ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: FRED SOMERFIELD - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE – SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: FRED SOMERFIELD

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD RAXWORTHY

SUMMARY:

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: This is the 9th Australian Field Ambulance AIF Oral History Project - Tape 16A, 30th April, 1991. I'm talking to Mr Fred Somerfield. This is side one.

Mr Somerfield, where were you born and when?

I was born in Cooma, New South Wales, on 26th August, 1921.

Did you grow up around there?

No. I left there after my father died and he was buried there when I was about 18 months old. We then moved from there was I was about three to Sydney, Randwick particularly, where my grandmother lived, and then my mother took over the lease of the Como Hotel and I moved to Como at the age of four to six and a half and then returned to Randwick.

Where did you go to school?

I went to school at Randwick, at the Sacred Heart school, behind the Catholic Church at Randwick, and then proceeded to the Marist Brothers. I had a couple of years with the Nuns at Mullumbimby where my mother had the lease of another hotel.

So the influence you had as a child, parental influence, must have been nearly all from your mother then?

From my mother and two elder sisters, who are now deceased.

What sort of influence did you think you got from all of them?

I have often said that I have been very lucky. If there was anything towards mothering I had it knocked out of me in the Army. I treat the Army as being a very formative period of my youth, of which I am very grateful.

Did you do well at school? Did you like school?

I didn't do terribly well. I was a pretty average sort of a person. I enjoyed sport and played a bit of football. But it wasn't until later years and again, particularly the war, that I decided that I had, euphemistically, wasted a few years and I had better get down and do some hard study.

When you came out of school, did you go straight to work. Was it the depression then?

It was the end of the depression. As a matter of fact my mother lost everything in the hotel at Mullumbimby, because the landlady, who had never run the hotel herself, refused to renew

her lease. So we had to just walk out of there with practically nothing. But I was able to continue on with the help of relatives, at school, and did the leaving certificate in 1937. I then went for a time to a legal office, but could not enter articles because I was then too young, so I just did general office work. I went back to school one day a week to do Latin, which was a prerequisite in those days. I finally got that at the next year and entered into articles. That was very shortly interrupted by being called up in November, 1941.

Where did you go first?

I went first to Ingleburn. I applied for the 9th field ambulance because a great friend of mine from school was already in that unit.

Who was that?

That was ultimately Captain James Cuff.

What was he in the unit?

He was Quartermaster Captain.

You naturally did meet him. You got to Ingleburn.

I did. There was a bit of interference from the office and the relative, because I then got a call up to interview the Brigade legal officer. At his influence I was seconded to him for several months, which I detested greatly. I had no shorthand or typing and I would have to take down the evidence of courts of inquiry or court marshals in longhand and then stay up all hours of the night typing out the transcript. So after Christmas I requested to be returned to the unit and fortunately I was.

What did you do next?

I was then just a private operating in the quartermaster's store.

Did you continue as a quartermaster?

Yes. I was on the staff of the quartermaster.

Do you remember much about the camp at that time?

Not very much I suppose. Sergeant Reid was the senior NCO as far as the physical training was concerned. The marches and the parades etc, etc, and the usual duties of being a hospital orderly, learning how to make beds and things of that nature.

As well as being a quartermaster?

I think that might have been indeed. But I may not have been firmly placed in the quartermaster's store at that stage. I find going back that far a little hard to put into proper perspective.

Do you remember the commanding officer at that time?

It was Colonel Davies. I had heard of him, of course, from Jim Cuff, when he was on leave. I certainly saw him. I was on the parade of the new ones who came in. He took that parade, if I recall. I don't think I saw him on his horse on a parade, but I did see him having his daily constitutional on his ride. I believe that he had the horse with him, and that he came to Frenchs Forest with us. But I understand that there is some doubt about that.

Can you remember him turning you out in the middle of the night?

If that was at Ingleburn, no, I can't. It may have been before I got there. I have heard that story.

Many people have told it.

Yes. It may have been before I got there.

What sort of training were you doing there? Were you doing normal military training, or was it hospital and ambulance-type training?

No. I can recall being out on a firing range. Whether that was from Frenchs Forest or whether it was from Ingleburn, my memory is too clouded.

Were you a combatant in the sense that you were allowed to carry arms, or were you one of the ambulances that were not under the Geneva Convention, allowed to carry arms?

We didn't have any arms issued at Ingleburn. It was not until we proceeded overseas, after we had, at Wallgrove, agreed almost unanimously, that we would volunteer and ask for us to be seconded to the AIF that side arms were issued to officers and NCOs and I think rifles to the transport group.

But not the nursing orderlies or the stretcher bearers?

I believe not, although I was not in the executive for an orderly room position.

Do you remember going on any bivouacs from Ingleburn at all?

I know I did a night rendezvous with the suppliers out from Kellyville. I believe that that was from Wallgrove, rather than from Ingleburn, but other than that I cannot recall any.

You did not go down south to Bulli at one stage?

No. I know that at the time Mount Keira and Bulli was talked about, that was before I was there.

They were apparently out with the horses at that stage.

I was hearing all this from my friend Jim Cuff.

So did you go to St Ives or Frenchs Forest? Can you remember?

Yes. We moved to Frenchs Forest - I cannot really remember - I think later in 1942. I recall, I don't think I had ever been in the area before, having been mainly in the eastern suburbs. I know we had the 17th battalion on the opposite side of the road to us. They would be on the southern side of the road. I remember being involved in fighting bushfires there and getting down out of the - or trying to get out of the heat - from the trees burning on one side of the road and pushing my head into a culvert and almost suffocating myself from the lack of air being pulled out from the fire on the other side of the road. However, we were able to subdue the fires ultimately but it was quite an experience.

Do you remember going to a function that was provided by the local residents for you after the fires were over?

I can't imagine a free function that I would purposely avoid. I can't think of anything of significance about that, except of course we had the Q store in the little public school that was on the confluence of two roads; the main road coming up and the side road running in. It was there that we got our first webbing equipment. I can always remember myself and one other - I think it was Ken Stonehouse, if I recall correctly, having great fun and games trying to work out how the equipment was to be put together. There were no instructions, of course on the boxes that came in.

Were you at Pennant Hills golf course at all?

No, I was not unfortunately, because I believe they had a very good time there. There was talk of one doctor, with a double barrelled name, enjoying his scotch while he took a shower, something I have never seen anybody else do.

So who was your commanding officer when you were at Frenchs Forest?

I said earlier, I thought in the early stage that it was Colonel Bretherton who came there, but ultimately I do remember that it was at Frenchs Forest that we got Colonel Bretherton.

Which company were you in?

Headquarters company, so far as I recall again because the Q store was always part of the organisation.

From there, where did you go? Did you go straight to Narellan?

No. My recollection is that we moved from Frenchs Forest back to Wallgrove.

Was that a camp?

That was a camp, a very, very big camp. It had been. It was still fairly well occupied, but it was, as I believed, not of the same dimensions as it had been earlier. I remember a person who later came as a swimming coach to Watson's Bay, Mr Wackler, who was a pretty good wrestler. He was a physical education officer and he was in the camp at the end of our road. His name came back to me again when I came back from New Guinea and I had the job of winding up the show and had to get all the equipment checked at the Victoria Barracks and get a clean bill of health and almost an audit account and he was the man who did it for me.

In the early times we are talking about, from Wallgrove. Did you have the vehicles in charge, or was that the transport people?

No. That was still the transport people. There was transport section of the show, which is my recollection, all of the time. Certainly there was a transport show in New Guinea. Bill Peters was the NCO in charge there with the various transport officers or tocos, who passed through their hands.

That is what they called them is it, Tocos.

They did, yes, it was an Americanism. We might have all picked up a bit of that, but I had better not get ahead of myself.

Can you remember Major Holcombe?

I cannot remember Major Holcombe very, very well, because on one occasion we were going on a march from the showgrounds - this is where my recollection of having been there may have been at fault - we were marching, I cannot remember the occasion, from the showground to either the Toad at Pymble or Pennant Hills and going up the road to the north side we passed a threepence on the road. I bent down to pick it up and he reprimanded me for breaking ranks. When I told him what I had picked up he said, 'We'll go halves'. We then proceeded, when we got back to camp, to try to split the threepence by chopping it with an axe on a block of wood. As you can imagine, we were not very successful. However, we had a piece of it each, but I don't know whether it did either of us any good. But he was a delightful person. I did not have very much to do with him

after he arrived in new Guinea because he was with a section of the crowd that always seemed to be somewhere else, other than headquarters.

> Do you remember going on - apart from that march - other route marches with him, when he was trying to get along stiff legged?

He was stiff legged but he had an amazing capacity for walking or even changing step with a little hop, skip and a jump. But certainly he used to march and he kept his timing if I recall.

> Do you remember the other major that was around the place? I don't know if he arrived at that stage, Major Heffernan?

I can't recall when he came to us, but I can certainly recall him operating on a cebaceous cyst on my neck in a tent. I remember at Townsville when we were waiting for 11 weeks there to be embarked or then boated, or whatever you call it, strangely enough, when we returned and after I was married in 1948, my wife and I went to live at Bexley North and he happened to be one of the local doctors and we formed a firm friendship until poor Rick found life a bit too heavy. He had an episode with the bottle and ultimately he died.

> You mentioned that he operated on a cebaceous cyst. Was he one of the mad surgeons, was he?

I don't know if he was a mad surgeon, but he certainly left me with a nice scar.

> But you would normally leave those things alone, wouldn't you?

He was the doctor. He said it should come out. What did come out I did not see, but I certainly felt it all over my neck. I had no bad reactions to it, so it must have been a successful job. There are other things I have heard about people who wanted to do various appendicectomies or tracheotomies with a rusty pen knife and have a few needles. But that could have just been Army talk.

> I had one in the Air Force and he was a real madman, but he was a terrific surgeon.

They do get their reputations a bit sullied, I suppose.

> I think they try to enhance them by talking as well and scaring people.

That is very true.

> Where did you go next?

From Wallgrove we then received word that we were on the move north. I can recall at that stage, I don't think I had ever been awake for 24 hours, but I can recall it was nearer 46 or getting close to 48, but we didn't sleep until such time as we had packed all the gear, got it into trucks, got it to the railway station and on to the train before we took off. But I know that I fell asleep very, very early on the train.

No sleeping compartment, I would think, either.

No. I think I might have been a corporal at that stage, but no, just with the troops.

Where did you go to in Brisbane?

We went to Eagle Farm in Brisbane.

That was the race course.

That was, and is now, the race course. It was there that we got our first indication that what we had been given as equipment at Frenchs Forest was not going to be used in New Guinea because we were then told we would have to dye the material, not us. We found when we arrived there that we had to get all our webbing equipment, those issues and that still in the Q store, and get it dyed in these large vats of green dye. There had been other processes suggested, in fact one was a spraying process, but all that did was congeal the whole paint over the webbing, so it felt like an armour and it would crack off at the first movement. That had to be all done and the stores were being repacked and dried and dried and repacked and everything else. The fellows had to do their own, of course. That took a bit of gilt off the gingerbread. It also led to another situation of having with some of the boys, Bill Armstrong I can remember was there, and one of the perks of the Q store is that having been issued with the jungle greens, if you were on leave I still had a pair of khaki drill. I went along with the boys to the City Hall in Brisbane to a dance in my khaki drill and khaki shirt and some of the boys were dancing around in their greens. Bill and I waved to him. I was dancing with a girl and she said, 'Do you know those fellows in green?'. I said, 'Yes, they're part of our show'. She just dropped me on the floor and walked off and left me. It wasn't until after I made further inquiries that I found out of course that there had been only a few weeks before the great Battle of Brisbane with the Aussies. Of course, the Yanks being in their khaki drill, or olive drill if you like, but the Aussies being in green, the girls wouldn't have anything to do with the Aussies.

So you got dropped just like that.

So much for the love of money, I suppose, or something.

Well, maybe they didn't like your fighting.

Maybe she didn't like the way I danced, either.

How long were you in Brisbane, weeks?

It wasn't too long before we went north.

Do you remember being on an ambulance train at that time or after, when you were up in Townsville, did you get on an ambulance train from there?

No. Myself personally, was after we arrived at Townsville and we were 11 weeks, as I have mentioned earlier, at xxx, that the question - and this was asked and can be registered as a result of the Buna Gona campaign there where the Americans were slightly mauled, that we were asked to see if we could take an emergency ambulance train from Townsville where the casualties were to be flown in, to Brisbane. We took that on.

What rank were you at that time?

At that stage I was a WO2 having been given the warrant whilst we were at Oonoonba.

Were you a sergeant before that?

I must have been. I think I must have been a sergeant leaving Brisbane, or having left Brisbane. I have an idea that that was done on the train, or I was told about it on the train going north. Again, all this is very long ago.

Can you remember the train going north being held up by floods?

At Townsville, yes I can. I can remember having found out that the Townsville Brewery, there was only one brewery operating in the town and my mates and myself decided to go to see what it was like. I can remember drinking copious quantities of the beer but having no apparent effect at all. I don't think anybody in the 9th Field Ambulance thought much about the Rockhampton beer.

That was on the way up.

I believe so.

When you got up to Townsville, where did you go then? Did you go up into the hills or did you stay down? A number of them went on to a hospital up there.

The unit, I think, this was after, I believe, after the emergency ambulance training which I was directed, was operative. It was after they had been up at - this is where my memory fails me. The unit was up at Atherton. I know, I can remember and I am pretty sure that this was the ambulance train that we took up to Tolga, after we had finished the run to

Brisbane and went back to Tolga because I know that I lost 400 blankets off the ambulance train, out of its equipment, the WEP. I also know that there is a civil defence corps, or a civil corps, whatever they were called in those days, camped alongside the train at Tolga doing some roadworks. I have always mentally blamed them for the loss. But I could never be sure. But the sequence of events, I find very difficult.

I believe the name was Ravenshoe.

That is right. The Atherton Tablelands was Ravenshoe.

I should put that down as well as Ravenshoe and that is the Atherton, of course. The other place that I haven't put down at all is Tolga. Where is that exactly?

Tolga was just a little bit south of Ravenshoe.

Was that a railhead?

That was a rail. We had a rail spur. I don't know that it was necessarily a rail head, but we were on a spur of the line and that was where we stayed. But we used to go into Ravenshoe on leave, although there was a pretty good little pub at Tolga and we didn't really need to go that far.

Were you in charge of the train on the way down to - where did it end up, the emergency ambulance train?

I know we ran from Townsville, because I had to go out to Ross River Siding, where the Abattoirs were, to get the provisions for it. I know that amongst the meat was a whole side of beef, also knew that we had the compliment of some 400 Americans, I don't know whether the war diary might assist in the recollection of that.

It doesn't.

I know also, one dining car, which had a small kitchen as part of it, we had to put that in the middle of the train because with the rest of the carriages for the walking wounded and the stretcher cases, had to be four or aft of it in order to assist the orderlies in the provision of the supply of the meals. The refrigeration of it consisted of a series of shallow let down galvanise lined, or zinc lined compartments, which are only about six to eight inches in depth. The ice was put into the top one and then dribbled down to the lower ones to the compartment which held the food. However, when we were all loaded up, I found that no-one on the team allotted me was a qualified butcher, or had any experience in butchering. So I had at least a side of beef, full set of butcher's equipment of knives and what have you, but no-one to wield them.

SIDE 2

So I then had to take it upon myself to draw upon whatever recollection I had as a child of going into a butcher's shop and seeing the experts roll off sides of roasts. As the train proceeded south during the night, pulling up at every little siding, so that the ladies of the towns could welcome home the brave soldiers, I was kept with my nose to the chopping block. However, I understand that my chief cook then at the time who was Stan Loon, to whom I have spoken to since about this, but he doesn't seem to remember that I had any cause for complaint. Yet he did a wonderful job of cleaning up after what he was given to cook. Of course, he certainly cooked as well. The boys were to be congratulated for the way they looked after the big American negroes who loved playing crap and dice and cards in the middle of the corridor when they were trying to look after the other stretcher cases in that particular carriage.

Do you have nurses on that train?

My recollection is that we had two, there may have been three, nurses on that train.

One of them has contacted us, her name was Green.

It could may well have been. As I was speaking then I just remembered that we had a nurse Kelly, but again, that has just come in out of the window.

Did you have a doctor on the train?

No. They had been examined before they got on the train. So it was only those who were either walking wounded or stretcher cases that were able to be attended to. There may have been an American doctor on board. I cannot recall. I am pretty sure we didn't have any member of our group as Captain on board. But we then ran into the Burdekin River being up. Whereas the train was equipped and vitteled for a two day trip, we had to proceed west, going out through Winton, Longreach and Emerald, and then back, seeing the flood as we saw it going as we went west and diminishing, and then as we came back east then growing. It was from the point of view of the countryside, it was a very educational trip. I was concerned that the troops would not be properly fed, but as I have mentioned earlier, Stan Loom and the rest of the boys did a fantastic job. However, it was a four day trip and I was very pleased to arrive in Brisbane and off load the wounded.

What did you do? Did you take the train back again?

I believe we went back to Tolga. I am not too sure whether that was in the expectation of having another emergency or whether it was just that it had been a north Queensland train initially.

Do you remember anything else. Was there any problems with the Americans in Townsville? Can you remember that?

No. I don't have any recollection in Townsville.

Do you remember loading up and going to New Guinea?

I can remember vaguely.

You don't remember loading up and then unloading again on one trip.

Yes, I do. I remember loading it at Oonoonba. But I did not go with the transport section that took it to the wharves because I would be going later with headquarters company. So I was not involved in the physical loading on to the ship and off loading it again. I know how disappointed the boys were who had to do that, and of course everybody was disappointed because after being there 11 weeks we were getting to the stage where we were ready to bite anyone.

So you finally did get away. What was the ship that you loaded on and went across to New Guinea? Was that the Duntroon?

I believe it was.

Did you go into Port Moresby there and unload at the docks?

Yes, we unloaded at the docks there. We then proceeded to, I thought it was a place called five or six mile, but it may have been Rigo Road.

There is a six mile. There is a nine mile as well.

Yes. I have a recollection of moving into a camp at night where others had moved out. It was up in the hills. I don't know whether it was as far up as Lux Lane.

Was it near the airport or not?

The airports were still on the coastal plains, were they not, whether they were six or nine mile.

I don't really know. I think they were up a bit. There were two airports weren't there?

Yes. There was Jackson's and Ward's. But my recollection of the other place, being up in the hills, is that we were going in by truck at night and the camp had been left only that day and not in a very cared for condition, because I know we went over a hell of a bump and the top of the 30 hundredweight truck, of which I was riding in the back, the whole section holding the canvass came off and hit me on the head, right in the middle of the forehead.

Where did headquarters set up?

Headquarters, I thought, set up at Rigo Road.

So you moved over there and were with headquarters, were you?

I was with headquarters, yes.

By this time you were the quartermaster, were you?

No. I was with RQMS. Captain Cuff was quartermaster. But where we were camped on this occasion, the camp as I said, had been left by another group the night before, we were very close to an American mule camp which they used for packing over the mountains, packing gear over. The first time in my life I was visited by an American officer who wanted to buy our boots. The first realisation that I had that we had something better than the Yanks, because the ones that they were issued with just wouldn't last in the humidity and the rainy season. They were the canvass topped ones with the serated soles, allowing them to walk on the mud of course, but the tops would come away from the bottoms.

He proved to be right.

He proved to be right in so far as we kept every one of our boots intact and we kept all our boots for our men.

So you didn't sell him any, so there. So what happened from there? How long did you stay at Rigo?

Everyone went out on various stations, Terapo, Bulldog, Wau, Lae. Were they at Lae?

Yes.

Yes, they were at Lae.

Right at the end there, that is where they were picked up.

Yes. These were all places that is just like reading a book now, when you were a child you would love to go there. I was just going nowhere, an old monologue ...

What about the mad mile? Did you go there?

Where was the mad mile?

It was an institution, I understand. One of Colonel Bretherton's institutions.

I remember doing that, but that was the mad mile at the Toad.

He had one everywhere, didn't he? Didn't he have one at Rigo Road.

I am not too sure where he had it.

Isn't that where everyone was going over an obstacle course? Other than the Toad.

Maybe I didn't have to do that as a warrant officer, I don't know. I know that he was going to put me on an A4 on one occasion.

What is an A4?

It is a summons, in effect, or misconduct or, contrary to the best thingos.

Prejudice of the Army discipline.

Because I failed to attend a parade that he had called, having been on other duties. However, I also understand that the RSM told him that he just could not do it. He couldn't put me on an A4 because of the issue of a warrant. However, I think I later apologised to him. I didn't hear the call for the parade anyway.

Didn't you go over to Wau with Colonel Bretherton?

No. Captain Guff did, I think.

So you stayed at Rigo Road for all the rest of the time. Were you ever at Lux Lane.

No. I was at Lux Lane. There were very few people left in the show at that time. I know it was at Lux Lane that the famous story of Len Pearson and Carl Bromwich, no doubt you have heard, they were both staff sergeants. The telephone, the field telephone to which we were connected was up at the top of the hill and they were sleeping down the hill nearer the river. The phone rang this night and Lennie Pearson wakes Carl, pushes him over and says, 'Carl, Carl, the phone's ringing'. Carl gets up and tears up the hill and answers the phone. Then he comes back and says, 'What the bloody hell did you call me for? Why didn't you answer it? You were awake'. I thought that was quick thinking. Carl, the phone's ringing. That, and having an occasional swim in the river and playing an occasional game of cricket was about how we put in the time.

What about Tom Kelly? He used to put in some training at Lux Lane didn't he? Were you ever there when he was doing one of his physical training efforts for some of the men?

I can't recall any particularly.

He never got to you, anyway.

I don't recall. I do recall being there for a Christmas. I think it was only one company that was there at the time. I just can't think whether it was headquarters or not. At Christmas we had saved up the supplementary ration which was a halfpenny a day per person, and we had a very nice Christmas dinner. I made little bits and pieces out of cardboard and sweet containers and what have you and we decorated the tables. It went off I think fairly well. It gave us a bit of a break.

Were you responsible for supplying any of your own men up in the various places that they were, or were they supplied locally?

Supply men?

No. Your men of the 9th Field Ambulance were all scattered all over the place.

Yes.

Were you responsible for supplying them?

No. Except for equipping them. For going up there and giving them their usual rations. But they were never close enough to headquarters to be supplying them. They were usually attached to some other regiment or organisation nearby on whose rations they would go.

I seem to remember that Colonel Bretherton went over to Wau for some time. Did headquarters move to Wau.

I thought I mentioned that I did not go to Wau. I don't know that headquarters company as such, or headquarters moved to Wau. It could well have done. But when you are not there you don't really know what goes on.

Are you one of the group that went back before the main party or not?

Back to Australia?

It was about 100 that were up at Lux Lane or around the place, around Moresby generally. They went back to Australia before the rest of the unit.

I think that is probably correct, because my recollection is that we didn't have a full compliment when we first went back from Moresby.

Was that near Newcastle?

Yes, near Newcastle, Rutherford. I may well be wrong in this. I know Captain Cuff, and it may have been one or two other officers. They occupied the old nurses quarters near the hospital which was on a rise overlooking part of Greta camp and

we were on the more eastern side of the site at Rutherford. But that was then a deserted camp.

When you came back to Australia, was Colonel Bretherton with you?

He certainly wasn't with me personally.

In that case, you must have been one of the first.

I would have to agree with that. My recollection is hopeless, I am sorry.

I can't think of any other explanation anyway. We have his report there, his war diary, and he reports on 100, he says, going back first from the Moresby area.

That could be quite right.

You went back from Moresby, did you?

I believe so.

Right. The rest went from Lae.

I certainly went back from Moresby.

Right. That solves that one.

I was trying to think of the name of the boat that we came back on.

They went back on the Duntroon again, but you couldn't have.

I thought it was the Duntroon.

You might have done, because it would have had time to come back. I think it was two months between the time when the first group went and when the second group went.

I see, yes. That could be. But we certainly did not fly back. I am pretty sure about that.

When you got back, did you come on the train or did you come straight into Sydney? How did you get up to Rutherford?

We came into Sydney, I know, because I can recall going home to Randwick and knocking on the front door and suddenly realising that I hadn't let them know that I was coming home. I must have had some leave coming to me.

When you were up in New Guinea, all the time you were up there. Were you living in hutted camps all the time? What were the conditions?

No. We were under canvas all the time. We had, in the tent at Rigo Road, there were two staff sergeants I think. It was floorboards, otherwise it was canvass.

Did anybody get any malaria out of your crew?

When you say my crew, do you mean the whole quartermaster?

No, the group that you were at Rigo Road.

That was general. That was the whole group there, as far as I recall.

Did any of them get malaria?

Not in my tent, no.

What about any of the other things, dengue fever or scrub typhus or any of those sorts of things?

The only one I recall of dengue fever and scrub typhus, and I think malaria also, was Johnnie Kilkeary. He was up the trail I think with one or two others.

I thought they were on their own, each one.

They could have been. As I say, when you are not dealing with placements or logistics, we were only logistic looking after stores and looking after food, it seems that cooks have enough to do.

I understand that their job up the Kokoda Trail was to act as medical orderlies for the signals people on the Kokoda Trail.

I see. They would probably be working individually, those who were up there.

Can you remember anybody else particularly? Anybody noteworthy of when you were there? People coming back and going somewhere else?

The only noteworthy thing that I can recall at the moment is that it is a small world. It is amazing where you meet people. I left an office that only had three articled clerks, I think, and I was sent out on a map reference to get some supplies when we were up there in New Guinea and arriving at the map reference as best as I could read it, I could see tents amongst the trees, but I couldn't see anybody about the place. We circled what looked like a track and I pulled up outside a tent and saw a fellow with a slouch hat on sitting with knees apart

reading the paper on a tin trunk outside the tend. I called out to him something about, 'Hey soldier', and he said, 'Goodday Fred'. It was one of the articled clerks from the office who had gone into the Army and didn't know where he had been posted. So it is amazing where you meet people.

I have had the same sort of thing at sea. You go to another part of the world and there you are.

That is right. It is always a good thing to think about, because even when you go away you shouldn't do things you didn't oughta, because somebody might see you.

I will tell you a story, but I won't tell you on tape.

As it turned out, when we came back to Rutherford, about the only thing of any consequence that occurred there was that the unit was disbanded and I received instructions to do the check up with Victoria Barracks as to how to get the WEP written off.

The WEP?

The war equipment - again, the memory escapes me. That was done, as I have mentioned earlier, and I had to go through and make out an invoice of all the plant and equipment that was there and get it taken down to barracks. They disposed of it and after they checked through the records that you keep and everything, we received a clean auditor's account.

Is that part of the blankets?

The blankets had been written off, not from our equipment, but from the equipment on the train, the emergency, the ambulance train. So it was not off 9th Field Ambulance stuff. But however, that was accounted for and moved back to Rutherford to find that everybody else had been given jobs somewhere around Sydney in various other parts except the old CO's batman and myself who were then ceremoniously given orders to train to Queensland to the jungle training camp at Canungra. I arrived some time in August and spent a fortnight going out in night marches with torches and all the things that we have already been through anyway. When it happened in August, 8th or the 15th, I was a WO, I was able to have my own paybook carried with me. So I soon got compassionate leave and I was back on the train to Sydney. I then went to showgrounds and applied for the CRTS course and did an exam there and passed that. I was only looking at it this morning, before coming round to see you, the correspondence from them and Sydney University. I was then back in the office - as I also know from the records - mid October 1945.

What did you do there?

I was going back to the law. I had been given the university course at the law school and having spent so much time away, I

set to and I was able to do the four year law course in three years. I thanked the Army very kindly.

What did you become, a solicitor or a barrister?

A solicitor. I have now retired and my son has taken my shoes.

So, you spent all your time almost in New Guinea and outside Moresby in a tent.

That is right. So when I said that we used to say after I was married, to my wife, if my son ever asked me what I did in the war, I would be able to say, 'I was a nurse, son'. But I didn't do it in the hospital, I was nursing the men with their food.

What about people? For instance, when you said that you were back at Victoria Barracks and you and the CO, you meant Colonel Bretherton, did you?

No, I am sorry, did I say CO? No, he had given me the instructions if I recall, or at least I don't think he gave them to me personally. I think I got them in writing.

Had he come back to Australia at that stage?

He must have, or I wouldn't have had any authority. Captain Cuff had gone north again. He was in Balikpapan.

Tom Kelly went up there as well.

Yes, but I think he was at Labuan, wasn't he?

I don't know, he mentioned Balikpapan.

They might have both been on the landing. Jim was with the second fifth AGH I think, the first of fifth.

I can't remember, exactly. I will have to listen to his tapes again to work out where they went next.

I think the Australian landing might have all been at Balikpapan. There was a group who went to Labuan. I read not so long ago a book about Borneo.

Right. Is there anything else I should have asked you?

I think I would be only batting the breeze if I tried to think up anything further.

You have raised a number of questions that I have to address.

I am not too sure about that either. But that is to the best of my recollection. I might have been mesmerised by the whole

situation. It is a long time ago and much water has run under the bridge since.

Thank you very much, Mr Fred Somerfield.

END OF TAPE ONE - END OF INTERVIEW