TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S00963
Title	(VX42559) Sturdy, Henry Arthur ‘Joe’ (Lance Sergeant)
Interviewer	Martin, Harry
Place made	Not stated
Date made	25 September 1990
Description	Henry Arthur (Joe) Sturdy as a lance sergeant, 2/4th Australian General Hospital, interviewed by Harry Martin for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45.

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: This is side one of tape one of an interview with Joe Sturdy about the 2/4th Australian General Hospital recorded on 24th September 1990 and it begins in five seconds from now.

Joe Sturdy, where and when were you born?

In Hawthorn, 16th April 1915.

Well, you're down as Henry Arthur. How did you become Joe?

Well, there were a lot of uncles on both sides of the family, Henrys or Harrys and to avoid confusion I was called Joe and so it has stuck in the family and to some people outside, particularly those in the army.

Tell us about your family. What sort of person was your father?

A very hard working man as a matter of fact. He worked in the theatre and he worked six days a week and Sundays was the only day he had off and we saw very little of him for that reason. But he was a good father to us but, unfortunately, he deserted us in time of need as a lot of fathers did, I don't know why, in the '30s, the depression years. Things got too much for him and we saw nothing more of him although we knew where he was. He was subsequently killed; hit by a police car in Mont Albert Road going to fetch a paper for an aunt of mine, actually his sister. And Mont Albert Road in those days had very poor lighting and lots of overhead trees. And, of course, he would be wearing a black suit, dark suit as old people did in those days, and this car must have raced through and it must have just caught him and tossed him in the air and that was it.

What about your mother? What sort of person was she then?

Oh, very outgoing. She also worked in the theatre and I've never known anybody to handle the sale of theatre tickets in the box office as well as she did. When people come up to a box office and say, 'I want three three-'nd-thrupennies and one junior, a child's', how anybody could work that out in their mind but my mother did. She was very good at playing cards too I might tell you.

How old were you then when your father left?

Fourteen.

Were there other children in the family?

Oh yes. There were sisters. And one was already married at that time; another one was nursing, so not living at home except when she was on leave; another one was a schoolteacher, mostly away in the country. So the house wasn't particularly crowded.

Where did you actually grow up when you were younger? Where did you live and what sort of times were they? Do you recall them as particularly hard times?

No. As a child you don't realise the .... They were hard times I know that. And I think my father at that time when we lived in Hawthorn, we lived near some brickyards, Fritz and Holzers and Spears. Some people might remember them, certainly there'd be quite a few houses with Fritz and Holzers bricks built into them. And I think the basic wage at that time was about two pound a week - it would not have been any more - for which you paid about seven shillings or something like that for the rent of the house and you lived on the rest. But we never knew that things were tough or that we were poor. We never envied anybody else that had perhaps something more. We didn't realise it. And it wasn't a case of keeping up with the Jones's as it is these days. Nobody had a motor car. I can remember riding in an old pre-war Woollsey [sic] which Mr Evans of D. and J. Evans in Hawthorn, Camberwell Road, Hawthorn had. They were builders at the time. And child-like, of course I hung around him and whenever he had to go back to the store in Camberwell Road to get any goods, of course I was invited to go. And I can remember sitting up on this high seat in this Woollsey [sic] while he went around the front and wound it up and so on. And there were very few cars about, even at that time, in that era. That, of course, is during the war, world war one period.

What about schooling? Where did you go to school?

At Camberwell and again here at Kew.

Was that a State School at Camberwell?

State School, yes.

As a boy what sort of aspirations did you have? Did you have any sort of thoughts as to where you were going in life?

(5.00) I don't think they went any further than the usual thing: driving a tram, driving a train, or riding on a fire engine. Those were the exciting things.

Had it been the sort of family where religion had played a very important part? Was it a church-going family?

Oh yes, we went to church. We were all confirmed in the Church of England but, like a lot of young people, once the confirmation was over, that was the end of church-going. You expected to know what you wanted to do by that time and my mother would never have insisted, forced us to go to church at all. It was purely up to us.

Were social issues at the time important, sort of domestic matters? Was it the kind of family that you'd sit around and have evening discussions about what was wrong with the world, why there was the depression, and so on.

No. No, you didn't. You were not encouraged to talk at the tea table at all. You did, but in consequence of not being able to talk one of my sisters and I used to get fits of the giggles. It was distressing and you'd be sent outside to get over it. Of course, you'd get over it and you'd come back and you'd only have to look at each other across the table and off again, outside. And many a meal we did not finish for that reason.

At fourteen then, when your father left, it can be a difficult age anyway. Was that a distressing period?

Yes. Yes, I was concerned at how we were going to manage because I'd started work at Hartley's Sports Store, strangely enough, and the wage by that time, I think I was getting ten shillings a week of which four and sevenpence I think had to go for a monthly rail ticket from Kew - we did have a train line from Kew into town in those days - leaving very little and, of course, some of it had to be contributed to the household upkeep.

So how did your mother manage?

Oh, she had to go to work. She was still working at the theatre for a long time. Because by this time other members of the family were able to contribute - not the one that had left to get married of course - but the other sisters who were working. There was only one non-worker at that time, my youngest sister. But they were able to contribute and we managed all right. The house was bought on a long term contract which meant that I suppose we paid eventually dearly for it, but it meant that the wherewithal to keep the payments up weren't exactly crippling.

So how long did you continue at that job?

At Hartley's? Until 1933. And then I was persuaded to go with a bloke that also worked at Hartley's and he had decided to start his own sporting goods manufacturing place. He had

worked for Alexanders over in old .... Tennis racquet manufacturing people in Launceston and they were in business until the post-war years. And he brought to Hartley's - they too were going to manufacture tennis racquets, they did make a lot of sporting goods: golf clubs, cricket bats, croquet mallets, oh, quite a lot of gymnasium gadgets too - anyway, things were getting a little bit tough of course at that time and they decided not to go on with the venture. I, in the meantime, had gone to learn racquet finishing, lining in particular - this was to be my job - but anyway it didn't eventuate, but he decided to go off by himself and he started what was known as the Spiderweb Sports Products down in an old factory he acquired down in South Melbourne. He was quite an inventive person. One of the things that he did invent was a cricket bat handle with a star-shaped rubber core in the cane grip handle which meant it was built like a split cane fishing rod with two sections into each of these four crevices of the rubber grip. It meant that a bat, whereas it only had a spring in one direction, fore and aft - the conventional cricket bat - this one had a spring. If you caught one on the far edge of the bat the spring operated there to take a lot of the punishment that the bat otherwise would have acquired.

Did it catch on? Did it stay?

No. They were bad times. He sold a few, quite a few of them. Incidentally, Australian willow from Daylesford was used in the manufacture of them. I think it was the first time ever in Australia.

(10.00) Another thing that he invented which is almost normal now in tennis racquets: the weakest part of a tennis racquet was the acute angle bend where the bend, where the laminations come in to the throat and it used to take a lot of punishment. And, of course, a stringing became more tense - it seems funny to think how racquets were strung like lacrosse bats once upon a time, almost as slack - but everybody - the game was getting a little more keen and everybody wanted more tension in their stringing. And it was always that weak spot that everything fell apart. So he invented a racquet with virtually no intake into the throat at all but a big U piece put in between which gave you the shape of the strung racquet but allowed the frame to continue down to the handle without bend. And that was very successful. Quite a lot of those were sold.

Were you working on the making of these?

Yes, I used to do the finishing.

So just before the war were you still at that craft or had you gone on?

No, no. Unfortunately he had no money, this man, and he had to rely on finance put in by another gentleman, whose name I won't mention because he may, he wouldn't be alive but the family certainly is. And everything he made was sold through a chain of furniture stores - you've almost got the name, haven't you? - and, on a sale or return basis. In other words,

when they sold a racquet or a cricket bat or whatever it was replaced and that's how he carried on. But, anyway, it got to the stage in 1936, early '36, where he really didn't have the money to pay the wages. By this time there were five of us working there and we had to take it in turns to have a week off, no pay. This of course was an accepted thing in those days, not only because of his particular condition, but in lots of other places and in lots of firms that you'd have thought could have withstood the financial situation better than they did. And being young, of course a week off wasn't any great headache. It was like having a week's holiday but you didn't get paid for it. Anyway, I could see the way things were going and I decided I had to make a break for it and I heard of a job with H.J. Corders. Now they were at that time really owned by Berger Paints but they still traded under the name of Corder which was an old Melbourne firm of paint and wallpaper suppliers. And they had a shop; their headquarters was out in Chapel Street, Prahran and they had a city shop also. And this job was a demonstration job of industrial finishes, they were wanting to branch out into the industrial world. So I went and had an interview and started work there and I'd just turned twenty-one and that was a fatal time I can assure you for anybody changing jobs because when you got to twenty-one in most jobs you either kept on with the adult wage or it was curtains -ta-ta.

> Did it change your job then? Did it suggest that you were a bit shiftless and therefore unreliable? Was that the feeling at the time?

No, no. I wanted security. I could see I had no sec...

> Did employers ...? Would employers see somebody who was changing jobs at that age as maybe ...?

Not at all. I was offering an ability that I had that I'd acquired in the few short years that I'd been working and that was industrial finishing because that was the job I was doing. All the, everything except a cricket bat for example was finished off in clear lacquer and perhaps with sometimes some lining designs on it to colour it up - transfers and all that sort of thing - and that was my job. Anyway, I started in with Corders, as I knew them then, and did some demonstrations but there really wasn't enough work so I also looked after the advertising department there which really was controlled from the head office in Sydney. But, of course, the local advertising like scatter ads on radio and the neon-sign contracts of course which had to be checked every month and all that sort of thing, I looked after that, as well as the distribution of colour cards and any other advertising matter of course that was distributed. And that I was doing right up until world war two commenced.

> When did you first get a feeling that there was trouble brewing, that ...?

I think we were aware of it really from about 1938, this man Hitler and so on and Mussolini. To us they were newsworthy jokes. Hitler we were perhaps a bit wary of. Mussolini we thought was a lot of fun and we gave him credit for the obvious thing that's always quoted, of

getting the railways running to time in Italy. Whether he ever did or not, I don't know, but it is always quoted. And the depression that we'd gone through, we were going through - it never really stopped until war broke out - we of course were inclined to blame the financial, the people that had the control of the financial reins in the way that Hitler did too and perhaps we were a little bit on his side. However, history of course shows how very wrong we were in all of that.

(15.00) But before all this happened I had a craze for riding horses. Funny enough, in the pre-war years it was mostly youths that rode horses: today it's girls, and thank heavens for that because youths didn't know how to handle horses. And whilst we could go out and hire horses, even in South Melbourne you could hire horses at Hacks for Hire - say that quickly - and ride them around the tan. And other places out here, you could hire horses and ride around the paddocks of Kew and Heidelberg and all that sort of thing.

The tan being the course around the Botanic Gardens?

That's right, yeah. But, of course, we didn't have the money to do that. So the opportunity was that most kids went into the army in those sections of Militia - did we call it the Militia? I suppose we did - who still had horse-drawn vehicles for example the Army Service Corps, artillery and field ambulances. Well, the artillery people they were the first to get away from horses and I think they did it in about 1938. They went over to tractor-drawn guns, [Marm and Herringtons], they were the first four-wheel drive vehicles I'd ever heard of in my life and they were Ford-built too, incidentally.

And the next thing that happened, the RACV started doing their service goods deliveries in motor-drawn vehicles and the only ones left was the field ambulance. So I thought, well, I'd better get into this field ambulance if I'm going to do some horseback riding and that's how it all started. Well, then war broke out and we had ...

How did you join up? What was the process to get into the field ambulance?

I went to the headquarters in William Street. The one that I joined was the 4th Field Ambulance. There was also another ambulance used to do their training in the same drill hall, the 10th Field Ambulance, and together we used to go on camps. Well, the first one after war broke out was a month camp up at old Seymour camp, that's on the east side of Seymour - Puckapunyal wasn't even thought of then - and that was a lot of fun of course. These horses were ridden, hitched up to a field ambulance vehicle - four, pair and pair - and you rode them postillion fashion: lead horse and wheel horse. And then there'd be a sergeant on the horse in front to sort of lead you and you were never, of course, to do anything more than a trot, but sometimes we had a little gallop around. And it was a lot of fun.

Were there accidents?

Never. Not with horse-drawn vehicles but we did, while we were there, we did service quite a few accidents, not with our horse-drawn ambulances at all, but there were accidents happen on quite a few of the roads with military personnel, speeding in cars and things.

What were they looking for when you were joining up the ambulance service? Do you have an impression as to what was regarded as necessary?

No. If you had an interest in what you wanted to do and you were quite capable of curry-combing a horse or using emery powder on steel bits of harness and doubling harness and so on, of course you were well accepted. And I was prepared to do that to get the rides. Of course you worked for it. These horses that we had, they were already at Puckap - sorry, Puckapunyal, no - at Seymour in the mobilisation stores which are just a little bit north of Seymour. And when you went up there you drew the horses like you drew rations and so on. And we had the same horses each time mainly. Well, they had to be maintained on a horse picket line at night-time which had to be guarded by shift work. It was a pretty lonely sort of a job, I can assure you, and the horses were never allowed to get down. If they got down, you had to go and get them up on their feet again. I don't why they were not allowed to have a little sleep but ...

Were you guarding the horses against possible theft or just ensuring that they were always ...

They were safe, yes. See, if they got down they could get tangled up with .... They had an ankle - that's not right, horses don't have ankles, do they, whatever they have anyway. A chain from one line onto a rear hoof, ankle, what is it?

Fetlock, is it?

Fetlock or something, I don't know (laughs). Isn't it dreadful. And another chain and up to a head bridle. So that they stood there. They couldn't move. They could shuffle feet and so on but if they chose to get down, which they could do, they had to be got up again before they got tangled up in this and did themselves some damage.

Was it military-like, the manner in which these exercises were conducted?

Oh my gosh, yes. The man in charge of us was an English sergeant-major with the most polished leather leggings I've ever seen in my life and, by Jove, you know he knew the complete ritual about horseback riding and the attention that horses should get and all the rest of it.

(20.00) So when war started, what happened in terms of how you went into the army?

Well, by this time we were doing a three month camp. In fact it had started but, of course, it was what we termed the 'phoney war'. Nothing was happening. Some Australian troops had gone to England, and I think they were ultimately brought back to the Middle East. Anyway, in the process of this three month camp, which would have been early in 1940, I decided that I'd have to get out of it. You know, I'd have to do something. It looked as though the thing was going to get serious. And, of course, like a lot of young people in those days, I'd never been any further out of Victoria than Mathoura across the river from Echuca. So I was anxious to see a bit of the world. I don't think it was patriotism or anything like that that induced you to join the army. It was only eagerness to see something that you otherwise would never have seen. And, I decided to transfer to the AIF. Well, this was arranged and I was sent back to Melbourne. I think first to Royal Park and then out to Caulfield to sleep on a grandstand seat there for two or three nights, but you were able to go home, which I used to do, as long as you reported back at a certain time in the morning. Then after about three days .... They never knew what, there were a lot of people at that time, a lot of chaps joining up and they didn't even have uniforms for us. I can remember appearing in a Glengarry cap and a greatcoat but my own civilian clothes underneath. Because I'd had to hand in the clobber that I wore for the Militia which was a dark blue coat, khaki riding breeches and leather leggings. And, anyway, we were gathered together and a bunch of us were sent up to start a camp up at Albury, which is on the old Albury showgrounds which I think now is the Albury Grammar School area. I don't know where the showgrounds are now. And I know I slept with about half a dozen other fellows in one of the bottom bull pens right down by the railway line where the Sydney to Melbourne train used to come rushing down quite early in the morning; and it was cold and frosty too. However, ...

Was it alarming early in the morning to hear a train bearing down on you?

Oh, you thought it was going right through you. You needed no wake-up bugle up there. It was dark at that time because, I don't know what time the train would pull in Albury where the changeover was made into the Spirit of Progress. Probably still dark I would think, especially in the winter and at that time of the year. Anyway, after about three or four weeks they began to sort us out a bit and because I had come from an ambulance, had experience in the army howbeit in an ambulance unit, they stuck a couple of stripes onto my arm early in the piece because they needed NCOs of course to take charge of sentries and pickets and things like that. And, anyway, I was sent down eventually with a lot of blokes where they started another camp down at Benalla, also in the showgrounds. But I was only there for about three weeks and they began to sort people out again and I finished up back at Royal Park, still coming home at night. Anyway, one day we were on parade and it was announced that the - there was a hospital unit in Puckapunyal, that was a going concern by this time of course - the hospital unit which needed reinforcements because they were getting ready to go overseas and I thought, 'Hello, I wonder if I've got a chance of getting into this and going away with them', never think it was going to be the exciting turn as it turned out to be of course. Anyway, I and a few others were selected to go up there and it was quite true, we were needed as reinforcements to build the hospital up to the strength it required of course for oversea service.

Had you kept your stripes in the transfer across?

No. They had to be handed in as soon as I got to the hospital. They were only, it was only a temporary promotion. Anyway, having got up there we were then pushed into ward duties, and all this was quite strange to me when I think of it. From horses to humans. However, it was the only way to get away, so we did. And there were very cooperative sisters there who went out of their way to help you with your training. We had to be trained of course. And the little that we got from them stood us in good stead later on as I shall relate. Eventually, after one false leave - a pre-embarkation leave - something happened with the shipping or something or other, I don't quite know. You never hear. You hear more rumours than the truth in the army of course, there's a hot bed of rumours.

(25.00) And finally, anyway, we were entrained back down to Melbourne and I can mention it all today, of course, all of Melbourne was there to see it go off, the *Mauretania*, anyway. And away we went. But not immediately; I believe we went down the bay and stayed in the bay overnight because there was either, we were too early to meet up with the rest of the convoy coming from Sydney or, of course the popular rumour was that there were German submarines waiting outside the bay for us. Well, that all made it sound very thrilling but it was probably bulldust.

Just before we leave Port Phillip Bay as it were, going back to Puckapunyal, what was the relationship between the orderlies and the nursing staff in terms of the way orders were conveyed? Was there any sense of uneasiness or uncertainness about the nature of the lines of authority? Any resentment about being told what to do or ...?

No, not at all. No. You've got to remember that the nurses, they couldn't .... They had to be a minimum age of twenty-five. So we regarded them more as an elder aunt rather than somebody nearer to our own age. No, they were most cooperative and there were not many of them. A lot of the nursing personnel in the 4th AGH had already gone overseas with other hospital units awaiting the arrival of the 4th AGH. And I don't know how many there would have been. We never ever saw all the sisters sort of on parade, all at once. But they were most helpful and, of course, I suppose, in a way, we were most helpful to them because we were there to do the heavier work: the lifting, and the dragging, and the bathing and cleaning and all that sort of thing, at the same time learning some of the elementary nursing duties. Anyway, some of us, and I was fortunate enough to be promoted to - without promotion in pay I might tell you - but promoted to a nursing orderly, which meant they must have thought that I had possibilities of being useful in that department. As it turned out, we had no choice anyway. And away we went. Oh, I was given charge of an infectious diseases ward on the top deck of the *Maure* because a bunch of infantry blokes from Adelaide had arrived with at least fifteen of them showing signs of, I think it was measles, but one of the more or less childish infectious diseases which are prevalent of course at the time. So they had to be isolated in a special section up top. And I was put in charge of that. However, I managed to get leave in Fremantle and go ashore. I hope I didn't spread too many measle germs around there.

How serious was measles for the people in those days? You get many common diseases which will seem to vary over the years and just how devastating they can be?

Well .... Measles could affect a man very badly as far as his regenerative qualities were concerned. But there was no real treatment for things. They just had to be nursed. You see, there were no antibiotics in those days and they just had to be nursed. It was a matter of comfort, good food, good nursing; that's all it was until you got over it.

Incidentally, did 'Pucka Throat' go beyond Puckapunyal?

Oh yes. Every camp in Australia had it and it was an ordinary - there was nothing peculiar about it - it was an ordinary upper respiratory condition. Wogs were passed easily from one to another and what better place to pass it in a military camp where everybody is living in such close quarters to each other and the hawking and spitting and so on that went on because of it, disgusting it was too (laughs), however we had to do it.

Did you get it?

I don't remember having it as a matter of fact; I don't remember having it, and yet I might have had it up in Albury. It started up in the Albury camp but ....

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

Identification: This is side two of tape one of the interview recorded with Joe Sturdy about the 2/4th Australian General Hospital on 24th September 1990 and continues in five seconds from now.

Did it also carry aboard the ships? The *Mauretania*?

Oh, there must have been quite a lot of infection of that type - respiratory infection - brought on board. Yes, there would have been. But the ship was very crowded although it hadn't been fully converted to a troopship as it became later. We had a cabin certainly on E deck which was pretty low down. It might have been below waterline. I think we thought we were in torpedo level. And there were six of us in it but we were not crowded. We would have had plenty, well, we would have had a floor space almost as much as provided in this room now. There were the original beds, or bunks - I can't remember what they were - in the ward but there were two or three more had been added to it but it was by no means crowded. And we could have hot seawater baths and things like that. It was really comfortable. But, of

course, that state of affairs didn't last too long because when we got to Colombo we all had to get off the *Maure* and get into a troopship, which I think was the *Mombass* ...

Nevasa, was it?

Nevasa, yes. That's right. I was going to say the *Mombassa*. Where did I get that from. *Mombassa* I think was one of our own trading vessels around here. Yes. Spotlessly clean boat. Oh, well obviously had been built for a trooper with provision for the troop's families to be transported. Every bit of timber on it scrubbed white and so on but, boy, the cockroaches that appeared whenever meals and things were served. It was wicked. However, it was a very slow boat and whilst the whole convoy had changed, we didn't - I should have added that the convoy included the *Queen Mary* and, oh dear, what was the name of it? It was the last of the old Cunard line four-funnel jobs, and it still was in service after the war.

Was it the *Oronsay* the ...

No, no. No. Isn't it dreadful.

Anyway, the record is there of the boat.

Yes, that's right. *Aquitania*, *Aquitania*, and I was always thrilled about that because the original *Mauretania* would have been a sister ship to that and I think the one that hit the iceberg in, off Newfoundland, I think it was a sister ship of the *Aquitania*. So it was quite a thrill to see that boat still in use and, as I say, it was refurbished and went on as a passenger liner in the post-war years. Again, well those boats left us; they had high speed and they didn't really need the protection of a convoy, naval convoy as the slower boats did. However, eventually we all got to Egypt and detrained on the south end of the canal ...

Was it exciting in the way that you'd begun to hope that ...

Oh yes, it was. It was. And, of course there was no other .... Air travel as we know it today of course was quite unheard of in those days. There were people that did fly. I believe you could fly to England from Australia via various changes of aircraft and by a very circuitous route. I think it usually included a stopover in Cairo.

(5.00) But it would only be a very wealthy person, of course, that could have taken it. Everything else but boat travel was too slow which is the main reason why people did not travel much because they didn't have the time. However, we were disembarked at, I think it was at Port Tewfik and into an Egyptian train and hurtled across the desert of course and up to Alexandria and then out to a campsite west of Alexandria whose name escapes me for the

moment. But there were lovely pink lakes we passed; I do remember that. And there we stayed for possibly a week with leave into Alexandria. And, eventually, entrained ...

What did you do during that week's leave in Alexandria?

Well, I went shopping, as a matter of fact, because I needed a few things and I found what the army gave you, supplied you with, was not enough; you needed a few personal things. For example, they didn't supply you - they supplied you with mess gear but there was no tea-towel. These are the things that you were brought up to use, to have. So I acquired a tea-towel. I do remember that. It was a lovely red and white check one. Whatever happened to it, I don't know. Personal things like that. Probably shaving cream because the army didn't supply that either.

Had you been briefed just before your leave as to how you ought to behave with the local people - warnings of VD and all those sorts of things?

Oh yes. I forgot to add that one of the first things we did before the *Maure* left Port Melbourne was the short arm inspection held on one of the lower foredecks below the bridge at which, I think there was quite a good audience leaning over higher decks (laughs), but, however, we were immune to that sort of thing. I don't know, I think everybody passed first class. Nobody got hurled off. And that, of course, was repeated now and again, particularly after leave in such places as Alexandria and Colombo and so on. But you were warned, yes. Warned so severely that, honestly, you would not have put a bare foot on the ground. You were frightened, which was an absolute lot of rot as it turned out, you know. You were so scared of these exotic diseases which are so easily picked up and so fatal in these countries. I can laugh about it now.

Were there some sort of more adventurous sort who set off to savour the pleasures as it were of Alexandria?

Ah, if there were in our unit, I'm not aware of it at all but one of the, part of the camp hospital at Puckapunyal involved an infectious diseases area, well wired in, very secure and that was for the benefit of blokes of course that had delved in dirty duck ponds.

Why well wired in? Was there a feeling they might abscond?

Oh yes, yeah.

Was that because of the treatment's got to be fairly primitive?

Well, they had an infectious disease and they had to be kept isolated until it was treated - cured.

What were the treatments at the time? Mercury and ...

Well, for syphilis, which fortunately I don't ever remember encountering at all, it was a mercurial treatment. But about this time the sulphur drugs, M&B 693 I think was the first of them, they had come onto the market, Burroughs Welcome I think produced them and I think they were treating gonorrhoea with the sulphur drugs and quite successfully.

What was the attitude towards men who picked up infections? Was there any sort of social stigma attached to it?

No matter what you thought about them privately and the fact that you .... Oh, your own thoughts about all that, you didn't admit it. They, of course, might have been awfully frightened and horrified of the disease they'd got but it only made them more brazen. There was that sort of feeling: you were not a man until you had it.

But conversely, were there sort of ...?

And this happened, you know, many years ago, back in the Edwardian and beyond days when young men who were leaving school and before they went up to Oxford or Cambridge or whatever, were sent on continental tours and fully expected to get venereal disease.

Were there fears for those who were introduced to the wards as attendants for the first time rather like AIDS, that there was an uncertainty about how you might pick it up and ...

(10.00)I think a lot of people, a lot of blokes would have shied clear if they could have but in the army you've got to do as you're told, and I was allocated for duty there for a period of time but fortunately there was a very lovely girl in charge of the ward, and that made it more comforting of course. The fact that you wouldn't have showed that you were afraid in front of her. The treatments .... I don't even remember how they arranged the treatments.

Was there at all the feeling when you'd first start off that you'd want to keep as far away as possible to avoid unnecessary contact; anxiety about picking it up in some obscure way?

I think we were well aware that the contact had to be very close. You'd have had to use crockery or handled - I don't know about gonorrhoea but in the case of syphilis - handled their sputum or something like that, you know, to have acquired it. And it would have to enter

your body through an aperture. I don't think we were really afraid as long as there was plenty of facilities to keep yourself clean, wash your hands and so on, and there was. We were never short of water there, however cold it might have been. And I think the fear is much worse today of course with the unfortunate AIDS business, and yet, I don't know whether it would have been easier to acquire one of those common venereal diseases. It probably was easier.

Anyway, you'd had your leave in Alexandria and then?

Oh yes. Then it became time to pack up again and we were taken then I think by motor truck if I remember rightly. I don't remember going in the train again. Motor truck around to the wharves at Alexandria and we were given a packet of biscuits amongst - I can't remember the quota - a tin of bully beef and a packet of biscuits that had to do two or three people or something because we were going up on a vessel called the *Knight of Malta,* and we were going up to, I think, Tobruk - no, or we were going to Benghazi? I can't remember that. However, most of us - it wasn't all 4th AGH personnel but a lot of our gear, our hospital equipment was on board and there were other troops on board too. Mostly air people. But most of us were shoved down into the forward hold and there we had to stay but it was really only to be about an overnight trip. Well I think it was on the third day, after the most violent storm they had had on the Mediterranean, we were washed ashore near Derna, I think it was. Anyway, we eventually got everybody ashore by hauling a lifeboat backwards and forwards because the boat, as boats always do, they get washed up broadside onto the beach so that provided a nice lee from the waves and everybody was got ashore. And then a party, of which I was one, of about eight volunteered to stay on the beach to protect anything that got ashore at all - to protect the wreck, you know, as it was by this time well, not broken up but would be - from any Bedouins and so that might appear, and they did, out from nowhere in the desert - marvellous.

How did they appear? How were they dressed?

Bedouin clothes and I think there was one with a camel. Some were just walking.

Were they armed?

No, no. But we ...

Were you armed?

We were, yeah.

You hadn't had arms training though?

No, no. We were left with arms.

Did you know how to use them?

I did, yes, because I used to give rifle instruction at the Albury camp and the Benalla camp. I knew exactly, you know, how to load and fire and clean the weapon and all the rest of it. Anyway, they would not be used of course and one of our officers, the officers that remained with us - oh dear, what was his name - Littlejohn, Charlie Littlejohn, he had a revolver strapped on, in a holster strapped on his side too, so he looked the part. He was a brother incidentally of the Dr Littlejohn that was headmaster of Scots for years around that time. And we remained on the beach, anyway, overnight and the next day. Oh, after ...

What happened with the Bedouin? Did they approach? Was there any discussion or did they just have a look and go away?

(15.00) Oh, a bit a chatter and then they went away again. They were only curious I suppose; who wouldn't be. Incidentally, most of the .... The rest of the personnel were marched out to the road. There's always a road in the desert that follows closely to the coastline and word must have been got to the nearest town, I think it was Derna or Bardia, or what was it? I can't remember. And I think some trucks were sent down and they were taken up there anyway. Then the next day trucks and so on came down.

But the next morning was rather amazing. The sea had calmed down, not only calmed down but the silt that had been washed around the fore part of the ship and the stern of the ship had built up almost into a bridge to the boat. So we were able to get across there, dry-footed almost, go up a companionway, and into the boat and get not only our gear but a lot of the other gear and bring it down. They had a lot of it on shore before the relief people turned up. Quite a lot.

Well, then we were taken on .... We went away in vehicles up to the town and got ourselves fixed up and so on. We had our own gear too, this was marvellous, and we were able to go away with that, and eventually anyway a lot of the gear was brought off and taken up to Tobruk. I think this is how it went, I could be a little wrong here, anyway, the object of the exercise: we were to go to a place called Barce which is inland from Benghazi and take over a hospital there that had been functioning - whether it was a hospital or a casualty clearing station I don't know - in the original advance up the desert. Well, we got there eventually and we bedded down there and we looked after quite a few patients, mainly Senussis who had got mixed up with armaments which they had not right to be anywhere near. But poor kids they'd picked up a little ....

Booby traps called 'Red devils'.

That's right, and got their hands blown off or their legs peppered with and so on. Things like that. And it was quite a happy situation and the country was lovely. It was mostly orchard country and grazing country. Plenty of greenery and so on; flattish. And little houses, I suppose in their way they were comfortable, which had been built to house Italian migrants to this place. Because when the Italians took over Cyrenaica they colonised it of course, as you know, and the town of Barce was very nice and there were shops there selling things. I remember buying a tin of Italian tinned fruit. I think it was pears, I'm not sure.

Was there suspicion about the Italians?

Never at all. They welcomed us like brothers.

Incidentally, during the period when the *Knight of Malta* went aground, were there any people in sick bay?

Not, I wouldn't know. We were in the forward hold, down getting pushed from one side to the other. We finally had to get out of it; get up on the deck. We couldn't exist down there at all. And whether they had, see, it was only a short trip. As I told you, we'd been issued with a tin of bully beef and a packet of army biscuits to share amongst three people I think it was. Our food, it wasn't intended to be as long as it was. It was just one of those eventful occasions that the Mediterranean apparently can turn on now and again.

Anyway, we stayed there for I think about a fortnight, no longer, and then of course the rumour came through that Jerry was in the act. It had been only Italians of course prior to this. The 6th Division had pushed them up along of course with their English counterparts, whoever was serving in the desert war at that time, and it was learned then that the Jerries were coming down, and they came at a very rapid rate. We had to pack up very hurriedly and get. And I believe that while we were coming down the coast road they were cutting across the desert. We could see their dust inland, tanks and things coming across. And apart from spending one night on the road between Barce and Tobruk at an old fort which was full of fleas - I think it was called Bomba - we eventually got back to Tobruk whilst the Germans of course were just bypassing Tobruk. They were going to pick all that up later.

Was there a feeling then that you might be taken prisoners of war?

Yes, there was, yes. Anyway, we got back into Tobruk and .... Now the gear that I spoke of that came off the boat, it must have been shipped to Tobruk, it must have been brought up there because most of what we wanted was there. So that would be right. Never really got sent on up to Barce at all, which is probably a good thing. And a lot of our female nursing staff had already arrived at Tobruk; they'd been there for some time waiting for the hospital to get established you see, further up. Well, the story is well known of course that they wanted to stay but were not allowed. The authority, higher authorities than our own hospital colonel, wouldn't permit it and, as it turned out, it was just as well because the facilities were

pretty hectic. I don't think anybody would have wanted it but the girls of course to this day declare that they would have preferred to have stayed.

(20.00) Anyway, after, oh, about two days I think, they started to, they were evacuated. I think they went on a hospital ship from memory. And we then had to get the place established. It was known what was going to happen. We had to get the place established and ready for casualties.

Now this place, it had been a barracks I believe, an Italian barracks. It was well dispersed but on a big hollow square basis, and what had been barrack rooms became wards. And there was a hospital section which, of course, became the operating theatre and casualty acceptance and so on section. And I think that was just prior to the Easter. And then at Easter they let us know all about it: bombing raids, mostly Stukas.

Was it frightening, the first experience with these raids?

Ah, exciting but not frightening. Not frightening. You'd hear a bomb coming down and you know it's not for you. But a shell is a different thing. There was a gun, we used to call it 'Bardia Bill'. Bardia, that would be the town further down of course. It used to fire up into the harbour. Now it never knew what it was going to hit. It used to have sort of a target, the harbour. Some of their shells used to come up fairly close to the hospital, but most landed down in the town area and around the harbour and it was a harassing thing. They knew what was happening that at night-time was the only time the place could be serviced, people were taken in or taken out or the wherewithal brought in of course, even water had to be carted there for quite a while. And that was more frightening because you never heard anything. You only experienced the explosion. It was a pretty big gun I think too. But the Stuka raid, and other bombing raids, were quite worrying enough and it was over that Easter that they raided the hospital deliberately in spite of the 'red crosses' painted on the rooves [sic] of the various buildings and I think a big 'red cross' worked out in stones and things, you know, in the middle of this barrack square. It was pretty obvious what it was. We got the treatment. And our first casualties appeared, occurred then. And I remember a chap that I was pally with, we just rushed into a building and we stood .... I said, 'Oh, where will we go?' and he said 'What about this doorway?', you know, so we stood either side of a doorway with the lintel of the door above us and so on. Well, the next thing, we hadn't been standing there more than minutes when I was pitched under a table and he was killed. It was a combination of bombing and strafing at the same time and he copped a bullet.

Was that a shock? Were you shocked with it?

Yes, I was badly shocked because I'd never seen a dead person in my life prior to that. I didn't know he was dead - Norman - I, when I came, when I rallied around, you know, what the devil's happening? Of course other people were there and he'd been carted away and so on and I couldn't understand it all.

Were you wounded at all?

No, I was not. No, no. Just shocked that's all, that what had happened, had happened. And I was talking to Norman one minute and the next minute it was all confusion. Anyway, poor Norman, I don't think he even got to the operating theatre from what I heard. That upset me for a few days, but you get over it; of course you've got to.

Well, then it became very busy and we had to maintain operating services twenty-four hours a day.

What were you actually doing?

Well, I .... In the theatre at this time and, as I told you, all the female staff had been taken out, which was quite wisely. So we had to turn to. Fortunately there was some chaps .... There was one chap, Sergeant McLagan. What we'd have done without him I don't know. He had had hospital experience, under what capacity I wouldn't know, but it was in the Royal Hobart Hospital, and whether he'd been a theatre orderly or a theatre attendant or whatever, or whether he'd had nursing experience, it doesn't matter. This David, he was marvellous; he was able to organise us all into our respective duties; organising the setting up of the whole theatre and the autoclaving and the instruments, everything. You see, all these things none of us had ever had any experience with, even in the short time at Puckapunyal. Our duties had been normal, common, nursing duties.

(25.00) Was there a short period where it took some personal adjustment to get used to the sight of wounds, of broken bodies and that sort of thing?

Nobody displayed it if they did. They were really a remarkable crowd of blokes.

What about for you? How did you ...?

Well, for a fellow at school when we'd have what was termed 'hygiene lessons', I don't know why it was so delicately placed, it never really got much further than that, hygiene, but if ever it got onto your .... The blood supply and the heart pumping around to your arteries and veins and all the rest of it, you know, this one used to nearly pass out and had to leave the room. And so I should have been probably the weakest character in the performance, but I wasn't, strangely enough. And I had to scrub up and assist, you know, hold, pass tools and hold forceps and things along with the rest of 'em. I never knew I could ever do it but you do do it when you've got to do it. Anyway ...

Were there some men in that initial contact who would pass out just that ...

No, nobody that I'm aware of. The hospital was divided into two sections. They kept the hospital in the town as a clearing station. See, a lot of the action was at night-time or at early morning, whenever an attack was made. So the casualties were brought in either at night or early in the morning and, really, our busiest time sometimes was through the night and by day it would be quite clear. Well then they had a beach hospital a little bit west of the city - I suppose a mile away it could have been - and they had tents there that would been erected in pits dug down about, oh, I suppose three metres, which gave the patients on their beds in there some sort of below-ground protection. It was bombed of course. We had other casualties down there at the same time as we had the casualties in the city, in the town hospital. There was a doctor killed down there, and others. That was mostly for medical cases. The surgery .... City, not city, there was no city, the town hospital was kept for surgery and a lot of them of course, we couldn't keep there there very long, so what they used to do with, secure them into plaster casts, you know, on the limb - supposing it was a leg or groin injury - they'd be put into what was called a plaster spiker where both legs and up over the hips was encased in plaster with, of course, the necessary holes out for their genitals and other orifices and so on. Well they were done that way so that they could be transported by destroyer back to Alexandria. We couldn't keep them. There was no further treatment we could give them in Tobruk. We didn't have the facilities, we didn't have the food; all those things were necessary.

And every night there was a lot of casualties of that type shipped out. Of course there were reinforcements brought back too. We didn't need any. We did eventually get some reinforcements later in the business but we were quite able to operate with the people we had, and that included the hygiene section, a catering section, a laundry section, an engineer whose job it was to keep electricity supplied of course which was desperately needed, you know, at the night-time we couldn't function without it, not only for the lighting but to keep the sterilizer going and to keep x-ray plant going. All these things were absolutely necessary. And that's beside of course an office staff which was absolutely at its minimum. But every, you had to keep full records of every casualty: where they came from; where they were going; and everything else. Well, this is so important otherwise nobody would ever know what was going on. You know, not merely in Tobruk but here in Australia too.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

No, but as I had no experience in pre-war nursing, I wouldn't really know but I'd imagine so. I think the male nursing staff, or male orderlies, or whatever they were; they were called 'dressers' I think in most of the hospitals in those days.

What about Puckapunyal then? There would have been doctors about. What was the relationship there then?

Very seldom got together. I mean, if any instructions in nursing were passed it would be from doctor to nurse, and if there was anything that you had to do in connection with dressings and so on, it would be passed to you from the sister.

So was there an initial stage of a little formality and stiffness that very quickly went, or how did that relationship go?

It went as soon as we got, really, on the boat; on the *Knight of Malta*, it was gone. And, of course, it disappeared completely once we were in Tobruk because we each needed the other man. It had to be a team job and it was a team job.

Was there any formality? Would you address doctors as 'Sir' or ...

Oh yes, yes, yes. Oh, well, you did. And if you were an infantryman you'd still address an infantry officer as 'Sir'.

Were there any instances where people just didn't shape up and had to be spoken to tersely or addressed in fairly formal terms to ...

Not in my hearing. It could have happened but I'm not aware of it. One occasion where it could have happened: about two weeks after this big raid on the town the army - it always amuses me this - came to light with a rum ration. Now, there were blokes in the hospital of course who'd probably never had a drink in their life before and some of course who declined it, too many unfortunately, because those of us that were weak enough to accept it of course accepted their ration as well. I think I spent the next three days in bed and I remember the Church of England vicar sort of having a bit of a yarn with me at one stage, whether he was saying the last rites, I don't know; I wished he had have (laughs). I've never looked at rum since. We used to mix it with hot water and sugar. Oh my God everybody said that was a beautiful drink. Oh, arsenic would have been more acceptable. However, on that occasion it was freely handed around. Of course, things had got a bit quiet, you know, it wasn't given at a time, one of the hectic times of course. I suppose it was kept back for that reason. So we didn't ...

So it didn't affect the operation of the theatre at all?

Oh no, not at all. There were plenty of people who would not have touched any at all. We had chaps there that were - well, it turned out to be, it did become - clerics in their own rights, you know. One of them's still alive - well, two of them are still alive; they are both retired. Ah, we had three of them I think altogether. Well, there were three blokes that wouldn't have touched it and there were plenty more, probably with the same feeling about liquor and so on. They were dedicated people.

During that period, April-May, there was something like a thousand cases were treated. At that most hectic time, how would a day go? When would your day begin? You were working through the night but roughly how did the day go in terms of having a break, having meals, getting some sleep and so on?

Well, sometimes you couldn't, you just worked on, but eventually you got a meal. That's where the catering staff were so great, they kept things going. You know, it wasn't a matter of having the meals at the appointed time for breakfast lunch and dinner. They'd keep meals going. They would see that you got a meal. Everybody was most cooperative. It wasn't like a normal army existence at all; it was a family turnout and everybody looking after each other. No, I don't ever remember being deprived of anything at all. Not at all.

Were you able to get adequate sleep during that period?

Yes, because you earned it. It was the best sleep you ever get and when you earn sleep you really do sleep and enjoy it.

What was the basis? Did you have formal shifts as such, certain amount of times, and you then had to take a certain amount of time off? Or was it on a needs ...?

(5.00) Oh yes, yes, it was because less .... If things got exceptionally busy it was all hands on deck. And in the early time in Tobruk we had two sources of additional help which weren't retained there: we had a lot of Italian prisoners of war and they were mainly medical personnel off an Italian boat which was down in the harbour half-sunk, the *St Georgia* [?]. And they were most useful. They did all the stretcher-bearing, carting war patients, you know, from ambulance into the reception area; from the theatre to wards and so on, all that sort of thing. That relieved our blokes of a lot of additional work. No doubt we might have got some other personnel to do it in the town of other units but it was a great help. Also there were a lot of Senussis in the town when we came there, but they had to be shipped out very early because they were of no value to us at all. They became dependent on us of course for water and food which we could ill afford so they were shipped out very early in the piece. But the Italians, they were retained I think for about three or four weeks, until, finally, it was realised that we didn't have the rations and so on and they should be sent away.

What was the relationship with the Italians then?

Couldn't have been more friendly because we needed each other. They needed us to survive: we needed them to help.

How were they addressed?

By their Christian names.

> Was there any sense at all around that these people were enemies and ought be treated in some sort of particular way?

Not with Italians, no. They never were like that.

> Were there any ...

They would be the most unwarlike race of people on God's earth, I think.

> Except at the soccer. And what about German POWs? Were there any Germans who assisted at all?

We did have some Germans in, but you've got to remember that it would be rare because the Germans were attacking. Now when they became casualties they had to be taken as prisoner of war and if they were taken prisoner of war they were very seldom injured. If they got hurt in an attack, injured, they would be claimed and taken back behind their own lines. So there were very few.

> Were there any actually used as orderlies?

No. Oh no.

> What was the impression you had as to how the Italians saw the Germans?

I don't think they liked them at all.

> After the attacks on the hospital, did you get the impression that this affected the attitude of the troops towards the Germans? Was there any sense that the buggers would deserve whatever they'd get thereafter? That any prisoners might be treated rather more harshly?

Yes. There was a hatred but it wasn't a poisonous hatred. I think if a German got into the hands of a patrol, of Aussies anyway - I can speak for them - I think they'd be pretty well treated; given the usual cigarette and whatever, you know. If they made an attempt of course to cause trouble or get away, I think they'd have got their just deserts, naturally, but I think as long as they were reasonable I think our blokes would have been quite, well, friendly - not

friendly but courteous to them anyway. I'm sure they would have been. I can't think of any Australian combat soldier that wouldn't have been that way.

I gather that dur .... Sorry ...

He would have been a very ignorant type of person I think to have done otherwise.

I gather during that period at Tobruk with the demands made that it was not uncommon for medical orderlies to do some surgical procedures. Did you get to do any?

Oh yes. There were quite a few minor things that you did. Not, you know, not serious. There were enough doctors there because it was a hospital and naturally every section of the hospital was well catered for in the professional staff, particularly in the surgery department, the medical too. And we had dentists, optician - an optical man, not an optician at all - oh, a pharmacy - Peter was lieutenant I think - and pathology. All departments there that you would find in any hospital at that time, you know, in a civilian hospital, they were there, well represented, professional staff and they had their assistants. These were blokes that might have had some training, but they were mostly those that had had some training in any particular facet of medicine whether it be pathology or x-ray or whatever. They usually had a promotion to sergeant or something of that type.

(10.00) Apart from the most intense periods when there was time, were you being educated more and more about the nature of surgical procedures? Were there formal classes or anything of that sort?

No, other than this Sergeant McLagan, no, but you learned by doing and watching. Now all this stood all of us, there's no question about it, in great stead later on. It did me in particular. But before we leave Tobruk it wasn't all hell and fire. We had days, there were plenty of days when there was, it was just so quiet and we'd all, well a lot of us who were off-duty, would go down to the beach and swim. There were lovely little bays and things, rocky coast. Sometimes you'd have to get out of the water and get into the lee of a cave or a cliff or something or other because there were planes flying over and you never knew who they were, although the German planes and the Italian planes had a distinctive sound. I can't quite describe it now, but they did sound different from British planes. But that didn't happen very often.

Were there concerns about sharks?

No.

In some of the North African waters the sharks can be quite ferocious.

We never thought about it. The water was very clear. Lovely yellow to white sand and very clear water. You could see, oh, I suppose to a depth of twelve, fifteen feet quite clearly, every grain of sand on the bottom if you were on a promontory overlooking it.

Were there opportunities for informal concerts, all that sort of thing?

We had a piano there and there were sing-songs and things like that. One or two concerts, yes, I believe there were and I think some of the troops .... Probably not especially for the hospital unit. We didn't have that much free time. It was a pretty big hospital and there had to be somebody on duty in certain parts for alarm but some of the patients, those of course who were not so sick, convalescing very well, they would attend, not only if there was a concert going on or a sing-song, but they'd very often eat in the mess hall where we would eat, with us, rather than be fed in their wards. That all saved a lot of work.

What about with the Italian orderlies with whom you'd become friendly? Would they share meals with you?

No, they had their own rations. They were given their own rations, but it was provided from our kitchen.

Was there any socialising outside the actual work area with any of the Italian POWs?

Oh yeah. I can remember receiving a cake from the family once in a tin and that night I decided to cut it up and distribute it around. Well, what those Italian blokes, orderlies, that were there on duty with us - they were there on duty as stretcher-bearers - we were waiting on casualties of course, they got their share of the cake, just the same.

Did you have anything to do with the x-ray unit?

No. No, not at all.

Apparently the levels of activity were such that in general terms would be, the exposure, would be regarded as quite dangerous. Was there discussion about that?

Never. Never that I'm aware of and yet I've often thought about that because one of the things that used to worry me and has worried me since, there was a gadget there called a

fluoroscope. Now if a patient had particles of shell in him and so on they had to be located. You can't sort of just hack and dive in anywhere, you know. They had to be located and sometimes sought for and brought out using this fluoroscope. Now what used to happen, this thing would be a screen over the body and it would show up any solid metallic object like that and of course other organs and things would appear and the surgeon would work under that. And I often wondered, 'Now Littlejohn', who's long since dead, 'What did kill him?'.

Did you ever run short of supplies; medical supplies that is?

We had to be careful. We had to not waste anything but bandages and things like that, there was a heap of Italian medical stores - I can remember this - it was a mountain that almost would have filled half of the height of this room and almost the surrounds of it. And that was mainly dressings of varying types - bandages, triangular bandages, oh, lots of things. They left a hell of a lot of gear there. They left the greatest stack of mineral water I ever saw in my life, [Recuara ?] mineral water which is apparently the favourite one; and we used to shave with it. Open a bottle of mineral water and shave with it.

Was that because it was softer than the local water?

(15.00)Yes, yeah. Well, the local water was distilled from the sea and of course that was in very limited supply. There was water brought by ships when they were able to, and we never quite liked the taste of it because it tasted like water that had been in and out of various containers. But this Recuara water was really beautiful and I'll tell you it was the best shave you could have had in those days.

With the more common and serious injuries, what were the major causes of the wounded that were being brought in? Was it artillery or bullets or did you form any impression as to the ...?

No. The ghastly injuries were shell fragment - fragmentation injuries. A bullet wound is a clean, nice sort of an injury, you know, it's a penetrating and an exit one. It might have done quite a damage on its passage through but it was always very clean. No, it was the shell fragmentation or mines did most damage.

Did it ever depress you at all, the thought of the consequences of all this, how it was going to leave young men?

Yes. I had the misfortune to hold a leg while it was being amputated, and take that leg out and dump it in an incinerator or a tin anyway - it was finally taken away eventually and incinerated with the rest of the rubbish - and unfortunately while I didn't know the young fellow that, I knew his family. They lived opposite an old family friend of my mother's down

in a street in Hawthorn. That worried me a little bit. But I was never a friend of the family's at all, I just happened to know who it was by the name and so on.

> Apparently there were a couple of periods where there were expectations of being relieved and they didn't eventuate. Did morale vary during that period?

Oh, we got excited a couple of times towards the end of our stay things .... There was supposed to be a relief party breaking through from the - I always have to stop and think it was in the northern hemisphere - from the east to the west, yes. Of course it would be from .... And that one went haywire, something went wrong there, they never got through and I think it entailed a lot of casualties and the units that were involved too, it apparently hadn't been wisely planned or the reconnaissance hadn't been of the best nature. But when we finally did get the relief, we didn't all go as a unit you know, it was a few each night and I went down, back to Alexandria on a little destroyer called the *Jackal* which swerved I'm sure over every inch of the Mediterranean. Of course they were dodging, you know, submarine movements; it was quite a thrilling business.

> What were you doing aboard that?

Mmm?

> Sorry, you went aboard the ...

This destroyer called the *Jackal*. It was a British Navy one.

> This was at the time of the evacuation, was it?

Yes. This was one of the boats that was used. There were a lot of Australian small boats used of course in the servicing of Tobruk. They very often get all the mention, I suppose it's natural they would in Australia, but the British Navy very definitely contributed their share and probably more.

> What about British Army members? Had you had much to do with members of the British Army?

Yes. I can't tell you exactly, apart from some units in the town, I can't tell you exactly who was there. There were also some Polish soldiers, and Indians. It wasn't a complete - as a lot of people would believe - it wasn't a complete Australian show. We certainly got all the kudos. We probably had the most troops there. We would have. We had a division of troops of course, but there were a heck of a lot of other people there apart from the Australians.

It seems there wasn't a lot of love lost between Australian troops and British officers, or particularly the military police. What were the impressions you had as to the nature of the manner of officers - British officers?

I very rarely had anything to do with them, and most of what we hear in that department could be gross exaggeration. I think a lot of it was a carryover from world war one where .... World war one diggers, they were more down to earth than perhaps the world war two blokes were; they weren't as crafty for starters. And probably a lot of the British officers at that time would be the monocle type and they would get their sixpenn'orth, of course they would and probably did. But I don't think that happened. I think our blokes had a lot of respect for a lot of the British officers. Now a lot of them were 'desert rats'. They'd been working back and forwards in the desert. After all, most of the action in the desert was done by tanks. Well, we didn't have any tank units. It had to be the British Army supplying all that.

(20.00) What was the feeling at the time then when you were leaving Tobruk? Was there a sense of having lost as it were, or what was the feeling?

No, we never thought it would be lost at all. We knew, we had an idea that it would be maintained; unfortunately it wasn't. It was handed over I think to South Africans, if my memory serves me correct. South Africans came in there and then the Germans promptly took it from them. We lost it.

So you finished up in Palestine and Jerusalem?

Yes. When we went back to Alexandria we had a bit of leave there and then we were taken to ...

What was the feeling at the time of relief? Was there a relief of tension? Was there a sort of feeling of having sort of got out of very difficult situation?

I suppose there was, but we were pleased that we'd been there. I think nearly everybody said, you know, 'I wouldn't have missed it for quids'. It was an experience, a wonderful experience, there's no question about that. But I suppose we were relieved and we were looking forward to leave. I just can't quite remember what the feeling, I think I .... We had an idea we were going back to Palestine. Well, we did. And we took over a hospital, or two hospitals I believe that had been operating by some British units and I can't remember which was which. There was a German hospital and an Italian hospital. These, of course, had been built probably by some German and Italian religious orders which was the favourite thing in Jerusalem of course to, for churches and so on to support hospitals and orphanages or whatever, you know, in Jerusalem. I have a feeling the hospital that I was sent into was the German one but I'm not certain about that.

Did visiting Jerusalem and being able to go to some of the sorts of places that were associated with what for most of us is childhood stories of the Bible and so on, did that have any particular import for you?

Yes, yes. We did a couple of tours around - just, you know, for a couple of days in a bus - and went to Bethlehem, a few other places of historical interest. We didn't worry very much about Jerusalem at the time because we knew we were going to be there, and it was exciting I suppose that we were actually .... Well, I can remember being down at a place called Ashkelon and here was some old Roman tessellated pavements and I pinched a little bit of it, just one square - shame on me - and thinking at the time, 'Good heavens, perhaps Jesus Christ actually stood on that once upon a time'. I can't remember how Ashkelon comes into the biblical stories but I think there is something about, 'Let it not be heard on the street of Ashkelon', where it fits in or who said it I wouldn't know but somewhere or other there's some quotation like that. All those .... You actually saw things that hitherto had only been stories in the Bible, stories read out to you by parsons or Sunday school teachers or whatever, illustrations - probably fabricated anyway - in illustrated Bibles and religious textbooks, and there it all was. And you began to believe, well, perhaps it is all true.

You were in Jerusalem when it snowed?

Yes. Yes.

How well equipped were you for that? I know it was pretty cold.

Oh, we had greatcoats. We were reissued with uniforms again. Mind you, we hadn't lost much but I think I still had my original greatcoat. We were warm enough.

What was the feeling in December of 1941 when Japan entered the war and then Singapore fell, there was the bombing of Darwin and so on? Do you recall how you felt? Was there a sense of anxiety?

Yes there was, but I don't think it worried me very much. When we got to Jerusalem and we were allocated our jobs - the hospitals and so on - I think again I was on night duty because I used to spend the days walking around the old town. I walked right around the walls of Jerusalem and ....

Did you have any particular mates or were you a bit of a loner?

(25.00) Oh no, no. There was always mates. But I think on these walks I used to go by myself, just curious, and I learned quite a bit about the town I think by doing that. I visited all the various gates and things around about that I would otherwise have never have known

about. But I never ever went down to the Dead Sea. Now, that was only a little bus ride from Jerusalem. I think I thought there was plenty of time I was going to be there. However, I got a bit browned off there. Things, it became so static and I suppose after all the excitement of coming overseas, the shipwreck, going to Tobruk, or going to Barce, the retreat back to Tobruk, all the excitement there, it sort of left me a bit flat. And I was on duty in the dysentery ward and my main job, the only job in fact, was gathering specimens of four dysentery patients' faece [sic], labelling it and all the rest of it and making sure it got to pathology. And I thought, 'I can't stand this any longer'.

> This is partially because you were back where there were nurses and so the sort of jobs you'd had were no longer.

Yes, and there were still some of the British nurses there of course whom you didn't know. It was a different ball game.

> Was the relationship between the British nurses and the orderlies different to that?

Yes, quite different. Quite different. Anyway, I decided that I couldn't stay there. So I had a cobber who was in the 2/8th Field Regiment and I knew they'd been up at Salum and those places on the border you see of Libya, and I knew they were back in Palestine and I got in touch with him, and he said he'd had a talk to the MO and there was a vacancy for a battery aid post attendant and would I like to come down. I said, 'You bet'. And I can't remember to this day how I ever got from Jerusalem down to wherever this campsite was that they were in. Anyway, I left the hospital and went to the artillery unit and I seemed to fit in very well there, so much so that ...

> Was there action there?

Oh, we did have action eventually. They had been in action, you know, up on the border of Libya and Egypt. Anyway, that's where I got my lance sergeant, three stripes. I couldn't be appointed a sergeant, I knew .... Apparently my experience was, left me a little bit superior in the medical knowledge than the bloke that was already there, sergeant in charge of the RAP, under the MO of course, and a battery medical orderly, he only had two stripes. He was known as a bombardier. But they gave me three stripes so that I had the advantage of the sergeants' mess but without the pay - lance sergeant. And that's what I remained right through.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

Identification: This is side two of tape two of the interview with Joe Sturdy recorded on 24th September 1990 about the 2/4th Australian General Hospital and elsewhere and it continues in five seconds from now.

So what happened then?

Well, we stayed in Palestine for a while and I had a little more leave while I was there. In fact, I think I had my Christmas dinner down there. I don't recall having Christmas dinner at Pales... at Jerusalem rather, whilst they did have quite a spread I believe. It has photographical evidence to prove that. But I don't think I was there. I think I was already down with the artillery unit. However, from there I was appointed to one particular battery.

What was the feeling of your friends who you'd been with? Did they sort of, oh, feel that you'd got a good chance or were they a bit disappointed you were going or ...?

Oh no. I think, probably after that there were probably a lot of comings and goings. There'd probably be people seconded to other jobs, that some would move to other jobs. It had all been very composed up to that stage because there was nothing else could be done. But I think once they got out, I think there might have been movement of some of the chaps that might have been looking for other jobs or promotion or whatever. Promotion would be limited in a hospital unit of course. But, no, I can remember saying goodbye to some of my closer cronies, but you didn't see all of them because we were actually manning two hospitals not even close to each other. One was the German hospital and one was an Italian and whilst I was on night duty, I wouldn't be in contact with those that were on day duty. That's how it was.

Anyway, eventually this artillery unit was moved up to Syria. It was always thought of course that the Germans were going to come down through Turkey, and come down and grab the Mediterranean countries and then finally, you know, get through to India. This was Hitler's ambition or at least the, supposedly it was, anyway. Whether he had that ambition I don't know. And we were to go up there and dig gun pits and things in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. Also to exercise in the Furglus Desert, that's all around Homs and that area and, oh, it was terribly interesting going to a lot of these places. We were actually inland from Tripoli and camped in olive groves on the side of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. It was most interesting; lovely country.

What was interesting? What was it about it?

Oh, the life there! The people, the ladies that would come and take your washing away and bring it back at night all laundered and so on. It was a terrific life. If you wanted to fry some eggs, you just got hold of some olive oil, of which there were plentiful supplies, and you fried eggs. And, my gosh, I couldn't think of it. The thought of it today, I'd throw up. Eggs fried

in olive oil, a deep bath of olive oil, oh God. Anyway, it was terrific. And we had leave in Beirut and Tripoli and so on and there was other little towns in between the coast of course and where we were camped. Some of the blokes were lucky enough to get up in the snow on the Lebanese mountains and do skiing; they were very privileged I thought.

(5.00) But I suppose the biggest exercise we had was a big desert exercise in what they called the Furglus - I think I have the pronunciation right - Furglus Desert of which Homs was a sort of a central feature and we got leave to go and tour over the Krak des Chevaliers and other forts and things there that date back historically to heaven knows when. Terribly interesting. Anyway, we were there for about five months or so. In the meantime, the 4th AGH I think had packed up and gone back to Australia via Colombo. But, of course, all this I never knew. I never knew what had happened to them, and it wasn't till the postwar years that I found out that they actually finished up quite close to where I finished the war. That's another story.

But all of a sudden of course the news came through that the Jerries were making another push back down through the desert, to Egypt and they'd actually crossed the border. They'd got close so the remainder, all the Australian troops were still in the Middle East and most of them had gone home - the 6th Division, the 7th Division, they'd all gone back - because of the Japanese threat here of course. We were a bit perturbed that we hadn't gone back, but of course we had this job to do thinking that the Jerry was going to come down through Turkey. That was the supposed thought anyway. And we eventually anyway had to pack up and we were taken by road transport without identification, our slouch hats had to be hidden, all insignia on trucks and things - Australia's insignia which of course was the kangaroo and a boomerang - had to be obliterated; very hush, hush. Taken down between a road that went down through the Anti-Lebanon and the Lebanon mountains. So we must have passed pretty close to Damascus and down through Jerusalem and eventually across the Canal, through Cairo, where all the people in Cairo lining the streets, saying, 'Hello, Aussie; hello, Aussie'. And do you know what it was? The tan boots. We were the only unit that worn tan boots. All the palaver of hiding all our slouch hats, the kangaroos and the things, and here we are - the tan boots. And they knew of course. They probably knew anyway. And up we went then ....

How long did that trek take?

I think about three nights.

Did you stop overnight and camp?

Oh yes, we camped on the road and food was brought and everything. It was very well organised. And we eventually then got up to a point just east, you know, of where the Germans had come from and we had to exercise and get ourselves established there and fit in. And I'll never forget the trip up that road. There seemed to be more troops, trucks and troops, coming back - going east - than were going west. I couldn't understand this but, of course,

they were troops that would have had no use near the front. They were troops who would have to be at the rear to serve their purpose. You get a wrong idea about things. I thought it was troops running away from trouble. But not at all. They were only doing what they had to do.

Anyway, we finally got up into this area that became the place where we had to dig in and withhold the Germans which, of course, as you know, was well and truly done. And that was my first association with the artillery in action. A very noisy business I can assure you and in the desert of course, you don't have much protection. You've just got to dig a hole that you can get your body below the surface. That is the great danger: the scattering of shrapnel and so on when a bomb bursts or a shell bursts or anything, you must be below the ground and it's the only .... Well, the greatest safety you can have. We had our casualties.

You were being shelled in return?

Oh yes, yes. But the casualties were, in the main, trucks - sometimes not our own - but trucks running through a minefield or something like that. One of our own supply trucks got involved in a minefield too, you know. So you're taking .... How people find their way around the desert I'll never know. It's just crisscrossed like a cobweb of wheel tracks and there'll be a little drum or something or other, and that is really a sign to somebody that you turn right or left or don't pass or something or other. How they ever ...? I never knew but it was never my concern to have to worry about these things.

Did people get lost in fact?

(10.00) Not that I'm aware of but there would have been, yes, there would have been quite of lot of units on the move that would have been lost. Don't worry, when we were returning from, coming back in the push back to Tobruk - I'm harking back of course now to the hospital unit - we did not know it but outside one of the towns at a crossroad there were, I believe, German soldiers done up as our military police directing traffic in the wrong direction. Now whether that was true or not, it never affected us, but it was popularly supposed that that was being done. And I can well believe it too. But in the desert, except for the main coastal road, which incidentally was paved, and by this time had a railway running up quite a long distance. They were eventually going to take a rail right through to Tobruk I believe but it never got that far that I am aware of. But, Alamein and all those places, they were non-existent in the early part of the war. They only became existent after this rail was extended and a water pipeline too. But it was around that area where we finally had to perform our job. A lot of it was, in the main, a lot of it was harassing fire, take gun out you know from each .... There were three batteries of two troops, two troops of four guns each in each battery, so that comprises an artillery unit and I was with one of the batteries.

How many medical personnel to a battery?

Only one. Only one. And you were very often quite a long way from headquarters, from the headquarters RAP where the doctor and the RAP sergeant was. It wasn't a very happy situation, and you were working out of a little bag slung over your shoulder which contained nothing more than a few first field dressings, a few triangular bandages and a few odds and ends that you might have given a bloke like an Aspro or something if he had a headache.

One might suppose if there were a situation where you had several wounded people and you'd put some first aid bandaging around them, it would be very helpful for people at the receiving end to know what the nature of the wound was. How could you do that?

Oh yes. If you gave an injection for morphine it would have to be marked very obviously on their forehead so that as they were moved back into through casualty clearing stations and things everybody would know at the time and what that man had received.

What would you use for that? How would you mark it?

With grease pencil. And the problem was .... Actually, you were never very long waiting on transport. With an artillery unit, while sometimes the guns would go forward into very forward positions, it was mostly at night to perform this harassing fire. They would have, say, a location, probably arrived at from aerial surveillance where it was known that the enemy would be using a particular road, you know, to get supplies or whatever to their troops. Well, they'd send a gun out at night and that gun would fire, just harassing fire, every few minutes, oh, it might even be every ten minutes, just one shell, into that area. And that would be enough to cause some problem in the use of that particular road or area, whatever, and this was of nuisance value and that's about all. The only thing that happened once was one of our guns unfortunately got loaded with the charge and the projectile hadn't been put in. And when the order came to fire, of course it lit the whole desert up like Luna Park. All you got was the flash of the projectile, the charge. That gun had to be hastily withdrawn of course from that area.

But I suppose the greatest excitement was the final Alamein attack. This is Monty, Montgomery had come into the situation by this. We'd had quite a variation of generals running things in the Western Desert, you know, but some of them were good, some were not. But Montgomery, for all his peculiarities and so on, he was a wonderful manager. He started what had never been done in the army before. He started promoting information right to the basest private of what was going to happen. It wasn't to be a surprise as it always had been. You know, in the army you were taken by the hand and led. But this time everybody knew exactly what was going to happen and the timing and everything. Of course security would have to be very well watched, naturally. But it provided a different atmosphere. People thought, really began to believe they were part of the army that was going to defeat Hitler. You had that feeling; you couldn't help it.

Did it also mean that previously you were just regarded as a dumb unit whereas now you were regarded as a person with some intelligence? Was it that sort of thing, was it?

(15.00) Monkeys being there - pardon, I'm an animal lover - monkeys could have served in the army just as well in the old days. You were taken by the hand. It was pick up packs, put down packs; move here, move there, go there; do this, do that; and never one reason why you did these things. Never.

Was there vocal criticism about the change? Were there people who would say, 'Oh, of course this is impossible. The enemy will, you know, find out?'

There probably was amongst some of the higher authority, I suppose there was. But Monty was a law unto himself as everybody well knows and he saw it that way and, by hell, it was the right way. It was the right way because it got everybody feeling, 'We're on the winning side. We're a team. We're going to win', and we did. Now the unfortunate thing about it was of course that the Australians had to be withdrawn after the Alamein operation had commenced. But it was thrilling and I made the greatest mistake in my life. Prior to that I'd only been involved with perhaps the noise of a gun or two, but these guns, we were right on the coast, and the guns were not exactly wheel-to-wheel, they were spaced probably hundred yards or more apart but right across the desert. Not merely the Australian artillery of course, that would have been three batteries of Australian artillery. There was all the British artillery and everything else. But it was a line right across and at a given time, and I think from memory it was ten o'clock pm the night, the barrage started. Sturdy, he had got himself a little hole on the other side of the hill from the nearest gun to the coast. He thought, 'This is going to be lovely. I'll be able to nick down into the water and have a wash and so on.' God, it's a wonder I can hear. Anyway, it went on of course, as you well know, till almost daybreak and by that time the Jerry was on his way and the infantry and the tanks were after him and so on, and the race back the other way never stopped.

Well, after all that, we, of course, had to be packed up again and brought back to Australia and unfortunately the action at that time - there would have been little actions going on at various places - but they wanted to get started in New Guinea and get New Guinea cleared out and most of the 9th Division .... Oh, incidentally, we'd been formed into what became known as the 9th Division then. That was all the troops that were left in the Western Desert and had been supplied with reinforcements out of hospitals and so on. We had some poor cases, you know, that had been lying in hospital for a long time, probably bomb-happies and everything else. They had to serve as reinforcements to the unit because there was no reinforcements coming from Australia. But we did very well.

However, when we got back to Australia after a period of leave in Melbourne, we were taken then up to the Atherton Tablelands and that was all lovely in those days, and I've seen the Atherton Tablelands since and I don't want to go back there.

How did you come back by the way?

Mmm, we came back on the *New Amsterdam*, loaded at Port Tewfik and sailed all the way back to Melbourne on the *New Amsterdam*.

What were the conditions like there?

Very crowded. The boats by this time had been of course provided with vast accommodation facilities because I think they'd been bringing the Yanks of course using a lot of the British ships and the Dutch ships of course to bring Americans over. Well, they were just crowded in. It was meals by rotation and all that. I had a bed in what had been the theatre, the picture theatre, in the *New Amsterdam* and I think if I tell you this, in that theatre - it was fairly large too, about the average size of what a theatre unit would be in town now. Not the old theatres that were big but the things they stack them into now - eight bunks high and no more than a bunk space between bunks. Now I couldn't tell you how many blokes slept in that theatre but every cabin, every space was filled just to that capacity right through the ship.

Were there evacuation drills?

Yes. There were, you were supposed to gather at the lifeboats but the lifeboats could never have handled us anyway. There were far too many troops. Oh no, they did have lifeboat drill and all that sort of thing but it would have been a bit of a joke if anything had happened. But these boats moved so fast that they required no escort.

Were you given duties aboard or was it ...?

Oh yes, yes. We still ran an RAP there. Of course it was only things like coughs, colds, snotty noses and toothache and things like that. But there were dentists on board. If a fellow had a toothache he could have it attended to. But no serious illness of course.

(20.00) What was wrong with the Atherton Tablelands? You said you'd never want to see it again.

Oh, well, when we went up there it was all *à la natural*. Lots of rain forests and what had been cleared around Atherton and Malanda. Malanda I think was a dairying place and another town was noted for the growing of tobacco leaf. I can't think of its name now. And around Atherton itself, the main and probably the oldest town up in the tablelands, there were fields and fields of corn which we know as .... What do we know it as?

Maize.

Maize, that's right, yeah. Corn, nowadays, we don't talk about maize now. Which when they picked the corn, the cobs, they'd have to stand up on a cart on an elevated stand to reach it. It was beautiful. And, of course, we were able to go around and see all these things, but I think one of our greatest disappointments was they decided, the army decided, that in the site of action in they were going to, the 9th Division was going to New Guinea, there was only room for one regiment of artillery and in actual fact the artillery, the twenty-five pounders were not suitable. They wanted mountain guns - howitzer types - and the 12th, the 2/12th Field Regiment, who were our arch-enemies, ...

What do you mean by that? Why arch-enemies?

Well, I shouldn't say 'we'. The 2/12th were in Tobruk, now the 2/8th were not, and this was always a bone of contention you see. The 2/12th, of course, were a 'Rat of Tobruk' whereas the 2/8th couldn't be a Rat of Tobruk at all. But, of course, this didn't affect me because I had been a Rat of Tobruk. I had to keep my mouth shut.

Why? I mean, was the feeling such that it actually led to blows between fellows?

Oh no, not as bad as that. But all the publicity of course had been about the Australian soldiers in the fortress of Tobruk. The poor chaps that were down on the Salum frontier, really holding the fort there, they never got any glory at all. However, that was all beside the point and we're all mates now anyway. But, anyway, the 2/12th went away with the rest of those units in the 9th Division that were going to go into action there, and we had to remain on the Atherton Tablelands building new campsites. We'd just get a campsite going right to our own satisfaction, 'Oh, that's very nice. Now we'll move somewhere else and build another one'.

And of course what was happening a lot of the units that had been formed in Australia against the prospect of the Japs coming into Australia, and they were mobile units because that's how the war would have been fought here, you know, in a mobile action as in the Western Desert, tank squadrons and all that sort of thing. They were being disbanded because they were no longer required because the war was going north. And a lot of those blokes were coming into, and not only as reinforcements into 9th Division units and other divisional units, but they were forming new units that would be of use in the islands and, of course, had to do jungle training as we all had to do. We had to hike through rainforests and all this sort of thing and go down to the beach and do landing craft exercises and so on.

It wasn't wasted time but it was glorious even though we were upset about not going away with the rest of the Division, it was glorious because we had such beautiful trips. Swimming in Lake Barrine and all this sort of thing; who'd want more. Well, in recent years, why I remarked about it before, in recent years I went back there again and, of course, the place has become too civilised. Cairns is a big town with high-rise hotels and so on. The Barron River

which supplied the beautiful Barron Falls which you viewed from the train going up, that was barely running because they'd tapped its resources somewhere back to make a hydro-electric scheme out of it. And where we had built our original campsite up on the tablelands, lo and behold, that is a huge dam, lake. We would be at the bottom of it where we had lived. Anyway, you can't stop progress of course, and miles and miles and miles of rainforest have been flattened to provide grazing country and so on.

Was it irksome to come back and return to an army that again didn't regard you as anything other than something to move around and never informed you after the other incidents?

(25.00) No. The atmosphere was quite different. When a unit was in training in Australia there was, I suppose for a very obvious reason, there had to be a difference between association of troops and officers. How else could they have performed their job and secured the command that they had to have over the troops? You know, imagine a lieutenant in charge of a platoon of thirty blokes. Well, it was like that but when the prospect of going away, when embarkation got nearer, there used to be stories circulated I'm sure on purpose, but not without effect either, of somebody becoming shark bait on the boat going over. That caused a lot of the junior officers anyway, I suppose, to change slightly their tactics and become a little more humanising. And by the time you got into action there the lesson was learnt, whether it be action working in a hospital unit or action being an infantryman in an infantry battalion. There it became very obvious that the absolute cooperation between officer and man was imperative. It couldn't be otherwise. Nothing would have worked.

So where did you finish up at war's end?

Well, eventually we went up and made landings at Labuan and in Borneo. And the first landing we did which was on an island, the only casualty was unfortunately one of our own men. And you know what shot him? Well, it's a long time ago so it can be talked about. We went in on landing craft - Alligators actually - and which there was a mounted machine-gun manned by an American with a cigar out of its mouth, and he kept firing into the bush as the troops, as the front door was let down, and the troops of course got on the beach and they were to go up in through the scrub and so on, of course, ready to attack. Firing all the time, of course. And one of the machine-gun bullets got one of our own men. And to our great distress there wasn't a Japanese on the island; they'd gone before. They knew what was going to happen. And why didn't they know, because for days on end there been strafing, bombing - aerial bombing - and firing from ships, naval craft out at sea, onto this thing. There was nothing to keep them there. They'd gone.

When you were going ashore, was it suddenly a bit unnerving to feel that you were going to be confronting Japanese?

Ah, ...

Were you armed?

No, no. In training, we went first of all to an island, whose name escapes me now, for training and there we were issued with Red Cross armbands and a revolver. Well, we were told to go round the coast a bit, you know, and have a few potshots with these revolvers so that we knew how to handle them and - I did - and then somebody woke up that it was quite wrong. If we were going to seek the protection of the Geneva Red Cross - which of course everybody thought the Japanese would never recognise anyway, and which they didn't - we should not have a revolver. So the revolvers were taken from us. That is the medical personnel. But there were only four of us and a doctor in the whole battery.

Given the knowledge about the way the Japanese behaved, was that a rather uncomfortable feeling losing the weapon?

No, not really. You've got to remember in the army you're not alone. You're surrounded by people all the time. You have a feeling of security and .... I don't think I ever felt - sometimes at night if things were quiet and so on, the slightest movement, you know, would stir you but this is in the jungle - but, no, I don't ever think I ever felt that I'd be attacked or confronted by a Japanese. In actual fact, I never was.

And, anyway, our next landing - that one, of course, was a big wipe-out - our next landing was on Sarawak from the South China Sea I think we landed there from memory. And that was a completely coastal job. We went in there on, I think we had ducks that time, I remember rightly. We came off landing crafts into ducks, that's right, and then came ashore off them. Well, there we stayed; we never moved. It was by this time that thing, it was looking as though the end was nigh.

Looking back on the whole experience, it seems to have left you with a lot of very positive feelings?

Yes, I regard it as a wonderful experience which I would go through again, although I'm no war hero by any means and I don't like the idea of it and I don't like the idea of it ever happening again. But it was a wonderful experience, no question about that. And strangely enough it was there where the 4th AGH ...

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW