



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A

Identification: This is tape number one, side A, recorded by Rob Linn for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive, Australian War Memorial on 23rd March 1990, interviewing Ray Baldwin who served with the 2/27th Battalion from May 1940 to November 1945 and held the ranks of private, lance corporal and corporal during that time.

Ray, could you give me some background on yourself please? Where and when you were born, your education and movement before the war?

Born on 2nd October 1921. Educated at Wellington Road Primary School. Apprenticed at Clarksons Limited in the mirror and memorial windows trade. I joined the Militia as a cadet at age sixteen and that really was what attracted me to joining the 2/27th Battalion because as a boy I used to sit on the fence and hear the bugle calls from the Kensington Drill Hall. And I'd run over from Trinity Gardens to the drill hall, sit on the fence and watch these soldiers doing their training.

And what had you hoped to become before war intervened in your chosen trade?

Probably had the usual thoughts of a boy, and that's all I was then, of one day perhaps marrying, settling down and having a family. I was brought up in the Methodist religion and most of my time was around that Maylands Methodist Church - social activities, things like that.

Did you have any political beliefs at the time?

Didn't know very much about it in those days, no.

Had you travelled widely, Ray?

No, I had not travelled at all.

So you were very much confined to Adelaide?

Exactly, yes.

At the time did you think of yourself as an Australian or in a sense a British Australian?

I always thought that I was an Australian and, of course, our ties were such that the British Empire meant so much to us in those days.

Now, did you have any connection through your family with the first AIF?

I was brought up in this Methodist home and I always thought that I was a normal member of the family, not that I'm abnormal, but to answer the question, yes, the lady whom I thought was my mother had two sons: one who was very badly wounded in world war one and he was my hero figure more than the other whom I thought at that time was my brother.

What were the elements of the ANZAC tradition perhaps that you were influenced by?

Again, I didn't really know that much as a boy except that these men were my brothers, whom I thought were my brothers, had gone away and fought for the British Empire. I remember one coming down from Broken Hill - my hero in fact - and he had shrapnel removed from one of his knees and that's about all I can say I guess.

And you said earlier, Ray, that you were in the school cadets?

Not a school cadet; a regimental cadet in the 48th Militia Battalion as it was known then before world war two.

Why did you join the Militia at that stage?

(5.00) Because somewhere there must have been stirred this love of uniforms, love of Australia. That might sound corny but it's a fact. And, oh, and of course, my mother had these great big books from world war one with hundreds of photos of soldiers who had been killed or who - and she also had a vast collection of cards sent back from France and so on. And I used to pore over those things for many hours.

Ray, do you remember your reaction to Robert Menzies' announcement on 3rd September 1939 that Australia was at war with Germany?

Yes I do, and strangely enough I found it quite exciting, and I remember a paper boy riding down the street singing out that war had been declared. And I thought, well, here's a chance to do what my brothers have done before.

So you saw it very much in the terms of a family thing at that time?

Yes.

And could you just recap where and when you enlisted please Ray?

In the 2/27th? On 17th May 1940 and at that time, still in the Militia, we had started the first of a series of three-months camp at Woodside. I transferred immediately from the 48th Militia Battalion to the 2/27th Battalion at Woodside.

Did you enlist with a group of people or as an individual?

We were on parade and they called for volunteers to form the 2/27th Battalion and those of us who stepped forward, two of them were in my immediate subsection. One whom I thought would enlist, my platoon sergeant, said, 'I'm not going to do that. I'm not going away to get killed', and in my sights he plummeted down to the ground in my estimation. Prior to that he was also a bit of a hero subject, I guess.

How about your family's response to your enlistment, Ray? Were they supportive?

Well, they had little option because at this time I was beginning to feel that I wasn't a truly born son to Ellen Baldwin whom I always knew as my mother. There was never a father figure about the place so she must have gone through a fair bit of turmoil because she did love me, there's no possible doubt about that. She already had her two sons back from world war one but, and as I said previously, one was very badly wounded. It was then that I discovered that I was adopted.

At the point of your enlistment?

Yes.

What was her response to your enlistment?

She was pretty upset and - but she didn't try to stop it.

And your employer, Ray?

Mr David Clarkson. They were proud of me I guess because I wasn't very old and, of course, they wished me well and gave me a send-off present and so on.

Did you expect to return to the same job after fighting?

Yes. And this was a promise made by David Clarkson whom I think had a bit of regard for me at that time.

And when you filled out your papers was there any need to falsify any of the information on it?

None whatsoever.

And the next move you would have had then, Ray, was possibly into training with the 2/27th at Woodside almost immediately?

That is correct.

At the time were you conscious of your - of that particular battalion's link with the first AIF and the fact that they were a South Australian battalion?

We realised that there was a link between the 27th Battalion in world war one and two but to my memory it wasn't stressed very much at all. There was no get together and giving us a rundown on the exploits of 27th Battalion world war one. It was sort of generally accepted and that was about all we were told, or digested.

How was it decided whether men would go into one of the four rifle companies or into a specialist unit like the mortars?

(10.00) Many of the enlistments were from militia battalions. In my case I was in the ack-ack platoon, anti-aircraft platoon, and when I enlisted in the 2/27th, Jimmy Dobbs said, 'Right, Baldie - Baldwin, rather, ack-ack platoon 2/27th' and that was it. And he had a fairly good knack of putting people in the right place for the right job.

What sort of character was he to you when you first met him?

He, to me, was a person I admired immensely.

Was he quite a fearsome figure, Ray?

Not exactly fearsome. He had this happy knack of getting on pretty well with people and if something came up that he had to handle, he was fairly abrupt, but, no, at no time did I ever dislike him. In fact, I admired him.

By August, the company had - I'm sorry - the battalion had begun company level exercises. Now, what sort of terrain was it presumed that you would eventually be fighting [in] and who would be the eventual enemy that you were being trained to fight?

It's a difficult question to answer going back to that time. I don't think any of us gave much thought to where we would fight because the situation was so uncertain anyway. But, I guess most of us thought we'd probably finish up in Europe.

Right. Now did you have any idea of when you would be sailing or - no, to put it better - when did you find out that you would be sailing and when did you know your destination?

Rumours started to spread some weeks before the date of leaving Woodside. Rumours always start anyway, and we started to pack boxes of gear not wanted on voyage and I remember that quite clearly. And then came the news. We had a battalion parade one Monday morning, I think, and we were waiting word from Melbourne that our CO, Murray John Moten, was waiting on word from Melbourne whether to send us on pre-embarkation leave or not. There was a general air of expectancy around about that time.

Eventually you were entrained to Melbourne and then to Port Melbourne, then boarded the *Mauretania* and you were transported over to the west coast of Australia and you had your last shore leave in Australia in Fremantle. Now, I'd be very interested to know what you actually did on your last shore leave.

Looking back I must have been rather naive. Still in this Methodist tradition I went ashore and there was some sort of organisation having an interview on the evils of drink, and I remember - I remember saying to this lady, 'Yes, there should not be any liquor whatsoever whilst the war is on', or something like that. And just by way of interest I did not drink myself until we came back from Gona. But then that was the reaction of a fairly young person I guess.

Ray, what was life like on board the *Mauretania* when you set sail from Australia? Did you have any type of training? Were there tournaments of any sort?

Life on board the ship was wonderful because she was still a luxury liner - fitted out as such. Many of my friends suffered severely from sea-sickness, which I did not, and you'd go down to the dining room and the meals were already laid out and so I ate rather well. On the

training side we did a bit of PT and a few quiz type things on occasions. But looking back now, the most humorous thing really was the fact that on top of the bridge of the *Mauretania* we had twin Lewis machine-guns mounted and these were to fend off any attacking enemy aircraft. Rather ludicrous when you come to think of the size of the ship and the comparative value of the weapon. But, in those days, we were full of death and gloom and would have taken on the aircraft had they come over.

Now after this voyage you eventually came to India and a camp at Deolali.

Yep.

You may have met members of the 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions. If you did, what did you think of them and how did you get on with them?

I cannot recall that at all. As I should say now you get a close affinity with your section and platoon mates but I was unaware of who the 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions were even.

Did you meet any of the British or Indian units at that time?

No, not that I can recall.

(15.00) And, Ray, would you have collected souvenirs or travelled at all in India?

No souvenirs from India.

Were you one of those who took an Indian servant at the time?

Well, when you use the term 'took an Indian servant', they more or less came round and we found the thing quite a novelty and they washed our feet and got us water and things like that. I never regarded them as servants. They were just fellows looking for a few annas. Mmm.

In November 1940 you would have sailed on the *Takliwa* and eventually come to the Palestine area. Now, in that area you would have had your first contact probably with both Jews and Arabs. Now how did the local situation strike you there?

I was still very young, and looking back over the years I must have been very naive and I suppose pretty poorly educated, because to me there did not appear to be any conflict at all that I could discern. And even now, looking back over the years, I could not detect or remember any such happenings.

At various times you probably could have occasional leave in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem but can you remember Robert Menzies coming and addressing the troops in early February 1941?

No, I cannot. Do you mean a personal appearance by Robert Menzies?

Yes.

No, I cannot recall that.

On the 8th June 1941 you with the rest of the allied armies invaded Syria. Now, that campaign would have been your first taste probably of fighting. How did that campaign affect you and what did you see as the core of the action, if you like?

I don't understand what you mean by 'core of the action'.

What was the fighting like?

Oddly enough it did not hold any fears for me at all and, in fact, I felt a sense of achievement despite the fact that when we did our first attack - it was a midnight attack - and momentarily I stood transfixed, couldn't move when the firing started from the French Foreign Legion positions or the Vichy positions. We weren't quite sure who was there at that time. I remember screaming out to a chap named Dick Petherick, he was on our Bren gun, and he wouldn't move anyway and he was killed on the spot. Things like that I still remember, yes. But I was not frightened.

Where was the first night's action, do you remember?

I think the name was El Boum or Adloun. I think El Boum but I'm not - the memory fails a little bit there.

And how, with your close colleagues in the unit and everything, how did you feel the whole campaign went? What sort of feeling did you come out of it with?

We came out with a feeling of having done a good job. The battalion - we could see the months of training in Palestine and in Egypt to a certain extent coming to the fore. We worked as a team; a magnificent team. And most of the time we knew what everyone else was doing except for a few occasions when, I don't suppose anyone knew what was happening.

Now from this time, after the fighting actually ceased in Syria, there was still general duties, if you like, around the area particularly around modern day Lebanon. Now, did you have any leave in Beirut or in that area and if so, what type of experiences were there to be had in a city like that?

Well, at that time Beirut was a rather beautiful city and, yes, we did go into leave there. Most of my time was spent on - it sounds a bit stupid I suppose - eating chicken and just looking around the place. I didn't go into brothels or get on the grog. Just, I suppose, just wandered around the city looking at things. One of the - hold it there -

Okay Ray. From that point, the battalion enshipped on the *City of London* and I suppose you thought you were on your way to Java at the time but you didn't make that and eventually had to come back to Caloundra for training in action against the Japanese. Was the actual training you had effective up in the Caloundra area and were you told about Japanese tactics at all?

(20.00) In my opinion the training was fairly ineffectual. We were told very, very little about Japanese tactics. No-one seemed to know.

In August 1942, the battalion sailed for Port Moresby and went into camp near Itiki. Now, that was at the beginning of the Owen Stanleys and especially - you went in near the southern end of the Kokoda Trail. Probably some of the first things you would have seen along the trail were the 39th and 53rd Militia Battalions in retreat. Now, what was the sight of those men like and what was your thought of them?

Can I just pre-empt that reply and reply to that question by saying this. Before we set off over the Trail we still had khaki uniforms and I remember clearly going past 44-gallon drums of green dye, taking our clothes off and dunking the whole lot in and dragging them out and there we had green uniforms. The only thing was that the first torrential downpour of rain, the lot washed out again. So you can see we were fairly well ill-prepared.

Now one of the things that I remember quite clearly, to answer your question, somewhere - and I wouldn't know to this day where - we did start to bump into soldiers coming back. We knew they were Militia - I don't think I realised their battalion number - but generally speaking they were young, they were - I can't remember any of them bearing weapons and they appeared to be frightened and glad to get out of it. They gave a message of, 'It's bloody awful up there. You just can't see them', and I hold, or held no ill-feelings against these young people because we didn't know what to expect anyway.

Your first action would have been somewhere in early September near Kagi and perhaps then at Efogi, the major fighting, but apart from the fighting - or you can talk about that too, Ray - what were the great difficulties on the Kokoda Trail?

First of all the physical difficulties; they were always there. It doesn't matter how fit a person was. The second thing I would point out is that our ration supply was limited. We always felt before we set off we were led to believe that there were food dumps all the way across. This was not so. And before we were committed to battle, the 2/14th and the 16th Battalions had gone on before us, as I understand it, the same as ourselves, company by company, and were committed in that manner. When we got there they - those two battalions were almost out of food and ammunition and we had to file past and make two dumps: one of food and one of ammunition, and this was then divided amongst what was left of those two battalions and ourselves.

How did you find the physical conditions? You mentioned them briefly, were they exhausting for you personally?

No, I was still young and still fairly fit and I could cope with most of it.

What was the outstanding section of that campaign that's remained with you? Was it the environment or the challenge of fighting the Japanese or just the shock of being underprepared?

The latter part of your question is probably nearer the mark: the shock of being unprepared. We just didn't know what to expect. The terrain was always a problem; the weather certainly was - no protection whatsoever.

Ray, after that campaign you may have been on a brigade parade at Koitaki where you were addressed by the brigade commander, General Blamey - sorry, not brigade commander - by General Blamey. Now can you remember what he said and did you find it a rather callous assessment?

Had we all reacted the way we felt like reacting that day we would have stormed up to the dais and thrown him to the ground because the remarks he passed were an insult to those who had been killed and wounded. It was taken in very poor light indeed, and rightly so.

How did you feel about superiors like Blamey making those sort of assessments considering the conditions under which you'd fought?

(25.00)I don't know what prompted him to make such a remark anyway, for a start. Whether he was under pressure from Australia politically, I don't know, but we had no respect at all for the man on that day. Well, we did not regard him as a man on that particular occasion.

After a brief period of rest and reassessment the whole battalion really regrouped in many ways. Did you have anything to do with the first action in Gona at all with Chaforce?

Not with Chaforce, no.

What was your part at that time?

We were still back in Moresby. I was prevented personally from being in Chaforce because I had injured my leg when climbing a coconut tree as a sniper in training.

Well, from that area in Moresby, did you go then up to Popondetta and the Gona campaign?

Yes.

Was that the hardest fighting that the battalion had seen up until that time?

Without a doubt. I was wounded on the first day but I absconded from hospital. I should explain that I was wounded with shrapnel from hand grenades over many parts of my body, two pieces of which were removed later back in Australia, but I rejoined the battalion at Gona. I left - I'm a bit hazy here, aren't I? I pinched a set of greens from the lad next to me - he was coming back to Australia - I wrote a farewell note to the sisters and pinned it on my pillow and took off down to the airfield and got aboard a DC3 without any effort at all and got back to the battalion, still bandaged up. And I was shocked at knowing that so many had been killed or wounded. We were very thin on the ground indeed.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE B

Identification: This is side B of tape one. Ray Baldwin talking with Rob Linn on 23rd March 1990 for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive about the 2/27th Battalion.

Just to recap and go back a little bit, Ray, you want to talk a little bit about Efogi. What is it specifically about that time there that comes to your mind?

The thing that comes - well, things that come to my mind are these: that first of all, the fighting was quite intense and after a while we realised that we were surrounded by the Japanese. The communications had broken down completely, to the best of my knowledge, until finally the word came through by our commanding officer, Geoff Cooper - I guess it came from him - anyway, every man for themselves. So we took off in small groups, taking our wounded with us, and this commenced an experience of my life that I will never forget. The going was uphill most of the time and carrying our wounded on homemade stretchers. Every morning we would wake up and there'd be one or two of them dead and so they were left there. We continued on, now completely out of food and finally we broke up into small packets or groups of men. The wounded were left at a place that I am not familiar with under the care of John Burns and Alf Zanker. At this stage I, myself, had this continuous repetition of songs going through my head in a high pitched tone. Whether this was caused by lack of food, I don't know, but we were all, of course, greatly reduced in our physical condition. Every night, without fail, after it would absolutely pour with rain and there was no shelter of course, and then we'd kick off in the morning and after a while we'd be drenched with perspiration anyway. So it was a state of perpetual dampness you might say.

We held very little hope of getting out of that for some reason. We thought the Japanese by now had taken Port Moresby and I finished up with my good friend who is now dead, and we had this silly idea I suppose of making a raft and getting back to Australia that way. That part of the Kokoda Trail campaign was rather trying.

Well, when you came to Gona and it went into the fighting there, was it what you'd expected or did you feel that somehow you were being forced into a situation that would have been better to have been left?

I still remember a state of shock. We arrived in the kunai grass outside of this village complex and we sort of stood around in our platoon groups and all of a sudden the 2/14th Battalion who had gone before us, they were involved in a very heavy fire fight. And I remember looking - we all sort of looked at each other and thought, 'Hell, what have we got ourselves into here?'. And the next morning we took off, and to my memory and to my knowledge there was not one bit of reconnaissance done prior to moving into this beachhead. We just moved in line abreast and then it was on for young and old. And it was all rather upsetting actually.

Did you realise that you were being sniped on from on high, if you like?

Do you mean from coconut trees?

Yes.

Yes, that was very obvious, and after a while I think it was an officer named Teddie Best who yelled out, 'Fire into the tops of the trees', which we all did and no doubt we got a few of the fellows that way. But fire was coming from so many places, it was very difficult to pin any one exact location.

Ray, when - and you were wounded there as you said with grenade shrapnel wounds, and you went back to hospital and then skipped hospital and got back to the unit. How were you received by the unit, or what was left of it?

Actually it was a fairly non-event. They all said, 'Good day Baldie, good to see you' and that was that. I think they were so devastated and so worn out that even if the King of England had arrived it wouldn't have had very much impact.

After that did you return with the battalion to Ravenshoe for training?

Yes.

Would you remember then about during 1943 that Blamey revisited the unit up there and what was the reaction of the soldiers to him that time?

It was much more favourable and, of course, he was better received and I think he felt sorry for what he might have said in New Guinea. If he didn't I would have been very surprised. But overall he was much better received, I felt.

Ray, did you go back in September '43 to the Markham and Ramu campaigns?

Yes.

And in those campaigns - in that campaign, was there a feeling that the Japanese, if you like, were on the run? That things weren't going as well for the enemy as they had been?

On the arrival at Kaiapit we still had a great deal of respect for the Japanese, of course as fighters. We didn't know how many there were around the area. The information was rather vague but, yes, we felt much more confident and we knew by now that the war was starting to turn in our favour - definitely. The most obvious thing about that was the fact that we had such magnificent air cover. We had fighter aircraft and bombers flying over all the time plus resupply with the old 'biscuit bombers'.

Was this quite a change from the earlier exercises at Gona and on the Owen Stanleys?

Absolutely.

And that was, what, heartening for you and the troops?

It was very heartening, very encouraging.

How did you find the fighting up, you know, up along places like Shaggy Ridge, Ray? Was it in small groups or as units, how was that fighting effected?

The Shaggy Ridge area itself was mainly on a section level of such a - the terrain was unbelievable and only allowed for virtually a one man front. But when the Japanese were tracked down, as a battalion, we fought them on more or less the same level of numbers involved and we won hands down. Licked the tail off them.

That would have been heartening as well.

It was very heartening. The casualties on our side were very small, thank goodness. But we certainly got the upper hand on the Japanese there.

Were there any other factors of that campaign that have remained with you?

(5.00) Oh, only the fact that I again took off from Battalion Headquarters, having coming back from hospital with malaria, and rather impetuous still and I took off back to my company - wanted to get back to my company and my section - only to be sent back again and reverted to a private for the fifth time. I found that a bit discouraging.

What had the previous reversions of rank been due to, Ray?

Um, two of them were very unjust: one was in the Middle East when I was a very proud lance corporal and my friend, who is now dead, he had a bad ear and instead of waking - there were only three of us on a gun pit - and instead of waking me up, I would have done his tour for him, he just went down into the dug-out and of course Jim Dobbs came around at five o'clock in the morning. Because I was the lance corporal in charge I copped it and I lost my very proud stripe. It was then that I was transferred to C Company and a similar occurrence happened here, this time in New Guinea. I was then a corporal and another good lad who died a tragic death on the Owen Stanleys - but a wonderful lad - he went to sleep and did not wake me up. Again, I would have done his tour for him and a bloody cow got into my company commander's tent - his name was Ron Johnson - and it chewed his underpants and singlet and he didn't take to that very kindly, so I lost my stripes again. That really hurt.

Well, by April 1944 the battalion had returned to Australia and did some street marches. Would you remember those marches at all?

Yes.

And what were they like? Was there a euphoria, if you like, about the situation?

It felt good to be part of a, shall we say, a victorious group of men. We knew we had done well and it was good to see the response, mainly in Brisbane. Their response in Brisbane was marvellous.

What type of response?

One of adulation, will you say, and thanks for what you've done, sort of thing. Yep. They were proud to be there and we were proud to be there.

And then you went with the battalion north of Brisbane, up the far north, to do training for the beach landings and that type of thing?

Correct.

And then you went to Balikpapan, didn't you, with the battalion?

Right.

Now, Balikpapan must have been extremely different fighting from anything you'd seen previously?

We went ashore - we took off rather in a LST - a landing ship tank - and when the aerial bomb and sea bombardment of Balikpapan started we were told not to go up on deck. But true to form, I stuck my head up through a hole and I couldn't believe what I saw. A whole beach area of Balikpapan and back in the hills a bit was just erupting with shell and bomb explosions. Yes, we felt confident.

Did you feel that the Balikpapan exercise was a bit of a sideshow; that MacArthur was saving his own people for the main fighting, that you were being pushed aside, if you like?

There was a thought in my mind, with all of us I guess, we thought we had been put aside to go into Singapore and this was a bit of a let down. We really wanted to go into Singapore and take some part in the relief of the 8th Division boys and other servicemen. The operation of Balikpapan in retrospect looked like a hell of a lot of damage done for no good reason at all.

That's in retrospect. In the training for it - I'm not disagreeing with you, I understand that's in retrospect ...

Right.

Your view.

Yep.

But prior to going were you given briefings about the places that you were going to?

Do you mean in Balikpapan?

Yes.

Yes. The briefing was excellent. We had aerial photographs, every man knew where just about where he would go and what his task would be. I was a lone operator. I knew that when I'd expended the fuel I had to go back and get refuelled and so on. Things of that nature. All detailed down to a very small level. It was excellently done.

Was this in stark contrast to the earlier campaign?

You might say that, yes, definitely.

Did you have any language training at all before going to Balikpapan?

I did not.

Had you picked up any Pidgin in New Guinea by the way, Ray?

Not very much.

And when you got to Balikpapan did you have any contact with the Dutch at all?

(10.00) I did not have any contact with Dutch personnel or persons. The only time there could have been Dutch people was when I went on a patrol with Major Charlie Sims. We went up to a place called Baru, I think, and here we found a hut full of dead and dying people. There could have been Dutch people there but I was unaware of it.

And any contact with the Indonesians at all?

No, only that they were dribbling back down through our positions, getting away from the Japanese.

And that campaign really was quite swift, wasn't it, Ray?

Yes it was.

Did you stay on afterwards for any type of duties at all?

No, I went with other members of the battalion on long service discharge plan and we were camped on a beach - at a beach area waiting to come home to Australia.

And how long did that take to effect?

I don't know. Two or three months. I know we kept waiting for this mythical ship to come in and there was a - I do remember we were told there was a very severe shortage of shipping. We just had to wait.

You were back in Australia by about November '45, would that be right?

Correct.

And that was your time of discharge?

Yep.

How long was it before you began a civilian job?

I suppose it would have been almost immediate on my discharge from Keswick. By the way, I must say, I felt a bit of a let down there. An officer without one ribbon on his chest signed my discharge certificate and said, 'Well, that's it', and I said, 'Well, is this all you get after nearly six years being away?'. But to get back to your question, almost immediate back at Clarksons.

Did you have any problems returning to that employment?

Yes. I didn't stay there much to David Clarkson's distress because, as I mentioned earlier, he liked me. But I could not take the inside conditions, the smell of ammonia, the smell of paint, nitric acid and the general closed-in feeling, so I left.

And this was a result of your war experiences, Ray?

Yes, definitely.

What were the main changes you noticed in Australia on your return?

That's a hard one for me to answer because I left as a boy and I suppose you'd say, came back as a man and, yet, I was still fairly immature on reflection. So, I don't suppose I noticed much at all really. I do remember going back to my Maylands Methodist Church and that was a non-event and I felt quite a hollow feeling about things there. Nothing seemed to be the same any more.

So the war had a profound effect on your religious beliefs, do you think?

Yes, it did.

Was there any resentment from the returned men against those who didn't go on active service?

Not that I can recall. I - again, on reflection, after a while I came to look on conscientious objectors as people who were false and hiding behind so-called religious beliefs. I didn't go for that at all.

And, Ray, did you take up any of the rehabilitation courses offered or any of the offers enabling ex-servicemen to do tertiary or technical training?

No.

Then what about the type of schemes that were available for low interest home loans or soldier settlement?

No, I felt that I was unqualified. I also felt initially that I would make a go of things back at my old firm, Clarksons.

Do you think that the war service helped or hindered your career in the post war?

Well, I didn't have a career really. I don't follow that question.

Okay. Well, we'll move on from there. Did you immediately become involved in ANZAC days and battalion reunions?

Yes.

And you went to unit reunions all through - sorry, have you been going to unit reunions ever since that time?

No, because after a period of further unsettlement in my mind, oddly enough I re-enlisted in the army where I continued all told to have thirty-four years' army service.

And what rank did you come to hold in the end?

Warrant Officer, Class 1 RSM.

Did you ever think when you returned from action that that's what you would do?

(15.00) Oddly enough I always liked the army even though I'd been through some fairly unpleasant times. I'm still distressed that my friends who were killed but I think I looked on the army - See, when the war ended, I remember leaving Wayville - correction, Keswick, and saying to myself, 'Where the hell am I going to live?', because a week before we went to the Middle East my - as it turned out - foster mother died and despite the fact that all my foster relatives - I got on well with them - they all wanted me to go and live with them, I did not want to. I just felt so unsettled. I'll leave it there because you may ask me another question in a minute. If you don't, I'll come back to that page.

Did you join the RSL as well, Ray?

Yes.

Do you think that that's been an effective organisation, looking after the welfare of ex-servicemen?

I didn't have much need to fall on their resources myself because I was still young, still single, still pretty fit. It's only when I got a bit older I realised the extent of their assistance to past serving members. Yes.

Did you have some difficulty in re-establishing your relationships with friends and family after the war? You've hinted that you did.

I didn't have any difficulty re-establishing friendships or relationships but I was under the impression, not knowing who my parents were, that I was illegitimate when I enlisted in the 2/27th Battalion, and this had a very profound effect on the way I thought about things. I had a dreadful inferiority complex, shall we say. And this bugged me for such a long time after the war, to the extent that I was drinking far too much, and till one day I thought, 'This has got to stop. I'm worth more than that', and so I took steps to track down my past. I discovered that I was not (a) illegitimate; I discovered (b) that I had two brothers and a sister - I have never met them either - but my peace of mind was much better.

Have your closest friends outside your immediate relatives been other ex-servicemen?

Closest friends?

Yes.

Yes, I guess you would say that, Yep.

Do you think you've suffered any long term disability or illness as a result of war, and that could be things like nightmares or nerves or anything.

Yes, I would go along with that. In fact, still now and again I wake Val up by yelling out in the middle of the night. My - the reaction on me is not so much physical I guess, as mental. I grieve, still grieve a lot.

Are you in any way receiving ex-service benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs?

Yes I am.

Ray, are those war years important still in your memories?

They are very important in my memory, yes.

And you often think about them?

Yes.

And have you changed over the years in your willingness to talk about them in any way?

I tend to bottle things up more than I used to. I had a thought and it's gone for the moment. One of the things that I do, I grieve, as I said, but I've also sat with many of my mates who have died over the years and they say to me - invariably say to me, 'Well, Baldie, nobody wants to die, do they?' and say, 'No, but it'll be, it'll be' and I always say to them two things, or two of the things I say, one is that we had the chance to serve Australia, and the second thing is that as a result we have known and still know many fine people and that to me is very important.

Ray, would you say that in what you've just said was the most important effect of the war on you?

What do you mean by that?

That (a) you have a sense of having served your country and a sense of belonging to, if you like, a group of mates, that the war gave you that?

Yes.

And was the grieving part of all that too, in a sense?

Yes.

Do you think your reaction in that has been similar or different from other people you know?

No, I think it's pretty similar in most cases.

And do you regret having served?

No.

Right. Well, thanks very much, Ray.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW.