ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

ACCESSION NUMBER: S01608

TITLE: VIC SHINER - 9TH FIELD AMBULANCE – SECOND WORLD WAR

INTERVIEWEE: VIC SHINER

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD RAXWORTHY

SUMMARY:

9TH FIELD AMBULANCE - EARLY LIFE; JOINING MILITIA; FIRST CAMP AT ST IVES, THEN WALLGROVE; RECEIVING COMMISSION; DUTIES CARRIED OUT AND THE TYPE OF DRUGS DISPENSED; UNIT POSTED TO EAGLE FARM IN QUEENSLAND; THEN ROCKHAMPTON; PROBLEMS BETWEEN AUSTRALIAN AND AMERICAN TROOPS; RAVENSHOE; SUPPLYING QUININE TO TROOPS RETURNING FROM NEW GUINEA; TOWNSVILLE; SHIPPED TO NEW GUINEA ON "DUNTROON"; STATIONED AT HEADQUARTERS AT RIGO ROAD; DUTIES AS ADJUTANT; SENT TO WAU; DESCRIBING TRIP TO WAU; LIFE AT WAU; DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL NATIVES; TRIP TO NADZAB WITH COLONEL REGINALD BRETHERTON AND TWO OTHERS; RECREATIONAL SPORT; SENT TO LAE THEN RETURN TO AUSTRALIA; UNIT DISBANDED.

RECORDING LOCATION:

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: I am talking to Mr Vic Shiner who was the pharmacist for the 9th Australian Field Ambulance Unit.

Where were you born and when?

I was born in Newcastle in 1911 - May 1911.

And did you grow up around there?

No. My early years were in Balmain up till I was about nine when I left Balmain and I came over to Randwick. I've been in Randwick ever since.

Where did you go to school?

Christian Brothers College, Waverley.

So you're still on the same old stamping ground.

Yeap, same area.

Did you go to university straight away to become a pharmacist?

Yes. Went to the university and started my apprenticeship in pharmacy in the beginning of '30. Qualified and registered and got my final in May '33.

So how did you come to get into the 9th Field Ambulance? Were you originally called up or not?

No, I was managing a pharmacy at Randwick and the owner of the pharmacy was a First World War bloke but was in with chest trouble and I was on a reserve list. But I knew Major [Solarla] and he was coming into the shop and I'd asked him if there were any vacancies would you let me know when and if I got cleared of being on the reserve. Bob Stinson came back to us and was discharged and okayed and Major Solarla said there was nothing available in the AIF but there were some positions in the militia and would I be interested in an appointment to go to Darwin, I think it was. And I said, 'Yes, okay'. But I didn't go to Darwin, I went to St Ives - a camp at St Ives.

So you posted directly to the 9th Field Ambulance?

Yes, directly.

Were you militia or AIF then?

I was militia then. It was a militia unit, there was no AIF vacancies and there was the vacancy and I had been cleared as reserve on asking for same.

So when you got to St Ives, was that the Green Toad?

That was the Green Toad, yes.

What was that like?

It was a fairly comfortable sort of a training camp. A good area, we had a lot of amenities available. I knew a member of the Pymble Golf Course. I was a staff sergeant at that stage. I stayed at the sergeants' mess as honourary members of Pymble. Then I got my commission in June of that year and then the sergeants and the officers were honourary members of Pymble. We went to Pennant Hills then. We had an area up at Pennant Hills, a section, and I know a couple up there so we were honourary members there. And we had a section at the Lakes and we were honourary members there. So if there was anyone who wanted to play golf, there was plenty available. And there was quite a comfortable set-up at Bankstown baths. The other sections were more widely spread but they were all pretty cosy. The conditions were pretty good really.

Where did you go next? Did you go to Wallgrove?

Yes, up to Wallgrove. We had a pretty hectic time up there. They had one of the suspected ... the one that's like the condition that's very like malaria, the one that's north of Queensland mostly. Mosquito carried one.

Not Ross River Fever?

No.

Encephalitis?

No. Oh, what was it? At any rate, where we were there was quite a scare actually. They all thought originally that it could possibly be malaria and we worked pretty hard. The whole of the camp, it was pretty well right through the camp. And you can imagine through Wallgrove we were pretty busy there for probably a month and cleaned it up. We found the source of it: there was a pool or a pond round the back of the camp that was the nice breeding grounds. Put a bit of oil on it and cleaned it up.

And as the pharmacist how did you operate with the unit? Did you have your own pharmacy or was it a mobile pharmacy or ...

No, make it as you go. It was pretty good really.

At Wallgrove there, do you remember Lieutenant-Colonel Whitridge Davies?

Davies, yes I do.

Or was it Lieutenant-Colonel Bretherton?

Bretherton was then. Davies was ... where did I meet Davies, somewhere or other. He was CO of the 9th before Bretherton. Bretherton was CO when I joined and that was in the beginning February '42.

Where did you go after Wallgrove?

We came back to the Toad I think. Yes, because that was after I'd got my commission. We came back there and I changed. I didn't like the dirty little old pharmacy they had in the first place when I joined up. I was promoted then on my commission and I was acting adjutant and I had it in the main building of the Toad and had a decent sort of a set-up then, they way I liked it. It was quite a good set-up there really.

Were you in that area when the bushfires were down at Frenchs Forest area?

No.

And where did you go next? Straight to Narellan or was it ...

Narellan, yes, we went to Narellan and that was our last station in New South Wales. It was pretty hectic actually. It was a Saturday morning I think it was, or a Friday morning, because a lot of the boys were going on weekend leave and the boss, we got called to a division and he said, 'You'd better come with me, this sounds urgent'. I went with him and I had the job then of trying to round up some of the ... to catch the leave train on the way through, which you can imagine - I forget where I got the leave train, somewhere on the way down - and went a couple of stations. Had the staff car pick me up there, went back to the unit, saw the boss, told him who I'd contacted. I contacted the main person and told some of the others to come back early and not to take the full leave - the ones I could see to come back the next morning from leave. And I kept the staff car and came out to Randwick and told them I wouldn't be ... I was saying goodbye then and that I'd be off north. The wife was down at a friend's place so I went down there and saw them. I went back to camp then and I think it was probably the heaviest twenty-four hours I've had because knowing nothing about transport, I was asked to get rid of and hand over the transport in the middle of the night. So I went with transport, handed that over, and I forget what else I had to do. I had to go to Med. and Vet. [Stores] and try to get a couple of things I was missing on - equipment.

So you had a portable pharmacy by this time, did you?

Yes. I'd had it all arranged, everything was packed prior to this. We knew that in the event, when we went into the camps we packed and had special containers and that.

Was that what they called panniers?

Oh, they were the ordinary routine surgical equipment. But the bread and butter stuff for the pharmacy, you had to do everything, you had to pack yourself and take a guess of what you wanted and try to arrange that because you were supplying a division or a brigade. The whole of the troops came to you for supplies. It was wholesale pharmacy.

I was looking at the War Diary there and of course in the War Diary, even when you were in New Guinea, they were talking about panniers. A pannier as far as I'm concerned is related to horses from the First World War.

No.

It gives what's in them. It's got a whole list of what's ...

No, it was a fairly adequate rough starting supply.

What sort of medicines did you have?

I had a pretty good range of supplies. You'd have ... sulphur drugs had just come into being, they were being used. Penicillin was just about to be on the way. The ordinary routine - a lot of dressings and that sort of thing. As you can imagine there were a lot of minor accidents and that that were treated at the RAP. You'd have oodles of cottonwool, oodles of bandages, oodles of various ointments, xxx and so forth. Then you'd have the routine treatment for rheumatic or any of those conditions or sprains or that type of thing. There were ordinary liniments and lotions, a fairly big range of that. Tablets that control that. Quite a lot of your old mist. tussi of course. You'd have gallons of that stuck around. Aspirin was used quite a lot.

What did they use for anaesthetics then?

Mostly you'd have your local and you'd have your pentothal for injection. Chloroform I think was ... or ether. But you didn't do very much. It was only the very essential stuff that you do in the MDS. MDS was your headquarters. Well, it would have to be absolutely a must to do any surgery. It was back to the AGH or the CCS, it was usually the CCS. But on the islands you found mostly you were closer to an AGH than a CCS.

Well, you're still at Narellan so you went off by train to Queensland, didn't you?

Yes, we went off by train to Queensland and we went out to, what was it, what was the racecourse? Eagle Farm, was it? Eagle Farm or Doomben, I think it was Eagle Farm we went to. It was a very big camp. It was crowded out, we had a section there. We stayed ... we went up there in December. I made a faux pas the first night. We got set up and the boss said, 'Well, if you want to go into town, you can go into town. While you're in there see if you can find a couple of rooms or a room in one of the hotels for anyone who's on leave while we're here, if there's any leave, they can use the room'. So I went in the first place that looked pretty good, I popped into the Yankee Hotel and wanted a room there. I got a Mrs Burns, a lovely person, and the girls in the office they said, 'Oh no, the great McArthur's taken over completely'. So I said, 'Oh yes'. They said, 'Well, Mrs Burns I'm sure would love to have some supper and a talk to you. We don't see any Australian officers here now'. So I went in - there was two of us there - we went in and had a nice supper and got a carton of Yankee cigarettes and she rang up one of the other hotels and booked a couple of rooms for us. We went down there and it was perfect. She was very good. A few times we went and had supper there with her. And at the officers' mess we invited her to Christmas dinner at the pub. When we moved there was a - we didn't say anything about moving - but she knew, she knew everything that was happening. There was a basket at the station waiting for us when we moved of. She was a very lovely person. It was quite an interesting stay.

I did about two weeks at Brisbane General while we were camped there learning a bit about anaesthetics and what have you, and helped by assisting in a bit of minor surgery just in case I had to use it.

So where next?

Next place of importance, Rockhampton. How many days? Four days on the station, or something like that I think it was, while the Burdekin flooded. Very slow, it was a very bad trip up really on the train. Even slow without that. The experience there too, it looked like there might be a mob of Yanks as you know right through to the coast and that at that stage and at Rocky, and being there, we were there for New Year's Eve. A Yankee MP - they don't call them MPs do they - what do they call their military guard? At any rate, the head boy there came down to the station and said there had been a couple of near fights - three lots of Aussies I think it was on the station at the time, three trains of Aussie troops, so there was quite a lot of troops there. And he suggested that we do a run around at night and I said, 'There are two dances going anyway. We'll make one Yank and one Australian and that will be the first thing we do'. And he came down with a couple of guns on his side. I wasn't very happy. I was in the field ambulance, I didn't carry guns, and I didn't feel like ... a possibility of a war between Yanks and Australian, I wasn't

keen on going out without a gun. So I went down and I saw Jimmy Cuff and I said, 'Jim I want ...'

Was Jim was a dentist?

He was a quartermaster. And I said to him, 'I want my 38 and I want it loaded'. 'Oh you can't'. 'Yes I can', I said, 'I'm going to have it'. At any rate I went out with that. It was an uneventful night, I had a good night. We had Smith and Wessons and the Yanks were very interested. They'd have given anything for that Smith and Wesson. I was amazed. They really wanted that. I went back to their ...

I suppose it was old fashioned for them.

No, they reckoned they were better than what they were using.

What were they using?

I don't know what they were using.

The whole American navy were using Colt 45 automatics.

I wasn't interested in arms at all really only I just felt I didn't like going out with the possibility of a decent brawl between Australian troops, at least you could fire in the air and get ... If the Yanks are going to fire you've got something in return, you know. I wasn't terribly happy about it but it was a good night actually.

So what happened at ... you went to Townsville, did you? Or were you up at Ravenshoe?

No, from there ... We did get a visit while we were there. After that night we got a visit out to the General's quarters out between there and the coast. He apologised that he wouldn't be there but would we like to come out. Facilities would be bad at the station and come out and have a bath and a shower. We went out there and had a nice old shower in Yankee luxury and a few grogs and something to eat and came back. We disembarked at Innisfail and went up the road to Ravenshoe.

And who was with you, was it ...?

No wait there. Did we go up there first, or did we go to Townsville first? No, I don't think we stopped at Townsville, I think we went straight through to Ravenshoe ... No, I'm wrong. I'm ahead of myself. No, we went to Townsville because I came on leave from Townsville and came down and was married. Went back and then we went to Ravenshoe.

What was the set-up like at Ravenshoe?

When we arrived it was pretty poor. They were just really finishing the camping area for the units that were coming back

from New Guinea, that was the Kokoda and the whole of that show came back through there. It was pretty good finally but we hit the wet season so you were up to your knees in mud in the camp area and trying to set up, but the camp itself was quite a good one. The camps through there were pretty good.

So did anything much happen before you went to New Guinea?

Only that I had a little bit of fun with supplies. I had to supply quinine for the troops going on leave. See they were still on quinine. And you could imagine if they wanted quinine, they had to have enough for the trip down and you had to give them about a ten-day trip because you didn't know how long it was going to take them to get down, then they had a long leave, then for the period of their leave, and then I think it was a fortnight's supply or three weeks' supply after that. So you were thinking in huge quantities. I tried the med. store at Atherton and they just looked aghast when I asked them. I just broke all the rules and got one of the brigade majors of the team coming back - my CO was away at the time - so I had a yarn with him. I said, 'Look, I'm going to have trouble with quinine. Can we short cut'. He said, 'Well, if you like to sign a signal, I'll send it for you'. So I sent a signal straight to LHQ anticipate supply such-and-such and I got those supplies through. You're thinking in 500,000 quinine tablets or something like that and you're getting through a week because you might use 200,000 on the train and there were trains - everyday there was one and some days there were two. At times there I was down to my last quinine tablet trying to get a train away.

When you people, Major Heffernan, ran one of the trains for a while, did you have to supply that as well?

No, no. No, all I had to do was make sure that the personnel on the train had their supplies for the period of their leave and so much to come back. And you were giving them fairly big quantities really.

The ambulance train that Major Heffernan was running, I think they ran it for four months.

Yes, that was running between ...

Grovely camp and Townsville.

Was he associated also with the one from Cairns to Rocky Creek?

I don't know. I haven't read it all.

I'm just trying to think whether he was associated. See we were isolated up there. We had a section still at Townsville Hospital, we had a section down at Rocky Creek and then we had a headquarters plus a few bits and pieces up at Ravenshoe.

I didn't read the whole of the report on the ambulance train in Queensland. And I haven't read the one in New South Wales either. Later on they ran one in New South Wales but that was after New Guinea.

Yes. I didn't have anything to do with that set-up. And, as I say, I left the unit really before it broke up. It was later that the unit broke up. I was transferred to 101 AGH ... no, 101 Con Depot and from there I went north again. I was up in Lae with the 15th Field Ambulance.

That was after New Guinea, wasn't it?

After we came back. After the Maitland/Rutherford set-up.

Do you remember any of the diversions that happened re the Yanks and the local populace in Townsville?

Not in Townsville, no. I didn't have much ... We were in Townsville for a while waiting. We looked like going to Goodenough Island at one stage and what we were supposed to go to Goodenough and they changed that and we were going to go over on the hospital ship that went down [The Centaur]. So we were a bit lucky on that one. I was away at that stage. I came down in May '43 to have some leave and I was married then. I was going to be married and we shot through before it happened.

But you went to New Guinea with the rest of them according to the embarkation roll.

Oh yes, I went over with them.

I notice that Sergeant Livermore did not go over.

No, Livermore ... There was a team. I was the first team. While we were in Townsville I took twenty fellahs down on leave then. I got back. Ray Feller - I think Ray went on leave then - Ray and I think Livermore took another batch and went down on leave in that stage. It was during this period that we were to go to Goodenough Island and it was cancelled and what have you.

Had you got back in time to go on the next one but some of the others did not.

No, they didn't get back. My staff sergeant didn't get back. He came back later.

Who was he?

Ray Feller.

Yes, he's not on the embarkation roll from my remembrance. It's there, I've got a copy of it anyway but I won't worry

about that. Can you remember the trip to New Guinea in particular? Anything unusual about it?

No, it was a very very pleasant trip over on the ... what was the name of the boat?

I think it was called the West Cactus.

No.

Not the Duntroon?

The Duntroon, we went over on the Duntroon. It was very comfortable. I'll tell who went over with us, one of the commando units went over on that trip with us. Food, everything on board the Duntroon was 100 per cent.

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

Straight to - if you want to know what the boys said - the arse hole of the world. It was twenty-two miles out of Moresby, just off from the drome.

So which one was that?

The major drome in Moresby.

There was two dromes there: Wards Drome and ... but was that Rigo Road or ...

Yes, that would be on the one that went up to Koitaki, wasn't it. Yes, that was the road up to the Koitaki.

Well, there's Rigo Road and there's Frome Road and there was - what's the third place that you were sent to - Lux Lane and the other one was ...

I haven't got a clue. I didn't know there were any names to the roads to the roads up there.

Rouna Falls?

That's the one that goes up to Rouna. That was Koitaki on the top and the falls were over from there.

So you were up that way. You weren't at Rigo Road with the headquarters?

The pharmacy? We were not far down from the 2/9th.

That was Rigo Road.

Rigo Road then.

I've never been there actually.

I don't think I ever heard of a name of a road anywhere up there.

> I was going by what people tell me and what's in the War Diary.

But that road went through, it went straight on from there up into that Koitaki area and went to the top to the Kokoda Trail.

> Did you know anything about the fellows that were sent on to the Kokoda Trail?

Our blokes? I didn't know ...

> According to the War Diary signed by Colonel Bretherton ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

> Identification: Mr Vic Shiner, side two. So you were up at Rigo Road. You were with headquarters at any rate outside Moresby, they were at Rigo Road. Can you remember who was sent in different directions? I mean, I've just been talking to you about it, if you remember it, yes, but don't repeat what I've just said. Can you remember anybody?

Personnel-wise, no. We had a couple of contacts at one of the dromes most of the time. We had a con depot up at Koitaki I think it is, we had a running con depot up there with a small ...

> Is that Lux Lane?

That's on that same top area. I think it was Koitaki, I'm pretty sure that was the name of it. They were just doing normal orders and just a minor medical centre.

> Do you remember the people that were on the water supply, for instance?

Water supply ...

> I believe they were up at the falls there - Rouna Falls. You don't remember anything at all, just forget about it.

No.

> So who was sent away first that you remember?

I don't remember.

Fair enough. So what was the routine there? What exactly were you doing at the headquarters at Rigo Road, 9th Field Ambulance?

We had an MDS there, a hospital - just a minor hospital set up. I was supplying various troops or most of the troops in the area with medical supplies. That was the ordinary weekly requisition for medical supplies. They'd be in every week and you'd supply just what they asked for. Supplies were pretty good. I was getting most of the quantities I asked for were okay.

Were you acting as adjutant up there as well?

Yes, but my staff hadn't come back at that stage and I was in the pharmacy in the dispensary on my own which meant I didn't ... that's why I missed a lot that was going on outside because I was fairly busy in that period with supply just for the local troops.

I notice as well at that time that your unit was responsible for the evacuations at both dromes.

We had not very many personnel, in fact, we probably had groups of five I would think. I don't know exactly what they had out there.

Do you remember the really bad event that happened out there at one of the dromes when quite a number of people got killed with planes going off the runway?

No, I don't remember that. It would go straight to the 2/9th I think. I think they'd bypass us there I think. We would evacuate too I'd imagine. We would have evacuated too straight to the AGH I would imagine.

Yes, I think you might have. They certainly would, any serious casualties I should think. But you people were responsible for doing the evacuations at that time.

Oh yes. You'd have your ambulance out there and a couple of stretcher-bearers and a nursing aid probably. I don't know whether any of the ... I don't remember any of the officers being at that set-up.

At any rate, it was a bad incident. It was when the planes ploughed into a whole lot of troops who were waiting to be enplaned there.

Now that rings a bell, yes, but I don't remember being involved at all.

There was another occasion when a number of planes exploded which wasn't as serious as the previous thing.

I remember the plough but I don't remember the other one.

So, you remained there for quite some time did you?

When did we get over there, somewhere about June wouldn't have been?

Yes, you got there late June '43.

We were up in Wau I think for Christmas, so June probably three or four months there.

So you remember going to Wau.

Oh yes. We went to Wau.

So how did you go? Can you describe?

Well, we went by a coastal vessel from Moresby round the back to the Lakekamu.

The Muliana is the name of it, I think.

Well, we went up the Lakekamu to Bulldog. And don't ask me to describe the trip over the road up to Wau. The only - I had a court of inquiry later on why some of the blankets were lost and so forth - the only way the drivers knew they were on the road was if they were hitting the bank on the other side - you had to hit the bank to know you were on the road. That was that. All you could see was side and how far the drop was. But I was in the jeep with one leg out.

What, over the cliff or the other way?

On the cliff side, very definitely on the cliff side. Yes, it was a pretty frightening trip actually. And it was misty rain most of the way. You were in sloshy sliding mud and the poor buggers working on that road. I don't know ... it must have been hell.

Do you remember going through the Mossy Forest?

I don't remember a great deal of the trip. I know I really had the wind up. I've spoken to a lot of the drivers and they said every time they went up and down they felt the same.

You mentioned a court of inquiry over an accident at Wau, was it?

Yes.

There was an accident, I would think there would have been a court of inquiry over that up at Ravenshoe somewhere as well, do you remember that?

No.

Somebody turned a truck over.

No, I didn't handle that one but I handled the other one. I was asked by LFC I think it was. I got a very nasty letter back about the court of inquiry and I just returned. I said to the boss, 'Would you just return it and say if they doubted what the finding was to come up and I'd take them over the road', and I didn't hear any more.

So when you got down to Wau what was there, nothing?

Wau, what was there. No, when we got to Wau we took over from the ... it might have been the 5th, I'm not sure.

Had they already built some sort of hospital?

They had a grass hut. Two of the main areas, there was a main home of a coffee plantation and the manager's quarters. They were the two homes standing. They were about the only two ... I think ANGAU had a place that was standing. That was all that was left in Wau. There was nothing else left, it was flattened.

No hotel?

Nothing, just ground. Our set-up was fairly good. The boys had an underground theatre - operating theatre - which was quite a good one which we didn't use. We had the operating theatre up in the main home because we weren't under fire at that stage, the other boys were. It was a very good theatre. And the general set-up. They had the dispensary under the main house actually. It was built up fairly high and it was under there. I moved that. I took the theatre area.

Who did most of your building?

We had the boys. Anything I wanted to do, you had to do most of it yourself and get the carpenter down if he wasn't doing anything.

The carpenter, who was the carpenter? Not Ross Usher was it?

No. Was it Len Bostick. I think it was Bostick.

He's a very dark fellow.

Yes, and a really lovely boy. He used to be a terrific bloke. But, you know, I'd just say to Len, 'Look, when you've got a few minutes come down, I want a couple of things done'. I'd start to do something and he'd come down and finish it for me.

Do you remember anybody taking photographs there using x-ray film?

No. I don't remember. There was some photos taken. I had one taken - but I don't think they used x-rays, I don't know what they used - there was a swimming pool down off the river there, the creek there, and ...

Did you have a pontoon in the middle there to dive off? There's a photograph there ...

I don't remember that. I know we spent a good bit of time cleaning up down there and getting it clean. It was quite a nice sort of a pool down there.

Yes, I understand the one in Wau itself.

In Wau itself.

Yes, I heard about that.

The boys did a mighty job there with the water reticulation. They ran a pipe through from the river up through the kitchens to some forty-four gallon drums that were over the heat and they had all the hot water and we had showers. You could have hot showers, they could have hot showers for the boys. Alongside that that was running through from the water they brought up from the river. That was something they worked out very nicely.

Did you have any trouble with any of the tribal natives up around that area?

No, none whatsoever.

Did you hear anything about some people called the Kukukukus?

I believe the Kukukukus, from what I could hear, used to follow up that original team that went to Edie Creek and often pick off one of the carriers at the back of the team. They were pretty fierce but I don't know ... No, the Kukukukus were evidently very fierce. They were only little blokes. There were a few of them, I saw a few of them at some sort of a ceremony at ANGAU just before we left. There were a few of the Kukus over there and they were only little blokes.

And what sort of weapons did they use?

Bow and arrow I think from what I could hear.

Did you used to get around the area much?

Oh yes. We used to go ... There is Edie Creek, we'd go up there and try a bit of work on the creek but didn't get any gold of any sort.

I understand some of them did.

A couple of the boys got quite a bit. Down at the cutting, that was in the New Guinea gold cutting, where they had the sluicing area, not up at Edie.

Did you hear anything about some of them selling gold to the Americans?

Oh yes. The Americans got a mixture of gold and copper. (laughs) A very pricey commodity. They were very well made, they were beautifully done. As a matter of fact, I made a mould for the boys, I had a bit of stuff there and made a mould. They used to get a rough mould. I didn't know what they were doing till later.

Did the Americans threaten to have a go at some of the men?

I think there was some talk about it. I didn't know anything that was really authentic but there were quite a lot of rumours.

What about the manufacture of home-brew?

Oh yes, the home-brew was ... they had a pretty good drop there at the finish.

Did you ever have to check it out - inspect it?

Unofficially they were allowed to have a small quantity and have some soft drink and they had it with that. They could do it that way. It was very unofficial and it was pretty well controlled. I don't know any time that I saw any of them get really full.

At one stage when it first started I understand that Colonel Bretherton had somebody go up and check it out to make sure it was safe. It wasn't you that got sent out?

No.

You didn't have to analyse it or anything like that?

No. But it was, you know, as I say, I think as far as I know that was the only control that I knew of that they were allowed to have some. That was before any grog came through at all.

And what about - you mentioned to me earlier on - you went on a trip with Colonel Bretherton to Nadzab. Can you relate that?

That was on the Lae/Wau road.

So how did you go and who went with you?

There was Colonel Reg Bretherton, his driver who was ... [Hamilton]

It's on record but I can't remember.

His driver - I should know that - and the sergeant, orderly room sergeant, Sergeant Bert Livermore, and myself. There was only the four us. The road was fairly good over the top down till you approached the Markham.

What, through Sunshine, Wampit?

Yes, down to about Wampit the road wasn't bad. It was looking pretty sick by the time we got to Wampit though.

What about Zenag?

Where was Zenag?

I think it was beyond Wampit.

No. Wampit was about the limit at that stage. And the Colonel wanted to know how things were going. He wanted me to have a look at the set-up over at the air evacuation at Nadzab and the natives down at Wampit, oh yes, they'd take us across. Well they were supposed actually to take us down to the road head which was a long way down the river. Instead of that they just took us straight over the river and dumped us there. Well there was nothing, only kunai. I looked at it and I thought I suppose the road head will probably go in, if we go straight in we'll probably hit the road head and then we'll know where we're going, to Nadzab, to the drome. And we looked till about dusk and we were still ... nothing happened. I said to Bert, 'Well, look Bert' - fortunately we had bloody mosquito nets with us - and I said, 'Let's bash down a square of kunai and we'll put our mosquito nets up and we'll stay the night. We'll have a look in the morning and see if we can find where we are and which direction we'll go. We'll wake in the morning and we won't have a clue'. So we woke up in the morning and got up very early and I said, 'If we look where the planes are coming out and going in, that should give us a direction to Nadzab'. But you couldn't, it was a bit hard. You're down and the kunai is near as high as this. We got to an old broken down tree and we climbed up and we got a bit of a sight of what was happening then. And I said, 'Right, go to Nadzab this way', and you can imagine we were only going a hundred yards an hour - you couldn't get through it.

What, you left your vehicle?

Oh, the boss and Hamilton are over on the other bank waiting for us to come back. And when night comes, that's when the boss sent ...

You said his name, driver Hamilton.

Yeah. The boss was worried then when we didn't get back. And the boss was in a panic of all times. And we were not supposed to be over there to start with, we were out of our territory, although we had the other one over there, we were not supposed to be on the other side. Plus the fact that we were lost. He sent signals up the road and signals to see if he could get anything from Nadzab, if they'd heard anything from us. Hamilton goes over to Nadzab, stays the night, and then comes back the next day. So they were all right. He got back and then the real panic was on because he'd been to Nadzab, we hadn't reached Nadzab - we'd been dumped in the middle of the no-hoper area. At any rate, it was funny, we walked through and finally came to a river and I thought, God, this is going the wrong way. It should be going that was and it's going this way. So I said to poor old Bert - I did a fair bit of outside stuff, Bert didn't do a lot, Bert was not very happy - and I said, 'Look Bert, I think this must be a tributary, it couldn't be the Markham. We'll back along. This should take us to the Markham'. Fortunately it did. And we came back up and on the way through a couple of frightening ones.

As we were pushing through on the river bank I put my foot on a great big alligator straight underneath me. It frightened him as much as he frightened me. So we decided then, where we could, we'd go out into the river and we'd go across onto the sandy spits and walk up rather than ... and we made a bit more ground that way. We finally got up to opposite where we'd come across. And the natives had been across to pick us up and take us back.

So you never got to Nadzab?

No, we never got to Nadzab. We'd spent from before midday - like today - till midday tomorrow just plain lost in the Markham Valley.

I was going to ask you what Nadzab was like when you got there but you didn't get there.

We didn't to Nadzab. When I got back the boss, oh, what a relief. You've never seen anyone quite so relieved as he was.

Did he rouse on you?

No, he couldn't. He told us to go. We'd been dumped. I don't know where the communication broke down with the natives. It was just a breakdown there. Because the native boys were good.

Was that before you set up a post ... no, you set up a post after that down at Sunshine and Wampit?

Yes, that was after that.

Did you have anything to do with any of that?

Not really, only supply. I didn't have much to do, other than that. We went up and down the road a bit. I went over the Lae to get some supplies. I heard the ...

Who was your driver?

Hamilton took me one time down I think.

What about John Rainbow?

Rainbow did too, yes. He took me down, when was that? That was to ... I wanted to see Bede McAuley, my old school mate, and he was on sporting supply. What do they call them? I wanted some football gear for the boys and some cricket gear. I went down and I knew this particular bloke and I'd set what I want. So I went down, rather than apply for it, I went down to get it. And we got all we wanted.

Were you in the team?

No, I was in the cricket team but I had a crook knee. I refereed in the football team - refereed for the football - which was not pleasant. Refereeing usually your own team playing nearly all the time and there was always a fair bit of betting on it and you had to be pretty ... you had to be scrupulous. The boys always reckoned I penalised them more than the others. But you just played it as you saw it. They were pretty good sports, all of them.

Do you remember when Captain Jack Elliott took over as coach? Can you remember the difference of coaching style?

Well actually what happened, they had a team. The boys more or less got a team together and the Colonel said, 'If we're going to play football and we're going to play others, we'll play it properly. They've got to train, they've got to play it and they've got to have a coach. Everything has got to be right. Got to have selectors and it's going to represent the unit, not a group'. So I said, 'Okay'. So that started it. I think we had two games in Moresby.

How did they get to Moresby?

That was before we went up to Wau. And then when we got to Wau - we were unbeaten in Wau - and we beat the Brigade. I don't know when the Brigades came up into the area.

Do you remember Captain Elliott giving orders that nobody was to give the ball away, to hang onto the ball?

That was partly his and partly my ... I was coached by Arthur Hennesy and Arthur Hennesy - that was South Sydney's coach when they won the six competition games in the league straight in the late twenties.

So who charged one of the fellows when he gave the ball away? When he kicked the ball actually? He was charged and fined.

Probably Johnnie.

For disobeying an officer.

Johnnie and I were at uni at together. Johnnie did pharmacy and as a matter of fact I've done my ankle at the final when I was playing for pharmacy in the inter-faculty league and I done my ankle in, Johnnie was playing second grade at the time I think with uni. I got Johnnie to come and take my place in the faculty team and we played in cricket together. We'd played cricket together in city and suburban while we were going.

We'd better get back to the important thing. So when you left Wau for Lae, did you go directly with them or were you sent back beforehand?

No, I went with the boys. We came back on the same old boat.

I thought you said you went back with the first lot from Moresby?

No, no.

You went back via Lae. So you weren't the first lot by any means.

Oh no. Some of them went on leave. I'd had my leave before we left and I didn't get any leave. I was there for about twenty months.

So when the party from Wau went down to Lae, was there anything special about that?

No, we left one behind. We left Johnnie Elliott behind. He caught up later. He was midwife to a native that was expecting, who had had several miscarriages - she was up in ANGAU - and Johnnie wouldn't come and leave her. So he came down later on. No, I don't think anything ...

What about the other twelve that got left in Nadzab? Do you remember anything about them?

I don't remember. I didn't know they were ...

A fair few got left behind, the second party. There was a third party at Nadzab.

No, I didn't know they were left behind.

So what happened?

They should have been with us.

Yes, they were supposed to but they didn't get there in time. The ship sailed before they got to Lae.

No, I didn't realise that.

I didn't realise it until several of them told me.

No, I didn't realise that.

Because the first lot back were the Moresby crowd and your lot were the second lot and then there was two others - there was Captain Elliott who was separated and then there was this eleven or twelve I think.

The company would probably take charge of them and bring them back.

They didn't meet up either.

It's a wonder Johnnie didn't catch up.

So when you got back to Australia, you went to Rutherford did you with the rest?

Yes.

And you were there when the unit was disbanded. Where did you go?

I was transferred from the unit before it was disbanded.

From Rutherford or where?

From Rutherford. I went out from Rutherford to the CCS, I think it was a CCS from Western Australia that was out in East Hills area.

And then you went up to Borneo, did you?

No, I went back Lae. I was up in Cairns for about a week or ten days when ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B - END OF INTERVIEW