ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: CAPT DR JACK ELLIOTT - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE – SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: CAPT DR JACK ELLIOTT

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD RAXWORTHY

SUMMARY:

DATE RECORDED: 5 JUNE 1991

RECORDING LOCATION:

ACCESSION NUMBER: S01559

TRANSCRIBER: SUSAN SOAMES

TRANSCRIPTION DATE: JUNE 1992

CAPTAIN JACK ELLIOTT

START OF TAPE ONE

Identification: I am talking to Dr Jack Elliott, formerly Captain Jack Elliott, a doctor who was in the 9th Australian Field Ambulance AIF during the Second World War. The tape number is 18B and this is the 5.6.1991.

Mr Elliott, where were you born and when?

I was born in Nowra in 1912.

And did you grow up around there?

Yes. I left at the age of seventeen to go to Sydney University.

What sort of family background did you have?

My father was a builder; my mother was a dear soul but she was also a very good pianist and she was a music teacher. I had two sisters.

What made you go into medicine?

Can I go about that gradually?

Certainly.

It didn't come as a sudden decision. When I finished school at Nowra it was 1928 - I did the Leaving Certificate in 1928. My mother wanted me to go to the university but I had not matriculated because Nowra school did not have requisite teachers. For instance, we acquired a maths teacher in first year, a french teacher in second year, geography and history in third year, Latin in fifth year, so I did not do Latin, hence I didn't matriculate in due course. Since I wanted to go to the university I would have to matriculate so I went to Sydney to Fort Street School for a year and did Latin during that year to matriculate which I succeeded in doing.

Where did you live when you were there, in Fort Street?

In various boarding places. Interesting about that, they all charged me one pound per week. In 1929, that was when I finished school, we were in the depths of the Depression. That was a very severely limiting factor on what I was to do in the future. It so happened that a friend, one relative, was a pharmacist in Glebe and he offered me an apprenticeship as a pharmacist. That was a three-year course and I got paid one pound per week - I was paying my board - the second year

twenty-two and sixpence and then thirty shillings over the three year. So I finished pharmacy in 1932.

I decided then to do science. We were still in the depth of the Depression and even jobs in pharmacy were hard to come by. I had no capital to establish myself in a business so I set off to do science. I had to pay for this myself, mostly fees and my living. I did that by doing part-time pharmacy jobs weekends and that sort of thing.

In 1933 I graduated in science and at that stage decided I would do medicine. Again, I was on my own financially but I had the qualifications - a science degree and pharmacy. I was given credit for first year medicine because I'd done all those subjects in science and pharmacy, so I started in second year and I was given credit for physiology which I had done. The importance of all this is that I only had to do anatomy and its allied subjects which gave me some time and this is the time that I felt I could you earn a living and my fees. So I continued to do part-time pharmacy jobs and a few other odds and ends. I forgot to mention I was a professional footballer at one stage.

With what team?

Nowra. I used to go down at weekends when I was at school. Two pounds a game I got and my return fare to Sydney. At any rate, at this stage ... at any stage in my life I can't remember even resenting my financial status. It all seemed to be a challenge and it was always satisfying to overcome it. But I was never hungery.

Anyway, we're now in medicine, the first year in 1936. It became clear to me towards the end of 1936 that I would not have time in third year medicine and so on to do what I was doing so I obtained a job with a drug firm as a traveller - May and Baker. I had applied for such a job at Parke Davis and Burroughs Welcome, they were the two outstanding drug firms at the time. Both of them offered me jobs: one in Melbourne and the other one in North Queensland, but they also insisted that I abandon the idea of doing medicine. The reason I joined May and Baker was that I'd read an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald on Saturday morning that May and Baker. So when I interviewed the manager, after hearing my story, he said, 'I don't think you can do medicine and this job. I repeat: I don't think you can'. Parke Davis and Burroughs Welcome said, 'You cannot. You must guarantee not to'. He [May and Baker] said, 'I don't think you can do it'. Well, to cut a long story short, I did. I did a full-time job with May and Baker for four years until I graduated in 1940. There were several hiccups: once a meeting was called when I was in fourth year

by the Dean of the Faculty, a lunchtime meeting with all students, at which he said, 'It had come to his ears that somebody was working outside his course'. He reminded them all that medicine was a full-time occupation and if there were any further ... if he had any evidence from any source that there would anybody doing anything else like that, he would be immediately dismissed. I had no option but to ignore it. Fortunately it never came up again. But I know from other events that occurred later that the people in high places knew about it because when I was in second year medicine, when I was given an exemption from physiology by chemistry, they gave me a job as a demonstrator in bio-chemistry at one hundred pounds a year. I only had to do two sessions of two hours per week for this but at the end of the year, the last term, I resigned from the job because I was too busy - I didn't have the time - I resigned. But at the end of the term I got a cheque for thirty-three pounds six and fourpence. So I took it to the Registrar, Mr Selly, and I said, 'I don't know what this is for', there was no accompanying letter. He said, 'What are you worried about?'. I said, 'Well, I don't know what it is for. I'm getting close to the line financially and I don't want subsequently to have to refund anybody thirty-three pound six and fourpence'. He said, 'You know, the university have never paid me anything I didn't earn. Do you realise that it's the one third of one hundred pounds?'. I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'Maybe you got a scholarship'. I said, 'I didn't get a scholarship'. 'How do you know? There was no letter with it. I wouldn't worry too much about it but go and see the accountant, he's along a few doors'. So I went along to see the accountant and he said, 'Well, I don't know what I can do about it because all the books are finished. How am I going to explain a wild cheque? Forget it'. So off I went. I never did hear any more about that.

When I graduated in 1940, the day after the results were announced, Selly, the Registrar, telephoned me and said, 'You don't have to pay two lots of ten pounds to get registered. All you have to do is take out your degree in medicine, then you can get registered with that. Leave the degree in surgery, you can take that out any time you like in the future when you've got ten pounds to spare'. So I knew that he knew what I was doing. Anyway ...

Did you do a residency before you went in the army?

Yes. I went to Sydney Hospital. ... I think this is of some importance. All the time I was doing that for the four years, as I say the university, whilst some people knew, there was no approval from there for what I was doing, and whilst we didn't ever speak plainly - that is, the manager of May and Baker and myself - I doubt whether he knew either. But on the credit

side, because of my qualifications, I was well received by the medical profession on whom I was calling and I made it my business to tell them all exactly what I was doing, which was a great help, because they didn't keep me waiting. They told me whenever I came to call on them to let the secretary know immediately to save time and in all sorts of ways they helped me. So I would say, I got through a days work in half a day's time. And so long as I could manipulate that, coorindate with the other fixed times of the medical curriculum I was in the clear.

On Saturday morning which was my habit to report to the office, on this particular Saturday morning I had to go and be registered somewhere in Macquarie Street, I can't remember where, where I had to have my thumb print taken. I was given a certificate that I was now a registered medico. So I went down to the office and I said to Mr Marrington, 'How many holidays am I due for?'. 'Oh' he said, 'Are you going to take your holidays!'. I'd never taken my holidays at Christmas time because I wanted to use all that for getting through my work. I used to save my holidays for stu-vacs, that is just before examinations. I said, 'Well, yes' and 'How much notice do I have to give you to terminate my employment?'. He said, 'Oh, two weeks I suppose. You're not going, are you?'. 'Yes, I'm leaving and I'm giving you two weeks notice, you can have the holidays'. He said, 'Where are you going?'. I said, 'I'm going to Sydney Hospital'. 'Oh! What are they paying you there?' and I said, 'Thirty-one and fourpence per week'. By this time I was getting over a thousand pounds a year working for May and Baker which was fairly good pay in those days because I was on a commission - gradually over the years I'd built this up.

I went to Sydney Hospital and we were required to nine months as residents before we could enlist. I'd been there only two months when Doctor George ... I'll think of his name in a minute, he was the coordinator of medical services. He called a lunchtime meeting for the residents and said they required two medical officers at Greta Camp. He said two of us to volunteer to enlist tomorrow, go up to Greta Camp, only spend a week and then come back and resume our course. George Bell was his name, a very important doctor in those days. A chappie called Les Dunlop and I went out to Victoria Barracks and enlisted on 2nd March 1941. The following day we were dressed in a uniform - I don't know how we did this - and we were on our way in a train to Greta. After one week we returned back and continued our jobs. At the end of the nine months I had a job in Newcastle and that would be the beginning of October ...

At the hospital?

Yes, it was Newcastle Hospital in those days. And on 7th December 1941 I heard the news, while I was still in bed, that Pearl Harbour had been bombed. So I packed all my gear and reported ... by the time I'd packed up a telephone call to report to Adamstown. So that's the end of that part of the story until I returned in 1946.

What unit did you join first?

I was allotted to the 33rd Infantry Battalion.

As ...

RMO, regimental medical officer. And then at mobilisation on 7th December I was sent back there. The unit was subsequently disbanded and combined with a St George regiment to form an ack-ack unit - mobile anti-aircraft unit. I wasn't there very long when I was posted to the 18th Field Ambulance. And from there I was with a company at JOOTS - that is the Joint Overseas Operational Training School - at Port Stephens doing landing operations, or preparations for. From there I was posted to the 15th Field Ambulance then camped at Cooroy in Queensland. We went by hospital ship to Moresby.

Can you remember the name of the ship?

It was the one just before the one that sunk.

Not the Centaur that was sunk?

No. It was the hospital ship that went over the journey before. Centaur was the next one, they were sunk. ... It had been a Dutch ship. Anyway, I remember the captain was a fellow called Garden. He was a brother of Jock Garden the infamous politician. Anyway, we arrived in Moresby and I'd been there perhaps two weeks when I was sent for by the ADMS in Moresby and he said that I was to go with a task force up in the mountains. He told me that I would be looking after approximately a battalion group of infantry, a number of engineers, other attachments and an unknown number of Americans for the time being. The object of the exercise was to build an airfield somewhere up in the mountains. The work would be done by the Americans but I was responsible for all the Australians. The battalion would have their own medical officer. I would not be able to evacuate anybody. I had to make arrangements to be there ... or at least, I had to assume I'd be there for three months. I wouldn't be able to evacuate anybody. I was to take all the stores I required, all the men I required and ...

From the 15th Ambulance?

Yes, from the 15th Ambulance. But I only had one aeroplane and aeroplanes carried five thousand pounds.

What sort of aeroplane was it, do you know?

A DC3. And they only carried five thousand pounds. So I decided to take nine other men and make ten with myself, each at 250 pounds and then we had two and a half thousand pounds for stores, medical equipment and so on.

An important thing: as I was leaving the ADMS shook hands with them and he said, 'By the way', as I was going out the door, 'what do you know about dentistry?'. I said, 'I don't know anything'. He said, 'I thought so, so I've made arrangements for you to have a dental course this afternoon' - the dentists love this story! - 'so go and report to Major so-and-so at the dentist centre. He's expecting you'. So that afternoon, about 1400 hours I reported to the dental centre and met Major so-and-so. He had eight chairs, each with a patient in them. He said, 'Now what I am going to do - I know what your problem is - I'll show you how to do an upper block and a lower block, that is upper and lower jaw, so you can do anything. It's rather complicated' but anyway.

An injection.

An injection and a long needle. I went down all the eight people and I put in the anaesthetic under his direction. Then he brought out a set of instruments - extraction forceps, all different shapes, sizes and angles - and we went down and we extracted the tooth. He showed me the technique for extracting the various teeth with the appropriate instruments. At the end of that time he said, 'You'll find that some people will have lost a filling or they'll have a cavity you can't deal with, well, here's what you do'. He gave me a little bottle of oil of cloves and some zinc oxide and he said, 'Make a little paste and fill it up with that and they'll be all right till they get back to base. Otherwise you pull the tooth out'. So I said, 'How do I know whether to pull the tooth out or fill it?'. He said, 'Here's a little hammer. Give it a little tap: if it hurts pull it out, if it doesn't hurt fill it. Goodbye, best of luck'. That was the dentistry course.

Did you ever have to use this ...

Oh yes. Mostly as he'd predicted, people losing fillings. Anyway in due course I arrived in Tsili Tsili, this was on the Watut which is a tributary of the Markham. And to get back to the 9th Field Ambulance ...

How did you get there, with a plane?

By plane. Yes, I had this plane. We landed on ...

Did you get to keep the plane?

No, no.

It went straight in and straight out.

Yes. A group of ANGAU men had gone ahead of us - overland of course - with natives and they used their machetes and they cut the kunai in an area where we could land which, ultimately, was used as the strip that had been chosen before anyway.

Did they come over the road which was known as the Bulldog Road later, or did they come the other way?

No. The Bulldog Road was built from Bulldog to Wau. That is from the south coast across. And then Wau was a separate venture. The road from Wau to Lae was built after that.

The ANGAU people, where had they come from?

They were New Guinea residents who had volunteered and they were put in a special unit which was called Australia New Guinea Administration Unit.

Yes, I understand that but I just wondered where they'd come from to get there. Had they come up from the Lae area or had they been in the area anyway?

No, no. The Japs had all the area. They would have come from somewhere near the Wau area.

So when you got in there, was there any Japs around the area?

No. We had these thirty natives who helped us build huts - we had no tents - they built huts and we generally looked after ourselves. We were there till about a week or two weeks before the Lae/Nadzab offensive opened, before we were discovered. And one afternoon we got the message that two aeroplanes had gone over earlier in the day, they were Japanese, and we assumed attack preparations and they'd probably mount some sort of attack on us which indeed they did.

The attack took the form really of waiting for the ... by this time we were getting in a large number of aeroplanes from Moresby - that's DC3s bringing in supplies and all sorts of

things, equipment for the strip. We already had a fighter squadron there.

Australian or American?

Australian ... sorry, they were American and they were ...

What sort of planes, can you remember?

No, I can't just remember what they were.

Probably Brewster Buffalos or something like that.

No they weren't, no. They were more sophisticated than that. There was a squadron of Lightnings at Dobodura and we knew, we could see them coming over - they were the highest - then there was a middle level and then there was ours. But we saw many dogfights from where we were. But what the Japs would wait for was probably the incoming DC3s and they destroyed a few of those.

On the airfield or just before?

About ... around about. Coming in, actually on the airfield, as they were landing. Nearly always this happened before our defence could get there - our fighters could get there.

In due course, about at this stage, this detachment of the 9th Field Ambulance arrived with Noel Thomas in charge. I'm not too sure to this day what they did. I can't just remember ever visiting their camp, it wasn't very far away.

Did they come and ask you where they were supposed to put up the camp?

Yes, I'm sure they were lost. Yes they did, yes they did.

But you couldn't tell them.

Well I could have told them but I think they wanted to be independent, they didn't want to join me. I don't know that they knew anything about it anyway. But we had really good communications but we didn't have any work to do.

You weren't getting any casualties?

No. We got a few from the bombings but I can't remember they were there then. I don't think that they had anything to do. But Noel will tell you that. But, as you say, he didn't know why they were there, I don't either.

Noel just said he never found out and neither did Colonel Bretherton.

I don't know either because, as I said, the battalion had their own medico and I had these other fellahs. What we did do some of was visit neighbouring villages. What we were trying to do was befriend the natives, get them on our side, because this was right on the verge of the Japanese occupied territory. They were on the other side of the Markham from us. And we went to some of the villages to give them injections of arsenic which apparently they became almost addicted to.

What was the idea of the arsenic?

It was an anti-syphilitic thing really. Yaws they call it. The disease yaws that is like syphilis. It is a similar organism and they'd been given this by the administration at odd times and they'd queue up for this injection and you had to be very careful to watch that they didn't double back to get a second lot because it had a very stimulating effect on them and they could very easily ...

What sort of dose were they ...

END OF TAPE

START OF TAPE

Identification: This is Captain Jack Elliott, side two. The tape is 19A.

You were just talking about the Papua New Guineans who were being given doses of arsenic for yaws. Are there any other stories you've got to tell from a medical point of view from that or should we get onto the time what you did after the 15th Field Ambulance at Tsili Tsili?

At Tsili Tsili ... my father was killed in a motor vehicle accident and I applied for leave but I was told in reply that the reasons I would be given later, they couldn't give me leave at that time.

That was while you were at Tsili Tsili, was it?

Yes, so I knew that there was something coming on. So, in due course, we knew that something was developing because for several days there was heavy bombing, daylight bombing, at Nadzab and Lae area. Then one day, I think it was the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion arrived and left the plane at Tsili Tsili and went off on foot to the Markham. Their task was to reach the Nadzab Airfield by dawn. The following day the attack would be

on and there would be paratroops landing on Nadzab Airfield. We found later that the Pioneer Battalion arrived at the airfield and in true army style didn't camp on the sides, they moved forward to contact the enemy and they found that the Japanese had abandoned Nadzab. So they were able to welcome the paratroops on arrival.

Did you go with them towards Nadzab or not?

No, we stayed there.

Did part of the 9th Field Ambulance go with them for any period of time?

No, I don't know what happened to them.

Were the 9th Field Ambulance there at that time?

This is only Noel Thomas with his little detachment.

Yes, I know that. But it is mentioned in the ... something regarding ... this is the only mention that the 9th Field Ambulance get in the official history that some of them joined this mob going towards Nadzab for two days and then came back.

I didn't know that.

But did you?

No, I didn't. What happened was that the following day - that is the day after the Pioneer Battalion came through us - the 7th Division through us. They landed at Tsili Tsili and regrouped I guess in some way or other before going on to land in Nadzab.

And did you go with them?

That day I went with them.

For how long? That day and the next?

Oh, we were down there for maybe ten days or something.

Right down to Nadzab?

Yes.

And were the 9th Field Ambulance detachment with you at that time, or not?

No. I didn't see them. I don't know what became of them.

They had already gone back or ...

I don't know what they did because when they go through a unit like that you're written off, in other words, you've got to really make your own arrangements as to how you're going to get home and what you're going to do. For instance, I had a lot of valuable instruments, medical instruments, which I had taken and I didn't like to jettison these so I took them with me. When I arrived at Nadzab I went to the nearest medical unit, which was the 2/7th Field Ambulance, and presented them with all these instruments only to be told, 'Take them away. We don't want anything to do with them, they're written off'. So as far as I know I just left them there but my name was on the box and subsequently a year or so later the box arrived back after the war full of these things.

Have you still got them?

Yes, I've still got them. Having got to Nadzab ...

By the way, were you given orders to go to Nadzab?

No, no, because everyone was leaving so we thought we'd be in it. You know, they were going forward ...

Do you know if that was the reason why ... you see, I can't identify any orders for Major Thomas and his group to go back to his unit, you see.

No, I wouldn't have left had I not been told to do. I wouldn't have left. I was told to leave but I wasn't told specifically to catch a certain plane. I know we waited on the airstrip for a ride. Somebody said, 'We'll take you'. But I was told to go and I was told to report to the nearest unit which was the 2/7th Field Ambulance. Anyway, from there ... there's a funny little story but I don't think we'll worry about it.

There must be something amusing in it.

There's one fellow that I can remember was a Father Smythe. He was a chaplain in 33rd Battalion when I first joined it a way back in Greta days. And somehow I seemed to encounter him in odd places after that. Because he didn't seem to have any transport he always used mine, whichever unit I was in, and he was always very welcome. And the culmination of this was that I hadn't seen him possibly for a year or so and when we arrived in Nadzab we were on our way - I acquired a jeep ...

Acquired?

See, when you go into action everything is written off. So if you wanted a jeep you go to the lot and get one. So I had this for ... maybe for two weeks I was at Lae, and the day before I left I was driving along the road with a driver and I saw this Father Smythe on the side of the road. We pulled up and renewed our friendship and what had happened to us in the meanwhile and I said, 'I see you're walking Father', he said, 'Yeah'. I said, 'I'll tell you what, I'll give you this jeep. I'm leaving tomorrow. It's yours'. So he later came back and was at the church at Adamstown.

He didn't bring his jeep did he?

No, (laughs). Then I returned home because I got a message that my leave had been approved and I came back for Christmas '43 when what was called then 'Mr Ford's Christmas Party'. Mr Ford was the Minister for Defence. And he decided as a big thing I suppose that a certain number of troops could come home to Australia for Christmas. I came because my father had been killed so I really jumped the gun there. But in due course I returned and on my way back I was notified that I'd been transferred to the 9th Field Ambulance. My unit had moved up the Ramu Valley.

Which was your unit at that stage?

That was the 15th Field Ambulance of which I was a detachment, and their headquarters had moved up that way. So the headquarters had been, when I was at Tsili Tsili, was at Moresby.

So they'd moved up to Dumpu or Kaiapit, did they?

Yeah.

Do you remember which it was, Kaiapit or Dumpu?

Kaiapit. Kaiapit was just opposite when we ... Anyway, where did we go from there? Kaiapit we could see ... or, we couldn't see but we had [O-pips], we used to get daily reports about Japs going up and back.

What sort of medical conditions were you getting at that stage? Were you getting a lot of casualties?

See, I wasn't involved in the attack so I didn't really have anything much to do there. And it was the matter of when I got to Lae it was to find my way home. My headquarters and my unit were still in Moresby but I was told that my leave had been granted. So we actually got a plane back, by waiting on the

airstrip for returning planes, DC3, and we got a plane back that way.

So when did you get to the 9th Field Ambulance finally, roughly?

In March the following year, '44.

So you must have gone to Wau to pick them up there then.

That's right. I arrived in Moresby and I was flown over to Wau.

And what was the condition of the 9th Field Ambulance in Wau?

They were very well set up but the CO met me at the airport.

Who was that?

[Colonel Bretherton] and said, 'I want you to come to a football match with me. I'll take you to camp afterwards. Is that all right?'. Of course that was all right with me. So we went and watched this football match. The 9th Field Ambulance were playing the bakery, the local bakery. I think he told me that in whispers. He wasn't proud of the fact that the opposition wasn't very strong. And it was a woeful football match and I couldn't refrain from making comments. He, of course, was a Victorian and knew nothing about the rugby football. And he said to me, while we were still in the jeep, after the game was over, 'I don't think they were beaten. You seem to know something about the game'. I said, 'Oh yes, I've played first grade in Sydney for five years', I did mention with the university, in the university days.

That was league.

League, yeah. They finished in 1936 and didn't play any more. So the following day at two o'clock he paraded the whole unit and handed them over to me. He said, 'This is no good. You can't just go and lose matches like this'. So I had a really good run. I told them there would be no football for a month, we'd have to get fit.

Was the Mad Mile was in operation by that time?

With the natives we cut one up around Little Wau Creek, we found the still up there. We had a couple of scotches.

You weren't supposed to find the still, were you?

No. But I didn't make any mention that I'd found it.

Who were the people doing the distilling?

[Elliott, distilling]

Rocky somebody or something. But they had it very well set up because they had made a still out of ... they had milk cans - there were milk cans in the old store at Wau - and they put their yeast and stuff in the cans and put all sorts of things and they used to ferment and froth all over the place and eventually they distilled it. The still was made of copper piping which they'd got out of crashed aircraft that were lying about. They made it quite ingenious. And they cooled it from the cold water from Little Wau Creek and they built up quite a business. They used to fill bottles. And the drivers driving them down the road would act as their agents and pass it down to the camps, the camps down the way. But they did quite well. But the others would know more about the people that did that.

What about the football team. I mean, you'd know more about that, wouldn't you?

Yes, then we get to the football team.

Incidentally, was the Mad Mile which everybody talks about which Colonel Bretherton I understand had set up, was that well in operation when you arrived or ...

No, we cut another one. But it was - I can't remember the other one - but this day I went up was the morning after my arrival before the two o'clock handover. So they didn't have football for a month. Then we started and they got very keen and we just won and won and won and, finally, we played the brigade team at a place up the way ...

Wampit?

No, where the gold mine is.

Bulolo.

Bulolo. So the brigade headquarters was at Bulolo. So since we'd beaten everything around, we went down to play Bulolo. Before we get there I must say that the theme of my coaching was what I'd had from my university days. Our coach was the Australian coach - I'll think of his name in a minute. But the emphasis was get the ball and don't lose the ball until you score a try with it. So this is what gospel I preached and nobody was to kick the ball in any circumstances so that

everybody on the team knew that he wasn't going to kick it and they'd get themselves in perfect positions.

How would Colonel Bretherton go with this?

He didn't know and he's a Victorian.

Yes, I know. But no kicking ...

Yes, well I'll tell you, this is where he comes into it. One day we were down - we'd played a game, won it quite handsomely - and I had to go back to camp and shower and clean up and I'd gone to have my shower when a runner came and said the CO wants you in his orderly room, which was a tent down in the coffee trees. And I got down and he's got the fullback on a charge sheet and he said, 'I distinctly heard Captain Elliott tell that in no circumstances for anybody to kick the ball before you went on the field. Now you're charged with disobeying an officer's command. Would you like to be dealt with by me or a court-martial. It's a serious offence'. 'Oh' says the fellow, 'by you, Sir'. 'Five pounds flat'. Now this fellow was only on his five shillings a day and it was quite a big penalty. So from then on there was real strict discipline in that team. They couldn't kick the ball for that price. So that was the greatest strength, the discipline was really very ... and Colonel Bretherton took quite good care of that.

Can you remember who got five pounds?

Yes, Snowy Calwell. (laughs) He'll come up often.

Can you remember any other top people on your team at that time?

Oh yes. I'd like to have had time to think them all out separately. But, yes, there's Jack Smith, Clarrie Smith who you'll see today, he was a fullback but he first ... this was a second grade game, he had two teams by then with Snowy Calwell kicking the ball.

Tell you what, when you think about it you want to write it down for me.

All right. The names you mean?

And also the story if you like, if you've got more to it.

Okay. Well, anyway, that was this football story. But ultimately the unit left effectively for home. They went down to - I think they went to Lae - but they left me with a rear party of fifteen. Sergeant Shepperd, Shepperd was a very good

golfer. He played off two. I think he played for New South Wales. And we found some golf clubs after the others moved on - we were just fifteen of us there - and Wau Airstrip was a grass strip and it was up hill, quite wide of course and nice grass and well mown and he and I used to play golf up this airstrip. Occasionally, well, he wouldn't hit them off course but I would, but we had maybe thirty natives at our beck and call and if we lost a ball in the kunai we'd line them up shoulder to shoulder and they'd pad through till we found it because we couldn't afford to lose anything as there was no way we could replace them.

How did they go with this? Were they enthusiastic about it or what?

The natives, oh yes. Well, there wasn't any tension at all, they were very easy to get along with. Whilst we were there we had some contact with them in a sort of a hospital where they were brought which we staffed and one of the things - not that I was interested in obstetrics at that time - but one of the things that happened if a baby were born prematurely they'd just discard it. They thought if it wasn't strong enough to feed it wasn't going to survive and that that was that, to forget about it. But whilst we were there the boys got interested in a couple of these babies and they fed them this canned milk stuff and rescued a couple of babies this way.

And did they give them back to their mothers or what?

No, we had to leave them with the mothers but, of course, the babies by now would have been viable so that they would have survived no doubt.

That's very interesting. And they would accept them back after they ...

Oh yes, if they were alive, yes. They couldn't cope with them if they couldn't feed. You see, they didn't know any other way.

So who was it that got interested in that in the feeding?

I can't remember. The boys might tell you that. I don't remember any individual that did it.

It must have been very painstaking to get them to feed from condensed milk even if their mothers can't ...

Yes, but of course they wouldn't have been all that premature either you see. If they were too little there's no way they could have fed them with tubular feeding or anything like that.

Is there any other medical things of interest during the period there that you can remember?

Oh yes. This is an outstanding one. There were two fellows who were very successful washing for gold up in Little Wau Creek. One was called Sidoti ...

He died.

Yes, I'll tell you how he died in a minute. And the other one, his name escapes me for the moment. Anyway, one morning Sidoti reported sick to me and he had an s-scar, typhus, s-scar on his shoulder about the size of a thumb nail say. He obviously had typhus. Now we had really no experience of typhus and it was a deadly disease so that day I shifted him out on a plane going back to Moresby and he died on the way. The next day his mate turned up with an s-scar and he begged me not to send him back. He didn't want to die in the plane. So we stuck on with him. I can't think of his name. And we stuck on with him and ...

Jack Brett was it?

Jack Brett, that's right. He got so bad that ultimately he got cardiac failure which was evidenced by ... he had gross oedema of his lungs, so bad that for some reason - I don't know why I was in charge of all the medication - but I thought that I'd have to take a load off his circulation. So I took a couple of pints of blood from him and he recovered very well as a result of this. [This is very old time], but nevertheless, as I saw it then, that his heart couldn't cope and it seemed logical to reduce the load, a reservoir of blood. And he stayed all right for a few days and then it became evident that he was anaemic. So we had a parade and we picked out those who had the right blood and - everyone volunteered of course - so we gave him a transfusion, a direct transfusion - we had no way of storing blood. Anyway, he survived the whole thing.

There was a comment made about somebody who survived in one case of scrub typhus, and as a matter of fact Major Thomas mentioned it, and he said that in this case there was a number that did survive - I know of three who I have interviewed - who, he said that this particular one, became something of a vegetable afterwards. He said he'd be better if he hadn't survived. Can you remember which one that was?

I don't think we had any others.

Well, John Rainbow, he got it as well and survived.

I didn't know him. He wouldn't be in my ...

Transport he was and he used to be back in the 4th between Lae ... he went actually down to Lae and he survived down there.

How would he get to Lae?

They took him down there.

It might have been before my time.

Oh no, it was right at the end, just before they came back.

See, I was there for a month just with fifteen fellahs as a rear party so that I was the last to leave Wau.

There was a post down at Busu down near Lae from the 9th Field Ambulance. It was there from Nadzab. They came down from Nadzab. So, anyway, he could have been ...

No, we're getting a bit mixed up here. I wasn't with them then. Now how did they get down there because, see, I was with the 15th at Tsili Tsili.

At any rate, take my word for it they were, because what happened with some of them, some of them were sent from Moresby direct, flown into Nadzab. Then they were flown up from Nadzab to Dumpu and then another lot were flown in from Moresby to Nadzab. And after Christmas, about February, they were sent down on to Busu and they remained there for the rest of the time until the unit went back in June '44.

Yes, but I think you're talking about before I joined them.

Possibly, yes, I don't know.

Well I don't remember any of that so that was before my time.

Either before or after.

I thought you were going to say amongst who volunteered to give blood one of them had had it, so we felt that his blood might have hit the scale in Jack Brett's favour.

And Jack Brett was all right afterwards. He recovered completely did he?

Oh yes. I heard from him a couple of years later. I think he was a tram driver or guard or something.

Incidentally, what about the gold story?

I don't know much about that. He gave me a ring.

It wasn't a phoney one, was it?

No, no, it was real.

Did you ever hear about them selling phoney ones to the Americans?

No, I didn't hear about that.

The Americans threatened to bomb them.

Did they. He gave me this one. What happened is, after the war I gave it to ... a chappie said, 'I'll take that. A friend of mine's a dentist and he'll know how to deal with that'. So that's the last I saw of it. So I presume it was anyway. Because, after all, he gave it to me because he felt he owed me something. So he wouldn't give me a phoney one, would he?

What happened to you when you came back to Australia? Did you come back with the whole of the unit, did you?

No, they were home before me. See, I was with these fifteen fellahs.

Right. So when did you come back?

I was at least a month up in Wau just with these fifteen fellahs. So they could have been a month ahead of me.

And when you got back to Australia, where did they send you then?

Down to Hay.

Did you stay there for the rest of the war?

Yes. That was the POW camp.

That was after the breakout was it?

Yes, that was at Cowra. But they moved over to Hay from Cowra. I arrived in February '45.

And what went after the war? Did you set up in private practice then or did you ...

No, I came back to Newcastle. See, I went on leave of absence. So I came back. Finished in '46, I was discharged in May but I came back in February, that was '46. In '47 they gave me a job a registrar in orthopaedics. At the end of that year I changed over to obstetrics and gynaecology and that was my direction from then on. I became registrar there and I finally then had responsibility of opening the new unit. They didn't have an obstetric unit in Newcastle Hospital. So I was given the job in 1947 to set this up, equip it, staff it and so on. And we moved into the new building which was built to house it in 1951. And that's another story, I've just finished doing that.

Well, thank you very much Captain Dr Jack Elliott.

END OF TAPE - END OF INTERVIEW