ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: DOUG DUNLOP - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE – SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: DOUG DUNLOP

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. This tape 18A, 10.5.1991, Mr Doug Dunlop, former lieutenant. This is side 1.

Where were you born and when?

In Sydney, 1917.

Whereabouts?

Leichhardt.

Did you grow up around there?

No, we moved to Liverpool then. Then from there I came to the Eastern Suburbs.

What sort of influence do you think you got from your parents?

Regarding army?

Well, anything - political, army ...

Oh no, just a normal family upbringing as it was in those days. Nothing sensational, just an education and away to work.

What had your father been?

He was a mariner; a mate on a ship.

And was there any religious education in the family?

No.

And political?

No.

Well where did you go to school?

Leichhardt Public School. I left at an early age, right in the middle of the Depression.

Did you like school?

No.

(laughs) And when you left did you manage to get a job? Was your father in work?

Yes. But I managed to get a job straightaway. Virtually I was never out of work.

So where did you work first?

I started at Lowes and I was there for twenty-nine years.

Right. So how did you get into the services? Did you volunteer?

No, we were all drafted into the army in 1940.

Did you do any compulsory military training before that?

No, none at all. We missed that.

Right. So when you were drafted in where did you go?

Ingleburn.

And what unit were you with then?

The 9th Field Ambulance.

Oh, straightaway!

Yes.

Have you have idea why you ended up in the 9th Field Ambulance? Did you volunteer for it?

No. It was just a matter of the method of which the army done it. They selected our area which is mainly Randwick, Coogee, Bondi area and we went to the drill hall in Carrington Road and from there we went straight to Ingleburn.

Can you remember what Ingleburn was like when you got there in the 9th Field Ambulance area? Were the horse lines there?

Yes, the horse lines were there, yes my word. Ingleburn was a well-established covered camp. It wasn't a tent camp, it was a covered camp. We had horses, yes.

Can you remember the commanding officer?

Yes, Pete Davies.

What was he like?

He was a very pukka gentleman type of commanding officer. Lived in the past and used to ride his charger. We'd go in a route march and he'd be out in front on his horse.

Where did you go for route marches?

Well, usually to the Cross Roads and back, that type of thing.

Did they let you in at the pub at the Cross Roads before you came back?

No, we didn't go in the pub as a matter of fact.

I see the pub's still there although it's a lot different to what it used to be.

Oh, a lot different to what it was then.

In those days, do you remember the horse ambulances at that time?

Yes. We never used them though. They were never used, they were just there. I think they disappeared after a sort space of time.

Did you ever go on a bivouac down to Bulli or ...

Oh yes, yes, many times. We used to cover from Broken Bay right down the coast to Bulli at Wollongong.

Matt Nolan mentioned taking the horses out on the bivouac to Bulli on one occasion.

I don't know about that. Matt would know all about the horses. We never saw the horses very much.

Did you come in as a private in the first instance?

A private, yes.

And where did you get your first promotion?

I got my first promotion as a lance corporal and then in October '41 I was a corporal and December '41 I was a sergeant and in May '42 I was a lieutenant.

And at what stage did you join the AIF volunteer?

That would be when we were at the Green Toad.

Did a whole lot of you volunteer there?

Yes, practically the whole unit.

So when did you go to the showground?

We went to the showground on 7.12.41.

For what purpose?

Oh, merely to supply ambulance service. See there's a lot of troops there and we'd pick up in the district too. Different army posts, down at Bondi for instance had a machine gun nest down there in Bondi and we had to service the whole area and bring them back to the hospital.

There weren't many people in the services for you to bring back, were there?

There were no war casualties but there was always a lot of sicknesses and that type of thing which you had to look after.

So when do you remember leaving Ingleburn?

Well that was when we left Ingleburn and we went to the showground, 7.12.41.

And next?

From the showground the unit went to Frenchs Forest then and we stayed there for quite some time.

Where were you stationed at Frenchs Forest? Where were you camping?

Oh, all I can tell you is it was near the 17th Battalion. Near Belrose as it is called now. But there was nothing there, it was just bush in those days. Sorlie Village is right opposite now. Well, that was not there when we were over there, it was just bush.

Were you there at the time of the bushfire?

Yes, very much so. We fought the bushfires and they were very frightening things. And when it was all over the locals put a special night in a little church hall for us and it was very nice.

Did you go to the Green Toad as well?

I went to the Green Toad after Wallgrove. I went to hospital from Wallgrove. I busted my leg and I was in hospital.

While you were at Frenchs Forest?

No, at Wallgrove.

You were actually at Wallgrove?

Yeah, we went to Wallgrove and from there I finished up in the 103 AGH up at Baulkham Hills. Then I came back from there to the Green Toad. The unit was already at the Green Toad and I joined it.

Did anything interesting happen at the Green Toad?

No, it was quiet. See, I wasn't there that long before they moved them out. They were going to the battle stations which B Company, they done the southern side of the harbour - in other words from Bondi. I was stationed at the Lakes Golf Club with that section then and the Company Headquarters was at the Bankstown baths and we were doing evacuations right through the area to the various hospitals.

What sort of vehicles were you using at that time?

Oh, standard army ambulances.

So where did you go next?

From the Lakes, from there we went to Narellan and we were there very long - that was a tent camp, it was all canvas - and from there we went to Brisbane.

Where were you when the Japanese bombed Sydney and the business of the ...

I was in the hospital up at Baulkham Hills and we got a big scare then. I had my leg in a full plaster you see and we had a big scare. This is right up at Baulkham Hills, and they said, 'Everybody under the bed'. Now this was up at Baulkham Hills and nobody got under the bed. We all went out on the verandah to look out. You could see a little bit but you couldn't see anything though really. That was it. I didn't see much of that at all.

At Narellan, how long were you there?

Narellan ... I'd say about three months from memory, yes, about three to four months because we went to Brisbane on 11th of the 12th.

Where were you commissioned?

At Narellan.

Where did you get your ...

No, sorry, it was before I went to Narellan. It was while I was in hospital and I came to the Green Toad. That was when I first got my commission at the Toad actually.

Did you do any officer's training?

No. It was purely a field ranking. We done a gas school, that's the only thing. See the purpose of the bearer officers - you know what they were - in the early days of the war there was a shortage of medical officers and each company had three medical officers. Well there wasn't enough medical officers to go around so the army in it's wisdom thought: well, we can get

by without one medical officer and have a bearer officer doing the drill work and general administration, things which doctors didn't have to do, and that hence created the bearer officers.

Did the doctors ever train you in things like anaesthetics and ...

Oh yes, yes. As a matter of fact, later on when I was not with the 9th, we used to give the anaesthetics, in Bougainville. As a matter of fact the padre and I used to fight to see who could get into the theatre first.

It always amazes me, even the medical orderlies, they only had nine weeks training.

Oh, we had a lot of training. We had lots of training. As you can see we were in the camp from late '40 and it was '43 really before we got to New Guinea, so we had heaps and heaps of training. And this is one of the reasons why the 9th Field Ambulance was so efficient. As you can see, in my army history I went through lots of units and wherever I went you always compared them back with the 9th and none of them measured up to the 9th because none of them had the basic training of the 9th. They were a very efficient medical unit. Mainly on account of our CO who was a tremendous stickler for routine and he was a very fine CO.

Do you remember the mad mile?

Mad mile, no.

Well you can't call it the as salt course in the Field Ambulance - an obstacle course.

Oh, this is up at the Green Toad?

Well everywhere I believe.

Yeah, they had one up at the Green Toad where you'd have to go across a rope and all this sort of thing. I always got out of those. I had a bad leg!

So, who was your commanding officer with your company?

Clipson at Bulldog.

No, before that - in Australia?

Holcombe.

Major Holcombe.

Tris Holcombe, yeah. He was our company commander. While we were there we had COs with the 9th, that was Colonel Davies who disappeared very early on and then Reg Bretherton and Reg

Bretherton came to the unit when we were at Frenchs Forest if I remember rightly.

As far as Major Holcombe, can you say something about him? Do you remember him?

He was an amazing man. He was a First World War man and he had - I believe - a bullet through his knee and he had a stiff leg. And in the Forest he'd take us out for walks and, honestly, you were flat out keeping up with him. He used to limp and hop along and he'd see a mountain and he'd say, 'We'll go up there', the highest thing he could see, and he'd go too. He was an amazing chap. He wanted to give the impression that he was as fit, if not fitter than all the younger blokes there, and he was too. He was a real character.

What was he like as a company commander?

Oh, very much the same. He wanted to impress everyone that he was - he was a good bloke - that he was fit. He liked to get on with his medical business too. He was very fond of operating on people.

Was he a mad surgeon?

Well not a mad surgeon but he liked to do these sorts of things.

So later on when you went up to Queensland he was with you then. You say you were at Narellan for about three months.

Yes. I'd say Narellan three to four months and then we went to Brisbane in late '42.

I was rung up by a sister who was at Narellan who says she remembers the 9th Field Ambulance very well.

(laughs)

She was giving me names and all that sort of thing. She mentioned your name.

(laughs) I don't think so.

Well, she mentioned Captain Clipsham as well.

See, they would be ... sisters are more concerned with doctors. The old lieutenants, they didn't get a look in anywhere. The medical people used to go for morning teas and that sort of thing but I was never included in that.

What sort of camp was Narellan? Was it a staging camp for ready to go ...

Yes, that type of thing. We were only there a short time and then we were on our way to Brisbane.

Was there anything remarkable about the trip to Brisbane?

No, not really.

How long were you in Brisbane?

Not that long really. But when we got to Brisbane, the main body of our unit, they went forward up to Townsville and they went to Oonoonba and, again, I was left behind with the rear party. But when I got to Townsville, Oonoonba, all the troops I had with me, they all had their winter gear - their overcoats and winter dress - and the CO, he tore strips off me. We should have got rid of it in Brisbane. I said, 'They wouldn't take them in Brisbane'. So at any rate we got rid of them and then that was that.

And did you dye your stuff green in Brisbane or ...

Oh no, we were all issued.

Some of them had to dye all their gear.

Oh I never struck that. Everything we had was straight out issue.

And you went to Oonoonba.

And it was while they were at Oonoonba that I got leave to come home then. It was early '43 I think. My son was born so the CO gave me a fortnight off. When I came back the troops ... the unit had gone up to the Tablelands. But then that was when we were sent to the 2/14th AGH.

Do you remember any troubles with the Americans with your men in Townsville?

We had none at all. As I say, when we were in Townsville I was with the 2/14th AGH and we had an American unit practically alongside of us and we got along pretty well them, they were very friendly.

No fighting?

No.

No competition for the local girls?

Well, there weren't any.

Probably why you got on well.

They used to like our food. They used to come home and eat with us and all they got was beans and we were doing a bit better than that.

Oh, it's usually the other way around people say.

Oh no, they were poorly looked after up there.

So when did you get your marching orders for New Guinea?

We arrived in New Guinea on 24th of the 6th we got to New Guinea.

You've got those dates there. Where did you get them from?

They're out of my pay book.

Right. Well, I've been saying to all of them, you should be able to have the dates from the pay books. Some of them have got pay books but there's nothing in them.

Well, they've all got dates in them and you've just got to work out who signed the businesses and all that. It's easy to work out. As a matter of fact it's stamped when you're in Australia. When you went to the battle stations it was all on code. It would say Ingleburn, Wallgrove, Narellan on your pay book.

All right. Then you were off to New Guinea. Do you remember there was a false start?

Yes, yes. We missed the boat which was fortunate in one way because the boat was sunk, the hospital ship.

Which one was that?

I'm just trying to think.

Other people have mentioned it anyway.

I just can't think of the name of it. But that's what held us up so long at Oonoonba. We were there for ages.

Then you were loaded on to an American ship.

Yeah, the [Shaunee], a ship called the Shaunee. It was a very nice boat too. It was a passenger ship and it used to do the coastal trips up and down the west coast of America. It was a nice ship to be on.

And you didn't go over with that?

We went over on it.

Oh, did you?

On the Shaunee, yeah.

Everybody else went on the Devonport ...

No, the Duntroon. That's right. The Shaunee was probably later. Our first trip was on the Duntroon. The captain's name was Lloyd, I'll always remember him.

What was it like on that trip? Was it good?

Oh, it was for us. We had a fairly easy trip over really.

So where did you go when you got to Moresby?

We set up a little hospital camp there - not very big. There was a major hospital there you see. We were only a field ambulance; we were just waiting for something to do really.

Can you remember where it was?

No, I can't, I sorry.

Near the airfield?

Not far away, no, not far away.

It wasn't Rigo Road?

No, no.

And it wasn't Frome Road, that was the airport?

No, it was one of those one mile, two mile things.

Oh right, 9 Mile.

Yeah.

What was that like?

Oh, I didn't like Moresby. It was a lousy place really.

Were you camped out?

Yes, in tents. But that's why we noticed a difference when they got to Wau, it was a beautiful climate compared with Moresby.

What was the food like in Moresby?

All right.

So what was it like there? Were you with Headquarters at that time or not?

At Moresby, yes, we were all together there.

Did Colonel Bretherton set up a mad mile there?

Not that I can remember. See, he might have for some of the troops. I missed all that. But, no, he was more interested in getting into action. He liked the action of it.

Who was your sergeant in your company?

I had Len Pearson, Carl Bromwich and Jack McKellar - there was quite a few of them from time to time.

Were you responsible for sending John Rainbow up to the pumps somewhere at Moresby there?

The pumps, no. He was in transport. It must have something to do with transport.

That's true. Yes, apparently he was sent up to man the pumps up on the water supply apparently and he spent most of his time swimming.

One of the things I remember about being in Wau, this Bulldog Road was a treacherous road. As I said, it's only seventy-two miles long ...

Let's get to getting there first. From Moresby ...

From Moresby we went up to the Lakekamu River up to Bulldog.

Can you remember the name of the boat ... the ship?

No, no. It was some little old tramp steamer along the ...

Not the Muliana is it?

Oh I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know the name of it.

So you set out from Moresby. How long did it take to get to Terapo?

Oh, not long. We done it in a day.

And did you pull in there at Terapo?

Oh yes, we pulled in there and we staged over night.

What was that like?

All right. Quite good. And the next day we ...

Was that the place the mission was?

That's right, yes, there's a French mission there. And the next day we went by barge up to Bulldog.

Did you ever run aground or any problems with snags or ...

No, we didn't run aground. We staged over night on the way and a lot of the boys thought they'd sleep on the earth rather than sleep on the steel decks of the barge but they got back onto the boat pretty quick because there were a lot of crocodiles around and you could hear them barking. They were back on board quick smart.

So you unloaded at Bulldog, was it?

At Bulldog, yes. As a matter of fact we staged a place at Bulldog. Our hospital - I don't know whether it wasn't quite ready but we had to wait till the next day to get up there and we staged in an old staging place. The rats were as big as cats there. One chap, a rat ate the back out of his boots. At any rate we eventually got to the little hospital which was a little bit further along.

You didn't have to build a hospital?

No, everything was built for us.

So what was your job when you got there?

Well, again, there was a lot of troops in the area and there were workshops and transports and administration headquarters at Bulldog and a lot of troops there and they all needed medical attention plus the fact that the engineers on the road, that were building the road, they were always having accidents and they had to bring them back to the hospital and treat them.

No problems with malaria?

Oh yes, everybody got malaria and/or dengue.

Did you?

I had dengue, yes, and a bit of malaria.

Was there scrub typhus around up there, or not?

Not there, no. We lost one of our boys with scrub typhus.

What, your company?

Our unit.

Which one was that?

He was a headquarters company. I'm trying to think of his name now.

I do know the names. He wasn't one of yours.

No.

There was Bob Sidoti and ...

Well Bob Sidoti was one of mine. I buried Bob Sidoti. He was a nice little Italian boy.

Where did he catch the scrub typhus?

Oh, that was early on. I think that was in Moresby. I'm pretty certain it was.

John Rainbow reckoned he got it as well but recovered and stayed with the unit.

Yeah, a few of them got it and stayed with the unit. But fortunately I didn't get anything like that. The worst I had was the dengue, that was bad enough.

Well from Bulldog, what were the other places in the area? What was it like on the Bulldog Road?

Unbelievable. You'd have to see it to believe it. Fortunately, being a medical unit we only travelled over it but the engineers they had to live there and they never saw any sun. It rained all the time. It was a terrible road. And landslides; I was caught there between landslides and had to stay overnight and the bulldozers come and cleared the road for you, back and front. The mud, just slid down.

You were there how long after it was built?

The road?

Yes.

Not long because it ran out of its usefulness and they pulled it up. We pushed on then to Wampit. They were going through to Lae but as far as we got to Lae they called it off at Wampit again and that was the end of the road.

So, while you were there was Major Clipsham there?

Yeah, he was in Bulldog.

He was your commander?

That's right. He was the company commander and senior medical officer for the area.

You mentioned medical training that you got at various stages. You haven't mentioned what it was and where you got it so to speak.

Well, we started off at Ingleburn camp. See, there was a camp hospital there and that was where all of us - none of us knew anything much about it at all - that's when you were starting to get your medical training there. See, when we went in, the nucleus of our NCOs were ex-transport people like tramways and buses and they all had training in first aid and they were the people that taught us. And then, on top of that, we used to go to casualty wards in the hospital of a Saturday night and see the casualties being done. You know, you learnt from all that type of thing. The general hospitals, even in Brisbane, we went to Brisbane General and spent time there.

From Bulldog were you ever called on to use your medical knowledge at all while you were at Bulldog along the road there?

In Bulldog and Wampit the main things were the fevers. We had to look after the fevers and that type of thing and try to get them well enough to travel in most cases.

So when you left Bulldog where did you go next?

We went through to Wampit.

That's past Wau.

Past Wau, yes, through Wau, down into Wampit.

What was at Wampit?

Similar type. We had a little small hospital. From memory it was only about six beds - when I say beds, they were made out of trees - the natives had built those for us and that was it. We used to just hold people there and get rid of them as soon as we could back to better medical centres.

What was that, a staging post or ...

Well it was the most forward post of the road, you see. You'd get accidents, people around all these bulldozers. They'd fall off bulldozers and all types of minor things like that and you'd have to send them back.

And what about places like Sunshine, did you go there?

Only through it. Sunshine is on the way to ... just a little place and went straight through there. But personally there was someone there but I was never stationed at Sunshine. It was part of our duties to look after it but I was further along all the time.

So you were at Wampit. Where did you go after Wampit?

Well it was after Wampit that we went back to the 2/5th AGH in Moresby. When I say that, a detail went back to work at the hospital. And it was from the hospital there - we were there for quite some time ...

Did you go back ahead of the main part of the unit?

Yes, yes. I was going to say we went to the 2/5th AGH in about April and we stayed there till August. Again I brought the advanced party back and we went to Rutherford.

The advance party you brought back, can you remember how many there were in it?

I think there were about sixty from memory. And we were stationed at Rutherford then and ...

Can you remember why Rutherford?

Well it was a deserted camp. There was plenty of room there for a start I suppose and also they wanted an ambulance detachment to do the circuits to pick up the people and take them to the general hospital at Greta.

I see. So do you remember what ship you came back on?

No.

It wasn't the Duntroon again, was it?

It could have been. I had a couple of trips on the ... I had so many trips I forget which boats they were. But, yes, it could have been the Duntroon.

And when you came back after that from Rutherford, were you at Rutherford when they disbanded the whole unit or did you go out ahead of them?

The unit was disbanded there but I think I was one of the first to get a new posting. I was posted away fairly early after the main body had arrived at Rutherford to the 7th Field Ambulance so I did not know what happened after that to the 9th.

When you were with the 9th around Wampit area were you involved in any enemy action at all?

No, no.

Nor Bulldog?

No.

No bombing, no ...

Nothing like that there at all.

And what about later on when you were with the ...

Oh, in Bougainville, yes, we got caught up in a bit over there.

In what sense? Did you get bombed or you were involved in action with the enemy?

Yes, well, being a field ambulance again we were fairly well forward and most of the bombing is going over us both way, you see, our blokes there and that type of thing. But then when they caught ... when the Japs surrendered, almost prior to them surrendering there was a terrible lot of casualties along there. At that stage I'd been moved to a CCS too.

Casualty clearing station.

Yes, yes. I was adjutant of the CCS. ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A - END OF INTERVIEW