ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: TERRY CALLINAN - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE - SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: TERRY CALLINAN

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD RAXWORTHY

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START OF TAPE

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Where were you born and when?

I was born in Merewether on 12 April 1923.

Did you grow up around here?

I spent all my life in Newcastle.

Did you go to school here?

I went to school here. I never looked at my books enough, but I got through. Then I became an apprentice motor mechanic at Stellards Garage in Merewether, quite close. I was called up in the army on 2 January 1942.

Where did you go?

I went to Raymond Terrace, in the 1st Field Ambulance. Then stayed with them until we reinforced the 9th Field Ambulance in Sydney.

Did you take any of your own officers with you when you were reinforcing the 9th Field Ambulance?

Yes. Two of them were Major Thomas and Captain Sands. They were the only two I remember. No others, no.

Where did you join the 9th Field Ambulance?

At St. Ives. No, we were at St Ives in the 1st Field Ambulance and we joined them at Narellan, all in a couple of days, we were moved away.

Then you went to Queensland with the 9th Field Ambulance?

Yes. I must tell you this. We went up on the Brisbane Mail I understand, I am just not sure of the dates, but there was a certain warrant officer named WO ... I can't remember his name. I was a young lad, cheeky and bold and I clashed with him on Sydney station and he charged me straightaway. I had only been in the unit 12 hours.

It wasn't Peters, was it?

No. It was Sergeant Major Reid. He had only been made a sergeant major that day before or so and he was very officious. We got up on the trip and we got as far as ... halfway up and we were having a meal and, being young and silly - it was a cut

lunch - and I went back and had the second and I was caught. He charged me again. So he really gave me some curry after that until we got to Ascot where the charge was to be heard and it was to be heard by our CO Colonel Bretheton. I was guilty on both charges, but I said, and it was true, I said, 'This man has given me hell, Sir, he is chasing me, he is really on to me'. He turned around and said, 'Is that correct, Sergeant Major?', and the Sergeant Major said, 'No, I am only doing my duty, Sir'. I said, 'He is really hassling me'. He said, 'Right, I won't have any of my officers doing this to my men'. He said, 'Case dismissed, march out'. Very fortunate, I was, but being young and silly, I knew I had a fair man, all I had to be was fair with he, which I was from then on.

How did you get on with the Sergeant Major after that?

We were always at loggerheads. But we got by. I don't think I was ever charged again, but he was immature, like I was, and so we both probably regret it. I asked him later whether he had remembered and he said that he didn't, so that's fair enough.

So you went up on the train then, did you? Did you go straight to Queensland. You didn't go on any hospital trains?

No. We stayed at Ascot for some time. Then we went out to another camp.

Would that be Grovely?

That is correct. Then we were at Grovely around about New Year's Eve, or something like that. Then we travelled on by train up to Ravenshoe. We got out of the train at Gladstone, or one of those places, and we went by army truck over the mountains to Ravenshoe; a beautiful spot, absolutely beautiful spot it was. Now we are seeing that the greenies are pushing it on and seeing that all the beautiful mountains in Queensland and the running water, and we were there.

So which company were you with?

I was with headquarters company at that time.

Who was your immediate officer?

I cannot remember. Ted Eckles was one of our sergeants. I don't know whether Tom Kelly was our officer for headquarters company. I'm not sure on that.

You don't remember Doug Dunlop, do you?

No, not really. I have met him at reunions, but no, I don't remember him really. He would have been a captain, no doubt.

No, he was the other bearer officer. It was just that he was at Bulldog.

I met him at reunions since, but I haven't got a great memory of him.

Who was the doctor that was with you?

It was Major Holcombe. Are you ready for another funny story?

Yes.

Major Holcombe was our headquarters CO, the commanding officer of our company. He was a wooden legged man and a great old soldier from another war, I believe. Anyhow, in those days when we were young blokes and always used to put our fingers in the wrong places. We were on a bivouac and climbing up a mountain and he was bending over and I went underneath and gave him a - you've heard about it, haven't you? It was only a joke sort of thing, it meant nothing - dating 'em up, I think it was called. He looked around and I looked at him and it wasn't meant to be Major Holcombe and he said, 'Callinan, if I thought you meant that I'd charge you straightaway and crime you', which would have been worthwhile, 'but I was still a silly young man'. But he accepted it and we got on good after that. I behaved myself, I think.

You thought he was somebody else, did you?

I did. I thought it was just anybody. It was one of those things that didn't mean anything, no meaning in it at all, of course. It was only just a gesture, I suppose you could call it. That's about all.

Do you remember if anything happened while you were up in Queensland, the rest of the time there? Did you get any trouble with the Americans?

No, not really. We went to the dances and heard the big American jazz bands. We couldn't even get into the hall. There were only the Yanks all nicely dressed. We were sitting outside and watching in through the window and listening to the type of music like Glen Miller's orchestra. But it wasn't, it was just that type of music. But it was marvellous, but we just had to accept it. The Yanks were the ones.

So when you went to Port Moresby, what ship did you go on, do you remember?

The Duntroon. A lot of our company were given duties because they had cabins. But the rest of us were down in the hull and it was pretty hot down there. We used to come upstairs and sleep at night. We weren't supposed to, but we did, just bring a blanket up. But it was quite good.

Where were you when you landed in Moresby?

We went out to Rigo Road, I think.

What was that like?

It was quite good. We made up camp, but it was quite good. It was comfortable enough. The Yanks were down below and not far from us. They were spoilt, but we were well fed and happy.

Are there any stories about there?

Yes. I don't know whether I should commit myself. Anyhow, we used to go to the Yankie films which might have been five or ten miles down the road. We would walk there, but they would be the latest films, good films, by the Americans. They had them, it was an American camp. Once or twice we came out and the first jeep that was available, four or five us would pile into it and back to our camp. I hope that doesn't go on record.

What about the time when one of your jeeps went missing.

No, I wasn't in that. No, never in one of our jeeps. It was always an American jeep. We would run it and leave it about half a mile from our Rigo Road. We were wild young blokes but all fit.

How did you get fit?

Our CO kept us moving.

Do you remember the mad mile?

Yes. That was at Wau, the mad mile.

You didn't have a mad mile at Moresby at all.

I don't think, so. We may have, but I can't recall it. But I do remember the mad mile at Wau because it was a bit treacherous and very interesting also.

Anything else at Moresby? What were you doing there? What were you working at?

I was just in camp duties, really. We had a football team and most our unit was there. We had quite a good football team and we played some good sides on ground that was bare of a blade of grass and maybe 40 degrees. We played a few matches and played against a lot of good players, and we performed fairly well. Our CO was very interested in us playing football and keeping fit.

So where did you go next?

We went to Wau, via Bulldog, up the - I forget the name of the river now.

Lakekamu River.

Yes. The barge trip, stayed overnight on the bank, halfway up, and we were on a barge up the river to Terapo. We had an overnight stop at a very interesting little spot in a bamboo hut that was up about 12 feet from the ground. It was a bit rough, but just a bit of ordinary tucker we ate, or whatever was available. At night I can always remember the wild pigs. They were fighting and going on and they were underneath us and they sounded pretty vicious. But we survived the night and then we got back on the barge in the morning and went on further and arrived at Bulldog the next day; picked up by trucks which were on a new road and we were slipping and sliding and we were very fortunate to make it to Wau, I believe.

Do you remember going through the mossy forest?

No, that was on the way to Wau, was it? ... Yes. I do remember now, I recall a very, very greasy road. The engineers were working and making roads. It was a very, very rough trip. We were concerned with mud slides and that, but we made it to Wau. At Wau we were kept fit with work and sport.

What sort of work did you do?

Just general duties again. Adjustments to the huts and things like that, plus our CO was very concerned about our being fit, which we were.

Were you in the football team?

I was, yes.

Before or after Jack Elliott arrived from Newcastle?

I had been in the football team all along, but Jack arrived and took over the coaching.

Do you remember an incident when he arrived?

Not straight off.

Who was coaching the team before that?

I just forget that now. We played in Moresby, as I said. I cannot recall. Freddie Seaborn maybe, maybe he'd played a bit of good football.

Do you remember getting fined for kicking?

No. I do not. Us or ... ?

One of the team apparently wasn't obeying instructions from the coach.

That's right, yes. That's Jack Elliott's forte that we could never, never kick the ball. Possession was everything. As a matter of fact there is a man coming on soon and he was the one who was to be the kicker. That was Jack, we had to have possession. He was a very good coach and he played with us. Jack Elliott was ten years older than us which was quite old for us, all young fellows, and Jack was over thirty, but he played very good football also.

You said you were going to tell me a story about Alan Willoughby.

Not Alan Willoughby, Ross Usher, was it?

About Ross Usher, yes.

Ross Usher was a practical man. That mightn't be the right words, but he fixed things like motors. Anyway, we had a lighting apparatus that generated and gave lighting to the camp and it broke down. Ross was going to fix the electrical side of it. Anyhow he never. And so my mate Butch Rowlands, who you will hear, one of the celebrities of our unit, he had a song about him. The song went something like this. He said - and it was to the very famous old tune: 'Old Ross Usher, old Ross Usher, F'd the motor, F'd the motor ...' and on it went. That's it. So we remember Ross Usher, that was a funny little side of it.

He's designing satellites now.

Is he? He was a very, very smart little man.

He's a radio ham.

Is he?

There's a group of them who designed the satellite which went up on the rocket a few weeks ago.

Go on. I could imagine that, because he was that far advanced from an ordinary layman.

He never managed to fix the power plant.

No, he never. That was one of those things I can recall, but that was since gathered by Butch Rowlands, who you will no doubt hear of. He was a real celebrity, one of the real celebrities. I can tell you, there were lots of them. One of the others, as no doubt you heard, is Snowy Caldwell. He was a celebrity.

Do you have any stories about him?

I've got that many, time wouldn't permit, but many.

We've got plenty of time.

Snowy Caldwell went home; he was a pug; he was a fighter; he had had 100 preliminary fights. He had to go home from Moresby to get married. He came back and the first things he yelled out to us was that he had only been married two months and he had a baby. They say babies take nine months, but anyhow. He was a real celebrity and he was a pug. The CO tried to put him on to an outback post from Moresby. The next he sees that he's in a fight at Port Moresby. There was all services fighting preliminaries and he was in a fight there. So the CO laughed about it. Eventually he got back because he was in charge of an RAP and he said that he broke his leg, or he hurt his leg and he evacuated himself back to the unit. But the CO liked him just the same, even though he was a naughty boy sometimes. He was an understanding CO our man was.

Can you remember any other of the officers, particularly? Do you remember Major Thomas?

Yes. Major Thomas I remember because he came from the 1st Field Ambulance. Major Thomas sent me to detention for fourteen days.

For doing what?

For refusing to go on a parade. There again, I was a very, very young man. So my pay book at that stage wasn't looking real good.

This was in Moresby.

No, this was in Rutherford, before we went away, when I first went into the army, and he sentenced me to fourteen days' detention, which I did at Victoria Barracks and then I went to Orange. I came back a better man but still not perfect.

Do you have any other stories of Wau?

Wau is an absolutely beautiful area.

Gold or grog?

Grog, yes. Gold: we went down to the sluice boxes. I wasn't one of the earlier ones, but we had a Scotsman with us who picked up a 14-ounce nugget. I don't know whether you've heard that before, but that's true. I forget his name now. I've just forgotten about it. Anyhow, he got this nugget. We all got gold from the sluice boxes and brought it back and melted it down. I forget how we melted it down. We all made rings and things to take away with us.

Not selling any to the Yanks?

No. The Yanks weren't near us in Wau.

Major Thomas told me about an occasion when a plane came in specially to buy gold.

Early Wau days the pioneers that went in there and one of their sergeants in the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion, I think it was, named Geoff Lennox, and they arrived at Wau when the Japs were there and the Japs blew the Post Office up where all the gold was kept and they did away with their ammunition out of their [bassik] pouches and filled them with gold what's-a-names. That's a true story, too. But Wau is a lovely area. It was a two blanket job at night. We got fresh vegetables at Wau.

Where did you get them from?

They were grown by the natives and the natives were controlled by ANGAU.

Do you remember a swimming pool there?

Yes. Where was the swimming pool? I remember the mad mile, and we used to lay on the creeks and the running water was beautiful. The swimming pool, I just cannot recall it. I remember the coffee trees. The German owner was interned. I do remember the swimming pool, and I've just forgotten it. I want prompting now.

Can you think of any other storitenes at Wau?

We had a great football side. This particular celebrity, Snowy Caldwell. We had two sides, two football sides, and we were going to play at a big match up in the mountains, I forget the name of the place. But this celebrity, this Snowy Caldwell was a real wag and a real better and all that. He went up ahead of the football side. All the football side might have ten shillings on. We'd pool it, and when we got up to this mountain area, Dumpu it might have been, I forget it now, to play this match. It was a very important match, it was a good side that we were playing. We won the match, but Snowy, this particular fellow was a real wag and he went up ahead of us and took some other money and bet. When we got there the betting we had to lay six to four or two to one against us, which wasn't good value. So Snowy never came up after that very well.

Did you remember any of the people holding the bets clearing off?

He may have been one of those.

It wasn't one of yours, and he was one of yours. It was one of the other side holding the bets.

Yes, there was. It may have been with some of his. But that could have been an excuse. Snowy could have been, he might have

reverted back to that, knowing Snow the way he was. Anyhow, I'm not sure on that.

Did you ever get into the spirits up there, the still?

No. I didn't drink. I didn't drink at that stage, I was young, and never had drank, never even in Moresby.

You weren't making it?

No. There were men in our hut that were making it and getting all the fruits in the ten gallon milk drums. I can remember it now fermenting. They were buying sugar from somewhere. They couldn't steal it out of the camp. They'd get it from sections. This particular man that found the gold, that 14-ounce nugget, he was the one that used to make it and he used to drink it also. I can remember him with a two-gallon petrol tin and he'd have a burner underneath it and it would come out as pure spirits. I wasn't very interested, but he might make a full bottle and that would take a lot of stuff by the way, and he'd break it down with a bit of juice, Mynor juice. But I never drank. But at the end we were allotted two bottles of beer a week. That's my introduction to drinking.

Did you get malaria or anything else?

No. I never got malaria. I never had any diseases, but a lot of the fellows did, especially the fellows that were in the isolated areas. But I never got malaria. We had one particular case about a man who got scrub typhus. Have you heard about that? Jack Brett, I think his name was. You've heard the story, no doubt, you don't want it repeated.

There may be different versions, can you remember well?

No, I didn't treat the man, but it was a miracle case. Our officers were doctors, a lot of our officers, and they told us what a miracle case he was. I watched the man. We built a special ward for him and he had the fortitude and strength to pull through. It was a miracle.

You say you built a special ward for him, you and a number of others. Who was the carpenter?

I've forgotten that. We were too interested in kicking footballs and running and jumping.

Did you get any medical training?

We did early, yes, field training, bandaging and things like that, pressure points. We got some, yes. We could have done the job if we'd had to, to stop bleeding or any of those sorts of things that were necessary.

Was there anything else at Wau?

All I can say is that, as I repeat, we had a wonderful CO. We came from the 1st Field Ambulance to the 9th. We brought a great bunch of fellows over and we mixed with a great bunch. I have been friends with them fifty years later, it has been great.

So where did you go from there?

We returned home and had leave. A lot of them came back on leave from the island. I didn't. I came back with the unit, on the Duntroon again. We had our leave returned back to GDD. Everybody was split everywhere. Several of us were sent to ... I went to the Masonic Hospital at Baulkham Hills for some time as an orderly. Only for about a month to two months.

Was that when you were still in the army?

I was still in the army, yes. That was the Masonic Hospital, but it was an army hospital. It was at Baulkham Hills. Then we were put into the 2/14th Field Ambulance. I think they were from Adelaide. As a matter of fact we were to go away again. I don't know to where. Anyhow, the war ended and we were discharged within a month or so. It was a wonderful four years, that is all I can say.

You are lucky.

I was very lucky. I've been lucky all my life. That's a photo of me there. That's me there. Some of those fellows there, great fellows here.

Do you remember where that was?

That was in Queensland, at a place called Blue Water or something, outside of Townsville I think.

Blue Lagoon.

Yes, Blue Lagoon or something like that, yes. We were all young fellows, all fit, look at them. Everybody was fit and strong. I have no more to tell, that's it.

END OF TAPE - END OF INTERVIEW