



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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TAPE 1, SIDE A

Identification: This is side one of tape one of an interview about the 2/4th Australian General Hospital with Russell Clinton recorded on 5th November 1990 and it begins in five seconds from now.

Russell Clinton where and when were you born?

I was born on ninth June 1918 at Malvern.

Tell us a bit about your parents. What they did for a living what sort of people they were.

My father worked in the tramways as a driver and then a storeman. We were just very simple, ordinary people of that day.

It's a period when there was something of a tradition of being fairly strict with children. Was it a 'children should be seen and not heard' sort of household, or a bit warmer than that?

No, I'd say it was a little bit warmer than that, yes. But, you know a close family relationship.

What sort of character was your father? How would you describe him?

Dad was a very straightforward fellow that was happy to play just his part, you know, not great leadership approach. My mother was a little bit more positive, you know, two opposites.

Well was it a period that was difficult in the sense that those years for many families were a struggle? Do you remember in your early years that it was hard times?

Yes, it was hard times because that was the period of the Depression, of course, and my father had one week on and one week off, so we grew up in not easy circumstances.

Other children in the family?

Yes, I had another brother.

Were you before or after?

I was before him. We had two other children which had died in infancy. I was the older brother.

Was it a church-going family?

Yes. I would say we were. I became more involved than possibly my parents did at that time.

In what way?

Well, I was a committed believer in those young days, and of course my friends came from that segment.

Was it the sort of family where the social issues of the time would be discussed? Was your father that sort of person who had an interest in those issues and would talk about them with you?

No, I don't think so. I don't think these were highlighted in those times like they are today.

Was it one of those families touched by the first world war, that it had members go off?

No. On my wife's side that would be, yes.

And to what extent, just as a matter of interest?

Yes, my father - my father-in-law, he was in the artillery and went overseas towards the end of 1917-18.

So what about your early schooling - where did that take place?

It was the state school in Preston.

And from state school?

We went to a tech. school, Collingwood Tech.

In your early years, what sort of ideas did you have about where you were going with your life, what you would do?

I guess our horizons in those days weren't tremendously looking forward, really. I guess our main consideration, like most, was to get a secure employment. That was very vital, I think, to all of our - it was survival - was the main thought of our parents and ourselves, I guess.

So what was expected from technical school?

Well I wasn't, I guess, the most polished student. I eventually went to work at the Myer Emporium and from there I grew up within the organisation, and so selling was my forte.

What did you start off doing at Myers?

Delivering parcels (laughs).

5.00 Around the metropolitan area or...?

No, round the city and then gradually as a boy in the departments and then growing up to do junior sales people. It was very much starting at the bottom in those days.

> Well starting at the bottom, but was it then the sort of job was felt - well here was a good secure job that offered potential for growth and your future was secure?

Yes, I think we were very happy about that because we did training courses and gradually graduated to other positions.

> So where were you at immediately preceding the war?

We were at, I guess a senior sales person in the furnishings department.

> Were you married at that time?

No. We were married after coming back from the Middle East.

> So when did you start to get an idea that there was a war coming?

I guess it was after the 1941, when there was severe setbacks for Britain. Of course and that developed a greater need for - to resist Hitler and his ideas (laughs).

> So how did your joining come about?

I just felt it was the right thing because we saw that Poland and other places were getting overrun. And Hitler, I guess his philosophies were against all decency. I guess there was a pressure and I guess we get caught up with the fervour of the day. We mightn't be quite as today, with our maturity, want to rush away like we would've (laughs) when we were young.

> When you say 'we' were you knocking round then with a group of mates who you'd share a lot of these thoughts with?

Oh no, not really.

> So who would you turn to discuss the idea of whether it was a good thing to do or not?

Oh, I guess it would be folks within our church, and in your circle of friends really. And you'd discuss it with your minister if you were - I guess, who was part of your circle of friends.

> Did you have a concern that there was a contradiction between the notion of war and 'Thou shalt not kill'?

Yes, I guess that did, and because of at I joined a medical unit. That was very much uppermost in my mind.

Well what about your parents? What did they think of you joining up?

I think they were rather shocked; but then quite supportive.

Shocked in the sense because of your church commitments and ...

No, not really. No, I think that when you take it yourself, if your own children decide to join the army, or the air force, or something, you've got to .... You know it would produce a shock in a lot of people and thinking along the line of the potential of disaster.

So what was the actual process? Where did you go to fill in forms and begin the ritual of joining the army?

Oh, I think there were a number of drill halls or places where we went along. You see, there was at that time - I think it was at Caulfield - there were a lot of people joining up because there was pressure on Britain, and the adverse war news. And I think it was pretty general that people were - At work we found, you know, deciding to go and join.

You did a medical at the same time, or was that later on?

I forget really. But I guess that we would have to .... To be accepted we'd have to have a medical.

What about your position at work? What was the feeling there when you came to resign in order to join up?

Oh, Myers for all their people, they said they would - that joined up to the AIF - that they would make up their salary, and they honoured that agreement too.

What, the difference between the army wage and the company salary?

Yeah.

With a large organisation like that, that could be quite an appreciable amount one might suppose.

I guess so, but they were a very strong company, as they still are.

Was there some expectation that at the end of the war you come back to your job?

Yes very much so. I think there were a number of companies, large companies, that said they would guarantee the position - to give you a position when you came back.

Were you guaranteed a position?

Well, I don't know in terms of guarantee. There was just that they made the statement that they would take people back and ....

Do you recall, just as a matter of interest, do you recall how that was made? Was it made on the basis of a personal remark to yourself from one of the employer group?

No, I think,it was put in writing. And statements were made in the press too, that they would do this sort of thing.

10.00 So having joined, what then? Where did you go for training and whatever?

We went to Caulfield racecourse and from there was taken to Puckapunyal.

By train?

By train, yeah. A shock to the system it was.

Yes, I was wondering if you had a few misgivings to find yourself in the hurly-burly (laughs).

Of course I did. I had a friend who was my pastor and I'm sure that, see .... I think it was a shock even for people who were more worldly wise than myself, because we moved within a certain select group of your friends. I wasn't the wild sort of type, but some of those people just had to have a drink of grog to steel their courage as they were moving away I think, you know on the train. But to myself it made me think, 'You know, boy this is for real' as we went up to Puckapunyal.

I suppose the language of the day perhaps even in rougher places was perhaps even milder than it is in the school grounds today, but generally I suppose many young men would feel the need to assert themselves by being rough and swearing and so on. Did you encounter a sense of crudeness that was a bit of a shock?

Oh, I think that's true. When guys get together they can be very crude. It depends on the type. In a medical unit we found, or I found, that there were, generally speaking, a better class - if we can use that sort of terminology - of people. A number had worked in hospitals. Of course all the officers were either dentists or doctors, medicos. Some had worked as orderlies, one or two were male sisters. And that was quite unusual in that day compared with today, you know there's numbers of them - of male nurses. So the general conversation .... Then were those of the general duties and some of those were rough diamonds, of course, they'd knocked about. But speaking generally in our hospital, there were some quite refined types of people.

Often that kind of refinement can be rather challenging to fellows who are rather crude and rough. Was your manner one of gentility, that in a way that singled you out or made you a bit conspicuous?

I can't comment on that one.

Well do you recall feeling that fellows may have felt that they needed to sort of make you a bit more worldly wise, or sort of test you a bit by ...

Oh, I think there's always odd guys like that you know. Today one wouldn't blink an eyelid at them. But I think the war and living with guys awakens you very much to what the world is around you, and of course some people will let them guys .... some will go downhill when they're away from their restraints at home and others will maintain a standard.

So having left Melbourne, you then went to Puckapunyal did you say?

Yes, we spent about, I guess about six months there in between coming down. I was in the quarter-masters store.

What kind of circumstance did you find yourself in, in terms of accommodation and so on?

Well first of all in tents. And at that time in the winter Puckapunyal was very cold.

How many to a tent?

Oh, I think there were about four, there might have been six. Very rough living.

What were the fellows like in your tent? Were they the sort of blokes you were able to get on with or were they a mixed lot?

No. I feel this: there were people - there was always a core group of people that had the same Christian beliefs that I had and you naturally made your friends with those who you could share your thinking.

Was it the sort of circumstance where it seemed prudent to keep those more or less as private thoughts or did you feel a need to try and share your sense of higher things with other men?

I guess with our Christian friends we would share our thinking. Because of our backgrounds we would be talking about family and the things we did.

Was there a general respect then, for those who were more inclined towards, if you like, religious concerns, or were you left alone, or were there some who would go out of their way to try and annoy you?

Oh, I think one would always find that (laughs), knowing human nature. There was always some of that would like to bait a person, but that's part of low living.

Do you recall any of those things?

Not really now. You see, you find that even at work. I found this at Myers. There was a returned soldier from world war one and while he respected my - the fact that I had joined up. I can always remember his very crude approach. See, you'll always find those that 'ave got some very base, crude outlook on life. That's the way he lived life. His wife had left him, and I mean, that was the product of his way of living. But in the army you learn to accommodate each other.

1500 Were any of the sorts of people who were a bit more sensitive in that respect, were they ever challenged directly to fight? Do you recall fights?

Can't recall no, no I can't. See I see the 4th AGH .... I was first in an ambulance unit for a little while till we joined the 4th and moved across to the hospital at Puckapunyal. No, I think we were very fortunate to be in such a unit.

Well having arrived, there you are in your tent in winter. How did you find the food and the other sorts of facilities?

It was all a good shock to the system; but I think that we improved in our health, because we were route marches and there was plenty of open exercise, outdoor exercise, and the food was good, I would say.

Well what did you make of the nature, then, of the notion of army discipline in terms of it being a rational approach to getting a group of men ready for war? Did it seem to be the level of ordering and the way you were treated to be the best system, or did you wonder about it?

I guess a lot of us would buck, because we got one of two NCOs who had been in the militia and I think they liked to throw their weight away [sic], they were quite knowledgeable on drill. But then again, sometimes we had NCOs who were more understanding of human nature. But it's a shock to the system anyone going into the services for the discipline.

So from that point what were the first things you got to do outside just the ordinary routine drills?

I went in to medical for a while but found that that wasn't what I was interested in and finished up in the quartermaster's stores. And there's various segments in a hospital like looking after pack equipment, looking after linen, looking after supplies, which fitted in with my background of retail trade.

Did it seem to be well organised? Was it an efficient system?

Oh yes. As far as the army with all its large requirements .... I'd say it wasn't that frustrating.

How did it measure up as a job then, in the sense on a day-to-day basis of being able to get a bit of satisfaction in what you were doing?

My recollection was that I was content to do the job that we were putting. We were just a small cog in the big wheel.

During that early period, then,what about leave and so on? Did you have time off that you were able to get away from camp?

Yes, I felt that we had some reasonably generous leave, you know, to come down to Melbourne and we had Sundays off.

What was the feeling then about leaving the camp in uniform? Was there a sense of pride? I mean did it make one feel good to feel that, well people could see you were there doing your bit?

I guess so. You know at that time there were those who were in what they called the 'chockos', the militia (laughing) - terrible the attitudes that can develop. They were looked down upon if they didn't have the grey patch. I guess we had a pride that we had volunteered to do a job.

Because the irony there was many of the chockos finished up on the Kokoda trail (laughing).

They sure did and my they had a tough time from what I - (laughs) everyone heard.

Did you visit Myers during your leave?

Did I ...?

During your leave when you came down in uniform, did you visit Myers, go and visit old friends and ...?

Oh, yes of course. And I think that lots of the guys did the same thing to drop in on their old friends. I think they we were all generally, you know we were proud of each other and I think it was generally very good will.

So after that period at Puckapunyal, what then?

From there we went overseas on the *Mauretania*.

When did you first get word that you were going?

Well we were packing stores down in South Melbourne and we knew something - with the quartermaster's store things had to be ready for a certain time so that we had some indication because we had final embarkation leave in Melbourne.

Were you cautioned about talking about what you were doing or the need for security?

Yes, that's always mentioned.

20.00 At the point then when you were getting ready to leave, was it made clear in any way or were you reasonably clear where you were going?

Well we knew we were going to embark at Port Melbourne because I guess our parents and our friends were down there to wave us goodbye (laughing), so we must have had some prior knowledge that we were embarking at Port Melbourne, which was the *Mauretania*.

Was it an emotional experience that sense of: well now you were going off to war and ....?

Yes I think that that was momentous, that time. As you looked at Port Melbourne disappearing and you wondered whether you would come back and see it. Very much so.

How did you find yourself quartered in the *Mauretania*?

We were in a beautiful ship. I was reading my diary (laughs) because when we got to Ceylon we went on to a troop ship and it - the contrast was just terrific. It had just come off the Atlantic run, I think, and we still had crockery and nice bunks to sleep in. It was beautiful.

You were in a cabin sharing with a group?

I guess we were, yes. I'm not that clear, there'd be two or three in a cabin.

Do you remember much of the voyage to Ceylon?

Yes. We anchored outside Rosebud in the bay for the night. Got up in the morning thinking we might have moved somewhere (laughs), but we moved out into the Heads and then we picked up the *Dominion Monarch*, the *Queen Mary*, and I think two or three other troop ships and the *Canberra* cruiser and we then proceeded south by west across to Western Australia.

What was the feeling at the time, was there a sense that 'Well we'll get there and show them, and after a while it all be over. That maybe be even back by the Christmas of the next year'?

I can't comment on that except that we all expressed the hope that it wouldn't be so long, but that's always what troops would be.

Did you get seasick?

No. Not that I can recall.

And what about in Perth - did you have time ashore?

Yes, we had time ashore and we looked forward to that. That was a bonus of a day's leave where some of us looked up our relatives and friends. It was .... Reading my diary, we were all very happy about that.

And then in Ceylon what sort of things .... You had a little bit of shore time there I think.

Yes, we had a day, I think, of leave in Ceylon and this was all new and wonderful. We hadn't travelled before. Like travel wasn't the privilege of only a few in those days and the palm trees, the exotic smells, the harbour and the colourful native gear was all very interesting to us all.

Had you been briefed on the way across as to how you should deport yourselves in Ceylon or how you should relate to the local people or any of that sort of thing?

Yes, we had lectures both from a health point of view, food and on the attitude we should adopt towards the people in other countries that we visited.

What was that attitude to be?

Well it was to respect the native people and to understand that they have different sort of feelings to us and ideas.

What were the health lectures about? What sorts of things were you advised on?

Well I guess there was always the potential of VD and that was always stressed. And being in a medical unit the doctors were always explaining what can happen.

Was it presented in fairly chilling terms? Would it be rather scaring to many young men?

Well I think to a lot of us who'd lived in sheltered homes, it was a whole new world. Those who were worldly wise, it mightn't have been a great shock to them, but the whole thing was wisely presented to guys so that they had a full knowledge of the possibilities. And then the other thing I think, was the tropical climate which affected a lot of us, you know as far as skin problems. There were lectures on that to minimise.

At this point you were in the 2/4th?

Yes. Oh yes.

So from Ceylon you then changed to the rude shock of a different sort of ship altogether.

Yes. After a few days and after leave in Ceylon went .... Which if you've ever been Ceylon it's a very beautiful, picturesque place and we had enough time to travel around and to see the countryside. It just looked beautiful.

25.00 Were there any mishaps that you know of, a few fellows got themselves into a bit of strife or ...?

I guess there's always an odd one of those sorts of problems. We .... In those days of course there was no jetty at Colombo, so we were anchored in the bay and of course the native people would come along in their boats and we would barter and buy things from them. And after two or three days the order to pack up and move across to another ship - which was the *Nevasa* - which was an old British steamer which we reckoned had been used for years between the East and Britain in guarding, and thinking back on that that was very rough accommodation - weevils in the food (laughs).

What was the actual accommodation like? When you say 'rough', can you describe it?

Oh, I think that we slept in hammocks. But it was very crude compared to the luxury of the *Mauretania*.

No air-conditioning, pretty stifling conditions?

Yes, it was a very old boat and there weren't a lot of home comforts, really.

Did it make you feel a bit more vulnerable, a bit more conscious of the possibility of submarines?

Yes, because the *Nevasa* had a reputation of being always told to hurry up, so in the end, as I read my diary, I find that the *Nevasa* steamed a straight line where the other ships zig-zagged - to keep up with them. But the cruiser apparently was always signaling 'speed up', and then the captain apparently sent a message that he was doing the best that it would do for speed.

Were there services aboard the ships as you went both to Ceylon and then on to the Middle East?

Your might ....

Church services, religious?

Yes. There was. We were fortunate. As a hospital we had three chaplains and that was an OPD, Church of England and a Roman Catholic. So these took their part and shared in the boat and there were services, sure, particularly on Sunday.

Well attended?

Yes. I would say the services generally were well attended.

I suppose as in any job or profession there are those who were good at it and those who weren't. How did the chaplains strike you in terms of their capacity to fit in with the sort of mixed lot of men that were going off to the Middle East?

I guess they varied depending on the person, individuals. We had a Baptist padre, Padre Salter, from Tasmania and he was ex-world war one, so that brought a respect for him, because he'd been there before and seen it all. And he was very understanding of human nature, had a very warm and pleasant personality. Now that doesn't degragate [sic] the others. We all have our individual's ability. But I would say the padres were well respected.

So from Ceylon, where was your next land sighting?

That would be Aden really.

Did you have shore leave there?

No, we didn't. We were at Aden and along with the shoreline did not look very encouraging because it was terribly dry hills and sandy desert; but I think our first reception was there was a bombing raid one night, or for a couple of nights until finally they moved us off the boat and went by rail.

Was it close? Were there any .... Close enough to really make you anxious and wonder whether this was all you see of the war?

Well you often wonder. We heard the bombing and the ack-ack fire but they assembled the troops into an emergency place on one of the dining rooms, I guess, so that you can't look up and see what's going on. But in the morning we saw a boat that was smoking, obviously had been hit with a bomb.

And from there?

From there we went by rail, we transferred on to Egyptian railways.
30.15

END TAPE 1, SIDE A
BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is side two, tape one of the interview with Russell Clinton about the 2/4th AGH recorded on 5th of November 1990 and continues in five seconds from now.

You were saying that in Cairo the British looked after you.

Yes, in reading back my diary I noticed that at some of these places they would give us a hot cup of coffee or tea, and after travelling this was a very welcome refreshment.

> How did the British strike you, particularly the officers where the class differences were much more marked than was the case in the Australian Army?

Yes, this was a fact of life, but I've got no, you know, striking comment on that.

> Was there any particular disposition towards you as Australians? How would describe their reception of you: was it indifferent, friendly?

I think that generally between British soldiers and ourselves there was quite a friendship. It was always interesting to share ideas.

> What was the train like that you travelled on?

Very much a rough old train where we would sleep on the floor which we've done also in our troop training in Australia.

> How did you get on for food on the travel?

Usually they would supply emergency rations, and then after a long period, like in Cairo, I recall where they marched us off to British Army transit depot and gave us hot refreshments and a meal before marching us back onto the train to continue on to Alexandria.

> Cairo has always a certain degree of infamy for its fleshpots and so on. Was there a heightened concern? Did you feel that the army was anxious that you trod the straight and narrow?

Oh, I think the guys didn't have a chance to get off the street at that stage. That was sort of more emphasised when guys were going on leave, which mostly was into Alexandria.

> So at Alexandria, what did you do there?

We went to a .... They were building a hospital at Amiriya for us that we were to use, and the comment was, at that time, there could have been the least likely place for a base hospital to ever be made.

> Why was that?

Because it was out in the desert and sand and away from any great facilities. But anyway after a lot of work, the Arab people were .... Builders were carried on and the army started to dig pits for sullage and to make the hygiene - improve the hygiene, so I guess that was .... Well we didn't from memory start looking after any patients at that particular spot. We were camped there - it was [Bir At Jurja?] or Amiriya was the nearest town, till we went to Tobruk.

What sort of things were you doing during that period?

I guess we were doing general duties, anything that would - that they felt would make the place more habitable. They erected tents for us. The living was hard especially when the dust storms develop.

What was the feeling at that time? Was there at all a sense of impatience that you wanted to sort of get on closer to where things were supposed to be happening or how was the morale and so on?

I think that there is always that 'Let's get stuck into it'. And of course when people get stuck into it they get more than what they deserve really. But that's always the case, 'Oh, let's get over and do the job that we're supposed to be doing'.

5.00 So you went on the *Knight of Malta* then.

Yes, that was, as I read back and think back on it, it was an ill-prepared exercise. You'll find that in the book. No embarkation list apparently, no respect for the weather. As they said there was no need to bound out into the Mediterranean, they could have waited for the storm to go. We were all very sick down in the hold. Our goods, the hospital's supplies were down in the front hold. They put us down there and we slept on these angled boxes. They weren't stacked very comfortably and put our pack and our kit bags there and they just left a littlebit of the front hold opened for air and that's the way we travelled.

Do you recall what you had in your kit bags?

I think just our normal clothes. Nothing ....

You'd not previously been seasick before this.

No, but we were dead sick this time, because of all the things that they fed us with was tinned fish - herrings in tomato sauce. Now, can you imagine any better diet for making one sick and then going out into the Mediterranean in a storm.

Were you alarmed when you ran aground?

Well we bounced about and we tossed about in sickening seas that seemed to - would overpower us - mountainous seas for two days.

Did you get up on deck at all? Did you take it in turns?

Yes we got up on deck and the sight was a very sad sight when you see these rolling .... But then on the Sunday after two days I got up and the sun shone and the sea didn't seem so bad, and I thought 'What and idiot it was that I'd volunteered to get myself into this sort of a jam.' (laughing). We went of course down to the hold that night as we bounced about, and I think it was fairly early in the morning that we hit rocks and of course that startled us all. We came up on deck and all that we could see was the breakers in the distance.

Then with the business of getting people and goods off the boat, how did you fit in, what was your role?

There was a navy officer, plus the captain - you see it was a Greek boat and I think the Greek seamen, they just about threw the sponge in - it was only the British Navy guys that took over, that brought some sense of control to the boat. But the navy guys arranged for the lifeboats. There weren't enough lifeboats, by the way. If we'd all been tipped into the sea - not enough life-buoys. I read that they're about a hundred short or fifty short of lifebelts for the number of people that were on the boat. We weren't aware of that at this particular time, but they managed to get a boat ashore in the morning which was very rough, and from then on with some strong rowers they got the boat ashore, they put a rope fore and aft on this lifeboat so that they were able to keep it headed into the waves, and that's the way we evacuated till we all were brought ashore.

Were you still sick at this time, or you'd got over it?

Oh no, we'd got over it at that time.

How long before you had your first meal? Once you were ashore.

We had emergency rations - they always gave us emergency rations like bully beef and biscuits and beans and I recall that the cooks salvaged some food from the boat and then we managed to make a fire and heat food up on the shore.

What was the feeling ashore? Was there a sense of 'Good God what've we got ourselves into', and a feeling of dismay, or was it all a bit of a joke as can be the case in disasters sometimes?

I think morale was pretty good at that particular time. We were so thankful to be - our feet on *terra firma*. There was a discussion, of course, between the officers of what would be the right thing to do and they decided that there must be a road inland which I think was somewhere near fourteen miles inland. And we dispersed into various groups so that if planes came across - they were concerned, you know, that the boat could be bombed and we could be strafed when they saw a lot of people about. So we set off for the road and eventually go going over many sand-dunes and ...

Were you confident about the process? I mean did you sort of believe that you were embarked on a sensible exercise or was it all a bit uncertain?

10.00 No I think that it seemed to be the logical thing to do and I guess the officers had some idea. They'd seen maps of where the road - the Bardia-Tobruk road - ran. So they were confident, and of course eventually when we reached there - they waited for one of the army, British Army, trucks that had come along the road and they went into Bardia, raised the alarm what had happened and the Bardia hospital sent out trucks to bring us in.

What was the attitude of the British? Were they amused or thought you were a lot of incompetent colonials?

No I think that generally speaking there was a good relationship. You always shared what each - the experience of each person had done. No I felt there was always a good relationship.

So once you were gathered up, what then?

Then they organised parties to go and salvage the supplies from the boat, which wasn't easy.

Did you participate in this?

I recall that we went back, yes, in parties. The British engineer group were involved because they had to erect a derrick on the boats - there was no steam of course on the boat - to work their winches and they erected by having some sort of barges or floats to bring the supplies on to the beach.

And once all that was accomplished, then?

Well then the engineers brought their trucks, and with the means of camels and other things got it over from the beach across, apparently, to the place where the trucks had managed to come. I think they grubbed a track in about fourteen miles.

Were you just a private still at this stage?

Yes, that's right.

So from there to Tobruk, was it?

From there we went to Tobruk, to Palistrina Port - Fort - which was just outside of Tobruk and we were camped there for a week or so.

Did you have any leave during that period?

Yes. We managed to get into Tobruk and have a look around. It was all very interesting. Everything was so new to our eyes.

Were you buying souvenirs and that sort of thing or were there real constraints on the basis of what you could do with stuff you bought anyway?

Well we had to be careful of picking up the grenades - Italian grenades - and things that might have been left due to - because the war had been fought over there. We were just in transit at that stage while the army made its mind up and we were finally were sent to Barce (spelt) B A R C E.

Were there any men that you knew who actually picked up booby-traps and injured themselves?

I just forget. It was an odd one or two that had .... You know the interest was to souvenir these things. And of course there was always warnings against this sort of thing.

But fellows did anyway. It was a bit of a challenge was it to try and get them and disarm them?

Yes, there were fellows who were able to disarm them. And I recall bringing one back that had been unloaded just as a souvenir.

And what followed from there?

We then were assigned to go to Barce which is up in Cyrenaica and its very beautiful country up there. You leave the sort of desert and you go into palm trees and gum trees which look like home - a very fertile section of the Benghazi-Barce area on that peninsula in Cyrenaica.

And doing what?

Well we took over from a casualty clearing station to relieve them so that they'd go on further. And I recall that they felt that that was an ideal place because that was on the assumption that the British Army would continue to chase the Italians, but at that stage things went sour because the Germans started to come across and become active.

And you were then getting your first casualties through, were you?

I guess yes. There was not a lot of activity until all of a sudden the Germans started to push, and of course the army had been weakened because it had been sent over to Greece. And the result was this: that the forces that were up in - pointing towards Tripoli just weren't sufficient to hold the German - the new Africa Corps that was coming across.

15.00 Was it a bit chilling suddenly to find large numbers of young men who were wounded or ill in one way or another coming through? I mean was there a sense of being closer to some reality that you weren't quite prepared for in any way.

I guess yes. At that particular stage it wasn't very striking. It was when we got back to Tobruk the brutality of warfare started to make itself manifest.

In what ways?

Well we were bombed as you would be aware, and that was a stark reminder of the brutality of war when you saw some of your own staff and, um, when a bomb hit one of our wards and patients, innocent patients, that had come in from the front line and some only for illnesses that they had developed and they were killed, legs blown off. It was rather shattering that particular Easter.

What sort of things were you doing at that time?

I was in the quartermaster's store and that includes the pack. We have linen for the hospital, new fresh linen. But I was at that time appointed to look after the packs of patients that came in and looking after their personal effects which are always taken .... It comes in, in the ambulance and you record that to look after their personal effects and arrange for them to have anything that they want out of their kits.

Did you have Italian POWs coming through there?

Yes we did. We had Italian people. And when you meet these young guys, you realise how stupid it is that we try to kill each other - and the same with the Germans too. You know the futility of war comes to your - face to face when you talk with these guys that are innocent people like ourselves drawn into a conflict.

Were there some that spoke quite reasonable English that you were able to have decent sort of conversations with?

Yes, well we found both Germans and Italians - you'd be struggling sometimes to make conversation. We met .... I recall making a very close friendship with a Polish guy. And I felt we had nothing to complain about. Here he couldn't get letters from home, because Poland was occupied, and he was away out in the desert, you know, with no letters from home, so it brought home to a lot of us that we were rather privileged to be able to even have letters and correspondence from home. Others, you know it was bleak.

Some people have remarked that some of the Germans were rather arrogant compared with say the Italians. Did you find that or?

I guess you would find individuals, Germans, that were arrogant. This could be some of the fighting people. Italians generally, I think didn't have a lot of heart to fight and that's why I think they were pushed back because they were easily ...

Were you also responsible for their personal effects as well?

Yes well we had to make out a form of having received their pack and their personal belongings. And I, from memory, I think if there was any money etc. that had to be recorded. So their personal effects were looked after.

What would you suppose happened with ultimately? Would they have got them back, or do you think ...

Oh yes. They would .... When they were disembarked at any time their pack had to be sent with them on evacuation.

During that very busy period in Tobruk where - I think it was March to September - where there were something like about thirteen thousand

casualties came through, how did that effect your activities? Were you also extremely busy.

Well I guess we were busy during the day and we were so busy at night dodging the bombs that we didn't sleep very well, and of course was often tearing off to the air-raid shelter.

Did it effect your nerves, as it did with some people?

Yes, I'm sure it had an effect on all the guys. You know you can take so much and I think that final Easter when they were dropping Easter eggs at night and during the day - we were getting bombed by stuka bombers during the day and then we were getting high level bombers at night: it was rather terrifying.

What were the Easter eggs, as you refer to them?

Oh, they're the bombs (laughing).

Maybe along with everything else there was some macabre joke being perpetrated.

That's right.

Did you get to a point where you felt you were going to crack? I mean did it get you to that extent?

20.00 I think some did have .... Anyone who was truly honest would say that they were scared, but there were some of course that had *anxious neurosis* there might have been an odd one or two in our unit, but of course a lot of the guys that'd been out in the front line laying in ditches during the day and difficult to be reinforced or given food, I don't blame a lot of those for cracking because we did have a number of guys, as in any war I guess, with *anxious neurosis*.

How were they treated? Was there at all a tendency to regard them with something verging on contempt? Did any adopt that attitude?

No. I don't think so. I think that in a medical unit they accepted that this was part of the injuries, really, of war. And humanly speaking we've all got a certain tolerance level, haven't we, of what we can take.

Conversely, was there at all a feeling with some that they were tired of just being on the receiving end, that they wanted to get into an active unit and could hit back?

Only an odd one or two.

Did you ever feel that yourself?

Not really, no.

> What about your own religious views at this time? Were they challenged at all? Did you being to wonder about whether somehow your concept of God and right and wrong, justice and evil were correct?

No, I believe that our faith stood us in stead. We accepted that if there, you know, we - our end was met we were confident of meeting our maker. We had good fellowship, for instance often we would have Communion on Sundays in the hospital in Tobruk. We'd only be dressed in shorts, sometimes not even a shirt, but that was a strengthening of our faith and our friend, Padre Salter, would be leading it. And there were other guys there and patients who would come. No, I think that that was a strengthening of our faith at a time of real stress.

> Many young people have a sense almost of immortality. They can imagine other people being killed or hurt but not themselves. Did you, earlier on, have that feeling that somehow or other you were meant to go through it and was that shaken by the bombing?

No, I wouldn't comment on that. No.

> What about religious services during this period?

Yes, the padres would.... There would be the big division was OPDs - other protestant denominations - the Anglicans, which were a strong group. And of course if no one had anything else they would be Anglicans or Catholics and each of the padres had their particular services and held them. They were advertised and patients who could come along to those were very welcome, and I think they were well attended.

> Were there some attendees who were unlikely ones - fellows who earlier on had scoffed who suddenly found an interest in religious matters as their own mortality was threatened?

I think when the pressure is on there are lots of guys who start to think more deeply about what life is about when the challenge of death is always a possibility.

> As quartermaster were you also responsible for medical supplies? Did they come under your wing, as it were?

There was a pharmacy under a lieutenant and he had staff there who looked after the medical supplies. No that didn't come under quartermaster stores.

> Generally, were the supplies adequate or were there gross shortages in some areas that didn't seem to make sense.

I think at times that, in looking back, we would get tired of tinned meat. And in Tobruk the navy and the supply occasionally were able to supply fresh meat and I recall the times when

that was greatly appreciated, even to a note in our diaries that we had fresh meat today instead of tinned meat.

When you were going through the monotonous periods would people tend to see you as somehow as being the source of the problems as quartermaster? Would you have to bear the brunt of a lot of complaints?

No, I wasn't in that particular supply. See the quartermasters were divided up into the physical supplies for food and water etc., the linen supply was another section of it, the pack room, looking after the personal effects of soldiers, was another section, so we weren't involved. There was a - broken up into a sergeant who looked after those and, for instance, water - we had a water point somewhere round and because a lot of the pipes had been broken in bombing, so there were .... It was divided up into various responsibilities.

25.00 There were also quieter periods. What sort of things did you do when you had time for yourself?

I guess occasionally we had to be able to go down into the town of Tobruk and look about it. I can recall once going out to the cemetery, going out to one of the aerodromes on the plateau. Not an awful lot to do really.

Did you swim?

Yes. Occasionally we went and that was always quite enjoyable in the beautiful Mediterranean. It was really lovely.

Was there access to beer or to alcohol at all during that period?

Yes, I recall the army canteen service would - that was always available.

Did you drink by that stage at all?

No. I've always been a non-drinker. And this didn't worry me ever.

What did you do with your entitlement? Would you trade it off for other things you wanted?

I don't think it was given away. I think at any time some might want to .... If it was rationed in any way, someone would appreciate one's ration for it which there was no problems there, if people wanted it. But it was basically sold in the canteens.

Towards the end of the siege of Tobruk was there a feeling, or did you have the feeling you might be taken prisoner of war?

There were many rumours that we were surrounded and I think that was the most devastating effect of all us. When we realised that here we were in Tobruk surrounded on all sides no way out. I think when that first hit us that that was very depressing. You can imagine it, can't

you? Surrounded by an army, getting bombed day and night and no way out except via the navy.

Was it a relief ultimately then when it was decided to withdraw?

Well we managed to survive and of course the reinforcements were gradually brought up, the Germans were repulsed as they - they did make a salient there and were very hard to shift, but it became a stalemate then. And I guess more confidence came back as mail came in and supplies came in, even if sometimes the hospital ship was bombed by the Germans in retaliation, I guess for our air force doing something to them which is part of human nature - tit-for-tat. And so gradually you built up the confidence but at the same time you wondered over those eight - seven or eight - months that we were locked up in Tobruk when ever would we get out. I think the Australian government was keen to have us out at that time for political reasons. And eventually it happened and I was on a rear guard party which - that means you survive. You're the last to get out - spread over a week or two. And as I reflect on that, I often wondered why I deserved being on the rear guard. In other words you had to survive a few more nights.

What did you do during that period? What sort of duties were ...?

Well it was a matter of handing over the work we were doing to the British hospital that had taken over the responsibilities, and they were like ourselves. See I guess where some of us are a bit - looked at the concept of world war one where the base hospital was way back in the base town, and then there were casualty clearing stations and then the field ambulance. None of us - and like the whole concept of war changed with the fluid nature of *blitzkrieg* warfare that surrounded and base hospitals just weren't back at base and we found ourselves in the middle of a town that was being bombed day and night. It shook us all.
30.00

END TAPE 1, SIDE B
BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

Identification: This is side one of tape two of the interview about the 2/4th AGH recorded of 5th November 1990 with Russell Clinton and begins in five seconds from now.

Had you had occasion to get along to the wards or to surgery during that period? Had you got inside the theatres?

Yes. I guess that the sight of blood wasn't - my nature didn't adjust very well to it. See we had a very busy theatre there particularly during action. And some of those guys, the theatre orderlies and the surgeons were working flat out - pair of shorts and a white jacket over them you know.

Surgical gloves or had they abandoned those?

Oh I think they took all the precautions that they could. We had an X-ray unit. Under very difficult circumstances I guess the unit was mentioned as doing an excellent job in Tobruk.

Did you spend time there at all or ever assist or was it just a matter of interest to see how it worked?

I guess it was a matter of interest. My line was essentially in the quartermaster's department. I just didn't continue on in the wards. I went for a short period and then was transferred into the QM.

When you say you were in the wards for a short period, what were you doing?

Oh its only early days, not in Tobruk, but in Puckapunyal and then it was decided that we'd go into the quartermaster's store because that would be in line with my civilian vocation.

So from Tobruk where did you go then?

Well I guess, we were taken out at the dead of night in the Australian destroyer *Napier*, and that to me was an exciting experience especially with the throb of the motor and it doing about thirty-six knots was quite an experience and there were I think other destroyers zig-zagging all the way down the coast to get past what they call 'bomb alley'. And in the morning we did have a scare and of course that made the adrenalin run because there was an aircraft over, spotting us. Of course the idea was this then the 'recce' aircraft would bring in dive bombers or something like that, but fortunately we got down to Alexandria safely without any further incident. But it was very interesting and exciting to see them doing evasive action at thirty-six knots. And destroyers were pretty big craft to be throwing around at high speed. Exciting really. But the navy boys were Australian Navy people, and of course they looked after us and they were able to feed us well.

When you left Tobruk were the supplies there left for the British, or you took your own supplies with you?

Oh no. Those supplies which we had salvaged from the *Knight of Malta* - we had taken some up to Barce and I'm not sure whether we'd unloaded many of the supplies at Barce - but whatever we had at Tobruk - I guess we salvaged too from Italian army units - was all left in tact, so that all they did was take over the hospital.

So what did you find yourself doing after Tobruk?

We were taken to Gaza camp and from there that was recuperation really and I think it was needed very greatly.

How did you do that, what sort of things?

What sort ...

What sort of things did you do during the recuperation period?

5.00 Well during that period, of course the army never left you wander around doing nothing. We had army marches. They set up leave for us to go, to travel. I recall the padres created some tours and arranged for us to take buses so that we went to Jerusalem for a few days and then went up to Samaria and Galilee, in other words took us around. And they were excellent times of refreshment and of course to those who had a commitment to their faith - in Christian faith - well this was quite illuminating to be in Jerusalem.

Was it moving? I mean was it deeply touching to find yourself in those places that you'd grown up with in a way?

I feel so. I thought, 'here is history and we're right there'. I've been back since. Of course after forty years the place had changed considerably - not the old city, but where we conducted a hospital. And see later on as they - we were detailed then to take over a British hospital in Jerusalem, we then lived in Jerusalem for a number of months before they decided to take us back to Colombo.

What were your duties then during that period?

Again it was the pack. We were split up into two sections from memory. There was a German hospital down the Street of the Prophets. We were in the German hospital and then there was an Italian one, which had been taken over by the British Army at that stage, and so we conducted a general hospital in Jerusalem for a period of months.

Was it a busy job? Was it the sort of thing where there were things to be doing all day or would you - fellows would play cards or whatever?

No. I don't think it was, from memory, it was a case of a reward for after being in a very difficult situation in Tobruk for so many months. Just the normal busy life of conducting a hospital, I guess and nursing patients.

There was that Christmas of course where there was snow in Jerusalem. Did you visit - were you in Jerusalem at that time?

That was a very pleasant experience for us to see Jerusalem and that did not happen every year I understood, that snow fell in Jerusalem; but it was very pretty and quite an experience to remember.

How did you get on with local people over things like taxi prices or the cost of food or drink if you were buying things when you were out, that side of life?

Well I guess there was .... If you're dealing with Arabs you definitely have to barter. I suppose there's you've gotta - watch - you make comparisons with your friends on what you pay for these things.

Australians have a bit of the reputation in south-east Asia as being pretty mean, that is they are pretty fierce bargainers. Did you get any sense as to how the Australians were seen by the local people in those sort of terms?

I think we learnt the bargaining bit from the Arabs (laughing) in Palestine.

At the point you were leaving, what was involved then in the final departure from the Middle East?

Well we came back to Gaza and of course there's always rumours in army camps of where you're going, but you're never sure. We weren't sure whether we were going to go home or what we were going to do. It was a time of uncertainty, but still a time of refreshment as we packed up.

To this point who had you been working to? Were there particular officers or people that you'd worked most closely with?

Well, as a quartermaster's staff under a captain, we would take our orders and directions from him.

Did you ever have occasion to meet the commanding officer of the 2/4th?

Oh yes, he was well known, Colonel Speirs. I guess he did a good job for a man of fifty-five when we went overseas. I think he did an excellent job. He had knowledge from world war one and he knew what, you know, made a hospital tick.

With the experience and familiarity, now, then with army procedures behind you, how did you feel was the relationship between officers and men in terms of efficiency and humanity?

I would feel that our officers who, speaking generally, there was a good relationship with them. You always get individuals who have a friendly and open and being doctors a lot of them felt strange about strict office discipline. But I feel that we had a good relationship really with our officers.

There'd been some hostility between Australian soldiers and British MPs. Did you see anything of this?

10.00 Not really. I guess this sort of thing comes from problems when guys are on leave and playing up in the cities really.

By this stage had you developed any particular friendships that had become very important to you, or were you the sort of person who pretty much led your own life and just tried to get on with people?

Oh no, we had very good friends within the unit. They had similar beliefs. We also .... I found an American missionary who was working amongst Jewish people in Jerusalem and we went to their home at night and made very good friendships with people like that.

Well what sort of work were they doing?

They were involved in working amongst Jewish people and of course Jewish people who changed their faith face awful problems of being disowned and virtually excommunicated from their families; but he was working to express Christian faith to the Jewish people in Jerusalem.

What were your feelings about leaving the Middle East? Were you glad to leave or had it become a place that had its compensations of the sort that you've just referred to - visiting the holy places and so on.

Yes, well I would think Palestine was a plus for lots of us. It was most interesting. Would you ask the question again, I'm sorry.

I was just wondering what your feelings were at the time when you came to leave the Middle East?

Anything that took us back towards Australia I think was a plus for us. There was always the possibility, because of the problems with the Japanese who were pounding at the top of Australia. Anything that took us back to home in that direction was marvellous thinking.

Was there a sense of alarm about that Japanese threat? I mean was there a feeling that 'Good heavens they could actually rush down and take Australia' or was that thought not really a likely one?

No, I think that that was a potential. As you know news .... We received newspapers occasionally from home and you got certain news. The Government didn't tell it all at that time. I guess it would have created panic, but obviously there were grave dangers to Australia at that particular time.

So you then went to Ceylon, was it?

Yes. That was a disappointment (laughs), particularly with the thought that it would have been wonderful to go home. But again it was a town, or a place, a country that I personally enjoyed seeing. It's picturesque, it's interesting. And I think anyone who loves travel to see people, how they live, and I was a keen photographer, and able fortunately to keep my camera. To me it was quite an exciting experience. And again we caught up with local people who had - belonging to the local church where we went to worship and made very good friends there.

Cameras were supposed to be illegal?

I think if one was in the front line, yes. But we - lots of the guys did have .... I don't recall about the illegal part, but I think lots of our guys had cameras.

How did you get on for film? Where were you able to get film?

Oh we would buy it at - we took some with us - we bought some in Ceylon I think on that day we went off. And in Egypt we bought film again.

Were you able to get it developed in the Middle East as well?

Well I managed to take some developer, some chemicals with me and I recall developing some films, just the negative part of it in Tobruk and when we came down to Palestine of course you could get your photos developed without any problem there.

Were you a good photographer?

I kidded myself that I was (laughs).

Did that have any special advantages to you? Were you able to develop the films of other men or ...?

Oh I think occasionally we developed some films, you know for our friends who knew. Yeah, I think so.

Was there any concern by the army to sort of vet the photographs to see that there was nothing taken that might be thought to have any sort of defence or security concerns?

No. One didn't broadcast this sort of thing around. I don't think so. There were some NCOs and I think the officers would take their own personal photographs. I took some around the hospital and the bomb shelter and various places. I don't think it would be vital as it would be different if you were out on the front line and likely to be captured.

15.00 How long did you spend in Ceylon then?

I guess it was about three months, without looking that up.

Did you have any trouble with malaria or dengue fever?

No. My greatest problem was skin trouble. And you know to this day it re-occurs, but the Veteran Affairs supply the medical problems when we cop that ...

What's the nature of the problem? How does break out?

Its a tinea virtually, I suppose is a common explanation. You know, you get it, in the crutch and under your armpits and it's a sort of thing some - the nature of some people doesn't need

much to trigger that off and I - in looking back on my diary I see that quite a number of the guys suffered from this in the humid conditions.

How widespread would it have been, ten, twenty percent had it?

I guess you might say that twenty percent. Some would have it more severe than others.

How would you treat it there, when you were in Ceylon?

I forget what the treatment was, but today we've got exotic ointments to rub on. I forget just what was the common treatment of that day.

So from Ceylon? After Ceylon?

After Ceylon, of course again the army never tells you where they're going to take you, but of course we can always tell whether we're going south or north and the boats were heading south down the Indian ocean, and of course we felt there was only one thing that was going to happen. That we would be going home. And that was a wonderful thought.

How did you travel? What was the nature of the ship and accommodation and so on?

I just don't recall the boat in my diary, except to say that it wasn't as bad as the *Nevasa* - the first shock, you know, going to the Middle East. But it was all sorts of boats were impressed in and I guess we slept up - on hot nights would sleep in hammocks up on deck but as we got down south of course we'd have to curl up. I'm not sure now what the boats - how we slept. But it was a very happy thought because we were continuing to go south.

So do you recall where your first sighting of Australia was?

Yes. We didn't touch Freemantle. Some did go into Freemantle and the folks at home got word. Girls at work would talk to my wife then they'd say, 'Oh! someone's rung us from Perth. They've arrived home from the Middle East', and of course our folks at home thought this might be happening. But I guess it was when we came round towards the bottom of Victoria was the first sight that we'd seen - the Heads.

Was there at all a sense of release that - of suddenly shedding a lot of tension and pressure, or was it touched by the emotion of returning home?

I just think it was such a wonderful thought to be home again. A tremendous thought.

Had relatives actually turned up at the dock? Was there ....?

No I think that when we docked there was a telephone put on and of course the officers would have first privilege for phoning but when it became free, I manage to ring my wife at the Shell company's office and that was the first word that we were home.

Where had you married?

Oh, we married when we came back from the Middle East.

Oh, I see; but you had known your wife before you went away. Was she aware that you were coming back?

Well all the lasses that had friends overseas were getting phone calls or messages, particularly those the boats that went into Freemantle, so there was some thought of this, something was happening.

Had the term the 'Rats of Tobruk' been coined and was that generally around Melbourne at that time?

Yes, I think so. See I recall it was Lord Haw-Haw that talked about the Rats of Tobruk.

Did you hear it?

Yes, I think we heard broadcasts from him, tuned into our radio. Someone would have a radio and they would listen to it.

Were there any parades then after you got back?

Yeah, they took us then by train which was awfully tantalizing. They took us up to - I think it was Seymour camp ...

Before you had any leave?

Before we had any leave.

Does that seem to make sense? I mean did you feel that having got back you should immediately have leave?

Well you know you'd think it would be logical but I guess they didn't have the facilities to bring troops back and dump them around Melbourne so that they could have .... But no, they took us to Seymour camp where they had, obviously, transit facilities and from there on we were given I think a week's leave.

20.00 How different did Australia seem at that time? Was there a different sort of mood and sense of the country being on a war footing?

Oh, I guess so. I guess that, yes. Things were more austere. The folks at home were surviving with coupons and other things, but they were all surviving and of course the American troops were .... You know America was assisting us and there were a few Americans around the town. So ....

Did you get to meet any?

Not really no, not that I recall.

> There seems to have been some ambivalence towards the Americans, of course on the one hand appreciation of their role here in the Pacific, but a resentment that they were over here, over paid and over sexed as it was said.

I guess that was always .... It didn't trouble me very much.

> So how much leave did you get then?

I think that we had about a week or ten days leave which was great.

> And from there?

And from there on we went back to Seymour camp, and I think we still had - there was nothing positive about going up north. I think we had some more leave too. Short leave before they trained us up to Brisbane and Redbank camp.

> Were you disappointed to be going further north? Or you just accepted whatever was necessary ...

We accepted that this was necessary, really.

> How did you find conditions at Redbank?

Well we got into the routine. I guess that we were always longing for home and tired of war. Queensland was most interesting; of course lots of us travel was just no existent in those days. There was only a very select people. And we found Queensland most interesting, its tropical growth and we made friends up there again.

> What sort of duties: were you still acting in the quartermaster's then?

Yes just the quartermaster's store, yeah?

> How were you finding it by then? Was it the sort of job that was starting to grate a bit because of the limitations of what you were doing, or again it was just a matter of accepting it as long as the need was there?

I think we were getting a bit tired of the game really, because at that stage I was thinking of transferring to another unit which I did eventually - to a camouflage unit - which to me was much more interesting than the pack store. I was always keen on photography and photography was a part of that: camouflaging guns, like we did around the coastal area of Brisbane, and then going up in a plane and photographing them to see how well the camouflage mixing paints, and nets and what not ...

> When did you do that? When did you make the move?

I made the move after about two months being anchored in Redbank. And found this engineer's, it was a small unit of quite a friendly setup, and to me that gave stimulation of a fresh sort of job.

What did you actually do on a day to day basis?

Well we would be .... We were connected with water transport at Redland Bay. This was the training unit and we were developing camouflage nets and suitable for mooring of barges in amongst the mangroves. We would develop these nets and photograph them. Then finally we'd go up in a plane from Archerfield.

Had you flown before?

No not really. But today you know I'm a pilot still. I've flown .... I've got two thousand hours up in light planes.

When you were going up then though?

Oh, no I hadn't flown before. The desire came later on in life fortunately. Then we moved across to Bribie Island and the water transport moved across to Toorbul Point, which is the point on the mainland opposite Bribie Island, but .... Our camouflage unit moved onto the guns which were on the - defending the coastal bay of Morton Bay. And that was a most interesting time because we could swim and fish at the end of the day. Work on the guns and it was good healthy exercise to develop these camouflage.

Were there greater security concerns with that?

Bribie Island was a restricted area, I guess at that time.

Would you have been briefed not to talk about your work, for example?

We didn't talk about our work very much. It wasn't a forward zone. It was just that we were, yeah, camouflaging guns. That didn't seem to be an issue.

25.00 So how long did you keep doing that?

I guess I was in that unit for six months or more and the war was starting to .... It might have been longer. The war was starting to wind down, and then I went across - was - left that unit as a photographer and visual aids assisting at Toorbul Point with the water transport training centre again that had moved across from Redland. And I enjoyed that. At that stage my wife was able to come up from Melbourne.

Was she in the services or a civilian?

No, she was with the Shell co...

When had you married, on leave or ...?

Oh yes, we'd married when we came back from overseas. No she came up when we were at Redland Bay, so it was a matter of getting permits for her to live across and the officers got permits for their wives to live across, and we bought a boat and rowed backwards and forwards or sailed. It was a good time.

Was the photography work one that you could actually develop your skills, did it have that sort of ...

Yes, I felt it was. It was a matter of taking photos of training exercises and sometimes making - in those days it wasn't thirty-five millimetre film transparencies like we have today - but we would make two and a quarter inch square slides for lantern, for visual training.

Were they very sharp? Were they decent photographs?

Oh yes, I think we tried to a pretty decent job with the equipment that we were given at that time.

Were there any important developments of a sort that were significant in advancing camouflage?

Well at that time it was a matter of using whatever artificial material that they could develop, like strips of hessian that were painted various colours to create a - as far as photography goes from the air - would camouflage barges and boats that were pushed in underneath, or near the mangroves. And we would prove it by taking photos and develop an area of camouflage, take photos of it and then they would evaluate the effectiveness of it.
27.45

END TAPE 2, SIDE A
BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

Identification: This is side two of tape two of the interview with Russell Clinton about the 2/4th AGH recorded on 5th November 1990 and begins in five seconds from now.

So how long did you stay with the water transport people?

I spent - just as war was finishing. That seemed to be .... The training place was starting to wind down and my wife had gone home because she was expecting, and as the war was winding down, or had finished, I think, I managed to get a transfer down to the army at Albert Park.

Do you recall where you were when the war finished? Or can you remember the moment when it was announced?

I think that we were at Toorbul Point. No I can't recall it, but I was in Brisbane. My wife was home and there was great rejoicing of course. I ...

Did you know the 2/4th had gone to Borneo?

Yes. I was aware that the 2/4th had gone eventually. I was - had felt I hadn't made any progress as far promotion goes and was tired of that repetitive work. That to be able to use your skills in photography and doing something different out in the open air was - suited my nature at that time.

Did you get some promotion during that latter period?

Yes I was just a corporal. Sometimes you were fortunate to get promotion or not, but then I went back to work after that and I was made a manager at Myers.

And how long after war's end before you were demobilised?

I spent some three or four months - it might have been longer - working down in records down at Albert Park which eventually became a very boring job because the war was finished and you wondered why you were making parts lists up for guns and for boats and for other things (laughing). It was just like a public - I can imagine a public service job, feeling there's no initiative.

Where were you living?

We were living at home and of course that was a plus.

Which was where?

I think at my wife's place because we didn't have a house ...

Sorry. Which area of Melbourne was that?

In Preston. Back in Preston, yeah.

How was the transport facility then? Was it easy to get out to Preston and back?

Oh yes the train service was good, you know or the trams. We accommodated ourselves and we accepted the transport of today where today we rush around in motor cars.

5.00 When you were finally demobilised, was it odd the next day to get up and not be putting on a uniform?

Well it was very delightful (laughing). Yeah, I feel so, yes.

How long before you then made an approach to Myers about the possibility of getting your job back?

I guess we had talked about this immediately and they put us into the department for photography first and that was .... I didn't go back into furnishings. And we were looking then for supplies and eventually the director I worked with, we developed supplies, of course starting to come from overseas and into office equipment as well. That was another department we sort of brought two of them together. They were small because of the lack of supplies; but that grew until finally I left Myers and went into business for myself.

And how many other young men were there returning to Myers at that time? Were there considerable numbers?

Yes I think that lots of the guys that spent some years in the services were coming back, it was the thing that they knew.

Did it create any sense of uncertainty in relationship with fellows who were there who hadn't gone away, who were somehow made to feel a bit awkward or a bit embarrassed?

Oh, I don't recall. I think that lots of us were proud that we had served the country, and we were given priority to come back. Yes.

What about various measures that were offered by the government for ex-servicemen, like low interest loans, education opportunities and those sort of things? Did you avail yourself of any of those?

I think we availed ourself of a loan to build a house and we also availed ourselves of the facilities to do training courses. And then I went to RMIT, as a result of that, and did a photography course which eventually I used and did commercial work.

What was your feeling then about the attitude of the country towards returned servicemen? Did you feel there was an adequate sense of recognition, or did you find some men who felt that they'd left jobs, come back and had trouble fitting in and somehow or other they weren't looked after properly?

Well I was quite content as far as Myers. I guess there's always odd occasions where people are unhappy about, you know when they go back to their job because after four or five years things have changed. I guess that is always a possibility. As far as myself goes I was very happy to be back at Myers.

You mentioned you'd had this dermatitis like problem in Ceylon, did it continue to bother you back in Australia?

Yes, on and off in the hot weather and I've still got the problem, but which was accepted without any great hassle by the Veteran Affairs.

What about the relationship with the 2/4th, over the years the continued sense of involvement, has that been important to you?

I guess that at times, with the 2/4th in the early days, after the early reunions, I didn't go back to them very much at that time. I guess I was a bit tired of the 2/4th (laughs).

Well, was there a sense at all that being a quartermaster somehow or other you were a little bit apart from the rest?

Oh no, not really and then there were a few years we were busy with our own lives and didn't go back to the reunion. But over the years now as a lot have passed on and died off, I've kept in touch with the 2/4th and gone to most of the reunions each year. In fact I've marched with them. But these days with arthritis I think a lot of us are not marching, that's because of our physical limitations.

There are many people who obviously feel that the period at war gave them a special sense of relationship and closeness to other groups of people and a sense of purpose even in national terms of a kind that's perhaps never been available to many other people. Do you have that sense?

10.00 These days I feel there's .... We have a good relationship with the 4th AGH and the guys that come and now our wives join in, and its a very pleasant reunion that we have. I guess some of the bawdy types and some of those who were heavy drinkers and could be easily get merry, a lot of those have passed on. Their drinking habits have caused that, and so today those who are the survivors are the guys that have adjusted their lives physically. They haven't, you know .... There's a very pleasant bunch anyway, of guys that we meet these days.

What about the service in terms of your feeling about Australia and as a nation? Does it give you a particular sense of identification, do you feel?

I'm always pleased that I accepted the challenge. I think that it's opened our eyes to what goes on in the world. I'm always pleased that I'm a returned soldier, that I've seen what goes on. I think it gives you a sense of well-being that you're able to meet the challenge and to live with guys and understand what the army's all about. And there are guys like Trevor McFarlane a really nice guy and there's others that we've got know them now and their wives, and I find there's good friendships in our reunions now in the 4th AGH.
11.30
END TAPE 2, SIDE B