



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Interviewer	Martin, Harry
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Description	Harold Arthur Butt as a lance corporal, the 2/8th Battalion and as a prisoner of war, interviewed by Harry Martin for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-1945.

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A

Identification: this is side one of tape one of an interview with Harold Butt about the 2/8th Battalion recorded on 2 June 1991.

Harold Butt where and when were you born?

I was born in Ararat on the first of the fourth 1917.

Tell us something about your parents, what your father did for a living, what sort of person your mother was and so on.

My father he worked on different jobs but the last lot of years he worked in the mental asylums in Ararat. And my mother was just an ordinary woman but she was very involved in charity work when we were kids.

What sort of work did your father do in the asylums?

He was an attendant for a long time then he was in charge of the cooking.

And did that give you some notoriety at school? Was that difficult to wear as a kid?

No, no worries at all.

What sort of person was he?

A very quiet person, a very good father and kept to himself a lot, didn't mix with the population too much and looked after his family.

How many children in the family?

There was eight. There was five girls and three boys.

Where did you come?

I'm third.

Were they hard times? Having a large family during those difficult years of the Depression and so on a lot of families really struggled.

Well that is right. We used to have a saying 'we lived on rabbits and river water' but we got through.

Was it a religious family as such?

Mother went to church a lot. We all attended Sunday school and church till we were old enough to make up our own mind and then we pleased ourselves.

What denomination was that?

Church of England.

Was it a family with any connection with the first world war where members had gone off to war?

Some of the relatives had. My father was called up during the war - joined during the first world war but he never got away.

So it was a period I suppose as a child the ANZAC tradition was something that would be raised at school, salute the flag and all that sort of thing?

It was very much so in the early '20s and '30s - early and late '20s when I was at school.

Where did you go to school?

Ararat.

State?

I went to the Church of England Grammar School and then I went to the state school and I finished up at Ararat High School.

What did you see yourself doing later in life? Did you have any particular ideas when you were young?

No the thing was to think about getting a job and bringing some money in. That was the main thing.

So at what age did you start to work?

I was thirteen and a half when I left school.

To do what?

Any job I could get.

What sort of things did you do?

I had a go at lots of things. I worked for a butcher for about four years, a messenger boy and general rouseabout type of thing. And then I worked on different construction jobs around the country in different places.

Do you recall the sort of money you were getting in those days as a young boy?

No, not very - well when I was working for a butcher I was getting twelve shillings a week but money wasn't very high in those days.

What about recreation? What sort of things would you do as a young boy to amuse yourself?

I played a bit of cricket, a bit of football. I did a lot of bike riding. I was pretty successful in that.

What do you mean by that?

Well, I won a few trophies and things like that. I was riding off second scratch in Victoria when I gave it away so - in the amateur ranks.

Was there any thought of the Olympics?

No, no such thing. You couldn't afford those things in those days.

So where were you during the period immediately prior to the second world war?

I was in Ararat. I was out of work actually and just picking up jobs where I could.

Still single?

Still single, yeah.

When did you first start to get an idea that there was trouble coming?

Well the first thing I knew was the night that Menzies made the speech.

You actually heard it?

I heard the speech. We were sitting in the kitchen table, a friend and meself and they made the speech and I said, 'Well that will do us', so we wrote to Victoria Barracks in Melbourne and offered our services. And we got a letter back to report to Ballarat - medical examination early October and ....

(5.00) How extensive was the medical?

Oh, it was pretty extensive. I know I'd just had me teeth out and I had to get me teeth in before they'd accept me.

Were there many other young men at Ballarat also seeking to join?

Yes. I was in the first group that ever left that area. There was twenty in the first group on 20th October '39 - we went into the army then there was every few days there was groups coming down.

What was the feeling? Was there a sense that you're embarking on some sort of great adventure or what?

More the fact that we were gonna get paid for what we were doing. We were getting five shillings a day. Well we weren't earning that outside.

So from Ballarat where and how did you go?

We went by train down to Melbourne and then to the Showgrounds - Melbourne Showgrounds and that's where the 2/8th Battalion was formed. And we went up to Puckapunyal from there.

Was it your first visit to a city, at least Melbourne anyway, when you went?

No I'd been in cities before.

What was the situation like at the Showgrounds? What did you think of that?

Very congested and everybody crowded into rooms, into huts. But, oh well, I'd knocked around a fair bit so it didn't upset me at all.

Did you come down with a group of friends?

Yeah, a chap, a couple of chaps from Ararat came down with me in the twenty.

What did you make then of your introduction to army life, the discipline, the orders and those sort of things?

I had spent some time in the Militia before that, back in the late '30s so I knew what to expect.

What led you to join the Militia?

Well, there was a Militia in the town and somebody talked me into joining it, I suppose.

Was it felt at the time the patriotic thing to do or what was it?

No, it was just interesting.

What sort of things did you do in the Militia?

We drilled and we attended - I attended a couple of camps at the old Seymour camp for training and things like that.

And at Puckapunyal?

Yes Puckapunyal was a pretty rough sort of a place when we first went in there.

Describe it a bit. Give us a bit of a picture of how it all looked.

Well, it was a lot of tin huts that they were still building. And a lot of work going on putting in drains and sewerage [inaudible] when we got there in '39 but it gradually built up.

When you first arrived what sort of accommodation did you have and how many were in a hut and so on?

About twenty in a corrugated iron hut.

Was it cold or hot when you arrived?

Well it was getting warmer because it was getting November.

What was the routine?

Plenty of drills and marching and things like this. Gradually got into rifle practice on the butts and things like that.

What was the relationship with the people who were in charge of you? I mean were they friendly or aloof or how did you see them?

Oh, they're good and bad, good and bad.

What were the bad like and what were the good like?

Oh there were some good blokes in there. The bad were a bit - they thought they owned you I think at some times like that, but they were handled, no trouble.

What do you mean 'they were handled'?

Well, (laughs) we had lots of ways of getting around some of the things they tried to ...

Like what? Tell us about it.

Well you could get out of sight if you knew how to do it when somebody was on the rampage a bit. Looking for somebody to do a drill you could always do a fatigue, you could always dodge a bit, when you got caught up with, you just did it and that was it.

What about food? How did you find the food?

The food was alright. It was rough at places but it was alright.

Did you find the marches tough? What was the general feeling about the sorts of drills you were given?

The marching wasn't too bad. Most of us blokes in those days were pretty fit, especially the country blokes because we'd be doing a lot of knocking around and that.

Did it all seem to make sense or did there seem to be a lot of rather pointless exercises that didn't really add up to very much?

No it all had a purpose I thought, you know, to get them fit and give you a bit of insight into army life and handling of weapons and such, it all had its points.

How long did you spend at Puckapunyal?

We left there on the - we sailed from Melbourne on 14 April 1940.

So how long had that given you about?

From early November till April.

What about the summer at Puckapunyal, how was that?

(10.00) Oh warm enough.

Did you get 'Pucka' Throat as it was called?

No I never actually. I saw a lot of it but I never got it.

There was a march through Melbourne. Were you part of that march?

I was part of that march, yes.

Does it stay with you the occasion? Can you remember it?

I can remember it, yes. I can - we went down the night before and slept in the Exhibition buildings and marched and then went back to Puckapunyal. My main thing that I remember most was I was marching down Swanston Street and saw me brother on the corner.

Did he see you?

Yes he saw me.

Was it exciting? What was the feeling?

It was a bit of a hype. You had a bit of a feeling that you were trying to do your best. It got a bit awkward when the crowd got out on the footpath and we had to hold our rifles and bayonets above our head - got out on the road to ...

There was such a crush.

Yes they crushed us in one place.

Were they throwing paper out the windows and that sort of thing?

No not much of that.

What about your sense of what the war was about? Were you briefed, were you given lectures about what was going on, what it all meant?

Oh there was different lectures and things like that, but there wasn't much stuff talked about what it was all about - you were in the army and that was it. You were going to be sent where you had to be sent.

What about the way the Germans were presented as your enemies? Was there a sense that somehow or other they were almost sub-human or ...?

Not so much the soldier, more so much the leaders of the Germans that was everybody was hyped up on Hitler and Goering and all these people.

What was the notion that Hitler was mad or ...?

Well that was the notion yes.

So when you finally got to go aboard ship, was that an exciting time?

Well it was - nobody was to know we were going and they - from Essendon to the ship at Port Melbourne the railway line was lined both sides. So it wasn't a very well-kept secret.

What about your own family, did they see you off at all?

No they saw me on final leave and that was all. They never came down to Melbourne or anything like that.

What was the feeling at home, was there an emotional element to it?

Oh yes, well me sisters were - most of them were young then and Mum was a bit cut up I suppose, but otherwise there wasn't much too it.

Was it touching for you to see your mother distressed and your sisters?

Yes, it was a bit, yes.

What about life aboard ship? Tell us about that.

Life aboard ship was quite good. We used to do a bit of marching around the deck and that. We had a little bit of bother. We liked to play two-up, an Australian game, and we were on an English troopship and the captain decided that he wouldn't allow two-up but he'd allow the English sailors to run a housie-housie game, but that didn't go down too well.

Did you organise two-up then?

Oh yes we had two-up, we played two-up.

Did you get into strife over it?

No.

Was there money changing hands, much money?

Nobody had much money. But there was money changing hands.

What about you? Did you win or lose?

I donated sometimes and I won sometimes.

Seasickness at all?

Yes. I was seasickness for the first three days. I prayed for somebody to sink the thing (laughs).

Where did you first touch port?

We touched at Perth on our first and then we went to Colombo.

With some shore leave?

Yes we had shore leave in Colombo.

What were your impressions of Colombo?

Well, it was just what I expected actually. Colombo, you know, the - all we were doin' was havin' a few beers. There wasn't much going on, you know, they just had us a bit of sight-seeing around and ...

Were you briefed at all about say, fraternising with the local people?

We were told to behave ourselves, you know, not to approach the women and things like this which was fair enough.

Did you behave yourselves?

Yes we behaved ourselves.

Any got into strife or turned up back at the ship perhaps a bit worse for wear?

A few of them got a bit under the tail but it all sorted out.

And from Colombo?

We went across the - and then went up the Suez Canal to Kantara. And from there we got in the train and went up into Palestine.

Were you worried about the possibility of torpedoes or bombers on the way across?

No we had a submarine scare in the Indian Ocean but there wasn't much to it I don't think.

What did you make of the Middle East then?

The Middle East was a strange place. There was a lot to see. I suppose I went and saw everything I'd learnt at Sunday school and that, all the places in Jerusalem and the Garden of Gethsemane and all these places. Had a swim in the Dead Sea.

Was it impressive somehow to find these places were real in a way that took you back to those early lessons?

Well it does because you'd learnt about them in your Sunday schools and your churches and that and then to see them was a bit of an experience.

(15.00) What about the British? You would have had occasional encounters I suppose.

Oh yes we had a few encounters with the British.

Well you smile as you say that. What sort of encounters?

Well they thought we should - the British officers thought we should throw them a salute every time we saw 'em as they were walkin' down the street and everything. We didn't agree too much with that.

Were there any repercussions?

No, a few scraps occasionally.

Like what? Did you get involved in any?

Oh I got involved in a couple of scraps.

Tell us about them. What happened? How did it start and so on?

Most of the scraps were with the English military police. They kinda didn't like the colonials much. And they'd grab hold of one of our blokes and then we'd all gang together and take him back off.

Tell us about it in detail. I mean can you recall a particular incident and how it started and what actually happened?

Oh well, different things. Some of the blokes hit a few under the tail and then the 'red caps' would decide that they'd arrest 'em and that caused trouble. We kinda protected our own.

Were any taken away from you, or did you get them free?

Oh one or two were taken away. A few got put in the boob occasionally but that's army life.

What about you, did you get caught?

No. I got a couple of black eyes at times and things like that.

From whom?

Oh the police and a few of the Pommies I suppose.

What were the Australian military police like?

Oh the military police were pretty good. We had a pretty good military police, the 6th Division. I've got a lot of time for them, but the blokes in charge of the army prisons over there didn't have such a very good name.

In what way?

Ill-treatment of troops and that.

Did you have any friends who had that direct sort of experience?

Yes I did. And one lad that got killed, had just come out of an English military prison in Alexandria and he joined us just before we went in the Battle of Tobruk and he was killed in there. And he said to me - he saw me when he arrived and he said, 'If I've got to go back there Harold I'll shoot meself'.

Did he say what had happened?

Yes he was ill-treated.

But in what way? I mean what did you understand from that?

Oh well they used to pick on the colonials, you know, the English blokes in charge of things in prisons. They'd abuse the colonials till they showed a bit of thing and then they'd get bashed.

Was there ever any complaint about it at an official level that you know of?

No.

What did you make of that? What was your feeling? Did you feel that somehow or other the Australian Army was letting its men down, that they allowed this to happen?

No. I didn't because you were under control of the English once you got into one of their prisons and that's the way they were treating their own soldiers. And they seemed to think it was the thing to do I suppose.

What did you put it down to? Why do you think they were like that?

Ignorance. How to treat men. That was my opinion.

So from those few days with leave, you then went into pretty hard training.

Yes. We trained pretty hard. We done a lot of manoeuvres and things like that which was learning the game really. That's all it was.

Was it difficult adjusting to the heat and the marches with little water and so on?

No never. I never noticed any trouble with it.

Evidently there was an attempt to get you used to the idea of being able to manage with fairly minimal water rations.

Yes that's right. Because when we got up in the desert in Libya we had minimal water rations.

Were there some who had difficulty in adjusting?

Oh I suppose some of them did, but they soon - when they went thirsty for a while they soon woke up how to conserve.

How long were you training before you were moved up to fight the Italians then?

We went over there in 1940 and we went into action in '41.

Were you starting to get a bit impatient?

Getting a bit toey I suppose.

How was the food there?

Oh not bad.

What about correspondence from home and so on? Did you ...?

Yes we were writing letters home and getting letters and that from home.

Sports - were you involved in sports?

Oh yeah, there was a bit of football being played and cricket and such things like that.

What was your overall feeling about that time where you were waiting and training? Did you enjoy it, I mean would you say you enjoyed it?

Yes I didn't mind, enjoyed it. I met a lot of good fellas.

When were you first told then that you'd be fighting the Italians?

When we shifted down to Egypt and we knew we'd be going into action because they'd started up in the desert. The English had started pushing them back from Mersa Matruh and we shifted up there and Derna was our first attack up there.

What did you understand about the nature of the Italians as a fighting force?

(20.00) Some of them would fight pretty well but a lot of them didn't have their heart in it.

Did you believe that to be the case before you met them?

Yes because we'd heard one or two stories about them surrendering *en masse* and things like this.

So where was your very first action? Can you recall the day, the time and so on, how it went?

Yes it was in Bardia. The first attack on Bardia. We didn't make the initial breakthrough. We came in late in the day and we never struck into much at Bardia at all. You know, we picked up a lot of prisoners surrendered, but they didn't want to fight, they wanted to surrender.

What did you make of the Italian prisoners then?

Oh they were pretty meek and mild most of them. One or two treacherous ones.

What do you mean by that?

Well one battalion - one of the New South Wales battalions was marching prisoners down the road and a bloke named Captain Green was in the front and one of the prisoners pulled a revolver and shot him.

And what happened?

Somewhere or other some trigger fingers got a bit itchy.

Do you know how many were shot back as it were?

No I don't.

Were you there at the time?

No I wasn't with that.

Did that influence the way men felt towards the Italians? Were there some who let them know what they thought?

Yes there were some, but if they fought till you got right up amongst them - to them - you treated them as good soldiers. But if they gave up before they looked like getting hurt or if they - you probably rounded them up and shoot 'em down the road.

Where did you, as it were, fire your first shot in anger?

Oh Bardia I fired a couple of shots but Tobruk was our main - our biggest battle. We had a pretty hard time in Tobruk. We struck a lot of opposition. We lost a lot of men.

Are there any particular periods or events that stay with you?

Yes there was one. There was one of our chaps - we attacked one place and most of us jumped over the wall. They were behind a stone wall over amongst them and one of our chaps run up the wall and an Italian who'd surrendered picked up a grenade and threw it and knocked him down and then shot him. So there was a lot of rifles went off in anger then.

What about your own role? Do you have any particular memories about how it went?

Yes I was a Bren gunner and I was kept pretty busy.

What about the training with the Bren gun? Where were you first introduced to it?

Over in the Middle East.

What did you think of it as a weapon?

The Bren gun was a good gun.

In what way?

Well it didn't get the trouble that the old Lewis guns that they started us off with had or anything like that. We had the first war Lewis guns when we first started. And the Bren was handy to carry and looked after it you never lost fire with it - never got stoppages.

Would the Lewis tend to jam?

Lewis used to get a lot of stoppages, yeah.

Did that cause trouble? Can you remember any incidents where men got into difficulty because of that?

No because the Lewis guns didn't go into action with us. We went in with the Brens.

What was the distribution? About one in how many would carry a Bren gun?

One in a section. A section was about eight to ten men.

Was there a particular sort of tactical view as to how the Bren ought to be used, why and when and so on?

No you used your own discretion on that. Sometimes you put them out on the flanks in positions to give covering fire and things like that.

Were they heavy?

No I never ever found it heavy really. Cause I'm not small.

What about ammunition? Would you - was that a difficulty maintaining enough?

Well you carried ammunition and you had a number two on your gun who carried extra ammunition.

So you'd always be with a mate then with the Bren?

Yes he was carrying the spare barrel and the spare ammunition. He had a rifle as well. You always had a number two on your gun.

Did you choose him, or the number two was chosen?

No he was chosen. I lost one in the first attack in Tobruk so I just grabbed the nearest bloke and he became the number two.

Well what happened on that occasion?

He got wounded, the first bloke.

Was it a shock to suddenly find men around you wounded or killed - the first time at least?

No not really. It didn't worry me. I - there's a few lads from me own home town were killed there in Tobruk.

What about later on after you maybe finished an action? Would it come back to you then and you worry about it?

No you just wiped it out of your mind. You didn't think about it.

(25.00) With the Bren and ammunition you'd carry your own water?

Yeah you had your water bottle.

So what sort of load would you be carrying?

I don't know. I never ever found it that heavy.

Did you carry food with you or that was being brought up?

No we carried food - carried bully beef and biscuits with us.

So as it was getting near dusk, what would you do? How would you set up for the night and so on, look after your meals?

You'd set up a defence perimeter, blokes .... You had a defence line in front of you and it was always manned.

And where would you sleep? What would you do?

Just lay down where you were.

Did you have any trouble adjusting, or were you just so tired at the end of the day?

No so tired at the end of one or two days there that you just went to sleep, changed guards every two hours and things like that.

What about fleas or mosquitoes or those sort of things?

No they never worried me.

They were there?

Oh they were there, they were round those insects - few scorpions and things like that.

What about local people? Would you come across local people while you were in these actions or in some of the small villages?

Yeah you found a lot of - met a lot of Arab people and things like that. And when we got up into Libya we got in with the Italian settlers that they'd put in there. We billeted with them - they billeted us one time like they just - the army just said right you take in these blokes and that.

So what sort of billet did you find yourself in?

Me - we had a room in an Italian house and the people were in the other room. We never interfered with them and they never interfered with us.

When you say 'we' how many of you ...?

The troops. Could be seven or eight of us in the one room.

How would you manage for meals? Would you prepare ...?

We cooked our own, yeah. We cooked our own. We weren't with them that long.

Were you able to make friends with them as such?

Yeah we spoke to them. You never had time to fraternise much. You were moving all the time.

Where did you go from there?

We went up - we went through to Benghazi.

How did you move, truck?

We walked some of the way. We went in trucks. We did advance guard in a truck for the army there once because the English armoured cars doing advance guard got ambushed. So I was in a section, or a platoon that went on the advance guard in an open truck.

Did you have any trouble?

No trouble at all. Italians were keeping ahead of us thank goodness.

So when did you next have trouble, in Libya was it?

That was in Libya where we were then. We were up in Libya. No we had a pretty quiet run then up till - when we came up to - we went to Benghazi and then we came back, came the other desert - worked our way back - was relieved by 9th Division, 9th Australian Division.

Was it a difficult retreat?

No. We weren't retreating. We were just coming out and the 9th Div. was going in. That was before the Tobruk siege and that. We took Tobruk in the first place.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

Identification: this is side two of tape one of the interview with Harold Butt about 2/8th Battalion recorded on 2 June 1991.

Was your attitude to war starting to change at all now that you'd had involvement and seen men killed and wounded? Did it change much ...?

No it never changed me because that's what I expected. I'd probably read a lot of stories on the first world war in me youth and things like that.

Were there some men who had difficulty in coping?

Yes there were some. Not everybody's built the same.

Do you remember any in particular and how they handled it?

Some got scared, some didn't - human nature.

What was the general attitude then towards those who got scared? Was there a feeling that they were letting their mates down and were ...?

No you felt sorry for them actually. A lot of them had find it very hard. If you were scared you'd find it hard.

Did it get to you sometimes?

No.

Did you have any close friends who got very anxious and you were wondering if they would get through?

No I never made any close friends in the army because I saw cases of close friends and somebody got hurt and the other bloke went to pieces a bit. So I was friends with a lot but I never actually ever had any very close friend.

Would most men tend to take it like that and adjust that way?

I think they did. We all mixed in together, but you had to adjust that way.

So after that period of withdrawal then, did you have some rest and recreation?

Yes we had four days in Alexandria and packed up for Greece.

Tell us about the four days in Alexandria.

Well, we were sent on leave for - it was supposed to be one day's leave, a lot of us stretched it to four days.

Were you effectively AWOL?

Yeah I think we were. We all got fined anyhow.

What did you do during those four days?

Had a good time. Looked around everywhere. Let off a bit of steam I suppose.

Most men were warned about the brothel and VD. Were they attractions at the time?

I suppose we all had a look at them.

What did you make of them?

Well they were regimental. There was regimental brothels in Alexandria in Sister Street. And they were. You went and had a look at them, visited them as we say.

Were they well run, were they clean and so on?

Yeah they were pretty clean. They were well run those.

Did you know any men who got into trouble, who did get VD?

Oh I knew a few.

How was it handled?

Well their pay was docked. Self-inflicted wound they called it. But they were handled pretty well.

And the treatment?

Yeah they got treatment.

What was it do you know?

No I never ever experienced it.

Were any withdrawn? I mean were there some whose illness, as it were, were so serious they had to be taken out?

Well I wouldn't know that to be honest.

Well what other things did you do?

Went and saw a few shows and things like this. Strip shows and a few of these things that are on.

Was it surprising to find the attitude towards sex and the openness of it all was so different?

No not really because a lot of us had heard stories from soldiers who were over there during the first world war. I don't think it altered much.

After the leave, what then?

Well we shipped to Greece. I shipped out on me birthday as a matter of fact, on 1st April. And we landed in Greece on 3rd April. Well then we were there about three days in camp at Daphne and the Germans declared war on Greece. When we arrived there the German consul was countin' us off the boat, they weren't at war.

Did that seem strange?

(5.00) It did seem strange. So we were shot up into - we got in the train and did 200 miles up to Larisa in the train and then we did a bit in trucks and then we marched up to the Yugoslavian border, up through the - about twenty-five mile we marched and ....

Cold?

Yes it was, especially when we got up in the snow because a lot of blokes had never seen snow but when we got up there we got up there about the same time as the Germans did so we were nearly in action straight away. There was - some of our blokes got picked up when we were digging in. Germans come through talking perfect English and rounded up a few of them and ...

Where did you first see action there then?

Up on the Yugoslav border on what we call Vevi Ridge.

What happened?

We got there that next morning. There was some patrolling that night, mostly by the Germans and for the next three days we were under attack most of the time.

Can you recall any particular incidents of things that happened during that period?

Not really. A few of the blokes got killed and things like this. It was a bit awkward. We had an English regiment, the King's Royal Rifles, on our left flank and on our right flank we had a Greek battalion. And the last day - we'd held for three days and the last day - well the Greek battalion was evacuated. That was by orders I believe and the Germans broke through the English battalion on our left flank the same time as they broke through some of us.

How well did the Greeks perform do you think?

I didn't see 'em. They were over, fairly well over on our right flank.

What about the British?

They were quite good. They fought well.

What was the feeling at that time? Did you have any anxiety that you might be taken prisoner?

Well we had an anxiety that we were going to be in trouble because we was getting the whole German Army coming down and there was only about three battalions there, two Australian, one English and the Greek. And some New Zealanders. We had New Zealand machine-gunners and that there.

How did you get on with the New Zealanders?

Quite good.

Did you really feel that this was it, that you mightn't come out of it?

No I never looked at it that way. I was too busy.

Did you think that you might be taken prisoner?

No I didn't then.

Had you been briefed at all as to what you should do if you were captured or how you should ...?

Well you only give your regimental number, your name and your rank. That's all you gave.

Had you taken any German prisoners at that time?

Yes we'd picked up a few. We met the Adolf Hitler Division actually and I got some, rounded some, and got some wounded. I can always remember we had some wounded Germans on a stretcher and I said to one of them - they spoke very good English - and I said to him, 'Would you like a cigarette?' and he looked at me and I gave him a cigarette and lit it for him and he said, 'We were told you people would kill us'. And I said, 'We won't'.

Were there any who were knocked about as prisoners?

The Germans? I never saw any cases of it.

At that stage had you heard anything at all, did you know anything at all about the way the Germans were acting during the war, the atrocities they were committing and so on?

Oh yes, we'd heard stories.

There were some who came across villages where Greeks had been massacred and so on - did you have that experience?

No. We never - that was after the breakthrough.

It seems Blamey was very unhappy about the Australian commitment there. Was that generally known?

Well, we shouldn't have been there. That was what we - we always said that. That was afterthoughts of course.

What about at the time, did you have any sense ...?

We were sent, that's where we were sent and that was it.

Did you begin to wonder what was going on that you were obviously so outnumbered?

Well that's right we did, but you were too busy looking after yourself then to worry about those things.

Were you part of a rearguard action or what was your role?

No, I got cut off when the attack up on the - the last day of the attack. I was on the Bren gun and I was trying to slow things down a bit. But I ran out of ammo and by that time the tanks were round behind us, some of us, and we had to try and head across country to get out and I picked up with a few more stragglers and none of us had any ammo left. We were all out of ammo and two days after we got picked up by a German patrol.

What happened? What was the manner of the Germans towards you?

Actually they were Austrians. They were quite good.

(10.00) What happened?

They rounded us up - 'cause we had nothing to fight with so it was no good fighting, and we were taken back to Salonika then, in Greece.

Did you feel you might be killed at that moment?

Well that was always a thought, they might knock you off. So what.

Were any of the men knocked around at all as prisoners?

Our blokes weren't. Some were I believe. I'd heard stories but the group I was with, we never. We were fairly well-treated.

How many of there were you?

There were seven of us.

Did you sort of stick together after that or were you split up?

No I got split up. I spent more time in the Salonika prisoner of war camp than anybody I think because I was keeping out of sight. I didn't want to go to Germany.

Why not, because I believe Salonika was pretty grim?

It was tough. But I had ideas I might get out of there and I had a contact with a Greek nurse who was allowed into the camp treating sick prisoners. And she did help some of the prisoners that were sick and they got taken to hospital in Salonika. There was a few escapes made from there. But this Greek nurse was mixed up in it and I don't know what happened in the finish. I contacted her when I was in prison camp and I got a letter back from her but I could never find her after the war. I believe she got mixed up in the Resistance and could have been dead.

I believe there were some escape attempts involving a sewerage pipe where people were slipping out.

That was quite right. I wasn't in that camp. That was Number Two camp but I knew all about it. Everybody was trying to get down. They got a good few out but there was a bit of a - the Germans woke up because everybody was pushing tryin' to get a turn down it, you know.

What about your health during this period, because I gather the food was not all that good?

I started to go in your health. I finished up, I was in Salonika for three and a half months. I was keeping out of sight. In the finish I was helping in the hospital - at a prisoner of war hospital - and I developed malaria in Salonika and I don't remember going to Germany. I was suffering badly from malaria and I was put - and Germans were very frightened of malaria - and I was put in a special place, at a place called [Nargold?]. They had a fly wire round everything to keep - isolation it was. And I spent about a month in there. I was alright for most of it but I was enjoying it then.

When you first started to come to, did you wonder where you were?

Yeah, you didn't - you don't realise where you are. You just come out of it like that too, you know - that quick. And they said - I was on a stretcher - and they said to me, and I was on the train when I came out of it and they said we're on our way to Germany.

What sort of medical staff did they have there?

Well we had a lot of our - in the prison camps they had a lot of our own doctors, English doctors, New Zealand doctors were captured, some of ours.

Did they have adequate supplies of medicines, bandages?

No they were battling. We had a few cases in the prison camp of guards firing into the camp and one New Zealander I got to know very well, he was killed in there. He - one of the other New Zealanders went to hang his - he'd done some washing and he went to hang it on the wire and the guard shot him and this other bloke, who was a medical orderly, went to help him and he shot him in the stomach and killed him. The other bloke lost his arm.

Why was that, do you think? What led to it?

Trigger happy. They used to do, there were some funny .... They were like a lot of other armies, the Germans, they had some ratbags in it. Another night they threw a grenade in some of the blokes were in the toilet, everybody had dysentery and that, in the toilet and they threw a grenade in. And I knew a lad that lost his eye in that episode.

Did it embitter you towards the Germans?

No not really. I met some good ones, I met some bad ones. You meet them in every walk of life.

When you were being moved then from Salonika, were you still unwell?

Yeah, I was still unwell for about a month there and then I got shot across to another hospital and I wiggled his way into another prisoner of war hospital at a place called [Rockmunster?] and I wriggled meself into a job on the staff there for a while, and then I think they begin to think I was a medical orderly, you know, when they shifted me next time they put me up with all the stretcher-bearers and medical orderlies up at Stalag 8B by Dresden and repatriation came along and I happened to get on the repatriation.

On what basis, of your illness?

No I don't know what it was really. Luck I suppose.

(15.00) How did the repatriation system - work was it an exchange of prisoners?

It was an exchange of prisoners, yes.

When was this? What year was this?

End of 1943. Changeover was done in Barcelona in Spain.

How did it work, do you know?

Well change of people, wounded people that would have no further action, medical orderlies and that. We came down by train to Barcelona in Spain, dodgin' English air raids all the way down.

What were conditions like on the train?

Pretty good. Because the chap in charge of the train he was a German count and his statement was to us when we left right up the end of Germany, 'You're free men as far as I'm concerned'. I thought we were treated pretty well.

Did you have German guards?

Yeah. They were pretty good. We changed over. There was a - at Barcelona in Spain we pulled into the harbour there and as we were going in all the cargo wharfs as you go in they had 'Viva Churchill′ right along it. And the you got up into the wharfs and that was - they were all for Germany, the Spaniards and the Francos and the people. We did the changeover with a boat load of Germans, approximately the same number there.

What was the feeling there at the time? Was it difficult to believe your luck or were you anxious that something might happen and you might be pulled back?

Well you kept your fingers crossed all the way down. But only one thing we did. When we were coming out of Dresden there were some French workers working on the railway line - prisoners - and they said, 'Where are you going?'. We said, 'We're goin' through France'. 'Can I come I come?', one bloke says. So we dragged him into the train and we had him in the train with us all the way across Europe down to Lyon in France and he'd been working on the railway and he got off the train there and straight up on an engine that was going on to Paris and a friend of his was driving the engine.

But one thing that did upset me on that trip was we had this chap in the - some of us had him in the carriages - only a few of us knew about it. And we had him there and one time we had a German sitting next to him. The bloke couldn't talk English and he was sitting next to him talking to 'im. So we - another time we had him under a seat, another time we had him out in a concertina in the back of the train at Stuttgart and the stationmaster sprang him there but when the stationmaster - by the time the Germans come I was in the concertina and the bloke was gone, so that went over alright. I was just gettin' air.

But halfway down I was a bit disgusted with some Australians out of a hospital unit, a sergeant-major came up to me and he said, 'You'll have to get that bloke off the train, you've got a bloke on the train'. I said, 'Who said we got a bloke on the train?'. He said, 'You got one, you have to get 'im off'. He said, 'We'll all get sent back'. And I just said, 'My friend, if anybody gets sent back, I'll be sent back, don't you blokes worry about it'. I was very disgusted that an Australian would come at that. That bloke was a sergeant-major in a hospital unit.

So did they accept that?

Yes, oh I don't whether the boys got out 'cause we hid him and we shot him a carriage or two away and they did come round searching but they never found anything.

Did he get, out do you know?

Yeah, well he got on the train at Lyon and was goin' to Paris. I don't know what happened to him then.

You said you were dodging air raids. Were there any close hits?

Yes when we were in - I'm trying to think of the name of the place - yeah they were very close. We were dodgin' - we got mixed up in a couple of air raids. Well we'd been mixed up in air raids several times. There were some Australians killed in prison camps and that from our own air raids.

Were there any on this particular voyage?

No. We got no damage.

Did it somehow seem worse - the idea being killed by Allied bombers?

No, didn't ever worry about it. You know that was part of war.

Where was the point then when finally you realised during the handover process that now this was OK, you were free?

When we got on the - there's a boat all done up, Free French boat called the *Cuba*. It was all done up in red crosses and all that. When we got on that we knew it. We went back to Alexandria then. We got back there in October.

How did you feel?

Relieved I suppose. And then we came back - we came there and we wanted to get home then, of course, naturally but they never brought us home. We never got home till 25th January 1944.

What did you do in the intervening period?

Well we had leave all the time. We just went sightseeing and went back - I went back up over the deserts looking for the graves of some of me mates and things like that.

(20.00) Did you find some?

Yeah I found some. Got mixed up with an air force - stayed with one of the Australian air forces up there for a couple of days and things like this.

Did you travel, able to hitchhike with any flights?

Yes. I had a flight. I went on a bombing raid over Rhodes actually while I was up there. They said, 'Do you want to come on a bombing raid?'. I said, 'Yeah, I'll go on a bombing raid'.

Night or day?

Night.

So were you flying into flak and all that sort of thing?

Yeah there was a bit of stuff flying round.

Was that a different experience? Did you feel more frightened there than ...?

No I didn't feel frightened. I just thought this is a new - something I've seen. Silly thing to do I suppose.

You didn't get into trouble? Nobody found out officially?

No.

Were there any drills? Did you have any routines?

We had no routines at all we just were in a camp and we could get leave every day, if you wanted. Sometimes we stayed in camp because we didn't want to go into Alexandria every day. Went to Cairo. We did a broadcast. I did a - I was picked to do a broadcast for Victoria in a Christmas broadcast from Cairo when we were - before we came home. It was broadcast in Australia.

How did you actually spend Christmas?

Quietly. They put on a bit of a feed for us and things like that, a bit of Christmas dinner.

What about the New Year?

No, it was very quiet - the New Year.

So when did you hear you were actually heading home?

Well when we - January some time they told us we were on our way.

Were you elated?

Yeah we were gonna get home. So we got back to Australia ...

What did you travel in?

We travelled in a hospital ship, the Australian hospital ship, the *Wanganella* I think it was, yeah.

Australian nurses?

Yeah.

Was that an especial moment to met an Australian woman again after that period?

Oh yes, although there were one or two Australian women kicking round over the Middle East when we were there. There were still a few true Australian headquarters and things kicking around there.

Were you still having health problems?

Yeah, for .... - well I weighed about six stone ten when I came out from Germany. I was down ...

How much?

Six stone ten. But I ...

What would your normal weight have been?

Twelve stone. But I built up quick and then we came home. We got home and they very generously said - we pulled in - we were given leave. We'll give you three weeks' leave and they said if you come back we'll probably give you three months. Well that was the greatest joke I'd ever heard. We had three weeks' leave and reported back and they put us into Heidelberg hospital and then they boarded us and I still see 'em boarding me. I still see this bloke, he went red in the face, he was a high officer and he said, 'Oh you won't be getting out of the army?'. And I just looked and I said, 'Who said I wanted to get out of the army.' I said, 'I was a volunteer in '39, I wasn't called up'. And he took exception to it for some reason. So then something come up and they said, 'Would you like to go on the war loan round Victoria'. I said, 'Yeah'. They were pickin' soldiers out from different places. So I did about two months goin' around - I went all round Victoria makin' little speech and ...

What would you say?

Oh just a little bit of a talk about the camps, not much, you couldn't say much. As I just said, well they were connin' people to buy war bonds, that's what it was. I didn't sell bonds, I just made a little bit of a speech.

Give us your speech. Here you are, you've arrived there's a group of people there.

You just tell them a little bit of life. You never told them the real truth about things.

Imagine we're here now before a small audience and I'm part of the audience and I'd like to introduce - were you a private then?

No I was a corporal.

Corporal Butt, would you say a few words?

Well I just said I'd come back from Germany and I said things are not too bad. You never - may have painted a bit of a picture and I said you people out here are lucky because over there the Germans had money in the bank they were just told they were thanked for their donation to the war loan, the German war loan. It was just taken, you know. And I said you people have got a chance of buying war bonds that'll still be money. And I said you've got a lot of relatives, friends and that over there and some of us who are still in the army, we're not getting out. We want to try and get them home too. This was all there was to it. Only a couple of minutes.

Were you being paid during this period? Army pay?

Yeah our army pay.

Where would you be put up and so on?

They paid our - we're put up in boarding houses and places like that when we went to the country. But in - when we were in Melbourne I - we were attached to 339 Swanston Street and I just lived out at the brother's. He was away up in New Guinea and I stayed out there.

When you first got back home I suppose you went to see your mother and your family.

They brought our mother and one of me sisters down to meet us. Their nearest relative, or two nearest relatives were brought down to meet us when we came off the boat.

(25.00) Were you still thin?

No I was getting back. I was about ten stone then.

How did your mother seem? Was she shocked?

No she was happy to see me.

So how long did you travel around doing these loans?

Over two months.

And after that?

After that they decided they'd put us in the Ballarat convalescent camp. So they put us in there for a week and they got rid of us quick there because we were pretty fit then.

Starting to play up?

No they put us on guard one night and they had one of our blokes in the guardhouse so we let him out to go into Ballarat and I went in the guardhouse and they didn't take too kindly to it for some reason (laughs). Then I went from there to - they decided I'd go into - they put me in a field ambulance and I went over to Darley and we were trained there in a week and then I headed north.

What was the nature of the training?

They were showing us how to make beds and all this (laughs) and a bit of first aid training. And so while I was there I decided, my late wife and meself were going together before the war and we got engaged when I come home from Germany, and always said if I was going away again we'd get married. So I had to ring her in a hurry and said, 'Make some arrangements, round up your end, I've got a week's leave and we're gonna get married'. So I dashed home to Ararat and we got married.

Small affair or lots of friends?

No, small affair. And she went down to Melbourne, down to the brother's house for a bit of a honeymoon and next thing she was on the train going to Ararat and I was on the train going north. We parted in Melbourne.

Where were you heading for?

I was heading for up on the Tablelands and joined the 2/3rd Field Ambulance up there. And the first thing they did was issue me with a rifle. And I said, 'That's strange isn't it?'. They said, 'No the Japs didn't sign the Geneva Convention, you're here to protect the stretcher-bearers'. And I just said OK, no worries.

How long did you spend up there?

Went up there in - about. I had nearly nine months up in the Tablelands.

Did you like it or were you missing your wife?

Missing me wife. I never got home in all the time I was up there because - so then we sailed. We went over to Morotai and across and did the Borneo show.

When you were on the Atherton Tablelands, what were you doing most of the time?

Training.

When you say you did the Borneo show - whereabouts in particular?

Well went over - we was over in Labuan Island. Then I was on the mainland of Borneo. We were in on the invasion of Borneo - of Labuan Island. Then went up and we were working up things when the war cut out.

What did you understand then about the Japanese when you were heading off?

Oh I'd heard a lot of stories about them and was never impressed with them. They had some tough fighters. Some of then were tough fighters but there was a bit of the hatred of the Japanese because we'd heard stories that had got out from the prison camp, prisoner of war camps. And I'd lost a cousin over there. He was sunk in the *Hobart* and he died on the Burma railway. We'd had word he'd died.

Had you heard about conditions on the railway?

Yeah some thing had got out about the conditions of it.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

Identification: this is side one of tape two of the interview with Harold Butt about the 2/8th Battalion recorded on 2nd June 1991.

Did you get caught up in any of the fighting against the Japanese?

Oh yes we was - we went in there when the attack on the town of Beaufort - we went in and bring some wounded out. I felt sorry because a lot of them were young fellows that they'd shot up, the eighteen year olders which I thought shouldn't have been up there when there was a lot of older blokes wanting to get up into the action. And we had one lad, his mate got killed near 'im and he just went off his head. And I carried him, and when we brought it out they - he couldn't walk, or his legs wouldn't work, so I said to the blokes, 'Put 'im on my back and tie 'im on'. And I carried him about four mile back to - picked up back to a river and they were picked up there by a barge and took 'im down to the treatment station. He was in a bad way, that kid. I don't know what ever happened to 'im.

Did you have any close encounters with Japanese? Did you actually get to see any prisoners?

Yeah we saw a few prisoners, Japanese prisoners. And we were going across from one river delta from the Klias to the Padas, I think it was. We were going across a track there and I was out in front because I was the rifleman and they come round the corner there was a Jap coming the other way and we both got that big a fright we both jumped out of the road. We both went - got out of the road quick.

Did he get away?

Yeah. He got as big a fright as I did, I think.

Given what was known about the Japanese, were there some fellows whose feelings got the better of them?

Oh yes. There was a lot of talk that the only good Japanese was a dead one. There was a lot of talk about that.

Did you actually see any Japanese actually beaten or hit?

No I never saw them. We recaptured some Indian prisoners up there and I wasn't back on Labuan when it happened but they put them in charge of the prisoner of war camp back there. These blokes were recovered. One was an Indian sergeant-major and he had the Japs standing slapping each other's face and there was a bit of a hullabaloo. He said, 'Well that's what they did to us'. But the International Red Cross stepped in and soon stopped that.

What sort of conditions were the Indians in?

Well one lot - a lot of them had been killed where we got them and some were still alive. They'd been shot up you know. They were pretty weak a lot of them. They'd had it hard.

Were there particular problems with infections in the tropics, where if you got, sometimes even if you get a small scratch it can very easily start to fester?

Yes, I found me feet the worst part because it got that way, you know you mightn't have your boots off for a few days and when you took 'em off the skin off your toes came with it. So that was the .... I've still got dermatitis which I got in the prisoner of war camps and it didn't help it being up there.

What about fungi of one sort or another? Did you get any skin fungi?

No I got a few bits of stuff on the skin but nothing to worry me much.

Malaria?

No. I never got malaria. I religiously took me tablets because I'd had malaria in Salonika. I didn't want another dose of it.

Did you have any health problems while you were there?

No not really.

What about Americans, did you get to meet Americans?

Only a few. There was an American boat group went in with us and the barges they had there were American barges and went up the rivers on and things like that. We met a few, they were good blokes.

Were you able to correspond with your wife during this period?

Yeah, I got a few letters home. We could write letters.

What about entertainments, I gather there were special concerts and so on put on?

(5.00) Yeah I never saw any of the concert parties. I saw picture shows on Labuan. I was on to the picture show there one night and a Japanese plane came over, must have been lost, 'cause they turned out every light in the harbour where all the ships were and the picture - they turned the picture down and all of a sudden they put every searchlight on and they picked this bloke up at about three hundred feet and he got hit with everything. 'Cause he had no hope. I reckon he was lost and of course as soon as the firing started there was a lot of panic in the picture theatre. I just flopped to the ground. I said that's the safest place. And you got run over and they went straight through and tore the leads running in their panic, some of them, they tore the leads out of the projection machines, we had no more pictures.

Did the plane get shot down?

Yes he had no hope. Every gun in the harbour opened up on him.

So where were you, do you recall, when you heard that the war had finished?

Going up, heading towards Sandakan. We were up past a place called Papar and I got flown out the next day. Anybody who'd been an ex-POW we got the first trip home.

Were there celebrations when the end of war was announced?

Yeah everybody was pleased and didn't believe it for a minute.

How did it go? Do you recall the celebration?

No a lot of noise - blokes cheering and carrying on. All I was interested of [sic] was getting home then. They flew us out the next day. It was over forty of us that had been ex-POWs were up in - were still up in action up there.

Did it give you a certain sort of status in a way? I mean were people rather more respectful of you as a POW?

No they never got in your road - they thought you might be cranky I suppose.

Were you?

I suppose we were all a bit silly.

In what way?

We didn't care. You didn't care after you'd been through there. You probably took a few risks.

Did you? What sort of risks?

Oh you just - I suppose you went places you shouldn't have a bit, you know, you should have been a bit more careful.

Like where?

Up in the jungle. Never used to worry me. But that's just a way of life.

There were many who felt it was wrong that the Australians, after having served in the Middle East, were sent to fight the Japanese. That it was a waste in many respects. Was that a view commonly held?

Not the New Guinea show but up in Borneo we were always of the opinion we shouldn't ha' been there because all those Japanese places were cut off. They couldn't go anywhere. There was no ships for them. Could have left them there.

Did you feel angry about it?

No not really. That was our job. We were soldiers.

So when you got back?

I got back, and I had a bit of leave, came home and saw me wife, had some leave and I was halfway through - I was nearly discharged actually. The chap that used to [inaudible] married he was a sergeant major in the camp. He said, 'Have you had any tropical leave yet Harold?'.

I said, 'No'. He said, 'Come on'. Up to the thing and I got three weeks' leave then, so I come home with me tropical leave and then went back and finished me discharge, then thought about lookin' for a job.

Was it odd suddenly to find yourself no longer in the army those first few days.

We went and had a few beers and things like that and then we - I had a letter of introduction from the army because I'd said I'd like to get a job at Telecom. The only reason I saw is they'd post up on the wall a poster and I said - they said 'What are you going to do when you are out of the army, Mr Butt?'. And it kinda strikes you know, you've been a number for six years. I looked up and I thought 'God', to meself, 'He's got me. Oh I'll join the post office.' He says, 'What branch?'. I said, 'Oh the Lines Branch will do'. So they gage me a letter of introduction to the PMG mob in Melbourne. There was about four of us went in on the one letter and we all decided to play round for a couple of days and enjoy ourselves and talk about old times, then went and saw them and they said, 'Well we don't employ you. Where do you want to be?.' I said, 'Ararat or Hamilton'. My wife had shifted to Hamilton and her father was on the rail and he shifted while I was away. So I had to come back to Hamilton. I said, 'It doesn't matter, Ararat or Hamilton'. They said, 'Oh well we'll give you a letter of introduction to a bloke in Ararat'. And I said, 'There's no need to give me an introduction to 'im, I've known 'im all me life'. So I came back here and he said, 'Where do you want to start?'. I said, 'Hamilton', so I got a job at Hamilton on Telecom then and I had thirty-two years with them.

Did the army offer any special training or education opportunities that you took up?

No I never struck any of them because a lot of that came in after we went away and when we came back there was none of it offered to us. A lot of people did but I didn't - the courses they did, I did all them with the Telecom after the war - with PMG it was then after the war I attended several schools which paid dividends.

(10.00) What about low interest loans for housing?

I had war - you could get war service loans then. I got one years after. I didn't take it first because I wanted to take it where I was going to settle. I took it not on this house, another house in Hamilton. And I was lucky enough to win some money on Super 66 and buy this place.

When was that?

1983 - I won $123,000.

That's a nice change of fortune.

Yeah.

How well do you feel you were served by the army once you left. I mean, do you feel, did you ever feel, that having done your bit that you were let down?

No I have been treated pretty well by 'em I reckon, by Repat. and that. I've had problems.

What sort of problems?

I've had this leg problem and several other problems and I had a bit of anxiety state at one stage and they stood by me with that. This was after I knocked off work actually. No I've been well-treated, I've got no complaints.

You never had any health problems where they'd would say well look that's got nothing to do with the army or that sort of ...?

Oh yeah I had a heart problem. I've had two heart attacks. I had a go at them about the heart and they said no that's nothing to do with army service. I accepted that.

But on the other hand couldn't that period of very adverse health during the prisoner of war camp contributed?

Could have, but .... That's their judgement, so why worry.

Well what about the RSL, did you involve with the RSL?

I joined the RSL as soon as I came out of the army. I joined in Hamilton actually and then I was working away. I worked a lot of other places. I was at Edenhope, I was at Casterton, and I got up to a good job on the Telecom so I was, did alright.

Was the RSL important to you?

Yes the RSL still is important to me.

Why exactly?

Well you've got a voice in some ways and you meet a lot of blokes. There's a kind of different bond in people that were in the army to people that weren't. You get a different outlook on life I think. I met some good blokes and blokes I served, the one you're goin' interview next, Wally Button, him and I served together.

In what way do you feel you have a different outlook?

Well you talk about different things. You talk about army. You do, you think of the funny things that happened, you get together and you talk about the funny things that happened when you were in the services.

Do you value it? I mean were there things about it that were really important to you?

Oh yes. There was because you had to be a - you had to have mates you knew were behind you if you were in any trouble in action or anything. You had to rely on your mates and things like this and you learn to do that in the army.

On the other hand were you ever badly let down?

No I don't think so. Not to my knowledge I was ever badly let down. Probably sent some place I didn't want to go and things like that, but that's nothing.

> Having served your country, does it give you a special sense of being an Australian and your life having had some sort of meaning?

Oh it does. Yeah. I get very upset when I see the Japanese men given the country kinda business, as most soldiers do. We get the feelin' that it's being handed over to them too freely.

> When you look back on it all and men that you knew who were wounded or permanently physically impaired or died, what do you make of it all?

Well I don't know, it was the luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time to get hit. We all could have been hit and it just happens.

> If there were war confronting Australia again, what would be your disposition - would you feel that it was important that young Australian men joined up, or would you be inclined to say it's not quite what it seems?

Well I think it's a decision that's got to be made by the bloke himself. I wouldn't go and say everybody should join the army. I had one thing - I'll tell you about one thing when I was in the prison camps in one hospital there was some English boys in there. Now they were conscientious objectors, these blokes in England, they had gone through the conscientious objectors' court, but when the British went into France they bought their own ambulance and went in as a unit, these fellas. They were cut off in France and they finished up getting out through Russia and went back to the Middle East and they were all captured in Greece, those blokes. And I reckon they were terrific blokes. They had a conscience and they stood up for it but they weren't frightened to go in, and they had their own ambulances, paid for them by their people and that and they were in the prison camps with me and they were good fellows. I believe a couple of them after, when they came out after when Europe finished up they joined the air force, a couple of them.

> With the benefit of hindsight, was it the right thing for you to have done to have joined or do you think ...?

I think it was. I've never been sorry.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A