ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: KEVIN RYAN - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE – SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: KEVIN RYAN

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD RAXWORTHY

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TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: This is the 9th Field Ambulance - tape nine - and this is Mr Kevin Ryan.

Where were you born and when?

I was born at Gundery, Moruya on 28th April 1913.

Did you grow up around here?

Yes. I grew up down at a place called Manora just outside Moruya and I lived there till I was ... When I was on the dairy farm, my father was a dairy farmer, and we lived on a dairy farm down there and I was there till I was about twenty-one years of age.

Did you go to school down here?

Yes, I went to St Mary's Convent, Moruya. I was taught by the sisters.

And after that?

And after that I went to work on our own farm. I left school when I was about fourteen years of age.

Did you like school?

Oh yes. Most fellahs like it all right. We had good teachers and we had a pretty strict Catholic bringing up with our mother and of course I suppose we didn't go too much on that because we used to have to walk a mile or two to mass every Sunday and every time there was devotions on in the church of a night we also had to get back to those too, so that was that. But anyway ...

What about your father? What sort of influence did you get from him? Was it just hard work or ...

Oh yes. My father was a good man, he was a good provider. There was six in the family for us and he had a family to provide for and he was a good worker. And he was a rather jovial man and a happy man and we always had a very good relationship.

Was there any sport played in the family?

We used to play ... I played football here in Moruya for a while and my mother told me that I'd pay for it when I got older and she was pretty right about that too.

Is there anybody you remember from your childhood, either at school or elsewhere, who had a bit of an influence on you other than your parents?

Well I lived a lot with my grandmother, she was an Irish woman. She was born out here in 1844 at a little place called Mogo not very far away from Moruya. I lived with her for quite ... she was a great friend of mine. She liked me very much and as a child I used to go up and nail the palings around the house for her and gather the eggs and she always paid me too. I used to get two bob for Saturday.

When you left school you first worked with your father and then you stayed there till the war or ...

No. I left when I was about twenty and I went and I got a job out at Forbes out on a wheat station out there. And I worked out there for three years.

What was your idea to go there? Why did you go up there?

Well jobs were hard to get so you took whatever job that was offering in those days.

You couldn't stay and work on the farm at home?

No. We had plenty of labour and the farm wasn't big enough and of course it was very hard then to buy land when prices were ... for a product was so low. I might tell you in those days if you got fourpence a gallon for your milk you did pretty well.

Fourpence a gallon, my goodness. That's amazing.

A top price would be sixpence. We eventually got to sixpence but then, I'll tell you what, we used to milk about fifty cows or so and there was only just a living; to feed and clothe six children and try to educate them. The fees at this convent school was sixpence a week per child. So there wasn't a lot of money about in those days. So we mostly got away - got out and got away.

How did you get on in Forbes?

I got along all right. I adapted pretty well out there. It was sheep country and cattle country. Something that I hadn't been used to because I was on a dairy farm here in Moruya but I soon learnt to drive a tractor and all those sort of things, as you do in the country. You've got to do these sort of things, or we had to do because Dad said go and do something and you went and did as best you could. He'd tell you how to do it and that's how you learnt and that stood to me all of my life that to be able to get out and get going and have a go.

So how long did you stay in the Forbes area?

I stayed in the Forbes area for about three years then I came back and I got a job at the PDS in Sydney - Valentine and Keith Street - and I stayed there. When war broke out I was working there and we were manpowered and in 1941 it was decided that all the men there would have to do some sort of service - army service. So I went into camp at the end of 1941. I went into camp up to Ingleburn. I was with the call-up and whilst in camp there I joined the A.I.F., the 9th Field Ambulance.

The first job I had in the ambulance was, I had a licence to drive a truck, so they took us out and I got a licence so they put me on the duty ambulance where I stayed for another two or three weeks until they trained a few more fellows to be able to drive the ambulances because they were all crash gearboxes and most of our personnel at that particular time were taxi drivers and they didn't know much about driving these particular type of trucks. But I had a lot of experience in the wheat country when I was out there driving big trucks and I didn't have any trouble at all to get a licence.

Did you have any military training out at Ingleburn?

Oh yes. We did all sorts of training there. Then I went into the motor part of it, the transport part of it, and we did rifle drill and all that sort of business. We did a lot of marching and that particular type of thing. Mostly, but practically the same as all the rest of the units that were in there with the exception of bayonet practice. We didn't do any bayonet practice but I had a bayonet. I had a 303 rifle and so many rounds of ammunition allotted to us. And to use the rifle was of no problem to me because born and reared in the country I had a rifle of my own and was used to shooting rabbits and one thing and another and I reckon that a man was a bigger target to shoot than a rabbit was, if it was necessary, but fortunately I didn't have to do any of that. I didn't have to fire a shot at anybody.

Did you get it explained to you while you were in transport, although you were in the Field Ambulance, what you were able to do and what you weren't able to do under the Geneva Convention?

Yes, but I think they got around that fairly well because I think we were ASC - Army Service Corps - and we were attached to the 9th Field Ambulance. I think that's the way they got around that type of thing and that was the reason why we could carry a rifle and they said that was for protection for our patients or anything if we had to protect it. That was the reason for it.

Do you remember your commanding officer when you first started at Ingleburn in the 9th Field Ambulance?

When I first started?

Yes.

It was late in 1941, it was, somewhere in October I would say.

Who was your commanding officer, do you remember?

Yes, Colonel Davies ... yes, Davies.

Was that him? (must show him a photo) He is on his horse. Did he have a horse while you were there?

Yes, they had horses there when I was there. They had horses there.

Do you remember his horse's name?

But he was an older man then when I saw him. Pete they used call him. He was a professor of anatomy at the Sydney University or one of the universities around about Sydney. You might check that out but that's what he was. And we had him, he was an erratic sort of a man. I don't know whether I should say these sort of things. He was an erratic sort of a man. He used to have a night out every now and then. Around about midnight he'd start blowing whistles and telling you that there's an air-raid so we'd have to disperse our ambulance and these sort of things. And of course we didn't have any training in those sort of things in those days and most of our drivers were city fellows. They just got in the ambulances and away they went to blazes wherever they could go and they didn't know where they were and when it came to get them all back again, they were probably into the next day before they located them all because they didn't have a sense of direction. It didn't worry the fellows that came from the country, they seemed to always have a good sense of direction in this particular type of thing.

Do you remember any other stories that you can tell of your time of Ingleburn before you went anywhere else? Well, do you remember when you left Ingleburn? Where did you go then?

We went out to Frenchs Forest. We went down over the Roseville Bridge and followed the road up until we came to the Mona Vale Road and we were camped in there.

Were you camped under canvas?

Yes, we were camped under canvas there. We had general training there such as digging air-raid fox holes or whatever you call them.

Trenches.

Digging trenches there and this particular type of thing. And of course we got a pretty fair grounding in first aid and that particular type of thing.

Had you been under canvas at Ingleburn or had you had proper huts?

No we had great big sheds, I suppose you'd call them. Great big buildings they were. We had a palliasse with straw in it and which we had to roll up and fold our blankets up and all these sort of things and it all had to be done in army regulation style.

And do you remember what transport you had in the first instance?

What transport ... we had about, roughly speaking I suppose, it was all single drive. We had probably seven or eight ambulances and about four or five trucks. Three thirty-hundred weight and then there were a couple of bigger ones than that, besides staff cars. We had one or two staff cars too.

When you got down to Frenchs Forest, where was the headquarters do you remember?

It was there too. The whole unit shifted down there to Frenchs Forest.

Did you go up St Ives at all?

Yes. We eventually when we left Frenchs Forest we went to St Ives, up to a place they call the Green Toad where we built ... we dug out a big hole there and we built a place to store petrol and one thing and another and covered it over with dirt and that sort of business. I remember that. But we didn't stay such a long time at St Ives. We went back to Rooty Hill. Narellan, is it?

No, Narellan is not near Rooty Hill. Wallgrove was it?

Wallgrove, yes, we were at Wallgrove there for a while.

While you were at St Ives or Frenchs Forest were you involved in a bushfire there - fighting a bushfire?

Yes. A bushfire started along the Middle Harbour and we went to that particular place to fight the bushfires.

Do you remember any of the other officers at that time?

I remember our officer, our transport officer was Norman Thomas who was our lieutenant, like our CO then. When we left Ingleburn we got a new CO, Colonel Bretherton.

What was he like?

He wasn't a bad sort of a bloke. He had a big practice over in North Sydney. He was a doctor and he had a big practice over in North Sydney. As a matter of fact he was my sister's doctor, but I never told him that.

Did he go much in for training? What sort of training did he give you?

Yes, he was a very good officer as far as training was concerned. He never asked anybody to do anything that he couldn't and wouldn't do himself. When there was a march on he was always out and he always marched and he was as fit as a fiddle he was. He never shirked his duty on that particular type of thing.

Did you ever get into any strife with him?

No. I didn't get into any strife but I could have done if it wasn't for poor old Billy Peters I'd have been in strife because while we were over in Frenchs Forest the locals used to put a dance on there for us of a Saturday night and we could all go so long as we didn't get leave but they let us go down there to this dance provided that we never left it and never went home. So what happened was that some of our smart alecs, they decided instead of going to the dance they decided to shoot through and never come back to next morning. Well they were checked up, he checked up on them anyhow, so he was going to ground the whole lot of us. So when we came out on parade I, having a little bit of Irish blood in me, I didn't like the idea of the fellahs that didn't do these sort of things should be penalised the same as the others, so I spoke out against it. But I was going to be put on an A4 about it but, anyhow, Billy Peters decided - he went over and had a yarn to the CO - but the outcome of the whole lot was, anyhow, that they decided that they didn't do anything for us and cut us out from going to the dances but what they did do, they set out and caught the blokes that were giving trouble and they punished them. So something good come out of it anyhow. But I could have done a few weeks walking around with a pack-drill on me back without any problems.

Do you remember the Mad Mile? When did that start?

The Mad Mile ... I don't know. I never was on the Mad Mile because I was in the transport part of it and the transport we probably carted them out and they had to walk back again I suppose. But somebody had to drive the trucks, so luckily I was in the transport.

What about the obstacle course? Did you never go on that?

No, I wasn't on that either.

Did you know at that time Tom Kelly?

Oh yes, I knew Tom well.

I heard that he was responsible for the Mad Mile, for it being constructed around the place.

Well it's a pity I didn't know that before this or there would have been something said about it.

I think they sent him on a physical training course and he came back and recommended that they set this scheme up.

Oh that would be right, that would be right. They should have put him over it, kept putting him over it until he got the idea out of his head.

Oh he went over it too. So where did you go next? Did anything else happen at Frenchs Forest before your move to Wallgrove?

No, I don't think there was anything more happen. We eventually then went back to Wallgrove where we embarked for Brisbane. We came on leave on the Saturday afternoon and before we got to Sydney they pulled the train up somewhere around about Parramatta and told us all to return back to Narellan.

Was it Narellan or was it Wallgrove?

No, Narellan. Yes, we'd left for Wallgrove and went to Narellan you see.

What sort of camp was it at Narellan and what sort of camp was it at Wallgrove?

What sort of a camp at Wallgrove? Oh it was all tents. It was only a tent camp, that's all it was.

And Narellan?

Narellan was more or less the same from what I could gather. It wasn't like Ingleburn; it wasn't built up like Ingleburn. There was a lot of barracks there at Ingleburn.

While you were at Ingleburn did you ever get down to the Crossroads?

The pub? Oh yeah, we went down to the pub. We used to go down to the pub whenever we could get down. In those days of course you could always drink a bit but we didn't have too much money to drink. We weren't like the Yanks.

So from Narellan you got the train to Brisbane. Where did you actually get the train from Sydney or from where do you think?

When we got the order to move out they put the field part of the ambulance on the train and sent them to Brisbane. They were to catch a convoy, as far as I can remember now, that was going to the Middle East. And we had to change all our - we only had single drive vehicles - we had to change them all over to four-wheel drive vehicles and then they had to be tied on. And none of our drivers could drive the four-wheel drives, they weren't accustomed to it. So it took us quite a while before we could get them loaded on and by the time we went up to Ingleburn, up as far as Singleton, and come halfway back again to let a train pass, or something like that, we were about a week before we got to Brisbane. And when we got to Brisbane the convoy had sailed and as our unit didn't have any transport they took them off and they returned them to Eagle Farm Racecourse and we picked up with them at Eagle Farm Racecourse.

And where from there?

Oonoonba. From there we went out to Oonoonba and we stopped out there for some weeks and then eventually we were loaded on and sent to Townsville. And I think we were to pick up another convoy, if I remember rightly, another convoy that was going over to New Guinea. Goodenough Island I think it was - but over that way somewhere anyway. But when we got up as far as the Burdekin ... not the Burdekin, up as far as Rockhampton - what river is that? Not the Burdekin. Is it the Burdekin? Anyway you can check that out. But up to Rockhampton anyway, it was in flood. And we were up there for about three or four ... a few weeks anyhow. There was no sign of the bridge. There was feet and feet of water over the bridge and between ourselves and 90,000 Yanks that were there at that particular time. So we were there for some weeks before we were able to get over the bridge and get on and we missed the convoy that was going over to Goodenough Island. And so we didn't go to Townsville. We turned off before we got to Townsville and went up and established a camp and a hospital up at Ravenshoe. And when we established that, they were bringing back casualties from New Guinea with malaria and this particular type of thing - dysentery and malaria and war casualties too - and some other unit took over the hospital that we established there and we went Charters Towers. We went to Charters Towers for a while and then we came back down to Townsville again.

During the time that I was up at Ravenshoe we were to go down to Cairns to pick up more ambulances and we had an accident. And I was in the accident and I spent nearly six months in hospital after it.

Were you driving?

No. No, if I had been driving there wouldn't have been an accident.

Who was the driver incidentally?

Jimmy Stewart. We had a new transport officer then and his name was Campbell - what's the bloke in Sydney, came there to the meeting? I know what they did call his nickname but I'd better not put that on the tape.

Yes, why not.

Well anyway, after the accident - I just can't think of the man's name - anyway he was in the accident. Anyway he was in the accident. He was with the driver, sitting in the front seat, and it was a one-way traffic down Gillies Highway - it was in those days - and they had gates on the bottom and gates on the top. And we went out on the third bend from the top. We were supposed to have dropped over about seventy feet they said and turned over two or three times and we would have went for about a week only luckily there was a tree broken off and the tail shaft went on one side and the body went on the other side and we didn't keep on going down the valley or otherwise ...

Did you know Carl Bromwich at that time?

Carl Bromwich, yes I knew him. He was the sergeant. Yes, I knew him.

Was he involved in that at all?

No, there was only our transport officer and Jimmy Stewart - they were in the front seat - and there was Billy Kelly, Jackie Shortus, myself and Bill Peters but two others I just don't remember who they actually were now.

Was there a court of inquiry involved in that?

I guess there would have been. But I was in hospital; I was away in hospital so I missed all that sort of business.

So where was the unit when you came back?

When I came back ... I was put into hospital up at Rocky Creek. Rocky Creek was up on the Tablelands up there and that's where we were at that particular time you see up at Ravenshoe and Rocky Creek was up in that area up there and I was put into hospital there where I stayed for nearly three months before I could sort of get ... And then as the unit was shifting - this is the reason why I came down to Townsville - and when I came to Townsville I was put into Pallarenda Hospital at Pallarenda there where I was boarded and I was boarded A1. Got twenty-eight days leave. Came back to Moruya to see me father - back on the train - and went back and went across to New Guinea from there. But by the time that I got back there the unit had got across and I was some weeks after them that we landed over at New Guinea.

Do you remember what ship you went over on?

The Katoomba.

And were there many with you or ...

It was loaded.

With your unit?

No, there wasn't many of our unit on it.

So where was the unit when you got there?

They were up at Seventeen Mile, what they call the Seventeen Mile. They were up at the Seventeen Mile where our unit was. I went back to there.

And what was that like? Was it a hospital or just a camp?

Wherever we went we sort of always had a first aid post. Up there we received a lot of fellahs with dysentery and malaria and that particular type of thing up around that area. There seemed to be a lot of troops up in that area so was basically the work that we did up there.

And how long were you on the Seventeen Mile?

Seventeen Mile, not for very long. They sent me up then to I think what they call Lux Lane. Lux Lane was above what they call the Pass. The Pass was another one way. It was getting up towards the head of the Kokoda Trail. The Pass it was one-way so it had gates on top and bottom. But the blokes wouldn't ride up in the trucks with you, they'd walk up. That's how narrow the road was. You could see the water below but it was hundreds of feet below. It was just a cutting taken out of the mountains there.

Whilst we were up at Lux Lane up there we did the same particular type of thing - picked up malaria cases and dysentery cases ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

Identification: This is 9th Field Ambulance - tape nine - Kevin Ryan, two.

And when you went up to Lux Lane was it different up there? What sort of accommodation, were you in tents up there?

We were only a very small portion of the Ambulance up there. We were sort of a first aid post. What did they call those things, an advanced first aid post it was.

Advanced dressing station or ADS or ADM?

It might have been ADM, something like that anyhow. But they were up pretty close to where the action was. It wouldn't be training, it would be advanced aid post.

What were the ambulances like?

Ambulance ... we had jeeps up there. One thing that sticks out in my mind, when we were up at Lux Lane we were very close to the river there - or a stream anyway. I don't know whether it was a river. It ran in north of Moresby - it wasn't the Markham, what river would that have been? But anyway, it came in there at Moresby and they used to have plenty of crocs in it down there. So my mate and I, we'd taken a load of sick personnel down to the AGH at the Twelve Mile Post and we came back and we decided we'd go in for a swim. So there was a wire across there, it was a narrow stream and very fast running and deep, and we walked down with our towels. We had to look at the wire across so that if you got into difficulties you could grab the wire and get out. So we walked down to go in for this particular swim and I happened to notice that there was like a little black log moving against the current in the middle of the water. And I had a look at it and I thought that was very strange to me because I thought with the current running the way it was it should have been going down. I thought there'd have to be some sort of an eddy there or something. But it kept coming up and coming up closer to the wire and all of a sudden it dawned on me that it was a croc. And it was up in fresh water and we were probably up 5,000 feet or something like that and they reckoned the crocs didn't go up there. So anyway how I said to my mate to go back and get and get my 303. So he went back to the camp and he got the 303 and loaded it up. I went down and had a shot at him. Anyhow I got him. He jumped clean out of the water, he did, and turned over and my mate sang out, 'You got him, mate', he said, 'You got him'.

What size was it?

Oh he reckons it was about eight feet. A great big block he said it was. Just as well he got him or he might have got one of us.

Who were you mates with up there? Was there anybody particular that you were friendly with?

Yes. I had some good mates when I went into the army first. You sort of pick out your mates when you go in there and if you're in the one unit you sort of stick together. And Bill Simpson is one of my best mates and Laurie Foggarty was another one of them. Gordon Fairweather and Roady O'Grady, they were

all fellahs that we all got into the one tent and we all sort of stuck together all through. And I kept in contact with them for many years after the war but I ended up, my best mate Bill Simpson, he died as a young man. He died a few years after we came back from the islands. But his wife always kept in contact with me. And it was this year, it was the first year that I didn't have any word from her. So I presume that after all these years that she's passed along to Bill too.

Did any of your mates get scrub typhus or anything like that? Did any of them get seriously ill or die?

Laurie Foggarty. Laurie Foggarty, he died when we were up at Ravenshoe, he died. Not at Ravenshoe he didn't, but he had a birthmark on his back and it bled up there one night and he went on sick parade and the CO put him in a plane and sent him back to Sydney to the AGH here at Concord and he only lived two or three weeks.

Was it a melanoma?

Yeah. The CO said that he was - I asked the CO about him because I wasn't too well myself at that particular time. I'd been in the accident and I was with him in the tent - and the CO told me that it had affected every gland in his body. And I asked him how long did he have and he said he thought he had about a fortnight and I think that's about as long as he lived. It was just that quickly. But I had his identity disc, that's one thing that he left behind him. I gave him a hand to pack and get his things and I had his identity ticket which I gave to Tom Kelly. Tom Kelly has got it I gather. And he's got the photo. I gave him a photo of Laurie and some more of us too.

Well that solves a problem because in actual fact when I was looking at the Field War Dairy yesterday I came across a list of the casualties and the illnesses of the people in the unit and they weren't named but it said the numbers of people that had the different things. One of them was melanomitis, I think it was. So that would be the one - melanoma.

He'd be 1175 but the last two numbers it would be in the lows - it would be probably twenties, twenty-ones or eighteens or nineteens or somewhere along that line - because my number is 117511 and we all joined up about the one particular time. An officer came through, a recruiting officer came through and we decided that we'd all join up. Well I didn't mind joining up anyhow because when I worked at the PDS I used to go to work at six o'clock in the morning and knock off at ten o'clock in the night because we had to catch ... being a food supplier we had to catch the convoys and the PDS got a certain amount of space on these ships and it had to be fulfilled. So if we had our section - I was in the honey department - if we had our section of it done, our quantity, then there was the butter and the cheese and the bacon and the eggs. So we just transferred. We

went to the next one and we worked on at that. And it was nothing to go to work on Monday morning and come home on Tuesday night - work all night.

So the army was easier, you reckon.

Oh yes, a lot easier.

Even in New Guinea?

Oh New Guinea the conditions weren't too bad ... weren't that good, like along the coast the conditions were pretty rotten but the work part of it at least you did have sort of regular hours. Particularly like here in Australia anyhow, you'd be on parade at seven o'clock in the morning and you'd knock off about half past four in the afternoon and have a shower and this sort of business. But many the night when I left and I came home from the PDS, I just laid on the bed and the clock went off at five o'clock in the morning and I got up and went off and worked again.

Did you go anywhere next from Lux Lane or did you stay there for a good while?

I stopped at Lux Lane until the campaign started around about Lae, somewhere in about that position, and I'd taken some of our personnel - probably half of them - we might have had about twenty-five or thirty or something like that, I took them down to Moresby and they went around on the barge to Milne Bay and when I got back up to Lux Lane they said, 'Righto, pack your things too. You're off'. And so I put my things together and they took us down to Jackson's Drome and they flew across and dropped us in at Nadzab. And we got two minutes to get off at Nadzab. The planes had to be back in the air again. So we went over. We had all sorts of stuff on board, so we kicked it off and jumped out and away the plane - never shut its motors off or anything - and away the plane went around the circuit.

Is this it?

This is it. Oh this is loading the casualties we had. We got these from Shaggy Ridge, these casualties. We had Japanese prisoners of war there too. Have you got a photo of that here?

No I haven't got a photo of any prisoners of war.

This was taken - this would be all of them in the ambulances. These were all Yankee planes. The Yanks sent us over these. We had I think a hundred-odd. I know this bloke, this is what's his name. I'll put a name on him in a minute. Dougie Dunlop. That's Dougie Dunlop.

Do you recognise Gerry Gilbert on the left there?

Here?

Yes. He's the one that died of scrub typhus only five days after that.

Gilbert. Yes ...

Gerry Gilbert.

Yes, he died of scrub typhus. Yes, I knew we lost some with scrub typhus, yes.

They had to take him back on the plane and he died in hospital in Moresby. Look at the state of him then!

Yes, you can see he's poverty stricken isn't he. We were all pretty thin. We had no weight on us. I was about eight stone when I come out of the army - eight and a half stone or some thing. I'm a bit more now.

Do you remember what sort of food did you get? Did you have cooks there?

It was mostly tinned food it was, bully beef and beans - baked beans - and all that particular type of thing. This looks like it was taken up at Nadzab, was it?

Yes it was. That's from Vic Milburn that one. That's Vic Milburn's photograph. Do you remember Vic Milburn up at Nadzab?

Yes, I remember Vic. It's a wonder I'm not here in amongst this lot.

There's another one here, it might be you. On the front of ... it might be with you, I don't know. I noticed from the records that on one occasion they had 900 casualties there waiting for evacuation.

That's right. That was at Nadzab and we had to get all the planes from the Yanks. The Yanks sent over, I forget how many planes, they sent twenty-five, thirty or fifty or whatever it was. They just sent them. They kept dropping in like that and they sent fellahs over to give us a hand and all to put them on and everything. ... 125355 ...

You're looking at the ambulance are you?

Yeah.

You were the mechanic of the group on it, weren't you, of the transport?

Yes, I used to do a fair bit of mechanical work for them although I never did a course or anything in the army with it. But I learnt a lot about mechanics when I was in the wheat

country because out there when I was on those places you had to do these sort of things. You had to find out what was wrong and get going again because one wheat station that I was on we were twenty-six miles out of Forbes so if you wanted to get in and get some tucker and one thing and another, you just simply had to get the thing going. So I learnt a lot about brakes and all of that. I did a lot of mechanical work during the war for the unit, keeping these things going and changing tyres and all those sort of things.

> At Nadzab do you remember how long you worked? Did those planes come in at night?

Yes. We had nuisance raids. When we first went up there we had nuisance raids. They came over of a night around about ten or eleven o'clock or something like that and they'd be over again two or three or four o'clock in the morning so you were keyed up all the particular time.

I remember on one occasion my mate, Billy Kelly, we were in the tent together - I don't know the others - but anyhow we'd had two or three of these nuisance raids over a week and Kelly decided that they weren't going to drop anything about the place so we decided that he wouldn't get up on the nuisance raid when the alert would go off he wouldn't get up and go to the slit trench - this is what I was trying to think of before - and go to the slit trench so when the alert went off, the shots went off, the alert went off, the rest of us got out, we were all in the nude of course - it was that hot over there - and we were all in the nude and we slept underneath a mosquito net. But anyway they dropped one not so very far away from us and Kelly landed in the slit trench about two seconds afterwards and all he had on him was a tin hat and one boot. (laughs) That's all he had on him but any time the alert went off afterwards he always got out. Yes, all he had was his tin hat and one boot on him, that's all and he didn't know till today why he grabbed the tin hat and one boot.

> Did you have any problem with malaria? Did you take your tablets regularly?

I took my tablets regularly. I took Atebrin regularly and I never had any trouble with malaria until I came back to Australia. I did seven weeks I think it was on Atebrin and I came back to Moruya and around about 1951, around about Easter time, I was here in Moruya and I got an attack of malaria here in Moruya and I was put into hospital up here and they never had a course of treatment for me. But being in a medical unit I looked after myself; I had my own. And I laid back in the hospital up here for my ten or twelve days, or whatever you had, and I took my own tablets. They were on the dresser of the thing alongside of me. But of course I'd been trained. I knew what the treatment was. The old doctor didn't know. He'd never saw it before and they never saw it in the hospital over here before and the nurses, the first night that I got the

attack was about three o'clock in the morning, I was in an old iron bed and you could hear it rattling out on the road, and she was running putting blankets and these sort of things on me.

> Did you get diarrhoea or dysentery up there at all in New Guinea?

No I never got diarrhoea or dysentery. There's one thing our CO wouldn't have any of us getting diarrhoea or dysentery up there. If you became a little bit soft in your motions and once you went above normal you were to go over to the RAP and get a large dose of castor oil and followed by some bismuth or something like that. And none of us ever got ... I don't know of any bloke ... he reckoned he'd slam any fellah that got dysentery up there. And that was the cure for it. No doubt it was too.

But I tell you what, it was a terrible ordeal if you saw anybody that neglected it. I remember one fellow we picked up there one night and I had to take him up to the AGH or take him down to the AGH it was and I had to take an orderly with me to hold him down he was that bad. And the smell of him, you have no idea what it was like. And by the time I got down to the AGH I didn't know which one to put in. (laughs) The bloke with the dysentery or the bloke that was looking after him. But ...

> The sheer number of people at Nadzab. I mean, there was one day for instance I noticed in the record that there was 900 people waiting to get planes to be evacuated on planes and there was 200 got on planes in the one day - evacuated. That must have been quite a lot of people to cart around on ambulances and that sort of thing. It just seems impossible.

A lot of them brought them in themselves. They brought them in. They sort of channelled them back towards ourselves you see.

> How many were you at Nadzab at that time you were there? Not many, were there?

No, only about ... I would say there were two MOs - I know the two MOs.

> You weren't there when there were no doctors?

Hey?

> For a while there when Vic Milburn was there they didn't have any doctor.

Well I wasn't there at that particular time ... No wait a minute, or was I. I don't know. I don't think there was any

doctors now. I think we were the first lot that went over there.

Were you there when Colonel ... the stiff legged ...

Holcombe?

Major Holcombe, that's right. Were you there when he was there?

I didn't know he was there.

So you were there after he was there then because he got sent back and that's when they didn't have a doctor.

He got sent back?

You must have been there after that.

I must have been. Our two doctors were Curry and Biddle. But I don't think there was a doctor there when I first went there so it must have been in that period of time.

How long were you there without a doctor there?

Oh, I just couldn't know. It might have been some weeks or something like that.

With the incredible numbers of people there who were waiting treatment, that must have been a real problem.

Oh yes. Well, what I mean to say is we were lucky that we were able to get the transport from the Yanks. That was the thing that saved us. What would have happened to us I really don't know because they were really good. They had these Dougs, they had a lot of troops there themselves. They were bringing in food and bringing in stuff all the time and they were going back to Moresby and what they did for us too, when they landed at Jackson's [strip] or Ward's [strip] or wherever they distributed the patients out to the hospitals. They did a terrible lot of work for us that way. They were really terrific they were.

Well how did you get ... you say the Yanks were bringing you in food. How did you get that thin do you think? Was it just sort of neglecting yourself in favour of your patients or what?

No, I don't think so. I think the Yanks had a different ration to what we had. The Yanks had everything, they had everything.

But you said, when I showed you Gerry Gilbert and the state he was in, and you said that you were all that thin or something like that.

Well when you live on bully beef and biscuits and tinned stuff and that sort of business and the heat up there of course you don't eat that much.

I suppose he could be an exceptional case because he does look ill, doesn't he?

Yes, he does look ill. He does look, he looks like he's got malaria too.

Oh he had malaria. He was in and out of the hospital. I picked that up in the ... He was admitted about six days before he died and he was sent out about two days later and then he was evacuated about three days after that to Moresby and then two days after that he died of scrub typhus. Do you remember that?

Yes, I remember him dying. I remember him dying there.

Do you remember anybody else dying there?

No. I remember Brettie. Brettie, there was a [brown] fellow by the name of Bret, he had scrub typhus too. And there was another bloke that ...

Bevan was his name. Trevor Bevan.

Yeah, that would be right. He was our blokes. He was the bloke I was trying to think of at the reunion the other day. I was looking at that Read bloke there and I knew I knew him and I was thinking there's another bloke but I couldn't put a name to him. Slim Bevan, yes, he was another bloke.

He was the third one to die of scrub typhus and those were the only three that you lost to scrub typhus.

Yes, that's right.

Do you know how the scrub typhus was carried around? Were you given lectures about that?

No, no, but I found out it comes from a mite. The mites are infected, they get infected from the rats and I've seen jars of them down at ... we went to Lae after Nadzab, and I've seen jars of these mites and I've asked - they used to go out and collect them, whatever they call them, the unit they call them that used to do that sort of work - and I remember one chappy showing me there a jar of them and he said, 'Some of those have got scrub typhus but we don't know which ones have got scrub typhus. Not every one of them has got it. But if one of those blokes had bitten a rat that had scrub typhus that's the bloke'. And it seems rather a strange thing that you could live up there and so few get scrub typhus because of the type of climate and the conditions you're under and all this jungle there around you all of the time.

Did you go to Bulldog at any time, did you?

No, I never went to Bulldog.

So were you at Nadzab till they finally went up to Dumpu?

Well from Nadzab I went to Lae and from Lae I went back to Wau. That's where I joined the unit. See we were all broken up up there. See we had some of them in Milne Bay, some in Bulldog and some at Nadzab and we had them ... we were sort of advanced RAPs you see. This is why the unit sort of got split up. But when I went back to Wau the headquarters shifted to Wau and then we went back to Wau ... we went from Nadzab back to Lae and from Lae back to Nadzab. But when we got to Lae of course they had an AGH there at Lae and the fighting had gone from Shaggy Ridge across to Madang. The Japs came in ... Lae was like there on the coast, Nadzab was in here, Shaggy Ridge was there and Madang was there. So what happened with the campaign at Lae, they had the Yanks come in from the sea and I think the 7th and the 9th Australian units, one landed north of them and the other landed south of them and they came up like this and the Yanks come in from the sea but they bombarded hell out them before they tried to land there. Well what the Japs did, they came through between Nadzab - Nadzab was in there - to Shaggy Ridge. They dug in in Shaggy Ridge there you see. And from then on, when they got them out of Shaggy Ridge, they went out to Madang. They moved out to Madang.

Shaggy Ridge was the time when you were evacuating all the casualties from Nadzab was it?

Yeah.

And how long after Nadzab did you go down to ... how long do you think you were all together up at Nadzab before you went down to Lae?

Oh I couldn't even take a guess at it, whether it was three or four months we stayed up there. You sort of jump one another in the war. It's not like you're here today and you're not far from the fighting and then when it moves away somebody else over-jumps you and goes up a little bit further. And you might be there ... you could be there for two or three months again before you get another assignment where they sort of pull you out. This is the way they seem to work up there anyway.

Lae, was that better than Nadzab?

Lae, well the climate was around about the same. There wasn't much difference in the climate but we didn't have much ... there was a lot of troops around about Lae there. There was a lot of troops around about Lae. There were no townships. There were no townships at Moresby or any of those sort of places. Where there was a township ... the only thing that was

around about Lae that was of any consequence was the aerodrome there and where they'd bombed the aerodrome and put a bulldozer in and shoved all the Zeros off the side into the jungle and left them there and then they used it.

So what about down at Wau? Was that better again, was it?

Wau was a beautiful climate at Wau. I would recommend it to any person, Wau. It's about 7,000 feet up and the days are warm and the nights are cold so you're right. You can have a nice hot day and a real good sleep of a night - you need a blanket too.

And was that a sort of return to camp life, was it, with the hospital there and that sort of thing?

Yes. Well, it was more or less I suppose you could say a sort of an assembling post I suppose.

What was the hospital like?

The hospital, oh tents, that's all.

Did they operate there?

Yes. There was one young fellow that came in - we didn't have any casualties amongst the troops, or very few, unless they have a broken leg or something like that, the Japs had gone out of it - but there was one occasion there where an old native fellow carried his son in. His son was only a young fellow about ten or twelve or something like that, twelve years of age I suppose, and they were playing throwing a hand grenade, a Japanese hand grenade from one to the other and it exploded. And it blew a leg off him and I don't know what else it didn't do but it left a lot of holes in him with one thing and another. And the old fellow carried him miles to us there in Wau and our CO and the rest of the doctors - I guess it would be Thomas and who else would have been there at the time with Captain Thomas?

Identification: This is Kevin Ryan - three. And you just told us the story about home brew up at ... where was it?

Up at Lae. While we were up at Lae one of our captains, his father was a manager of a warehouse in Melbourne and he got hops and yeast up from Melbourne for us to make a home brew up there.

How did you come to be the one to make it? Had you put him up to him in the first place? Whose idea was it?

Well I had the recipe so you can take it from there. I was the only one that had a recipe so I suppose when he found out that I had the recipe and he got the ingredients up. But anyway we were stumped for malt. So what we did, we raided the RAP there

and we got the cod liver oil and malt out and we mixed water with it and the oil went to the top, so we syphoned off the malt from the bottom and when we got enough malt I set to work and made a home brew and I think I made forty-eight bottles. So Captain Curry gave us twenty-four bottles. There must have been only about twelve of us there I think at that particular time. I know there was two bottles a piece so I asked the blokes, they wanted to get at it after we'd brewed for a week or two. We dug a hole in the ground and kept it watered all the time to get it a bit cool and then they wanted it. They asked, 'When are we going to have it?'. So I went over and saw Curry and he said, 'Oh well, we'll have it tonight'. And the party was on and over in twenty minutes and there wasn't a man standing on his feet after twenty minutes. They drank the two bottles one after the other and they were down everywhere about the place. The only people that were standing on the ground were the two officers, one of the batmen and myself.

Did you make any more after that?

Yes, we had another batch or two made after that but they took it a little bit easy. They only drank one bottle until they got a little bit of effect of it and then they went a bit easy. But on the first occasion they drank the two bottles, one after the other.

Any other brews of any sort around? Were you the only one to do it?

I was the only one that made beer. But the cooks used to distil a bit there. Like they used to get any peelings and dried fruit or anything like that that they could get their hands on and they'd mix it altogether until it would ferment and then they'd boil it and they had a copper pipe that used to collect the steam and it would go through cold water and it would drip out pure alcohol. It would knock a bullock fifty yards off. One bottle of that you'd have half an army tight. By hell it was powerful stuff.

There's one thing I didn't ask you and that is about the native labour up in New Guinea. Did you have many of them working for you?

Yes, we had a few of them. The biggest job they had was cleaning up all the porridge that we didn't eat. They used to keep eating and eating and eating and their stomachs would keep coming out and out and out. But, oh, we didn't have any trouble with them.

Were they carrying the stretchers in at Nadzab or was it all jeep/ambulances?

Oh they did a lot of carrying. They carried the stretchers. You can see by that photo there that they carried the stretchers, those fellows, yes. But so long as you fed them

well they were all right. But you needed a lot of them to do a little work but, anyhow, there was plenty of them over there anyway and they were quite willing to work for us too. There was no problems to get them to work.

Is there anything else I should have asked that I didn't, if you can remember stories that you can tell?

Oh I think I've told you enough stories.

All right. Thank you very much Mr Kevin Ryan.

END OF TAPE THREE - END OF INTERVIEW