TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S00780
Title	(NX34620) Price, Charles Frederick Thomas (Sergeant)
Interviewer	Stokes, Edward
Place made	Not stated
Date made	19 February 1990
Description	Charles Frederick Thomas Price, as a sergeant, 2/6th Australian General Hospital, interviewed by Edward Stokes for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45.

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START TAPE 1, SIDE A.

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Charles Price, 2/6th AGH, Tape 1, Side 1.
>
> Charles, just to a get a recording volume and see how we're going there, could you perhaps tell us when and where you were born?.

Um, born in Sydney, 7th February 1917 Ed, and I've been going strong ever since (laughs).

> Did you continue your schooling there?

Yes, I went to Canterbury High School and from there on I became a clerk in the Public Service with the Department of Agriculture, just prior to enlisting in the AIF.

> Right, let's just pause there. Well, just a couple of things to pick up on the pre-war years .... The whole story of Australians in the first world war, the tradition of ANZAC and so on, was that something that you were particularly conscious of as a boy and a young man or not?

Yes. My family never had any real connections with the first AIF but I was always very conscious of the wonderful job that they did. Everybody, all of us had heard about the heroism at Gallipoli and the casualties and the horrors of war, but it didn't influence me to any great extent. I think I would speak for nearly all the people that enlisted, I think they, ah, they sort of enlisted because their mates enlisted. It's one of those things that you'd be, you know, working in a big organisation and a quarter of them would enlist, and before you know what was happening, another fifty or so enlisted, and I think that's just the way the ma... the majority of enlistments were made. Everybody went in with their mates.

> Yes, I've certainly heard that before. Looking at the period in the late 1930s, how conscious were you as an individual of political developments in Europe? The rise of Hitler's power and so on?

Well, we were very conscious of it Ed, but um, I don't know that I placed a great deal of importance upon it. I mean, as I might have mentioned to you, I was a very self-centred individual, devoted mainly to playing cricket and (laughing) I felt that really, when Hitler declared war, that, the first thing that struck my mind, `Well, um, he's interfering with my cricket career to becoming a well-known test cricketer'. That was my first impression (laughing). Naturally, you know, it was a very solemn occasion. I think it was on a Friday evening I think when we heard that, heard Menzies declare that state of war, that England was at a state of war, and consequently Australia also, and I thought, `Well this is going to have a lot of ramifications among all people of my age' - exactly at the, say, at the right age I think, round about twenty-one or twenty-two to enlist, and I thought that, `Yes, it's one of these things. I suppose I'll have to get into it eventually'. I didn't rush down to enlist, but as I mentioned, um, ah, some of our mates started to enlist and then before you know where you are, you're joinin' up with them.

> Hm. That's most interesting, especially the comments about cricket. Back to cricket in a moment but first your family, your parents in particular. Did they support your decision to enlist or not?

No, they hated the very thought of it Ed, because, and it gave me a ... that was one thing that gave me a great deal of concern because I was the only child and my poor old mother, she'd been in a wheelchair for about ooooh, I suppose forty years, and I was more or less one of those ...

(5.00) I mean dad was marvellous. He was in full employment with the Transport Department, but they looked to me also to supplement the income and it gave me a great deal of agonising thought that if I had to enlist, I thought, `God, I ....', you know, `what's going to happen to mother?' So they were my prime thoughts.

> That's most interesting. Um, just turning to cricket briefly, because it does play a part in your later war career, Charles. I understand you were a very good cricketer, in fact playing first grade?

Yes. I played .... It's amazing the effect it did have on my subsequent war career, because I was a pretty well known first grader and, funnily enough, when I did join up, as I mentioned, very early in the piece, there were no buildings available to take all the enlistments, so we were carted off to Marrickville - day boys - it was a sort of a day boy camp where you learn something about the basic administration of the military, then you went home of a night-time, and I was only there for twenty-four hours and someone said, `Oh that chap was a first grade cricketer for Marrickville'. So they came over and they made me a corporal straight away. (Laughing).

> Mm. That's very interesting.

Not knowing a thing at all about how the military operated, but they said, `Look, this is very good for the morale of sportsmen. We want as many sportsmen as possible to enlist. You're a first grade cricketer and we'll make sure that this is given plenty of publicity'. So the next day on the - I think it was the *Daily Telegraph* - had a great photo of me looking at guns. It had `Corporal Price answers the call, which all sportsmen will eventually follow. He is here inspecting guns'. (Laughing).

> Mm, that's interesting. So they were really using sport as a peg to draw in other people?

That was the idea of it, yes.

> One of the other - well, we'll come back to cricket later at the end of the tape when we do talk about the end of the war. One of the other things, of course, was that you'd studied first aid. Could you perhaps tell us who you had studied with, why and to what level?

Well, as I mentioned, my poor old mother was an invalid and I had to learn something about basic first aid, just in case she fell over and all that sort of business and I became quite interested in it and, um, ah, I attended a St John's course and they .... I went there for, oh, I

suppose six months or something like that and I became pretty well qualified in the basics of, of first aid and I think that it stayed with me really. I think that anybody really should undertake a course in first aid, because you just never know when you might need it.

> Mm yes, that's an interesting point. I often thought I should do that myself. Well going back to, ah, your career in the army, ah, it was in I think June '40 that you did enlist. You went to Marrickville.

That's right.

> What's your very first recollection of the discipline and the general indoctrination, if you like, into army routines and so on, all the parade ground bashing you no doubt did?

Yes, well I think it's quite an eye opener Ed, to anybody that's never had the slightest, ah, training or inclination to join the army. It's one of those things where you find that the sergeant-major whose got ten times more power than a policeman. There were no sort of trials. He just orders you, tells you what to do, and so discipline is the very first thing that came to my mind, where, ah, you were ah, paraded and taught how to march for a start. That's one of the things where you had to keep your, ah, rhythm in marching, keep your left arm as you strode forward from the - I remember from the elbow to the hand it had to be kept very rigid so that your arm sort of went straight up in a very straight motion. So parade ground drill was what it boiled down to, and we did that every day, you know, all the time, and it was one of the things that stuck in my mind. And of course, being made an instant corporal (laughing) they expected that I knew something about that, and of course I knew absolutely nothing. So I had to be a very quick learner and learn something, as all of us, about parade ground drill.

> Mm. Yes, it must have been quite a situation to be put in. Moving on a little bit, it was from Marrickville, the day boy period, when you went to the showground where the 6th Division, I think, was - or had a holding camp.

Yes.

> What's your recollection of that period? For instance, what were living conditions like and what filled your days while you were waiting there?

(10.00) Well, quite honestly, the living conditions were pretty shocking. Ah, with the old showground, I remember they used my knowledge of administration mainly, to get into the Q Store situation and people bringing their packs in and I sort of had to list them and that sort of, ah, work I had to do. And I remember that the 'flu was very bad, infections were on and off, and I was quite ill. I was determined to bat on, of course, but I was quite ill at the showground the whole time and I wasn't alone there. The, ah, the housing conditions, the sleeping quarters - we were in cattle pens - and I think the cattle had just been removed and we sort of had to get in there with our straw palliasses and make do, as my recollection. It was a very uncomfortable few months.

> How hygienic was it? Had the cattle pens been thoroughly, you know ...?

I suppose basically they'd, the engineers, all those, you know, medical people had made certain that ah, that you wouldn't die of any incurable disease there, but a lot of people still got very ill and, um, I for one was very very glad when that period of the holding camp came to an end.

> Mm. Well moving on a little bit, the, um, it was at the showground at that holding camp, that men were sorted out into the different units they were to go to, and of course you went to 2/6th. Do you remember, or have any idea, of what criteria were used and why were you, was this simply your first aid qualification that led to your going to the hospital?

I think it was my first aid qualification mainly. I remember a chap called Major Ken Richardson. He, ah, he was the officer given the responsibility of lining up personnel for the 2/6th AGH and I remember him asking me what I did and I said, `Oh yes, I've been trained in first aid and, you know, bandaging' and `Oh, right' he says, `you're someone'. He said, `Have you had any clerical experience?' `Oh yes, administration with the Public Service'. `Righto, you're in'. So that's all there was to it. And being a corporal I suppose that impressed him (laughing).

> Yes, right. When you knew that, was that a decision that pleased you, that you were going to a non-fighting unit or not?

Yes, it did please me to a certain extent because, as I mentioned, my poor old mother was - she was very very worried about the whole situation and I think it eased her a bit to know that there was every chance that I wouldn't be killed in the first rush. So she was pleased about it and I, I'd have been prepared to go anywhere really, except that I don't think I was really cut out to, um, to be an infantry man ah, or I was never any ... I was never mechanically minded and the artillery and that, those type of units, never really appealed to me so I was quite happy with that really, with a knowledge of first aid, that they'd put me in the 2/6th AGH.

> Hm. Well, that's interesting Charles. Um, let's move on then to when you went to Walgrove, where the hospital was actually forming up. What's your first impression of Walgrove, and what was it like in the subsequent, um, few weeks - in fact, I think a couple of months - that you spent there?

Again it was in the embryo stage, where we had to, um, buck in and erect tents, and help consolidate the, um, the unit getting established, and again, ah, it was a bit of an eye opener when our first sergeant-major came. He was a very, ah, sort of aggressive type of individual and again we had that sense of discipline and parades and marching and all that sort of thing, even although it was a medical unit. They insisted that we do everything you could according to law.

> Did you do, besides that, the military training, did you do any purely medical training? Did other people do medical training at Walgrove or not?

No. The, we had, ah, the classifications really were, ah, you had the doctors. They were, of course, specialists and they were the main people, and the rest of us were virtually on general duties, ah, and again later on I was headed towards this medical inspection centre, where I was told that eventually when people arrived that I would have the administrative job of

checking over the availability of beds and where patients would go. At that stage, ah, I think there were a few patients suffering with, oh, not malaria, but what do they call it? Sandfly fever.

(15.00) And we had a few of those type of patients in there, but ah, not a great, not a great many. So I was mainly connected with looking after their packs as they came into the hospital and checking them for them and giving them a receipt and that sort of clerical work.

> Right, that's interesting Charles. The sort of thing I'd like to ask you at some point, and perhaps this might be a good moment to do it, is ... the *esprit de corps* of the hospital was obviously very strong, although there was a period when it slumped - when people were shunted off to different units in the Middle East and so on, but it later revived. Um, but the general impression I've got so far talking to other people, was that there was a very very strong positive feeling in the unit generally. What would you put that down to?

I think it could be summed up in one word Ed - leadership. Ah, I was tremendously impressed when I first saw Colonel Rex Angel Money. He was a veteran of the first world war, he'd won the Military Cross, and on top of that, he was one of Australia's leading brain surgeons. Ah, he'd remained in the military after the first world war and, um, he'd won the Efficiency Decoration, he's mentioned in despatches and he was a born leader. He ...

> Why was he a born leader?

Well he had this, this penetrating, ah, mind, ah, allied with a very very fine sense of public relations with his men. Ah, he got to know them all personally and his memory was remarkable, and he, ah ... at all times he was very strong on esperit [sic] - *esprit de corps*, ah, but the importance of everyone's individual task. And he took all sorts of trouble to point out to everybody the importance of their work, no matter how menial it was, and accordingly, he was highly respected and very well liked.

> Yes. The story of the Christmas dinner I think, says a lot about that. Could you recall that for us?

Yes. Well it, to me, it seemed typical of Rex Money that the commander-in-chief, ah - prior to embarkation, um, we had this sort of a Christmas party in the canteen and, ah, everybody was invited - all the officers and men - and Colonel Money did this business of the lowliest private went first, followed in chronological order with any other privates, then lance corporals, corporals, sergeants and up to the officers, and the very last person of the lot was Colonel Money, with a dixie in his hand, going round serving the men. And that was the type of thing that commanded such respect among all the - all the men.

> Right, I'd say very rare too. What was the immediate conversation after that um, after that dinner, about that particular approach of his?

Well he let it be known that embarkation was very very close, and on top of that, I recall that - which again endeared him to the men - ah, he was a very good singer, and he had all the parodies in the world and some of them were quite risque, but the men would have their sergeants' mess, or even the cor... cor... or even the privates' mess, and Rex Money would

come along and perform for them. You know, for a man with such distinction, with a Military Cross, mentioned in despatches, Australia's leading brain surgeon and a very commanding presence that he had as well - he was quite a handsome man - and to come down and do that and talk to no matter who it was, you know, he was, really he was very very well liked. At the same I say this, that among the medical fraternity, I understand that he wasn't all that well liked though. (Laughing) He was, he, he was ...

Medical fraternity ithin the army, or in civilian life?

No, more or less in civilian life. I mean, I go overboard about Rex Money. I say, `What a wonderful man' and my views weren't entirely shared by many of his, many of his colleagues in civil life. They said that, for a start, he was overbearing, that he never ever suffered fools gladly, that if he wanted something, you got it. There was no beg-pardons about it. He could be extremely rude and that was a side of him that I never ever saw, but the medical people told me that, ah, that's ...

Yes, that's interesting. Um, I do know that, I think it was Jack Whitlam, who'd been a cook with his world war one battery, applied to join the hospital. That in itself seems to say something.

Yes.

Um, one thing that does seem interesting was that he had been a first world war front-line soldier. How much do you think that bore on his, the attitudes that he had as a doctor and as a hospital administrator in the second war?

(20.00) I think that, er, his experiences in the first world war must have taught him, or shown him, how important it was for a team effort, that, ah .... Rex, I think he was a commander of an infantry battalion at one stage, ah, quite apart from being a medico. I know he was gassed in France and he was well looked after. Then I think that Rex got, he got the respect, the work that went on around him, and I think that that feeling that was conveyed right through his command of the 2/6th AGH.

Right. Just one other thing. I think his deputy - I'm not quite sure how you pronounce his name ....

Niesche, Fred, F.W. Niesche, yes.

He was another outstanding character.

Yes. Fred was a very very fine personality. Fred never had the actual military command that Rex Money had, but Fred Niesche was more, er, of a top line surgeon, but a very very gentle man. I remember once at, ah, in Gaza I think it was, where I was in attendance in a theatre where Fred Niesche was operating and his concern for the patient .... What happened I think, this chap had, um, he'd wandered out of bounds in Gaza somewhere and he was shot by some, by a couple of terrorists around the place and the bullets were everywhere in him, and Fred's - the operation went on for several hours, and I remember he was very concerned. The anaesthetist - a chap called Marshall, Major Stewie Marshall - he was concerned that Fred was spending too much time extracting the bullets sort of thing, and that the patient would die

before the operation was completed, and I remember Fred so full of concern and kindness towards this chap. He said, `I'm going to fix this chap up. I'm going to get him well. It's a tragedy what's happened to him, so you, you keep up that anaesthetic Stewie and let the surgery, let me worry about that part of it'. Anyhow the chap, the operation was a success. But, Fred was very very highly respected.

> Right. The matron, Matron Abbott, who must have had a fairly key role in co-ordinating the work of the nurses and so on. What's your recollection of her?

I didn't see too much of Matron Abbott and the nurses. They, they were in the .... As I say, I was mainly in the general duties medical inspection centre and Matron Abbott and the nurses, they did a very valuable job in, um, tending the patients. Ah, they, they came to us - well we didn't see that much of them, I think they came later on in Greece for, ah, they came after us, and I can never remember them, seeing them on Crete. I think, got an idea that they left, when they evacuated from Greece they went straight back to Gaza.

> I think they did go to Crete, but perhaps to a different place.

Yes, yes. I just missed them. In any case, though, to answer your question, I do know that Matron Abbott was an outstanding person, that she, again, like Colonel Money, she held the entire respect of all the sisters and the nurses and subsequently, a lot of the VADs that came over to the Middle East.

> Right. Well going on a little bit, just before embarking Bathurst. What do you recollect of the period at Bathurst? What were the main tasks you yourself were involved in?

Um, Bathurst again was, ah, pre-embarkation, we were rather unsettled. We knew that it was only a matter of days. We weren't in Bathurst very long and we, we knew that it wouldn't be much good - we felt it wouldn't be much good - setting up a fully established hospital there, because we'd be leaving it very soon and, um, I remember Bathurst again, was virtually a holding strength for field ambulance units, CCS units. They all came, we all intermingled and it was a very very big camp really. And, ah, it's, actually it was an ideal introduction to camp life.

> Mm. When news did finally come through that you were to shortly embark, although of course you didn't at the time know where for, what was your reaction? Were you pleased or not?

We were terribly pleased, Ed, that at last something was happening. It was, er, we knew that we were going on the *Queen Mary* - I suppose it would be one of the worst kept secrets of the war that we were going on the *Queen Mary* - because I remember a lot of the troops' final farewell messages to their families, they were dropping messages over in bottles, you know, saying `Well we're on the *Queen Mary* and it's a wonderful trip'.

(25.00) They described every bit of it, so I think any Fifth Column, they'd have a marvellous time deciphering where we were going. We all knew we were going to the Middle East and we were going round via Fremantle and, um, then we'd be, er, getting off the *Queen Mary* at Colombo and getting onto a smaller ship. But the *Queen Mary* - 84,000 tonnes - it was one of

my memories of a marvellous ship, and - when was it, about forty years later, had the pleasure of going over the *Queen Mary* again and it brought back an awful lot of memories.

> Yes, you were saying that before and of course that was the, both the second and third journey later in the war on board her for yourself. The actual departure from Sydney, um, I'd imagine a fairly stirring occasion. What's your recollection?

Yes, as I say, it was um, it was a badly kept secret. The wharves, I remember, were lined with hundreds, could have possibly been a few thousand, relatives all waving good-bye. Everybody knew that the final leave was up and we'd be coming down by train from Bathurst to the wharves and ah, we could even guess that it could be some time round 11 o'clock in the morning or something like that. We were able to ... you see, phones were, ran red hot. People knowing their final leave was up they wanted to say good-bye to their loved ones and so they left the message with them. You know, `If you happen to be on the wharf round about 11 o'clock, we'll give you a final farewell'. So it was really quite a, quite a stirring send-off.

> Right. Well we might skate a little bit over the journey by sea, Charles, simply because there is so much more to talk about, but of course it was a - in some senses, or many senses, I guess - a dangerous journey and I think you said you were involved in submarine duty. What's your recollection of that and, more generally, of the voyage itself?

Well, I forget how many thousand troops - I don't know, I might be guessing a little bit, but could have been something like 5,000 troops aboard. They came from everywhere, um - New Zealanders and the Maori contingent, and I think one of the highlights of the trip was the boxing championships that were organised on the trip, the idea being of course that everybody had to be fairly active and keep themselves in pretty good condition, and it was pretty well compulsory for us to walk round the decks of the *Queen Mary* at least a dozen times. Now that represents a couple of mile hike, going round the decks of the *Queen Mary*.

> Per day you mean?

Per day, yes. That was sort of a route march, and then these boxing tournament championships were, um, were entered into and our representative, he went into the championship and he was knocked out in the first round. (Laughing).

> And carted off to hospital?

So then again, forty years later when I was looking at the scene of the boxing championship that memory came back very strongly to me.

> The hospital itself while you were at sea. Was it involved in caring for patients, and how were you involved, if so?

No I wasn't terribly involved then, Ed. Um, there were, ah, sort of first aid posts on board the *Queen Mary* and the doctors and the surgeons, they had little to do. They were all, the thousands of people on the *Mary*, they were pretty healthy people really. I can't remember anybody being seriously ill on the trip. I think, when I come to think of it, I think one chap,

ah, one chap had a great psychological problem and he suicided, ah, just after we got to Suez, but that's the only thing that I can recollect on the medical side of going over on the *Mary*.

> Right, and of course you went through, um, via Ceylon - now Sri Lanka - and there you changed ship.

Yes.

> I have heard it said that the journey on the ships that people transferred to from the *Queen Mary* was rather more pleasant than the journey on the *Mary* itself. Do you recall that or not?

Yes, well it become more individual. I mean, the *Mary*, there were thousands and thousands of people every day lining up for mess, ah, start, you know. You'd be pretty lucky to get a - a very decent feed. It wasn't, the food wasn't all that terrific really, but when we got onto the smaller ship, it became more individual and I think my recollection of the ship we got onto, I think wasn't, wouldn't be much more, much bigger than the Manly ferry I, I don't think. But again, um, the - we didn't carry out any medical duties aboard between Colombo and ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

START TAPE 1, SIDE B.

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes recording with Charles Price, 2/6th Hospital, Tape 1, Side 2. End of identification.

> Um, yes, we were just talking about the voyage on beyond Colombo, Charles, and you were saying there were no medical duties. Well, the arrival in the Middle East, um, must, I'd imagine, have been quite striking, if only because of the landscape and the society were obviously so totally different to the Australia that most of you knew. What was your general recollection of the disembarking?

You're quite right, Ed. We ... There was a stark contrast. Um, it took quite a while to, ah, sort of acclimatise yourself to going through the Suez Canal especially. I mean, most of us had never seen, um, divers for instance. You know, you throw a coin over and they'd go over the side and retrieve them for you. It was just, ah, all of us had never really gone outside Australia. It was really an eye opener, and I remember arriving at, going through Suez and entraining to Gaza. I remember the air raid alarm had started and we thought, `Oh, hell, this is it', and in the distance we could see lots and lots of things circling around and we thought, `God', you know, `the fighters, the pilots, or the air force is coming over to get us', but really only they were a flock of birds (laughing). But that was the state of, I suppose, confusion that, um, of going into a brand new country and seeing all the sights that none of us were used to. I mean, the outstanding impression that I had too was of the absolute magnificent citrus fruits, um, mangoes and oranges especially. They were really, really, really beautiful.

> Was there - you were hinting at the tension when this flock of birds was seen and so on - was there a, a very heightened general tension in that you were entering a more active war zone? Or was it just fairly muted?

I think there was a heightened tension (laughing) because, I remember some chap, he said, `Well', he said, `I dunno'. He said, `We were taught that when the air raid alarm goes and we see any signs of hostile aircraft, you look around for a slit trench' and so this is what we did. In the distance of course all these birds - oh, huge birds they were too - circling around. There could have been a couple of dozen of them and, you know, being brand new novices sort of thing, we thought, `God', you know `we'll have to look for a slit trench and ....' Again, as you say, I think there was a heightened tension that we were entering into a war sphere.

> Of course the period when the hospital first arrived in the Middle East at Gaza was in many ways, I think, rather confused, and it wasn't long after that that, of course, you went to Greece. Now that first period at Gaza, when I think, um, a hospital of sorts was established, what's your recollection of what happened?

Well, luckily, um, the 1st AGH had been over there, I suppose, oh, six months prior to our arrival and they had things pretty well under control from the point of view of consolidating a hospital. Um, we were told, you know, that a 600-bed hospital had to be enlarged to 1200, could even go up to 2000. So we, we really built on what the 1st AGH people had already performed.

(5.00) Mm. The hospital that you were organising, was that mostly a tented hospital?

Mainly tents, yes. Ah, there were a few, a few buildings. Ah, I think I might have mentioned that we were fascinated with mud brick, that some of the quarters - you might have seen, I think, even now it's possible to build a home out of compressed mud - and the Arabs had this down to a fine art. So some of the quarters were, especially where we, where the sergeants slept, um, they were, um, made out of compressed mud, but by and large, the 1st AGH, with some of their carpenters and people, they had established a couple of buildings, complemented by dozens and dozens of tents.

> During this period at Gaza Charles, just looking to your own personal work, what were you mostly doing?

Well they put me into a division called the medical inspection centre and something like, ah, a first aid post really. If anything dramatically happened - I mean if somebody had, within the unit, had suddenly burst an artery or something well they carted him off to the MIC, the medical inspection centre, where we would render first aid and immediately call on a, upon a doctor surgeon or a doctor to do the job properly, and my main job there really was, ah, keeping a tally of all the available beds in the, firstly in the 600-bed hospital. Well, I think they had about seventeen wards and there could be up to thirty or forty beds in each ward, and so we had a tally of admissions going into a particular ward, the discharges the previous day and the remaining beds available. And it was my job to let the surgeons and the physicians know that if somebody, um, had a particular complaint or problem, there was a bed available in a certain ward.

> Right. So they would then, I assume, make a medical inspection and a diagnosis of sorts, a preliminary one, and based on your information they would shunt people to one or other ward.

That's right.

> Well you have got this list here that I think is really particularly interesting, this original listing here. I think this is in fact of a later period, because you have, were going up to twenty-three wards here. Could you just perhaps read out - not the actual numbers of available beds - but the listing of the wards, to give an idea of the different wards that did exist?

Yes, well we had an officer's section, we called it OW1 and OW2 for officers; another ward for sisters and VADs - I think they became AAMWS; ah, then ward one was isolation ...

> Contagious diseases?

Contagious diseases; ward two, surgical - with emphasis on chest wounds; ah, ward three was medical; ward four, medical; ward five was medical dysentery. That was quite a problem in the Middle East really. You know, dysentery was quite a nasty thing to pick up. Ward six, um, septic surgery, where the incidence of um, of septicaemia might be very very prevalent, so that had to be especially looked at. Much the same as ward seven - acute surgical - where there could be a matter of, I suppose you'd call it now, intensive care. We called it acute surgical. Ward eight - ear, nose and throat. We had a chap, a well-known

Macquarie Street specialist called Sir George Halliday. He was in charge of the ear, nose and throat operations. Ward nine - orthopaedic - people with trouble with their back and, mainly their back. Ward ten - eye - people that might have been partially blinded and any eye infections or eye disorders. Ward eleven was, ward eleven and twelve and thirteen were all general surgical wards, so that they virtually, if they weren't acute surgical, chest or septic, well they went into ward eleven, twelve and thirteen. Ward fourteen was skin - ah, we had a skin specialist with us and, it's amazing really, the skin diseases that could operate in the Middle East. You could pick up all sorts of things.

(10.00) I suppose inc... this is including VD?

No, er, VD was .... They had a special hospital for VD called the Eighth Special. They, ah, they looked after all venereal disease problems, and ward fifteen and sixteen, seventeen were all medical. And we had ward eighteen - psychological. That was pretty important that because, as I mentioned, we had a few people come in to us that really had psychological problems, so the 2/6th AGH had their own major psychologist - I think his name was Alan Stoller from memory. Then the others, ward twenty-one, twenty-two and twenty-three were virtually fill-in surgical wards again for those that couldn't be handled in the more acute sections.

> Right, that's particularly interesting - a very valuable piece of paper there, Charles. Ah, just a couple of things to pick up on it from - perhaps. The officers' ward, was there ever any feeling amongst non-commissioned officers and other ranks that it would have been more appropriate for officers with particular medical categories simply to go into those wards with other men? In other words, was the segregation of officers necessary or desirable?

I think Ed in the army there was always an anti-officer feeling that the average private, the average soldier, he, he looked with a great deal of suspicion at officers. They, I think from my recollection from six years of mingling with privates and NCOs, that they, officers, um .... I mean, we had a lot of respect for certain of them, like Colonel Money for example, but other officers, they didn't go down terribly well. I mean, it was, I think, one of the nicknames was `Skull' you know, `Skull one', `Skull two' - that was officers' ward one, officers' ward two, and ...

> What's the relevance of skull? I don't quite get that?

Ah, I think you just felt that, um - it's an old army term really - `he's a skull', that means `he's an officer' (laughing).

> Skull as in (spelling) S-K-U-L-L?

(Spelling) S-K-U-L-L and I don't know where it sprung from, but ...

> They did head work as against physical work perhaps?

Could have been that way, I suppose.

> Well that is interesting anyway, though. So there would have been a certain degree of resentment that they did have their separate wards?

I think there could have been slight resentment that .... People would often say that `officers never ever got VD, they went straight to the officers' ward'.

> Right. The issue of food actually has been mentioned by a couple of other people I have spoken to in connection with the 2/6th, both as regarding the troop ships - the *Mary* and other periods too, that the hosp... and that the officers really ate infinitely better than the men. Of course they did have their own mess funds and so on. Was there a, ever any resentment to do with that?

I don't think so, Ed. I think actually, I think it was one thing that Colonel Money insisted upon, that the food had to be of equal standard right through the whole, the whole of his unit, and I remember he was very very friendly with his old army cook of world war one days, Jack Whitham, and ah, I remember him saying to us that he wished he had Whitham in the officers' mess. He said that he's ten times, he got ten times as much ability - or capability - of know-how in cooking a meal than what the current officers' cook had. So I think that, really, ah quite honestly I'd say that the food standard was very very good. I mean the officers probably got a few extra little perks around the place, but as far as we were concerned at any rate, I think that the food was very good, of a good standard right throughout - officers, NCOs and men.

> Right. Well let's go on from there. Um, just two other things based on this list. Um, I'd assume in collating the actual data of the numbers of, ah, patients in each ward and therefore the number of vacancies you yourself were trekking around the hospital to gather that information, were you?

Yes, that was my job also. Ah, I'd have, I'd probably work, oh, from seven or eight in the morning until four or five in the evening, day-time duty at the medical inspection centre -the MIC - and then there might be two or three days off where then I'd come onto night duty as a wardsman in charge of wards. So I would be going around with my little torch and my list, going round to each individual ward checking with the doctor or the sister in charge, ah, who came in, who went out, the general conditions, if they had any problems with patients. Sometimes, you know, there could have been some disturbances, some of the patients might be reacting very badly. Well it was my job to stamp that sort of thing out, and to, er ....

(15.00) How did you cope with that? If a man was proving difficult in a ward?

Oh, had to, sort of, use a great deal of diplomacy or tact and public relations and talk with them, be friendly with them and as part of the job, that had to .... I never ever really, ah - I think once in Jerusalem I had some trouble with - one of the doctors called me over. I'd just come back from that sea ambulance transport work that was going to take us to Tobruk, and this chap, he said to the, ah, patients, `Look, I've got a soldier here who's going to look after you people' (laughing). So he called me in and he put me on the spot really, because they were in... they were inclined to be playing up a fair bit and I had to sort of talk myself blind and to, um, to pacify them to see what their problems were. But mainly the patients were very grateful really that they were looked after as well as they were.

Hm. Right. Well just one final thing before we move on to the Greece episode, Charles. You did mention that there was a psychological ward there. Ah, I assume, amongst other things, that ward was taking men who, for whatever reason, were unable to cope with the stress of combat or had been badly affected by it?

Yes, that's, that's exactly what it was, Ed. The, um, in the early days there wasn't a great deal of use for it - or even then though, people coming from their private civilian life into the army life, it did have rather a profound effect upon them ...

Just the stripping away of individuality and so on?

Yes, they ah, so in the early days in Gaza, I remember there were, you know, could have been at least a dozen patients that were undergoing some severe problems mentally, worrying about their future, about the loved ones at home, so they had to be counselled and we had a top line psychologist in Major Alan Stoller to look after them.

With the more severe cases, men who had been in combat or in particularly dangerous situations and for some reason had cracked, um, was there general sympathy for them amongst other men in seeing it as a kind of, I suppose, a human situation that rightly or wrongly anybody could um, become entrapped in a sense? Or were they in some or other way resented by men who felt they could have coped?

No, my recollection Ed is that there's a great deal of fellowship between all patients but I think sympathy would be the wrong word. But if somebody came in that had just been up the line and had a very bad time, I think the psychology of treatment was to say well, you know, `You're lucky, you know. We haven't been there' and sort of `God, you know ....' They didn't lay on the sympathy angle too much, they, the patients would talk with them and say that, `Gee whiz you're lucky, just coming out of Greece' or `... coming out of Syria' or something like that. `We've been stuck here, sort of thing, haven't seen anything. How do you manage it?` you know, jokingly, take the mind right off the person's problems.

Right. Well that was obviously positive but there was no ... I guess in that, implied in that, you're saying ....

No, no, there was no resentment.

There wasn't any judgmental attitude?

No, oh no, nothing like that.

Mm. Right, well going on a bit. Of course, um, the period, initial period at Gaza, was somewhat confused in that there wasn't a stable future I suppose for the hospital. But it was there that you knew, I think you knew, you were going to Greece when you left? Um, there was a very bleak period I think in the Amiriya transit camp, and then you went on to Alexandria. What's your recollection of that?

Well when we, um, when we knew that we were on the go, we really weren't terribly certain that we were going to Greece. I mean army furphies, they spread like a disease, and we didn't know - the was talk about we might possibly go to England, we might, we could be going anywhere, so it was quite an anti-climax really when we went to this staging camp called Amiriya, not very far from Mersa Matruh in the desert, and it really was a really shocking place. It was something like you see in the movies, you know, with the miles and miles of sandhills and bleak, ah, desert, winds howling and we thought, `God, I think he's going to set up a hospital here' and the idea absolutely appalled us. We thought, `God, this is .... This is .... We just didn't know that it was really only a staging camp before we shifted on to Alexandria for, um, embarkation.

> Right, of course this move to Greece, too, was the first time the hospital was travelling with all its equipment, and the equipment I think had come in various different ships from Australia.

Yes.

> Um, how much were you involved in that yourself? And how difficult was it to simply succeed at that logistical operation of moving a whole hospital and very diverse equipment?

(20.00) Well we all had our roles to play and, um, most of us were seconded to general duties then, to do a lot of the lifting and the heavy work of getting the machinery, or getting the equipment that would be necessary for a field hospital, ah, in Greece. So we all did our bit, our part in that, in assembling all the equipment to get onto the um - this particular boat was the cruiser *Orion*, and um, it went quite smoothly really.

> You did have a strong recollection of leaving Alexandria, the importance of military music?

Yes, the um, I don't know whether anyone else had this experience, but we had three cruisers, the *Orion* was the one we were on, and also the *Ajax* and the *Perth*. The *Ajax* had a fairly illustrious experience already. I think it was in the *Graf Spee* operation and the *Perth* of course was a very renowned cruiser that went down with all hands later on. But as we were leaving Alexandria, could have been par for the course I think, that the marine - the band of the military, Royal Military Marines I think they called themselves - they struck up in the harbour `There'll always be an England', and `Land of Hope and Glory', all these stirring, patriotic tunes. Ah, the - I remember a couple of cannons were fired. It was a sort of a salute, you know, like they did in the old Roman days `We salute you people who are about to die' (laughing). But it cut, it was quite a stirring, patriotic farewell really.

> And I understand the journey to Greece itself was across some mirror-smooth seas.

Yes, it was a beautiful, beautiful trip. I think the main recollection of that trip across was the blue of the Mediterranean - it was absolute sparkling blue - as a contrast to the white as we approached the Greek islands. Everything was white and blue, a marvellous contrast.

Was there much tension, knowing that you were heading towards a combat theatre?

Oh no. We were really looking forward to doing something. Um, we felt that this was what we'd enlisted for, that we had to get into the action, and um, we thought `This is going to be, quite a good campaign'. We were completely unaware really of the logistics of the army or how things were going to turn out. We knew that, ah, Italy had declared war on Greece, but Germany hadn't. And it was one of the strange things when we landed in Piraeus, the port of Piraeus, and we went to Athens, that the Australians that had been fighting Germans and - in the desert, were now walking side by side with the Germans in Athens and in Greece. They weren't liked of course by the Greeks, but the Italians were the main foe of the Greeks, and you know, the Germans, they just didn't seem to exist.

Right. Of course it was on April 6th that all that suddenly changed. Ah, I think that was the date Germany declared war on Greece. You yourself were at Piraeus at the time, I think, assisting in loading equipment to go on to Volos - Volos - ah, and you had quite remarkable experiences that day I think.

Yes, the, when the um, Germany declared war on April 6th in the morning, church bells rang out everywhere and the Greeks in a great burst of patriotism and frenzy, they raced all round Athens wildly excited about things and superconfident that just as they'd forced the Italians back, they would do the same with the Germans. They felt that they were invincible. They had a tremendous morale and sense of patriotism, the Greeks. They knew no fear whatever about that and so, from Piraeus we wandered into Athens about four or five miles away to watch the action and we were seized and hoisted on some of the patriots' shoulders. These Evzones with their colourful costumes. They were the permanent soldiers of the Greek army, and they walked us on their shoulders along, and I had my little miniature camera snapping things left, right and centre, and we stopped at this, I think it was the Normandy or the Grande, the Grande, Grande Normandy Hotel where their Premier, Premier Koryzis, he was the focal point of all their patriotic outburst and he went to the window of the balcony and he waved and smiled and all that sort of thing. And the Greeks were wild with delight, you know, that there was going to be a tremendous show. They'd fix up these Germans in no time whatever. Well twenty-four hours later, Koryzis committed suicide, which was quite a blow, a devastating blow to the Greeks.

(25.00) Mm. That's for sure. Charles, the bombing of Piraeus, you yourself were at Piraeus unloading, rather loading equipment ...

That was on the same evening, on the same night, April 6th that we were supposed to load equipment on these caiques and sail, and sail up with them up to the northern port of Volos, where we were going to establish a field hospital.

Just to pause for the transcriber, caiques I think were a local coastal vessel, were they?

Yes, not terribly big, and really not much bigger than, oh, say twice the size of an ordinary launch, and so we had all these - all this equipment to put on these caiques, and then that evening, I think round about 8 o'clock at night, the Germans came over with their first raid of the war and it was so devastating that Winston Churchill talks about it in his memoirs. He

said that it was the most single factor that, that sort of struck at Greece with the bombing of the *Clan Fraser*. It was an ammunition ship tied up alongside our caique, and a lot of people that were aboard the *Clan Fraser*, and we had no idea that it was really an ammunition ship, so we thought `All right, we'll see if we can help out here'. The ship was blazing from stem to stern ...

Could I just pause, or stray, for a moment Charles?

Mm.

You had been unloading, um, and/or loading supplies?

Yeah.

When you were going on to this, ah, ship, as you were just to tell us, evacuating people and so on, were there officers there directing you to do that, or was this just based on your own initiative at the time?

No, it was all upon our own initiative. The, um, I don't remember any officers being present at all, and there were certainly no Greeks about, because they knew what was contained inside the *Clan Fraser* and we couldn't speak their language, they couldn't speak ours, so we had no idea that it was a smouldering cargo of explosives. But while it was burning we, we got, we helped oh I suppose a couple of dozen people that were, their flam... their clothes were on flames. We helped them out of the ship, ah, onto the, onto the wharf itself and ...

Did they get evacuated beyond that?

Ah, I think they did. Once we got them out of the ship, we did what we could to put out the flames and sort of treat them, given them whatever first aid treatment we could, and I think some medics did come in and take over. I don't, not quite certain about that, but it happened in, so quickly, in such a confused state with .... This ship was blazing from stem to stern that we worked for about three hours on this ship, still not knowing, you know, that the cargo was, had such explosive, and then round about .... So we thought, `Oh' you know, `we're just about had it now', and um, if you can imagine an overhead railway, big viaduct going overhead, and underneath it were lots of little buildings, and we went along. We thought, `We'll go in one of these buildings and have a bit of a sleep', and there just wasn't room. So this great friend of mine, I thought, `Oh well, this is no good. We'll get behind this big bale of, of wool I think it was, a big carton of something or other'. And just then the *Clan Fraser* blew up, and the impact was so great they found pieces of the ship's anchor in Athens a few miles away. And it was absolutely amazing the impact it had. It flattened Piraeus. Where we were going to sleep became just a complete flat wreck. So we'd have been killed instantly. As a matter of fact, three of our people were, and they'd gone under there somewhere and we never, never saw them again.

I think you're saying that the blast was so severe that you were temporarily blinded and your uniform blown off?

Yes, I, I was deafened too. Oh, I just couldn't have, I think that I lost my hearing, proper hearing, for about a week and the flash was really tremendous. It was one of the worst

explosions that I'd ever encountered anywhere in the, at all, and very luckily though we were shielded to a certain extent by the big cartons of things that we were hiding behind and the caiques, they went up about twenty feet, up in the air, then they just disappeared out of sight with all our equipment.

> And so a lot of the hospital's equipment was lost?

It all went by the board yeah.

> But what you did on the ship was obviously, whether or not you knew that being an explosive ship or not, I would have thought quite so heroic. Was there ever any recognition for what you and your friends did then? Did it become officially known?

Yeah, a couple of people got mentioned in despatches. I was only a corporal then, and we had two sergeants and they both, they sort of, they were mentioned in despatches for their work. That was recorded in the annals of, you know, being a pretty good sort of a job to rescue all those people, but the sergeants really got the recommendations for the rest of, for the remaining four of us and, um, ah, it's just one of those things, that's all, that you acted on the spur of the moment to help. You see somebody with their clothes all alight, you know, you've got to try to ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.

START TAPE 2, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Charles Price, 2/6th Hospital, Tape 2, Side 1. End of identification.

Well you were just finishing that story there Charles of out in the ship.

Yes, well I think it must have created quite an impact in history, because Winston Churchill talked about it in his memoirs, saying that, um, the Germans could not have had a more opening devastating blow, ah, to the Greeks.

Yes, it must have been a terrible blow to morale too, being so close to the capital.

Yes.

Well, it was from there of course, that you went up by road to Volos, um, I think, arriving there about the 10th of April, where for a fortnight a hospital was operating. Tom Wilkinson was there as well. What's your recollection of that period? What were you yourself mostly involved in Charles?

Again it was the old story, Ed, of starting to establish, ah, to get tents up and to try and consolidate our field hospital. We knew by now that there were going to be some pretty heavy casualties coming from the north, with the Germans now into, into the war, so our main jobs then were getting these, these tent wards established.

Right, and while the hospital was there at Volos, I think you did have wounded men beginning to come through from the north?

Yes, we'd take anybody, Greeks, ah, British, anybody that was, was wounded at all would come through.

Did you have any Italian prisoners?

Not, not at Volos, no, I can't recollect any. We had some later on in Alexandria, I remember some Italian - I remember some German prisoners too, coming from a hospital ship when we were unloading a hospital ship in Alex, when I was seconded at the Sea Ambulance Transport Unit, but I can't remember any Italians up at Volos.

Just as a brief sidetrack here Charles, where prisoners-of-war were involved, were they treated on a, on a purely, on purely medical criteria? In other words, if a prisoner was more severely wounded, for example, than an allied serviceman, would the prisoner have been treated first or not?

I think that, from the point of view of the medical profession and the doctors, I think they treated everybody alike, irrespective of whether they were Germans or allies. But I do remember speaking, not act... well yes, I was speaking to .... A lot of German soldiers that were wounded had come out of Tobruk and on the wharf at Alexandria, and I was struck with their, um, with their intelligence. They spoke very very good English and rather arrogant sort

of characters too. They sort of, they were quite convinced in their own mind that, um, they were going to win the war, and they, they sort of had the feeling that they were very sorry for us, that, ah .... So most of them were pretty highly educated you see. That was a pretty early part of the war really and the best part of the German forces were young, intelligent fellows that'd become involved, and, so speaking to a couple of dozen of these German people - had no trouble talking with them at all - but I was struck with their arrogance and they were on stretchers, you know. We were carrying them and they were sort of, took it for granted that, you know, that's what we had to do (laughing) to look after them. But I remember they left us in no doubt at all that, it was bad luck that they were, got wounded, and we should sue for a separate peace sort of a thing. They were interesting people to talk to. And around, quite honestly, around that time in December 1941 I thought they might have been right. Things were very tight.

(5.00) Well going back to Greece, of course, things were even tighter at Volos, and as I understand it, basically the Germans encircled the area. I know Tom Wilkinson must have left [inaudible] by road. I think you finally evacuated by sea, abandoning much of the equipment?

Yes, they made a decision that we had to get, get the patients out, but the equipment would have to look after itself. Um, so our job then was to get these patients on stretchers, or those that could walk, the walking wounded or the stretcher cases and to get them onto the wharf at Volos aboard a ship called the *Bantria.* It was an old merchant vessel and, um, so that was our job then to get these people aboard and, ah, it was quite an horrific trip down the coast down to Piraeus on the *Bantria*, because the Germans were bombing everything. They had pretty well total command of northern Greece then and from their bases they flew over, they gave us an awful time dive-bombing and, um, you know, we thought we were gone a couple of times. But anyway, we were able to get everybody down to Athens - to Piraeus - and then transport them to a hospital. I think probably many of these people would have been taken prisoners-of-war, I think, later on, because we were able to continue on our downward path to evacuation, but the wounded, once they were in hospital, I don't think they could have got out.

Yes, of course. Just going back to Volos for a moment. Ah, of course, besides leaving some medical equipment - I think quite a lot of other medical equipment was in fact destroyed - or I understand that's the case. Is that right?

Yes. Once the Germans had circled Volos and continued down, one of our officers with a couple of other orderlies - Captain Kennedy - he took a different route back up to Volos to see if he could rescue some very very valuable equipment, but he got back there and it was hopeless. The, what hadn't been destroyed would have been looted, so there was no, nothing there at all.

Sorry, I was on the wrong track there, Charles. I'd understood that some of the medical gear was destroyed by yourselves.

I don't think so. I, it's possible. That's something that I wouldn't know about. Tom Wilkinson might be able to inform you about that.

Right, well perhaps we can move on. Of course, after reaching Piraeus I think you then, as many others did, went by land to near the Corinth Canal, and then

on a little further by land prior to evacuation. What's your memory of those last few days in Greece?

It was round Armistice Day, the twenty-fifth of April 1941 that we finally had to evacuate ...

ANZAC Day, I think you mean.

ANZAC Day, yes, and um, ... It's one of these things - we evacuated under cover of darkness of course, and I've got a recollection of a couple of, something like little caiques again - they were transporting us onto this big ship. I just forget the name of this big ship now. Ah, it wasn't, you know, it wasn't a tremendous ship but it was big enough to take a couple of thousand of the diggers that were being evacuated and, I remember the caique, or the transport in front of us, suddenly got lopsided and went over, and we never ever saw the people again. They just continued on and we ...

You couldn't pause to stop?

No, we couldn't pause and couldn't stop, and we got on .... I remember that on board there were bodies everywhere. They were all alive, but exhausted, you know. The guys that had been up in the front coming down and, um, they were lying in all sorts of conditions, shapes and sizes, and I remember there was a wireless going on with Winston Churchill saying that, not to worry, that the position was a little confused but there was no doubt in the world that Greece was going to be held, which was rather ironic I thought.

Yes, particularly coming from the person so closely involved with Gallipoli.

Yes.

Um, well of course, from there you went on to Crete and we might just pause for a rest, but, perhaps just before we do, ah, just to finish off, to round off this episode in Greece, um, was there much talk or did you yourself think at the time, that given the realities of the situation in Greece before you went, that in fact committing a large general hospital to Greece then was rather a futile action? That perhaps sending a smaller, more mobile units would have been more appropriate?

(10.00) I think Ed, with hindsight, it was a big mistake, but I think, see, General Blamey was, he was the commander in chief at that time and I think he summed up the whole operation on Greece as being a complete exercise in futility. Um, we were told later on that it had its good, served a good purpose, that it stopped Hitler from, um, operating in some other theatre of war, that it set his timetable back. It could have done. I mean, I suppose from, ah, for two months at any rate, it stopped him in his tracks and he could have gone on to some other conquests somewhere, so it could have served something there, but from our point of view, ah, it really was, as General Blamey said, an exercise in futility.

Right. Well that's been very very interesting to know, Charles. It's very full and clear. How about a break?

> Right. This is just continuing after a pause. Um, Charles of course, after Greece you went directly to Crete. Things, I think, were pretty tight on Crete too?

Yes, we felt that the Germans wouldn't be happy to, um, to remain with all their conquests in Greece. We felt that something had to happen because, um, when we were there an awful lot of reconnaissance planes were coming over to spy out the place, and also a few bombing raids started to appear. But we never really thought that, um, thought about parachutists. That was something new in aerial warfare. I don't think it, in the history of the second world war, I don't think they'd ever thought about anything with people jumping from aeroplanes. So, anyhow, we were there for a few weeks and, um, when we were there from 25th April to the 14th May, and the time came when the evacuation of Crete started and we were getting out of Suda Bay just as the parachutists were landing on the other side of the island, and there was very heavy bombardment as we were getting off um, off Crete onto a, onto a fairly large ship and, um - it took a few thousand troops - that got us off. And the soldiers that were left behind - I think a lot of English troops were there and anti-aircraft artillery people were there - but I think Crete was taken by the Germans in a matter of a week I think. It was just, you know, all over. They were very highly disciplined people and they just over-ran the island.

> Hm. A very short campaign. But while you had been on Crete, had you yourself or other members of the hospital you were closely involved with, had you been carrying out any medical work or not?

No, not really, because again we thought of the futility of it. At, at all times, no matter where we were, we always had a type of regimental aid post, ah, so if anything did happen at all with one of our people or an allied soldier, we could look after him fairly well, but hospitalisation was out of the question on Crete.

> Right. Well one other thing I think just, that's interesting to pick up on to end the Crete story was what you said about Colonel Money and staying on till the end.

Yes. I was reminded so much of our Christmas party prior to leaving Australia where the, um, the privates went first, then the corporals, the sergeants and finally the officers and last of all was Colonel Money with a dixie in his hand, getting the food and serving and waiting on the, on all his men. And it struck me exactly the same thing on, on Crete, that when we were all assembled to get onto the ship, ah, the officers were dead last. The privates went on first and the corporals, the sergeants and then finally the officers and last of all was Colonel Money. He was that type of man. There was no sort of suggestion that the officers would, because of their position, would rush forward and get into the safety zone. His thoughts were always of the men.

> Was that talked about by the men?

Yes, oh yes. As I say, they had tremendous respect for him for this matter. I don't know whether there was a simile with other men as it was with me, thinking about the, the party, but it just struck me as being typical of the man, that he really did put his men above everything.

> Right. Well moving on to, back to the Middle East. Of course you went to Kilo 89 I think at Gaza and then some time after that on to Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, but just staying at Gaza for a time, what's your recollection of the hospital establishing itself there?

(15.00) Well again, further consolidation took place with the erection of more tents and it had already been built on - upon - to a certain extent by the 1st AGH and subsequently when we sort of merged with them we added a lot, but when we came back this time, ah, again, further tents and wards were established. But we knew that, um, ah, that the prospects of remaining there were not a hundred per cent. We thought that, um, ah, there would be further moves. I mean, in my instance, ah, they said, `Righto, the Syrian show's on and we want, ah, fit and able-bodied people to go up there to field ambulances or CCSs', so I went up with half a dozen other people and, um, via Nazareth - that was a first staging camp - then on to, on to Beirut. And out of Beirut, ah, up the mountains a little place called Aley, and so we operated there as a field CCS with casualties from the Syrian war, where we were helping with the first aid treatment, hospitalisation and stretcher bearing and all that sort of thing. At that moment, there was a great division between the Free French and the Vichy French, and there's a great deal of feeling between them.

> Mm. The, um, the CCS - casualty clearing station - I think, where you were working ...

Yeah.

> What were you yourself involved doing? Was it again a matter of sorting men to go to different destinations depending on their medical condition?

No, not really. It was more first aid there, more helping with, ah, with bandaging, operating room procedure and stretcher bearing, because, ah, they never had a big holding strength. Anybody that, ah, had any problems that, say, medical problems, psychological problems or, ah, anything that weren't acute surgical, they were really sent right back down to, down to Gaza.

> Mm, right. I see. Um, of course during that time I'd imagine in some instances in any case you came across men with very serious wounds, perhaps sometimes horrific. How did you yourself cope with that? Um, was there a distancing, a kind of emotional cut-ff that made it easier or what?

No. I always felt, um, ah, quite comfortable with the things. I don't know whether it's part of my nature, but I remember, ah, some poor air force chap had been struck down and they carried him in and it stuck in my mind - his right ear was shrivelled to about the size of threepence, or a size of two cents - and I thought, `That's strange'. And then, anyway, he died and Colonel Money said, `I want you to give me a hand' he said, `I'm going to do a post-mortem on this chap and you can see what goes on'. So he operated on his skull and (laughing) if you've never seen a post-mortem operation on a skull, it can be fairly horrific. The, it's like sawing a lump of dead wood through ... the bony structure's very very tough, and so Rex got to work with a will and it didn't affect me all that much, ah, really. He exposed the chappie's brain, he went here, there and everywhere and `Oh' he said, `this poor chap' he said. `He's had an embolism' somewhere here, there or other - he's talking in medical terms

about this - and he said, `Look at this business here. Look at the pus and the inflammation there' and of course I became quite fascinated. At one stage of the game I was even considering taking up a medical career really, but I was too far gone really. I, you know, it's one of these things you should take up when you're about eighteen or nineteen, not twenty-five or twenty-six, and so, but .... It never affected me. I saw lots and lots of patients coming in. I saw gunshot wounds, very very bad wounds. I remember once, um, ah, a chap very severely burned and I was on stretcher bearer duty, and there was a chap at the other end. He'd also been burned and he said to me, `Ah', he said, `Get my mate' he says. He said, `We've got to get him in straight away and get his burns treated because, ah' he said, `he's not a very strong fellow'. So this guy was at the other end of the stretcher with me and, anyway, three days later ...

You mean he himself was burnt?

He himself was burnt, but I thought, `Oh well, he's strong enough' and he was, you know, quite happy to do this. I didn't order him to do anything like. He just wanted to do it. He was more concerned about the chap on the stretcher. Well to cut a long story short, the chap on the stretcher, he, he survived, but the other guy that was helping me, he died three days later.

(20.00) So, burns really can be, it's a case of shock, more than the actual burns itself now. I believe the treatment for burns now is not to do anything, just (laughing) cover them up.

Keep cool. Just going back to that episode with the post-mortem, it was, er, Colonel Money who was operating I think you said?

Yes.

Was that common for him to be at a forward casualty clearing station, as against back at the base hospital?

No, actually I jumped ahead of myself. This was back at the base hospital where this post-mortem took place on this chappie. We thought that really he suffered some sort of internal injuries with, when he was shot down in the plane, but he'd apparently had some sort of brain disease, I think, and Money - being the top brain surgeon that he was - he picked this very quickly.

Right, well that's interesting. Besides the time that you spent up at that casualty clearing station in the, ah, first-Gaza Kilo 89 period, what else were you involved in doing, Charles?

Um, well I think I should mention too that one of our patients that came through that CCS and also the hospital was, um ... he became the Governor of New South Wales - Sir Roden Cutler. That was where he got his VC, in Syria. He had his leg amputated and he was one of our patients. Um, from the, from that Syrian campaign, we went back then to Jerusalem to the Kaiser's palace. That was a very opulent area that, um, built for Kaiser Wilhelm and his - I don't know what they called her, Kaiserina? - and it was a magnificent place and that was ideal for hospital purposes. That was really ...

Yes, I understand it was an excellent building, but I think also the time in Jerusalem was a particularly happy one for the hospital generally. Other people have said so at least. Is that how you remember the period or not?

Yes, it was a, it was a very happy time because, ah, conditions were so good, you know. There was no howling winds and sands and you had the sort of great feeling of security there as well. We knew it wouldn't last for ever, but in the few months that we were in the Kaiser's palace, ah, the hospital really did flourish. They had, the surgeons and the physicians were really able to, to get on with their work, and it was a very very constructive period in the 2/6th AGH.

Mm. The, ah, life besides work there in Jerusalem, was it possible for you to get away on leave much? Did you see much of the local area?

Yes, we saw a fair bit of Jerusalem. It was a, it's a fascinating place. I, as a young guy, I virtually had a, a, oh a fairly semi-religious background. I was a Sunday school teacher and of course t e Holy Land, I thought, `Gee, that is terrific' and I was tremendously disillusioned. I remember that, the commercial aspects - even in those days - I don't know what it's like now but the commercialism of Jerusalem was, to me was oh, it was dreadful really. I mean, there was an Arab ... I remember he grabbed me one day up at Mount Scopus and he said that for ten - acker[?] I think it was - `I will show you the actual footprint of Jesus, where he took off for his Ascension' and the cement was hardly dry, you know (laughing). That, that sort of thing happened, you know, and I was greatly disappointed even with the nativity - the holy sepulchre - you know. It looked like a glorified Woolworths and, you know, it all looked like paste jewellery sort of thing, and yet at Nazareth on the way up .... If you're thinking of the Holy Land, I'd say that Nazareth would be the best place to go to because that was, ah, that's where Jesus, ah, he lived as a carpenter as a boy, and we were billeted at one stage in the actual building, which became a, - sort of a monks' priory type, type of thing - a church. But that was a, to me, that was really what the Holy Land as I visualised it as a young, young Sunday school teacher, was all about.

Despite that commercialisation Charles, was Christmas there particularly special for you or not?

Oh yes. We, we had all our, you know, as I say we'd consolidated for a few months there and we put on all sorts of Christmas parties. We had some quite talented people in the unit that played the piano beautifully, and - we had two fellows that were really outstanding pianists - an excellent banjo player and somebody on the, on the piccolo or the flute or clarinet, and they'd, they'd have their, their dances and that sort of thing, and we'd go round entertaining the patients. They were having a great old time too.

(25.00) Just going back, perhaps for a moment, to the, where you were working at the casualty clearing station, I had meant to ask you this before. Could you outline in more detail how the men - the patients - were transported from there back to the hospital, and what treatment was given before they left, what treatment was given perhaps en route to the hospital?

Well they had some, as I remember, some very first-class doctors, only fairly young people, but they were really terrific specialists or doctors and they, ah, they would give the, the prime

treatment of the particular problem. If it was a gunshot wound well these boys would - they knew exactly how to operate, how to bandage, how to set the patient up for his transport back to Jerusalem or Gaza, and the roads, the convoy road system was very good, you know. There seemed to be lots and lots of trucks and military trucks available ...

There was never a shortage of transport?

No, no (inaudible). I mean, we'd often, um, we'd on a weekend or something where you had a couple of days off, we'd hitch-hike a lorry into Damascus, which wasn't very far. That went right over the mountains of Beirut, the Cedars of Lebanon. It's a beautiful place really and I feel so sad when I read about the devastation that's taken place in Beirut, because it was really a beautiful city.

Yes, it's appalling, isn't it?

Mm.

Just a moment. [Break in recording]. Um, Charles, you were saying - just clarifying now - that it was at, during the Mount Scopus period that you were detailed off to go to Tobruk, although in fact you didn't reach there. What was the purpose of the journey?

Well, the, they had a what was known as a sea ambulance transport unit - only a very small unit - and the idea was that, ah, that we'd assemble down in Alexandria and we'd go up on some old merchant ship - anything that was available - to rescue, or to evacuate the 2/13th Battalion - or one of the battalions at any rate, that were holding out against the Germans. I think they held out for about nine months at Tobruk. And so we were down there and that was round the period December '41 when I thought we were going to be very lucky to win the war, because Hitler had, on the .... He'd by-passed Tobruk, and he couldn't get .... They were all - all the Australians were in there holding out, but he was marching on towards Cairo. He'd gone across to Syria and from his bases in Greece and Crete, he absolutely dominated the Mediterranean. I remember when we were in Alex - Alexandria - one night, there was a ship - a cruiser actually - called the *Queen Elizabeth* and the submarines slid underneath the boom across Alexandria and they blew it up. And that's how close Hitler was to, to establishing mastery over that area. All the way, almost to Cairo, right across to Greece, Crete, across to Syria, on his way down from there. So, Syria was really the first holding point that he was stopped, so that campaign in Greece could have had that couple of months timetable effect that threw him out of gear.

Mm. Going back to this episode when you were to have gone to Tobruk, but in fact didn't, ah, what happened there for the plans to be changed?

Well I think that, ah, finally, the Australians broke out and they'd, they'd mainly become evacuated by transport - land transport - and their place was taken by, um, by the British, and I remember that at the time they thought, `Well, you know, it's in good hands'. The Australians after nine months or so, they were due for a spell. They'd suffered a really severe bombardment of things, but they'd got out by land and so our sea trip was really aborted. But when we were there, ah, they used us up in, ah, stretcher bearing duties ...

When you say `there' - Alexandria?

Alexandria. The, um, there were still some hospital ships operating and at that time the Germans did respect hospital ships. I mean, later on, I think they weren't that particular ... I'm thinking of the old *Centaur* in, back in Australia, but at that ...
END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

START TAPE 2, SIDE B.

Identification: Edward Stokes with Charles Price, 2/6th Hospital, Tape 2, Side 2. End of identification.

Yes, you were just saying about hospital ships, Charles.

Yes, well they used us as stretcher bearers and there were a considerable number of casualties, Italians, Germans and um, [telephone interruption] ...

Just continuing after a phone call. Yes, you were saying about the casualties on these ships, Charles.

Yes. There were quite a lot of Germans we had to look after on the stretchers and I was very impressed with their intelligence. They were very arrogant sort of characters. They, some of them had, you know, quite, had nasty wounds, but they dismissed any sort of treatment that we were giving them as something - as a right. They had to expect that. Very arrogant. And they left us in no doubt whatever their opinion that they were going to win the war very quickly, and why we were holding out they couldn't understand (laughing).

That's interesting. We did, I think we covered some of that before. Do you remember when I took a side track? About general, about Christmas?

Oh right, yes.

After this period when you were posted down to these, well originally Tobruk but then these hospital ships, ah, I gather you then went back to rejoin the hospital at - was that at Jerusalem or at Gaza?

Gaza, this time.

I think it was during this second Gaza period that the El Alamein campaign was being fought.

That's right, yes. We ... Again, part of our duties were on-call really, for any theatre of war where, ah, able-bodied personnel were needed, especially those with medical training, and in this instance round about October/November '42 when the El Alamein show was on, we had two or three doctors and, um, half a dozen men were sent to El Alamein to establish a sort of a regimental aid post there, and they did an outstanding job there in giving immediate aid to the, to the wounded before getting them back into a field ambulance or a CCS or eventually back to the base hospital.

You yourself I think during this period were at the ...?

I was back at Gaza then in the .... I'd sort of just recovering from the sea ambulance transport.

Right. And at this last period in Gaza Charles, were you again involved in the work sorting out cases to go to which ward and so on?

Yes. Right, well the hospital then had expanded to a 1200-bed, and, ah, the job that I was given as a medical inspection centre supervisor was the availability of beds, had to see what the numbers of beds that were, actually were available for any of the wounded in the various, various wards. And so in company with a couple of doctors, we would go to wherever the campaign happened to be - in this instance at El Alamein - well we would go to, ah, El Kantara, ah, near the Suez, and I'd have with me an up-to-date list of all the various wards, the, so that the doctor would immediately examine a casualty and say, `Right, he's got a chest wound. Into ward three'. Or um ...

And this decision is being made well away from the hospital?

(5.00) Well away from the hospital, so that what happened at, once they were landed, once the casualties were put on an ambulance, there was just no delay. They, the doctor would study each person and say, `He's got a severe abdominal gunshot wound. I have given him such and such a treatment. I have given him so-much medication. I recommend that he goes into this ward that's avail... the bed's available. The treatment is so-and-so, so that when this chap's landed, when he's on the ambulance, he goes straight into the ward and treatment is given immediately. It was very efficient, um ...

Yes, I was going to say, the actual arrival at the hospital therefore was very much speeded up in turn.

Yep, no delays.

No mucking round at all.

No delays and, believe me, I saw quite a lot of gunshot wounds come in where a matter of, of ten minutes might make the difference between life and death, so the prompt treatment that was given these people was very very valuable.

Hm. Just one other question - in fact, again I meant to ask before. Referring back now to the, ah, casualty clearing station that you were in up in the Syrian episode, Charles. What were the conditions like in casualty clearing stations? How close were you to the front line and what were the physical facilities like? How primitive were they, or otherwise?

Actually they were first class, because we took over from a French hospital. Ah, you see, France was, um, the main protector of Syria and they'd built, they'd put a lot of modern buildings up there and this place was just out of Beirut - a little place called Aley - and it was an old French hospital and it was ideal for a hospital really. But for a casualty clearing station it was really first-class. The, um, there was no make-shift mud-brick huts or tents or anything like that. We went straight into first-class buildings.

Hm. Was that unusual for a casualty clearing station to have that quality of facility?

I think it would be. Um, CCSs in any theatre of war I think were mainly tent, so we were very lucky to get into that situation.

Right, well looking back perhaps more generally over the period, this last period in the Middle East - Gaza - and perhaps other periods there too, do you have any other particular recollections of either work or life?

No. The Middle East period is such that most of the work of value I think was carried out by the 2/6th AGH. Ah, it really was. They did a worthwhile job, the surgeons, the physicians and all those people. Ah, in the various campaigns of war, as I say, a lot of these people used the hospital as a base which it was, but still they had to be on call to go to any other theatre of war, no matter where it broke out. I mean, in Greece some of them went up to the Yugoslav border and in, ah, Syria up to Beirut or even up as far as Aleppo really, up the north, and down in El Alamein. These, these people would go anywhere but then eventually all would sort of come back under the umbrella of Colonel Money.

Ah, just a couple of other things before we leave the Middle East, Charles. There was obviously a significant number of women nurses and volunteer aides and so on in the hospital, but far more men. How much contact was there between the men and women in the hospital? How much general socialising and so on?

Not a, not a tremendous amount. Um, there would be occasionally some - a few dances perhaps, you know, where the sisters or nurses would participate, but there wasn't a great deal of socialising that went on. Where, where conditions were, um, ideal, such as the final establishment of Gaza when it was fully established as a 1200-bed hospital, they had some first-class tennis courts there and I know that an ex-Davis Cup player, the AIF headquarters, would come over - a chap named Colin Long - ah, and ah, there'd be a lot of, lot of tennis play. They'd, they'd invite members of the Arab and the Jewish community over to play tennis. But that was all, er, when things quietened down after the, um, after the, mainly after the El Alamein fracas.

(10.00) Right. Other social life generally, when you relaxed, when there was time to relax, what would you have done yourself?

Well being, you know, tremendously active in cricket, we formed our own little cricket team over there and, ah, we played cricket against the Palestine police. They were um, they were highly respected force throughout the Middle East and they had some old English county players. Ah, there'd be tennis played against some of these people, but it wasn't all, ah, it wasn't at all possible really, you know, a bit like, you know the old MASH series, you know, that you saw on the American television? That when the action was on it had to be on, you know. Everyone had to be right on their toes. But when there was a lull in, lull in proceedings, well um, that's when you could engage in some, ah, form of social life and, again, I'll say that, you know, the nurses and sisters did a marvellous job of the nursing and later on, ah - when was it? oh, the last part of '43 I think - a big contingent of VADs came over. I think they became, um, was known as AAMWS ...

Yes.

(Spelling) A-A-W-M-S [sic] and they also did a great job before we returned.

Was there much contact between, um, people working in the hospital such as yourself and patients? Besides your professional contact?

Yes, we'd go along and, ah, we'd try and establish a form of contact with them. We had a chap over there called Stag - his nickname was `Doovers' and um, he was a technical expert on um, with a wireless and transmitting, and so he called himself the `voice of the desert' and he was very very good. And through him we'd be able to broadcast to the patients, you know, tell them funny stories. We'd start up a controversy about which was the greatest cricket team that ever left Australia sort of thing, and we'd get the patients to talk and we'd go round and visit them, and there'd be some musical entertainment and this chap, Stag, he was very very good.

And each ward had its own radio?

Yes, yeah, they'd, you know. It was really really civilised. (Laughing).

Mm, that's fascinating. So basically you had a kind of local broadcast set up for the hospital?

Yep.

Mm. That must have added a great deal to the life of the people. Er, did hospital staff ever take in-patients off on excursions round about when they were able to walk, or once they were no longer bed-ridden, were they discharged elsewhere?

No. Very few walking tours around, mainly because, um, we were still surrounded really with foreign people. I mean, the Arabs, um, in the main they, we got on all right with them, but if you stepped out of line with them at all, there could be trouble. So, ah, they weren't encouraged really to go on, to go walkabout. Um, but around the hospital grounds sort of thing, we'd often .... Somebody that was recovering from a wound, we'd often take hold of him and give him a conducted tour of what was happening around the place.

Right. Well going on a little bit. Um, the journey back to Australia. I think it was in February 1943 that the hospital - I'm not sure just around about that date ...

Yes.

Doesn't matter too much. Um, when the news did come through that you were to return to Australia, how did you personally greet the news?

Oh with wild acclaim. We thought it tremendous really because the great feeling of optimism. I mean, Hitler had been defeated on most fronts. Ah, El Alamein was a great turning point, Syria was a turning point. I mean, Greece was a debacle and Crete, but ah, we felt that he'd been stopped at the very gates of Cairo and he'd been turned back. Ah, General Alexander and Montgomery and these people, they did a magnificent job in getting rid of the, the Germans getting into Egypt, so that we felt that the Middle East phase of the war was over

and we could look forward now to going home and seeing what all the Japanese people were about.

Right. So there was a feeling there too - was there - of wanting to be involved in the more direct sense with Australia?

Yes, I think so. I think also the politicians also felt that way too. John Curtin wanted all the Australians home to, um, face up to a possible threat of invasion by the Japanese, so we were quite happy to go back and defend Australia.

(15.00) Right. The actual move away from the Middle East. Of course you, I think, left the hospital standing to be taken over by others, so I don't think there was too much packing up of gear and so on, was there?

Not that I can recollect Ed. I think, um, ah, when we left I think the British might have moved in. Somebody else might be clearer on that point, but I think we left it as a standing concern and I've got some idea that the British took over.

Well the journey back itself. I know some people travelled again on the *Queen Mary*. I think perhaps you did too?

Ah, yes, we got on one of the smaller ships through the Suez and again embarked on the *Queen Mary* at a beautiful little spot called Trincomalee in Colombo - now Sri Lanka. And that was a very very happy return trip. Thousands of, um, the 9th Division I think was the division there with us then, but New Zealanders as well and ah, it was a very very happy homecoming.

Mm. Australia when you returned - had it changed in your eyes or not?

Not really, no. We, it was still the same old Australia. They, um .... We had heard stories that, you know, there'd been strikes on the wharves, that they were holding up equipment and all that sort of thing, but not really. I think when we got back, I think we noticed there was a far greater involvement in the war effort. That applied to women as well as men and boys, young teenagers and all that sort of thing. They were all doing, um, worthwhile work. I think that's the thing that struck us.

Mm. Of course it must have been a great joy to be reunited with families and I guess particularly in your case where you're an only child, as you were saying before, and your mother's concern. Um, how did you feel personally coming back? Had you changed at all?

I think I could have become much more mature I think. I sort of thought that once cricket was my beginning and end of everything. I thought there were other things in life. And I remember getting off the ship at, off the *Queen Mary* and trans... we were transported by train to Walgrove camp, and a lot of the guys were tremendously - they were ecstatic. I remember one chap - he got off the train and he raced into the camp and I saw him on his hands and knees - he was eating the grass as fast as he could go. He said, `I'll never ever leave you again mate, never in a hundred years'. He was shovelling this grass down as fast as (laughing) he could go. He was so emotional about the whole thing.

It was a real appreciation of Australia?

Oh yes, it really was. Well again, the first thing you notice is instead of stunted small olive trees, for the first time you see these great big guns, you know. That was the thing that really hit us - how tiny and insignificant the trees are over in the Middle East, compared with our beautiful gum trees.

Mm. That's an interesting thought. Um, well moving on a little bit. Just a moment. Well after returning to Australia of course, the hospital went up to Rocky Creek on the Atherton Tablelands. Um, did you, how early did you arrive there? Or did you arrive before the hospital was at all established or not?

No, it, um, it was still in a pretty raw state, but they did have these CCC people - Civil Construction Corps - workers who were skilled tradesmen and, ah, they, they were building a lot of prefabricated buildings and so Colonel Money and his officers, they got them to start constructing the wards. Ah, most of us still had to rely on tents, but with the help of some of these CCC people and our own efforts, we built a nice sergeants' mess. Ah, but the rest of the, of Rocky Creek, was I suppose fifty per cent buildings performed by the CCC and the rest were tents.

Hm, hm. The life there at Rocky Creek, um, both your personal life and the working life at the hospital must have been very different, I imagine, to being in the Middle East. Is that how you would see it, or not?

Yes, I think, from memory I think they only had about 500 beds - a 500-bed hospital. Ah, and at that stage, I can't recollect a great many casualties coming through from the New Guinea campaign.

(20.00) Later on there were quite a few that came through but most of the, most of the patients I remember coming - I think - through were with malaria, and then later on some gunshot wounds and other casualties started to appear. But, ah, from my recollections it wasn't as big as the hospital that we had in the Middle East.

Did that mean you were less heavily worked yourself? And people generally? Or not?

I suppose it'd be fair to say that we were less heavily worked. I still had the same job as a, in charge of wards, ah, medical inspection centre, er going round and seeing the availability of beds and acting as a first aid post type of thing, but it didn't seem to have the same pressure that there was in the Middle East.

Mm. And no doubt you carved out a cricket pitch?

Oh yes. We had our (laughing), our cricket pitch up there in the Atherton Tableland, which is a beautiful spot really, you know, right above Cairns - the Barron Falls and Lake Barrine. I thought then that it's, it's going to be one of the showpieces of Australia and I haven't been back there since, unfortunately, but I believe it is a very big tourist area there now.

Yes. Did men get around the area much? For example, did you play cricket against local communities and so on?

No. There weren't too many people in the Atherton Tableland, apart from troops. Ah, we played against neighbouring divisions. I mean, while everybody was hanging-fire, waiting to go to New Guinea, we, we played them cricket or sport or entertainment and all that sort of thing that went on. But it was just about where my liaison with the, or service with the 2/6th AGH finished (laughing).

Yes, well I do know there was the episode I was just going to ask you about in a moment. Um, cricket and so on and Blamey's involvement. But just pausing for a moment at Rocky Creek, was there anything else that you'd recall as particularly significant about that period?

Not really. The, um, the isolation of it, ah .... See, there was nothing there. Ah, you'd, you'd go to Cairns and then I suppose Atherton Tableland would be a thousand feet above it and Stony Creek - as it was known and probably still is - there was just nothing there at all. Even the, um, the Atherton Tableland main shopping centre, I think, would consist of one hotel and a post office probably. There was just nothing, nothing around at all in those days. Of course it's very heavily populated now I would imagine.

Ah, just a small point, when you said `Stony Creek' then, er, I have it as `Rocky Creek' ...

I'm sorry. It is, I think it is Rocky Creek, too. Yes.

Right. Well let's move on then. Um, It - oh, but perhaps just to put on record too, a fact that you've given me that is certainly significant and says a lot about the hospital I think. 15th December '45, of course after you left I think the figure was 48,126 patients in all through the hospital?

Yes. That's the ... Tom Wilkinson compiled a history of - he's the president of our association - he compiled a very well documented story of the work of the 2/6th AGH and I notice at glancing through it this morning that the total patients, by the time they finished in Labuan was 48,126 which was a very, a very good performance.

Yes, a huge number of people. Um, when you came to leave, um, how did you feel about it in that this was a unit that had a particularly strong, um, spirit I suppose and a very tight bonding between people?

Well it was very sad, but in, um, I'd been prepared. See, Colonel Money had left it some months before and I felt that with the influx of reinforcements and new officers and a new commanding officer, that it had really lost a lot of its character. So I thought, `Well, you know, all good things have to come to an end' and a lot of people had got out of the army. They'd been recalled back into their private professions, and in my instance, I wasn't looking forward to going to New Guinea, but I thought, `Oh well, I suppose the war's got to end sometime. I hope I can see it through in New Guinea'. Then along comes a telegram and

instead of going to New Guinea, `We want you to go to England'. I thought, `Oh, you know - Christmas - all my Christmases have come at once'.

> Let's follow that story through in just a moment. Um, you were saying that Colonel Money had left. I'd in fact forgotten that. He obviously was very much revered from the comments that I've heard from everybody. Was there a farewell for him?

(25.00) Yes. We, um, all sections - the privates, the NCOs, the officers - they all gave him separate farewells and I was a sergeant, and I remember our farewell to him was quite emotional really. It was in the mess at the Atherton Tableland and, um, it was quite a, a very very sad occasion and everybody spoke from the heart, that he was an outstanding man. Honestly, I say this, that he'd be the greatest Australian that I had ever met in my life. He was capable of doing so many things in so many different spheres.

> Right. Well your own farewell from the unit also did have this, ah, very positive side to it. Perhaps you could tell us about the details of the journey to England?

Yes, well I'd received a telegram to go down to Victoria really to attend an officers' training school, and I thought that was wonderful. But actually I got this telegram when I was in the officers' training school in Victoria to proceed to England and I think I might have mentioned that it all came about really because of my love of cricket and I, I was a first-grade and a New South Wales representative player, and General Tom Blamey was an absolute fanatic about cricket. He had his liaison officer was Bertie Oldfield, famous wicket keeper, whom I knew quite well. He knew me, we'd played against each other. So when Tom says, `I want to form a prisoner-of-war reception group. Ah, the second front is about to open. We're going to sweep through France and we'll be embarrassed by the number of allies that we've got to repatriate. We've got to have some machinery. We've got to have a unit there, and it's not just a junket for the boys. They must have had at least three or four years experience in the Middle East, and if there are some cricketers among them, put them in - if they've got any administrative ability - because I want to form a second AIF cricket team over there'. So that's how it all came about, you know.

> So he was really killing two birds with one stone?

This is right. So we, we already had some famous cricketers over there in the air force with Keith Miller and Lindsay Hassett came over with us, and so we formed a pretty good team over there. We played five tests against Wally Hammond and Len Hutton, the famous cricketers. Won two, lost two, one drew, and we attracted thousands of people, really, and .... We never got any money out of it whatever. We were still on military pay. But only a couple of years ago the MCC said, `Look these poor fellas, they put thousands of pounds into English cricket. They never got anything out of it. Come, we'll invite them over'. So British Airways came to the party and we had a tremendous reunion at Lords. You know, they got us over and without any cost. And coming back we toured India for three or four months and then we toured the Australian states. So, finally ...

> Just to clarify coming back, coming back from ...?

From England?

Not this recent reunion tour, when you originally ...?

Oh, no, when I was originally .... Yes, we came back, we toured these places and so the last part of the war really was a Cook's tour for me (laughing), very pleasurable.

Yes, well of course, as you were saying, you passed through India and witnessed some of the drama of pre-Independence and Indian politics and so on.

Oh yes, yes. It was a very bad time then. India was still bitterly divided but not geographically divided between the Muslims and the Hindus, and our final match at Calcutta there, they stormed onto the field and we thought, `This is it. There's going to be a second black hole of Calcutta', but, um, an Indian manager there was able to convince them that we were colonials also fighting the British yoke, so we got out of it.

Just finally Charles, looking back on it all. You were discharged in February '46 I think. Um, what's your recollection of the period as a whole in your life?

Well it's a period that I would never have missed. Um, I think anyone who has been in the army, ah, would say the same thing, that there were some bad moments, but everybody remembers the good times. They forget about the bad times, and that's why I really am in favour of some form of compulsory training. It matures you so much. You depend on your mates, you establish such a lot of friendship and fellowship that you really don't find in civil life, and for that I think all my years in the army I'd be forever grateful.

Mm. That's most interesting. Well we are about to run out on the tape here. There's just a tiny bit of space. First of all I'll say thank you on behalf of the War Memorial. Is there anything else that you feel that's significant that you'd like to add to this record?

Not really, Ed. It's been, I feel it's been a bit of a punish. I mean there were far more illustrious people that you could interview than myself, but, ah, the friendships we formed in the army, those that are still alive, they're still very active. As a matter of fact they become your very dearest friends, ah, when you get out of the army and that says something that .... In civilian life you make friendships but they mightn't be as enduring as what you had ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW