

Australian War Memorial

TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S00779
Title	(NX54650) Anderson, Leonard William ‘Len’ (Private)
Interviewer	Stokes, Edward
Place made	Not stated
Date made	14 February 1990
Description	Leonard William 'Len' Anderson as a private, 2/6th Australian General Hospital, interviewed by Edward Stokes for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45.

Disclaimer

The Australian War Memorial is not responsible either for the accuracy of matters discussed or opinions expressed by speakers, which are for the reader to judge.

Transcript methodology

Please note that the printed word can never fully convey all the meaning of speech, and may lead to misinterpretation. Readers concerned with the expressive elements of speech should refer to the audio record. It is strongly recommended that readers listen to the sound recording whilst reading the transcript, at least in part, or for critical sections.

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

A few changes or additions may be made by the transcriber or proof-reader. Such changes are usually indicated by square brackets, thus: [ ] to clearly indicate a difference between the sound record and the transcript. Three dots (…) or a double dash (- -) indicate an unfinished sentence.

Copyright

Copyright in this transcript, and the sound recording from which it was made, is usually owned by the Australian War Memorial, often jointly with the donors. Any request to use of the transcript, outside the purposes of research and study, should be addressed to:

Australian War Memorial
GPO Box 345
CANBERRA ACT 2601

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: ... making the first tape of the history tape on the 2/6th Hospital.

Len, could I just begin by asking you please your full name and when you were born?

Leonard William Anderson. I was born at Port Macquarie, 7th November 1913.

Right. And I think you were saying that you grew up in Port Macquarie?

That's right, yes. I was a butcher there till I was twenty-four.

Right. Let's perhaps begin by talking a little bit about your childhood. I think you said you left school when you were sixteen.

Yes.

Butchering was a family trade I think?

Yes, that's right. Yes, it was Anderson & Sons Butchers of Port Macquarie; there were four brothers and we were all butchers. Andersons were butchers there for ninety-two years.

Right, that's quite a tradition of butchering. Len, one of the things that I just thought I'd touch on was what memories of the first war - I guess you were a young boy, a child, during the war - was the whole Australian perception of the ANZAC tradition and certain glorification of what Australians had done in the first war, was that very much part of your childhood memories, or not?

All I can remember is Armistice, when Armistice was assigned I was only four, and there were great bands playing and people were so joyful around the town - a small town it was at the time.

What about when you were a young man? Were there memories of ANZAC Day being a major event, or not?

Yes. I always looked forward to the ANZAC services even at school and after I left school I always attended the ANZAC service at the cenotaph. I was interested in it.

Right. Well, moving on a little bit. I think you left Port Macquarie when you were about twenty-four to come to Sydney.

Yes.

Why was that?

I wanted some experience in the city. I'd lived in the country long enough I thought. My mother was a bit against me coming to the city but I wanted to see the city life so down I came to work on the trams. From there I enlisted.

> There was, I think, a connection with the 2/6th on the tramways that while you were working for the tramways you did a first aid course. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Yes. It was while I was working for the tramways they had courses for first aid which I did and I got a certificate for this and it came in handy for the war effort.

> How detailed was that training?

I just can't remember exactly. No, we had lectures ... no, I can't quite remember.

> Right. Well, let's go on to the actual declaration of war. Do you have any actual memory of the day Australia declared war with Germany? Where were you? What were you doing?

Yes. I was in the tramways out at Waverley and a special newspaper came out, 'Australia at war: Britain at war with Germany'. Yes, I was on duty at the Waverley bus depot. It sort of cast a spell over the place: we're at war.

> Could you perhaps tell us a little bit more. You said 'it cast a spell', what were people's feelings?

Yes, very mixed feelings, you know. Well, some people thought it wouldn't last and some people said it would go on for years. But I thought I was at war and I had to be in this.

> Was that ... when you said you felt you had to be in it, was that for reasons of, say, national duty - patriotism - or for personal reasons of wanting to be in on what might have adventurous aspects?

Patriotism I think, for king and country.

> Right. Well, I think I understand from what you were saying before that the actual process of enlisting was somewhat drawn out and tortuous. Tell us the story about the navy and your being a butcher. I thought that was rather amusing.

Yes. A mate and I went down to join the navy. I thought I ought to get a dry bed in the navy and I was twenty-six at the time and my mate was the same age. We went down to enlist in the navy and they laughed and said, 'We want boys from sixteen to seventeen. You're far too old'. So my friend said he was a bugler and they took his name and I said I was a butcher and he said, 'Oh, we don't have butchers in the navy. We tear the meat apart with our teeth'. So I missed out there.

(5.00) And I think after that you tried also to join the air force?

Yes. We both put our - Joe and myself - put our name down for the air force and it was a time when you had to wait and I gave up waiting and I enlisted in the AIF. The day after a letter came from the air force saying to apply so-and-so but it was too late now. My friend joined the air force but I joined the army.

> Right. And could I just ask why the army - you mentioned about the navy having dry beds and so on - what other reasons were there for the navy and air force being put ahead of the army in your estimation?

I don't know. I'd always thought they were the senior services but I thought, 'Oh, the army's the last hope', sounds like they'll have me, so I joined the army, yeah.

> Right. I think when you first joined up you spent some time at the showground doing initial training and so on and I think there was no uniform for some time?

No, there was a lack of uniforms. I had enlisted, I was out there for about three weeks before I could get a uniform to fit me so I worked in my navy blue suit for that time. I thought, 'I'm not going out till I get a uniform', so I eventually got one and out I went very proudly.

> Yes, I can imagine that. What are your other recollections of that first induction into the army and into service life, how did you feel about it? And what did you do?

I found it very hard to accept first. We were sleeping in the B cattle pavilion at the Sydney Showground with hundreds of others and lights blaring all night; the lights didn't go out all night. I don't know why but it was very uncomfortable. We slept on bags of straw on boards and most uncomfortable. I thought, 'Oh, why did I come here? Why did I enlist?', so I thought, 'I'm young. I can cope'.

> Do you think that feeling was reasonably general or not?

I think it would have been, yes. Yes, some boy said, 'Oh, I think I'll go back home. Home was never like this' (laughs).

> I can imagine that. What about the aspects of being suddenly forced into a fairly tightly disciplined kind of life? Having a lot of day-to-day decisions made for you, how did you cope with all that?

Yeah, it was hard to accept at first. You were told to do something and that was it. I mean, if you disobeyed you got general duties or washing dishes or something like that. So you just had to step into line with whatever the sergeant major said or whatever.

> What about parade ground drill, I'd imagine that was a fairly strong part of navy's [sic] clamping its fist on you? Sorry, it was the army, not the navy.

Yes. We got, heavens, right turn, left turn. Oh, I thought, heavens I'll never make a soldier. Anyhow eventually it all fell into line and eventually I just loved route marches. We'd go out all day sometimes on route marches. I enjoyed it. Mmm.

Right. I think you spent it was about two to three weeks at the showground before moving on, wasn't it?

Yes, yes. Yes, I was there about three weeks I suppose and we moved on to Walgrove.

Right. Of course, this is the first connection with the 2/6th. I think you were saying before that the tramways first aid certificate did have some bearing on your posting. Could you elaborate on that?

Yes. It's when you enlisted, all the different questions: Could you type? Could you cook? Could you do first aid? What have you, and you had to put a tick alongside what you did. So as I had a first aid certificate I put the tick there and just automatically got drafted into a medical unit.

When you first heard about that, Len, about being drafted to the 2/6th, were you pleased about that or not?

I didn't exactly know what it meant but I had a couple of friends out at the showground and we were all going there together so I at least had some friends to go with, to find out what was going.

Was there any regret or otherwise that you hadn't been posted to a fighting unit?

No. I had a few friends and doing medical work we were told it was just as essential as anywhere else, so we accepted it and enjoyed it.

Right. Just a moment. [Break in recording.] This is just continuing on. Len, tell us about Walgrove, joining the hospital, what did you do there?

It was mainly drill, drill, drill. A few lectures from the sisters: how to make beds; how to do bandages; what pills; et cetera. It was very interesting what the sisters taught us there. It was dusty, it was dirty. We were living in tents, sleeping on boards. The going was a bit rough. We were glad to leave Walgrove camp.

(10.00 Right. Just going to the specific training. You were mentioning beds, bandages, medicines and so on. That was taught to you by sisters, not doctors, was it?

Mainly sisters, yes. The doctors would give us lectures but it was mainly the sisters - the practical work from the sisters.

Right. So obviously by this stage it's been decided that you're to be an orderly.

That's right, yes.

How did you feel about that? (phone rings) Just a minute. [Break in recording.] This is just continuing after the phone call. Len, when it was decided that you were to be an orderly, did you welcome that decision or not?

Yes. I thought this would be interesting work and the more I heard about the lectures from the sisters and the doctors I thought, 'Oh, it sounds like a good war effort', so I went along with it.

> The training that you received from the nurses, was that fairly tightly organised? For example, did you have to pass tests and that kind of thing, or was it more informal?

No. I don't know. It was more informal, I don't think. No, when we were accepted as orderly it was a special extra shilling a day for doing it but I'm sure we didn't get a certificate for it. I don't think so.

> One other thing I was going to ask you later but perhaps I might just bring it up now: In your recollection, between the nurses who were working for the 2/6th hospital and the orderlies, the male orderlies, was there ever any tension or resentment for example that the nurses were I think better paid and later had the status of officers and so on, or not?

No. It was generally accepted but it did have a few male nurses from ... quite a few from Orange. They were trained male nurses, psychiatrically trained and they resented being told to do this and do that when they, you know, already did it in their training. But we newcomers enjoyed it.

> Right. Just going back to Walgrove, one other aspect of it, living conditions. You were saying before that the showground was fairly bleak. How much of an improvement was Walgrove?

At least there was six to a tent but, as I say, it was so dusty and dirty and sleeping on boards was a bit hard to take too but we survived.

> Did you get much time there for recreation or was it fairly full on training and so on?

Yes. We did occasionally weekend leave or night leave to 23.59 minutes to twelve. You had to be back in by, yeah.

> Real Cinderella stuff.

Yes (laughs).

> I think from there the hospital moved to Ingleburn and then later to Bathurst.

That's right, yes.

> Perhaps we can spend more of our time talking about the period in Europe which perhaps is more interesting. But what are your recollections of Ingleburn and Bathurst?

I liked Ingleburn; we had better quarters there. And when we moved to Bathurst they were practically brand new quarters and we set up a temporary hospital. We had a temporary hospital at Ingleburn and we had a temporary hospital at Bathurst where we started working in the wards looking after patients; our first experience with patients.

> These were men who were coming down from ... being brought back from Europe or ...

No, no. Just sick or mostly medical cases or some surgery cases ... no, there was no operating theatre there, only slight operations.

> Mmm. And what was it like actually working on the wards?

I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it, yes. I thought it was something different, something new - I enjoyed it.

> Moving on a bit, the hospital I think in ... left for Europe in .... Right. It was late December 1940 when you left Sydney Harbour. Of course sometime before that the decision had come through. How did you all feel? How did you feel personally when you knew you were leaving Australia, going to Europe?

I was thrilled. We came down by train from Bathurst and we caught the ferry from Darling Harbour and they took us out to Athol Bay to go on a 'big ship'. You could go round the big ship, it cost a shilling to see the big ship; they would never name it. But when I walked up the gangplank of the *Queen Mary* I said, 'You beautiful big thing', getting a trip on her.

> Right. Can we just step back a moment in time to go back to Bathurst, as you were saying a hospital was established at Bathurst and then you had to leave. The logistics to me of packing up a hospital of all the equipment, beds, medical equipment, et cetera, et cetera, seemed just mind-boggling. How did that all ...

No, it was just a walk-in, walk-out procedure. We took it over from a unit and another unit took it over from us. So, it wasn't our equipment.

> I see. So on the journey to Europe you weren't actually transporting ...

No, although we were ... I worked in wards on the *Queen Mary*. Yeah, the huge dining room was ... huge big rooms were transferred into hospital beds.

> Right. Let's just go back then to actually leaving Australia. I'd imagine embarking on a ship, in particular, perhaps the *Queen Mary*, must have been a very emotional experience?

(15.00) Yes, yes. As I say, beautiful big thing. You know, our quarters were very good. There were six of us to a room. They put special bunks in. Yes. When we went overseas on the *Queen Mary* there were 8,000 on board, when we returned two years later - oh, they had

swimming pools and the swimming pools were converted into bunks - so when we came back there were 11,000 on board.

What's your memory of sailing out of Sydney Harbour, Len?

It was sad yet it was an adventure. We were going to venture the unknown. There was mixed feelings.

Was there a great flotilla of boats farewelling you or not? I mean, was your departure known, or was it an unknown ...

Yes. Yes, we left at 7.30 am. There wasn't much small ships around at that time of the morning.

I think the *Queen Mary* sailed via Fremantle to Colombo.

Yes.

What's your recollection of that part of the journey?

Yes. Although we left here in February, after a few days it became very cold and then we were told we were sailing around the bottom of Tasmania. No wonder it got cold down there. Then we called into Fremantle to take some more troops on board. And from Fremantle we went to Trincomalee on the east coast of Ceylon that was, now Sri Lanka. So we transhipped there to the *Queen of Bermuda* ... no, I'm sorry, it was the *Dilwara*. And the *Dilwara*, the food was full of weevils. Everything they dished up had weevils in it. So fortunately we called into Colombo on the other side of the island and picked up some fresh fruit. One piece of fruit a day kept me alive.

What was shipboard life, both on the *Queen Mary* and on the ship that you went on to the Middle East in, like?

Yes. The *Queen Mary* just seemed to sway from side to side and going up the west coast of Australia all the flying fish were fantastic and the sunsets were beautiful.

Was there a lot of organised recreation and so on or training?

Yes, yes. I won the sprint around the ship - so many times round, I've forgotten now, so many times around the ship. Oh, I've forgotten that bit. Yes, and we had swimming races. I won swimming races and I won foot racing. Yeah.

That's interesting. And what about training? Did you have ongoing training on the ship or not?

I don't remember that. We just worked in the wards. We took our time working in the wards of the ship, yeah.

This is just caring for men who'd become ill during the journey?

Yes, that's all, yes. A couple of the patients went berserk and they had to be locked up, yes. Just couldn't take the ....

> Being cooped up on a ship. I'd imagine for young men coming from Australia, as it then was arriving in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka must have been a fairly exciting experience and then going on to the Middle East. What's your general recollection of that cultural change that you had before you?

Yes. By then quite a few had passed through Colombo and they knew exactly who we were but the conditions were poor and the wealthy are such a - line in there. But we had a day's leave in Colombo and we enjoyed it very much.

> And then you pushed on.

Yes.

> Let's go on to the Middle East period. What's your first recollection of disembarkation in the Middle East and where did you go to?

Yes. Well, being a small ship it went right through the Suez Canal. I've never heard of a convoy doing that before, from Port Said to Port Suez and we went up the Palestinian coast to Haifa where we disembarked. But there were two ships from Germany that were scuttled on Haifa beach and they were still pulling - out of the port holes - they were still pulling sheets and what they could out of the port holes because the ships had been scuttled on the beach.

> And it was from there that you went to establish the hospital at Gaza, I think?

Yeah. We relieved the 2/1st at Gaza. They were quite busy at the time from the battles in the desert. There were quite a few cases coming up there. They were the 2/1st - 2/1st AGH. We helped them, relieved them from there.

> Right. So, once again, in terms of equipment you were really walking into a set-up hospital?

Yes. Our gear was never unpacked and it went to Greece.

> Right. You were saying then that here you had the first contact with wartime casualties who were coming up from North Africa?

Yes.

> What was that like? I'd imagine there must sometimes have been cases where men were horrifically wounded and so on. How difficult was it to cope with that?

Oh, there weren't so many men who had come out from Africa. It was mostly medical cases. I was in an RAP at a place called Daphni in Greece and I remember distinctly some of the boys had syphilitic sores all round their penises and we had such little equipment in those days. There's a tablet called the M&B, we used to grind them up and powder them and drop it

on their sores. I often wondered what happened to the poor chaps, you know, going up to the front-line with these syphilitic sores they'd contacted in Cairo or Greece ... Cairo or Alexandria, yeah.

(20.00) Well in the period at Gaza before the hospital went to Greece, what were the main medical duties, again dealing with sicknesses rather than injuries?

Yes, it was both there but a lot of casualties. The first chap, the first chap I contacted - the first chap that I knew was on crutches, had a leg taken off. Yeah, the first chap I knew.

You mean your first patient?

No, the first chap I recognised rather. Yeah, the first chap I recognised had a leg taken off. There was quite a few casualties there from the desert campaign.

As a male orderly was it ever difficult to come to terms with the kind of loss people had suffered through the war and how it would affect their later lives, or were you so busy doing what you had to do that you just didn't think about those things?

No, we just kept on working, you know. It was a twelve hour shift a day - seven till seven and the night shift from 7 pm till 7 am - so you just kept working.

Tell us a bit about the general work routines? Could you tell us how the hospital there was set up? What kind of facilities it had? And, also, what your living facilities were like?

Yes, we had huts over there. About twenty men to a hut. And the wards was ... there was over 1,000 patients there, mostly from the desert. A lot of war wounds. And from there they were shipped by the Manunda or hospital ships back home. It was there that I nursed Sir Roden Cutler. Orderlies resented being looking after the officers and as I said our food was so dreadful, I was sent to relieve in the officers' ward and I found the food there was so much better I asked to be kept on. And my mates couldn't understand, getting on the officers' ward, you know, you resented looking after officers but in the ward was Sir Roden Cutler. Oh, this big tall man with this stinking stump leg. Oh, stinking stump leg. I used to have to dress it every day. The tulle gras - it was called tulle gras - it was mosquito net boiled in vaseline, I used to dress his wound with that. But although we knew he was recommended for an award it wasn't announced until he was on his way home by ship that he was a VC winner. But, you know ...

That's fascinating.

Yes. And I wiped his bottom with cottonwool several times (laughs) he was so sick.

That's an interesting claim. He must have been a very - well, a very personable character I would imagine?

Yes, but not so popular on the ward. He was a very sick man, but not so popular on the wards. I don't know why.

Could I just take you back to what you said about orderlies resenting looking after officers. What was the root of that?

I don't know. You know, the ORs just resented working on the officers but, as I say, our food was so dreadful I just didn't mind looking after the officers because I got decent food.

Was that that they ... I mean, there was a kind of implied distinction between orderlies and nurses, where nurses were perceived as having officer status and therefore ... or was it that the officers tended to be ... I don't know, I'm just speculating ... arrogant or something towards orderlies?

No, no. The sisters were very good to us. No, it was just officers in general. We got on very well with our own officers but, of course, they were all doctors. But it was just, I don't know, it was just looking after officers the ORs seemed to resent.

Right. Okay. Do you have any other general memories of the period here in Gaza before the hospital went to Greece?

No, we weren't there that long before we went on to Greece of course, yeah.

Just a moment. [Break in recording.] This is just starting up again after a coffee break. Let's move on to the period in Greece, Len. Do you remember how much warning the hospital had that you were to leave Gaza and go to Greece?

We had ... we were up at Daphni staging camp where the 6th Division came through. Any medical things we attended to or small wounds we attended to but we had two English working there too and they suddenly said, 'Oh, we're going. We've got to get out of Greece', but we had no warning at all till word came that we had to go back to Kephissia to join the unit. The unit had left Volos and come back to Kephissia and dumped all their gear in the ocean.

(25.00) So you had very little warning that you were to go to Greece?

No, no.

Right. This, I'd imagine from what you've said before, was also the first time that the hospital was actually travelling with its own equipment boxed up. Is that correct?

That's right, yes.

What's your recollection of that, just the sort of logistics of getting all the material on board ships and so on?

Oh, I'm not sure ...

Were you involved in that or was that done by other people?

No, I've no idea how it went over. No, I don't know how it went. No.

> Right. Well, you journeyed by sea from the Middle East across to Greece. What's your recollection of that journey?

Oh, it was very good. It was an English warship, HMS *Orion*. It was twenty-four hours from Alexandria to Athens up and over the waves. We just sort of slept on the deck anywhere at all. There was no bunks, there were so many on board - English and New Zealanders.

> Was there any fear of attack?

Yes, but I don't know. We just seemed to go so fast it didn't matter. We arrived in Greece and we were on the wharf for hours waiting for transport. When we were on the transport the Greeks were saying, 'Oh, look, it must be the Americans. It must be the Americans with the big broad hats'.

> I understand it was quite some time, or the early days in Greece were rather confused in actually finding where the hospital was to be established. Was that correct?

That's right, yes. Yes, I was at this Daphni staging camp and the bulk of the unit went up to ... on the east coast of Greece, to a place called Volos. I never got there because on account of the evacuation, I never got that far. We were kept behind in Daphni.

> So, while you were in Daphni, what were you involved in doing?

We had our hospital, a one tent ward with about ten temporary beds in it. We sort of kept them overnight or as best we could and then sent them back to Athens or ... usually back to Athens if they couldn't cope with them there.

> Right. So you were dealing ...

It was just a small hospital and just the two of us to run it.

> Just two ...

Two, another orderly and myself.

> And how many doctors were there?

Only one. Yes. Captain Cameron.

> So the men you were dealing were men who'd been wounded in the campaign and were arriving there.

Yes.

> What sort of condition were they arriving in?

Oh, they weren't that bad actually otherwise they wouldn't have been sent over. They would have been kept behind in Egypt. But it was only minor casualties that came over.

> Right. The .... So during the whole period that you were working in Greece as against when you were withdrawing, did you spend your entire time at that little hospital?

Yes, yes. And then we were sent back - we were brought back to Kephissia where the 2/5th AGH was stationed and there was plenty of us orderlies from the 2/6th told to stay behind and become prisoners of war and stay with the 2/5th AGH. We were there for twenty-four hours when Colonel Kay from the 2/5th came out and announced that it was bad enough for them to stay and for us to get away. So, away we got. Colonel Kay was killed at Port Piraeus the next day we believe. And for days we were on cattle trucks and marched overnight ... marched overnight and hid in the olive trees in the day time.

> Right. Perhaps we might just go back to the story of the actual retreat in a moment. Was there any perception on the part of men generally or you particularly that the whole thing had been bungled in that if a defeat was so likely, so imminent, it didn't make a lot of sense sending over a major hospital unit and the whole operation would have been handled better with some small mobile units?

Yes. They must have thought we were there for - indefinite. Then I thought, 'Oh heavens, it could be another Dunkirk'. Crete was so far away and Alexandria was so far away again, across the Mediterranean, you know, how could it be another Dunkirk. But apparently we managed all right. We got away fortunately. Some didn't.

> Yes. Were people at all critical of decisions made higher up?

I'm not sure about that. There must have been, yes.

> Right. Just a moment Len.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

> Just talking about some other things to do with Greece. There was one story you were telling me about, Port Piraeus, and how I think you were saying you wanted to go there but you exchanged places with somebody.

Yes. I was chosen - the sergeant read out the names, two here, two there, two there - I was to go to Port Piraeus with one of the young boys and one discovered his mate - they were separated from his mate, and they asked me would I exchange and I didn't like the chap I was going with out to Daphni staging camp and I thought, oh, a matter of days, it doesn't matter. I didn't like him. A matter of days it didn't matter. Anyhow, the two boys went together and they were both killed in a direct hit with a TNT that was docked at Port Piraeus. So I was fortunate I did move on.

There is obviously a lot of fate in it all. How did you ... did that have a very deep impact on you or was that just pushed aside?

Yes. Yes, I felt that terribly. To think that two young boys, they were nice kids, and they were great mates, to think that they both should die together but I thought how fortunate I was to have swapped with them.

Right. You were also telling me before about doing a period in Greece, about quite a lot of problems with venereal disease.

Yes.

What do you remember about that?

Yes. It was staging camp for the 6th Division and they had a sick parade every morning and every evening and quite a few of the boys came along with syphilitic sores. I'll never forget them because they were just covered in sores and all we had at the time was a tablet called the M&B. We used to ground this up and powder it on their syphilitic sores. Often wondered how they finished up, the poor lads.

And I think you were mentioning before we started taping that in the area where you were there were a few brothels. Did the hospital, or was the medical knowledge existing for any kind of preventative measures to have been taken before men contracted venereal disease, or not?

I think the [inaudible] is at each brothel, they were there to serve the boys and the Australians entered to make sure they had a wash out after intercourse with the girls.

Right. And that was fairly rigidly enforced, was it?

Yes. Yes, it was.

Right. Just a moment. Just before we go on to the story of the retreat, Len, do you remember any other details about that short period you had in the little hospital in Greece?

We become friendly with two Greek soldiers that used to bring us a gallon of wine every night and we'd see them coming up the road and thought, 'Oh heavens, we haven't drunk all that wine', so we tipped it out so make sure they had a fresh supply coming the next day.

Sorry?

... no.

Was there a very warm feeling between the local people and the Australians?

Yes. Yes, there were. Yes. Although Daphni was a little staging camp, it was sort of more or less out in the bush. We used to go for a walk to the Mediterranean. It was so blue, we used to put our feet in but it was too cold to do anything else - to bathe in it.

Did you enjoy Greece?

Yes, yes. Very much. Learnt a little bit of the Greek language but enough to get us by.

Lovely. Well, let's go on to the story of the retreat. Before you actually left this small tent hospital that you had established, how much warning did you have that you had to get going?

It wasn't ...

(5.00) Was it a matter of days?

A matter of days I think, yeah. A couple of days. Yes. A couple of false alarms. We've got to leave tonight or we've got to leave in the morning but it never eventuated. Anyhow, eventually we did leave and we joined ... the body, the main body of the unit had already gone and we were sort of left behind to assist with the 2/5th AGH.

Right. And this was when the decision was then made that you should not, in fact, not stay but go.

Yes.

Well, let's go on to the story ... Just before that, there is the issue of medical equipment. Obviously as much as possible I would imagine was taken but you were saying before that some was destroyed and you seemed a little critical of that?

Yes. Although it was medical equipment I believe, although I wasn't there, I didn't witness it, but I believe a lot was pushed into the ocean so that the Germans wouldn't capture it. But I thought what a waste, you know, of medical equipment. It could be used even by the German ... or the enemy. What a waste it was.

Was that a generally felt view amongst men you knew or not?

Yes. Oh, of course, as I say, I didn't witness it but, you know, I believe it was .... I don't know why they decided to do such a thing. You know, it was more a criminal thing I thought.

Yes. That's interesting. Let's go onto the story of this retreat. It's obviously ... This must have been a fairly dramatic period as you were trekking down to where you were to embark. I think you were saying you were under fairly regular attack?

Yes. Yes, we were bombed and strafed. We were in cattle trucks. We had Cyprians on board the train too. But every now and then there was an air-raid and the bullets would come tearing along the trucks. A lot of the boys would tear out into the fields and hide under the

bushes or trees, whatever, and I thought the best thing is to hide under the trucks. Well, they were only cattle trucks, it would take a lot to penetrate that. Anyhow, this went on for some - a couple of days till the line was bombed and then we had to start marching then. We marched all night and hid all day.

> And while you were on this journey were you .... Did you have any men who were wounded or ill who you were responsible for?

Some of them had broken arms and some we had to leave behind. I often wondered what happened to them. We got to a place called Argos where we were to meet this ship ... meet the ship but when we got to the harbour it was ablaze. It was burning. So we were so terribly depressed to think the ship that we were to go on was there but burning. So we had to ... a couple of more days we had to march again all night and hide again in the daytime so that we wouldn't be seen by the Germans.

> How organised would you say this retreat was? Was it fairly tightly disciplined and well thought out or was it more a sort of helter skelter rush for safety?

Yes. Although it was a mad rush, I mean, some of the English or some of the Cyprians were panicked, you know. As far as I remember the Aussies weren't so panic-strickened. There was a couple of sergeant ... I don't remember any officers being there but there were sergeants and, you know, do this and do that, which we did.

> What about nurses? Were there nurses travelling with you?

No, they had gone previous to that. Yes.

> Right. I thought so. Let's move on then to the story of your actual embarkation which must have been a kind of blessed relief. When did news first come through that there was a ship waiting to take you off?

Off Greece. Yeah. After that, Argos, the ship was burning there, we marched again for a couple more days and as soon as it falled night time we were to move down onto the beach. Both hands had to be free so we could climb aboard a barge. I waded out. It was up to my waist so it must have been pretty high on some of the young chaps wading out. It was a covered in barge and I looked up, I could see a small hole up in the canvas. I thought, 'If this sinks I'll make for that hole. I'll tear it big and get out'. We went .... A couple of hours we drove in the night time and then we transhipped to another destroyer and then from another destroyer - we had to walk a plank at midnight and the water was rush, rush, up - lapping up between the two warships and they had a plank from one to the other. And, 'Come on, come on. Hurry up, hurry up. Haven't got all night'. The chap ahead of me fell off and he said, 'Don't bother about him, we haven't got time to save him'. So I got on my hands and knees and crawled across.

> Mmm. It sounds fairly drastic. And what did actually happen to that poor fellow?

No, I never know. Just keep moving.

Right. So when you were finally embarked there must have been a great mixture of different people. Where did you travel to?

(10.00)To Crete; Suda Bay. Yes, we, you know, had very little to eat for days. We pinched some green beans from a farm, we pinched ... some local Greek girls brought us up loquats. They were as big as hens' eggs - more or less saved our day. But when we were aboard the naval ship HMAS *Stuart*, we were served hot chocolate. It was so beautiful, this great big mug of hot chocolate.

I think they used to call that kai.

Yes, that's right, kai, yeah.

I remember that.

Oh, it was so beautiful. After we'd starved for days and be greeted with that, yeah, and we landed at Suda Bay.

When you landed at Suda Bay were you actually ... was there the kind of organisation, the infrastructure for you to actually work as in a hospital situation or were you just dumped there and waiting for something else?

This is it, yes. Waiting to see what happened next. Yes. We either ... oh, we were the rear party. We walked all day that day till we found our unit and it was sleeping in the open under the olive trees - thank God for olive trees. Further up the mountains there was this cold stream. We used to go up there and swim in the nude and wash our undies till they dried on the bushes and watch the air-raids from up in the mountains. It was a daily routine because there was nothing else to do.

This was in Crete, Len?

Crete, yes.

So how long were you there?

About three weeks on Crete.

And it was literally just filling in time?

Yes, that's right. Yes. And the field flowers, the spring flowers, oh, they were beautiful. Oh, there were poppies and grape hyacinths, oh, just flowers and flowers - so beautiful.

Sounds rather lovely and far removed from the horrors of Greece and so on.

Yes. Quite a few air-raids; air-raids every day. The planes'd come over every day. That's why we used to go up the hills and dodge them and watch the spectacle from up the top.

Where was the bulk of the hospital by this stage?

We joined them in Crete; we found them in Crete, yes.

Right. So you were there with the officers and nurses and so on.

No, I don't remember the nurses being there. No, I didn't sight the nurses on Greece or Crete. They did go to Greece but I mean, I don't think they went to Crete, they went back to Alexandria.

Right. Well that was obviously quite ... I mean, you were lucky to be away, but quite a significant period with nothing to do and the general sort of ... I gather from you, a general shemozzle. Was there any feeling that things might have been handled better by people ... well, officers in command or was it just an acceptance that you'd been put in an impossible situation?

Yes. It was just an accepted thing and being a non-combatant unit I think this is why we got away. I mean, the infantry and that were kept behind to fight the battle of Crete but being non-combatant, we got away.

Right. Let's move on from there because I think it was from Crete, of course, that the hospital finally returned to Palestine and basically spent the most significant period in one place I think, from about October '41 to January '43, near Jerusalem.

Yeah. In Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives.

What's you recollection of the shift from Crete to Jerusalem?

Yes. We arrived at Port Suez and then train back down to Gaza Ridge. We helped the 2/1st AGH again. All the ward orderlies were mustered around and back to the wards. We were there quite a few months before we went to Jerusalem. We took over from an English hospital. It was built for the Kaiser, it was called the Kaiser's Palace. In the courtyard there was a statue of the Kaiser and the Kaisereen which we had as our parade ground, it was so huge. It was a walk-in, walk-out job. The English ... we had no equipment and we just took over from the English and just walked in, walk-out and took over their patients and all. Yes, and I say, it snowed Christmas '41, it snowed for the first time in twenty-one years. I had never seen snow before. Yeah.

That first Christmas in Jerusalem, I imagine must have been rather ... well, rather a special place.

Oh, it was, yes.

What's your recollection of that being in the Holy Land?

Yes. It was all, you know, patients and staff, officers and nurses, it was all in together and we had quite a few reviews, concerts and things we made up and it was very good, interesting. I liked Mount of Olives because we used to walk from there down through the Kedron[1] Valley

[1] Also known as Kidron Valley.

up through St Stephen's Gate. Walk over to Jerusalem, have a day's leave. Although you walked alone you never felt you were alone in Jerusalem.

(15.00) What? In that you were surrounded by the history of the place?

Yes, yes, yeah.

Just going back to the Christmas. You were saying that there was a very warm feeling in the hospital, I think ...

That's right.

What kinds of things did you do for the patients? How was Christmas made special for them?

Oh, I can't remember exactly what happened .... Yes ...

Oh, that's fine. I think there was one amusing recollection that you could just tell us, Len, the story of going to a fairly smart bar, or nightclub.

Yes, very high class restaurant. It had an orchestra and we thought we'd live it up this particular night and then I asked the orchestra would they play the 'Holy City' and the bandsman said they'd never heard of it over there.

That's a nice one, isn't it? Well, on to the more serious aspects of the place. The hospital here, I think, was quite a large one, something like fifteen hundred beds ...

This was at Gaza.

I thought at Jerusalem?

No, no. It wasn't that big at Jerusalem. About 500 beds in Jerusalem, yes. See, it was the old Kaiser's palace. All the rooms were made into wards.

What was the main work of the hospital then at this stage? Was it dealing with injury cases or with sicknesses?

No. No casualties. Street accidents or something like that but mostly medical cases we had there.

What were the major medical problems?

Oh, I just can't remember. ... I think it was in Jerusalem that there was an English sailor, officer, he was drunk, climbing out a drain pipe and he fell and Colonel Money - he was a brain surgeon in Macquarie Street - he had to operate on the officer's head. That was quite dramatic that particular time, yeah.

> What was a general ... a typical day as a ward orderly like Len? Could you perhaps .... Could you perhaps try to give a picture of what the wards were like? How well they were equipped and so on? And how did your day begin and what did you do?

Yes. In Jerusalem I would come on duty and the meals would come to the wards. We'd dish up the meals and the sisters were there of course so they helped us out. They were wonderful. The typical day was looking after the patients, getting them up and around as best we could. There was more to do at Gaza Ridge as we took over from the 2/1st AGH there and we had, oh, about 1,500 patients at the most I think. And Colonel Money and Matron Abbott did rounds. They ... amazing memories, they just knew every patient's name although we had over a thousand patients there.

> That's remarkable. Were you orderlies involved in medical rounds or not?

Yes, yes. In medical rounds, yeah.

> Just going back to the ward work at the hospital in Jerusalem, Len, could you actually describe how well equipped the wards were or how poorly equipped they were?

Yes, they were very well equipped. As I say we took over from an English hospital and they had everything we needed there. It was very well run; very well organised.

> Right. Malingering - were you ever conscious of men malingering and if you were, what did people try to do about it?

Oh ... no, I just don't remember any cases of malingerers. You heard of them but I never encountered one myself.

> Just turning to life - perhaps again - to life in Jerusalem, you've told us about Christmas and so on, what were the other great appeals of being in Jerusalem? It was supposed to be, I think, a very happy time for the hospital.

Yes, it was ... we were reunited, we were all there together there which was the first time we had been since we left Australia, we were all back together and it was one big happy family. It was a most enjoyable time really.

> Were you - looking back on it - were you impressed by the quality of men who were the key officers in the unit, or not?

Yes, we had some very good officers. As I say, they were all doctors and they were all specialists in their own field - ear, nose and throat, brain, surgeons, physicians - a very good lot of doctors we had. Mmm.

(20.00) And so I gather from that that the morale of the unit was fairly ... was high?

It was, yes, it was. Yes, they were very well respected the officers, yeah. There's not too many of them alive now. I think there's only ... because they were all elderly and ...

Yes, I guess so. Older men at the time.

Yes.

Did you have much time for recreation, Len? For example, you know, were there many excursions you did around about the area or not?

Where, in Jerusalem?

Mmm.

Yes. There was always bus trips, [inaudible] bus trips. We'd go to ... we went to Bethlehem quite a few times. We went out there on Christmas Eve. Down to the Dead Sea; I had a swim in the Dead Sea. There was a little jetty going out into the Dead Sea and I had my costume with me fortunately. Anyhow, I dived in and it had a funny feeling. It threw me back up into the platform again. And you tried to swim, your legs and arms were in the air so to speak. And I got out and the time I walked from the water up to the sheds I was just covered in specks of salt. So I was glad to get under the shower to wash it off. It stung your eyes and all your ... your mouth and your rectum, oh, it stung severely.

That's very interesting. I would imagine it would be like that. Perhaps going on a little bit, later in the period, at the hospital when there was quite heavy fighting I think in El Alamein and so on, did you get many wounded cases coming through to the hospital?

Yes, yes, yes. See, from the ... they'd go from their field ambulance - field ambulance is the CCS, Casualty Clearing Station - from there they'd come up to the Australian General Hospital. So we had quite a few, as I say, well over a thousand. There was quite a few hundred casualties from El Alamein.

Did you have enough facilities to cope with that influx of wounded?

Yes, yes. We had plenty of wards. We even put up some tents to cope with the crowd. There was ... well, a lot of casualties there.

Right. Just a general question: Was there much difference, from your point of view as an orderly, in looking after and dealing with men who had been wounded to looking after and dealing with men who were ill for one reason or another?

Yes, it's funny though. They seem to be, the medical patients seem to ... they had a feeling of, you know, I'm not a casualty, I shouldn't be here sort of thing but I mean they were still patients. They still had to be cared for but they had this feeling that they should have been a war casualty, not a medical casualty.

And there was some resentment on their part was there?

Yes, yes. Yes, one of our lads broke his leg playing football and he was in the ward with all the - all legs up in positions where the ...

Traction?

Traction, yes. And the poor boy was hurt playing football and he felt a bit uncomfortable being in the same ward as all these casualties.

Yes, I can understand that. And the casualty cases, perhaps the ones who weren't too critically wounded, did they ... was the converse true, were they quite happy to be in hospital and just to be out of it, or not?

Oh, the casualties, yes, they were glad to be out of the firing line again. They'd like to be kept on as long as they could so that they wouldn't have to go back again. The hospital was very good. They used to run conducted tours through the kibbutzes [sic] and that sort of thing and afternoon tea parties. Yes, they were well looked after once they were up and about the patients.

Yes. It must, I'd imagine, have been quite a long period of convalescence when people were capable of walking and so on. And they still stayed in the hospital, did they?

Yes, yes.

Or were they ...

Yes, there was a convalescent home that they went to but they had to be pretty fit to go to those places. The food wasn't too bad. The patients' food. But the men's food was always bad. This is why I went to the ... this was when I went to the officers' ward and asked to be kept on because the food was so much better. Yes, I'd get in the queue and I'd get a whiff of the meal and I'd almost heave to think that ... oh, I'd lost so much weight, the food was so crook.

That's interesting because you simply didn't eat.

No. No.

Why was it so bad? What sort of food was it?

I think the worst thing was egg, powdered egg. It smelt as though it was rotten egg. Oh, it smelt dreadful. Oh, the tinned tomatoes. Bully beef, I liked bully beef, a tin of bully beef as long as it wasn't ... the sun hadn't melted the fat and the fat went everywhere. But I'd chew bully beef but the M and V, they'd try to camouflage it in so many different ways but it was dreadful food though just the same. The officers' ward was good.

What sort of food were the officers eating?

Oh, they even had grilled steak up there. Yeah, I told Sir Roden Cutler lately that's why I kept onto the officers' ward because the food was much better. He said, 'Oh, the food was very poor there. What must your's be like?'.

(25.00) That seems strange, especially in a hospital unit, there'd be such a disparity between food for men and officers.

Yes there was, yes, yes. I thought the officers' ward saved my life.

There must certainly have been a level of resentment about that. I can understand what you were saying before about orderlies rather resenting dealing with officers.

That's right. Yes, yes.

Well, moving on a little bit, just before we come back to Australia, Len. Is there anything else of that period in Jerusalem that you'd recall as particularly significant?

I enjoyed the Middle East. I had a week's leave in Cairo which I enjoyed very much. You had to have so much money in your pay book before you went to Cairo. My mother sent me some money so I had enough money to go to Cairo, I had a week's leave in Cairo which was very good. I just loved Jerusalem, seeing the old sights of Christ and I really enjoyed it; enjoyed Jerusalem, enjoyed the Middle East all told. And the citrus fruits were something out of this world.

Yes, I can imagine that. Well, moving on a little bit. How much warning do you recall having before the hospital embarked for Australia?

Oh, it was a fair warning. Yes, because we had to pack up everything from Gaza Ridge and all the patients possible were sent on the *Manunda* ship, the hospital ship, and we all sent letters to patients on the hospital ship so that they'd get them in Sydney to say we were coming in. But, of course, to trick us, their ship went to New Zealand and it came in after the troops came home. So we came home unexpectedly.

Right. And when the news came through that you were to leave the Middle East was there ... which was the greater feeling, sadness at leaving the Middle East or pleasure at returning to Australia?

Oh, pleasure returning home after being away two years. Yes, it was a pleasure to be on our way home again.

Right. The actual voyage out, do you remember - the voyage back to Australia - do you remember anything about that that seems significant now?

Yes. I was on the ship called the *Queen of Bermuda*. It went as far as Fremantle and at Fremantle we transhipped back to the *Queen Mary*. It was a very rough ship on the *Queen of Bermuda*. She had to go back to Africa so we were back on the *Queen Mary*. But as I say, we went over with 8,000 troops to the Middle East, 8,000 troops, but, of course, the

swimming pools were converted into bunks and there were an extra 3,000 so we had 8,000 [sic] on board coming back into Sydney Harbour.

That's really interesting. Arriving at Sydney Harbour, how did you feel yourself?

Oh, it was a wonderful feeling, yes. I stood alongside a Victorian chap and he said, 'We always slung off about Sydney Harbour. You and your Harbour Bridge and Sydney Harbour' he said, 'I had no idea it was so beautiful'. It was a beautiful feeling. We all stood around the deck.

Yes, I can imagine that. Just for the record, sitting here looking at the Harbour Bridge from the opposite side of it now. It's a lovely thing. Len, when the unit, the hospital, came back to Australia, I'd imagine there was a short period of leave?

That's right, yes.

Did you go home?

Yes, yes. I got married in that leave. I was engaged before I went overseas and then got married when I came back. Yes. Quite a few of the boys were married in that period. Yes, and we reformed again at Walgrove and from Walgrove into a troop train up to the Tablelands.

This was at Atherton?

Yes.

Right. What's your memory of the period at Atherton that I think was quite drawn out?

Yes, it was a place called Rocky Creek on the Atherton Tablelands, Rocky Creek. We had to set up camp there. It was all tents, huge tents that housed it all. It was quite a general hospital and it functioned quite well there.

The patients here were obviously people coming down from New Guinea?

That's right, yes.

Do you recall them mostly being medical cases with tropical diseases or injury cases?

Both. Yes. I was a corporal and I was in charge ... I used to go with the ambulance out to Maroubra[2] Airport every morning to pick up casualties that happened to be coming over. Coming from New Guinea to a place called Jacky Jacky and from Jacky Jacky to Miranda ... Mareeba Airport. Yes. We used to go out there and wait all day for any casualties coming in.

[2] Means Mareeba airport.

Some days we'd wait there all day and there's nothing happened, other days there'd be quite a load of cases that were coming into the hospital.

> I know you did later become a bit jaded with life, or rather wanted to go overseas again and we might come to that in a moment. But was that because you ... was it simply that you wanted to go overseas or were you disenchanted with life and work at Atherton itself?

Yeah. I thought we were stuck in Australia for the rest of the duration. You know, I'd been overseas for two years and I thought, stuck up here in Queensland, I thought I wanted to get away again so I ... Colonel Money wouldn't release me but when we got a new colonel in charge, he released me. But I transferred to the 2/3rd CCS because I knew they were in New Guinea. I dropped my stripes and waited in Townsville to go to New Guinea when the 2/3rd CCS, Casualty Clearing Station, moved out.

> Mmm.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

> Identification: This is tape two, side one with Len, the 2/6th Hospital.
>
> Len, could you perhaps tell us a little bit more about the period at Atherton. Were you as heavily worked as you were at other times, or not?

Yeah. Oh, not as heavily as at Gaza Ridge but we were kept busy up there, mostly through medical patients. Quite a few operations. But we were kept busy and it was quite a big hospital we had up in Rocky Creek.

> And was there .... What about life outside the hospital. Did you get away from the base much, or not?

Yes, yes. We used to hitchhike to various places and visit other units and other friends up in the tablelands. Yeah. Go down to Cairns for the day if we could hitchhike.

> Did .... You were saying that some of the men had married when they came back. Of course travelling around Australia was very difficult in the war. Did many of the wives manage to get up to the area to be with their husbands?

Not in Queensland, no. They didn't seem to jump the border. Some got as far as Brisbane but, of course, we weren't stationed in Brisbane long. Yes, in Brisbane, when I was waiting for my unit, waiting for transport further up, I was in pig pens - of course they were cleaned out but they were pig pens - and we lived in pig pens on the concrete.

> Mmm. That's really quite rugged, isn't it?

As I say you had to be young, you know.

And what about the general living conditions, food and that kind of thing at Atherton? Was that an improvement on what the men had had in the Middle East?

Yes. Our quarters were very good up there and, of course, the food was so much better. I relieved in the butcher shop quite a few times and the fresh beef was beautiful up there. And fresh vegetables. Oh, it was much better being back in Australia for - food wise.

After .... Well, during that period I know you became, or you had this desire to go overseas and you've told us about joining the 2/3rd, I think it was, CCS - Casualty Clearing Station.

Yes.

With them you went to Balikpapan.

Mmm.

What's your memory of that? Could you tell us a little bit about that?

I was on the advance party for Balikpapan and our barge ... yes, we were on Morotai first. From Morotai ... we were stationed in Morotai and doing a meal queue one day a stray bullet from somewhere come and went through the back of one of the young chaps, Hogan, from Adelaide, was shot through the back. From Morotai we went on barges across to Balikpapan, I was in the advance party but it broke down. We could see Balikpapan in the distance and the shells were just flying over our heads and quite a bombardment. We could see the flame throwers going, digging at the Japs in the holes but we eventually arrived there. We weren't there long when the Salvation Army had a cup of tea for us. (laughs)

Amazing. And they'd actually got there before you.

Yes, yeah. Because we were twenty-four hours just tossing around, you know, broke down. That's why that happened.

I didn't realise the Salvation Army was ...

Yes, I was amazed to think ... oh, God bless the Salvos.

And what were conditions like at Balikpapan?

Yes. It was ... Oh, it was dreadfully bombed and burnt out. We were up near Sepinggang airstrip and the airstrip was just a mass of holes. They had to repair that before any planes could come. We were up in a little rise. We'd lost our convoy and we'd passed the ... oh, the front-line troops and asked them where such-and-such a hill was and he said, 'It's not past us. There's Japs in front of us', you know, 'That's how far you've come'. So we had to turn around quick smart and come back. We'd got lost. Yeah.

(5.00) I'd imagine it was quite different working in a casualty clearing station to working in a hospital?

Yes. You got patients more direct from the firing line. We had quite a few casualties at the CCS and, you know, gunshot wounds, yeah.

> Could you tell us the kind of procedure that was carried out to accept people into the casualty clearing station? What was done first?

Oh, they'd come through the field. The field ambulance was always the first stage, from the field ambulance to the casualty clearing station. The 2nd, I think, AGH was there but ... no, I don't think so. I'm not sure. That's right, I don't think there was an AGH there. But the 2/2nd CCS and 2/3rd CCS I think. So we operated as a whole ... like a small hospital.

> Right. And as men arrived they were taken in and dealt with immediately?

Yes, yes.

> There must have been cases, I'd imagine, when ... if there were a lot of people around, I'd assume what was done was that the men who could be saved were worked on and men who were obviously going to die, for whom everything was too late, were left. Do you remember situations like that?

No, I'm not quite sure about that. I'm just thinking back in Queensland ... yeah ...

> That's all right. I will turn off for a moment. I might just ask you about this, Len. This is just recalling scrub typhus cases in Queensland. What's your memory of ...

Oh, great big, tough soldier would come in with scrub typhus and you'd see them dying before your eyes. They gradually went down to a skeleton. It was something they just couldn't cure at the time and there was quite a few came in with that. It was a dreadful thing.

> Much worse than malaria for example?

Yes, oh yes. At least they could cure malaria. We were all yellow from the atebrin tablets we were taking but scrub typhus fever, oh, it was a dreadful thing, yeah.

> And were there cases of scrub typhus in Borneo?

No, I don't remember in there. It was up in Queensland most of that was, yes.

> Right. Just going back to this. We were just talking about the casualty clearing station, did men talk about this general issue much that obviously in a medical situation, sometimes to save some lives that could be saved, others had to be left to die? Was that moral issue ever something that troubled people or not?

Oh, it was more or less generally accepted. Yes, you just couldn't do anything for them so you just had to leave them. Mmm. Just a general thing.

Did you always have an adequate supply of pain-killers and so on?

No, no. The orderlies didn't have any pain-killers at all, no.

So men who were badly wounded just had to put up with it?

Yes, that right.

Right. Well, is there anything else that you feel is particularly significant about your work at Balikpapan, Len?

Mmm. ... tapeworms in Gaza.

Oh, it doesn't matter if it's out of context.

Yes. Epidemic of tapeworms. The chaps would pass these tapes, oh, a yard long, you know. We'd just examine their stools and saw the head come at you, you'd recognise the head. But all this tapeworms that came out. They blamed that we had so much New Zealand lamb, or mutton over there that they blamed that for having so much of that. But it caused so many tapeworms.

Mmm. That's interesting. Well, when peace was finally declared later in 1945, what's your memory of that? How did you react to that news?

Yes. It came over, you know, the atomic bomb has been dropped; war is finished. We just couldn't believe it. Yes, people were shouting and ... But it was a couple of days after that we actually got the message that war had finished. But we were so pleased, as last it was over. But even then a few of the Aussies went out into the bush, scurrying out in the bush, and I did myself, but quite a few were shot, you know, because the Japs were still hiding in the bush and just wouldn't give themselves up.

Was there any real understanding of how appalling Hiroshima and Nagasaki were?

Any ...?

Any real understanding. Did you really ...

No. But thank God, you know, it finished the war. You know, so many lives were lost. It was a dreadful thing on the civilians but at least, you know, the people that had been killed, at least it stopped the war, you know. It just went on and on.

Sure. Well, Len, looking back over it all, how do you remember the war and did it really change you as a person or not?

(10.00) Yes. When I came back, when I was discharged, I just couldn't settle down. My wife and I had a private hospital - one in Rose Bay and one in Petersham - but, you know, it carried on from when I was ... fortunately I had the medical experience I had because we had a hospital. We had one at Rose Bay for twelve months and we had our own hospital at

Petersham after that for six years before we went to Beddell House Private Hospital for the Wesley Central Mission. We were there for twenty-eight years and my wife got the Order of Australia being there for nursing. But the war, nursing during the war came into ... helped me a lot with our own hospital back in civvy life. But I couldn't settle down for quite a while. I just had a feeling I had to go up to Queensland to cane cut, why I don't know. But it was just feeling, it took some time before I could settle down before I could, you know, accept that I had a wife and child to look after.

Did you, in fact, go cane cutting?

No. I just wanted to but I don't know why. No, I never got there. Just had to get out, you know.

Well, there obviously had been quite a level of adventure in the war.

Yes, there was, yes. And everything was ... you didn't have to do any thinking for yourself during the war. I mean, you were told to do this and told to do that so, I mean, you didn't have to make any decisions yourself.

Yes, I can understand that very much. Perhaps just going back to your wife briefly. You'd met her before you'd left Australia?

That's right, yes.

She was a nurse then?

Yes. She was training at Sydney Hospital.

You hadn't met her in an army unit?

No, no.

Okay. Well, just finally, I don't know if there's anything you feel you'd like to add to this that hasn't been said about the war, about your involvement in it?

I thought of something last night I wanted to tell you but I've forgotten now. Yes, how they went berserk in the ship going over and had to be restrained. Yes, the evacuation during Greece. Then life on Crete.

Yes, you did mention the men earlier on who went berserk on the ship.

Yes, yes. They had to be tied down.

Was that, incidentally, because of the situation on the ship or because they were going to war?

Fear of war, I think. Fear of submarines the main thing was. The fear of submarines were going to hit the convoy.

We'll just turn off for a moment. This is just to end with, a story about ... was this coming back on the *Queen Mary* or ...

No, going over on the *Queen Mary*. Yes, I was working in the officers' pantry and they lived like lords in that pantry and I was in the sweets pantry and, oh, the beautiful sweets they had and the poor troops upstairs were on the breadline more or less. I pinched a tin of ice-cream one night to take it up to ... to give to the boys in my cabin but I was caught going out the door and I got the sack from the officers' pantry. I wasn't allowed back there again because I'd pinched some ice-cream.

Mmm. That issue of very different food surely must have been quite a ... I mean, really fueled some resentment between ...

Oh yes, yes. As I say, every night we had bread, butter ... bread, butter, margarine and ... no, bread, butter, marmalade and cheese. The same thing every night.

And that was the meal, full stop?

That was the meal, yes. Eat as much as you like, but that's all there was. Yeah.

While the officers were sitting down to meat ...

Oh, turkey. (laughs)

It seems incredible.

It does, yes.

Just a final thing here, we were just talking about funerals. Where a man died or a woman, obviously there was no family, and if units had been broken up, perhaps not even a lot of their own close friends in a hospital setting, how were funerals handled?

Very dignified. I was usually the corporal in charge of the cortege and moved along so it was usually taken out on a truck. One of the funniest thing was a chap died at sea. He was balanced - it was on the *Queen Mary* - he was balanced to go - there was a lot of two-up played on the sea - and he was about to go when some chap from the rear sang out, 'Two bob to see him go'. (laughs) The poor man was balancing on the ship. You know, and the padre's taking the service and he said, 'Two bob to see him go'. Oh ...

So in a general funeral party you were saying there was a cortege formed up with an army truck and so on.

Yes, yes.

Were men always accorded a firing squad or was that only given to men who ... to combat fellows?

Yes, we never had a firing squad. No, nothing like that. But up in Queensland there was a terrible lot of ORs - this is on motor bikes ... on motor bikes speeding, taking correspondence from one place to another but they used to do a lot of speeding. On my way from the men's two-up to the hospital, where we had the hospital up in the Atherton Tablelands, on my way to work I always called into the morgue to see, you know, if any more R&Rs were killed on duty. You know. I always checked on the morgue on me way up to see if there's any bodies there.

(15.00) That's interesting. Well, on behalf of the War Memorial, thank you very much.

I hope it is some help.

Yes. It certainly is.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW.