ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: CARL BROMWICH - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE - SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: CARL BROMWICH

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD RAXWORTHY

SUMMARY:

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: We are at the Australian War Memorial and recording the oral history of the 9th Australian Field Ambulance. This is tape 74 for the purposes of the ambulances numbers. The time is 2.45 and the date is 5.3.1991. We are in the War Memorial Studio.

And I'll ask you first Carl Bromwich: where were you born and when?

I was born in Portland, New South Wales in 1919.

Did you grow up around there?

Yes, I grew up until I was fifteen and I left Portland.

You went to school there?

I completed my schooling there, yes.

Was it a small school or large school?

Well it went to what they called intermediate high school in those days, which was I guess for a country school it was a reasonable size.

What was your father, what did he do?

He worked in the cement works.

And what sort of influence do you think you got from him as a child and later, do you think?

Well, I certainly learnt to be obedient if I learnt nothing else. No, he'd been a powerful influence in my life and I give him full marks for being perhaps a bit tough in what I considered to be tough times.

Was there any religious influence from your mother on any of you?

Well, certainly, more from my mother's side than my father's side, my father was a Roman Catholic but not practising. My mother came from Tasmania and she was what we call Church of England in those days and certainly I grew up in a Church of England way.

Any political influence in the family?

No real dominating political influence, my father, I guess he would have been an ALP supporter by nature but no strong political bias in the family.

Were you interested in sport as a child?

Yes, I played a considerable amount of sport. We always swam because we used to walk out to our big dam out there at Pipers Flat. But also I played a tremendous amount of tennis and I represented the school at rugby league.

What sort of subjects did you like or dislike at school?

Well, I didn't like languages, if I can put it that way, I always seemed to get into trouble with the French and Latin portion so I stuck principally to the English, history, mathematics and general subjects like geography and ...

Anything you particularly disliked, apart from the languages?

No I can't say I disliked any other subject. I obviously wasn't bent on the language direction or the teachers couldn't convince me I had bents in that direction and we parted company.

Any influences in your life at school do you think particularly?

I suppose the greatest influence would have been the headmaster, John B. Ireland, he was a man who later went to Lithgow. But he seemed to have that balance between ... of toughness in the sense where it was necessary but he also if you had a legitimate reason to go to him he was very fair in his assessment of the situation. A very talented guider of people's faith and I think he did a lot ... the young people that went through him owe him a debt of gratitude for where they ended up in life.

As a young person in your school days, was there much recreation for youngsters around the area?

Not much organised because we grew up ... my final years ended up in the depression years, of course, where there wasn't much money so you tended to have to make your ... first of all your enjoyment came in your family where you tried to make the most of the little that you had. And then anything else was more or less organised by people who had you purely and simply at heart because there was no money anywhere in those days.

Your father keep on in work during the depression did he?

No, we were on the ... we experienced the dole, the queuing up, of sugar bags full of hand outs of bread and onions and spuds all been thrown into the one bag. And then he went out doing alluvial gold mining, he used to walk out about four and a half miles each morning and do a hard days yakka and then walk back four and a half miles of a night. And we did that in our school holidays.

So, what did you do when you left school?

When I left school we moved - that coincided with a move to Sydney. And I started off in a millinery warehouse - ladies hats. Jobs were pretty short at that time and you were glad to get hold of a job, so I started off my first job with a pound a week in a millinery warehouse.

I suppose you couldn't skylark around the place in those days and there wasn't much money to do anything with?

No, there wasn't much money to skylark around. Your main ... my main recreation came out of youth club activity and at the Anglican Church at Enfield in Sydney ...

That's where you lived around there is it?

Yes, that was our first move and ...

And where did you work?

I worked in York Street in the city.

And did you get the train in or what?

Got the train in, used to walk up to the cross roads there at Ashfield - Burwood direction and then catch the tram to Burwood and train into the city.

So what was your next job, did you stay there until the war ...?

No, I ... that place went broke eventually and I ended up in the factory side of the millinery game, with doing what they call hatblocking, which was a steam process where shaped hoods that came into you in very elementary shape form and you turned them into different shapes and that sort of thing. And I worked there until the war.

Well, did you like the work or was it boring?

No, the work I didn't like but it was I guess a situation of where we were contributing to the upkeep at home and you tended to cling on to what you had rather than trying to make changes and perhaps in a situation where it wasn't easy to get employment.

Before the war did you have to do any compulsory military service of any sort?

No, no my first compulsory training was the citizens military forces.

Well wasn't that compulsory military training?

Well, it was compulsory in the sense that you were called up but that was only a once the war started that the call up came at about ...

And where did you go first?

Ingleburn.

And straight into the 9th Australian Field Ambulance or not?

Yes, separate course for citizens military forces unit and so we were drafted straight to that.

And what sort of training did you do out there?

Just the ... because we were in the field side of it a terrible amount of marching and drill and parade ground drill and bush exercises, carrying stretches over all sorts of terrains and things like that.

Did they have the horses there then?

Yes, they had the horse line there then, yes.

Were you involved in that at all?

No, no I kept away from them, they weren't my particular hobby. No the old horse lines under Matt Nolan and crowd, they were there over on the rise.

Who was the commanding officer, do you remember?

Yes, Colonel Whitridge Davies.

What was his nickname?

I forget what they used to call him now.

Do you remember his horse's names?

No, I can't remember his horse's name.

I've got a bit of a picture there of him as on his horse and he doesn't ...

No ...

Can you remember any stories about him?

Well, I can remember he was a grand old fellow sort of thing, the very old school, medical man, the Sydney University, very likable person. But he used to have one failing and that was his Coopers beer of any evening and I can remember on more than

one occasion when we were orderly corporal or whatever it was, getting a call from the mess to come and get him and take him back to his tent and then you'd ... to his hut. And then you'd have to wait for him to divest himself of his clothes and make sure he got into bed and didn't crash anywhere and then you got permission from him to leave. But you didn't leave until you got dismissed by him. And the only ... one night I can remember very vividly in that it was a very cold night and he had one of the old kerosene heaters with the little loop thing that stood up very high and he used to strip himself off bollocky naked and then he'd stand and warm himself and this night he must have been more full than others and he swayed and he dropped his cods on the top of the kerosene stove and poor old fellow I never felt so sorry for anybody in my life as I did on that night. He really was in agony, of course I tore off to get some assistance for him. But no he was a figure head there's no doubt about it. I think he was useless from a military training point of view but he knew his medical background but he wasn't a commander in any military sense.

Do you remember him turning you out in the middle of the night at all?

Oh my word yes, many occasion, early hours of the morning you'd get a ... the bugles'd be going and out he used to get you, frost on the ground ...

What sort of time did he turn you out?

Oh any time, it could be one o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning, five o'clock in the morning, anytime at all.

On what pretext ... what for?

Just so that you were always at the ready, you know. He'd be feeling a bit like causing a bit of ruckus sort of thing, obviously the after affects of his evening out and he'd ... out you get.

Did you go on any route march with him at all?

I can't remember ever route marching with him as such. I can certainly remember we did plenty of route marches but I can't remember him actually marching as such.

Can you remember any stories about the horse side of things with Matt Nolan?

No, I can't recall much on the horse side. I didn't ... we weren't, you know, being in the field side of it we didn't get over to Matt very often and no doubt Matt's got plenty of stories and I used to fraternise with one of the fellows that was on the horse team but I can't recall any stories now.

So were you in the transport or where you a medical orderly?

No, I was ... well I was in the I guess you'd call it stretcher bearer more than anything because we had medical orderlies as part of the team and then you had the other people which just did the plain lugging and a certain basic medical training where your medical orderlies were more highly trained in the medical needs of the situation.

So did you get any other training apart from what you basically got at Ingleburn?

Well I got ambulance training and that's first aid and plenty of that sort of thing and plenty of exercise in that but later on I got extensive training in the physical training and remedial training which is the fixing limbs up after they'd been damaged and that sort of thing. And I did two stints, I did one at Randwick Race Course and then I later went to Frankston where there was the combined Australian ...

Did you have contests in splinting and things like that?

Oh my word yes, plenty of time contests and ...

Can you explain what these consisted of?

Well, it consisted of a party that had the stretchers, the old stirrup splint - Thomas splint - and you'd start at a particular point and you had to race out and pick up a casualty. And he could be in any situation and you had to do your best to give him the preliminary treatment, get this Thomas splint on in prescribed fashion and in the quickest time you possibly could and get back - would carry the stretcher back to the appointed place. And we did that hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times.

Where there any other routines like that where you had competitions?

Not in the medical sense, I suppose, we had on the physical sense in that you'd have to cover a certain mile I'd say particularly with when we later on got onto old Colonel Bretherton, he used to have mad miles and places like that and he'd be standing with the clock and saying, 'You'll have to do better than that, Bromwich, ... you're too slow' or you know, 'you're you bumble footed?'. Or something or other, nothing complimentary at any stage.

So have you got any other stories you can tell about Ingleburn before you went on, where was the next place?

No, I think Ingleburn was the main thing. The only thing I can think about Ingleburn was my wife turned up on my first time to see us and she arrived up and Harry Reid happened to be

standing there and she said - and this is the Ingleburn camp remember not just our field ambulance area and she turned up and Harry Reid happened to speak to her and said, 'Who are you looking for?'. And she said, 'I'm looking for Carl.' In a place the size of Ingleburn, so I copped it from there after.

Did you ever get a chance to get down to the Crossroads through Ingleburn?

Yes, we ... well we went regularly down to it in the sense that there were many of the marches took you there. But there were a couple of occasions where you went down for perhaps relaxing - not that I did that much of it - some of them were very regular, I used to go occasionally but not regularly, it wasn't my cup of tea sort of thing.

So, where did you got next after Ingleburn?

Well I can't remember where we went after Ingleburn, whether we then started to be split up round Sydney in different spots or whether we then went to Narellan, I think it was.

Where did you go to? Did you go to St Ives or Frenchs Forest?

We went ... they had ... we were at St Ives, we were at the Lakes Golf Club ...

What were you doing at these various places?

They used to have little units. I guess what the idea was it was part of the defence area - because these are the days before the Japs bombed Sydney and that sort of thing. So it was part of the inner Sydney defence plan I would think that they had, as well as infantry battalions and that sort of thing, say camped at Rosebery and that sort of thing. Well you had us there as field ambulance. Bankstown swimming pool was another one I spent time at.

Camped out or how were you living?

No, ... in some places we had to erect tents, in others we were using the facilities that were there. So say part of the golf house, the club facilities and that down below would have been shut off and used by the services.

And would you have a call for your services or were you just training in the area?

No we used to do ... there was a mixture of what used to happen is that if anybody say got sick on a route march they tend to send them to us as being the first point and from there you would then have to decide whether you sent them back to their unit or they were recommended they go on by ambulance to say Ingleburn or some other point.

I had one very distressing point in that when I was at the Lakes Golf Club, an infantry man came in about one o'clock very distressed, high fever, said he'd lost sense in his legs - he'd collapsed during a route march that morning. I'd never done much diagnostic work but I thought that this was the nearest thing I'd heard to that spinal disease, meningitis. But of course we had laid down rules that we had to clear them back to Ingleburn but I knew that if he did have meningitis there was only one place for him to go and that was the Coast Hospital. And I tried to get permission to short circuit the situation on this day but the medico sort of wouldn't listen and he had to be cleared back to Ingleburn. He got up to Ingleburn they got into the ambulance to look at him and they said, 'What the hell's he doing here? Get him to the Coast.' Well by the time they got him to the Coast he'd practically gone, where if they could have got a spinal tap within the time scale I'd realised there may have been a possibility of saving him.

Where did you go next from there?

Well, I'm not sure the order of things but I guess after that was then the fact that we went on our way up into Queensland.

You didn't go up the north to St Ives and the Green Toad and places like this?

Oh yes, we had all those places, yes we were there at some considerable time, of course the whole unit was there.

It sounds a bit Dad's Army sort of thing now looking back?

Well it does in some respect but there was a lot of ... we did a lot of work out of there - the terrain was pretty tough all around there, so from our point of view of preparation for the New Guinea scene, of course it was a ... we couldn't have had a better place to be lugging up and down hills and dragging stretchers up and down those particular places.

Where did Colonel Davis ...

He must have finished before that because I'm sure that Colonel Bretherton was with us at that time, I can't remember the exact time that he left. I think it was when we became a ... it must have been either just prior to or about the time that we became permanent forces and he couldn't of possibly cleared the medical requirements required ...

Can you remember your service numbers and the first one and the second one?

I can't ... well I think as ... can't remember the first one but certainly I remember the second one - NX117563. The other one I got an idea it was only a five figure number, if I remember correctly but I can't recall it at this time.

Did you get any call on the North Shore there to do anything in earnest, so to speak, did you go along with troops on manoeuvres and have to pull people out at a ...

No, I can't say that I personally can recall, perhaps others did because we went out fragmented, as you know, we didn't always go out as a complete team. So it's quite possible that a small team could have run into that situation, I personally didn't run into that.

Were you broken up into two companies at that stage or were you all in one?

No, I think we were three companies then, A, B, and C.

Do you remember the officers? Who was your superior?

I can't ... I've got an idea it was Clipsham, but I'm not sure, they chopped and changed.

Lieutenant Clipsham, was it?

No he would have been Captain because he was a medical, so we didn't have the lieutenants to commence with, the lieutenants came in as a later addition, so the company commander was always a captain or a major but more likely to be a captain who was a medical officer. He was there for his medical capacity more than his military capacity because that responsibility fell largely on the sergeant-major and the staff sergeants in charge of the companies as it was at that time.

And you were a private at that time or had you been promoted?

No, I think I'd crept up the rank a little bit, I can remember becoming a lance corporal or one striper or something, back in the Ingleburn days, mainly because I had a fair voice and I could bellow out across the parade ground, I think.

What about weapons training?

No, we didn't have weapons training because we carried that little piece of paper that said we're non-combatants and we haven't so I didn't do any military training until after I came back from New Guinea and somebody sent me to an infantry school.

Who had pistols in the ambulance?

The company commanders carried pistols and the RSM but not the staff sergeants if I remember correctly.

So, that little piece of paper you were saying now what was this about?

Just a little card that you had under the Geneva Convention that said that you were non-combatant and they should treat you a little differently to other people.

Where you allowed to use weapons at all?

No.

You were not permitted to?

No.

Even in a situation where you had to protect your patients?

No, no no we just didn't ... we didn't know how to handle them. The transport people did, certainly the transport people they had that responsibility so if anybody had to could protect you it would be the ambulance driver or somebody like that but the actual field companies - no you didn't have any sign of weapon about you.

So when did you leave Sydney then and how?

Well I guess we left by train.

To where?

Initially I think we went to Brisbane where I think there was some restaging done and things like that. I don't know whether it's Eagle Farm that we were at or something of that nature but ...

What the race course was it?

Yes, the Farm we were at. [Eagle Farm]

And were you under canvas there?

I think we were under canvas there, yes.

Any stories about that?

No, all I can remember about Brisbane was that people used to get out as frequently as they could and get into Brisbane itself. But of course Brisbane was teeming with Americans and if you wanted to you could easily be in a stoush with the Americans at any time at all. And those Brisbane pubs had these flying doors, you know, half doors and you'd be nothing to be walking along the street and half the hotel'd emerge with fists going between Australians and Americans - they didn't get on too well together I'm afraid.

So how long were you in Brisbane, can you remember?

I can't remember.

Where did you go next?

I suppose the next thing would have been up onto ... Ravenshoe.

By train?

Yes, yes the trains, of course, the old Queensland trains they were ... and we saw a fair bit of train travelling because after we came back from Ravenshoe and came back to the Oonoonba staging camp we were there for months sort of thing, buggerising round. And we'd take regroups up as a far as Charters Towers and places like that, so we saw a lot of the old Queensland ...

What do you mean regroups?

Well, people who'd been injured in the early part of the war years, come south for treatment and then coming back to join their units, used to regroup, I think it was Charters Towers and other places up in the north of Queensland. And they'd arrive in Townsville and we have to see that they got to their regrouping spots. So they were part of the jobs we got thrown us. We worked on walls and we did all sorts of things when we were at Oonoonba.

Have you got any stories you can tell?

No, not at Oonoonba, I can remember being at Ravenshoe when the rain pelting down day after day and everything went mouldy and you couldn't move off the road for fear of getting bogged up to your hocks and that sort of thing, very steamy. Oonoonba staging camp, of course, it was a dreadful place, it was dusty and filthy. We were under canvas and food wasn't good and we used to get called in while the wharfies were sitting down having their cups of tea we were pushing their drum - forty-four gallon drums - around and getting them onto the ship so that they could get away. So we were quite an unhappy bunch, we were there a long time and I used to ... one of the things that helped me through the war years I think, was my faith in Christ, I used to read the bible pretty regularly every day in the tent. And I can remember one Sunday morning waking up desperately unhappy and I said to ... in my prayers that perhaps some way would be found for me to get home and get married because when I'd parted it'd been the understanding of being the next time I came on leave we'd get married.

Did you get home on leave?

I did interestingly enough, that morning at eight o'clock Major Heffernan came round and said, 'The CO wants to see you, he's going to send to a party home on leave, he's jack of sitting around here waiting to get his movement orders and that will

all be done by ballot but you have to take them out, you're not in a ballot, you've been nominated to take the draft home.' And at eight o'clock that night I was on the train back from Townsville.

And you got married?

And we got married the following Saturday week, yes.

How long before you had to go back?

Oh, about three weeks.

Oh well, could have been worse.

We couldn't notify anybody until we got back to Brisbane, I think that was the Wednesday we got to Brisbane. I had to make contact with the headquarters in Brisbane to ensure that there were no later movement orders for us or to have to put them all back on the train and take 'em home. There was nothing there so that night we were on the train, they all then could notify their relatives and friends they were coming home on leave.

... how long did it take you to get back after your leave?

Didn't take long because we got back to get on the train and I think if I remember correctly we did have a bit of a delay in that the two rivers in Queensland that flood frequently, flooded and we were held up at ... forget the name of the place, where there was communal feeding, there was that many people held up on troop trains ...

So the Burdekin?

Yes the Burdekin on one side and one of the nights we were there one of these typhoons struck [cyclones] the place and turned the old signal stanchions over like leaves and hurled all the four gallon drums of food off ... the railway trucks were just hurled up in the air like leaves - it was a terrifying situation. But soon after we got back to Oonoonba, of course, we got our marching orders and we were on our way. I did have a stint whilst we were at Oonoonba out at the old Pallarenda which was that camp hospital out there, we went out there as a working fatigue, I think lieutenant Dunlop was in charge of us at that stage if I remember correctly.

What was he like?

Oh he was quite a good fellow, sort of thing, very relaxed Doug Dunlop. I've never known him be in a tiss about things yet he was very relaxed.

I was reading his reports they were very succinct?

[laughs] Are they? I can understand that too, yes he was ...

Well to the point of brevity in one half liners and ...

Well they wouldn't be much help to anybody, there's something to having it succinct I suppose but you ...

I don't know they read all right.

Do they?

Yes.

Yes he was very relaxed person, we had ... there was no problem between us at all. I had a wild mob with me, B Coy ...

Did he?

Yeah, they were toughies, Seabornes, some Callinans and blokes like that, they used to frequently go into Townsville and wreck cafes and there'd be the military police would be there the next day and Colonel Bretherton used to eat MPs for breakfast, they never got very far with him. But I guess of all the groups I had the wildest mob that you could possibly have. But if you wanted a job done they were the fellows to do it, they knew how to muck in when the time came to get on, couldn't stand buggerising round they ...

And Bretherton stood them, he ...

Oh yes, well he knew their worth, he'd seen the other side of them and he stood by them when it came to these situations. They'd cop a caning from him of course, he wasn't beyond giving a decent old dressing down but he stood by his men extremely well, that's one thing he didn't ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

This is Carl Bromwich two and this is 9th Australian Field Ambulance at the Australian War Memorial Studio at 3.15 on 5.3.1991. And I'm not sure I think in my tape numbers I think we're still tape eight. And I'll ask New Guinea, how did you get up there, was it on the ship, what ship do you remember?

Yes, Duntroon. I happen to know it because I ended up with one of the old silver milk jugs I've still got it at home, it's up on the mantel.

What was the trip like was it hard or ...

No trouble at all, straight through to Port Moresby and we had no problems.

Where were you billeted or were you under tents or in barracks at Port Moresby?

We were under barracks in Port Moresby.

And where did you work?

Well I was still in the field company which meant that you were responsible for the continuation of training and that in the field sense.

What was Colonel Bretherton's idea of training then?

Well, he believed in running your inside up to the toughest possible hill side he could find.

Did he run as well?

Oh yes, oh yes he didn't ask you to do anything that ... another tough man that we had with us was Major Holcombe of course, who whilst he was First World War and had a stiff leg or something or other, he used to go red in the face and you'd think his heart was going to burst but he was still there and he'd set a merry old pace, if you could keep up with Holcy you were doing very well.

What even with a stiff leg?

Oh my oath, yes, he was tremendous.

How did he run with a stiff leg?

He just sort of ... you hobbled but his walking gait was a very long one and he used to lift that leg and throw it out and he used to set a merry pace ... and maintain it.

And what about the .. what did they used to call it? The assault course was it of some description that you used to have?

The salt course?

Well what would they call it - there was another name?

Oh ... I read it somewhere ...

No but what did your unit call it - the training course that they used to lay out - did you ever see that ?

What in the unit?

Yeah, Major Bretherton used to ...

Yeah, I can't remember it, I read it in a little diary I had of my own - what we used to call it but whatever it was it wasn't a salt ...

No I know but ...

... it was sort of thing and I can't recall now ...

I think you mentioned it earlier actually.

Yes, I did mention it earlier yes.

I can't recall to mind and Tom Kelly's told me, Lieutenant Kelly's told me about it as well that they used to make this course up wherever they went.

Wherever he went the first thing - practically the first thing - he did was to go out and find the toughest possible course that he could track down.

And so what did you do first there?

Well it was mainly hanging round waiting for developments where you might have been deployed in the meantime keeping the men interested, keeping them trained up to a certain level of training. And that was the biggest problem, of course, is they'd been a long time at Oonoonba and so we did have to cater for it but you had to get them used to the New Guinea conditions and get them up into the highlands where it was a bit steamy and that sort of thing and try and get them accustomed to the climate that was the first thing.

So what was the routine, what did you do on Sundays for instance?

Sunday was usually a day off and if you wanted to go to any church services they went to it and the rest of them just relaxed if there was a swimming hole somewhere well they'd go and have a swim.

What about sport?

Well, a lot of the area didn't lend itself to sport but we used to do ... there was a lot of things like volley ball and tossing a quoit and that across a net, so we usually had that sort of thing. And certainly the sergeants kept themselves fit they usually built our own course and we played volley ball and we played ... threw a quoit hurling that backwards and forwards. And then of course a shower and something of that nature. Later on of course I became involved in the playing of football team but that was much later on when we got them into Wau and those places.

So where did you go next after Moresby?

Well, we travelled around a bit in that some of us got shoved about a bit and then we went and had a section up at lower levels over the falls.

And what was the road like to get up there?

The road wasn't too bad to get up to there. See the road wasn't too bad up to the base of the rubber plantation area Koitaki area, the roads were quite good to get up to that.

And did you have a detachment up there did you?

We had ... what at ... yes we had one of the companies up there all the time.

At where?

Up just around the Rouna Falls.

So what was that called there?

I can't think of the name of what they called it.

And you were never there?

Oh yes, I was there, yes, I was recalled for having the capability and then the phone rang which was up on the hill and we were camped down below to some how convince Len Pearson that he ought to be the bloke to get up and answer it. I'd say, 'Len the phones ringing.' Oh oh Lenny'd get up and after he'd say, 'What the bloody hell was I do going up there?'. [laughs] But that was just another area where it was a change - a slight change - in climate and it was a bit easier on you in the climate sense, in that the night was cooler, there was a nice swimming pool right along side where we were camped.

Was it under canvas or huts?

No, it was a combination ... mainly tents, the office area was a building but the sleeping quarters were mainly tents.

And what about the mess, where you ate ... did you eat anywhere?

We ate there, yes, we had a cook that detailed to us, so we were self dependant in that sense.

Was the cook any good?

The cooks varied of course, we had some beauties and we had some that they weren't so good. We were very fortunate in that we had three very good fellows and we had a Chinese called Stan Loon who was a cook and two Condon brothers who'd been pastry cooks and they converted to general cooks. And then we had Harry Harper who we always thought was just that little bit

inclined to be gay, so Harry used to get cheeked and that sort of thing - he wasn't too bad a cook but then we had some very others who used to perspire freely when they were cooking such as George Warnecke's in there and people like that. But I can always remember back in Ingleburn when Ernie Rice was detailed at the last minute for an officers formal mess, cooking the meal and he was making blancmange and one of the things that used to happen to Ernie was he used to quite unexpectedly have a nose bleed when he was cooking a meal. This night he was cooking blancmange and the nose just went plonk straight into the blancmange. 'Oh,' he said, 'they'll have to have strawberry flavour.' And went on with cooking it and left it at that. Yes, but overall we did pretty well and of course ...

It's not all bully beef?

Well we were on pretty much hard rations, we got a bit of a break from it when we were up in Wau for the first time and we got a bit of fresh meat in but pretty much we were converting bully beef and things like that but you could get fresh vegetables and things like that which used to vary it.

So where did you go next?

I suppose the move out of - the ultimate move out of Moresby then took us up over that famous Bulldog Road track over to Wau.

Did you have to wait for that Bulldog Road to be built?

I don't know whether we actually waited but by the look of it it hadn't been ... they were still making it as we were going, so I guess ...

And how did you go, did you have to march or did you ...

No went by jeeps and similar four wheel drive vehicles but it was a hell of a trek because in New Guinea trying to make new roads was practically an impossibility, because if you got anywhere where the wet was you'd dig it for a today and it would collapse overnight and you'd have to start again. So the engineers did a tremendous job of even getting some people up over that way.

Did you have any casualties or sick ones from the engineers that you had to get back or treat?

No, no we were just - obviously somebody else was probably looking after them because we were simply to get through to the back of Wau.

I had a note there from Colonel Bretherton in the papers mentioning how much malaria they were having trouble from?

Well, malaria would have been dreadful up there, it was so cold and of course that's when it hits you sort of thing. And it was so cold in places that even the New Guineans couldn't work they got pneumonia in about five seconds flat and died so the Australians had to do it purely and simply up in the high parts of it.

Did any of your unit get sick?

Not that I'm aware of I can't recall any of mine being taken sick on that particular run. The thing that I can recall about it is that we got up so high at places that you were in what we called the mossy forest the green growth was at some stage but all that was left was sort of tree trunks with moss all over it and you could walk around if you had walk on the roots of these trees or you just sink up to your hocks in the slush and we were up so high that the DC3s just looked like butterflies down in the valley.

Where was that?

That was on that Bulldog Road up over getting into Wau.

So when you went up to Wau what was it like when you got there?

Well, Wau of course had just been ... the Japanese had only not long been moved out of there and they'd got back into Lae and those places and of course Wau itself was knocked around in that anybody who'd had been living there had blasted the side of hills and covered their garages with dirt and any mining equipment had been blown up and ...

So what was the job up there, who was ...

We were there to form a back stop to whatever advance went on from there because they were planning attacks through the back way getting into Lae to come in through the back way to get to Lae.

So what did you do while you were up there?

Well, different parties went to different places ...

So where did you go?

I stayed mainly at Wau, although I did a stint at a place called Wampit, I ran ... I had a twenty bed place out there where a lot of people with malaria and those people that you could possibly treat and hold for a while and ...

Was that tents or what?

No that ... it was sort of native huts where built there ...

Thatched huts are they?

Yes, thatched huts and the beds were just timber with hessian across them to form a base.

And how did you evacuate people from there?

Well by ambulance back to ... by jeep ambulance ...

Down the Bulldog Road?

... no that was a different road, see the Bulldog Road came up from the coast up to Lae ... up to Wau and then Wampit was on the road to Lae so we was able to get them back through the road that went out through Bulolo, Wampit and down to Lae.

So you were a sergeant by that time were you?

Yes, I was a sergeant.

So how many men were you have under you in your ...

I suppose we had a cook and an assistant and I suppose there'd be a half a dozen men to look after the sick.

And so what was your responsibility?

We had no medical officers so my responsibility was to determine whether I thought I could bring them round, hold them and treat them or whether I thought they ought to be evacuated. A medical officer would come through occasionally on the jeep but you had no reliable source because the road back even to Wau was constantly being washed away ...

That was at Wampit was it?

Yes, that's Wampit.

So what was that actually called?

It was just called Wampit.

I mean was it called a post - an aid post or what?

I suppose you'd call it an aid post would be the best description to give it, yes.

And you were there on your own?

Well, I was there with a corporal and with a nursing orderly - mainly because that was what was required.

And how did the people arrive at your ...

They were just brought in by vehicles and whatever unit was in the area they'd just bring them back ...

Was there any badly wounded?

No, not so much no, it was more malaria - it was people working on roads and things like that and then they just suddenly collapsed with malaria or pneumonia or whatever the devil it was.

And your people did you have any trouble with any illness?

Not bad, no not our there.

No scrub typhus?

Not at that place, no scrub typhus emerged back in Wau itself and there were a number of occasions where they tried to get oxygen through from Lae through Wampit back to treat scrub typhus pain. Now that ... they always seemed to think that that sort of tick - whatever it was caused that was only up the hills at the back of Wau.

Tell me you told me earlier on that you hadn't had any medical side of the training that you were a stretcher bearer so to speak in the first place, had you had medical training later?

Only what you were given on through the unit in that you were got accustomed looking at malarial conditions ...

Were you given lectures by the doctors?

We were given lectures by the doctors just so that you ... it was very basic because what fell down really is there to rush out, slap bandages on, stop bleeding, do what you could with wounds by dropping powder into them and getting them back to a clearing station or a hospital, so the whole idea was very much preliminary.

Did you have penicillin at that time or was it all sulphur drugs?

No more sulphur.

And they were all right, you had plenty of them?

Yes, I had the drugs.

And what about for malaria - there was nothing you could do once they got it was there?

Oh malaria was the case of trying to convince them to take their pills - the tablets - regularly in accordance with the prescription. If you didn't of course, once you had it it was

very difficult to treat, you just had to keep them calm and cool and ...

And what about scrub typhus?

Scrub typhus - there was nothing you could do for ...

But what about prevention?

Well, because little was known about it at that stage you really couldn't tell people where not to go or where not to do. It was really never known quite caused it - well they knew what they got these wretched symptoms and about all they could hope for there was to keep to keep them dry and then they got very distressed to give them oxygen. And I think they fed them on vegemite sandwiches, was about the only thing I can think of. So little was known about it that it was something which if you got it you just prayed like hell that ...

Where you ever called upon to assist in an operation with a doctor?

No I never actually assisted, I observed operations but I never actually assisted.

You weren't instructed on anaesthetics or anything like that? Some of them were.

I think we were given, you know, if we had to you just slapped the old mask on the face and scattered the ether over it and things like that but I didn't actually have to perform an actual operation. We were skilled in needle giving and all that sort of thing. On many occasions I cleared up, you know, hundreds of blokes marching past you of an afternoon without a medical officer being in sight - giving them their injections and things like that.

And do you have any facilities for blood typing and that sort of thing?

No.

No facilities for transfusions?

No, because ...

You couldn't blood type?

... because you couldn't blood type so you couldn't give them transfusions. So say our basic kits were, you know, bandages and initial treatment for wounds and things like that, that was basically what you were on. Now a lot of them did come back into half-baked clearing stations where they had to adapt to those situations. I didn't get into one of those I was very

much other than the Wampit situation that I found myself in for about six weeks I think I was ...

You were in charge for six weeks. Then where did you go next?

Well, from there we went back to Wau and then of course some of them got caught up in the Nadzab situation.

But what about you?

No, I didn't get caught up in that.

Well so when you got back to Wau what was doing then?

Well whatever they'd been doing at Wau and ...

What did you do?

Well, I was still B Coy, part of whatever B Coy was there I was Coy Sergeant Major, and I looked after them and kept them occupied wherever they were and whatever they were involved in.

And who was the officer at that stage - the Commander?

I can't remember who was the ... I'm afraid that I just can't remember ...

Which company were you?

B.

Oh well we should find it out from that.

You should be able to pick all that up.

It wasn't Tom Kelly was it?

No, well see Tom was A Coy.

And he was bearer officer?

And I guess Doug Dunlop must have been ours.

Your bearer officer was he?

Yes, yes.

So you were in that branch, so that would be ...

So Doug - all Doug got sick of, as far as I was concerned, was reading the letters that I used to write fairly regularly back to my wife and family ...

Oh he was censoring?

He used to censor it, he said I sent a record for the number of letters that went out of the unit, I was hardly famous for it.

Did you ...

Other things I guess that kept us going was a few of us who used to meet regularly in the form of a prayer meeting of a Sunday night and we found that as very refreshing and very enriching and it seemed to help us over difficult situations. And then of course Bretherton made sure we had a sports oval at Wau, so we did a tremendous amount of intercompany competition ...

And you got involved in that?

And then that was where of course we built up that famous football team that eventually carried the day and ...

What other troops were there at that time?

Mainly supply elements, 19th Battalion was in the area at some time, somewhere at Bulolo, transport companies and things like that, they were in the area.

And you had a hospital at Wau?

We had a hospital at Wau.

Properly built or was it a hutted one?

Um ... I think it was a hutted one.

Native huts or was it a ...

I think the huts ... we were occupying buildings but I'm not sure that the hospital wasn't a bit more better developed, major hut arrangement. I don't think we used an actual property for that but we may have done.

What about an operating theatre, you had that did you?

They did had theatres for that facility, yes. Because the MOs at different times found themselves or they were in situations where it wasn't ...

Was it a wooden prefabricated building or was it a thatched hut or was it canvass inside a thatched hut or what?

I don't know, I can't remember it.

You didn't have any responsibility for that sort of thing?

No, there was nothing - no. A Coy generally seemed to carry that responsibility for some reason or other.

And B Coy were responsible for transporting people around?

We were ... well A Coy had that responsibility also but if it did come back to an operating situation it seemed to be looked on as a senior company.

At Wau did you get any large number of casualties through at any time?

No not a large lot because it was mainly people who if they did come back they came back through an aircraft and they were cleared from there.

Right. From Nadzab?

Nadzab of course, we didn't get much from there because they then took them back to Port Moresby.

And you didn't get up to Nadzab at all?

No I didn't get to Nadzab at all. We had a crowd up there all the time, I've got an idea that Holcombe was up there with a ...

He became ill and ...

Yes, and I can't remember who ... certainly I think Holcy was there in the initial stages ...

Do you remember how long they were out - would you have known how long they were operating without an officer up there?

No I don't.

See I'm looking in the records, I was talking to Vic Milburn, he can't remember exactly and looking in the records that doesn't tell me exactly either. Because on one occasion they give an officer's name who was supposed to be there and the next thing a few days - a week odd later he wasn't there at all, you know, he was detailed to be there and they went up and got lost and various other things happened. I was just wondering how long - as I say Vic can't remember how long they were one their own.

Vic was in charge there?

He was in charge there, yes, way after Holcombe then they sent somebody else who was a radiologist I understand. But the papers don't seem to give any real answer.

I can't help you with that but I guess somebody must have been there before and after.

Yes if you've got enough of them.

Yes.

When did you become a sergeant major so to speak?

I've got no idea, I tried to track down when I became that. I must have been that for a fair length of time because I certainly ...

Where you confirmed as a sergeant major?

Yes.

Of the company?

Of the company, yes.

Right and is that a rank of sergeant major or a rank of warrant officer?

Well, it's one of those that's become in between, you've got your sergeant and in some battalions you go straight from sergeant to warrant officer. It seemed that in some of these non ... perhaps non-combatant places they had this substitution of a staff sergeant as a company sergeant major whereas other units an equivalent rank would have been a warrant officer two. See the transport didn't have the staff sergeant it had a warrant officer.

So for the rest of the time there how ...

Well, we then reached a stage, of course, where we had to get out of Wau, there was no long any necessity for us because they'd taken Nadzab but then they went north further to Lae. The next thing was to get ourselves out and we went out through Lae and we were shipped back to Australia - those of us that came back to Australia were shipped out from Lae on the Duntroon once again.

And where did you end up?

I ended up at ... initially back at Rutherford.

That's in New South Wales?

In New South Wales. On the trip back from it took about twelve days to get back to Brisbane, we did quite a haul, we did from Lae to Milne Bay, from Milne Bay round to Port Moresby down to Thursday Island where we picked up a thousand troops and then back down the coast to Brisbane.

Were you at Rutherford until the 9th Field Ambulance was disbanded?

That's right, well, I don't think it had actually been disbanded by that time but people were beginning to be allocated to other areas and I came back to Ingleburn where I started off and my first job was the reception of POWs from Germany where it was our responsibility to get to them all their medical clearances before they were discharged. So we first of all did that and then we got to then we started to see those that came back from the Japanese prisoner of war. But personally and I stayed at Ingleburn until I was eventually discharged.

Any stories you can tell, that you can think of?

Stories I can tell about Ingleburn was some of the distressing cases you saw for people that had been prisoners of war, those who'd obviously stood up to it very well, those who hadn't stood up to it so well. But the main thing was were we had the biggest responsibility to get the villains to front up to their medical exams because once they got back to Australia all they wanted to do was run around the country side, we wanted to get them cleared and get them out.

Incidentally, there's some of you people up there were painfully thin almost as if you'd just come out of prison camps, in the photographs and what area was it you were all very thin. For instance, there's Gerry Gilbert who'd died of scrub typhus, not long before he died, I pointed that out to Tom Kelly and a few of the others and it looks to me as if he's just come out of a prison camp.

Any of them that got allocated out onto small groups and got out along the front line, I think they undoubtably suffered from that situation. Also, ...

Was it lack of food?

No, it's the actual climate itself, if you got up into the full jungle situation you couldn't,you know, it was that overbearing that you couldn't really breathe and of course if you were on the move, because some of them were, following troops up and down, trekking getting people in and out, they just really didn't have time to eat properly, they were eating on the run and no proper water, you had to like do yourself careful when you were back in major camp because you can boil water under proper conditions and that, they were relying on tablets in water bottles and obviously getting dysentery from time to time because the whole place was Japanese had left dysentery in every water way there was in New Guinea when they got as far as they did - when we found the Japanese they were just skin and bone. Their insides had been drained out because one of their beliefs in curing dysentery was to get into running water and let the water wash it away. And so wherever we went back

across their tracks we were simply following disease and disaster.

So you never got in that sort of state that they did?

No, no quite that ... I got dengue fever but I never got malaria. But Len Pearson's got a theory that anybody who be a negative, -RH negative, never got malaria and he's been doing a bit of...

That's interesting.

... book out now because he's tracked through people in our unit who had that blood groupings and none of them seemed to get malaria.

Funny you know I haven't had it and I'm RH negative, I've been in all parts of the world as a sailor and working here.

Well, I've been to sea. I've been India, I've been through Cambodia, Vientionne and all those places, Saigon - after this war and ... No if you weren't back where you got a bit of relaxation you'd quickly lose your meat that you had on your bones.

Well I think we're close to the end of the tape here and have you got anything else that you want to sort of add what do you think?

I don't think so, I think that's fair enough, my memory's not as good as it used to be. I did manage to keep a diary - a day to day diary - just a very rough one so I can say the exact date I went to Wampit, the day I got out of the it, the day I left Brisbane ...

If we can get photocopies of that that would be good?

I'd say you can have a look at them.

Yes please. Well that's the end of the tape, thank you very much.

Thank you.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B - END OF INTERVIEW