ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: CHARLIE PRICE - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE – SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: CHARLIE PRICE

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 - Charlie Price.

Where were you born, were you born in East Maitland, were you?

Yes.

And you grew up around there?

Yes.

Went to school there?

Yes.

What was your job before the Second World War?

Before ...

Before the war?

I was born in thirteen.

Sorry?

1913.

Right, what was your job before you went away during the Second World War?

I was working for BHP.

You were working at BHP, right. Did you get put off at all during the Depression?

Well, I wasn't working at BHP during the Depression.

Right.

During the depression days I didn't have anything to do.

You were still at school I suppose a lot of the time?

No.

No?

No, the Depression didn't start until '29.

Right and you couldn't get any work during that time?

No, I worked on a farm for a while ... a few years.

When the war started were you working at BHP then?

Ah ... yes.

Right. What made you join up or did you get called up?

Got called up ... and I joined up.

Where did you go to, Rutherford?

Yes.

Did you volunteer for the field ambulance or did it just happen that way?

Just happened that way.

Do you remember getting sent down to join up with the 9th Field Ambulance?

Yes.

And whereabouts did you go with them?

Oh, it was somewhere in Sydney there.

Were they at St Ives at that time or Narellan?

What's that?

Were they at St Ives or where were they?

At St Ives.

And did you go to Wallgrove or ...

No.

Narellan?

Did I what?

Did you go to Narellan before you went to Queensland?

I can't think then.

You remember going up to Queensland did you?

Oh yes.

On the train?

Yeah, went to Queensland ... to ... Atherton.

Do you remember where you stopped over in Brisbane?

No.

Were you at the racecourse at Ascot?

We ... where were we? We didn't stop anywhere at Brisbane I don't think, we went straight through.

Grovely, does that ring a bell?

No.

All right, did you get held up by floods at Rockhampton?

We got held up at Rockhampton for a fortnight I think it was.

So you must have had Christmas up there?

Yes.

And what unit were you with, what company?

Ah ... what was his name? Tom Kelly's company.

He was B Company I think wasn't he?

Yeah.

So, where did you go when you got there, did you go up to Ravenshoe?

We went to Atherton, from Atherton down to Tully, out that way.

Right, can you remember much that happened up there at all?

Not much, exercised a bit in the bush.

Do you remember any accidents?

No.

There was at one time somebody remembered. Were you on any of the ambulance trains?

No.

And when you went overseas ... or do you remember any run-ins with the Yanks or about the Yanks in Townsville at all?

Yes, with the Yanks ... up in the Markham Valley.

Oh yes, I know that, yes. So when you went to New Guinea where did you go first? What part of New Guinea?

Moresby.

Right, Moresby and what camp were you at?

Ah ...

Rigo Road, Lux Lane?

I forget now.

Was it a post or was it ...

We went up over ... oh some trail there up over mountains, some hill they called it.

Was it a one-way track where you had to go through gates?

Yes.

That sounds like Lux Lane to me.

One way up and one way back.

You were there a good time were you?

We were there for about ... a couple of months, I suppose.

Who were your officers at that time?

There was Kelly ... sergeant was ... Pearson.

Len Pearson was it?

Pearson, yes and ... [Selmes] I think his name was.

All right, so when you got sent away from there where did you go and how did you go?

We were put on a plane and went up to the Markham Valley.

Plane? From where?

From where we were ...

Which was?

Yes, we had to go ... ship to the airfield and we flew from there to the Markham Valley.

Ship to the airfield?

Yeah by truck and that, you know.

Oh yeah and you were on a plane to the Markham Valley. Where did you land do you know?

Oh ... I couldn't ...

Wouldn't be Nadzab would it?

Yes, that's right.

Right and you flew in there?

Yes.

And who was with you do you remember, who was in charge?

Um ... let me think ... Lenny Pearson was one of them and ... Tom Kelly I think it was.

No, Tom Kelly didn't go to Nadzab. You don't know about Fred Seaborne?

Yeah Fred Seaborne, he was there, he was one with us.

He was a sergeant wasn't he?

Yes.

And he went with you did he?

No, he wasn't up there with us?

Oh he didn't go up there with you?

No.

So who was in charge of that party?

I'm trying to think of ...

Was there an officer, a captain?

Captain ... can't think now.

I do know actually one captain, I'm trying to think of his name. Let me pull this one out ... beginning with B I think, the one I'm thinking of did anyway.

He come from Melbourne, this one ... When we left there we come back to Lae.

Was it Captain Biddle?

Who?

Captain Biddle, Curry?

Curry, that's his name, Captain Curry.

Captain Curry, right. And who was the sergeant? Captain Curry ...

Lenny Pearson.

Was Len Pearson?

Yeah and ... there was Harry Selmes, I think his name was.

Harry Selmes. Do you remember Charlie Price ... that's you, Clarrie Smith?

Who's that?

Do you remember Clarrie Smith?

Clarrie Smith, yes.

Was he with you?

Clarrie, Clarrie ... no I don't think he was with us up there.

That's interesting. So you were the second party into Nadzab, the other one had already moved onto Dumpu, is that one?

Beg your pardon?

Were you the second party into Nadzab, the first party had already moved up to Dumpu?

Yeah, they was up ... oh where were they? When we got the movement order to come home they got pulled out and we couldn't get a plane back in time and by the time we got back to Lae they had already gone home. And I remember the captain, he went around to the headquarters and said we'd be on the next boat home. We had to wait three months for it.

So that was ...

Delayed an extra three months.

Three months for the boat home. Well they had already gone home in September, so that must have been the following Christmas, '44?

Yeah. We were a terrible while away.

And you were still up at Nadzab?

At Lae.

Whereabouts were you in Lae?

Oh ... we was on one side of the river and the Yanks was the other, I know that.

It wouldn't be the Busu River would it?

It could have been.

Well there was Butibum River, that was one river - it's a hell of a name isn't it? - and there was the Busu and then there was of course the Markham.

Markham River.

Were you at the airfield at Nadzab?

Yeah.

And when you left there where did you go?

We come back to Lae.

You came round back to Lae and then you were waiting in Lae ...

For nearly three months before they came home, yeah.

I understand. So when you were in Nadzab there was another party of ten came along, do you remember them?

A party of ten?

How many of you were there, with Captain Curry and Sergeant Len Pearson, was there twelve was there?

About ten or twelve.

Right, well according to the war diary there was twelve plus the officer and it there was also Captain Biddle mentioned, I don't know whether ... you haven't heard of him?

Captain Biddle?

No you haven't heard of him, right. But Captain Curry was the one that was there all the time was he?

Yes.

Right. You didn't see another party come out from Moresby?

None of ours.

Right. So that's a different group, well that is interesting because you see I was talking to ... so apparently you were the second party into Nadzab. And when you got back to Australia were did you go then, did you go to Rutherford or had it already closed there?

No we went back to Rutherford. I was at Rutherford for a while then we got ... a few got sent here and few got sent different other places. I know I went out to a prisoner of war camp at ...

Hay?

No ... oh ... Cowra, I was sent there for a while. And we come back into Sydney but we got a movement order to go overseas again and then the war ended and we didn't go.

Right. Where were you in Sydney?

Holsworthy I think it was.

Right, Holsworthy. And then the war ended and that was it?

And the war ended and we went back to Merrylands, a few of us were sent there to look after the big hospital there at Merrylands. Of course, the Yanks had it and they left as the war ended and we more or less looked after the gear there. About thirty of us sent there.

Did you get malaria at all or anything like that?

No.

Any of the others in your group get any of those sort of things?

No, none of our mob.

Not up at Nadzab either?

All come looking like Chinamen because of the tablets.

Oh yeah right. And did you come under Jap bombing or fire at all up at Nadzab?

We had a few scares with them up there. They scouted the airfield a couple of times up there and dropped a few bombs.

And nobody was hit?

No, not in our mob.

What were you actually doing?

At Nadzab? Well more or less looking after them as they come off the planes like and we had a bit of a hospital there and we'd put them on the planes that go back to Moresby.

So you were acting as a casualty clearing station?

Yeah.

Right. Do you know what unit you were under at that time?

I forget now.

There's one which is called 111 CCS, would it be that?

It could have been.

You don't know?

No.

And you don't remember the name of any other field ambulances you were working with at all?

No.

Do you remember where the wounded were coming from or the sick people?

No.

Were they coming from Dumpu?

Up that way somewhere they coming from and on the plane and land them there and ... we used to take them off there and put on the other plane.

Did you ship any of them down on trucks into Lae?

No, not by trucks.

Right. So where they not putting people into hospital at Lae at all?

In Lae?

Where you not sending people anybody into the hospital in Lae?

No, no they came to Moresby.

Well that's interesting because there was another group that was sending them into Lae.

Oh.

Yeah, so you must have been in another part of the airfield to the other team?

I could have been too.

That's interesting that because they were sending them down to Lae. Well, well, I didn't realise that the two sections were separate. Yeah, well you learn something everyday. So the other ten must have ... I'll have to get onto Fred Seaborn, he's on still around, he's at Northbridge.

Yes, Fred's still going.

And I believe that the other bloke I spoke to was Clarrie Smith.

Clarrie?

Yes, and he was with Fred Seaborn.

Freddy Seaborn?

Yes, that was his sergeant, he said that they didn't have an officer, so he must have been one of the ten.

Must have been.

And he said that they went around by boat as well.

No, we didn't get boats.

That's right, so you weren't in the same group as Clarrie then? Ah right, that's very good because now we're got them all covered, we know something about all the groups. And is there anything that you can remember ... do you know what happened to the mascot Sheila?

[Laughs]

The dog?

Yeah they wouldn't let us take her on the boat.

So did you have her at any stage?

Yes, we had her for a while. Jack Smith, he was a corporal at the time and he used to look after her. We smuggled her onto the boat ...

Did you help him, did you?

No, I didn't help him.

But what happened at the end when she was at Lae?

We got as far as Moresby with her I think.

Yes, you got as far as ... was she in Lae afterwards?

She could have been at Lae?

But you don't know?

No.

I tell you were she did go to, she went to Bulldog and she was at Wau but the question is what happened to her then?

I wouldn't know what happened to her. Jack Smith, he smuggled her onto the boat.

I've got a picture of Fred Summerfield and Doug Dunlop swimming at Bulldog, for goodness sake, it was thick with crocodiles and there's Sheila there barking like hell at them. They've got nothing on - we've only got back view mind you.

She was a great old dog.

But you didn't see her at ...

No, I lost track of her when we got to New Guinea, we moved up like, you know. xxx went there.

Do you know anybody that ... Jack Smith is dead now is he?

Yes, Jack passed away.

Is there anybody that was with him do you know?

Jack Smith?

Yeah.

Friends?

Do you know who might know more about what happened to her, the mascot?

The sergeant that went away with Smithy?

Bromwich? No.

xxx, Smith ... no he was at Lae with us, he was with us in the valley.

What Jack Smith?

Yeah, that's right.

Well what ever happened to the dog by that time?

Oh I don't know what happened to the dog, no.

So he was with you?

We had her up on the hill, [over the gap] and then when we went up the valley we had to leave her behind, what happened to her after that.

Well she was taken to Bulldog because as I said I've seen photographs of her there.

I've got a photograph here of a mob of us at Lae, you know, playing football one day.

Were you in the football team at Moresby?

No, we wasn't playing football, just kicking around because we had nothing to do and xxx xxx more or less, xxx xxx.

Right and when you were with Tom Kelly, did they ever construct a mad mile?

Mad mile?

Obstacle course?

No.

You were lucky. Apparently he came back from some physical training course and then the next thing they constructed this and they had one all over the place and you must have missed it. All right, well is there anything you can think of that you should give me a yell about?

Most of the blokes I was with up there they are practically all gone now, you know. Ray McPherson, do you know Ray?

I recorded him the other day.

Ray, he was up there.

Was he at Nadzab?

Yeah, Ray was.

Was he? I don't remember him talking about that. He seemed very, very ...

There was a few of them up there but they're not here now.

Okay, well thank you very, very much. If you think of anything just write it up and send it to Tom.

Right, good.

And thank you very much.

Good. Tut-taa.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A - END OF INTERVIEW