ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: ARTHUR STEWART - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE - SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: ARTHUR STEWART

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD RAXWORTHY

SUMMARY:

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START OF TAPE 27B

Identification: This is the 9th Australian Field Ambulance, AIF, Oral History Project - Tape 27B, 3.9.1991 - and I'm talking to Mr Arthur Stewart who was a member of the 9th Field Ambulance.

Mr Stewart, where were you born and when?

Chelsea, England, 1919.

Did you grow up around there?

No, I was out in Australia six months later and I've been here all my life. My father was a First World War digger. As a matter of fact he was in the 1st Field Ambulance. He married over there and brought his wife out here.

So whereabouts did you grow up?

I grew up mainly in Sydney. I finished up I was living at Coogee when I joined the army.

Where did you go to school?

Well, we shifted around. It was during the Depression years. My father had lost his business; he'd mortgaged everything to ...

What sort of business was that?

He was a watch repairer. And he started off in Lidcombe and he tried to expand out and unfortunately he overreached and had a bad time during the Depression years. We finished up moving from place to place and I went to about six schools in two years so it wasn't any good. But I finished up at Darlinghurst in West's Bush Primary School ... Junior Tech.

That isn't the one that's down the back of Woomera Avenue, is it?

Yeah, that's it, yes.

That's still there very much so, yes.

It was a long time ago.

Great little old school that.

Yeah. When I was about twelve I left school and did lots of things.

What did you do?

Well, selling papers and running errands for different people. And I finished up, I was about thirteen and a half when I got a job in the printing industry. I finished up getting an apprenticeship in the printing industry.

Whereabouts?

Up the back here in Holt Street, Surry Hills.

Can you remember the name of the firm?

Yes. Lonsdale and Bartholomew.

Were you called up for your military service from there, compulsory military service?

Yes. I was still working there. I was within about two months of finishing my apprenticeship there and I got the notice to go in. But I did go back there for some weeks after. I'd had an operation on a hernia and it broke down while I was in the training and went back there for another operation and finished up I spent a few weeks back at the firm. They told me then if you were within six months of completing your apprenticeship you were deemed to have finished if you went in the army. So I got full pay that time. I still had about two months to go and I was quite happy about that.

So when you were called up, where did you go first?

I went to Ingleburn?

What was it like there?

I liked it.

Was it straight into the Field Ambulance or ...

Yes, straight into the Field Ambulance.

What was the camp like when you got there?

The camp, well, it was a good camp; it was well organised. To my mind it was a very efficient sort of an organisation. They had the hospital - we didn't have much to do with it at the time, doing normal training. I remember the fellows that were there, particularly the blokes in the field like Eric Short, Jack Rockford, Tiny Shaw. They were expert, really expert first aid men and they taught us a lot. You know, their creed was: if you can't do any good, don't do any harm, and they'd keep pressing it and try to get you to understand that it's easy enough to show you how to put bandages on and splints of that nature but they kept insisting on getting to know a bit more. The CO himself at the time was Davies. I think he was some specialist in the vascular system and he taught us a lot about shock and the blood system and all that type of thing. I

really liked it. As a matter of fact they sent us to Prince Alfred Hospital. I went for four days for two weeks and this little nursing sister, she would have been about five foot three and about as thick as a match, she was efficient. We introduced ourselves - there were four of us, I can't remember the other fellows' names now - but she said, 'Oh, I've been asked to show you around the hospital. This is the best hospital in Australia and we want to show you why'. And she walked down, she was as smooth as anything, she walked up to an old fellow lying back in his bed there and she said, 'Mr Kelly' - I think his name was Kelly too - 'You don't look too comfortable there. Let me help you'. And she got xxx pulled him on one arm and she pulled on the other and got him up, got his coat off and she got him laid down, pillows out, gives him a sponge, got him up and she said, 'There you are. Don't you feel better. There's the tea trolley just coming in. Cup of tea and I'll give you an extra biscuit today'. She introduced us all around and we'd only just spoke our names once and she knew our first names and our Christian names and what field ambulance we were in. And she took us around, she showed us the dispensary, we saw them go in to do fractures, x-ray department, we went into the operating theatre for two days and saw them doing quite major operations. We were in masks and gowns and we were sitting up with the students and all the time the doctors were just describing the thing. And we finished up ... I quite enjoyed it.

Incidentally, did you volunteer for the Field Ambulance or was that just an accident?

No, it was just the way it was drawn out.

And you could handle it, could you, going into an operation and that sort of thing?

Oh, I loved it, yeah. As a matter of fact I was always happier when I was in that sort of area.

So when you were at Ingleburn there, what was the transport like?

It was horse transport then. This is how I broke out my hernia I think, we were lifting these stretchers up onto these high-backed horse transport things. I don't think they had a car or truck at all. It was 1914-18 stuff.

So what year was this?

It would be 1941, beginning of 1941.

Was Tom Kelly there at that time?

Oh yes. I think what I liked about it was, I liked what they were teaching and with all their knowledge of first aid, I learnt so much.

Had you learnt first aid before you came into the army?

No, I never had anything to do with it.

So it was luck that you got there?

Yeah.

Yes, I wondered how they selected them, that's all.

It was just out of a hat I suppose. That's the way it went.

Can you remember anything special about Lieutenant Colonel Davis?

(laughs) He used to have a xxx for having kit parades about two o'clock in the morning. Turn out in your underpants and singlet and show your whole kit. He had his horse, Sally, and take us on route marches. I remember one particular march we went on. I think we'd been in for about six or seven weeks and a lot of people cracked up. We had a fellow there, he was a pretty great athlete in his day, Grant Taylor, he was a professional boxer and he was an axeman of real class. I worked with him on the wood heap there at one time and boy oh boy, did he know how to chop wood.

How long were you in the 9th Field Ambulance at Ingleburn before you were out again?

I just can't recollect exactly. It was some months. It could have been four or five months. I'm not too sure. Then trying to get me into a hospital again to have this hernia repaired took - the situation was pretty crook in those days, it's like today getting into hospital for minor operations, you know - and it took months before they could get me in. Anyway, finally, I was out for a while and then I went back in.

You didn't go into an army hospital?

No, we didn't go back to Ingleburn. I don't know where I joined them.

You didn't go to an army hospital?

No, no. I went to Sydney Hospital. I'd had it done in Sydney Hospital and then I went back into Sydney Hospital again.

I see. That would be why, because they did it in the first place and it had broken down again. And you went back to work afterwards?

I went back to work for some months ... not months, six or seven weeks I suppose. Then I was recalled again and I just

can't recollect. Then we went to Frenchs Forest if I remember correctly.

And when you were recalled was Colonel Davis there still or had the CO changed?

I think Colonel Davis was still there, yes.

And can you remember any of the other officers when you were in the first time and then when you came back?

No, I just can't recollect it at the moment. I wasn't associated with that situation.

Can you remember any of the other men who were in with you that you were with later? Can you remember the cooks for instance?

Rice, he was the cook in those days, Ernie Rice. And - I can't think of the fellow's name - he was a quartermaster, he was there when we went and he was there when we came back.

xxx

No, it wasn't Coxford, it was another fellow. No, Jim Cuff wasn't xxx.

You went to Frenchs Forest next, did you?

I think we went to Frenchs Forest then.

And did you fight the fires there?

Yes, we were in the fires there. I remember that padre we had - I just can't think of his name now ...

Did he go away with you later?

No, he didn't go away with us. Yes, Ridley his name was, Padre Ridley. I remember on one occasion there was a fire was approaching a house, it was a large bushfire, and it had got to the outhouse - there was a small outhouse with chickens in it I think - and we had to move back. It was just overpowering us. And I remember him saying, 'Come on men, one more go, one more go', and suddenly it just stopped. And the house was saved and I'll always remember that.

Did you get roast chicken?

Oh, we were glad to get out of it, I'll tell you.

Do you remember anything else there?

Not of any consequence except the route marches and ...

Where did you go on route marches?

Down to Palm Beach way carrying those wretched panniers.

What panniers are these?

Oh, we had a medical panniers and a surgical pannier. They were from the First World War and the bandages in them were rotten. There was nothing of any use in the surgical pannier but we just carted them round with us as part of the equipment and they went with us everywhere we went. And right to the time we finished up in Lae - in the medical pannier there was a demijohn, a stone demijohn, full of rum - and it was Captain Clipsham was in charge there, and we asked him if it would be all right to drink the rum. We hadn't had any intoxicating liquor for ages and he said, 'I didn't know anything about any rum', so he said, 'Yes, if there's any there, use it'. Well, we put about a teaspoonful in a tin mugs and was it strong. Everybody got sick.

Was it good?

Oh, it was terrific. One fellow - I can't think of his name now - but he was standing up on the mess table afterwards singing 'Black Ridden Bandit', and he swore the next day he'd taken us all to bed.

And this rum, had you actually carried it around all down to ...

It was from 1914-18 War and it was in this demijohn and ...

And you fellows had carried it.

And it had stayed safe. That's how good the people who were in it and it come out like treacle. A teaspoon of it in a pannikin was enough to kill anybody.

Any unit I'd ever been in, it would be mostly water by that time.

That was a fact, yes. But it was part of a procedure when you went on a major route march, they carried them down to Palm Beach, over the hills and up and down the dales there one day. And they were quite large. They were the length of this table and the height and about a third of the way across there.

And how did you carry them? Between ...

They had sort of ropes on them. You could carry them anywhere.

So it was like four people carrying them or one each side?

Yes, all take a turn.

So when you got back from that, where did you go next?

I think we went to the Green Toad then. I'm not too sure. I think we went to the Toad.

Anything special about that?

It was a beaut little spot I know and we used to be able to get up to Hornsby dances and things like that and down to the Chatswood RSL Club quite easily. No trouble, leave pass or not.

So where did you go when you left that? Oh, by the way, had you changed commanding officers by that time?

Yes, oh yes. Colonel Bretherton took over.

Was he much different from ...

Oh he was a different type of person altogether. Oh the other bloke he used to like a lot of grog. Bretherton was a man that I think he could have been an alcoholic, he didn't drink except on a couple of occasions I saw him drink. I think he made a fool of himself one night and he decided not to drink again.

So where did you go next after the Green Toad? St Ives, were you on Pennant Hills Golf or ...

Yes, we were at the Pennant Hills Golf Club there. A very interesting thing there was Geoff German. He was in the tent and he used to swear. Something would come down and he used to sit on his chest and breath into his face and he said it was a horrible smell and we couldn't believe it. One night we all come in and we just watched one one night and it was a squirrel and it did come down and sit on his chest. It scared the life out of German.

And ...

I wasn't involved with the hospital section. They had their little hospital section there.

Were the officers living in the club, were they? Or were you living in the club or tents?

No, we were in tents at the back of the place.

The officers living in the club, were they?

I don't know. I presume they may have.

Somebody said to me - I can't remember who now - that you could get a - I presume the officers could - get a scotch while they were having a shower. You could order a scotch.

I didn't drink at that stage.

The club was still going as a club, was it?

No, no.

It wasn't. Oh well, I don't see how they could.

No, it couldn't operate as a club.

So where else did you go after that? Did you go to any of the Bankstown baths or Bondi or ...

That was interesting, the Bankstown baths.

You went there as well, did you?

Yes. And we had some funny episodes there. Of course Major Heffernan was in charge and he could leave the place; he was there for the whole time. It upset him a little bit when a few of us used to get out of the place - there were holes all around it where the kids had broken the wires around the thing - and we could get out without going through the main section. The pub was on the other side ... the back of the pub was on the other side of the lane there and we had a wonderful time there. There was one fellow called C.C. Smith, he was a chemist by profession, and when we got there there was a big jar of pure alcohol and there was none in it there when we left.

One night, I'll never forget, the Major knew that C.C. Smith wasn't on the premises. He made a special tour around to have a look. He finished up he had a sentry post on every one of those holes and he sat himself right in the front entrance waiting for C.C. Smith to come in. They had a gate at the back of it, it would have been just on ten feet tall; a very high gate. And C.C. Smith comes out of the pub and we called him over - we were standing up on the top of the thing - 'Come this way, come this way. You can't go through there'. And we finally got him on the top of that gate and then he fell. I thought he must have broken his neck. Anyway, it must have been about twelve o'clock the Major went round looking again and he saw C.C. Smith in his bed. Do you think, he hit the roof! He was going to confine everyone to barracks forever.

They were funny days. We had some good times there and plenty of leave and there was nothing to do much. I think it was one of those occasions, we had a bit of an epidemic of flu and they just put them into beds. You couldn't do much more than give them a bit of a sponge or some aspirin.

In the dressing rooms or ...

In the dressing rooms. I'll tell you if you didn't have a dose of the flu before you went in, you finished up with one when you'd come out. It was all concrete, you know. Anyway ...

Whose bright idea was to put it in the dressing rooms at the swimming baths?

I don't know whose idea it was. But I know, one instance, there was a lieutenant came in, he was sick, and Major came down and he said, 'Oh, give him a sponge and some aspirin'. So I went and got the dish of hot water - you had no cabinets on the side, it's just a bed jammed up tight - and you usually used the other bloke's bed to put the thing on. And I couldn't get his pyjama coat off, I couldn't even get it up. So I just sponged his hands and his face and I said, 'If you could just move a bit so I can get your jacket open I can give you a bit of sponge around the chest. It might bring your temperature down'. He wouldn't move. So I just picked up the dish of water to take it away and he suddenly just turned his backside and, boong, it went all over him. He got up. (laughs) I said, 'Have you got another pair of pyjamas?'. He said they were in his bag. I got them out and gradually got the coat on and I took the other one out and I hung it on a chair outside. It was a beautiful day - sunny - and I thought I'd just leave it there for now, it would be all right. I put another blanket on him. And I forgot it and went off duty and the next morning, just as I was going to go in, I thought, 'Oh, that pyjama coat' and I went to look for it and it was gone. I asked around if anybody had seen a pyjama coat - no pyjama coat. And I thought, no, it couldn't go in there. I walked over and I looked out and there it is about six feet down in the bottom, all green slime, algae all over the baths. I finished up, I got a bit of the wire from the fence and I dug it out and I gave it a wash and somebody had an iron there, I think one of the cooks had an iron. I just ironed the thing and it was nice and warm and I took it in. 'Good morning Sir. Are you feeling better this morning?'. What did he say? He called me a stupid bastard ... oh he said, 'No thanks to you, you stupid bastard'.

It was quite a good camp there. There was nothing much to do. It was just real good time.

Where were you living?

I was living in Sydney at the time.

I mean in the camp.

In the camp, oh, we had ...

Was it tents or what?

We were living in the changing rooms, somewhere.

Were you at any of the other places around Sydney before you went away?

Oh yes. Was there a camp hospital at Wallgrove?

Yes there was.

Well, that must have been where it was. There was a very severe epidemic of flu there and apparently - we weren't running it - but apparently they were short of staff and some of us were detailed to go across there and work in the hospital. They were coming in like flies; they were just dropping everywhere. They'd take their temperatures and if they were over 102 well they'd stay there longer. We just gave them a bit of a sponge and some aspirin to bring their temperature down. As soon as their temperature came down they were out and replaced all the time. It took about three weeks before we got rid of them all.

You don't see flu epidemics like that any more. I mean, I've heard about the 1919 one where a lot of people died. This wasn't like that, was it?

Oh no, no. This was a two or three day flu. Quite vicious, you know, but in these areas where you're confined it can spread very rapidly.

Yes, but they had to nurse people for two or three days, did they?

Yeah. They had to put them in beds because they were incapacitated and they were very sick; very sick indeed.

Yes, I haven't heard of any epidemics where that's happened recently.

There's a lot of people with flu around today but they generally stay at home in beds and things.

Yes, I suppose that's it.

And we didn't like sending them out too soon because that was probably the most infectious period when they were recovering.

I understand the most infectious period - we better not get into an argument about that - is at the beginning. So where next? Or was there anything else more about Wallgrove?

No, I don't think so.

So where did you go next?

I just can't recollect now.

By the way volunteered now and joined the AIF, did you?

That's right. We volunteered and we were ...

So how did you get persuaded to volunteer?

Oh, it was just the fact that the CO said, 'Well, we want to form it into an AIF unit. Those who want to volunteer can put their names down and those that don't well don't', and we just put our names down just like that.

Was there any sort of arguments amongst you or did you all just ...

No, no. There were a few there that didn't want to. As I said, there was one friend of mine, Angel his name was, he had a young family. His wife was very upset about him being in the army at all and the prospect of him going away was going to be a very critical thing. So ...

Did he want to go away?

He'd have loved to stayed with us I think. They finished up they transferred him out after they'd made an AIF unit and he was in Milne Bay before we even left Australia.

So where did you go next? Did you go to Narellan before you went to Queensland, or where?

I'm just trying to think where we went then. Oh, it was at Narellan where we left for Queensland, wasn't it? Yeah. I got home, it was on the Saturday I had leave and at Liverpool I got on the train from there to the Regents Park line. And apparently they caught up the rest of the fellahs at Strathfield and told them to go back the same night and I missed out. I got back at 23.59 on the Sunday evening and everything was ablaze with lights and there were trucks everywhere and they said, 'Did you just get in?', I said, 'Yeah'. They said, 'Well you can just start unloading that truck over there', and I was still unloading trucks at nine o'clock the next morning. I was dead tired.

And where did you leave from?

Well we left from Narellan.

All right, but where did the train leave from?

Oh I just can't think now. They just put us on trucks and took us to the train and ...

Campbelltown somewhere would it be?

Possibly, I'm not sure.

Do you remember the trip up to Brisbane?

Yes. It wasn't that bad. We were all jammed in. If you wanted to sleep you just went out into the corridor. It was one of those toast-rack type things, you know, with the corridor down the side, and you just lay down on the floor or took turns on the bench seats. When we got to Brisbane, in the afternoon just before the evening meal, and we went into the mess and I remember the Colonel was there and you could see steam coming out of his ears. Outside the mess there, the mess hall, there were about two or three huge forty-four gallon drums for putting scraps in and the scraps were piled up for at least four or five metres right up the thing all the way around. Well, the next morning you never seen such a clean camp. By gee, he got stuck into them and cleaned that up.

Where was that?

Oh I don't know the name of the camp. I can never remember most of the places we went to most of the time.

Grovely?

Oh, it was Grovely, yes.

I don't know, don't take my word for it. I don't know where you were.

No, that's right.

Some of them were at Grovely but you might have been somewhere else.

No, I was at Grovely. The camp there was a gaol camp.

Ah, right. That would be Grovely I think. So where did you go from there and how long were you there do you think?

It wasn't that long.

Did you go north with the rest, did you?

We went north with the rest, yes. ... No, we went on the hospital train. I think we went on to Brisbane. I'm not too sure now. I just can't recollect where the hospital train started but I think it was Brisbane.

And the hospital train, who was in charge?

Major Heffernan was in charge. And we had two nursing sisters.

Can you remember their names.

One was Kelly, Sister Kelly. I can't remember the other one. Of course she was a very positive person and we had a pharmacist on, a Ken Payne. He lost his life up there. They went out fishing near the island there - Magnetic Island - and the boat sank and they ...

And Tom reckons that that's not Ken Payne ...

END OF TAPE

START OF TAPE

Identification: This is the 9th Australian Field Ambulance, AIF, tape 28A, 3.9.1991, Mr Arthur Stewart - two.

I will ask you again the question that I asked at the end there re the Ken Payne. You thought that he was the one that was killed in an accident - drowned in an accident - was he?

I must have been mistaken. It was one of the members of the train and I thought it was Ken Payne. But I'm informed that it wasn't him.

Tom reckons it wasn't him because he was still alive later. So it somebody else but we don't know his name. And he was a pharmacist was he?

I'm pretty sure. I just can't recollect now. I knew Ken Payne was a pharmacist and I thought that he was the one that was killed but obviously I've been mistaken on the name.

Right, well on the train, when you went north, did you get held up at the floods at Rockhampton, or not?

Yes. We were held up at Rockhampton for a couple of weeks. The railway tracks had been washed right out and the railway lines were like skeletons hanging off the sleepers. We got to Brisbane and loaded up. They just brought the people in. Most of the ones I spoke to of them, and most of them were suffering with malaria and they were pretty debilitated; some of them were quite sick. But ...

You loaded up in Brisbane?

Up in Townsville.

In Townsville or somewhere ...

In Townsville. We were at the railway station and they brought them by ambulances to the train and we loaded them there.

Had they come off the boats?

I don't know where they came from. I think they might have been in the hospital there before they left, but I'm not sure. Although they were quite debilitated I thought they seemed very subdued. I don't know whether they'd come out of a battle area but they were very subdued people. There was none of that chit-chat or chiacking that goes on. And, as far as we were concerned, all the patients that we did carry all the way down over the various trips, they were all capable of looking after their own toiletries and ablutions and ...

No dysentery cases?

No. They were all quite good and we did not have to keep any charts on them or test them and we had no medication to give. Virtually all we had to do was see that they got their meals and cleaned the area and that was it. And really it was just a holiday trip: we were virtually six-bob-a-day tourists for the rest of them. And when you calculated the time that we were on the train and the number of trips we took - it took about four or five days to come down - and that was it.

Four or five days to come down from Townsville to Brisbane?

Yeah, well there was troop trains going up and we got priority I think but they still took ... you should have seen the train and the engine they had on it. Hornby would have been real pleased about it.

Hornby you mean?

Yeah, Hornby the ...

The small narrow-gauged trains.

Oh, it was all right along the coast and ...

Did you ever go inland to avoid the floods?

We loaded up once at Townsville and we went out through Charters Towers to avoid the floods and we come down through a place called Longreach. We got there about eleven o'clock and I was asleep and suddenly the commotion, the noise, and the train was invaded. They'd stopped the train - stood in front of it - they wouldn't let the driver go on. They took every one of the patients in my car and most of the other cars, took them down to a little hall and they fed them and they gave them all sorts of things. I think we carried two people from our car on the stretchers down there. One bloke even got up and danced around in his pyjamas and bare feet and then we had to carry him back again because he didn't have any shoes. And I don't think they'd ever forget it, these fellahs, such a spontaneous thing as far as they were concerned and they were ... oh, it must have taken two hours to get them settled down again. Every one of them finished up with a kit bag full of

cigarettes and cakes; huge fruit cakes. They had at least half a dozen each, every patient in my car. And we just got them settled down about two o'clock and at about three o'clock in the morning we pulled into a place called [Akaldeen] and the same thing happened. They stopped the train. Well, they wouldn't let the driver, he was getting frantic because he had a schedule to meet I suppose, but they stopped it and they invaded the train with more cakes, more cigarettes. They must have denuded the whole of the town of cigarettes.

And when you were on these trains, there were no wounded? It was all malaria cases was it?

No, there were no battle casualties as far as I can say on the card. It could have been ...

Any Americans?

We did carry a few Americans, yes, at one stage.

Did they get different treatment to the ...

No, they didn't get any different treatment and they couldn't be bothered. I think they played crap most of the way down. (laughs) But, as far as we were concerned, it was quite a pleasant thing. There was no work involved and even when we were travelling there was no parades or anything. There were no route marches. We didn't do any of that. We had a little roll-call in the morning to see that we were all with the train and to see if we were shaved, and that was it and we had the rest of the day to ourselves.

So, when you finished that, where did you go then?

We left the train at Atherton, or near Atherton; a place called Tolga. The engine had gone and we were there for two or three weeks and they just decided that that was it.

And who else was at Tolga? Major Heffernan was there. Who else was there?

Sister Kelly and the other sister.

Was there a bearer officer? You know, Tom Kelly and Doug Dunlop were bearer officers.

No, I don't think ... no. We had three medical personnel as far as I know. They were quite capable of handling any emergencies but that was it.

So where did you go next then?

I'm just trying to recollect.

Did you go down to the staging camp?

We went down to the staging camp. We went back to Townsville again and then we were doing some training and we finished up at Ravenshoe I think.

What was the training like?

The training? Oh, I enjoyed it. It was just marching and we had plenty of sport - volley ball, all that type of thing.

Did you have a mad mile there?

Oh no, no. No mad mile there. We didn't cop that till we got to New Guinea.

So you were there for a while before you went to New Guinea.

As a matter of a fact we were down on the wharf one time, we were supposed to be going onto a ship and somebody said it was the one that was sunk, that hospital ship that was sunk, but I don't know anything about that. And they went back to camp again and I know I was detailed for some roadwork up in Townsville main street and I'll tell you exactly what the road consists of. Those big white pebbles underneath, you dig into it and I'll tell you, you'll break your arm doing it. They were laying telephone cables or something under there and we were digging it out.

We had one job there unloading a train and the carriage happened to consist of a load of beer in boxes, about a dozen wooden boxes with about a dozen bottles in each. And there was a provo patrolling up and down to see that you didn't take anything and there was a forty-four gallon drum there half full of water so we all marched out with a case up there and one bloke got two cases under his arm. We were just all crowded around him and when the bloke was walking the other way he dropped one into the drum. Well, we got away with it once, we tried it again. We dropped it in. It was beautiful. So somebody said, 'Let's get another one. We'll get some for the boys then'. Well, it was all right. The provo didn't even see a thing. Then he was wandering up and down and he saw the water just dribble over the top of the thing and he looked in there and we were gone.

There were some instances in Townsville. Oh, I'll tell you.

Did you get any trouble with the Americans?

No. I never got into trouble. They got into trouble up there in Townsville. There was a Butch Jones was the instigator of it. We were in a cafe, couldn't get any beer, couldn't get anything, so we ordered milkshakes. The next thing ... it must have been about half an hour making these milkshakes and I don't know whether we were too boisterous or not but the boss

was looking at it, you know, and the girl finished up coming over. And Butch said something, it wasn't very complimentary I don't think, he was just trying to be friendly, you know, and she picked up glass of the milkshake and poured it over his head. Butch picked the tray of milkshakes up and just poured it over her head. The next minute there were provos everywhere. Nugget Gale lost his hat that day. The next day we were going on the ship and the provo ...

What happened to you?

I got away. I don't know what happened to me.

You didn't get caught.

They grabbed Nugget Gale and I think they grabbed Lennox, Rickets - there were about three I know that were there - and Butch. Yeah, and there were a couple of others. But they didn't grab us. And the next day we were going on the ship and there's this provo with a brand new hat on. And of course, Nugget had just bought the hat - he'd lost his other one and he had to pay for it - and he had this brand new hat and here's this provo with a brand new hat, so they swore it was him, and he was just standing - what do you call that big wooden block they've got on the edge of the walks, about eighteen or fifteen inches thick - he was standing next to it with his machine gun and they spotted him. They were all edging towards him to see if they could just push into the water. And at the last minute, he must have recognised one of us, I don't know, he hopped up on this big block of wood and he said, 'Get back, get back', and we got back. (laughs)

So when you got to New Guinea, where did you go first?

We went to Seventeen Mile I think. The first night we were there ...

Do you know the name of that camp?

No, we called it the Seventeen Mile. And there was an air-raid over Moresby. I think it was Harry Reid, he had a gas rattle and he was running around with a gas rattle to tell everybody there's an air-raid, to put their helmets on, gas masks on, but they were too far away. You could see the planes silhouetted with the search lights down there but ...

Were you near any of the airfields up at the Seventeen Mile?

Yeah. I was at Jackson's Strip there ... I was detailed there for about six or seven weeks I think.

Doing what?

Well the job we had to do was as the planes would come in we would have to watch - there were about four of us there ...

Do you remember who the others were?

No, I can't recollect now. I've got a bad memory for names. And as the planes would come in they'd signal, they'd have a white handkerchief or something like that if they had a casualty aboard or two handkerchiefs to let you know. We had two ambulances there, they'd go and collect the patients when the plane stopped and then bring them back to us just to check them to see if there was anything we could do which was virtually nothing because we had no equipment. All we had was a tent and a pot there to boil some water in and that was about it.

Were they your ambulances or ...

Yes, they were our ambulances.

Where were they taking them, do you know?

Well there were two hospitals there, I just don't know the names of them. One was fairly close and the other one, it could have been the 2/9th. Anyway, all we'd do was just check them and see that they were breathing and they weren't bleeding and something like that and if they needed a bit of attention to do something but that's about all. And just forward them on to the hospitals.

You were lifting them on stretchers out of the planes, were you?

No, they were on them. They were in the ambulances when they got back to us. We were stationed say one end of the airstrip ... the planes would come in this way, the planes would finish up there, the ambulances would go down when they got the signal.

So you were just checking them.

All we did was just checking them and sending them to the hospital there.

And how long do you think you were there?

I think we were there about six or seven weeks. We were there when the planes took off for the assault on Wau.

On Wau? On Nadzab you mean?

Wau, no they went into Wau. And I know that because there was one young fellow he came back a few hours later. He just stepped off the plane and a machine gun got him right across the abdomen. Well, he came in, and fortunately the Americans

did it in style. They had an area about sixteen feet square and inside it was a complete operating theatre all set up; the whole bit.

On the airfield this is?

No, next to us on the edge of the airfield. They were doing the same thing, just looking after patients and sending them probably to their own hospitals. And normally there was only a lance corporal there but on this particular occasion there was a medical officer and when this fellow came in with a bullet wound through his abdomen, I said, 'I've got a bad one over here' and he came over to have a look. He went straight in and he got a half gram of morphine and gave it to him and wrote on him in indelible pencil a quarter gram of morphine at such and such a time and away we went. But then we were there when ...

You didn't have any morphine.

We couldn't get aspirin. But, no, only doctors could give morphine in our unit. We could give, say, phenobarb if the doctor ordered but that's about as far as we could go.

Were you there was an accident at ...

I was there but I was on day leave back to the headquarters.

So you didn't actually see this accident.

I didn't see it. I saw some of the casualties afterwards but ...

Was this the one where the plane ran into a whole lot of men?

Yes. It was a B-47 I think. It took off loaded with bombs - it was going over Tsili Tsili or somewhere like that - and it had to return because the Japs were there or something. And they came back and they just put them down overnight there at the camp at the end of the airstrip. And this bomber took off late at night or early in the morning and didn't get airborne and just dropped into the middle of them. There were over a hundred casualties there I think dead plus numerous badly burnt people and very badly injured people.

Were you called out to that or were you not?

No, I was not called out. By the time I got back the next day they told me all about it. We were there when they had the airborne assault on Lae.

Was that Nadzab?

No, this was at Jackson's Strip, yeah.

I mean, when you're talking about the airborne assault on Lae, you mean the airborne assault on Nadzab the airport at Lae? Was that it?

I don't know what the airport is there. As a matter of fact they were paratroopers and there were four strips there at Jackson - four main landing strips - and they were up one, down the next one, up the other one and then taking off on the next one. And there were tails the whole way.

You were there at that time?

Mmm. There were a lot of accidents.

An accident with the Liberators, were you there at that time?

I thought it was a B-47 but it was Liberator. I think it was a Liberator that crashed into the fellahs.

It was a Liberator, that's right. The query is: where did you go next? How long were you there, weeks, months?

Six or seven weeks I suppose.

And you were living at the Seventeen Mile all the time and coming every day.

No, we were living in a tent on the airstrip. We were there the whole time.

So where did you go next?

I think when I rejoined the camp I think we went up to Lux Lane if I remember. We were in Moresby for a while, then we went to Lux Lane.

Did you have an officer with you at the drome?

No, I was a lance corporal at the time and I was in charge.

You can't remember who was with you?

No.

When you got to Lux Lane who was up there? Can you remember who was in charge up there?

No, I can't remember that either.

Were you involved with a bearer officer, either Doug Dunlop or Tom Kelly?

No.

When Major Heffernan went to Nassau Bay, where were you?

Well, at that time, after we left Lux Lane I think we went back to Moresby again. It happened that they were going to do some tests. They had a new drug out. I think it was the first of the sulphanilamide drugs. They called for volunteers. They said: that four, that four, that four and that four and they told us what they were going to do. And they sent us down for routine check-ups and the pathology blokes they did a pretty good job. As a matter they probably saved my skin because diligence was the reason they picked up the fact that I had a bit of blood in the urine and they sent me up to the 2/9th at the Nineteen Mile I think it was - the 2/9th AGH. So I got up there and a couple of days later the doctor come in and said, 'How are you feeling?', I said, 'All right'. He said, 'We've got a real problem'. I said, 'What's the trouble?'. He said, 'You've got a kidney that will have to come out'. I said, 'Oh no'. He said, 'The problem with it is that it has got to be done but where to do it, whether to send you back to Sydney or do it here'. And I said, 'Well, who'd do it here?' and he said, 'Colonel Wyndham'. That man had been decorated in the Middle East and we knew about him. The doctor said, 'Yes, he's a very brilliant surgeon'. I said, 'Right, that will do me. I don't know who I'm going to get back in Sydney'. So they had it out in about I think two days later. And I think the Colonel, when he sent me up there to the hospital, must have known that there was a chance of them moving because he just wanted to make sure we were okay before we went. But he come in to see me and said, 'Bad luck, Stewart. I believe you've got to have your kidney out', and I said, 'I've had it out'. And he just went away and he had a talk with the doctor. He come back and he said, 'Incredible. Anyway, good luck. We're going over the top' and that was that. And I was there for another seven or eight weeks. Once I recovered ... I walked out, I was as fit as a fiddle.

I went back down to GDD and they said on the papers 'back to Sydney'. I was supposed to be on a plane to go to Sydney and I went into the GDD there and I met a fellow I'd known before the war. How it come about that time out, as soon as I got in there they put me on the wood pile. I was happy but after about five minutes I was exhausted. I didn't realise how weak I was. I said to the sergeant in charge, I told him I just had an operation, and he said, 'We'll find something else for you to do'. He took me over into this office and there's this fellow sitting there and he seemed important. I said, 'Where's our mob?'. He said, 'Oh, I'll look it up for you' and he came back and said, 'They're at Wau'. I said, 'How do I get there?', he said, 'You can't'. I said, 'Well, how did they get there?'. To this day I don't know how youse got there. How did you get there?

Never mind.

I said, 'Well, there must be some way to get there'. He said, 'Well, come back and see me later'. So I went back later in the afternoon and he said, 'There's a ship leaving this evening about eight o'clock. It's going down the coast to a place called the Lakekamu River and ...'

Do you remember the name of the ship?

No.

It wouldn't be the Muliana would it?

No, it would have been a Manly ferry. The pre-war Manly ferries, that's how big it was and we were all just around the edge of the rail. It was only going to be a twelve hour trip. Then, the next morning, they were going to come and take us in on these steel barges.

How did you get onto the barges?

Well, we were there for forty-eight hours. A sand-bar had built up in front of the river and I'm not a sailor and nobody else was; everybody was sick. They finished up they finally brought these barges out and they were way up in the air and the next minute they were about twenty or thirty feet below you and you just had to jump at the right time. One fellow fractured his leg I believe on the barge before us. I don't know what they did with him. I said, 'I'm in the medical unit, I might be able to do something'. And they said, 'No, he's looked after'. Then we got on the barges up the river.

We stopped one night and it was a beautiful spot; it was green. The grass was about eight to ten inches high and we put our groundsheets down and put the mosquito nets up and I thought this will do me for the night. Oh, the mosquitoes, they bit like piranhas. They were as big as bull frogs, I'm sure. But it didn't matter what you did, the grass was too high and they just crawled in underneath and got inside. We'd stripped off too because it was so hot. We finished up putting all our clothes on and wrapped ourselves in a blanket to keep the mosquitoes out. The next day we got to Bulldog.

Was it Terapo?

No, Bulldog. There were four or five of our fellows there I met. I recollect their names. I think Nugget Gale was one of them but I'm not sure. And I only stayed there one night.

Was there Captain Clipsham?

No I didn't see Captain Clipsham there.

Where did you see him?

I saw him at Lae later.

Okay. Anybody else? Did you see Doug Dunlop?

I just can't recollect who I actually saw. I minds has just faded with the times.

So where did you go next?

What I did then? I asked where the main unit was and they said at Wau. I said, 'How do you get there?' and they said, 'Up that way'. So I got on the jeep and I got up as far as Centre Camp. We were passing all these places. There was one called the Mossy Forest, Blamey's Lookout and we got to Centre Camp and went in and had a feed and I stayed the night. There was a tent vacant so I rolled down there. The next morning I went out and I said, 'How do I get to Wau?'. One fellow said, 'I don't think you'll get through, there's been landslides all the way down'. And I said, 'Perhaps I can go up as far as it goes'. So they give me a lift up as far as the first landslide and there were fellahs there digging away at it. So I went over that. I think I passed three major ones and a couple of small ones and there was nobody there. I just walked all the way down into Wau. I got as far as Edie Creek. I'd read about that in the xxx books, I used to love reading in the old days, and a bloke by the name of Shark [Sharkeye Park] found gold in New Guinea for the first time in quantity, and I expected to see a huge place. It was only a small plateau but it overlooked Wau which was about 3,000 feet above Wau at that level I think and it dropped down within a few miles. And I sat there for about half an hour looking at it. It just looked like a floral garden; absolutely beautiful. When I got down there and I walked into the camp - I was pretty bedraggled, I hadn't washed any clothes since I left Moresby - and I went straight to the mess tent. Apparently what they did then, they must have thought I was pretty sick or something so they gave me a nice easy job in the ... they had one little hut with about eight beds I think and it was rather an elite area but it became an area where we took a lot of very very serious casualties. You know, one fellow had gone over the cliff on the road over the mountains and he had bad fractures. A couple of our blokes took a lot of risks getting him up from the ... And there was another one who had a depressed fracture of the skull. We lost one of our fellows, Bob Sidoti.

What of?

Scrub typhus.

Did you nurse him?

No. Just as soon as I got there he was just being moved then.

So you didn't nurse him?

No, I didn't nurse him. He died apparently on the way to the hospital at Moresby. They got him out by plane. And we had another fellow there, Jack Brett, he was with Bob Sidoti. They were collecting firewood down at a place called Crystal Creek I believe and they contracted this. Apparently the doctors picked it fairly quickly because it has a special type of scar. They call it an S-scar on the body. And he was a physically strong-willed man and he survived. He was delirious for at least eleven days of that whole period.

Did you nurse him?

Yes, I was there the whole time, twenty-four hours a day.

END OF TAPE

START OF TAPE

Identification: This is the 9th Australian Field Ambulance, AIF, Oral History Project. Tape 28B, 3.9.1991, Mr Arthur Stewart - three.

We were just talking about Jack Brett there. How you actually nursed him from scrub typhus?

Well, there's not much you could do except keep him in bed. There was no treatment for it; absolutely no treatment except that ...

You mean there was no medication?

No medication.

There was treatment surely?

Oxygen. We used all our oxygen and we used all the oxygen from all the engineers in the surrounding area. The CO got onto an American unit in Lae and they came up - and you should have seen the two beautiful girls he had with him, two nurses - and they brought the oxygen and they said, 'Right, we'll take him back. We'll look after him' and the CO said, 'No, we just want your oxygen. That will do us thanks'. Oh, they insisted but the CO had made up his mind and that was it. And they left their oxygen and away they went. And I'll tell you what, we were all like this, you know, looking at these beautiful girls. They were like people out of MASH, you know. And ...

I don't think MASH had been invented then.

It wasn't invented but, you know, when you saw it later and saw the way they looked ... Anyway, but while he was crook he was delirious for about twelve or thirteen days. At one stage he was saying that he was in the water. He went on a plane and he was flying back to Australia and it sunk in the Timor Sea or something and we were trying to hold him down. It finished up

we decided to sort of let him be because the more we held him down the stronger he got. So we just let him subside down. And everybody involved, the pathologist had a continual check every day on his blood count. His haemoglobin count was down to about sixty per cent, it was incredible. And his blood cell count, his red blood cells were way down. How he survived I don't know. He wasn't getting much oxygen.

Was it a problem to get liquids into him?

No. When he was conscious all he could say was 'feed me, feed me'. You've got no idea how much he ate. And he kept eating. He said at one stage, 'If you don't eat you don't shit, if you don't shit you die' and that sort of thing. And we just couldn't put enough food into him.

What about drinking?

He got plenty of fluids and all that type of thing. Everybody really contributed, the kitchen, the pathology blokes. We kept a record. We had a half hour temperature chart on him for over two weeks, and pulse chart. You'd be absolutely surprised how bad it was and he still survived.

At one stage, this was ... I got into strife. Everybody had gone to mess and he suddenly swallowed his tongue. He was a big heavy man and there was no way in the world I could sort of get his chin out and try and get his tongue up. I was yelling out to get a doctor and nobody heard me, they were all at the mess apparently. I finished up, there was a pair of forceps there with little prongs on. I just pulled it out and grabbed his tongue and held it there for about five minutes and he was breathing normally to what he was doing before. But he had a shocking tongue after it, I'll tell you what. One of the doctors come in and he said, 'How would you like that to happen to you?', and I said, 'Well, I didn't know what else to do Sir', and that was it.

But eventually he recovered and I don't know what happened to him after that but he was with the unit and I didn't have much to do with him after that. I don't know what happened to him.

But he regained his strength, did he?

Yes. I struck him later when we were at Cowra in the POW camp there in the hospital. A number of our fellows had been detailed there and I was there. One day the Sergeant Major said, 'We've got a new man coming in today', and I said, 'Beauty, we need some men', and in walked Jack Brett. We were taking him around the hospital and we got to one place, one of the few Japanese soldiers that were there - they were all Korean and Formosan labourers really - and ...

Was that after the breakout, was it?

Yes. But they'd sent the rest to Hay. And they said, 'This is Leo, Leo the leper'. 'Leper!', he must have jumped at least eighteen inches to two feet off the ground and about three feet back. He was straight up to the office and he said, 'I'm not going to stay here', and they let him go. But that's another story. He was only in the hospital five minutes and he was gone, out, finished. (laughs) Fair enough, we should have done the same thing.

At Wau, anything that you can remember next?

Generally we had ...

Which unit were you in there?

The 9th Field Ambulance.

Yes I know that but which company?

Headquarters.

So what was your job then?

My job, I stayed on in that little section for the remainder of the time that we were in Wau.

Who was in charge of this little section?

Well I was more or less in charge, I was corporal at the time and I was in charge of that section. We had a lot of fellows ...

Which doctors were there?

Sluggo Elliott was there. Oh, I can't remember now. It's got me beat. I can remember incidents but I can't remember names. We had a couple of patients come in there one day that were very serious with malaria. They'd been out for about a week without any treatment. We got them back from out in the scrub and they treated those with about a quart of saline and quinine and they recovered fairly quickly.

We had another smash-up on the road and one fellow come in badly smashed up; he had two fractured legs and an abdominal injury of some sort. He actually collapsed and stopped breathing. The Colonel was there at the time and he didn't hesitate. He just put his knee on him, put his whole weight on him and bang; he breathed. But they got them out. They must have flown them out. That was the only way they could get them out to somewhere where they could get proper surgery.

We treated a lot of patients there, very serious conditions.

Can you remember any of them particularly? I mean, for instance, do you remember treating any of the native New Guineans at all?

No. We had one little native New Guinean and we taught him all the sayings of the time. He was very important, his friends used to stay back and he'd come into the camp. He'd bring the paw-paws and things in. He'd say, 'They twice as nice if kept on ice. Sure to get it at Grace Bros. Gone to Gowings'. The whole lot, he must have known dozens of them. He'd walk out ...

Somebody must have taught him.

Well we taught him. (laughs) He was a funny little character. Mainly they had a ... we didn't have any natives there did we, but I don't know where they come from.

Do you remember the case of that young boy? Didn't have anything to do with it?

I don't know anything about that.

He'd been badly injured apparently.

No.

Any personal experience?

We were on the river, where would it be? I'll never forget it. They had a big shower things, they were big forty-four gallon drums and you just pumped your own water up from the river and you just stood under it, you know, it depended how much water, how long you wanted to stay and how much you pumped up.

This is Wau, is it?

Lux Lane. I've got another story.

We didn't cover Lux Lane.

Anyway, above the camp, up the river, they had a camp of people but they had to go past our camp to do their washing. And we were all in the nuddie underneath these things and all these natives walked past with their washing on their head and they've all got their eyes down and the last one turned around, she was a girl about eighteen or twenty I suppose, she turned around and looked. You ought to have heard the roar.

Do you remember a swimming place there at all? For instance ...

Up there there was a Devil's Hole up there outside of Townsville but I don't remember ...

No, no. There was one where they used to swim sort of on a pontoon?

Oh yes, that was Wau. It was on the Wau River. Yes. We were camped in a coffee plantation and they had a big hut there - it had been a big home - and that was the headquarters for the officers and we were in tents in the coffee plantation right on the edge of the river. It was a beautiful river. One night it had a flash flood up the top and trees as big as telegraph poles were just turning end over end and the next morning we come out the whole river looked a different place altogether. It was only a narrow one but it was very very deep.

Do you remember the mascot up there at Lux Lane or up at Wau?

The dog, yeah. I remember the dog but I don't know what happened to it.

Where did you first see the dog?

I think we had him in Townsville I think.

Who had him?

I think Jack Smith if I remember rightly.

Did you know Jack Smith well?

Oh yes, yes.

So you weren't around when the dog got taken to New Guinea?

Yeah, they took him to New Guinea. They had him up at Lux Lane, didn't they?

Right. I've got a picture - it's one of the one's that I've got copied - of the two of them on this little pontoon, this little float with the dog, and they were diving off it. Do you remember where that would have been?

That wouldn't have been at Wau, no.

So was it at Lux Lane?

It could have been at Lux Lane although it was only narrow river there, wasn't it, at Lux Lane?

[Tom Kelly]: The Loki River was there.

There was another name of a river somewhere, I can't remember the name. I talking about above Moresby there in the Lux Lane area.

[Tom Kelly]: That would be Luloki. That went through our camp.

They've got a picture there of somebody diving off a pontoon. You mentioned there was a pontoon ...

No, it wasn't at Wau, I know that because it was only a narrow river and very deep precipice type thing where we were.

So you can't remember ...

That could have been at Bulldog.

Oh, I don't think so because of the crocodiles. I really don't think so. No, it's not in this lot. It's one of the ones I've copied from Doug Dunlop's photographs.

There was one other incident at Wau that was quite important actually. They had an outbreak of dysentery, or we were told it was dysentery, and there were five patients involved. So they set up a special area, roped it off, a couple of tents down the back of the camp, and we had to isolate these people. They were crook. I saw some crook people but I never saw anybody as crook as these. Three of them, they were dreadfully ill.

Where did they come from?

I don't know. They just come from different places, different areas, wherever they come. And we finished up we had to ... all the food, anything like that, they'd just come over and just pour it into a tray that we had and not come anywhere near them. They had the hygiene blokes, I think it was Don Kennard I think was the hygiene. He had his two ...

So up at ...

I was talking about the dysentery outbreak.

This was up at Lux Lane or ...

No, this was at Wau. And they isolated them and the hygiene fellows dug a great pit, put a big log in there and they got it burning. It was like a big coal in there. All the faeces were just emptied into there. All the piss and everything just emptied into it and any food that the people could take, they just emptied it into a tray and we were just isolated. We had two half forty-four gallon drums that we kept one for washing the toilet utensils and one for the plates and other things like that. We kept them boiling all the time. And at night we'd leave this and there was another fellow, Snowy Calwell, he was there with me and he'd take all the faeces and empty it all in the thing and come back and wash all the whole lot of the stuff. And at night when we left the area, we'd go straight

down to the river below the camp, take off all our gear, have a real thorough wash, wash all our gear and leave it hanging there for the next day. And then go back nuddie into the tent, put some new gear on and go to the mess. In the morning we'd have our breakfast and put the fresh gear on and that's how the routine went. We didn't leave the camp, didn't leave the area all day. It was a number of weeks, but they were crook. Whether it was dysentery I don't know but that's what they told us.

And they survived all right?

They all survived.

And nobody else caught it?

Nobody else caught it, it was completely isolated. It was very well done.

Do you remember anything else about the camp there? Did you play football at all?

I had one game but I finished up I hurt myself. I injured the sciatic nerve and I was weeks and weeks trying to recover again. I finished up getting over it all right but it was a bad injury.

Do you remember anything else on the camp? Do you remember anybody who used to make beer or distilled spirits?

We did do that, yes. I had a number of primuses in my area and somebody made up a nice little still and we had plenty of methylated spirits to keep the primuses operating and they distilled it. They had this forty-four gallon drum down about three hundred yards down in the bushes and we'd gone without sugar for weeks and we had all these paw-paws and everything. Unfortunately what happened was the flies became so bad, you could see them, a great big swathe of flies going down to the bush, and the CO, his eyeballs nearly popped out when he saw this. He followed the flies down and ordered that it be buried straightaway. But while they were digging the hole they put some holes in the bottom and drained it off. It finished up they distilled it and they got about two thirds of a gallon of this fluid. Anyway we decided fortunately to leave it until we were leaving. It was a couple of months off. We didn't know when we were going to go but we were going to have a celebration the night we were leaving.

By the time we got around we got around to it there was an inch or an inch and a quarter of white stuff, I don't know what it was, so we had to strain it off again. They tell us if we had have drunk that it would have probably [blinded] us or something, we don't know what it was. Anyway we all had a taste. We had some tinned pineapple juice to mix it up and

break it down with and, oh, it was terrible. But there were two fellahs there, one had been a member of the Grenadier Guards as a matter of fact - I don't know how he come to join the unit but he had been - and about two o'clock one morning these chaps had been drinking and they decided to have a fight with bayonets out in the middle of the parade ground. They didn't do much damage, but they got rid of the rest of it.

Did you have to go over the mad mile at Wau?

Oh yes. Anybody that was going to get their ... we all went around the mad mile. But one fellow there, I think his name was Webster I think, he was a pathologist bloke and he wrote a little ditty and put it in the thing: anybody that suffered with malaria or anything like this was likely to be afflicted by being banished to the land of the Philistines and that's what they called it, the land of the Philistines around the mad mile.

That's in the 9th Bully Tin.

We were all very fit at that stage too.

And you got fit again after your kidney operation?

I was fit, yeah. Fit as a fiddle.

Any other things that happened around there? Do you remember the people getting gold?

Oh yeah. Everybody had a little go at that down at the open-cut mine at Wau. Some of the made up little riffle things and they'd save up their rest days and go out for two or three days. Jack Brett was one that got a fair bit.

One day a civilian came down there.

This is after he got the scrub typhus or before?

Before he got the scrub typhus. What they were doing, they were melting it down and somebody got a bright idea that they could make a bit more gold by anybody had any pennies - pennies were worth two bob - and just add a little bit more copper in it, you know, and a bit of silver and you've made a lot more gold and they were selling it to the Yanks. They were very smart. They even made a pair of bellows and they were ...

They, who were they?

The people who were involved in getting the gold. Everybody had a go at everything.

What about you?

I got down a couple of times but it was too much like hard work trying to lift all these rocks. One fellow walked down and he was just watching the others and he picked up a nugget that weighed almost an ounce and a half. He was only just watching them and they were tossing them out.

There was one fellow come down there one day in civilian clothes and he said, 'Try over there, you might to better', it was just on the edge of a corner. We went down there and there was a bit of gold there.

Where did he come from?

I don't know. He was a civilian. He was up there and everybody thought, 'Oh, we're in trouble now', and they were doing all sorts of things so that they could get it back. They were painting it. Making it in the shape of spanners or something like that and painting it. They thought they would pick us back on the way back. But, no, they didn't bother us when we got on the shore.

So where did you go after Wau? Can you think of anything before we finish at Wau?

We left there and we went to Lae and we were there for a while.

While you were at Wau did you go down to any of the other places apart from the actual time that you went back to Lae? Did you go to Sunshine or Edie Creek or Bulolo or ...

No, I'd come down from Edie Creek.

Yes, but I mean the ones that went on the other way, Sunshine and Wampit?

No, I didn't go there. We went down by road through Bulolo and we went down to Lae. We were there till ...

You must have gone through Wampit though.

Oh I wouldn't know the names of the places. Nobody told me the names of the places, we just past them and that was it. Well, we got back to Australia of course and I think we were at Rutherford and they disbanded the unit. I was transferred to Ingleburn and we were there for a number of weeks - a couple of months. We were just looking after the hospital and then they transferred us to ... I, myself, Bill Armstrong and two or three others were transferred to Cowra. The people that were involved there were only Korean and Formosan people who had been picked up by Japanese as a workforce and used on their roads and airstrips and that type of thing. They were quite passive and we had no problems.

What about illness?

They had the general things. There were four tuberculosis cases, very bad. One of them died while we were there. Another one had a sclerosis of the liver, he died. We had five mental cases and we had ulcer cases. We had the general things and a number of surgical things. They would do surgery every week. There might be about seven or eight surgery cases. There might be appendix ...

Who were the doctors there?

Ah ...

That wasn't the 9th Field Ambulance then, was it?

No, This had nothing to do with the thing. After the break ...

Breakout you mean?

After the breakout, yeah.

You weren't there at the breakout were you?

No. We were sent up there to take over after. They'd moved most of the medical staff down to Hay with them and they transferred all the Japanese prisoners except two I think. One was a leper and one, he had a colostomy operation and he had to be treated all the time.

Was there any special treatment for the leper or did you just ...

Ah, well I'll tell you. Not one doctor examined that man the whole time we were there. I think he was there about fifteen months. If they had have, the bloke that was there before me, he probably would have finished up in bloody gaol, there's no risk about it. Anyway, I won't tell you the rest of that story. It was a [great chappie] you know. But they were on a treatment called [mudrol] iodised mudrol, they had an injection once a week and they also had tablets. I queried one of the doctors and he said that he'd had no experience with lepers but when he was training they went into it extensively and he said, 'As far as we're concerned I think it is just a placebo', so we just discontinued the treatment. Nobody said anything. As a matter of fact it wasn't even on his chart. What had happened after ... I abused this fellow. He said to me - he was a sergeant and I was a corporal at the time - and he said, 'I'm off. It's all yours now mate'. And I said, 'What do you mean?'. I didn't know what was going on, I'd only been there a couple of days, you know. I was sent up there urgently and he was being discharged on compassionate grounds or something like that. And I went and I told him what I thought of him. It was the cruellest thing I've ever seen anybody do to a man and he must have come and taken all the papers except the man's actual name and rank and all that type of thing. So there was nothing

on the charts, the doctors never examined him. I just asked the doctor and he said it was just a placebo and we'd just discontinue it and that was that. And the patient recovered. It's amazing. He was isolated in a tent in between the huts. They go down there and of course the other patients, they wouldn't go near him. They just pour the food down onto his tray like that, you know, and that was it. He had a rough old time in his tent on his own.

But the mental cases, oh there were some funny ones. One of them was a little bloke, he had tuberculosis and he was also classified in the mental category because his tuberculosis hadn't advanced far. Although it didn't take long, about six months, and they were in a critical condition. As the doctors explained it was a relatively new disease in the East and they succumbed very quickly, not like people in Europe.

> We are nearly at the end of the tape. Where did you go next? Not on the 9th Field Ambulance actually.

Then we transferred over - they got rid of these blokes, I'd take a long while to tell you that story - but then we transferred over to the Italian section and I was invited to go back with them as a nurse to Italy with them but I said, 'No thanks', all I wanted to do was get out.

They put two retentions on us, two or three months retentions when we were due to go out and that was it. So they discharged us from there and away we went. That was it. Practically nothing.

> And you went back to the place you'd served your apprenticeship before?

No. I went in and they said, 'When are you coming back?' and I said, 'I'm not'. What had happened, see prior to the war my father had lost his business, he'd overextended, he'd mortgaged his home and everything like that and, well, they had a pretty rough time during the depression and he never got started again until when I went in the army I had a bit of money and I said, 'Do you want to have another go' and he said, 'All right'. So we went and bought some tools, built him a couple of benches and he started up and my brother he started up as an apprentice at the beginning of the war and he finished at the end of it. So I had always been interested in it, even when I was a kid of nine I could pull clocks to pieces and do things like that. I was always interested that way.

> You went back to that as well did you?

So I went back. The other people, they'd sold out. The boss had died and Gordon and Gotch bought it out and they asked me if I'd like to go back and I said, 'No thanks'. They gave me some very good advice, told me what would happen, the problems I was going to strike and they were right. They knew

everything. We had a pretty rough time for a while but finished up we did fairly well.

All right. Well thank you very much Arthur Stewart.

You're welcome. Thank you.

END OF TAPE - END OF INTERVIEW