ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: HARRY REID - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE – SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: HARRY REID

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD RAXWORTHY

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START OF TAPE 26B

Identification: This is the 9th Australian Field Ambulance, AIF, Oral History Project - tape 26B, 27th August, 1991. I am talking to Mr Harry Reid who was the Sergeant Major in 9th Field Ambulance during the Second World War.

Where were you born and when?

Yes, I became the RSM Sergeant Major when we left Sydney. I was made the RSM on the train because their RSM, Jack Armitage was a First World War man and the CO thought he just couldn't stand up to the strain in the tropics.

Where were you born and when?

I was born in Double Bay, on 8th August, 1916.

Did you grow up around there?

Yes, I grew up in Paddington.

Did you go to school in Paddington, did you?

Yes, I went to school at Paddington, I also went to school at Sacred Heart School at Darlinghurst and I went to St Frances School Paddington.

Where did you work when you left school?

I worked ... oh it was hard to get work in those days. I worked as a messenger boy for a firm called Thomas Smith in Woolloomooloo; they run the Tasman Radio. And I became a process worker, working sheets in their workshop. Then in 1933 I left there to go and work in the Transport Department as a cleaner in Waverley Tram Depot. And from there I stayed on, when I turned twenty-one they kept me on and I worked as a tram guard and I was with them up till the war started.

You joined up quite early, I see a photograph of you there with the old blue uniform on?

Yeah, well I joined the ambulance on 8th April, 1936. The reason I joined it was that all the men in that Field Ambulance were ... or most of them, came from the Transport Departments Ambulance Unit Corps. There were only fifty-two in a unit. Three came from W.D. and H.O. Wills, one from the Australian Gaslight Company, and all the rest came from either buses or trams or railway.

Did you do first aid in the trams?

Yes, I was in ... I did first aid, very keen on it and I was in the New South Wales team that beat Queensland from the Transport Department. And by going into the field ambulance I thought I could further my knowledge, which I did.

When you joined the 9th Field Ambulance where was the unit then?

The unit was in Victoria Barracks.

Was there anybody else who was in there with you at that time or ... George Warneke for instance?

George came in after the war had started. At the beginning of the war there were quite a few from that pre-war days but most of them either went to the 1st AGH, 1st Field Ambulance and ... some of the other medical units. One of them went with the ... I think it was the 5th AGH, I'm not sure, 1st AGH ...

Which is where?

Went to Greece and one of the boys in our unit that left us to go with them, he got all the nurses out of Greece and before that he got the [BEM]. That was Joe Parmasino, his name was.

Was there anybody in the unit with you in 1936 or around that time that went to New Guinea with you later?

One ... that was Jack Rochford, he was a first world war soldier, he was a sergeant with us. But they sent him back because he was too old for it. He'd been with the 4th Battalion in the First World War. He wasn't a young man.

And you were there at the barracks for how long, you were in the 9th Field Ambulance till the war?

Yes, we were there from 1937 till the war started, from there we went to Liverpool. It took the first batch of what we called the UTs that came in to transport, they were universal trainees. Tom Kelly came in with the first batch in January, 1940.

What was he then, a private?

He was a private, he came from the railways, he was a clerk in the railways and to get someone in to do clerical work was much appreciated by the CO I can assure you. He opened out from a peace time strength of fifty-two to a war time strength of 257, the only ones that he had left were those boys that trained with him before the war that had any experience. When the 1st AGH was formed we more or less went over in mass to join it but Pete Davies was the CO and he said no, he's not taking all of us so he grabbed us back. Then when I volunteered to go in 3rd Ambulance ... in the cavalry units, to go for the motorised

cavalry, the CO wouldn't let me go in that, so I just had to stay put.

When you first joined at Victoria Barracks was Colonel Davies the CO then was he?

No, the colonel then was Lieutenant Colonel Reg Money, he was a brain surgeon, and he left us in '38, I think, and Colonel Davies - Pete Davies was his nickname - he came to us. He was know as Pete Davies throughout the Australian and England too. He was a man that was a colleague of one of the Huxley's in England and his experiments of the lungs and what have you. And I remember the Governor-General came out to see us at Liverpool and people ... and he gave a quick salute bringing his head down to his hand and Lord whatever his name was, the Governor-General said, 'How you going Pete?' You know, and I thought you see he's head of the army coming and talking to a colonel and calling him Pete, 'How you going Pete?' 'Oh all right, whatever his ...' Yeah, Lord Gowrie I think it was. And he said, 'All right Fred', whatever his name was, you know.

Also about that time the members of the Field Ambulance Association from the First World War came out and they presented us with the flag of the 9th Field Ambulance ... they carried with the 9th Field Ambulance in the First World War, also the bugle. Later on that bugle was put to great use, Lenny Pearson was made a bugler and he was sent out in the hills to practice on his own.

What happened to the bugle do you know?

I don't know where ... I think the bugle - I'm not too sure on this - but I think the bugle and I know the flag is up in the cathedral, the Anglican Cathedral at Bathurst. That's the last I've heard of them.

I'll have to see if the bugle is with it?

Yeah well the bugle should be with it. Lenny Pearson may be able to tell you if you can contact him, where it went to.

Well as a matter of fact I've already interviewed Len Pearson and I haven't asked him about that.

Yeah, well that's just something he's forgotten. We also had before the war, we had Major Steigrad and Major Snedding. Major Steigrad was there when Reg Money was the CO. He was a bit of a larrikin, Steigrad, play up a bit, great one for practical jokes but he was a children's surgeon and he was very good. He ended up being a brigadier in the medical corps before even the war ended, so he ... we had a very good unit. I remember just before the end of the war I had the unit at the university with a Major-General Maguire, Colonel Davies and Alan Henderson, Captain Alan Henderson and Major Maguire said to me, 'You should be a very proud man, Mr Reid,' he said, 'You

took one of the best field ambulance, best trained field ambulances away from Australia that's ever left here.' And I was very proud. Although I was one of those that trained.

When you first went out to Liverpool did they have horse-drawn ambulances there?

Horse-drawn vehicles, that's all we had.

Do you remember going on any bivouacs with horse-drawn ambulances?

We went ... it was Colonel Davies who said that the Germans go out and practice, he said they walk out fifteen miles, set up a camp, pull it down, go back before they have breakfast. He said of course they have motor vehicles, so he said all we've got is horse-drawn vehicles and you blokes will have to march. So he'd take us out and do about three miles and then we'd come back but he reckoned that was the equivalent of what the Germans were doing in their motor vehicles.

We also had another bloke with us that taught us quite a lot, a Captain Connolly. Captain Connolly was in the ... don't know which side, but he was in the revolution in Spain before the war. And he came back from the war with a lot of the German ideas for the way they set up things and he brought back the idea of light sections in field ambulance xxx which was a German idea originally.

When did you move to Ingleburn, how long were you at Liverpool before you moved to Ingleburn?

We were at Liverpool ... let's see that was in 1940, crikey, we went to Liverpool, we went to Liverpool when the 7th Divi pulled out to go to overseas, that would be about May, 1941 I think, I'm not sure about that.

Do you remember parades with horses at Liverpool/Ingleburn?

Yes, we didn't have a great many. Matt Nolan was a great horseman and most of the men with the horses they went away with either the AGH or one of the other field ambulances though as the AIF xxx. At that time we were still a militia unit really. So we were only ... they were all the troops we were getting in were call-ups - eighteen year olds that started off in January - at eighteen year olds being called up for six months then they'd go out and they'd be in for two years. They all got trapped in the finish and we had more than we knew what to do with, so we gave birth to two other field ambulances, the 17th and 18th Field Ambulances - NCOs and all came from the 9th Field Ambulance. They had a lot of young NCOs that we'd made NCOs from UTs that we'd called up.

So where did you go first when you left Ingleburn and did you go down to St Ives or Frenchs Forest?

Yes, we went ... that was we went before the Nips came into the war, we'd been to St Ives. Our area was allotted to us was from West Head down to Wollongong, or down below Wollongong, Nowra or this side of the river.

And how many men did you have to do that?

We had to do the whole lot ... to cover the whole lot we had 257, that's including the transport, which was forty, fifty-two I think in the transport.

Do you remember when you first got your motorised transport?

Yes, it was all impressed, it was all civilian transport that was impressed by the government at ... handed out to us. We had to go to a lot of different people that you could come at it. Well we never got a decent set-up, all our vehicles were really ... we had let's see about ... after the Nips came into the war and I nearly got twenty-two utilities - brand spanking new from General Motors and the transport NCOs and the officers, they grounded the lot of them. They were all unsafe, they all had to be ... every nut and bolt had to be done up and they were laying there for a week. The boys worked like diggers on them to get them road worthy.

While we were at Ingleburn we had at one time there I was a company sergeant major - staff sergeant, and Pete Davies said I want you to take these load of boys out, he said and teach them how to drive. So I took five out, I think, in impressed Ford utility that we'd got and Tommy Kelly was one of them. I remember I took them out around Campbelltown, all around the hills and he's coming back from Campbelltown and I said to Tommy Kelly - I'd told him what he had to do - and I said, 'Change her down, change down a gear.' So he changed down all right, he put her into reverse gear and I thought the back had gone out of the ute.

Yes, so when you went down to Frenchs Forest where were you stationed down there?

We were stationed a good place called the Green Toad in Stanley Street.

At St Ives?

Yes, St Ives. And from there we had small units out. We had one lot at the showground and ...

Doug Dunlop was out there wasn't he?

Ah ... Doug Dunlop was ... no.

I've got a picture of him there.

Yeah, well he was only visiting because ... you got an officer there.

Well he has a picture himself, he reckoned he was and that was supposed to be at the showground where he took the pictures.

Well I was in charge at the showground, the officer in charge was Captain ... oh wait a minute I'll think of it in a minute.

Clipsham?

No, no. What was his name? The whole family ... Burfitt, Captain Burfitt, his whole family were doctors, mother, father all the whole family. Mary Burfitt was very good anaesthetist, she was at Concord Hospital. She gave me the ether too one time when I was inthere. We had then out with the various battalions attached to them, although they were scattered. I remember Pete Davies said to me, 'There's something wrong here young Harry,' he said, 'I want you to come with me.' I said, 'What's wrong?' He said, 'Well there's 917 men in a battalion,' and he said 'The 1st Battalion is stationed down Bondi, down Coogee that way,' he said 'We're going down to see what's going on,' he said, 'Either they're the most promiscuous women in Australia or,' he said, 'there's a few just getting more than their ten per cent leave each day.' When we went out Bondi beach was all covered in barbed wire and everything, we went out there and we found out at night why they were using so many condoms or French letters as we called them in those days. They used them to put over the barrels of their rifles to stop the sand getting in them and rusting.

Who was that, the mob that stationed at the Bondi Bowling Club?

No that was ... the boys at the bowling club were from EDC, the people in the beaches was from the 1st Battalion on that side and the 17th Battalion and 18th Battalion on the north side and 45th Battalion on that south side of the harbour. One of the men from the 45th Battalion - oh I'm going back a bit - during the war was W.C. Smith who was later on a minister in one of the Menzies cabinets. He got meningitis, isolated, he had a hut there, one hut and he was in it and I was the bunny had to look after him all the time in isolation with him. For a solid fortnight I never left that hut and I looked after him and later on he became a lieutenant and then a raid in Sydney he would have mucked up the whole of Sydney if he was allowed to have his way. The sergeant flattened him, they took the single box near Central, he was standing outside Central. Funny things went on during that war.

How would he have mucked up the whole of Sydney if he had his way?

He wanted to pull all the signals. They had guns and rifles and he was going to pull all the signals and the sergeant told him he couldn't do that he said, he said they've got to learn, the Japanese they'd do that they've got to learn, so the sergeant clocked him and flattened him, knocked him out and they calmed him down for a bit and put him away somewhere for a little while. I don't know what become of it, he got pretty mad but he got into parliament anyhow with some of the things he said.

Did you go out and see some of the other units like Pennant Hills Golf Club and Bankstown Baths?

Yes, at one time I was at both of them. They were our ... Pennant Hills was our major pull back from the coast to the north side. Next down Bankstown, I forget what company that's next to ... B Coy, I think was at Bankstown. A Coy ... no Headquarters Coy was at the Pennant Hills Golf Club. Where in the forest they got the engineers there in the forest and for all I know might still be there Frenchs Forest, they built, the engineers built an underground operating centre in concrete and a recovery room.

Did you ever use it?

No, not for reality it was just .... would have been used, not that it would be much good because guns all down that road that went down to Dee Why and they had soldiers guarding a few of them, the real ones they were made of wood and the real ones had no one there to make you go up and look at, it was just a camouflage job or to put people off. But to see soldiers guarding wooden guns, we knew you know.

What about going to Queensland, after Frenchs Forest and St Ives did you go to Wallgrove, did you?

We went to Wallgrove, yes and that was a place where the Brigadier Fisher came out there to have a look us over. He'd looked us over out at the St Ives and this was eight months later I suppose, he came up to see us at Wallgrove. And Major Holcombe, Tris Holcombe, he had a leg - he was in the First World War - and he had a leg, a stiff leg and knee and I remember him saying to me, he was sitting down in front of the tents and I said to him you've got to get out on parade, see I was actually RSM that particular day. And he said, 'Ah I'm done Harry, I'm done.' I said, 'What's the matter?' He said, 'Well if he sees me knee,' he said, 'He'll bar me I won't get away.' I said, 'I don't know what you did, did you sprain it just a while ago getting ready?' He said, 'Hey.' I said, 'Get me a four inch bandage.' And I bandaged up his knee and he went down and the Brigadier Fisher said to him, 'Holcombe what have you done?' And he said, 'Oh I sprained my knee, Sir, I tripped over the guy ropes.' 'You won't want to do that in New

Guinea will you?' He said, 'No, no sir, no I wouldn't do that in New Guinea.' That's how Tris got away and Reggie Bretherton who hated First World War blokes, soldiers. Of course he was ropable over that, he didn't want to take any second world ... First World War men with him. Because Tris Holcombe was in the first war, Captain Alan Henderson was in the First World War and Reg Bretherton, himself, went through Duntroon and he came out as an officer and graduated from Duntroon the week the war ended, so he never got away and he was very crooked on anyone who got away, in the officer line.

What about Major Heffernan where did he come from?

Major Heffernan came to us during the war. He came from out Strathfield or Ashfield somewhere, he had his practice.

But he hadn't been in the First World War?

No, no he was a younger man than that, a little bloke, he was a very cocky little bloke, very good company commander. He took his ... I remember him up at New Guinea and they came back - they went up with the Yanks for a landing - there was a medical team for the Yanks at the landing. And after he came back I got him his mail and when I gave it to him I said, 'I've got some mail for you up there, I sent it up.' He said, 'Bring it up.' So I took it up and when he opened it up one was a square loaf of bread and inside it was a bottle of black and white whiskey. He was having that and one of the little fellows named Quinn, this is in New Guinea, Rigo Road it was. One of these boys, Mama Quinn we called him, Mama Quinn couldn't take Atebrin and he had malaria and he had to have quinine. And they had a captain that was sent up to us and the police took him down to the RAP and this captain told him - Richards, the captain - he told him he was malingering. So the boys came up to me on his company and they said, You come and have a look at Mama Quinn.' So all right, so I went down and I took a thermometer, he had a temperature of 106. So I went up to Captain Richards ... ah Captain ... Major Heffernan and told him what I thought of Major Richards or Captain Richards - I get mixed up. Anyhow we called Richards up and he had a go at him and Richards got annoyed about that and he went to Reg Bretherton the CO and complained about being dressed down by Major Heffernan. And I had to call Major Heffernan up for the CO and I sat outside the tent and listened. And I heard Major Heffernan say to Reg Bretherton, 'If one runs a practice in civil life the way you run this unit I'd be bankrupt.'

When the unit went up to Queensland did you go up with them in the first instance?

Yes, I was on the train, they emptied everyone off the Brisbane Express, just bundled them all out and put us on the train and away we went. When we were at Wallgrove, we got two ... one day's notice I got and the unit had 108 boys - we were short - 108 boys from the 1st Field Ambulance in Newcastle, Joe Davies

came down with that outfit. And that was the first time we'd seen them and I said to Jack Armitage who was the RSM at the time, I said, 'We can't go Jack,' I said, 'We're a hundred odd blokes short.' He said, 'You've got 180 or something out there to pick from.' He said, 'But they're going with you get rid of them as you like.' And we went on the Brisbane Express, they bundled everyone off and put us on. We were going in for a [four score pygmy force] which supposed to take Goodenough Island and we bundled them up on that train we went to Brisbane was Ascot Race Course they call it Doomben Race Course now. And we were there and then that was where they decided we had to have greens and all we had was khaki. They gave us a stove so boiled them up, put green dye in and we had to put all our webbing and everything into that. And that was to cause the greatest crop of dermatitis you've ever seen amongst our fellows.

So where did you go after that?

Well we weren't long in Brisbane. We took off ... we were to go to Townsville, and embark at Townsville and go to Goodenough Island with the pygmy force. But by the time we got to Townsville they said that one of the companies from one of the battalions up there had already taken already Goodenough Island, so the force was need disbanding. We went on then up to Ravenshoe. And there we formed a con depot with one half of a company and the other half of the company formed the ambulance train from Ravenshoe to Brisbane.

And you didn't have anything to do with the ambulance train?

Not myself personally, I supplied all the personnel for it. One of the men on it I remember was Les O'Sullivan. It was Maurie O'Sullivan the MH or the MLA who was later on the minister for transport and the minister for health, he was one of the boys, he was a corporal.

END OF TAPE

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We were just at the end there talking about up at Ravenshoe.

Yes, as I was saying, one of the men, one of the corporals that I put on the ambulance train was Les O'Sullivan who was the son of the MLA for Paddington. He said to me, 'I've only got one boy, Harry, you look after him', and said, 'I'll see what I can do for you, don't worry'. So Les had very thick glasses, he was B2, so I got him put on the ambulance train and when we

came down to xxx, out of Townsville, we left him on the ambulance train and he continued on. I don't know what became of him after that. But I met his father after the war and he returned a little compliment that he'd asked me for.

> Yes. Well he said that he was on the ambulance train for the rest of the war. Then after the war, at one stage, he reckoned they did 10,000 miles in six weeks returning wounded people from the various hospitals to their local states of origin.

Those blokes, they picked up from Redbank - I think that's the name of the place - they picked up all the people that they'd tested for various gas xxx and took them down to Townsville. They went around to a special hospital that was erected on the beach down in Pallarenda and that was just to deal with those boys that volunteered for this exercise at Redbank for testing out gas and the equipment.

> Les O'Sullivan was on the New South Wales train.

Yeah, and he went up to the Brisbane train too.

> Right.

He was on some Brisbane to Sydney and from Brisbane to Rosedale.

> He didn't mention that. I've already recorded him and he mentioned being on Brisbane to Sydney and then Albury.

I maybe got mixed up there but I know I put him on an ambulance train because ...

> He said he spent the rest of the war on that one, on the New South Wales ambulance train.

Oh, I might add it's forty-odd, fifty years or so, you know.

> Cec News was on it at the end of the war as well when they came back.

Cec News, yes. Yes, I knew Cec went there. Cec worked for the Water Board. I see him occasionally.

> Cec was orderly room sergeant on the train. He was responsible for the administration there and Cec was a clerk when he came back after New Guinea.

Cec was a clerk at any case in the Water Board. But Les was a corporal when he went on the train and he got a promotion when he went from us. He was a lance corporal with us and he went to a corporal.

> When you went to New Guinea, where did you go first?

When they left for New Guinea I wasn't with them.

Where were you?

Colonel Bretherton ... we were out at the racecourse out of Townsville and Colonel Bretherton's mother died and I was to go on leave so I'd be in Sydney on 24th May. My wife was at that time about to have a baby. Well, Colonel Bretherton when he came back, after his mother's funeral and that, he came back and said, 'What are you doing here?'. I said, 'Oh well, Colonel ...' - I've found his name there, I've seen it - 'he said, no' and he stopped my leave. He said, 'Right, you go tonight' and I was on the train and off to Sydney - that was at Townsville - and they told me at Rockhampton that my wife had died the night before. And when I finished up my leave and straightened out what I could, I went on then and I flew to Townsville and from Townsville I flew to Moresby and we would be getting into September then when I caught up with them.

We were at Rigo Road, the headquarters there. We built a hospital there out of tree branches and malthoid and what have you and put mosquito wire right around it. Then we got into trouble, it had got that big, we got into trouble from Melbourne for screening - we were not really supposed to do. But the boys didn't want to go into the hospital where the nurses were, they wanted to stay where the boys were looking after them. Those that had been in hospital reckoned the nurses were too bossy. They'd rather be where they'd get a good laugh with the men.

They didn't all feel that way. I hear some of them went down to visit sisters in Moresby that they'd met on the ambulance train.

Oh yes, that would be on too but they weren't in there as patients. It's the patients that didn't like the nurses. I had a lot to do with the nurses even back in Ingleburn. They had twelve nurses there.

What about Narellan?

Narellan, we never had any nurses at Narellan.

Now that's a baffler because a nurse has rung me up saying that she was at Narellan for about six months and according to her there was an officer named Dunlop there.

In Narellan? We had nurses at ... six nurses at Wallgrove. I don't remember any nurses at Narellan. I suppose there could have been. See, we were pushed around a bit while we were at Narellan.

Rigo Road now. You told me about Rigo Road. What was that like?

Rigo Road was our headquarters, our base. We had the units. Quite a lot of the unit like sections were from Murray Field or one of the airfields there, transport airfield, and we were doing what they called strip evacuation. They go over with the plane, some of them, and pick up wounded from the different places - Nadzab, Tsili Tsili, Dumpu - all those places that had strips, they'd pick up the wounded and bring them back to Moresby. There we'd transport them from Moresby to the 1/5th AGHs or the 9th AGH if they were coping.

Can you remember the names of any of the fellows who were on the planes? I haven't found one yet?

Oh I knew Sullivan. There was Dominic Smith - Dominic may be dead, I'm not sure. He and a couple of others at one of the strips, there was a bomber taking off from one of the strips and something went wrong and it crashed and Dominic Smith and two others - I can't remember their names now - they dived in and got three of the fellows out of the plane before it blew up and the Yanks recommended them for an award for bravery. Colonel Bretherton wouldn't have it. He just said, 'I think they're only doing an AMC man's work', so they were cheated of an award for bravery.

You mentioned somebody who was on the Kokoda Trail who ...

Yes, I can't think of his name, but he's one of the Newcastle boys. Joe Davis would have known him.

He can't think of his name either.

Fair haired bloke, I never remember him very well, he's about five foot nine, five foot eight and a half.

And what did he do?

He was with Jack Kilkeary's mob on the medical patrol for the signallers who were maintaining and building the line and this signaller got crook. This fellow - I can't think of his name - he carried him on his back anyhow for nearly three days and when he got him where he could be attended to, the poor bloke was dead. And he was recommended for an award. But like I said, the meanest old Bretherton never gave any awards to anybody. Some of them did some amazing things.

Who else, can you remember?

Jack Kilkeary should know a lot of them.

Well Jack is dead.

Oh is he! Oh well, Maurie would know. Maurie was in the office all the time, he was clerical.

No, he doesn't know. He suggested that you might know.

No, I can't think. It's too far back. I think I'm suffering from that Alzheimer's Disease I think or something, I can't recall too well.

So where did you go from Rigo Road?

I went back to Sydney ...

You weren't at Lux Lane at all?

Yes, I was at Lux Lane. But from Rigo Road I went back to Sydney to see if I could arrange something for my daughter who was born when my wife died, and I went back to Sydney and they made me RSM of an LTD at the showground. I stood that for about four or five weeks. I remember there was another captain there who was from [2/4th Battalion]. We marched up to Victoria Barracks and we saw the captain up there in charge of [O] and we said we don't want this bloody job. Get us out of it. We might as well be up there as down with all the bludgers down here, you know. I went back from there and I went to ... when I got there there was a jeep to meet me and a signal there I was to take charge of all personnel returning and take them to Lux Lane. Well, I'd never been to Lux Lane and I got up to Lux Lane and I set up receiving station for the men coming back off the [ten per cent] leave as they went. Tom Kelly came up there and Dunlop was there for a while. Dunlop was the winnie the war winner, all he had the blokes doing was cut the kunai grass to keep it down, you know. What was he going to do, he's going to take them for a route march up to Owens Corner. Lux Lane was at the lower level xxx. We took off from there one day and we were marching east along up the road and there was a car coming down, Chev car, and it fired sparks, it pulls up and backs up. We were walking up with mud on our heels because it rained every day up there. And the car pulled up and a bloke beckoned over, called over, 'Dougie Dunlop' being the captain, he said, 'the General wants to see you'. Dougie went over to the General and it was Blamey and he said to him - and I walked over seeing I was one of the echelon boys - and he walked over and he said, 'Why didn't you salute when you see the flag?'. He said, 'I didn't see the flag'. And he said, 'And I suppose you didn't see it either did you sergeant?'. 'No Sir, I couldn't have seen it, I was slipping and sliding everywhere. I had no time to look'. Anyhow Blamey got this fellow to take Dunlop's name but we never heard anything more about it. Fancy saluting, a bloke who's slipping and sliding and he's sitting back in a car there with his xxx jacket and his hat on.

So how long did you spend at Lux Lane?

I stayed at Lux Lane till, let's see, except for a few little day trips over the top with the plane, I stayed there till July 1944.

What were the troops over the top in the plane?

Oh, just for something to do. I'd get sick of Lux Lane. I'd get an ambulance or a jeep, go down to the aerodrome and go over with one of the planes, the biscuit bombers. They'd drop their load of food or whatever, then they'd come back and pull into strips and pick up the wounded. When they came to Moresby they had a white flag, a red flag and a green flag and that would denote to us down below what they wanted, whether they had walking wounded, stretcher cases or just no-one.

And did you need to get permission to go over on one of the planes or not?

Never got permission once. I just took [French] leave sort of thing.

Did you have any medical training?

In the unit, yes, quite a lot. We were trained mostly before the war through Reg Money and [Joe Sigar], they were the officers and later on with Pete Davies. We went to the university for lectures at the university on anatomy. We went to Prince Alfred Hospital for general nursing. We went a couple of times down to the children's hospital. They were the only people that had an iron lung at the time - that was made out of ply wood. And then we went to Major Holcombe. We came from Hornsby and he arranged for us in teams to go to Hornsby Hospital for operating theatre experience. Along with all that training we had quite a lot of good surgical teams in the unit. We had at least three to each company and that was six in A and B and we had quite a few of them in headquarters company. We had more officers in headquarters company and more opportunity to perform surgical work.

You were always close in. Did you ever get a chance to do any assisting at surgery?

Yes. I did a bit up in New Guinea, not much, I had too much other work to do. When we were at - harking back - when I say we were at the showground, I'd be in the RAP there from the hospital, after the regimental aid post, and bring them in to us and quite often the officers that were supposed to be there wouldn't be there, so we'd just sew them up, stitch them up, whatever to do with them, send them back to their unit and we used to sign the officers name on the [A46] and send them back unfit for duty or fit for duty. I did a lot of that.

I was walking down George Street one day after the war and a bloke pulled me up and said, 'Hey, do you remember me?', and I looked at him and I couldn't. He said, 'I was the butcher with the 1st Battalion and you stitched my hand'. And I said, 'Have you had any trouble with it?', and he said, 'No'. I said, 'Well what are you worried about, I'm not', you know, and that

was one of the things I thought they might catch up with some of the work we did do.

I was on one of the trains going up there, I was going back from leave, going up between Brisbane and Townsville, some of the chaps came along and said, 'Anyone from medical corps there?'. I said, 'Yeah, what do you want?'. He said, 'We've got a bloke up there and he knows that he's got a carbuncle', so I said, 'I'll come and have a look at him'. So I went and here's this bloody big carbuncle on the back of his neck. They said, 'Well, what can you do?'. I said, 'Well, I can lance it. It's fit to lance but I haven't got any tools', I said, 'What about the next place we come I get a new razor blade' and I took it down in a dixie, food dixie, we got the xxx stain go all over it, cleaned it up, and we got some hot water and we washed all around this fellahs neck and lanced it, a cris-cross backwards and forwards like a star, you know. And all we had to get the stuff out with was a poultice with Lifebuoy soap and sugar and we put it on his neck and said, 'You get into Townsville tomorrow morning and you go straight to the RAP but don't tell them who did it'. But I forget whether he got away with it all right. A lot of rough and ready stuff.

Yes. Some of the others that went to Nadzab, that went on to Dumpu ...

Yes, that was Major Holcombe, Tristan Holcombe had that at Nadzab.

He was sent back from Dumpu. What happened to him then?

Well he came back to us and he came back and was sent home to Sydney. He got an RMO discharge, you know. But Tris had done his trick up there but he was very well respected by the Yanks up at Dumpu. I remember I kept hearing about him, they were at Dumpu and they could see the Japs up in the hills at this airstrip they were at - [they had the airstrip evacuated] - and the Yanks were there and they used to come to him and they thought the world of him. He'd have his pipe and his walking stick thumping around and when they'd come and ask him something he'd lay down on the stretcher and, 'Now what's it all about', and they take what he said as gospel. A great man for tonsils, Tris Holcombe. If you went to him with a sore toe he say, 'Oh yes, open your mouth' and he'd look in your mouth and say, 'Yes, those tonsils will have to come out. That will fix it'. He was a real good tonsil man.

Some of those surgeons are.

Some of they are good. There's one, he's name's there somewhere, he was a good sergeant. He was up with the colonel with the 2/4th Field Ambulance. It was strange another one of our officers was CO of the 2/4th Field Ambulance. One of them in the early part of the war, a fellow by the name of Alex

MacIntosh, he took over the 2/4th. That's the fellow there, Thomas.

He's still alive. I've interviewed him.

Yes. He lives over ...

Northbridge.

Yeah. You won't find what's-his-name on that.

You're not on that. That's the roll for New Guinea.

Yeah, but he wasn't in New Guinea with us, Alex MacIntosh. He was with us in the beginning of the war at Liverpool and he went ... I seen him in New Guinea. He came over to Rigo Road to see me and he asked me would I like to go across and be RSM. He wasn't happy with his RSM and he'd known me since before the war. And I said no I wouldn't go because I knew all the blokes. Better the ones you know are better than the devils that you don't know. So I wouldn't go with him and Reg Bretherton said, and called me in, 'Who was that talking to you out there?'. I said, 'Lieutenant Colonel MacIntosh'. He said, 'He never came in to see me'. I said, 'No, he didn't want to see you, he wanted to see me'. He said, 'Yes, I gathered that'.

Another thing when we were at Rigo Road, Bretherton said to me, 'They're getting out of condition. They're not doing enough' he said, 'Make up a mad mile and everybody has got to go over it once a day'. So I made up a mad mile and I'd take some of them over twice a day. I'd take sergeants over with me first and then they could take some more, you know, so that everyone got over. So he decided he'd have a go one day himself. He said, 'I'll go over with you. You and I will go over it', so I took him over. He always didn't like anyone to beat him, Reg. And he had no chance of beating me because I was as fit as a fiddle. I was a footballer before the war you know and played with South Sydney Australian Rules. I was as fit as they come. And he went over that mad mile. When he got back to the unit he collapsed.

I had a bloke named Harold Jones who was a WO in the 'Q' side of it. He got rid of him but he got Fred back to us and he had two WOs and Summerfield and Jones as 'Q'. Now Harold Jones went to the CO and said, 'Do you think I could go over the mad mile', and he said, 'Well, don't go over with bloody Reid, he'll kill you'. Harold Jones was an old man too, he was well in his forties then when he was up there. He should never have been there.

I understand when they were leaving Wau he was getting the natives to clear an area for the mad mile up there as well.

Yeah, it was coming on, the mad mile. And the one we had out at St Ives we had to go across a creek out there with a rope. They used to wet the rope and when you'd go across there you're hands were slipping and sliding and after dozens had gone over there was no chance of getting right over.

Yes.

I remember Brigadier Fisher had a look at it and he said, 'Will they keep up? How often do they do this?'. He said, 'Once a day'. 'Oh, very fit mob you've got'.

When you came back, you didn't come back with the rest of the crowd or did you?

No. I come back and I was sent to the showground, unfit for tropical services I came back. And I was out there with the men of the, I think, men of the 113th Camp Hospital. They put me and the Major who was in charge, he said, 'You get my [AMROs] up to date', and I said, 'Well, if you've got all the amendments' and he said, 'Well, there they are' and he pulled out a brand new book and all the piles of amendments and some of the amendments were amendments to the amendments. It took me three months to get the book up to date.

The other boys came back and they went up to Rutherford. All I kept in touch with them was by telephone. A week before I was to be discharged I rang them up and I said, 'I want some beer - bottle beer', you couldn't get it in Sydney, and they said, 'Oh, we've got plenty of it up here'. So I went up to the barracks and I got the [ODMDVS's] offsider - what was his name - Major ..., I forget his name. I got him to give me a warrant to go up to Rutherford. So I went up to Rutherford and they filled up a suitcase full of bottle beer which we wanted for a wedding, and we brought that back. They had plenty of beer up there but you couldn't get it in Sydney.

So you were discharged then or what happened?

I was discharged then on 29th March 1945. Another thing, this doesn't matter know, when we came back with a crew from up there, when I was coming back for the final discharge in July '44 I had a charge of a whole swag of blokes and we got to this camp near Mt Stewart and they issued us all with new underwear, socks and greatcoats and everything else and off we come. And they gave all the Q-stuff, books and signs to me. So I just tore them up into little thousand pieces and threw them out the train it went along. When they got to Sydney they got a fresh lot.

And at one time I had to go out to - before we got to the barracks - we went out to Marrickville, Addison Road. Who was with me? There was xxx and Matt Nolan and a few more of the boys but only two sergeants so I said we had nothing for them. We said, 'Come on, we'll go in here and get a rum', you see.

So we marched into the sergeants' mess and we were all having a few grogs, beers together, you know, and a fellow named Theodore was the warrant officer in charge out at Addison Road and he was the nephew of the fellow that had been the Treasurer of Australia. He came in and he wanted to know what are these fellows doing in here? I said, 'They're all NCOs, all sergeants'. He said, 'How do you're know right'. I said, 'Well, there's mine' and I had a ...

END OF TAPE - END OF INTERVIEW