ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: GEORGE READ - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE – SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE READ

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD RAXWORTHY

SUMMARY:

DATE RECORDED: 11 FEBRUARY 1991

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START OF TAPE

Identification: This is the 9th Australian Field Ambulance AIF Oral History Project.

Mr Burt (George?) Read, is it?

We were reinforcements from Victoria for this unit and we come down and we joined the unit at Townsville. This come down from Atherton Tablelands in preparation for us going over to New Guinea. There was quite a lot of business, about twenty of us joined and were mostly in the transport.

Where did you do your training?

Mostly it was in Melbourne - around Melbourne. See the transport, we didn't do any medical.

Right. So you drove a truck, did you?

Ambulances ... and trucks when it was necessary.

What sort of ambulances did you have?

We used to have Chevs, Chev four-wheel drives.

Were they built in Australia?

No, they were Yankee but they were pretty good. They'd get you to anywhere.

And where did you come from in Melbourne?

I come from a place called Macedon in those days. It's about thirty miles out of Melbourne. Quite a nice place. Did I happen to tell you that I thought Melbourne was one of the best States, the best capitals in Australia? Well we used to argue about that in those days and we're too old now. I'll think we'll give it in. The Yarra used to flow upside-down but now the beaches there, they flow upside-down.

I've got a story here about you throwing some food on the fire to cook.

Oh, Matt could tell you that one better I think. (laughs) Matt had been out one night at the pictures ...

Who's Matt?

... and I was home at the camp and just before he got in I threw a tin of meat and vegetables on the fire and told Matt to go up to the fire, he'd find the kettle would be boiling. And Matt just got up to the fire, just timed it lovely. The kettle wasn't boiling but the meat went 'bang'. Everything went

everywhere and he hasn't forgotten it to this day. The first thing he did, he said to me, 'What about that explosion?'.

Were you a volunteer or were you conscripted?

Oh no, I was a volunteer, yes, VX.

How old were you when the First World War ...

I was thirty-five years old when I went in. I was in four years and when our unit was abandoned after the war I was drafted to New Guinea, to New Britain, attached to a hospital there looking after the transport - the mechanical part of the transport there.

You weren't with them until Atherton on the tablelands there, were you?

No, I joined them when they come down from the Tablelands.

And you went overseas with them.

Yes.

And do you remember going over? Do you remember how you went over?

Yes, we went over - I can't remember the name of the boat, it was a pretty big boat - and I was sick all the way and everybody else was all right but me. I was feeding the fish all the time. There was a lot of nurses went over in our boat too.

Where did you land?

Port Moresby.

Did they just unload you normally on the wharf?

Yes, yes.

And did you go into camp at Port Moresby?

Yes, we went into the bush there and we made a camp hospital in the bush and serviced a lot of the units around that area. And then parts of the unit went up to Lae and all around that way. The other chaps will tell you more about that.

Did you go up there or not?

No, I never went to Lae; I kept around the Port Moresby area.

So for the whole of the time that you were there?

Yes, yes.

Until the end of the war.

Until they come back, yes.

Do you remember being bombed at all there?

They had been, just for a little while then they stopped. They got the Japs on the run then. We were pretty lucky.

What actually were you doing? Were you driving ...

I was driving the ambulance.

From where to where?

From the base taking doctors around the different parts of the unit. If the hospital wanted the transport back to the wharf to send them home we used to take them down to the wharf to take them home.

When there was any bombing do you remember any bad situations?

No, no ... No, they stopped the bombing just as we got there. As I say, we were lucky.

Thank you very much.

END OF TAPE - END OF INTERVIEW