



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Interviewer	Martin, Harry
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Description	Alfred Trevor MacFarlane as a corporal, 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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BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE A.

Identification: side one, tape one of an interview recorded on 23rd September 1990, with Trevor MacFarlane, about the 2/4 Australian General Hospital.

[initial comments missing from tape]

... was she?

Well this was - I suppose our main recollection is of the depression years, too. And there she was a very competent housewife. A very neat and tidy person. She made everything it was possible to make - as I suppose most people did in those times - but even during the depression years, from the old PWMU recipe book, how to make soap, and boot polish, and those sort of things. And Dad had a very big garden there, so I suppose through those years we fared better than most.

How many children in the family?

Just the two, my sister, and myself. She's two years older than I am.

So what are your general feelings about the childhood, was it a difficult period, or, as you've indicated better than most - how better?

Well I think it was better, because part and parcel of being on a station in those days, you got the quarters. And they did kill sheep for themselves, and you got a portion of that meat. We never had to buy meat, and we had a cow, and we had chooks, and we had a big vegetable garden, and a fruit garden. So - and Mum made everything it was possible to make so I suppose we didn't feel the pinch as people who were perhaps on a wage, and certainly people in the city.

Was it a religious family, churchgoing?

Yes, churchgoing. Not deeply religious, but very much a churchgoing family. And involved in things locally. And went out to all the country dances and socials and concerts, and things like that that people entertained themselves with at that time.

What about social and political issue? Was it the sort of family where those sorts of issues were discussed over the dinner-table and so on?

Political issues were, you might say almost a no-no. No one worried about them to that degree in a country town like that. Social issues didn't seem to arise. I suppose there were

prejudices against people who stepped out of line at all, but by and large I think the people then accepted them for what they were.

> With a name like Macfarlane - presumably of Scottish background. How did you see yourselves in the sense that many Australians at the time saw themselves primarily as British, and thought of themselves in those terms?

Not greatly. I mean we were conscious of things Scottish, but there wasn't any nationalism at all about it. My grandfather came out from Scotland, and he came out as an eight-year-old boy, and I can't find the circumstances of that. And Dad used to judge the Highland dancing at the local shows, but apart from that there was no - nothing other than thinking of ourselves as Australian.

> It's not unusual for some Irish and Scottish families to have rather hard feelings about the English, was there any of that?

No, not there. At that time we used to vaguely hear that there were stories of the Irish in - having machine-guns in their convents and things like that, but it was just a sort of prejudice that existed. It wasn't showing up in the country area. In fact when I was going to high school at Hamilton, which was twenty-two mile away and you couldn't drive a horse and buggy each day, so I stayed up in Hamilton. And I used to come home every second weekend by going around the town of Hamilton, and - knowing the numberplates of the few Macarthur cars - and propping beside one until I could get a lift home. And then I'd quite often go back with the priest who came from Hamilton on - to run mass at Macarthur on the Sunday.

> Did that Scottish sense of background give you a very particular sense of identity then?

I think possibly more of later years than then. We were conscious of the fact that we were of Scottish background, but there was no big thing about it, and no sense of, 'I'm Scottish, I'm better, well what are you calling me mingy Mac for?', or something or other like that (laughs).

> Did those sorts of things bite at all, was that a useful irritant if people wanted to get under your skin?

Oh yes, I think we all reacted to irritants when we were young (laughs).

> What about schooling, where did you go to school?

(5.00) I went to school in Macarthur Primary School, to what was then Eighth Grade, and then four years at Hamilton High School. And then that - came away from there in 1934. And there was no work available. In fact, of course, at that time, as a country person, and

pretty naive, the only job I thought that had anything other than ordinary was to be a banker or a school teacher. And they weren't available. So I then came down to the city, and an aunt of mine - her husband had a barber's shop, and he used to be a person in the clothing trade - and he used to have a haircut there, and she induced him that he should take me on as a young worker, because I'd been round all the jobs in the city and got the, 'No, oh no, how old are you son?'. 'Seventeen'. 'Oh no, we can - what have you been - why - where have you been working?' 'I haven't been, I've been doing extra schooling'. 'Oh we can teach anything - anyone - all they need to know.' And of course the older the age the greater the wage, so you didn't get it.

Was it demoralising?

Yes. It was. It was worrying, I suppose, more. But I don't think we were taught, or thinking, how much we were being demoralised then. I think it's fed to you that you are being badly done by, now. But we thought well, it was just a fact of life.

So you were able finally to get a job as a barber's assistant?

No, no.

Sorry.

As a - in the clothing trade, as a - he was running a shirt and pyjama, so I became a cutter with him. And I had a good association right up to his death a couple of years ago, although I didn't work with him all that time. But it was largely due to him that I eventually ended up in the medical unit. Because he said to me one time, 'Look, if I pay the five shillings for you to do the St John's First Aid course, would you go and do it?'. And I did go and do it, and I got hooked on it. And from there I worked into a medical background. And when I enlisted I was taken into a medical unit and that's how it all followed through. And following through from that of course I maintained a big involvement with St John until the - well, up there twenty-five years, on district staff, and ran their officer training course, and their ceremonial parades, and was well-involved in their rescue and mobile nursing training. And ended up being made a knight of the order of St John as a result of that. So it all followed one part of life onto the other.

Hadn't the first world war loomed very much ...?

The second.

No, had the first world war loomed very much as part of your growing up, the tradition of ANZACs, had your members of family gone off to war, and so on?

No, Dad hadn't gone to war. Mum's brother died en route to the Middle East. He had fever on board, and they placed him out on deck, and he got sunstroke and died. But other than that oh, an uncle, he had been a veteran too - but not greatly, there wasn't a great deal done. It was a small town, and they had a service on ANZAC Day, but other than that, no. When I came to the city as a part of St John a must was that - usually - that everyone went on duty on ANZAC Day in case the old fellows collapsed along the march and that sort of thing. But ...

Did that happen at all, the ...?

Oh yes, yes, that was happening, because they, like us, were of varying ages. Some of them, in the thirties, were quite old men, and some of them of course were still reasonably young men because they were able to go off to - this last time, for seventy-five years on [?], so ...

What sort of first aid skills had you acquired by that stage?

Pretty good basic appreciation. They - St John - ran a first aid course, and then they ran what they called a home nursing course, which was a supplement to it. And there we learnt the other skills of caring for a patient as well, in a home situation. And it all again tied into what I was eventually doing.

What led you to do that? Was there a notion of a sense that one had to have a special sense of service, or purpose in life, or what?

I think, yes. I think my boss, he started it off by getting me involved in the first aid course. And then I was meeting people who had a sense of community service and involvement. Some of them had been in it a long, long time then. And then I got in - through that I got involved in the Middle Park Surf Lifesaving Club, if you please. A most inappropriate name for a bayside club. And I was first-aider down there. And, through my mates there, I got involved with the Middle Park School *Young Gazette*, and we ran dances for the school and various things like that, we ...

You had a uniform then, for those sort of weekend functions that you went out representing St John's?

When you went out on St John you were in uniform, yes.

Was that a matter of pleasure, was there a pride in the uniform?

Oh, definitely a pride in the uniform. I think a pride - if you're doing anything that you feel is a worthwhile thing, I - well you wouldn't be doing it unless you had a pride in what you were doing.

(10.00) How old were you when you first got notions that there was trouble looming, that there was war perhaps brewing?

Oh, I suppose from 1936, '37, onward. I would have been then just on twenty. And we realised that well there was lots of talk of war, and a feeling that it must inevitably come. And then, I suppose, late '38, early '39, I think it became fairly inevitable in our minds.

For a lot of young Australians there was a notion of wanting to do your bit, and show your mettle. Was there almost a sense of eagerness to have your chance to go to war?

No, not to have your chance to go to war. But once it started, or became practically inevitable. Then you felt that if it was on you couldn't be out of it. And you wouldn't want to be out of it.

So how did the joining up happen for you?

Well actually, I was an only son, and I knew Mum wouldn't appreciate my joining up. At that time St John members they were also enrolled in voluntary aid detachments, and we received the King's Shilling to keep us on the roll each year. And I more or less let Mum imagine that the VAD part of it transferred us over to the army, and went into Militia at 5 CCS down at - well for the first - for one month before Christmas after war started - we were down at Portsea in the quarantine station cottage, and we were running a camp hospital there for the troops of Point Nepean, and all along the bay they'd come in there to hospital for us. And then in the three months after Christmas we were down at Queenscliff in the cottage by the sea, doing a similar job down there.

That's now run as a holiday camp for so-called 'deprived children'.

Well it was a holiday camp then, and they closed the camp down during the war, and we took it over as a hospital for those three months.

The term, 'The King's Shilling' was there an actual formal handing over of a shilling?

Yes.

An ordinary shilling, or was there some special coin?

No, an ordinary shilling. Just that you had received the king's money so you were part and parcel of his forces.

When you were down at the first posting - at Point Nepean was it- the quarantine station?

Yes.

Yes. What was it like there, how many people, how large was the hospital and so on?

I think we would have had about twenty people in our unit, and there would have been at most about twenty patients I suppose.

With what sort of complaints?

Coughs, colds, accidents and various things like that. Nothing major. But they had to be treated and had to be looked after. And we were doing a lot of other training as well - stretcher-bearing, and getting lectures, and generally brought up to scratch.

What about accommodation. Where did you stay?

We were in tents in that ground. It was a wonderful war at that stage, because we were getting away from there into dances in Portsea and up to Sorrento, and even walked back from Sorrento one night to Point Nepean, and ...

That's a fair hike, how far's that?

I wouldn't have a clue now. It's that long since I've been down there, but I suppose it would be seven or eight mile I should think.

So at least a couple of hours?

Yes.

What about the food standards and so on, how was that?

Oh good. We had an old cook, and he was a very, very shrewd man. He - the army service who delivered our rations - he used to invite them to stay to lunch. So consequently we got the best cuts of meat and everything that were going along (laughs).

And what about the training as a stretcher-bearer, what did that consist of?

Oh, learning the basic routine. I mean you just don't walk along, you have to be walking out of step, and all those sort of things. And what were suitable carriers, and how to properly lift, and how to lower, and .... Among other things they showed us too, was that if you were in a war area and carrying a stretcher, and a flare went up, you didn't go to ground, you just stood where you were, and you were less likely to be seen in those cases. And we had a bit of mapping and how to find our way round, and all the basic skills, I suppose, of a person in an army.

As it turned out was that training good training? Were most of the things you were taught, were they based on good information, or was it - some of it - a bit redundant, and not really very much to the point?

I think it was good, basic training. There weren't all the skills of medical and surgical nursing then that there are now. It was just basics. And I suppose people got better more because of their own natural resistances, than a lot of the things that we swallow now to do so.

What about the actual drill and those sort of things?

Yes, we did our share of drill.

Was it hard drill, were you pushed, or...?

(15.00) We weren't roared at as you see in the TV films now. It was a good practical and you did what you were told, and you were - we were told what if you didn't. But there was no real push about it, but you were .... Well I suppose you were going as to your own pride - that if you were going out and going to be on a parade you wanted to put on the best show, so that you didn't look a lot of dills.

At the back of it I suppose was the possibility if you didn't shape up, or deliberately didn't shape up there were formal army disciplines. What did you understand to be the nature of the sort of disciplinary measures that could be used?

Well it could be confined to barracks for a few days, and what have you like that, which isn't much of a problem, because you weren't getting that much leave. Or it could be up to twenty-eight days in a detention centre. But that didn't happen very often.

With the attractions of dances and young ladies not so far away one might suppose some fellows might find it a bit hard to get back in time. Were there occasional instances where fellows got into trouble for being AWL, but ...?

Not at that period of things, because it was all - as I seem to recollect, and going back through diaries - fairly casual at that time. We seemed to be in and out of camp pretty regularly; so long as we were there to start work the next morning there seemed to be no real worries.

Were you saluting, and was it 'Sir' to all the - the officers or ranks?

Yes. That was definitely so. And that was one of the requirements. But again in a medical unit I suppose the officers may not have been so exacting as they may have been in some administrative unit either, because they'd - again learning the fact of where they stood in the hierarchy as being officers, because they'd been used to working just as doctors.

Were all the men in the - this unit, who were going to be stretcher-bearers, were they all volunteers, or were some appointed into the positions?

Oh, this .... We're still speaking of pre-war, with relation to Militia now, and they were all volunteers, yes.

So you'd actually joined up pre-war?

No, I joined up soon after the war started. But, again to let Mum think that it was an inevitable movement in. And I had gone before war to enlist, and was with - or to enrol with these - and with three of my mates, and I was three years older than any of them. And they got accepted. And they said to me, 'Go home, and get your birth certificate, son', because I was a you know, a babyface, or something or other like that. And I said, 'Well I haven't got one.' 'Well get your Mum to sign it.' I said, 'My Mum's 200 miles away.' So I didn't enlist then, but perhaps if I'd enlisted then I might have had a totally different war anyway, because I'd have been away with the 6th Divvy rather than with the unit I went with, you see. Who knows.

For a lot of young men the notion of actually bearing arms seemed very important. Were there some who wished that perhaps they could move out of stretcher-bearing and become regular soldiers as such?

Not greatly, I don't think. I think the reaction was more the other way, 'Oh, they're only medics. They're only - they're not prepared to bear arms.' But there wasn't any great conscientious objection amongst us. I think we had one conscientious objector with us who was not prepared to bear arms. But I think the others were all fairly complacent about it, so ...

How was the conscientious objector regarded, was he seen as a bit beyond the pale, or ...?

Oh, just a bit of a - a bit funny. But not beyond the pale. There was no intense feeling about it, as apparently occurred in the Vietnam war, and that time.

Were there any regular army soldiers who'd make a point of saying things to him, or ...?

No, no. We had a couple of regulars who .... I think our RSM had been a regular, and one of the administrator officers of the unit but other than that they were all duration people like ourselves.

You mentioned that you were sometimes seen as only medics. Did you get the feeling that there were those who would look at you and saw you as taking some sort of easy option, as getting out of the tough stuff?

There were - until they experienced the need for us. And then .... Well our unit - from our work in the siege of Tobruk - we stand very high with them all, and ...

But before that, did it cut a bit? Was it a bit of a sensitive spot?

I suppose yes. You - well you resented it. But I think we appreciated what our role would be anyway, and that we could take pride in what we were doing and do it well, and do a good job, and we'd have that satisfaction anyway, even if someone didn't think as highly of us as they may have.

How far did that ambivalence go, I .... Would you even get officers who seemed to sort of see the medical people in those sort of terms?

It never became apparent to me, no.

Why were you then moved to Queenscliff?

(20.00) Oh, well at that time those of us who were in Militia, you did a month's camp, and then they decided they'd do a two months' camp. So the first time we went down to Portsea, and the second time we were sent to Queenscliff. And it was just as the army saw their needs at the time. Or maybe after we'd left Portsea the first time they put another unit for two or three months, which meant it wasn't open as a position then, so they put us around on the Queenscliff side.

How were conditions there, much the same?

Oh good, very good. This was just after Christmas, and all the girls and their boyfriends had booked in at Queenscliff holiday places for the Christmas. And their boyfriends were in camp, and there were all the girls in the guesthouses, and the guesthouse proprietors said, 'Can't some of you blokes come down for a party, or for a dance tonight?'. And it was a great war. But not in the sense that that could possibly be construed at this time. But it was a very, very pleasant existence there, and we ...

Can we leave .... Sorry.

... we were looking there .... We'd sit there, having our meal and looking out, and seeing the ships going out through the Heads. And go down for a swim in the afternoon and play a bit of sport, and do our work, and our drill, and our tent-pitching learning, and all our extra training and again look after - we had quite a few injuries there because they were starting to get a bit more active in their training. We had one which we very much thought was a self-inflicted wound, and ...

What sort of wound?

Shot through his hand. He had been a permanent soldier and apparently wasn't prepared to go away. That was their - the contention. We may have been wrong. We had chicken-pox and a few of the other sundry illnesses like that, as well as the ordinary flu, and minor sporting injuries.

Were there any tensions between the young men in uniform and those out at the dances? Did the young women of the time tend to regard a uniform as smart? Were there those sorts of feelings?

Oh, I think it was appreciated, yes.

Did this ever lead to fights between the young men in uniform and those out, who sort of resented them getting off with the girls, or anything of that sort?

Well I think that so many of the young people were already in anyway at that time, and it didn't seem to arise. I suppose the - at that period - the ones in uniform were there and available, we'll say, in Queenscliff, whereas the other blokes were working anyway, so they weren't there. And of course both these places were pretty much army towns, so perhaps it might have been a bit different to - even in peacetime, you know, from - the people were well accustomed to uniforms.

Was there a sense that both Portsea and Queenscliff then were a long way from Melbourne. Did it sort of feel a bit isolated in those terms?

No, not really. I think we got up on a few occasions there. And occasionally had to run someone up to Caulfield Hospital too, and we contrived to have two or three hours spare in between anyway, because I used to board down Middle Park, and go and see the people there en route from either run.

How would you take people down, by truck, or ...?

Ambulance, ambulances.

So how long were you at Queenscliff?

Two months. And that took us through till early March. Yes.

And then?

And then, early May, I convinced Mum that I ought to be in the AIF. And I enlisted early May, and wasn't called up till the end of May, '40. And we went into the Melbourne Town Hall for our examination, and then out to Caulfield for a couple of days, and ...

What did you do at Caulfield?

Well it was just a staging till they could get transport, and one thing and another, to get us to Puckapanyul.

Was that at the racecourse you stayed?

Out at the racecourse, yes.

In tents and so on?

Yes, and they were sleeping up in the stands. We were given great lectures of how to be wary of our valuables, that there were some less than desirable people who had enlisted, and things might get knocked off. And the strong rumour went round there that someone got thrown over the stand who had been caught pinching. So, whether it was true or not we don't know, but - or whether it was just something that was instituted to make sure that no one got any ideas - but we had a couple of days there. Well in fact during those couple of days we were out on leave anyway most of the time. And then we went off up to Puckapunyal. We went over into the camp lines. And June then - nice and cold at Puckapunyal. A few tin huts - no lining. And we froze for a while. And it was amazing, as I say, looking through the diaries today for this, and I found that somewhere down in August I put, 'First hot shower in

Puckapunyal'. So from June to August with cold showers at Puckapunyal was quite an experience (laughs).

(25.00) Did this affect the attitude of the young men. Were they either anxious to get on and go to war, or feeling a bit fed-up?

Oh, I think you knew that once you were in the system you - there's not a great deal you could do about it. You had to live with the system. And we were all aware that supplies and things weren't .... Because we went off in giggle-suits, and giggle-hats, as they called them - like a sort of an overall before we got uniforms. Everything was slow coming through because they just weren't geared up for us. And ...

So how were you spending your time, what was the ratio in terms of drills, as against medical matters?

Well for the first few weeks we weren't doing any medical matters, it was purely drill, and lectures, and how to do it, and what-not-to-dos, and tent-pitching, and more of the same, as before. Stretcher work.

Were you trained in weaponry at all, as a fallback, just in case, or anything like that?

No. No, we had no training in weaponry at all in the medical unit, until we were returning from the Middle East to go into the 'Jap' area, where they started to give us some training, or theory of both weapons and of duties - this type of thing - but what ...

Was that on the basis of known atrocities by the Japanese - the expectation was, well realistically you'd just have to know how to look after yourselves?

Yes. This would have been after Singapore had fallen.

Who was your immediate superior officer at Puckapunyal? Can you recall the people - and the kinds of people they were - who were responsible for your medical group?

Our colonel was Colonel Speirs. He was rapidly known by the troops as 'Darts'.

Did you meet him personally at that time?

Oh yes, we .... He was a very good CO. He looked after his personnel very well. He ...

What do you mean by that? How did he look after them very well?

Well he had been a gynaecologist and apparently he'd had some experience with a family by the name of Cooneys in Gardenvale, who again ran a clothing factory. And they more or less adopted our unit and they used to see that we got quite a few extras in one way and another. And they also organised affairs where they got us water-sterilising equipment for theatre. And they organised that we got a pianola up there at Pucka, and they came up for various trips. And right through the war years - and until many years after, until old Mr Cooney died - we had a good association with that firm. And the same way he seemed to have people to back us up. His officers were .... Well they were all primarily medical men and none of them had any great ideas of what the army was about, you might say, any more than we were. And we just worked as people doing the same sort of job.

Our RSM - well I suppose he was a little bit militaristic to our point of view - but he had his job to do, and I suppose - thinking back on it, and what we see on TV now - we were treated as gentlemen rather than the - what do they call them - 'dumb clots', I suppose you might say, as appears in present TV and films.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.

Identification: This is side two of tape one of the interview recorded on 23rd September, 1990, with Trevor Macfarlane, about 2/4th Australian General Hospital.

What do you mean when you say the Regimental Sergeant-Major was seen as a bit more militaristic? Did you - he give you drills that you thought weren't needed, and ...?

Oh, he was directly responsible for all discipline, so he had to be the man who talked discipline to us and made us realise that what he said he meant, and if we were told to do something, well we did it. And that was .... I suppose in that way he was fairly different to most of the others in the unit, because he'd had that background beforehand, and he knew what he was about.

Did this notion of being medics, and therefore having the soft option, was this one that you'd feel a bit more keenly alongside regular army fellows at Puckapunyal?

Well, we were only over in that area for a couple of weeks. And then we started to move over into the camp hospital, because the Pucka Throat epidemic had started so we lost - left - a lot of our army training, and became practically straight away, ward orderlies and nursing

orderlies. So we again got over into our own area. And the people that were in there needed us, so we didn't get much - anything at all - other than appreciation for what we were doing.

Were you then a ward or nursing orderly?

At that stage a ward orderly, for a start, and then moved to nursing orderly.

So what were the sorts of things you were doing?

Oh well, temperatures and records of temperature, pulse and respiration. We didn't actually, I suppose, keep the records. Washing patients, and seeing to their general comfort, and making beds, and keeping the area clean. Pans and bottles, and those - general care of a patient as confined to a bed.

What was the relationship with the medical staff, say between doctors and the orderlies, and nurses and the orderlies? Was there a difference in manner, would doctors order, would nurses ask, was there that sort of difference?

No, I wasn't conscious of any reactions like that. It would be .... I suppose even then we weren't 'Private So-and-So', we were 'Mac', or whatever. And we would call them 'Sir', or 'Sister'. But there was no real stress on, 'I am an officer, therefore you will', or anything like that I think.

But how would it work, would somebody say, 'Mac, go and do this', or 'Mac, would you', I mean what was the relationship in those sort of terms?

It was usually the 'will you'. It was the normal politeness of the home life carried out into services. Because they .... I don't suppose they even thought that anything else was expected of them.

On the other hand doctors used to be almost a separate people in the sense of the authority that society conferred upon them. They were seen as ...

Exalted.

Yes. Did they bear themselves in that way?

Oh yes. Well they didn't bear themselves in that way - I think it was society's appreciation of them, rather than their own appreciation of themselves. I don't think any of them would .... Well I suppose if they had started to act like that, we would very soon have put them down at the bottom of the list, rather than at the top of the list. And we had none of that [sic]

problems with us. We had a great team of men, both in their professional skills, and in their personalities.

Were the nurses' matrons seen in the same sort of light, or not quite the same exalted rank in a sense?

Not the same exalted rank - but pretty high up. They were perhaps, as is common with the nursing - or was common with the nursing services at that time - that they were possibly more regimented than any other part of civilian life. You know, their respect for their matron or their charge sister, and what they did, and what they didn't do - and perhaps more concerned with giving an order, rather than an asking.

Would any of the young men who were working as orderlies perhaps entertain the possibility of romancing the nurses, or was that just somehow accepted as something that wasn't possible any more?

(5.00) That was out of bounds. They were as officers and we were as the other ranks. So it was definitely not on, particularly at that stage of the war. I think there were a few instances later on, where things loosened up in that respect, but it was all done very, very discreetly, and no one much was aware of it. Nurses were invited to officers' do's, I suppose, whereas we wouldn't have been invited to any of those sort of things.

Did that feel a bit hurtful in a way, that somehow you weren't, you know, what you could offer wasn't regarded highly enough?

I don't think so. I don't think we felt any exception in it at all, because we were .... Well I suppose we were busy and we had - outside our working hours - we had plenty of other things we could do, without worrying about trying to get into that situation anyway.

What other sort of things?

Well we could go into .... From Pucka we could go into Seymour for pictures and the dances, or go and play sport, or go and just have a few noggins in the canteen. And there were camp concerts came through repeatedly there. In fact I had a very jealous night on my behalf at one stage there. The Parker Sisters - I don't know if - most people wouldn't remember them, but they were on the lines of the Andrews Sisters, and very popular at the time, and I'd known them from my work down at the beach club. And they appeared on stage, and I waved to them, and they said, 'Hey, Trevor', and all the boys, said, 'Ah, beauty', and I think they were jealous of me for months after (laughs).

You weren't able to meet them, and go out with them though?

Couldn't go out with them, they were only up for the concert that night, but we went backstage and had supper with them. And they were very nice girls, and ...

> With any group of young men, inevitably you'll get the odd one who in a way might be a total larrikin - they just can't abide authority. Did you have fellows like that?

Oh yes, we had fellows like that. We had fellows that drank too much, and .... But they were accepted, they fitted in reasonably well. We had a few went AWL from - overstayed their leave, or something or other like that, and had a bit of punishment, but it wasn't serious. Again I think people felt that, well, they'd enlisted, they'd taken it upon themselves, and there was a war on, and they were going to have to do their bit, seeing as they'd started. And they should just wear it with the best grace possible.

> Had you by this stage formed any particular friendships - fellows that were particular mates?

Oh, I don't know of any particular mates, but we were all a pretty close-knit community.

> Was it beginning to sort of change you at all, in the sense that now you're with a group of young men who - more inclined to drink, to expand a bit, in terms of your - how you lived, and behaved?

Not greatly. I think again the family I'd come from, and been involved in, it was .... There was no great pressure to do so, so never, I suppose you might say, stepped out of line. I had .... I ...

> Did you ever get drunk on social occasions, or have that sort of experience as a young man, as is common for most young men, I suppose?

I had a beer or two, but I don't think I was ever drunk at that stage of life.

> Did you ever incur the displeasure of any officers during that period of training, and so on?

I got told by a corporal once that I should have been court-martialled. We were putting in, I don't know how much a week from our army pay, with the intent that before we went for overseas we were going to have a big bust-up in Seymour - or wherever from. And then about three weeks before this was due to happen they said, 'Oh no, we won't do that, we'll save it till we come back from overseas'. So a few of them were pretty grizzly about it, and I suppose I was probably more loudmouthed than others, and this bloke said, 'Oh, you're breaking army regulations, and you must accept an order, and you should be court-martialled',

and all that sort of thing. But in the event we had a unit meeting, and we had our bust-up before we went overseas.

What was the nature of the bust-up?

Oh, it was - the women of Seymour put on a beautiful dinner for us. And just some beer, and drinks, and soft drinks, and what have you like that. It was nothing great I suppose, but it was just a formal farewell I suppose, in other respects. But we felt strongly that if we were going overseas there were ones who were entitled to be in that nice do, who may not be with us when we came back.

With that sort of expectation, were there young fellows who felt that maybe a few larks at the officers' expense might be a good thing to try, were there ...?

Oh, not really. I suppose it was more the sergeants they tried it on. We - in the last few weeks we had, when we were doing nothing else - we had a few basketball games, and the men, and against the sergeants, became quite a - a staunch effort. But, no spite about it, but when it was all over ...

But willing.

Yes, (laughs) willing.

How serious was Pucka Throat?

It was a big epidemic. We were very, very busy with it. And we had the mumps epidemics there. It was a disabling thing, I think. I copped it, because we were nursing them, and I think I was in bed for seven days, and ...

You got it yourself?

Yes, and the same with mumps. I hadn't had mumps before, and I was in, I think for about seven days with that too.

How well were you looked after as a patient, how did you find the experience?

Oh good, yes. It was a .... We did have a couple of tin wards and wooden wards at Pucka, and then the rest were in extending marquees for wards. And in the mud of Pucka that was quite an experience. But .... And then we had the isolation ward, which was also the VD ward. And we didn't feel too happy being over there with mumps as - while - with VD at the other end of the wards. But I don't think anyone got any cross-infections.

What were the sorts of treatments for VD then? Because there've been some fairly primitive, almost tortuous sorts of things used for VD treatment. There was one that involved a kind of umbrella for scraping the urethra that I understand was pretty painful. And then gravity-fed flushes, and so on. Were they - those sorts of things - used?

No, the - it was just a - injections of - what was it? Mercury, I think, a mercury injection. Type of - a mercury type of thing. Not as we understand mercury in a thermometer. There was another one I think, 606, which was the 606th experiment to find something that was successful, and it got that name. They were - most of them were not of a syphilitic nature - and they were more amenable to treatment than the syphilis-type infection.

So it was more gonorrhea, and ...?

Yes, yes.

How did men wear this? Were .... Did they tend to wear it as a badge of honour, or was there a sense of shame associated with it?

I think you can go to both extremes there.

Well so for most of them?

No, I'd say it'd be pretty much .... Well I think more would be rather they hadn't had it, than be wearing it as a badge of honour.

What about the medical staff, was there a tendency to sort of adopt a rather judgemental role. That these fellows had got what they damn well deserve, and sort of carry that through in their manner?

I don't think so. There may have been some who held that view, but I don't think they would have made it too aware to the patient.

With lectures then on the topic then of sex hygiene, how was it conveyed? Was it done in a way to try and frighten the life out of people, so that they'd, you know (laughs), be effective that way, or was it done in a fairly rational and sensible way?

I think it was done as very much a frightening exercise, I suppose you might say. But again that was the total community acceptance of speaking of it too at that time. And I don't think that. Well I suppose there are some that it did effect in that way, but I think we more or less, I suppose took it as a big laugh. Because we weren't going out as people are led to believe, to

go out to have a one-night stand, that was sort of something that came out of the blue if anyone was so lucky. But there's not the present standard of thought of going out for a night out.

During the Vietnam war there were rumours of people being sent off with incurable VD to islands where they would never be allowed to return to Australia, and so on. Did you get similar sorts of rumours, that there were some particularly perilous forms of VD, that it would drop off, or things of that nature?

Not really, no, no. I wonder perhaps of course whether, being a medical unit, they gave us a talk-down rather than a talk-up, because they realised we would have our own training to tell us what the dangers and the story was. Whereas if they went just to a fighting unit who rarely got a medical lecture, or didn't know much of infection, and what have you like that, that they would have to treat it in a different manner there.

How did orderlies feel about working in the VD ward, was there a sense at all, that, oh, it's a place you'd rather not be?

I don't know. I was never working over there, so I didn't have much appreciation of it. As I say the only time I was over there I was working in the mumps ward for a while - that's when I got the mumps - but I wasn't actually in the VD ward.

With mumps, and Pucka Throat, were there any actually died of complications associated with either of those?

Not direct complications that I'm aware of. Mumps - I don't think I've heard of deaths relating from mumps, really. And Pucka Throat - we had a few old chaps in the units at that time, and I'm again not conscious of deaths from it.

When did you first hear then, that you were going to be moved, you were heading off overseas?

(15.00) Oh well, it was wishful thinking for months of course. But I suppose it would be in late October, in 1940, we started to really get itchy feet, and started to get tin hats equipped, and gas lectures, and various things like that, and we thought, 'Oh well, it's getting closer'. But again we'd been there what we felt so long then, that we were getting doubtful that we'd ever get away before it was all over.

So how were you formally advised that you were off?

Well our nearest formal advice was when your final leave will commence - November, yes. And then we were back for two or three weeks. And then we had another couple of days at home -I was able to get home. And in that time we knew then it was very, very close.

Were your parents anxious?

Yes, naturally, yes. I went home in November on final leave. And on the first of December we had our Christmas dinner, because we knew pretty well that I wouldn't be home for Christmas dinner that year. And so ...

Was that a sobering sort of feeling for you?

Yes. And also, I suppose, sobering because of realising how Mum and Dad must be feeling. And my sister of course. But I think we had the adventure coming up, whereas they just knew that we were going off, and I might never come back again.

The departure was supposed to be a secret one, or relatively one; but obviously it wasn't. Did your parents come down and see you off?

No, no, it was quite a major trip down there in those days. And again they didn't know - we didn't know to a near enough date that they could make arrangements. But in and around, any of the city people I think, the train line from Essendon to Port Melbourne was lined with good wishers, and unit banners being held up, and all sorts of things like that.

Did you go on the *Mauretania*?

Yes.

What about the boarding and so on, was it an emotional moment, as finally they were all aboard, and started to move out?

Yes, very. I think naturally the Auld Lang Syne, and Maori's Farewell were sung by thousands, both on the shore and that, as she moved out. But it was an emotional scene.

What about the billeting in the ship, where were you placed?

Oh, we were in three-berth cabins, and with five people in them, and oh, it was a beautiful army troopship at that stage. They did take all the fittings and that out of it later on. But we did well.

It was your first trip to sea?

Yes.

Did you get seasick?

Not then. But much later, when we were on another part, of which we'll probably touch later on. But ...

So the voyage across to Fremantle for you wasn't one that was associated with discomfort? (Laughs).

No. We used to have concerts on deck every night. And there was a pipeband from the 2/8th Field Ambulance, they were on board. And we were down somewhere off Tassie on New Year's Eve, and they marched through the ship, and with pipes blaring, and we reckoned every sub from Perth to Sydney would be able to hear it. But ...

What other sorts of things did you do on the trip to Fremantle?

They had boxing tournaments, they had lectures of course and we had to do PT, and have a certain number of circuits of the deck - marching - to keep us fit. And there was a canteen of course. You know, a canteen both open for drinks at a certain time and other times bingo, and various card games - illegal card games. Crown and Anchor and what have you going on there. Two-up in a corner. In fact they .... Our old CO, when we were en route further in the *Mauretania*, going to Colombo, he came up on deck and they were playing Crown and Anchor. And he threw the Crown and Anchor overboard, and he was pretty near likely to go over himself, only a few others came around him.

What was Crown and Anchor?

It's a gambling game, and you put your money on the crown and the anchor, and there were a couple of other symbols like that, but it was just a variation of it.

What was the general attitude towards this form of gambling, would officers tend to turn a blind eye, or were there rigourous attempts to stamp it out?

The old CO had pretty strong views on it, but other than that I don't think there were any. And I think his sense of it was there to protect people who might otherwise lose all the little money they did have. And I don't think it was because he thought gambling was basically bad, but it meant that there was a chance that people would lose what money they had, and also that they might then be induced to do some stealing to have enough to do something else.

Did any of that in fact happen?

Not that we were aware of. But again and you get .... I suppose there must have been a few thousand on board the *Maure*, and you don't hear much other than in your own little corner anyway.

Who were the sorts of people who organised the gambling, were they people - sort of heavy guys - who saw good opportunities to get a bit of money, or was it all pretty spontaneous, and ...?

(20.00) Oh, I think they were smart guys, you might say, rather than heavies. And possibly folks who ran two-up schools anyway in civvy life, and ran the same sort of games in civvy life, which were also illegal in civvy life, and they just carried out their normal day-to-day activities.

What about the canteen? There was a ration as to beer, you could have a couple a day, or how did it work?

It was rationed, yes. I can't remember what the number were now, but again that could be got round if you wanted to, because they'd say, 'Oh, you're not drinking, Mac. Oh, can I have your two tickets?', or whatever. You know, it could be got round. By and large it was pretty self-regulating though.

What about Fremantle? How did you - had a day off in Fremantle, what did you do with your time?

Went in and around the town, and I suppose again had a few beers, and chatted up the locals, and there wasn't much else to do, I suppose, you could think of anyway. They wouldn't .... Pictures or anything we wouldn't have bothered about, but, because we were off the ship and we were just walking about, and I suppose being almost touristy you might say.

Did you have films on board ship? Were there training films, or that sort of thing?

I think we had some training films, I wasn't conscious of any other films now, that I can recollect.

And so from there you went to Colombo?

Yes. We arrived in Colombo, and we had a couple of trips ashore around there, and then we transferred to a ship called the *Nevasa*. And it was a very rude awakening. We were .... Little bunks and terrible meals, and what have you, after what we had had. In fact up on the

deck rails some of the previous occupants had carved, 'Hell Ship', and things like this. But it was. It was a rude awakening from what we'd had.

What about your time in Colombo, what did you do there?

Again the touristy things I think, and tried to buy some souvenirs, and ....

Was it exciting, a sense of being in an exotic place, and that sort of thing?

Oh, very much so, yes. And we got a trip a fair bit out of the town as well, and we went around there, and of course saw ourselves in rickshaws, and things like that, and did all the - I suppose the usual things that you'd expect tourists to do. And went to the - oh no, it wasn't, it was when we came back we went to the pictures there. But I don't think there was anything very different we did, apart from being in a native area. But again it was a different native area to what we'd experienced because practically everyone spoke English anyway. And it was a beautiful place at that time.

With the unloading of the *Mauretania*, and then the *Nevasa*, did you have to participate in the loading, or unloading and loading?

No, no, we weren't involved in that. Well I wasn't anyway. And I don't know, I suppose the quartermaster staff would have been involved in checking and what have you, but I don't think the physical part of it was done by any members of our unit.

So a transfer to the rude *Nevasa*, so to speak, how was the voyage itself?

Oh, pretty good, but the surprising thing, we were a medical unit onboard with others, and we got the guard duty down in the ship. What we were supposed to do we didn't know. We had a stick in our hand and we were walking around through the ship at night, just keeping an eye on things. But I don't know whether it was just to give us some sense of purpose or not. But I always remember that - being in the forepart of the ship - there on my own in the middle of the night, and thinking, 'Well if a mine hit this I'd be in a pretty nasty spot, wouldn't I?' But, you know, it was a romantic notion I suppose because way out in the middle of the ocean it was a most unlikely thing to strike anyway.

What sort of stick was it? Who would give you the stick?

Just like a bit of broom handle. I don't know what we were supposed to do with it (laughs).

Was there any pilfering at all, or were there fellows interested in trying to knock off extra rations, all that sort of thing?

I don't think anyone was that keen on the rations (laughs). That was .... Yes.

So what about disembarkation, how did that go?

We arrived at Port Tewfik. And then we found we couldn't go through the canal because the night we arrived there'd been an air-raid along the canal, and they dropped mines in the canal, so we disembarked in, at Tewfik. And then went by train through Cairo, around through Alexandria, and to Abd El Kader, which was where there was - a hospital had supposedly been built for us to staff. It was out in the bare, real, desert sand and we were in tents there, and we just were doing some training, and again to keep us busy, and out of problems, while they eventually decided that we wouldn't be needed at Abd El Kader anyway. And - because the war had moved that quickly up the desert - that we would have to get further up the desert. Perhaps if I could come back to to one thing I neglected to mention?

(25.00) Mmm.

While we were at Puckapunyal several of us were sent down to St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne. And we were to get extra training there, and go round the wards, and through the theatres and there .... And we had a real good eye of the sort of things we may be treating and it was really a great experience, and everyone was so very, very kind to us. And again we were living out in billets - well I was living at Middle Park with the people I boarded with pre-war, and we had a great war.

When you say you were able to see the sorts of things you may be treating, were there wounded soldiers who had returned, or were these injury victims, or ...?

Oh, just injury victims, and people in plasters, and manipulation of - and in other sicknesses to what we had been aware of. General how a working hospital really ran - I suppose that was the main thing we gained out of it. And a better appreciation, because there we had a pretty closed society, I suppose, up in Pucka. And it was just a camp hospital here you were working, where there there was more equipment available.

How were you seen, was there a sense that you were perhaps regarded with a bit more respect in your capacity as a medical orderly out of the army, when you were at the hospital?

Oh yes. We had a great relationship with the teaching nuns, and the ward sisters, and the nurses there. It was .... And they were all only too anxious to try and give us any skills that we could possibly accept.

Did the notion of teaching nuns seems a bit quaint?

It was a bit of a surprise. But again we had had some contact with it, or I had had some contact with it pre-war, by - I suppose by just visiting friends in there and it wasn't as great a shock as it might have been.

Were there any men given to the occasional blasphemy or utterance that came out and embarrassed them in front of the nuns?

No, I think they respected them, and just made sure that they didn't offend. I think it was a natural thing at the time.

At Port Tewfik were you still a private?

Yes. In fact I never got beyond corporal, because if I had gone beyond corporal there was no establishment, as they call it, to remain in theatre. So by the time I got to corporal I was well involved in theatre and I stayed as corporal for the remainder of the time for that reason.

You enjoyed that work?

I loved it. You felt you were really doing something very worthwhile. And an immediate result, I suppose you might say. And it is still a great fascination.

Did you see any wounded while you were at Port Tewfik?

No. It was very much just an Arab town and a disembarkation point to us. And we didn't see anything of Tewfik itself I suppose, other than off the boat, onto a lighter, onto the train, and away.

Had you been briefed just immediately before landing as to what your relations might be with the local people?

We had those sort of lectures coming across. And, you know, what their beliefs and their values were. And what we should and shouldn't do, and where we should and shouldn't go. And how we should look after ourselves too, and not go anywhere where we put ourselves at risk, too.

How were the Arab people generally regarded then, was it ...?

END TAPE ONE, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE A.

Identification: this is side One, tape two, of an interview recorded on 23rd September, 1990, with Trevor MacFarlane, about the 2/4th Australian General Hospital.

Did you get to meet any Arabs at all who obviously were a sort of person that challenged your presumptions about the nature of Arab people? That, 'Oh, these are the people we call wogs, but - ', you know?

No, we didn't have enough real contact with them. It was just wandering around the streets, but we were never in homes, or at events, because we were only in on day-leave to there, and I suppose we were again just tourist-type attitude to the place. And had no opportunity to mingle, other than with the people in the shops who were, in our mind, out to fleece us.

You would have met British troops and officers by this stage, I suppose?

British troops we met but of course we didn't get to the exalted British officer, because they were a race apart from their men. Not like our officers - they weren't as approachable. And I think they had the idea that the colonials weren't going to salute them anyway, and if they could keep out of the way they wouldn't be embarrassed by not being saluted.

Did you salute them?

If we had occasion to formally approach them. Otherwise we didn't. In fact later when we were in Jerusalem we used to play the game that if a British officer was walking down, and he had something in his right hand we'd salute him, but if he didn't, we'd cross over to the other side of the street (laughs). But, you know, it was a fun thing more than a really serious thing. But I don't think they were terribly appreciative of our sense of fun.

How did you get on with the British troops?

Oh great. We had the greatest respect for them, and found them very easy to get on with. They had different attitudes on some things to us, but again most of them ...

What sort of differences?

Well most of those were professional soldiers. They had been all along, I suppose. And they'd been in the desert, they'd been here, they'd been everywhere. And they spoke their own language, their own community, you might say. And I suppose in those days the famous 'F' word wasn't used amongst us greatly. But everything was then, 'Oh the fooker: the fooker this, the fooker that.' And again that sort of put them in a totally different category to us. Not because we looked down on it, but just because it seemed so strange to our outlook.

We like to think of Australian disrespect for authority as being something healthy, and showing our independence. Of course to other people it might be seen as being terribly slack, and lacking discipline. What was the impression you got as to the way the British saw you?

Oh, the British other ranks, they thought it was great that we were able to do this sort of thing and get away with it. And I suppose the British officers thought of us as rude colonials.

So from Port Tewfik you went on the *Knight of Malta*?

No, that was from Alexandria.

Sorry.

From Port Tewfik we went round through Cairo, Alexandria, to Abd El Kader. And then from Abd El Kader we went on the *Knight of Malta*, that would be late February, '41, yes.

That was pretty crowded?

It was only a small ship, it's a 1500 tonner. In fact I've got her ship's flag, and I've got her articles from Lloyds here at home. And we went on board there late afternoon, and they gave us a tin of goldfish - that's herrings in tomato sauce - and some dry biscuits, and we were going to ration ourselves. We were supposed to arrive in Bardia the next morning. And we went out of the harbour and the greatest storm ever for years, they reckoned the sloop that was escorting us didn't survive. And, the third morning after, we ran aground, about four o'clock in the morning, beyond Bardia. And fortunately in the only sandy cove for miles in either direction. And we abandoned ship at about six-thirty in the morning.

Had you been asleep at the time when it ...?

Off and on. Well we'd been put in the hold originally, and then got soaking in water. And we'd ended up for a while in the cruise quarters - we had to be two in a bunk to stay there. And then we got back into the lounges, and we rolled everywhere, and broke all the furniture. And - through vomit, and orange peels, and things like that, and I ...

(5.00) Did you get sick?

Yes, there I certainly did. And I've never liked herrings in tomato sauce since then (laughs). And then I got sleeping in one of the lengthwise gangways, which - it meant you couldn't roll so far one way, but you could go a nice direction one end to the other. So it was an experience I wouldn't like to go through again. All the outside stairways and that were broken. In fact I nearly went overboard there. We were moving across and got a big swell,

and those capes that we had in the army, they flew up over my head, and my hat went off, and I made a grab for the stairs, and got through, but ...

Did you lose your hat?

Yes.

Did that present you with any problems?

Not really, because of having .... It might have I suppose had the ship survived the storm. But as it was we - everyone - had to get most of their equipment replaced anyway - personal equipment. It had either been vomited over, or through someone else's vomit, or through seawater and what have you.

As it became clear that the ship was in real trouble, what was the feeling aboard?

Well when it hit the bottom they said, 'Oh thank God she's on firm land' (laughs). And then we .... They could just get one lifeboat working and they had a long rope on that, and they took that ashore, and a rope the other end, and they'd pull it backwards and forward to get us all through. And as the waves do, they eventually put a suction under the ship, and she got in when it was low tide to quite close to the shore. One lifeboat load overturned, but no one was lost.

What was the feeling? Was there .... The fact that by then it was dawn and you could see the shore, was that enough to be reassuring that, well there was no real personal danger?

Yes, when we could see the shore and knew just where we were, we realised we - it was just a matter of time then, we'd be okay. We went over in the lifeboats and put just what we could put in our pockets, and everything else stayed on board. And got ashore. And they threw some tins of rations over, which washed in, and organised a meal. We slept there that night on the beach and then the next day we walked fourteen miles - about twenty-two k I suppose - to the road. Of course we had to orientate [sic] ourselves too - that we were north of the equator then, and that we were going south, rather than when .... Here I suppose we would have been thinking of going north to get back to the road. But it was a good long walk across there - particularly as all of us had been so seasick. And when we hit the road a truck came by and took the news into Bardia, and they sent trucks out, and picked us up there. Took us in there, and the British troops opted out of their own beds, and gave us beds, and meals, and looked after us no end. Went back the next day, and started unloading, and they took every door and every mattress off the ship, to make a roadway over the sand, and unloaded all our gear.

Was that hard work?

Yes, it was hard work. I only had a day of it, though. And that included a pianola we'd brought from Australia, that Cooneys' had given us. And the story of that one of course is that when they were loading our, packing our medical stores down in Melbourne before we left, they'd packed this in a big case marked 'X-ray equipment'. And the man in charge of stores there, who was supervising our men, he said, 'You know, some of these units have got a cheek', he said, 'one lot last week were trying to take, oh, some minor comfort, big thing, over there'. And here he is leaning on our pianola at the same time, saying this, and telling us how bad the others were.

(Laughs). Did you lose personal effects on the *Knight of Malta* that you valued?

Not greatly, no. Our stuff came off it, and we dried it out, and mostly it was alright. We got .... Possibly the only thing was new uniforms and things like that, that we needed. I suppose we might have lost minor things, but nothing great. Anyone with their illegal cameras made sure they looked after those, and got them off with them in their pocket in the first instance anyway.

Were cameras illegal, any camera?

Oh, yes, definitely. Cameras, diaries and all those sort of things were illegal. But by and large we - everyone that wanted one had one.

Was this known, and again a blind eye turned to it, or ...?

A little bit of both. I think if you were discreet you didn't invoke any wrath, but if you ...

Did you have a camera?

I had a camera, yes.

What sort?

Oh, I don't know what it was now. It was only a cheap little camera, that I could sling round my neck, and it would .... And I could open up my shirt button and take ones where I shouldn't be taking things, and what have you like that. But it was a very ordinary camera, not a good one.

What sort of things were you taking? Did you have a sense of wanting to record in a systematic way some overview of what you were doing, and where, or was it just what took your fancy?

(10.00) Oh both. But by and large I wanted really a history of where we'd been, and what we'd done.

Did it work out reasonably well in those terms?

Pretty well. I suppose I've got about 1500 photos some of them - some not my own, for the five years.

Were you ever caught, or spotted with it?

Yes. When we came home here we went up through Albury, and we went out to have a look at the Hume Weir, and the old and bold who were guarding the Hume Weir confiscated my camera, for taking photos. And then told me where I could go into Albury, and buy a detailed story of how many tonnes of cement and size and everything else of the whole thing. And I didn't get my camera back then until we were up in Redbank, and I'd been over on the *Manunda* to Moresby, so I missed good photos of that trip.

So after the abandoning of the *Knight of Malta* I gather there were a lot of Italian supplies that were found?

When we got stationed in Tobruk we got onto a lot of Italian medical supplies. And they were of magnificent standard. Everything that opens and shuts, you might say, for the period. And the main thing - that we didn't realise the full import of at the time - was that they had their dressings and: they were packed in paper packages, and neatly as you'd see on the shelves now, and recently I read an article saying that these paper package things shouldn't be used after six months after sterilisation. And here was stuff that had been out in the desert for quite some time and we were using it for - just undoing the package and using it straight into an operating wound, whereas here you apparently you couldn't think of doing that without resterilising it.

Did it in fact have adverse consequences?

No. No adverse consequences. And it certainly made our job a lot easier.

Your own dressings would be prone to get filled with sand, would they?

Well we weren't aware of the fact that they weren't remaining sterile, now. And this is just recent publicity in the safety manual, I think, that I read, stating that it should be done in this other way, because the treatment wasn't adequate.

Was sand a problem with your own dressings?

No, no. Sand didn't physically didn't get into them. They were sand-proof you might say, but apparently they reckoned that they weren't germ-proof.

I gather there was quite a bit of wine found, as well as dressings?

Yes. Oh there were - on the battlefield - there were guns and everything all around there, available. The only thing that you had to be careful was what these they called the 'moneybox' hand grenades - were a little tiny hand grenade. They wouldn't cause anything like a Mills grenade would but they would blow a hand off, or - and the Arab kids of course picked them up, and lost hands and things like that, too.

These were what were referred to as the Red devils were they?

Yes, yes. Well the Red devil was a little bit more substantial than the moneybox one.

What was the Red devil then?

It was more like a little bomb-shape thing, with a more solid case. But it was the same idea that it was a - they could be left as a booby trap. In fact one of our boys - he was our first casualty. We were scratching around through the battlefield and he walked over a blanket or something or other, and one of these little ones went off and he caught some minor shrapnel where he would prefer not to have caught it, but it didn't cause him any total effect.

Did you have any friends along the way who were killed or wounded by booby traps?

Not by booby traps, no. It wasn't .... The ones that were killed were the ones in air raids in Tobruk.

How long did it take you to get set up then in Tobruk?

Well first of all we went from Bardia. We went up to Tobruk. Of course there .... By that time it had long been captured by the 6th Divvy and the war was up beyond Benghazi. And we staged there a day. And then through there, and then we went on to Barce. And that's an Italians' one, up near Benghazi. And it was a beautiful spot. It was an Italian colony and

beautiful solid houses, and what had appealed to us was avenues of gum trees. And we started opening the hospital there in an old barracks. We worked for about fifteen days. And someone walked into the hospital one morning and said, 'What are you people doing here?' And we were gone in two days. A rapid pack-up and in what they called the Benghazi Handicap, trip back to Tobruk.

Had you begun to treat patients there though?

Yes, we had begun to treat patients. We didn't have our sisters. Our sisters were still back in El Kantara, which is on the Suez Canal. And we were working as an all-male hospital. And doing things that would have been frowned upon, had the sisters been present. We had to do injections, and we had to do a lancing of things, and all sorts of extra activities that you wouldn't do when - in a proper medical situation.

(15.00) Were there any serious war wounds there?

Oh yes. Yes. We were getting them back from the front, which was quite a fair way up. We had a man with us - he was then Corporal McLagan and later Sergeant McLagan - and he was a rarity in those days, he was a male SRN - male sister. And he .... We found out he's topped every examination all the way through. But he had us organised there. He was part of our training you might say - a big part of it. All our doctors were good in training in that respect too, because they knew what was happening. And Mac was running a little theatre there, and he could so organise it that he could work on his own. Now normally you .... If you've got a sterile person you've got a scout running around, but he had himself organised so the whole lot could be done. And he did a wonderful job there. We had three other experienced people with us who had been dressers in their - as they called them - in 'cas ward' of the Alfred Hospital prewar, but the rest of us were .... I suppose I, being St John-orientated, was possibly more trained than most of them when we first went into the unit.

Male nurses often, even now, still tend to be regarded as - with a bit of humour, as perhaps being a little bit suspicious as far as their sexuality is concerned. Was this male nurse subject to that sort of attitude?

No. You couldn't possibly get any such attitude from Mac. He was just one of the best. I think the attitudes are starting to die out now for the male nurses here. But it .... I now realise how much it was, for a start, a problem.

Well when you then did finally get set up in Tobruk, when did you first start to work in theatre?

Oh, after about three weeks I suppose. When we came back, we came back into Tobruk, and it was pretty much a rushed trip. And then the sisters were already there and they'd started working. We were officially a 600-bed hospital. I think they had about 500 patients at that time. And then, when the perimeter closed, the army decided that it wasn't a right place for

women with a siege coming on. And they chased them out, much against their wishes, and against our CO's wishes. And - well some of them went from bottle orderlies to theatre sister overnight, as we say. But I was working a pretty acute surgical ward on my own at night for a while, I think. And then got into theatre. And then after a couple of weeks in there I scrubbed for my first job, which, you know, that's other than acting as a scout and general dogsbody around the place.

So when you scrubbed for your first job, what did you then do?

Well you were assisting the surgeon. We'd have a surgeon, and one of us, and an anaesthetist. And in some cases we were doing jobs that they'd have eight or ten round a hospital - an operating table - for now.

Was it at all worrying? Did you worry about whether or not your own level of expertise was up to the responsibility?

No. To a great degree we felt it was so sensible and wondered what all the mystique was about. It was a matter of concentration and thinking. And I found the greatest thing was to know your anatomy, and think of what the possible area was, and you would .... And in nursing training they used to say, 'You'll have twelve of this forcep, and five of that', or something or other. But we just thought, 'Oh yes, well they're going to work there, that's a pretty bloody area, so we'll need a lot more Spencer Wells haemostats', and things like that, and work out our - set up our table accordingly to what we knew of our anatomy.

Were there any orderlies who found that the nature of surgery was such that they couldn't take it, or didn't want to take it?

Well I suppose anyone who was that, if they suggested those come over, they'd only be in there for the first few hours and they'd have probably not come back, so we weren't really. I was never conscious of anyone like that. We were conscious on a couple of occasions that - when we got some reinforcements later on - that they came to the door of the theatre - it was just before lunchtime - and we were working there, and looked up casually and saw them. And then we were sitting beside them at lunch and they expressed their views against working in operating theatres, so we told them all the gory details, and they shot through for their lunch (laughs). But it was a fun ...

Were you sometimes asked to sew up - if you'd had operations that were long, and then the sewing up part were not so difficult?

Well, off the record, we did do some minor operations. We'd say, 'Sarge, can we do that?', and ...

What sort of things?

(20.00) Oh, they might have been just the removal of foreign bodies, and various small things like that. A bit of suturing. We gave injections. We had one young doctor come into us one time. And we had a .... How we organised there, once we got really into things and we did have up to 1100 patients by this time, and they would come - be wounded and put on a stretcher out at their regimental aid post - they'd come in by ambulance to us. Whereas in the normal army channel they went through an advance dressing station, a main dressing station, a CCS, and then arrived at a base hospital, as we were classified. They'd come straight to us. Anyone that needed operation we put into a pre-op ward, and we'd have a - oh, about a fifty-by-thirty ward there, with about twenty stretcher trestles in it - and we'd put these same stretchers on top of those. And we'd go along and chalk on the floor or a doctor would come along, 'Priority, one, two, three'. And then they'd be just fed into theatre in that rotation. Well someone in that ward would say, 'Right, he'll be going to theatre probably in another ten minutes, so we'll give him his pre-op morphine, and atropine', and we'd just do it as a routine, without any - being told to.

And this young doctor came in, and he said - we knew a bloke was in theatre, and Tex was one of our rough nuts and he said to Tex, 'This man had morphine and atropine?'. 'Yes, sir.' 'Who gave it to him?' 'I did.' 'Who told you to?' 'No one.' So he eventually I think talked to the other doctors after, and they soon filled him in on this. But from there you'd have your one to fifteen probably in priority for theatre, and then another ambulance-load'd come in, and you'd probably .... Someone would go along there, and wipe out half those numbers and substitute others and put their priority. In fact at one stage I've got a note that for the first time in three days - we were working shifts of course - an operation was finished in the theatres and there wasn't one waiting to come in. And there was a whole three-day period we did close the theatre morning and night, for a - perhaps an odd time. To have a bit of a general clean-up and restock. But it was a continuous operation.

> Where you carried out occasional small surgical procedures yourself, were they with local anaesthetic, or full anaesthetic, or ...?

They would have been mostly under full anaesthetic because we didn't want the patients to know.

> No, I was wondering if any of them protested.

No, I don't think so. But it was a very unofficial thing. And it was a very wise part of training, I suppose, because we were all there with the .... We were having more air raids than Malta there. And we were all very conscious that anything could go wrong and a surgeon might be glad that someone else could carry on.

> Where were you when the first bombing took place that was close enough to suddenly feel you might be hit?

We were ... Well the first .... The bombing was continuous, you might say. And of course we were aware that we might be hit, but the actual time we were first hit, we were over having our tea in the mess and we heard them go down. And we scattered everywhere to where they were, and picked up, and started feeding them into the pre-op ward, and dealing with the situation.

Did you have occasions where you'd be in theatre where the bombing would start and you'd have to make a decision whether you'd continue or abandon the operation?

We continued. There was no point in stopping. The more you would be in the middle of an operation, so what's the point in stopping. And then the others were in the pre-op ward, they could be hit in there, so you didn't know where they would be hit, so you may as well keep on working.

Was it a matter of your mind being so focussed on what you were doing that in a way it would push the possibility of personal injury out of your mind, or was there an underlying sense of anxiety at the same time?

I suppose you had an underlying appreciation of what could happen. But I think again you realised there was no point in doing anything about it, because, if it was going to happen, it was going to happen, and there was nowhere you could go to get away from it, and it just had to be endured.

Was all the bombing daylight, or did you have night bombing as well?

Both. Pretty continuous. We had high level and dive-bombing by the Stukas. We were, oh, 150 yards from Tobruk harbour, which was - had to be - supplied by the navy of course, and patients evacuated through that. And it was a vital thing, so they'd bomb the - particularly the Stukas - would bomb the harbour, from dive-bombing. They'd shoot down over the harbour and they'd fly beside the hospital, that low that you could tell if the pilot had a cigarette in his mouth at all - using the hospital for cover. And the ack-ack guns were on the hill behind us. Well they were too close down to them for them to be very effective. And ...

So they did that purposely to evade the ack-ack?

Yes. And then they'd go low on the other side of the hill, which was where we had our medical tented beach hospital, and they'd use that for cover to get out to sea.

If they were that close did you ever have a sense of eye contact, or wave, or anybody wave at you, was there that sense?

You had a definite sense of eye contact, you know, if you weren't working, and you were in the quarters at the back, and looking out there, you'd get a sense of eye contact. As I say, you could tell if he had a cigarette in his mouth, and I .... No one bothered waving. They were too intent, I suppose, to see us, whereas we saw them.

Were there blackouts at all during these night operations?

Oh yes. We had blackout screens everywhere, in fact ...

No, I'm sorry, did you have power failures, I meant?

(25.00) No, we had a power generator of our own of course, which we worked on. A bloke by the name of Geoff Morley - Norley - he was from the - a previous SEC man, and he ran an electric generator right through the siege there. And that was, ran our lighting and our X-ray, and everything that needed to be run.

As the casualties were coming in, were there adequate supplies of painkillers, and so on, or were you getting men who were coming in, just screaming in pain, and ...?

Oh no, we had adequate supplies of all those sort of things. Talking of painkiller, our operation set-up couldn't have happened if at that time they hadn't started using pentothal sodium anaesthetic. That was one that was called the truth drug at one stage. But it was an absolute beauty of an anaesthetic. In fact, the old drunks woke up drunk from it, and happy. But there were no nursing them through their post-op sickness and vomiting and that, that happened with ether and chloroform anaesthetics. So without that we .... Our job would have been immeasurably - almost impossible, you might say.

Would you have instances where you'd get some people who seemed there'd be no hope for them, would pull through, and others who looked to have every chance, would just slip away, you'd lose them?

I suppose working in theatre we weren't as conscious of that as in the wards. In the wards they were more conscious of it. We had one interesting experience there - a young Indian. We had to operate on him, and he had some shrapnel or something around his lower abdomen. And naturally we wanted to shave, and when we tried to remove his garments to shave, of course that was the greatest impossibility so far as a Hindu was concerned. So they said, 'Oh well we'll get him under anaesthetic, and we can do the shave then'. So they got him under anaesthetic, and the - he said, 'Oh, I think you're right now'. When he took his pants down, he died. And we reckoned it was his shame. Because that was his religion, and he was somehow conscious of it, and he just went.

How did you handle the sight of continuing flow of young men with bodies in varying states of trauma, from mild to substantial, or major? Did it get to you at all?

No. I think because you felt that you were able to do something for them. And that was it. If you had been unable to do anything I think it would get at you more. And the fact that you knew you were going to do something, and he was going to go from you in a better state than when he came in - that was what made it possible.

With people being sedated - and once a body is opened up, and it's essentially a carcase, and flesh, and meat - do you, was there ever that sense of detachment, that somehow it just became so routine in that period of continuing work, that you'd almost lose sight of the fact that they were people?

No. No way. Nothing at all like that. In fact one thing I always think of now, when they speak of it, is having held a beating heart in my hand, and I think that's something that makes you reflect on the fact, and think of it always as a person.

How did that happen, what was that instance?

Well we were doing some chest surgery, and I think the surgeon said, 'Oh, want to feel a beating heart, Mac?', and that was it. So it was done. Again these officers ...

What did it mean to you at the time, I mean what ...? Can you recall what your sense of that was?

Well we were always .... All our theory was of course that the heart was the essence of all things, and just to actually think, 'Here is someone's beating heart, and there I'm holding it, and if it stopped, he's gone'. And I think it made you more aware of people, as people than just as what could possibly eventually be just a body.

And the patient survived?

Yes. Well he survived from theatre. Then we .... Again we wouldn't know what happened when he went to the ward. But it was possibly nothing that may have been killing in that respect - there was no actual injuries to the heart at the time on that one. But we were inside the chest area, so that was the .... But, as I say, the doctors would use every opportunity to educate us. And when they were operating they would go through their *Gray's Anatomy* book that they learnt as students. And they'd be talking of the origin and the insertion of muscles, and the veins and that. And apparently they always do that to maintain their detailed anatomy in their mind. It was interesting to us to think of them doing it, though.

(30.00) Did it lead you to suppose that maybe when this was all over you'd like to become a doctor?

I would have loved to have become a doctor. In fact finishing up with the doctor that we did finish up with from 2/4th AGH in the surgical team. He eventually moved to Hamilton Hospital, which is near Macarthur, and he was - I suppose I'd better mark this as not to go on outside this tape - and he was eventually sparking with the daughter of the station Dad worked on. And we used to .... The cows used to be milked up at home, and they'd come up and get butter, and milk, and cream from there.

Is ...

END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE.

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO.

Identification: this is side two of tape two of the interview recorded on 23rd September, 1990, with Trevor Macfarlane, about the 2/4th Australian General Hospital.

Sorry.

And Mrs Cardy, of the station, she came up there one time, post-war, when I was up home, with both our young boys. And she said, 'I believe, Trevor, you should have been a doctor'. And I said, 'What gives you that idea?'. She said, 'Oh Doctor So-and-so was saying that you should have been'. And I said, 'I would love to have been'. She said, 'Would you still want to be?'. I said, there was no way I could possibly think of doing it. I said I'd got a family now, and I'd have to go back and - even to start the very barest of Latin, which was even, not done at our high school. And one thing .... And we spoke along these lines. And she surprised me by saying, 'I would be prepared to sponsor you if you would'. And I said, 'Look, thanks very much, but I don't think I could possibly think of it, because I wouldn't be happy just to be a doctor. I'd want to do surgery.' By this time I was in my thirties, and before I got where I wanted to be I'd have been in my forties, so it was an impossible dream, I suppose you might say. But again that shows the family feeling there was through that station, and our family.

Did you get involved in X-ray procedures at all?

Yes. We had a great X-ray man, a Dr Tommy Tyrer - a wonderful gentleman. He would take us down there of an evening in Tobruk, and he'd say, 'Right, now, today's X-rays', and he'd put them up there, and explain X-rays to us, and, you know, get us interested in our anatomy in that way.

And then when I was at Townsville I did a little bit of work in the X-ray department. But again I got back into theatre, and stayed in that.

> It seems that the way X-rays were used, and the amount of X-raying that was necessary for the people who were actually responsible for the procedures were far beyond the levels of what was thought to be safe. Was there a concern at all at the time?

Well we knew vaguely that it wasn't safe, but Tommy Tyrer, he took the attitude that all these blokes were there because of the risks they took, and in treating them well we just had to be prepared to take risks ourselves. In fact, when I think of the number of times we stood over that fluoroscopic screen, and operated to remove foreign bodies that we couldn't find, it's amazing that none of us got any bad results from it.

Do you know of anybody that's known to have had some adverse consequences?

Well one of our young men who worked in that X-ray, and then went to work at X-ray over at Bardia, he died at a young age, but I've no idea of what he died from. So I - but I don't think so. Glenn Carroll, who was the assistant, he died only two years ago. And so we weren't aware of anything like that. The man who took over from Tommy Tyrer, up at Redbank, he had very strong views about it, and he made sure that all the things were followed to the letter.

> What about mental health. Were there many men who were coming into hospital with nerves, or breakdown or such?

We had a good psychiatrist - Dr Alec Sinclair - who died only a couple of years ago. He was a wonderful man and he had quite a lot of patients there. They used to put them in what they called Z Ward, which was a concrete tunnel in under all the ack-ack guns. But it was .... There were people who had nervous breakdowns, or whatever you choose to call them. There wasn't the same stigma on them as there was in world war one.

> Why is that do you think?

Difference in community attitudes, I think. And against that it was the stiff British upper lip, and everyone had to be brave and all that sort of thing in world war one. Whereas I think people were more acceptable [sic] of the frailties of human nature.

> How would they be treated, what was the usual sort of procedure?

Well mostly counselling. And the counselling may be done under sedation, to get it, get an impression over to people, rather than anything else. Dr Alec Sinclair was very down to earth about his trade.

(5.00) When we were at Townsville he came in there at one stage, and he found me reading some psychiatry book. And he said, 'Put that bloody rubbish away, Mac, will you'. And I said, 'Why?', and he said, 'You'll end up self-analysing yourself, and then you'll be making allowances for the fact that you're making allowances, and you'll end up round the twist' (laughs).

VD again was to become a serious problem in Tobruk. At one point 4.8 per cent was the incidence of VD. Was there a consciousness about VD?

I wasn't even aware that there was any there. In fact I don't know how they got it, unless they brought it with them.

Well perhaps that was a bit later on, was it?

We didn't see a woman for eight months.

Mmm. Well maybe that was Palestine, and Jerusalem (laughs).

Well that may be likely. But certainly not in Tobruk. It wasn't acquired there, if they did (laughs).

I see. What about dental health? Australians at the time generally probably didn't have a very high level of dental health. Were you involved at all in dental care?

We had a .... Our chief dentist was Professor Amies. And he was again a pretty wonderful man, too. And he looked after us all very well. Our dental health was generally bad, but he did a lot of work, of course, on it there, and we worked a few times with him in theatre on facio-maxillary jobs. In one of which he .... Our patients were evacuated by sea of course, and we had to wire jaws on occasion, and Alexandria sent up word that the jaws were not being wired tight enough.

With what effect?

Well if they were seasick on the way down they died, because they couldn't vomit through it. And so he used to do them loose. In fact, he would even take out a tooth at times so that there was some way of clearing an airway if a patient vomited in transit on ship.

Did you have any problems of, with regard dental health at all while you were there?

Not there, no. I had some tooth work done while we were at Puckapunyal before we went away, but I don't think I had anything then till possibly post-war.

Just how effective could some of these reconstructions be, where people's faces were badly damaged?

Well that was a long term job, and one we didn't have anything to do with. They were evacuated to Alexandria, of course, from us initially. And then they would go to specialised facio-maxillary units. And, well, from all reports the results were wonderful in most cases. And it depended on the actual amount of injury in the first place, but ...

Well what would be the sorts of short-term things that would be done in the operating theatre, if a person had, say, substantial head injuries, maybe part of the jaw smashed and lost, eyes missing, or nose, or ear or whatever?

Oh, well just to make it as clean and free of infection as possible, and to allow - make it firm enough to withstand travel - and to allow nature to take its course until they got back where more work could be done. That's the same in civvy life now. You .... The immediate work isn't done, or the main work isn't done immediately as regards the end result.

What were the expectations though between the time you'd do that first handwork, and then to a point where there could be something done on a longer term basis?

Well some of them, I suppose, would be getting some more specialised work within two or three weeks. And it would depend again on the nature. Some of them they have to allow quite a long spell for things to heal before they can start carving around again to do anything else. And this ...

Well ...

... When we got back to Jerusalem we went in working with a British army hospital to take over from them. And they had a facio-maxillary and plastic surgery ward there, which was very interesting nursing, because we found people with a lump of their stomach coming out, and attached to their arm. And once that grew onto the arm, they would cut it away from the stomach, and they would move the arm perhaps up onto the head. And they would attach that tube of flesh to the head, and cut it. And once it took on a blood supply there, they would detach it from the arm, and then they would spread it where it was needed on that original entry site. And that was the nature of plastic surgery at that time.

Were infections much of a problem?

Not greatly. We had a wonderful result up the desert. Whether partly it was the lack of contaminants in the air - although it had been an old Arab town - or the lack of other humanity around other than ourselves, but - or whether it was just good technique. We'll say it's good technique (laughs).

What's the delay between that primary operation, and then the availability of later treatments, such that you'd be having to make decisions, say, to amputate because of the time lapse?

(10.00) No. I think the decision to amputate was on the fact that, the same fact that they would do in a public hospital here now - in our experience there. If it was someone at the front-line, they may have to do an emergency one, because they thought there was no point in trying to transport that limb in with the person - it was definitely going to have to come off there. And they thought, well maybe better to do this immediately rather than later. But by and large, from our point of view, it was just an ordinary surgical decision.

In civilian life, without the pressure of war, there are mishaps, there might be a sponge left in an abdominal cavity, or something of that sort. Were the pressures such that there were things just went wrong, sadly, because of the pressure to - build-up of patients, and so on?

Not that I'm aware of. I think we had an excellent record. We never got any complaints that we, I heard back from base, of anyone having to be opened up, because of these sort of things. No, we've got a record we can be proud of.

Did you ever see people on the operating table that you'd wonder, 'God, are they going to get through?', and then later find them, and run into them, and see them recovering, and well?

Not that I can definitely recall. But I can still meet people in the street, and they say, 'Oh you were in theatre when they operated on me in Tobruk'. You know. I've got no recollection of them of course, because they're just a face that passed in a short time; but they of course took a great interest in us. For their .... To make sure who was going to handle them I guess.

Could this have given the nature of your wartime experiences a very different sort of dimension. One meets a lot of men who've been through the other side of war, who've been in the killing and shooting side, for whom it's been a very considerable trauma, almost it's got worse as time has gone on. Has yours, because it was involved in that creative, saving side, left you with a very different feeling about the whole experience?

A totally different feeling. I look on it as the most wonderful experience that it was possible to have had. Again, not purely from a selfish point of view, but from the point of that - what we were able to do for other people.

> What was the feeling at the time of evacuation from Tobruk, in October of 1941?

Disappointment. Because some of the troops had gone out, and we thought, 'Oh, we're going to be right through'. And we went out about a month before it was relieved. And the 13th Battalion were the only ones who stayed in, because there was a bombing in the area they were supposed to go out from, and they couldn't catch the destroyer. But they went right through the siege. But we'd love to have had that honour and prestige of being right through but it wasn't to be. And I suppose, when we were on the ship, and on our way out, we were damn glad to get out of it. But by and large it was .... We were - well we were proud of it. It was the first time the German Army had been stopped in that world war.

> Was there a sense of relief, in the sense that while you were there, just dealing with things on a day to day basis there was perhaps a build-up of tension that you weren't - wasn't apparent until you'd actually got away?

Yes. I think that's a fair assumption. In fact I think the one thing that stands most in my mind was eventually when we got back to Australia - which would have been nearly two years later - sitting in the Capitol Theatre and they were showing some war things, and they showed the dive-bombers of Tobruk. And I suddenly realised I was cringing down in my seat. And at the time I wasn't perhaps so conscious of it. And I thought, 'Well, you know, it's been more than we acknowledge'.

> When you got back to Palestine, and then Jerusalem, of course the nurses were there, and that would have altered again, very dramatically, the sort of work you were doing. Were - how did you feel about that?

Well I think they had a great respect for what we had done up the desert. And I think we had a better than usual relationship between the nurses and the male orderlies, for want of a better word. And I think that they treated us with that respect. And I suppose we missed taking some of the responsibility we had taken. But again, I suppose, in .... While we were in Jerusalem we were that busy enjoying a bit of civvy life as well again. And then when we went to Colombo again, I got away with an all-male unit that went up the bush behind Galle, in case the road was cut by the Japanese, so I didn't work that much with the sisters there. And then, as I say, I left them at Redbank, very shortly after. So I suppose by and large .... But the relationship is still very, very great between the whole group.

> And when you got back to Palestine and Jerusalem then, what sort of things were you doing, recreationally, that were ...?

We were having some sport. In fact we learnt to play soccer and a few things like that. And then I got involved - I used to play table tennis pre-war. And we found the big YMCA in Jerusalem was a good spot for that, and used to go over there and play table tennis pretty often.

(15.00) And we used to go down to the cafes, and they all had a band, and they had their girls there for dancing. And for those who wanted them for other purposes. And we used to just socialise I suppose there. And one night we went .... We heard there was a dance for NCOs only. And we had first been given temporary rank of corporals in Tobruk, because of the extra work we were doing. When we came out they took this off us. So we were all privates. So we put up stripes, and went to this dance. And we .... It was a Jewish community thing and we found that there was - grog was there. And so we ended up with a couple of card tables almost full of bottles, I suppose you'd say. And two of our men walked in. Captain Barnet, who we were a bit doubtful of because he'd been a regular and was our quartermaster, and Tommy Tyrer, who we knew was alright, and a couple of the sisters. And we thought, 'Oh, we're gone'. And walked over, and Tommy said, 'Where'd you get the grog, boys?', and we told him, and then they came back and we had a wonderful night with them. But next day I was walking down the street in Jerusalem on leave, and I thought, 'Oh my God, I'm not a corporal'. Took them off in the middle of the street (laughs).

What could have been the consequences?

I suppose you'd have got a pretty severe reprimand. If anyone had caught it. You know, because you were disobeying regulations. You were putting up stripes that you weren't entitled to, that would be the only thing.

Did you go back into theatre, were you doing hospital work in ...?

Firstly in Jerusalem I was working in the plastic surgery ward while the British were still there, and then I was working in theatre, and in surgical wards.

Were you then able to do, or were you allowed to do, rather more than you had, previous to your Tobruk experience?

Yes, I think we were. I think more than .... I think we were given other duties that we wouldn't normally have received.

What was the feeling when news came about Japan, and then the attacks on Darwin, and the sweep south?

Well I think we all had a desire that we ought to be home now. But again we realised that possibly there was no reason other than sentimental that we should be. Because there were probably people there who could do the job. And we had our .... There was no way all our

troops were going to be moved out, so we had, were needed for their purposes anyway. They wouldn't have survived in a British Army hospital.

Was there a feeling at all that Australia was in imminent danger of being taken, did you sort of have that sense?

Yes. I think when Pearl Harbour was so heavily bombed we could see no reason they couldn't island-hop down. And we knew that really our services' numbers are pitiful compared to what any other country can put in the field. We thought with our three divisions we were doing good, and here's someone else moving, fifteen, twenty, up to ninety divisions around. So we realised we were only small potatoes, you might say, in numbers of men available to do anything.

With Christmas at hand, and having had in - in the earlier part of your life some sense of a religious background, did Jerusalem mean anything in particular to you?

We went around all the sights. Perhaps it became a bit hackneyed to us, because each of the religions were saying, or each of the different churches were saying, 'Oh this is the one real spot'. And I think I rather offended Mum, because I sent two photos home, one of the garden tomb, and one of the Church of the Holy Sephulcre, and said that this is one of several spots that they claim are the true resurrection site. And I think it probably hit her hard in that respect. But it was a fact of life, that it was so very commercialised there that you lost some of the faith of what it was all about.

I suppose many men confronted with the intensity of the experience of seeing very terrible injuries, and death, and danger to their own lives might either become very religious, or engage more in black humour? Which way did you go? Or a bit of both, perhaps?

I suppose more to the black humour, I think it was the only way to accept it at the time, because you didn't want too many challenges. I think that again I'd had a couple of experiences in Tobruk, and I'd rather hoped these weren't put out too publicly. And the day our hospital was first bombed, we had four of our own people killed, and over - well Rupe Goodman in his book quotes thirty patients killed, and we heard at the time about a hundred, and I recently received a copy of the old CO's report, and he talks of about a hundred killed or missing - and we were taking these back and forth over to theatre. And I was carrying one - helping carry one bloke over. And he was calling out, 'Padre, padre, padre'. And one padre came over, turned his dead meat tag over, and said, 'He's not one of mine'.

(20.00) And went on. Now that boy wouldn't have known what religion he was. And that hit me a bit hard. And at a later stage another padre - I had to organise some church services there - and he .... I went there, I'd been on a couple of occasions, and missed for a long time, and this bloke said to me, he says, 'Oh, here's Mac, he's an air raid Christian, just

comes along when there's - air raids are bad'. And I said, 'You, you so-and-so', I said. 'It's the only time I'm here, when the air raids are not bad, because I'm too busy in theatre.' And I said, 'You're first in the shelter and last one out'. Well those two things have made religion a pretty private thing to me since. I don't accept anyone's valuations, apart from my own.

You said before that when you went to Ceylon that you went out the other side of Colombo. What was that about, what happened?

Well we arrived at Colombo when the air raids were on for - pre-Japanese invasion as was thought. And we opened up our hospital in the town. And then they decided that with a possible invasion down the south or the west of, east of the island, that it would be very difficult to evacuate patients to us. So they decided they'd open up a small hospital down in behind Galle. And this was on a tea plantation. We took over the superintendent's bungalow as a hospital and theatre. And we took over the assistant superintendent's bungalow as quarters. I suppose about twenty of us went down there as an all-male hospital, and we were doing operations, and general full nursing down there. In fact we were rather cock-a-hoop, because we had one bloke come in with peritonitis down there, and we saved him, and at the same time they had one down in Colombo, and they lost him. So we were pretty cock-a-hoop.

So you were again acting doing the sort of work that a nurse would normally be doing.

Yes, operating theatre nurse.

How long were you there?

Oh, we were about six months, I think. In Ceylon - down in the bush. We were only down there for about three months and then they decided there was no likelihood of the invasion, and we - we came back then. We had a good trip round the country though. They reckoned it creates a different impression amongst possible spies. They'd keep moving people round the country to make them think there were more troops than there were. So we had a six-day bivouac right around parts of Ceylon and had a wonderful view of all the scenic spots, and what have you like that. It was good.

How were you getting on for money? What was the nature of the pay, and just what kind of lifestyle could you enjoy with what you were getting?

Pay was six shillings a day. Six shillings is sixty cents, I suppose, but I suppose an average worker at that time would've been getting probably five pounds to seven pounds, I suppose, which would be about twenty times that amount. You were being fed. You were being clothed. You had nowhere much to go that you couldn't hitchhike for. I suppose you had your beer and had an odd admission to a theatre or something. There wasn't a great deal that you needed to spend money on. We managed alright. When we came up later of course the

British Tommies thought we were living on clover, because they were getting much less. And when we came up against the Yanks, we thought they were living on clover, and we were the hard-done-by ones. But, by and large it was no problem. In fact we mostly all put through some allotment to home anyway. Which might have been, you know, only a few shillings here and there, but it was money in those days.

When you got back to Australia, and with the changes that were apparent, and the number of Americans who were around, with - who, as you say, were relatively rich - what was the feeling, what was your feeling about the Americans?

Oh, a necessary evil, I guess. If they had stopped telling us how good they were we might have got on better.

Did you get involved in any fights, or friends involved in any fights with Americans?

I didn't, but there were some who did. And we were in Brisbane when those riots were on in which a few people were shot on both sides. It was fairly well concealed, but it is now a fact of history there was a big riot in there. Individually they were alright, collectively I think the British attitude was - what was it - 'Overpaid, overfed, oversexed, and over here'.

There were also suggestions there were quite a few broken jaw injuries round that time. Do - were you involved in ...?

I wasn't personally involved, but there were quite a few, and there were a few while we were at Townsville too. And the story of repute that there was one bloke in one of the battalions who was - how he got in the army on a height basis no one knew. But a fight started in a pub in Townsville, and his mates lifted him up on the bar, and he was walking up and down the bar, and hitting the Yanks on the head with an empty pot. But there were some quite good brawls there. And in Brisbane, and, I suppose, in most other places that we didn't hear of.

(25.00) Given that ugly side that is always there in the capacity of people to act in a mean, and even vicious way, did you get close to any nasty or unpleasant sorts of things, apart from the war, during your war years?

No. I don't really think so. One exception I took was when we were on the American LST, going for Balikpapan. We were sitting up on deck one night, and we were just talking. And this Yank was talking to us, and he says, 'Say, Aussie, what do you think of the Limeys?'. And we said, 'Oh they're - we reckon they're great, you know. We were with them in the Middle East, and they're great.' And he says, 'I hate the bastards', he says, 'If America declared war on England tomorrow, I'd be first to enlist'. And we said, 'You, you bastards, you didn't come in this until you got your asses kicked by the Japs'. And that was about the most open expression that I had found of the American dislike for Britain.

There was a suggestion that at Redbank there were Italian POWs in some instances in hospital alongside Tobruk patients. Did you ever encounter that circumstance?

No, not in - well, as I say, I wasn't at Redbank for long. Because we arrived there, and within three days, I think, a mate and I, we replaced two of the *Manunda* staff who had got crook, and we went up to Moresby, to pick up patients - or to take the sisters up for the hospital at Moresby, and to go round to Milne Bay and bring back a load of wounded. And then we were only back a few days, and I went off then to Townsville, with Dicky Lee.

With the nature of the tropical climate in New Guinea, and - did - were there real problems there amongst the wounded, as far as infections were concerned, were you aware of it?

Well we weren't working amongst them in New Guinea, until after the war. Because on the way home I stopped over in Lae for a few months and we were doing clean-up surgery before they came home. But that was a civilised period, I suppose, but out in the lines they would have had a lot of problems I'm sure.

Did you have anything to do with the returning POWs?

I didn't, no. The ones who went to Labuan did. What we did have from New Guinea was while we were at Townsville we were a staging hospital for the wounded coming back from New Guinea. And some of them had some pretty infected set-ups. But so did .... We had some... To go back to Tobruk we had occasions there when people had a plaster on the arm, and we'd be tending to evacuate them, and we'd sometimes bring them over to theatre, and take that plaster off, and replace it, for the consciousness of the sisters back in base. And Dicky Lee - they were mostly orthopaedic ones - and he'd say, 'Oh that's great, they've got maggots'. And of course maggots will only eat dead flesh. And they were at one stage breeding - in the Spanish Civil War - breeding sterile maggots, so that they could put them to clean up pustulent orthopaedic wounds. And so he'd hate having to take it off, just because there were a few maggots in the wound. And you would also get what they called plaster soup, which was a very, very smelly exudation from wounds. And we had a few of those come in and - to Townsville. And on one occasion we had about twenty blokes brought in from New Guinea, and they had a few MPs, who had been up to the islands, and they were throwing a lot of - that's the only place I think we had a lot of yak at us about being base wallahs, and working back in there - and anyway Dicky Lee our CO and surgeon he looked them over, and he said - there were the three Macs, there was McLagan, MacFarlane, McConnell, and Max Efrom - 'You blokes can clean these up, can't you? If you want to know anything, come and see me.' So we said, 'Righto', and we went off, and we were cleaning them up. And the MPs, we took one in, and - oh, these were Jap prisoners, sorry, that came in - and the MPs said, 'Oh well, you take him in there'. We said, 'No, we're base wallahs, we can't look after fighting men'. So we made them come into theatre with us, and of course as soon as we opened up a plaster with a plaster soup, well the MPs knew we were the strongest. And they shot through. And anyway we cleaned these up and they went on

their merry way, but it was again probably the only open criticism we had during the war, of being base wallahs.

So when you were demobilised, the war was over, what were your feelings, at that moment, about what it had all meant?

(30.00) Well I think a pride at what we'd done. And that - I think that was the greatest feeling. That it was over, we could get back to normal living. And I suppose we realised to a degree that there were going to be some, a lot of problems, and big changes to our thinking, because of what we'd - how we'd had to think during those years. And I had my job to go back to. My boss had maintained a contact right throughout, and I was welcome to go back there, I didn't have a worry in that respect. And I had the place to go to, and stay in ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.

END OF INTERVIEW.