I know that have given less than a good account of themselves, and I know personally, are still around today. I haven't the same ...

I certainly wouldn't show it. But I can't help but seeing that that chap, you know, he let us down. At the other end, that chap didn't. He was a leader, he looked after us, he did his job. So it has sort of formed my opinions of certain people.

(25.00) Has it affected your view of humanity as such?

I suppose to that extent it has made me realise that not everybody is what they seem to be and it wasn't always the big bronze ANZAC who wasn't in fact when the pressure was on. In fact, it was frequently the other way round. It was the quiet, unobtrusive bloke who said very little that was the solid backbone of, you know, the ... I can't quite think of what the word is but not in every case. I mean, appearances had nothing at all to do with it. Even the occasional bloke who you'd put down as a braggart – boastful character – often turned up sometimes too. So, you know, it's not consistently valid as a guideline in assessing a man's character. You're leading me into a deep discussion, Michael, that I try and avoid.

I think we could probably just wrap up there. In politics did the war sort of give you a ... or did it mould your political opinions in any way?

I can't say that it did. I've always sort of been liberal minded. I've never had any strong political leanings at all. I've never been ... I guess I'm just a middle-of-the-road man in my political thinking. I believe in just a fair go for everybody.

Mmm. Your attitude to fascism, for example, that sort of thing?

No. That's one extreme and the other one is the, you know, the hierarchy of the people that have got everything and I'm not in favour of that either. I think the middle way; somewhere between the two is a ... is what we should be all be striving for. Yes.

END OF TAPE 3 – SIDE A

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