The Years of World War II

Extract from the Memoirs of

Wilfred Bertram Paget

December 2004
Prepared for the "Tell Us Your Story Program"

This is the story of the war experiences of Wilfred Bertram Paget who was born on 22nd November 1914 at 479 Newcastle Street Perth. He commenced his education in 1919 at the age of 4 years (His mother put his age up to 5. She was a single mother struggling to support the family and Wilf was ready for school). He first attended Newcastle Street Infants School. In 1921 he transferred to Newcastle Primary School and then, not long later transferred to the Thomas Street School. In 1926 he transferred again to the James Street Primary School. In 1927 he enrolled in the Junior Technical School which was held in buildings behind the Technical College in St George's Terrace. In 1929 he enrolled at the Senior Technical School where in time he passed the leaving certificate course.

During the school holidays and after school, Wilf worked selling the afternoon newspaper "The Daily News" in the city streets. He also worked as a bowser boy for Temple Court Motors at the corner of William Street and St George's Terrace, also for a short time as a general worker for a shoe wholesaler, and later as a helper for a representative for the Blind School. In 1932 he worked in a temporary job on a Roelands farm owned by Mr Albany Bell.

In 1934 Wilf commenced work at Perth Public Hospital in the X-ray department, which was to be the beginning of a lifetime career in professional hospital work as a radiographer. When he retired in 1979 he was Chief Radiographer at Royal Perth Hospital.

After the war he worked for a number of years at Chennel House Clinic with Dr Donald Copping, and later at Lister House doing radiotherapy with Dr Alan Nelson. In 1960 he returned to work at Royal Perth Hospital.

During the war years Wilf married Florence Craig and they set up home together at 71 Essex Street Wembley. Two of their children were born during the war and they had a daughter after Wilf returned from overseas. Wilf and Flo, as committed Christians, were very involved in their local church, Wembley Church of Christ. Wilf spent many years as a lay preacher in the Churches of Christ.

Wilf has had a very full and interesting life. He is a life member of Rostrum Club. For many years he adjudicated in "Youth Speaks for Australia" competitions and was active in the Rostrum Club. He has been very interested in astronomy and an active member of a local astronomy club based at Murdoch university. He has a passionate interest in books and has a magnificant library covering a wide variety of topics such as science, especially astronomy, history, travel, theology, Christian living etc. In his retirement years he has enjoyed overseas travel. He has been to China, India, Singapore, Israel, Europe, England and recently, when he was 86 years he travelled alone on a round the world trip to visit some of his grandchildren who live in England and the United States of America. On this trip he visited a town in Germany where Wilhelm Conrad Rontgen, discovered X-rays.

He has just celebrated his 90th birthday. His wife, Flo, died in 1994 and he has continued to live independantly since then. He still enjoys giving speeches, and the family enjoyed the one he gave this Christmas. He has been writing his life story for many years, and this is just a small portion of what he has written.

1st January 2005

Chapter 9
The Years of World War II
Army Medical Corp, Claremont WA

The war in August 1939 was to bring a change in everyone's programme. It put an end to the studies of our group from the X-ray Department of the Perth Hospital. I eventually enlisted in the Army Medical Corp in June 1940 and was sent to Melbourne for training in a completely new method of X-ray technology. Australia became active at the commencement of the war with this new method of using miniature 35mm film for mass radiography of the chest. This method had been devised by a Brazilian radiologist, Dr D'Abreu, back in the mid thirties, and Nazi Germany had developed special equipment to use this cheaper method of detecting TB with their storm troopers. An Australian X-ray technician, who was understudying the modern equipment being produced by the giant firm of Siemens was involved in the production of this type of X-ray machine. He was advised to leave Germany just before the outbreak of hostilities and had got across to England and had returned to Australia. He notified the army medical authorities about this new equipment, and the army had immediately set about introducing this rapid procedure as part of the enlistment routine. With another technician, Mr John Miller from the Fremantle Hospital and myself, we were enlisted to study this new method, and supervise the setting up of the new plant in Perth at the army enlistment centre.

At the beginning of June 1940 I enlisted and was given train tickets to Melbourne. I remember that I enlisted on Wednesday morning, received my instructions about the training trip to Melbourne and proceeded back to the hospital to notify them that I would be finishing on the following Friday. As a hospital technician my position had been classified as an essential reserve occupation, but when the army needed our services then we were free to join the armed services. So I automatically was placed on special military leave for the duration of the war. It was all very hurried, but I managed to make it to the Perth Railway station with my case and bag for the train trip to the eastern states. Flo also was waiting at the railway station and we said a fond farewell to each other before I had to board the train. Flo was a bit cross because she had been waiting near the first class compartments, but we were only given second class tickets, not being commissioned officers, so we didn't find each other very quickly. However she forgave me for the misunderstanding and we waved to each other for as long as we could. When the train got to Midland Junction it was getting dark and I was met by the leader of the young people from the Midland church where I had been preaching . The leader was Miss Ruth Knight whose family ran a food shop in the main street and she brought a hot pie and the young people gave me one or two other small gifts for my trip. It was all very moving to experience such kindness but eventually we were on our way east.

We had to change trains next morning at Kalgoorlie, because of the change in the rail gauge and at the frequent stops across the Nullabor, the huge steam engine was a centre of attraction and we met groups of aborigines at most of the centres where the train paused. I had brought my camera and I quickly discovered that these dark skinned people were no longer as naive as we had assumed. They would not allow us to take their picture unless we paid them some coinage. It was an interesting experience to see these native people right out in the raw outback conditions of Australia. Eventually we reached the capital city of Victoria. It was my first trip to the eastern states and I was directed to a brand new army camp in Royal Park. They were still erecting buildings and the ablution block was still primitive and incomplete. There was no hot water, so cold showers in Melbourne were

exceedingly brief, partly because the building was designed for steaming hot showers, and the walls had a twelve inch gap at the bottom and a similar gap at the top so that the steam could get out and fresh air could get in. June in Melbourne seemed to be a time of continuous cold winds, so one did not look forward to having a shower.

I was completely green to army ways and had to be very observant to pick up the correct protocol and behaviour. We had not been issued with uniforms so we were neither "fish, flesh, nor red herring" and could not salute any officers because we were not properly dressed. However we were there to learn the operation of the new type of X-ray plant. Army enlistment was going on apace, and hundreds of men were being X rayed every day. Johnny Miller and I just joined the team who were operating the X-ray plant . After the long work days we had our evening meal in the dining shed and came back and slept on the floor of the X-ray department. It was cold Melbourne weather and we had to collect some extra blankets.

An amusing incident occurred one night when I was returning from an outing in the city. The new road through the park up to the buildings of the recruiting centre was surfaced with fresh finely crushed stone. Walking up this road was a very noisy procedure, each footstep on this crushed rock could be heard over a great distance. As I was approaching the corner of a building I was suddenly faced in the darkness by a soldier rugged up in a great coat, with a rifle pointing at me and at his shouted challenge "who goes there". I gasped out "its me" and was then covered with confusion at the whole situation. I had never met a sentry challenging strangers and had received no warning or instruction on how to respond. The war situation was so serious that recruits were being taken to the armed services without any preliminary instruction or guidance. I had not been issued with an army uniform because they didn't have one large enough for my height. All they had was a great coat and a hat and an army passbook. So we must have looked an odd pair from Western Australia, dressed in civies, but wearing an army great coat and hat outside in the cold weather.

It was a very busy recruiting centre for the city of Melbourne and we quickly were inducted into the usage of the brand new style of X-ray plant and we were taking our turns and rostered to various duties around the X-ray machine. Living quarters were so short that John and I slept on the floor in a room adjacent to the X-ray machine. We had straw mattresses, rugs and pillow. The building was a galvanised iron structure and the Melbourne nights were quite cold in June. One night I woke up wondering why my head was so cold, it was because I had wriggled up and my head was touching the galvanised wall. The month passed very quickly and we were able to see a little bit of Melbourne over the weekends and I went to church at the Lygon Street Church of Christ which was a very well established fellowship going back to the middle of the 19th century. I was able to meet at the church two young women who had been members of the Lake Street church before transferring to Melbourne. I was very impressed with the crowds of people thronging the main streets of this city especially at the traffic lights where hundreds surged across in every direction with the green lights coming on. Perth had not got any traffic lights and the crowds in Melbourne were completely new to my experience.

Eventually John and I were on our way back across the Nullabor in company with a Warrant Officer who was in charge of these army X-ray units. He was the technician who had been to Germany and had brought back the technical description of the new apparatus he had worked with

during the recruitment of nazi soldiers. When we eventually arrived back in Perth we proceeded to the Royal Agricultural Show Grounds at Claremont which had been taken over by the army as the General Details Department Camp which of course centred around the procedure of enlistment of recruits here in Western Australia in all the armed services. It also accommodated in the vast array of buildings a great number of troops who were passing through Perth some on their way out of the State and others who were arriving from elsewhere and were briefly staging in Perth before further movement. So it was a fairly busy army camp and we had to set up the X-ray activity in a building adjacent to that where the medical examinations were regularly done, so that the movement of troops through the enlistment procedure was orderly and convenient . We were in a large building labelled "Fruit, Flowers and Vegetables" (these commodities of course had been regularly displayed in this building).

A major project was to plan the arrangement of the equipment for an orderly flow of traffic and for the avoidance of bottlenecks and people becoming lost. We had to build a dark room at one end of the building and army engineers quickly laid down a cement floor with plumbing and electrical needs looked after, a small window that could be opened for ventilation, a door that could be locked and a lead lined pass through hatch adjacent to the X-ray machine outside. This hatch had two doors, one on the inside of the dark room over the bench and the other outside, and the feature was that only one door could be opened at any one time. This was to prevent light entering the dark room through the hatch during the development of films inside. Special water supply was laid on to a sink and two large wash tanks for the washing of X-ray films which were the large 17 inch x 14 inch X-ray films used for the full chest examination. These normal X-ray films were only used for special cases where the miniature image on the routine 35mm film displayed signs of possible tuberculosis or other chest complaints. The vast majority of the X-ray exposures were done by photographing the large fluorescent screen before which the body was placed by a Zeiss camera attached to the small end of a pyramidal box and focussed on this screen. This resulted in a roll of 35mm film with 36 images of the chests of 36 recruits. Then the film had to be changed and the exposed film taken to the dark room and placed in a special box ready for later processing. The new film was quickly installed into the camera when the X-ray procedure could be recommenced. In this way a near continuous flow of troops could go through our set up and the average time taken to X-ray each recruit would be 3 or 4 minutes. The army engineers had been told to prepare 3 mobile lead screens about 5 feet square for protective purposes. When these were delivered we looked askance at using them for ourselves since we were 6 feet tall, so we ordered 2 new sets in addition, this time 7 feet high with lead glass panel at eye height to look through. We placed the machine control behind one of these large screens using the second one to stand behind adjacent to the camera unit, so that two technicians at a time could work together, one operating the X-ray tube and control, the other, handling the patient. This would speed things up so that fast movement of troops could be maintained.

The two smaller original screens were now used on the other side of the machine to protect two clerks who sat down at a table and handled the paper work and the identifying lead numbers associated with each recruit. While one of the clerks was recording the patient's serial number, army number, and name on an official roll sheet with three carbon copies, the one nearest the machine was placing the required lead numbers from the roll onto strips of sticky tape which could be quickly attached to the top corners of the screen over the shoulders of the patient. This indelibly identified each of the small images on the 35mm film, which would be ultimately after processing run through a high quality projector which enlarged the image to a fair size on a projector screen. This would enable

the radiologist sitting in front of the projector to quickly assess each chest image and usually say "pass" when he could detect no abnormalities in the chest X-ray picture. Another technician with the rolls associated with the film would read out the numbers which the radiologist would check and when the decision was uttered the technician would write the word in the appropriate place against that name. If there was any abnormality detected, the radiologist would say "a retake film please" , and the clerk would write "retake" against the name. The person associated with that request would be brought back - usually from within the Claremont camp - when a full sized normal X-ray film would be taken of his chest. This would enable much finer detail to be examined and a more accurate decision made as to the consequences. In every case the lead numbers associated with each person was part of the X-ray record.

In addition to army recruits we also had to slot in squads of recruits from the navy and the airforce. These centres would ring up and require an appointment to bring a coach full of recruits down to the X-ray centre at Claremont. The airforce came from the Perth centre, while the navy recruits came from the Leewin Centre at Fremantle. They would specify the number of recruits they were going to bring and we would give them an appointment time, usually in the afternoon, after most of the army personnel had been dealt with. Here we found an interesting comparison. The navy clearly reflected the great tradition they had received from the British navy of absolute, systematic reliability in all their procedures. When they indicated that they had 25 recruits and we gave them an appointment for 1.00pm, exactly at 12.59pm we heard the coach pull up outside our building. The naval officer in charge quickly assembled his squad and marched them in through the double doors of our building, and there before us were 25 naval recruits. The officer handed us the nominal roll with 25 names typed with their naval number and all necessary details. They never ever showed any carelessness or muddle in their system. By contrast, the airforce who were recruiting hundreds of young men keen to do flying, and who had grown like a mushroom from the inception of the war, were not very efficient. If they indicated that they were bringing 30 recruits down often they were late arriving and frequently only had 18 or 20 men. We did find however, that as the months passed they improved and became more reliable in their procedures. We also had to deal with miscellaneous groups such as "the chinese labour corp", who were used to drive the old horse drawn waggons from World War I for army salvage. Then of course, we had to handle batches of young women joining the nursing corp, and ultimately the auxilliary women's services for all three sections of recruitment.

The commanding officer of the Claremont GDD[15] was a Major Webster, a veteran of World War I who still had a badly injured left arm from his involvement in a fierce engagement on the western front. He still was able to drive his car and was a very efficient and fair minded officer. He called me in one day to his office across the road and looked at me in a puzzled way, saying, "Staff, I can't work out who you are. You are still wearing civilian clothes and yet are working in the army. What is going on?" I told him of the difficulty that the army had not yet got my size in uniform, even though I had been in the army for nearly six months. He was perturbed at this situation and said he would write to the Francis Street Headquarters about it. I was later told that he had queried the headquarters about it, declaring that if a uniform wasn't soon provided for this staff sergeant, the original measurements would be superseded by growth. Very soon, I was called in to pick up my new uniform and at last got a full equipment of clothing. However, for six months I had to provide my own shirts and underclothing, shoes and so on.

[15] General Details Depot

On a subsequent occasion when I was passing our commanding officer and giving the correct salute, he stopped and said "Staff, I've noticed that when you're dealing with all those women that come into the camp you close the door into your department. I am wondering whether I should inquire as to what is going on? " This he did with a pleasant smile, but I assured him that it was to ensure the privacy of the procedure with the girls since they were only partly dressed and wearing gowns and deserved our respect. When the women folk were being handled through the medical centre the whole of the medical buildings were off limits to male personnel not connected with the recruiting procedure. It was all very nicely and properly arranged. But I had an amusing incident when X raying a very senior woman in her 50's who was coming in to the Women's Army Auxiliary Service with the rank of Colonel. She was so plump and rounded that the white gown supplied to each woman kept slipping off her shoulders when I positioned her for the X-ray picture with her hands on her hips. I repeatedly clutched the falling gown and tried to hook it over her shoulders, but it was unsuccessful and she saw my difficulty and reached around and clutched the gown and threw it away and said "Carry on, Staff Sergeant, I'm not worried". I laughed , took the X-ray picture, picked up her gown and replaced it over her shoulders. At least she showed a good sense of humour.

One of the colourful characters was an Englishman who had served as Sergeant in one of the famous British Guards Units. His name was Markham and he not only knew British Army methods but was always talking about his experience and praising the efficiency of everything English. He had the loudest voice I have ever heard and could stand in the centre of the ring at the showgrounds simultaneously drilling three squads of Australian staff moving on the outer track. With typical cockney wit he would bellow his commands to each segment of Australian soldiers on the outer track He never seemed to stop with his tremendous voice and constant sarcasm. With his loud shouting he was constantly critical of the slovenly Australian methods. Typical of his critical commands were - "If you don't march for me today, you will run for me tomorrow. I'll put Epsom's salts in your morning tea". Although the drill started at 6.00 am we were all wide awake under the lash of his fluent cockney speech!

Japanese bombers were active right down the west coast of the State to Sharp Bay and it was feared that they would eventually be bombing targets around Perth. Western Command ordered all units in the metropolitan area to begin active practice of reacting to a warning siren before a bombing raid. Slit trenches had to be dug close by working positions and at the warning siren all necessary emergency steps such as turning off electrical circuits had to be completed and all personnel had to be out of sight in an adjacent slit trench. The siren sounded one morning and in our X-ray set up we turned off the main electrical switch and deposited our valuable German camera in a safe place and we then ran outside and dropped into the slit trench. Our building was on the corner of two roads in the showgrounds and presently from sheer boredom we peeped around to see what was happening. To our surprise an old horse drawn army wagon came in through the gate, the sleepy soldier in charge not having noticed that the armed guard at the gate was not in evidence and the horses slowly walked past this intersection near our trench. Walking up toward us was the Commanding officer, Major Webster, and the Sergeant Major Markham. Markham saw the horse drawn vehicle passing by in front and raced up to the intersection with feet apart he turned to the horse drawn vehicle moving away and shouted "Who the devil do you think you are? Lady Godiver! Get down off that lorry." At the sound

of his roaring voice the horses had stopped and the sleepy soldiers tumbled down and crawled under the wagon. It took us a long time to subdue our constant laughter at his cockney wit.

These missing pages tell the story of his wedding to Florence Craig, the setting up of their home in Essex Street Wembley and the birth of their first child.

his hands in the sugar bowl or some other container. I remember once when I needed to attend the Perth hospital with Flo and Robert in order to receive a belated wedding gift from the staff of the X-ray Department when Robert was at the early walking stage. He scampered ahead of us in the walkway to the department and stumbled and fell which upset him and he was grizzling about his hurts when we had to take him into the department. They were very kind and were giving us a very nice serving tray for special occasions. I still have some lovely photos of Robert at this early developmental stage.

We also took him in the train to Rockend farm at Brookton where his proud grandparents were delighted with his progress. I have a photograph of Robert with his Grandfather Craig both on all fours butting their heads together in a playful time.

The increasing intensity of the war effort against Japan was now absorbing everybody's attention and energy. Petrol had been strictly rationed since the beginning of the war effort, but now clothing and food were moderately rationed and we were all issued with food and clothing coupons. But it was mostly imported luxury foods that were curtailed, and no one needed to go hungry or feel very deprived. We often were able to have a half a bag of crushed wheat from the Brookton farm together with non standard size eggs from Grandma Craig's flocks of fowls. When she sent her eggs to the egg marketing Board she was never credited with non standard sizes, and so she sent them to us. Some overall control of food and clothing supplies needed to be imposed not only because of the needs of the Australian fighting forces but because there were huge numbers of American soldiers and sailors and airmen being sent to Australia and were dependent on Australian supplies. I remember once when I happened to visit a big grocery shop in Claremont, an American officer was there and his orders were stripping the shelves of such common items as breakfast cereals, jams, condiments, and other food necessities. I learned that he was part of a contingent of American military personnel temporarily stationed in the showgrounds and was responsible for scouting around and ordering their food necessities. But when he kept saying as items were located on the shelving "I'll take the lot" it emphasised the growing pressure on food supplies.

I visited the lines of some of the Americans at the showground military base and saw their style of tenting and equipment. Many of them were sleeping in hammocks strung up in shady places and these hammocks were equipped with fly proof nylon netting and a waterproof cover. One side panel of the fly netting could be opened by the new zip fastener. These fasteners and the nylon material were completely new to us in Australia and we could only gaze in admiration at the splendid modern equipment of these American servicemen. One group was from the submarine fleet which had made Fremantle its base and the crews of submarines being repaired or refurbished after long service were given extended shore leave and arrangements had been made for them to have free accommodation at certain military camps in the metropolitan area. This was all paid for by the United States Government and the men could enjoy the amenities of city entertainment after long isolated service in a submarine. They also acquired appropriate premises in scenic spots along the Swan river which would serve a similar purpose for their officers. One of these was an old mansion in Queenslea Drive Claremont which overlooked the river. At the end of the war the USA authorities advertised these properties for sale and a small group of Church of Christ people undertook to purchase this one at Claremont. Their purpose was to establish a Christian hospital and this was the origin of Bethesda Hospital which still

functions today. When the Americans learned of the purpose of the purchase they were very generous in leaving a brand new hot water system and other amenities intact for our use.

The Colonel in charge of our X-ray section, Dr Horace Gibson, told us about a terrible incident connected with the servicing of the American submarines at Fremantle. He was the senior surgeon and radiologist of the Fremantle Hospital and had served at Gallipoli, Lemnos and France during World War I. As the most senior medical consultant in Fremantle he was called in for the X-ray examination and treatment of an American serviceman from the mother ship of the submarine fleet based at Fremantle. The American serviceman was a technical officer with great expertise in the maintenance of the machinery and equipment of submarines. He had been called upon for a long period of tedious adjustment of sonar equipment fitted in to the bottom of the hull of the submarine which had become non operable. He was alone in a very isolated position while attending to this scientific equipment. We were told that he had a chain of men lying down in the restricted space behind him who could pass whatever he needed up to him, including refreshments. At the conclusion of his long tiresome work he returned to his cabin jaded and exhausted with one of his companions. On his bed was a wrapped bottle of fluid boldly addressed to the "officer in charge". He picked it up and exclaimed "Someone has sent us a drink and am I ready for it". He tore the wrappings off the top, removed the cap and put the bottle to his mouth. After two or three hurried gulps he tore the bottle away and began coughing and spluttering exclaiming at the burning effect on his mouth and throat. His companion grasped the bottle, removed the rest of the wrappings and revealed to his horror the words on the label - "Sulphuric Acid conc.". His mate was in a collapsed state and an ambulance was called and he was taken to the Fremantle General Hospital. The X rays revealed terrible damage to his throat and stomach, and despite all treatment he died a couple of days later. This concentrated acid had been ordered for use with the banks of acid batteries used in the submarine when completely immersed under the surface of the ocean, and had been carefully addressed and dispatched "to the Officer in Charge".

1941 quickly slipped by with the pressure of the recruiting work gradually easing during the second full year of the war, most of the recruits being older teenagers enlisting in the armed forces of their choice for war service as soon as they became eligible to enlist. Naval recruitment was of course limited to replacement personnel since the supply of new warships was very intermittent. Recruits for the airforce were constantly increasing because of the attraction of aviation and because of the Empire Training School being now based at a big training centre in Canada. The intensive bombing of England during the "Battle for Britain" in 1941 had left an indelible impression of the enormous need for the expansion of the airforces of British countries. Then on December 7 1941 there was the historical thunderclap of a completely unexpected bombing attack by Japan of the huge American Naval Base at Pearl Harbour. This calamity which caused enormous damage to America's naval facilities in the Pacific Ocean ushered in a completely new phase of the war.

When Japan bombed Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941[17] there was a new burst of recruiting almost to the point of conscription with Manpower revising all sections of reserved occupations. About a week after Pearl Harbour recruitment into the services soared to new heights and on the first day of the new activity I was on my own and personally X rayed over 600 personnel . Since my colleague was not present I then had to embark on the processing of all the rolls of film that had been taken. I had to ring Flo and explain to her that I would be very late home so I had my

[17] I am unsure whether this occurred after Pearl Harbour or after the fall of Singapore.

evening meal at the camp and proceeded to the developing of all the films. I remember riding home on my push bike very tired about 11.00pm. in the evening

America immediately declared war against all the axis powers - Germany, Italy, and Japan, and Japan commenced her military conquests in a southward direction towards Australia. Japanese army activity on the mainland of China and Manchuria was severely curtailed and large contingents of her fighting forces were moved southward to Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. American forces under General Douglas MacArthur were bottled up in the huge island fortress of Corregidor, off the coast from Manilla. With her huge naval and army resources Japan quickly conquered these territories in her southward push. Only feeble opposition was encountered except at Corregidor, where the American soldiers held out against the siege for several months.

There were also small British forces which opposed the Japanese push southwards in Malaysia as well as some Australian units, but these only offered a small delay in their progress toward the big British Naval Base at Singapore. This was supposedly very well prepared and even impregnable to Naval attack. Australia had sent some 30,000 army troops to help garrison Singapore. There were huge naval guns built in to the hills on Manos Island (south of the city) which commanded the approach to the harbour at Singapore. It was considered that no naval attack could succeed against such armaments. Imagine our dismay when the Japanese massed on the other side of the channel separating the tip of Malaysia from the island of Singapore proceeded to cross the channel in small boats and quickly causing a capitulation of all the British and Australian forces.[18] No naval activities were ever involved and because the British guns could not be turned around they were never fired and in actual fact were only equipped with armour piercing ammunition to be used against battle ships. All our Australian forces were imprisoned, first of all in the infamous Changi gaol.

Post war information has revealed that the Japanese were in fact completely out numbered by the British forces, were at the end of their supply lines, were short of rice and their ammunition was so scarce that it was down to 7 bullets per soldier. It was just their continued persistence and drive aided by very feeble leadership on the British side that gave them the victory.

The work in the recruiting section proceeded steadily through 1942 into 1943. I had commenced doing some night school at the Perth Technical College in Engineering subjects and continued with physics during 1943. This was University 1 grade and I passed the exam at the end of 1943. But for our family there was another exciting event, we learned of Flo's second pregnancy in the middle of 1943.

It was at this time because of Flo's pregnancy that we decided to transfer our membership from the Lake Street Church to the Wembley church fellowship which was situated in the next street from where we were living. This saved a lot of inconvenient travelling on buses for Flo and our small child, Robert, and it was much easier to walk around to the next street where we also had many old friends from our Lake Street days. The Wembley Church had been built in 1939 and the membership included a large group of young families from the Lake Street church who were now living at Wembley and Floreat Park. These two suburbs were recent developments and Floreat Park was the newest suburb still developing in the metropolitan area. The Wembley church was started by a grand old Christian, David M Wilson from the Lake Street church who had bought a house in Holland Street. Trained as

[18] Date of the fall of Singapore?????

an engineer he had retired and lived with his daughter, Elsie. The chapel of the Wembley church was opened by David Wilson in 1939 and he was the senior elder from the commencement of the church. Elsie and Flo were great friends and on our first wedding anniversary we left our new born eldest son Robert in Elsie's care while I took Flo out to dinner. So we had many old friends as well as some new associates close to our home. The Wembley church were not able at this time, to appoint a full time minister, but the pulpit was well occupied by visiting preaching brethren and by ministers from other suburbs. One such frequent visitor was Mr Jabez Wiltshire from the Lake Street Church who used to ride his bicycle from his home in Mount Hawthorn across to Wembley. So young Robert was put on the cradle roll and Flo was able to join in some of the church activities including tennis parties with some of her friends at the church.

Chapter 11
The Years of World War II
Service at the Military Hospital in Northam WA

A new army general hospital was being established at Northam, and John Miller my associate, was transferred to take charge of the X-ray work in the new hospital. I managed to secure the recruitment of an assistant for me at Claremont, a middle aged man from one of the Perth photographic centres which was closing up because of the shortage of film in the commercial world. His name was John Parks and of course he knew his photography very well indeed. He came to be my assistant and to do all the dark room work, but of course he very quickly became helpful on the X-ray side of the work. About the middle of the war, John Miller was brought back to the metropolitan area on compassionate grounds because his young wife had suffered two miscarriages so I was then transferred to Northam to take his place in the X-ray department of the 118 AGH (Australian General Hospital). This was in January of 1944. It was a drastic revision of duties and lifestyle. I was able to come home for a weekend every fortnight and although Flo was disappointed at this break in our home life, it was much better than thousands of other soldiers experienced when they went overseas.

At the Northam military hospital the X-ray Department had been functioning in temporary quarters and the processing of the films was being done in a toilet. But when I arrived the new X-ray Department had been completed and all the equipment had to be transferred to the new building. Although the X-ray room proper had been completed they were still constructing and finishing the dark room next to it. The Officer in Charge was Major Norman Long. He was a young man, very athletic and very self confident. As the Radiologist he was in charge of the whole X-ray Department, but the equipment was really in my care as I was the Radiographer responsible for its use and performance.

On an early visit to the new department I learned that they were about to paint the whole of the interior of the dark room jet black. I was horrified and told the engineering officer that this would have to be altered. I had set up two dark rooms from scratch in my long experience and had worked in dark rooms for ten years. I explained to the painters that the labyrinth entrance passage ways needed the black paint, but the inside of the dark room should be cream to reflect the safe lights hung from the ceiling. These safe lights shone a very pale greenish light which did not affect the photographic emulsion of the X-ray films. But it was so faint that unless there was reflection from the walls and ceiling you would be unable to see what you had to do. The engineers proceeded to arrange this change of colour when Doctor Long paid a visit and immediately cancelled my change and ordered it to proceed with his previous suggestion of black. I was very busy in the old X-ray quarters finding where things were and how things were organised and our paths did not cross very often. On my next hurried visit to the new dark room I learned it was all going to be black. I had to demand an immediate interview with the Major and clarify the set up and the procedure for the new dark room. He had never ever developed a film, whereas I had achieved the cadetship at the Perth Hospital partly because of my photographic experience. Like many new officers who imagined that their rank gave them knowledge and authority over everything in sight, the Major was quite stubborn at first. But when I declared that I could not work in a black dark room and that he would have to do all the developing of all the films he finally relented and allowed me to reinstruct the painters.

We got on quite well after that and the hectic period of changing our operation to a new building proceeded quite smoothly. There was a brand new high powered X-ray machine installed and I was able to requisition from the engineers a properly constructed lead lined shield where I placed the control of the machine. This was contrary to the machine's design, but I was very conscious of the need for protection from the scattered x-rays during any exposure, and spent a whole rest day (Sunday) rewiring the machine to the control behind the new screen.

But I did find the X-ray work in a hospital rather challenging because of the wide coverage of the human body now required. I had been away from hospital work for nearly 3 years and I had to quickly brush up on a lot of the activity that I now had to master. I also found that a large military hospital was a different organisation to the specialised work I had been doing at Claremont. We were very busy at Northam because of the outpatients from the military and airforce establishments all around the countryside, Pierce Aerodrome, Cunderdin Air base, a naval munitions store at York and other military establishments in the surrounding country districts. Ordinary accidents and mishaps injuring military personnel made it necessary to bring the injured by ambulance to the Northam Military Hospital for specialised attention. We had up to 800 patients in the wards of the hospital.

An interesting side of hospital life was the construction of two wards for prisoners of war, namely Italian and German POWs from the encampments established in the south Darling Ranges at Jarrahdale. The sick and injured were again brought to the Northam hospital, so these two wards were fenced around with a 3 metre wire fence. The NCO's quarters were adjacent, and we had to walk past this fence when going to our quarters from the hospital buildings. We always noticed how neat and tidy the German ward was and the grounds surrounding it. But the Italians proved interesting because they delighted to stand out in the sun and sing Italian opera. It seemed that not only were they very fine singers but they all knew the songs of a great many operas . Different leaders would step forward from the group and spontaneously lead in the singing of a new opera and the results were really attractive to hear. They never worried about tidying the grounds outside their ward and we were told that it was likewise inside, but they loved to sing their hearts out in the open.

An exciting event for our little family was approaching and toward April Flo and Robert moved across to her sister, Edna's, in Mount Lawley, which was close to St Anne's Hospital[19] where she preferred to go for the birth of our second child. I only got home for two days every fortnight from the Northam Hospital, so my contact with Flo and Robert was very limited. It happened that I was admitted to a ward in the Northam hospital because of sinus trouble which quickly cleared up, fortunately, as on the third day I received the exciting telegram that a second son had been born in St Anne's Hospital. Our second child was born on the 28th April 1944. Edna, of course, had taken Flo down to the hospital in their car at the appropriate time. I was able to get an immediate leave pass and to catch the next train bound for Perth. I alighted at East Perth station and walked across to St Anne's Hospital about lunch time and was able to see our new infant. It was thrilling to see Flo fully recovered and we were both excited with the new baby. We agreed on his name, Graham Wilson, in memory of the man who was responsible for the foundation of the Wembley Church of Christ. His daughter, Miss Elsie Wilson was a close friend of Flo's and her father had only recently died. We had

[19]Now known as Mercy Hospital

just entertained him for an evening meal a fortnight previous to his death. He was an outstanding Christian leader, a qualified engineer and ran a very successful monument gravestone business.

I had to catch the troop train back to Northam at 7.00pm and well before that time one of the sisters of the Catholic hospital inquired about my movements and when I mentioned the train she immediately left and shortly told me that a hot meal was waiting in a neighbouring room. They were very kind and thoughtful. Robert had been looked after by his Aunty Edna and was very joyous to be reunited with his Mum back at Essex Street upon her discharge from hospital, when my brother-in-law Arthur McRoberts took Flo and Robert back to Wembley.

On my fortnightly leave pass I would journey back to Wembley and quite often Robert would see me coming and run to meet me. He was delighted when I swung him onto my shoulders and carried him down the side of the house to the back door. We were wonderful friends and he tried to copy me in the various jobs I might be doing such as mowing the lawn with his wheel barrow while I was toiling with the hand mower.

On one such trip from Northam at an unusual time of the day I ended up riding in the steam locomotive with the train crew. It was a heavily laden wheat train on its way to Fremantle and at Midland Junction where they stopped briefly to top up their water tank and their coal bin I discussed with the crew the problem of leaving the train which was not going to stop until it arrived at Fremantle. The crew agreed that they would be slowed down on their westward journey climbing the hill at Leederville and agreed that they would be going slow enough for me to jump off at the Leederville railway station. I was not carrying much luggage and so the careful preparations were made and fortunately they were going quite slowly while passing through the Leederville station where I was able to jump off and proceed to walk over to our Wembley house. Needless to say I needed a clean up, because of the coal dust in the locomotive.

After one weekend which I had enjoyed with my family, I missed the troop train to Northam which departed from Perth regularly for members of the armed services. I caught a passenger train to Midland Junction and proceeded to the main road leading over the Greenmount Hill. I eventually got a lift in a car which was turning off the main road half way up the hill. I proceeded to walk slowly with my kit bag up the hill nearly to the top where it occurred to me that it was fruitless to go on walking. So I paused and waited and in due course I saw a motor vehicle slowly climbing the Greenmount hill. I automatically waived to it and it slowed down and enabled me to jump into the back. It was an army covered van and there were already several soldiers dozing in the back. They made room for me and to my surprise I found that it was our hospital vehicle on its way back with several stragglers to the Northam Hospital. Next morning at breakfast one of my colleagues who had been in the van the previous evening accosted me and demanded to know how I had made the arrangements with the driver to meet him in the middle of the bush. I smiled and replied that I worked with X rays where we learned to solve such mysteries.

The year passed very quickly and I continued to have a fairly heavy workload in the army hospital, and I was often busy in the evenings developing the X-ray films taken during the afternoon. After one of these evening sessions I walked back to the Sergeants Quarters fairly tired and the Sergeant Major remarked that I was making a late appearance. I explained to him the situation and

said I would like to have more evenings so that I could write an occasional letter to my wife and hinted that I would have to have some extra help in the work of the department. He promptly sought to squash my suggestion by telling me that the X-ray Department was already overstaffed, as the establishment read one radiographer, female. I was incredulous at his assertion that we were over staffed since I was on my own in the technical work, but the incident triggered me to discuss with the radiologist the need of someone to help in the darkroom, and we were eventually able to have the services of a young soldier who was not confined to bed, but was undergoing lengthy medical tests for his condition.

Because of the war time situation we in army hospitals were also expected to assist in civilian work when ever possible. On a visit to the Northam civilian hospital I found that the nurse doing the X-ray work was being exposed to radiation in a way that was likely to affect her future health. The reason was lack of primary education in X-ray technology and she was standing close to the table bearing the patient during X-ray procedures. I pointed out she should be some distance away behind the shelter of a lead screen bearing the control unit. She needed to find some cord so that she could make the exposure from a great distance away from the patient. We organised how this could be done and instructed her for her own welfare.

I had a very busy year coping with some major changes of equipment. We received powerful new X-ray equipment in place of the usual portable equipment supplied to field hospitals. However this big general medical centre at Northam was classified as a "Field Hospital", so all sorts of things were unobtainable because they were not available to a temporarily situation unit. So we found that we could never order a coat hook to hang the lead apron on as coat hooks were never issued to personnel living in canvas tents.

One thing that I had to organise was an electric bell from our department to the electrical generator set some distance away. This was a powerful motor driven generator to supply our department with alternating electrical supply, as the local country electricity was direct current. X-ray machines could only be operated from alternating current. Usually this generating motor was left idling until we were ready to make an exposure. Then, the motor was accelerated to full speed needed to produce 250 volts. After the brief exposure the throttle would be put back to idling speed. The difficulty was running the 50 metres there and back continually during the day instead of looking after the needs of the patient during the X-ray examination. So I consulted with the doctors in charge of other wards and found that there was an adjacent ward which dealt with long term patients who had a leg or an arm in plaster cast. These patients usually suffered acute boredom awaiting the setting of broken bones so, I talked with them and found one man who could walk very keen to help us in the X-ray department. We stationed him on a chair with some books close by the door of the generator room and instructed him about the simple procedure of adjusting the generator to full speed when we rang the bell and then after the second bell turning the control back to idling speed.

I usually had to develop the films at night after the day's work so I made another exploration and found a mobile patient who had some mysterious trouble which they were endeavouring to treat by a long term of medication. He too was bored to tears and enthusiastically came and learned the developing procedure in the dark room, and became our expert dark room assistant

In 1944 we received a sudden notice from army headquarters that we were required for a special short term job of X raying the chests of all the prisoners of war in the large camp in the Darling Ranges east of Pinjarra. This prison camp was called Marrinyup .This was undertaken by the army in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Special equipment and transport was ordered including a special X-ray unit set up in a large caravan. At the back of the caravan was a small dark room for developing the films. One of the requirements was the supply of alternating current which needed a motor driven generator in a strong trailer which could be taken to the required site. Our field hospital was the only unit in the State to possess this item, as it was our reserve back up generator in case the main unit installed in a building had a break down. A large 5 ton army truck was to be dispatched to Northam to take this heavy trailer with the generator set in tow to the Prisoner of War camp. It would also collect me as the technician in charge of the operation and we would first go to the Karrakatta camp in order to set it all up and have it in working order for the trip to the prison camp. The large trailer unit with the X-ray unit was all brand new, so I had to requisition everything required to have this unit in operational order. I requisitioned developing solutions, hypo solutions, necessary large X-ray films for special retakes, and supplies of 35mm high speed Kodak film, plus stationery and other small items needed for the official records. One of my tasks in setting up the new Zeiss camera with its special high speed lens was to have the lens locked at the exact focus position for photographing the fluorescent screen in front of the patient's chest. I did this by taking 8 special exposures with a piece of metal flywire fastened to the fluorescent screen where the patient would be standing. There were very finely engraved marks on the rotating cylinder of the lens to secure an exact focus position. We measured the exact distance between the lens and the screen and set the lens at that distance, then we moved it four divisions to one side and proceeded to take 8 exposures of the flywire, moving the lens one mark each time and numbering the exposures with lead numerals. When that piece of film was processed and dry we examined the images of the flywire with a magnifying glass, and were able to spot the sharpest image of the flywire. The number of this exposure gave us the exact position for setting the lens and locking it in position. Eventually all was packed and ready and two trucks, one towing the X-ray unit caravan, the other the large generator trailer from our hospital set out for the journey to the Darling Range camp.

The X-ray unit went on ahead and I accompanied the driver towing the generator set. We unfortunately experienced a mishap when bringing this heavy unit down the Greenmount hill from Northam. The driver was hurrying to give us plenty of time at the camp and found himself breasting the crest of the hill and rapidly gaining speed down the steep incline. He endeavoured to slow and finally had to apply the brakes of the truck. Because the trailer had been fitted up early in the war it only had steel wire mechanically operated brakes. The truck was an up-to-date type fitted with pneumatic brakes connected by hosing. So we were not able to apply the brakes on the heavy trailer unit. That is why he was reluctant to use the brakes too much. Now he had to apply them and I was suddenly aware of a severe jolting, the trailer pressing hard against the towing bracket on the truck had started to swing from side to side breaking the hinged drawbar connection and was now being towed only by the wire cable which had been hooked out of the way onto part of the truck bracket. When the truck pulled on the wire, the brakes of the trailer jammed and the truck felt a severe pull backwards. The strain moved the trailer rapidly forward when it butted the back of the truck pushing it forward and again causing the brakes to be applied. The truck was jolting and moving in an erratic path on the last stage of the hill just touching the township of Mundaring. Finally the driver managed to bring the

kindly invited us in to have an evening meal with them. We were so gratified that before we left we gathered up our emergency rations of bread, meat and vegetables and handed it to them with our sincere thanks. Soon the repair truck reached us and repeated the repair to the steel towing bracket. Then we were on our way again back to Karrakatta . I was able to surprise Flo with a late arrival home for the night. Next day I had to give a report of the work accomplished with the prisoners of war and submit all the X-ray films for despatch to our X-ray headquarters at Claremont Showgrounds where the films would be officially reviewed.

The trip back to Northam was accomplished without mishap and I think that the driver was heartily glad to be rid of a monstrosity that did not properly connect with his truck.

The following Christmas was the last one for our hospital unit at Northam (1944) as news had come that the unit would be transferred to the eastern states. I was the official photographer at the various Christmas celebrations which were in effect "goodbye" to our Northam facilities. Everybody was interested in having some photographs as souvenirs of the Northam site and so it was necessary to have our films from the various group functions printed and duplicated to meet these requests. I put up notices requesting staff to come to our X-ray department and see the prints we had, and to write their name on a list indicating the number of the print that they would order. The costs were set out so that everybody knew what they would have to pay for the various enlargement sizes. The Northam photographic shop had worked with me in a very helpful way to provide fairly cheap rates for our order. Eventually when we had the lists ready I took them down to the photographer who proceeded with making the various enlargements. I had explained to the shop that I would be collecting the money as the prints were picked up so he parcelled them all up and handed them over to me for distribution and collection of the costs. It was quite a packet of photographs and I then put a notice up on notice boards that pre-ordered pictures could now be collected in the X-ray department.

What followed was one of the most shattering experiences I have ever had. I was summoned to immediately report to the Unit Officer who happened to be of German descent. He was Captain Carl .A..... who had been to the Middle East in the early fighting there and was just filling in time back in Australia with our unit. His main object of army life seemed to be to bully and humiliate Australian soldiers who had not been to the Middle East but had been serving only in Australia. The unit was closing down ready for the move to the Eastern States and many patients had already been transferred to the Hollywood Hospital . Wards were being closed and packing was proceeding apace. When I reached the orderly room it was in a chaotic state with records stacked here there and everywhere, some for proceeding with the unit, others to go into storage at army headquarters. The Sergeant Major was busy sawing pine boards for lids of packing cases that were lying around all over the place. When I arrived the Company Commander, Captain A....., was obviously a very harassed officer in a very bad mood. He immediately challenged me on what I had done by ordering the enlargements without already having the money for them. He shouted and swore at me for being such a cantankerous irresponsible idiot. I was literally thunderstruck and quite unsure of how to respond to his slander in the presence of numerous staff in the orderly room. He finally withdrew a small purse of coins from the safe and flung them at me across the room. I dodged the coins which slammed into the wall with him still raving and cursing my stupidity. He finally shouted "that's all the money we have in the photographic account and now you will have to personally pay for this outrageous mistake. The hospital cannot be responsible for your foolishness."

outfit to the side of the road and stop. We were appalled at the dangerous situation that had developed.

We rang transport headquarters reporting the damage and we had to wait until a repair truck with welding equipment and mechanics could arrive to put things right. While we were waiting I looked back up the hill and was stunned to see the swerving skid marks of the trailer and truck. I walked up the hill a couple of hundred metres to examine the skid marks while the corporal driver lay down on the front seat of the truck to have a snooze. While I was on the road an army staff car with a senior officer on board pulled up and asked me what had happened. I explained the situation to him when he cuttingly remarked "And you've left the army truck unattended". I coldly informed him that the driver was lying on the seat recovering from the shock of the mishap, so the officer proceeded on his way. Eventually the repair people arrived and commenced to straighten and weld the towing hitch into proper shape.

Now we were on our way albeit still moving in an unsafe way because of the absence of any braking on the heavy trailer. But it was a time of war and no one was able to decide how to solve this problem. This forced us to travel very slowly, allowing the X-ray unit to proceed ahead and disappear from view. Finally we reached the Prisoner of War camp and were admitted through the heavy gates. We set the equipment up under a clump of trees in order to have shade and were instructed on how the prisoners would be handled during the X-ray procedure.

There were two large groups, German and Italian, each needed an interpreter, but it was obvious that it would be advantageous for me to give the instructions to each prisoner in order to time the pressing of the button for the X-ray. The German interpreter was very helpful and carefully schooled me in the words I had to use, correcting my pronunciation until I had it right. One of the instructions needed was to tell the patient to stand with their feet well apart so that they would be in a comfortable, stable posture when standing in front of the screen. When I used my German words telling him to move his legs apart, nothing happened. The laughing interpreter came to me and explained that I had to shout the words "Fusse altzeineder" I was struck with this reflection on how the nazi soldiers were trained by staccato commands that were shouted at them. This is a common place occurrence when a command is given to a large group on the parade ground - simply so that everybody hears the command. But in a cosy medical situation when you were speaking to a patient two metres away Australian protocol always allowed for ordinary conversation and loudness. So I shouted the words and was startled to see the German soldier literally leap in moving his legs apart. So with the help of people in charge of the prisoners I was soon able to move quickly through the long lines of POWs. I then had to develop the films which were then examined with a magnifying glass by a medical officer and the few doubtful images were identified and these men brought back for a large X-ray film retake. Finally we were able to pack up and disconnect the wiring to the X-ray trailer unit and start moving back to Perth.

We were moving reasonably slowly but once more fell into the trap of a trifle too much speed for a sudden bend in the road leading to a bridge over a small creek. There was a repetition of the Greenmount episode, not quite so violent, but the trailer draw bar was broken again. All we could do was find a phone nearby and get the transport repair truck to come to our aid. Nearby was a farm house and the elderly couple had come out to see what our plight was. It was dusk and they very

I picked up the purse and fled from this uncouth officer. I was tempted to go to the CO (a very senior Medical Officer) and acquaint him of the abuse I had received. When I later met the Sergeant Major at meal time I asked him whether he would support me in my account of the situation, but he suddenly denied hearing anything, claiming that he was sawing wood and was not listening. He was obviously not willing to stand up against Captain A..... But I knew the staff and was personally acquainted with all who had ordered these enlargements. They included many Sisters from the wards, other NCO's and people all over the hospital. The difference was that I knew these people personally and Captain A..... never really knew anyone under his command; he was a born bully and he assumed that no one would want to honour their obligation to pay for the photographs when they could get them for nothing. I immediately set about collecting the fees for these photos. The X-ray work in our department had ceased and we were busy packing up so I had plenty of time to move quietly around checking with those people who had collected their prints and were going to pay later. (Few people in an army hospital walk around on duty with money in their pocket. There are no shops available unless you have a leave pass and leave the hospital unit.) Some of the Sisters took a little tracking down because of the broken routine of life with patients disappearing and packing to be done. Several times I was told "She has gone over to her quarters" When I got there she had left and had gone to see the Matron. Often she did not have her purse and promised to call in and pay me in the department. However, eventually all the payments due were collected and I triumphantly proceeded down to the township of Northam and paid the bill to the photographic shop. It was a simple commercial transaction. And lo and behold I had 7/6d surplus. I then resolved that since I had been made responsible for the supposed deficit, I could also claim the right to keep this small surplus. So I managed to hand back the purse with the coins to the orderly room when Captain A..... was not there and to proceed with my task of not only packing the goods and chattels of the X-ray Department but also supervising the storage in wooden packing cases all the medical gear associated with the operating theatres. Included in this important section were glass instrument cases, special operating apparatus, the operating table and the overhead lighting unit.

I was entrusted to see that this valuable equipment was safely packed for transport to the eastern states. The full packing cases were all labelled with the unit's name and the contents and were stored in the fleet of ambulances and in trucks. We had a team of men making the cases to suit the equipment and when packing them in the ambulance we had done an over-thorough job. We managed to pack so much into the ambulance that the springs were bent in the wrong direction, and the Deputy Director of Medical Services from Perth (Dr Trethowan), was careful to note the overloading of our vehicles and gently suggested distributing more goods on to the trucks. But he was very satisfied with the job we had done with the medical equipment which was to be entrained on flat tops to the eastern states.

One of my deep satisfactions when we finally reached New Britain and set up our hospital under canvas ,was that there were only two breakages discovered: one was a piece of heavy lead glass associated with our X-ray gear which had shattered because of the breaking of a perished leather strap holding it in its position, and the other was a broken china bedpan of World War I vintage which I had packed in a copper hot water urn overlooking the possibility of pressure upon it because it was a neat fit in the urn.

The 118 AGH[20] had a few chequered experiences during its stay at Northam. Fairly good timber and iron buildings had been quickly erected in rows for the wards. There was a long covered walkway right through the centre of these rows of buildings and the headquarters with the orderly room and CO's office were on each side of the main entrance which led through to the walkway. There were outlying buildings for engineering, and recreation facilities including a fine hall which was associated with Red Cross work and activity. Many concerts were held in this hall when sick patients in wheel chairs and others walking could be brought in to enjoy the items being presented. We had many visits from musical groups, top artists such as Mr Vaughan Handley the musical leader of the Perth Symphony Orchestra. We had lectures from visiting speakers on topical subjects and some of the concerts would include items from local army personnel.

Originally all staff had been living under tents, and during this period a violent winter storm had cut a pathway of destruction through the grounds of the hospital. Tents and personal washing hung on ropes had ended up in the branches of trees lining the Avon river nearby. Most of the Sisters tents had been destroyed, and the window over the bed of the Commanding Officer blew in on top of him as he was resting after an exhausting day of surgery, (Dr Hector Stuart). More drastic damage had occurred because at the time, it was feared that the Goldfield's water pipeline might be damaged by bombing and all water supplies lost. A number of huge water tanks had been ordered for ultimate connection to the gutters of the new buildings going up. These tanks had been stored in a large clear space adjacent to the Sergeant's tents. When I arrived a week or two later squashed and broken tanks formed an enormous stack of unusable junk. The Sergeant's headquarters building where they could relax during the evening and enjoy coffee or tea was built on sloping ground so that the end of the building was on two metre posts to hold it level. They told me that during the storm the building had been felt to lift up and down with the wind.

I lived in the tent lines during my stay and we used the showers of an ablution block some distance away. The toilets were also some distance away so that life was not an easy going comfort. But we had to be up and about for morning parade about 6.00 am before breakfast and many were the ribald comments when half dressed Sergeants were sleepily assembling still trying to adjust their clothing. We were rostered to undertake the duty of Orderly Sergeant one at a time which meant rising very early taking the Australian flag to the flag pole, assembling a group including the bugler and raising the flag during the sounding of reveille . This was the bugle call to alert all ranks that it was time to get up. The orderly sergeant had to spend the evening in the orderly room after his day's duties, when he would attend to phone calls and visits from civilian people.

On one such occasion when I was on duty I was getting the folding bed ready because I had to sleep in the orderly room next to the phone, there was a visit by an apologetic taxi driver. He explained to me that he had "one of our boys in the cab, who wasn't very well and would need help to be taken into the hospital". I went outside and opened the back door of the cab and a body fell out almost at my feet. It was the body of a lieutenant who was just about unconscious. He wasn't very big and I hoisted him up onto my shoulder and walked into the hospital, thanking the taxi driver who assured me that some of the patient's friends at the local hotel had already paid him for bringing him back. I tackled the long walk down the covered way to the officers' ward, but on a couple of occasions I had to pause and hold him over the wooden rail so that he could proceed with vomiting. He was in a drunken mess.

[20]No. 118 Australian General Hospital

I finally got him right down to the officers' ward and helped those on duty to put him into his bed explaining to them the situation. Coming back up the covered way I was suddenly startled by a woman's voice from the shadows of a doorway, "Are you going to put him on the charge sheet, Sergeant?" It was the Deputy Matron who in company with another senior nurse were completing their midnight ward rounds. She had observed the whole situation, but while I was disgusted with such results of over indulgence, I felt a bit sorry for this slightly built younger officer. So all I could reply was "I'll think about it, Matron" . I decided not to write up a detailed account in the orderly room record and simply said "a taxi called with a sick officer". I did not to take any further action, but I was then surprised to be stopped on my way into the Sergeants' Mess by the young Lieutenant now looking much more improved who accosted me and thanked me for helping him the previous evening. He must have learned about my identity from the Sisters in the ward and had me pointed out to him. I listened to his very sincere sounding thanks and had time to collect my thoughts. I then replied "That's all right Lieutenant, I was glad to help you last night. But do remember when you are in charge of other men who sometimes overdo their drinking at the pub don't be too hard on them, but encourage them to be better soldiers."

Chapter 12
The Years of World War II
Overseas Military Service

The hospital staff had been subdivided into several groups. There was a small forerunner group who departed early on the overland train and proceeded to Sydney to ensure that arrangements were well in hand for the accommodation of the rest of the hospital group. The main body of staff were to accompany the gear on the overland route at a later time, and finally there was the post-rear party who stayed behind to ensure that all the buildings and grounds were left in a scrupulously clean and hygienic state. I was posted to this party and after we saw the equipment transported on the motor vehicles down to the railway station to be entrained on the flat top trucks we said goodbye to the main body of staff who then departed in busloads to the Northam station to find their places in the passenger section of the train. Those of us who were left proceeded to inspect the buildings, clean and tidy, collect remaining rubbish and we soon reached a stage where we thought everything was shipshape and tidy. But the hygiene inspectors had to come and make a thorough inspection. They found hidden drains that we didn't know existed which needed cleaning and they discovered drains around the kitchen area which still contained a lot of floating grease. So we had to toil for a few more days to clean these places before final approval was given when we were free to pack up and leave the old Northam hospital site and return to Perth.

Departures from Western Australia were all handled by the Graylands Military camp and we were allowed a few days leave and issued with our train tickets and the times of departure from the Claremont railway station. On the day of departure I rose early to transport my kit bag, knap sack and other gear to the departure camp to save carrying it a fair distance from the train station at Claremont right over to the Graylands camp. I then raced back on the motor cycle to Wembley and parked the bike for the rest of the war in the garage. It was a very hurried departure and having said goodbye to Flo and young Graham I set out from home in Essex Street with Robert riding his tricycle beside me. I knew I barely had time to catch the trolley bus and a few houses from Grantham Street I hugged Rob and told him to look after his Mum while I was away and ran off turning around every now and then and waving to him still on his bike. He was still a little bewildered by it all, but managed a wave or two. This was early in 1945, Rob would have been 3 years old. I remember waving to him from the bus which was to be the last sight of my family for over a year. I left the bus near the Subiaco railway station, caught the next train down to Claremont and so eventually arrived at the Graylands camp. I collected my gear and typical of army movements, after all the hurry and scurry to be on time, we were left waiting for over two hours before transport for the afternoon train was arranged. On a side line of the Claremont railway station was the long troop train taking army personnel to the eastern states. Again there was some shuffling around before we departed. I was surprised to meet one of our preachers, Mr Roy Raymond who was farewelling his own son on the train and he promised to ring Flo and tell her that I was departing and was well. Later after I had returned I thanked him for doing that and he told me that Flo was crying as she spoke.

The train proceeded slowly in the mid afternoon through to Midland junction, over the Darling ranges and on to Northam. Here the train stopped again and I was thrilled to be greeted by Mr Charlie Hollett, one of the members of the Northam Church of Christ who had always been very

helpful and had often invited me to his home especially on one Christmas day. He had learned of my movements and was there to bid farewell, and when the train finally moved off he drove his car along the roads to a railway crossing on the other side of the town and as the train moved over the crossing I was able to wave to him again.

We settled down to the long overnight run to Kalgoorlie when we had to change trains for the overland trip across the desert. I was eventually attached to a medical officer as his assistant for the trip. He and an engineer were allotted a two berth compartment in very old rolling stock that was used for army trains. It was a very crowded train and I was squeezed in with the two officers. It soon occurred to me that as there were only two sleeping berths I would end up sleeping on the floor. But when evening came the engineer insisted he had brought his sleeping bag and was quite used to sleeping on the ground, so I had one of the bunks after all. There was a wash basin in the cabin and I remember the doctor quietly smiling at us and asking us would we mind him having a good wash. So we removed ourselves so that he could strip off and enjoy a cold wash.

On the way across the desert the train would stop for water and the medical officer would promptly move along the train inspecting the people in the carriages in order to help any who were sick or unwell. We had a lot of soldiers in goods carriages where the travelling was very rough, dust from the wheels surged up through the cracks in the floor, and they had to leave the sliding doors open for ventilation. Their toilet arrangements were very primitive consisting of a couple of large buckets in the corners. Some of these soldiers had been overseas and were not very fit. Many became unwell on this part of the journey. The medical officer was very concerned for their well being and we did many visits along the length of the train to inspect and help the sick. He was prescribing valium to all and sundry and I asked him why he was doing this. He turned to me and said "What else can I do, I have no other drugs. The best thing I can think of is to put them all to sleep for the rest of the journey!" We eventually staged for a short time at Adelaide when those proceeding to Melbourne were allotted their places on the next train to that city. I had time in Melbourne to visit the big army hospital at Heidelburg and there they had the very latest X-ray equipment in Australia. I spent a few hours in their department watching the X-ray work going through but I had finally to report back to the transport authorities and was given my ticket to Sydney for the following day's journey.

When I arrived in Sydney with the others of our rear party we were met by the Company Officer - Captain A..... He was in a very cheerful mood seeing the last of the staff arriving and greeted us quite jovially. When he spotted me he mentioned that he would collect the extra money from the photographic enterprise and I of course nodded in agreement. We arrived at our new camp south of Sydney at a place called Punchbowl. Here there were an enormous collection of buildings in an area known as Herne Bay, which was a local coastal name. These buildings for a very large hospital set up had been erected by the Australian authorities to comply with a demand for suitable accommodation for a large American hospital, at a place they specified as "Herne Bay". When the American leaders arrived they wanted to know the exact location of the hospital on the north Queensland coast, they were told that the hospital had been built south of Sydney! It turned out that there were two "Herne Bays!" and the Australian intelligence had selected the wrong spot. So these buildings were all empty with the exception of two Australian army units, our 118th AGH and the 101 AGH who were also staging in Sydney. Our job now was to inspect our gear, sort it out, ensure that it was labelled correctly with army codes and generally get ready for departure from Australia.

A wait and see policy then occurred when first it was us who were going overseas, and then it was the other group. The unit who were to stay in Australia was expected to unpack their gear and get ready to set up their hospital activities in some of these buildings in which we were staging. As decisions were altered no one knew who was to do what. Eventually the vacillation ceased and the official decision was made that we of the 118 AGH were to go overseas. While we were waiting in Sydney great celebrations for VE Day on 8th May 1945 were made in Sydney. There were marches of troops through the city and there was great relief that the Nazi regime had at last collapsed.

I had been attending services on a Sunday at the George Street Baptist church in Sydney. It was a very alive church and they welcomed visiting service men to their services and functions. Shortly after arrival in Sydney I had managed to catch a tram across the Sydney Harbour bridge which was my first sight of this striking engineering landmark. It was thrilling to come out of the tunnel toward the daylight and see the bridge looming up ahead until one was actually going through the towers surrounded by steel work high above the harbour waters. I had followed the construction of the bridge back in the early thirties and I was pleased to see it at last.

At the Baptist church I had heard about a special meeting and organ recital, but was unsure of the date and time. I called in to find out these facts and saw that another service was being held in the chapel a short distance from the street entrance. Deciding to wait until this service finished to make my inquiry I left my bag, military cape and hat outside the door of the chapel and slipped in through the doors to sit inside. A few minutes later the service ended and I rose to retrieve my belongings. To my dismay the bag had disappeared. The bag was a gift from my mother for my 21st birthday and I carried my German camera, films of the children and quite a few personal belongings that I had decided to take overseas. I found that the nearest Police station was in York Street nearby. When I reported the loss they were very sympathetic, but the old Sergeant looked at me and inquired "How long have you been in Sydney, lad?" I said "Two weeks". His reply was "When you've been here a little longer you will learn to stir the sugar in your coffee quickly or they will have that too." I never heard any further and I finished my war service with the regret of having no souvenir photographs of my trip overseas.[21] My search for another camera ended up with my purchase of an ancient English box camera and it was almost impossible to find film for this amateur work.

I am uncertain of where I was when the two atomic bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki[22]. But this momentous news followed in a few days by the surrender of Japan was a thrilling series of events. Later news from Japan told us of the horrific devastation and widespread human injury that followed the atomic explosions.

After several weeks of waiting we were assigned a ship which was to take us to New Guinea. This was a special hospital ship which was to transport all the gear and personnel of a field hospital from Australia to New Guinea. It was a full scale army hospital: 1200 bed capacity, complete with surgical operating theatres, x-ray unit, pharmacy, electrical generating plant, ambulances, motor trucks

[21] Photos taken during this period have now been found

[22] First atomic bomb on Hiroshima dropped on 6th August 1945. Second atomic bomb on Nagasaki dropped on 9th August 1945. Army records show that I left Sydney on 25th August 1945 and arrived in Jacquinot Bay on 10th September 1945. Japanese surrendered on ???

etc. There was a mountain of packing cases, about 20 motor vehicles, and another great heap of canvas marques and tents. All of this material had to be stored in the holds.

When the berth was announced some of us were assigned to the shipto supervise the loading of all the hospital gear. Then to our dismay we found we were up against a strike by the wharfies who were demanding danger money when handling army gear claiming that they had to load dangerous ammunition onto the ships. Of course when the army people received the ammunition later it was all handled by the troops, and eventually the infantry soldiers had a bandolier of live ammunition strapped across one shoulder for use in their firearm. Of course, they received no danger money, nor when they were being fired at by the enemy. The army authorities wasted no time arguing with the strikers: they simply sent in some infantry boys to load the hospital ship. The fact that our hospital never handled any ammunition was ignored by the wharfies but not by our staff who were disgusted with such an attitude in war time. The wharfies stood around on the wharf shouting and jibing at the army boys handling our gear and loading it by the ship's cranes. The soldiers gave back as much as they received, and there were times when we thought there was going to be a real stouch-up on the wharf. Fortunately it didn't come to that and our gear was quite steadily loaded into the ship's holds.

I was personally in charge of the X-ray gear and the medical material which included the operating theatres and some of the ward equipment. The most important items for the setting up of an X-ray department overseas was of course some spare X-ray tubes. These were very expensive and, of course, difficult to order from a remote location. I had two spare X-ray tubes in special boxes where they were suspended on steel springs so that they would not be damaged by droppage or other impacts. I spoke to the Captain about the fragility of these two items and he suggested that they be stored in his room near the bridge of the ship. So I was able to personally carry these precious boxes and lodge them in a corner of the room where they were surrounded by some other boxes.

All our hospital staff were outraged at the hold-up, but eventually the calm planning of the army succeeded and all ranks were able to come aboard and settle in. The nurses and female staff were all allotted the better quarters upstairs, with male staff down in the depths of the ship. Water in the bathrooms was cold sea water only. There was a trickle of warm water in the wash basins, and cool drinking water was only available from spring-controlled fawcetts up on deck, where our water bottles could be filled.

Eventually we sailed from the quay which was on the west side of the Sydney Harbour Bridge near to the city. As our ship moved out and turned under the bridge we began to receive many salutations from other ships and ferries moving past us in the busy Sydney harbour. All the way to the heads ships were sounding their sirens and even some motorists on nearby shores were giving us a greeting with their horns. When we passed through the heads onto the open sea we felt we were really on our way, but we had only proceeded about 10 miles when the ship slowed down and we learned that there was some malfunction of the engines. Soon we had turned about and were proceeding back into Sydney harbour at a very slow speed. As we moved into the harbour we were again met with many sirens as though we were heroes returning from the islands. We felt a bit shamefaced about all this since we had only been away for a couple of hours. We returned and tied up at the wharf once more. We all felt very deflated, but all the hospital staff were given immediate overnight leave

because life on a crowded troop ship was not always comfortable and the shipping people needed to conserve their allotted supplies of food and water for the real trip northwards after repairs.

I proceeded to North Sydney with an overnight bag to the home of the preacher of the Falcon Street Church of Christ, Mr Paternoster, who was a very senior minister whom I had got to know and asked whether I could have shower and a clean up before going back to the ship. They were very kind and after I had enjoyed a shower they invited me to stay for a delicious evening meal after which I enjoyed the company of some of the church young people. This time of relaxed fellowship was much appreciated, as we had all been very busy on the ship finding our way about and doing our allotted tasks. Meals had been scrappy as the ship's kitchens were not fully functional and we never did locate the bathrooms which were well below the main deck level. The Sergeants were accommodated in 5 tier bunks which had been erected in a wide covered passage way leading on to the foredeck. I had secured the top bunk and had simply put my personal things there and gone on with the work of stowing the hospital equipment in the holds. I think we were able to secure snacks from a nearby army depot on the wharf.

When I reported the next morning to the ship I found that the engineers had located the trouble and expected to have the engines functioning again by midday. They achieved this and after lunch the ship set sail again, once more drawing much tooting and cheering from ships and people on ferries as we proceeded eastwards towards the heads. Again we experienced the swell and large waves of the ocean, but this time we were able to keep going and turned northwards toward Brisbane. I was glad to lie down because I was not a good sailor but this was only very mild weather compared with what we were to meet later. Over night and next morning we proceeded on our way to Brisbane where we threaded our way up the comparatively narrow river to finally tie up at one of the wharves east of the city. We were all given a day's leave to visit Brisbane while the ship replenished its supplies of water, fuel and other things. We were also going to have additional troops embarking as passengers to the islands. I spent a few hours in Brisbane enjoying the sights and noting the large number of American service men walking the streets. One of the popular new things that had been introduced for the Americans was popcorn. I bought a small packet of popcorn, but found that it was soaked in butter and was very greasy, so I didn't eat much of it. I found my way back to the ship and late in the afternoon we proceeded eastwards toward the ocean, and so at last we were on our way to the islands in the north.

Next day we continued to move northwards out to sea from the great barrier reef. Many more troops who had embarked at Brisbane. Every deck and every passage way was full of sitting and sprawling bodies playing cards and chattering together. It was a difficult and tricky procedure when trying to get from part of the ship to another and I quickly learned that troop ships did not have much spare room. During our second day out I was contacted by one of the sisters from the nursing staff and told there was one of the new soldiers who had come aboard at Brisbane who had asked her whether I was aboard in the hospital group. She had told him that I was and after she had unfolded a scrap of paper she announced his name - George Cugley, one of my old friends from the Lake Street church. I was very excited to learn about this and set about going around the ship to try to locate him. But this was a bit difficult as there were several hundred soldiers travelling to the north. Eventually I ran across him and we both greeted each other very enthusiastically and spent the rest of the day together. George was part of a group of transport people and was the driver of one of their vehicles. To meet an

and went out onto the foredeck. It was pitch dark as we travelling in black out conditions and after latching the door behind me I proceeded to enjoy the downpour of rain in the warm tropical night and to soak myself feeling the enjoyment of a fresh water shower. Then it happened - I dropped the soap and heard it clunk on the steel deck. But where was it? I got down on my hands and knees groping for it and then became aware of being in a patch of pale light. Glancing over my shoulder I noticed a hooded torch being shone on me from the bridge area above. I quickly located the lost cake of soap in the scuppers and got back through the door to dry myself with my towel. Ever since I have often wondered what the thoughts of the officer who was carefully shining the hooded torch to see what was going on below him on the deck in the wee small hours, were, when he only observed a naked human body crawling around the floor deck in the rain. He must have concluded that he had a real daft lot of passengers aboard. But I felt fine after the shower and resumed my sleep. There was only salt water in the taps of the bathroom, except one small basin which was reserved for cleaning one's teeth. Around the deck were special spring loaded taps surrounded by curved steel bars so that only our army flasks could be inserted under the tap for refilling with drinking water. In this way there was strict control of the consumption of water and wastage was avoided. However I did manage some further "showers" by borrowing another flask and proceeding to the bathroom in the bowels of the ship toward midnight when the rush had finished. I was able to enjoy a salt water bath and then trickle fresh water from the flasks to remove the salt. I found this quite satisfactory.

It was thrilling to approach a tropical island and see the palm trees and thick vegetation almost to the beach as we approached Milne Bay. This is a huge bay many miles across with long arms of land stretching out southwards into the sea, at the southern tip of New Guinea. We proceeded into the bay where it was beautifully calm and went and docked at a war time wharf where the ship was able to replenish its fresh water supply. We were there for a few hours but there was very little activity, only a few small naval launches which were attending to visiting ships like ours. All army activity had ceased in this area and the Japanese had long since been pushed back northwards. Our ship did not stay long and soon proceeded out of the bay and again swung around into a north westerly direction along the coast.

We passed the D'Entrecasteaux islands, one of which had a large volcanic mountain. Proceeding further north through the Solomon Sea we called in at Lae and then around a peninsular to Finschafen where we again paused and were able to go ashore. We were dropping troops at their various destinations and finally cruised along the north east coast to Wewak. It was at Wewak that we dropped most of the remaining troops. At Wewak during a fairly lengthy stop I was able to discuss some military politics with an engineering officer who had come on board. He had been at Wewak for a period and maintained that the whole of recent efforts by the Australian Army in Borneo and here at Wewak was pointless and unnecessary in the war effort. He emphasised how helpless the Japanese were in the New Guinea jungles cut off from all their supply lines and Japanese Headquarters, without any shipping or aerial support. He was sure that they could have been left until after the Japanese surrender. So eventually the ship turned around and returned to the passage way between New Guinea and New Britain.

We then turned eastwards and sailed along the southern coast of New Britain to Jacquinot Bay, where our hospital was to be set up. All the hospital staff proceeded to disembark in an orderly way and were taken ashore in small launches with their personal gear. Over the next day or two all the gear

old friend on a troop ship was quite a thrilling experience, and later when the nursing sister asked me had I found my friend I was able to impart to her some of the excitement I felt. George told me later that he was at one time in a large audience of soldiers who heard the wonderful singing of Gracie Fields from England. This was an outstanding experience to all the soldiers in the great audience that were privileged to hear this wonderful singer.

On a troop ship there is always what they call "the ship's staff" who are soldiers who have nothing to do with the running of the ship, but everything to do with maintaining discipline among army personnel. The officers and crew of the ship are not allowed to direct or correct the troops on board, but must work through "the ship's staff". The Captain of the ship would convey all his directions and expectations to the officer of this group, who, in turn would instruct the Sergeant Major to see that it was done. This Sergeant Major turned out to be a very officious bully who constantly barked and complained about everything. He allotted duties to all and sundry and I was allotted the task of supervising the cleanliness of the foredeck and nearby companionway where we had our bunks. It was a simple task and I coped for a day or two, getting all the cigarette butts, scraps of paper and wrappings from lollies which were scattered about these areas swept up and disposed of in the bins. But after the third day we began crossing the Coral Sea and as it turned out were about to enter a very stormy area, when the ship encountered huge seas and gale force winds. For two days and nights the ship rolled excessively and only made slow progress through this storm swept area. I was violently sea sick and very miserable and had nothing to eat for two days.

Once while visiting the dining room to get a cup of tea I saw one of the expert stewards who was setting food on the table go sprawling on the floor with the food he carried. I was lying exhausted on my bunk ready to rush across to the ship's rail when above the noise of the waves and wind the stentorian voice of the Sergeant Major began bellowing my name. Others pointed to where I was lying on the bunk and he came over and dressed me down in front of everyone around for not attending to the cleaning of my part of the ship that morning. I tried to tell him that I was too busy vomiting to think of doing the cleaning but he was in a fury and left me with no option but to attend to it immediately.

During the storm I found a seat in the middle of the ship by the stairway leading upstairs which was the place where passengers entered the ship. The doors, of course, were closed, but looking through the glass during the rolling of the ship I alternately saw huge waves and later the clouds in the sky. When the storm abated I was able to eat some food and to feel much better.

There were notice boards around the ship which gave us the progress of our voyage and where we would be travelling next day. One of these notices indicated that we would sight land about mid morning and everybody was gazing ahead trying to be the first to see the expected landform. During the morning some shouts went up from keen eyed people who thought they could see the distant land. Sure enough it was presently visible for all to see and we found ourselves approaching Milne Bay.

Following the storm I had gone to bed and fallen asleep but was woken by the loud clanging of a steel door leading to the foredeck. I got up to close and latch the swinging door and saw that it was raining heavily. Since there was no fresh water available for showers or bath I thought this was a good opportunity. So I slipped back to my bunk, procured a cake of soap, divested myself of pyjamas

and equipment we had brought was unloaded from the holds and taken ashore in barges. It was planned to set the hospital up on a flat area of land which the engineers had prepared with huge drains traversing the site 2 metres deep which were needed to cope with the deluge of frequent heavy rainstorms. Several small walk bridges enabled foot traffic to move across these drains because of this heavy rain in the monsoon season, but we did not experience such wet conditions for the brief period we were there.

The male staff were accommodated in large native huts with thatched roofs built with slender poles with low side walls less than 2 metres high covered with tropical palm leaves, and with a large space above up to where the sloping roof formed large eaves at the sides. This space was to provide adequate ventilation in the steamy jungle conditions. We set up our stretchers and mosquito net and we were all warned to invert our army boots and shake out any creepy crawlies that may have settled in the boot during the night time. The possibility of thrusting one's foot on top of a scorpion was thus avoided. We were also instructed to chase out any lurking mosquitoes from the mosquito net interior before tucking it under the horse hair mattress on the stretcher, and to avoid allowing any part of our body to rest against the mosquito net. We did not wear pyjamas and only needed a sheet to cover us during the warm nights. Sometimes, just before dawn we would pull up a blanket. But once the sun had arisen the temperature began to rise again where it always reached the high 90's (Fahrenheit).

After dark the jungle environment became a very noisy place. Hosts of insects and other living things made their noises and my first impression was to doubt the possibility of sleep with this unexpectedly noisy background. I was quickly dismayed when a loud staccato sound drowned out the background buzz and which seemed to be somewhat like a frog's croaking. I was impelled to get my torch, get up and investigate the source of this disturbance. I searched under the stretcher without finding the offender and tried again to get some sleep. But this piercing noise continued in the darkness, although it had stopped while I was flashing the torch. There were two or three further investigations at a greater distance from the stretcher and near the edge of the hut I eventually found a monstrous toad, as big as the palm of one's hand squatting complacently and concluded that this was my tormentor. I hunted for a piece of wood and managed to roll this monster under the wall where I tried to dispatch it without success. Imagine my amazement when the same piercing noise commenced again. This time I made a much more thorough search under the stretcher and eventually found in the torch light a tiny frog only as big as one's thumb nail. It could easily have squatted on a 20 cent coin, and was on the leg of the stretcher right beneath my pillow. I removed it and it proceeded to make prodigious leaps until it was quite some distance away. It was a light green colour and must have been one of the noisiest of the frog clan. However at last I was able to get some sleep, after this hectic introduction to living in the tropical jungle. All my nearby companions in this hut were at least appreciative of my efforts.

Being free of hospital duties we were able to spend our time in leisurely exploration of the coastline. Nearby were extensive reefs extending well out into the sea. At low tide we were able to walk over considerable areas of reef which were strewn with empty shells, some of them being very attractive. I was able to collect quite a number of the beautiful cowrie shells as well as a few of the other large shells from this tropical reef. We also explored the empty encampments of an AIF Division which had been active in the area for some time prior to the surrender of Japan. When we went by jeep or truck a little further eastwards we saw a miniature Japanese sea plane which had

brought the General of the Japanese forces in Rabaul down to Jacquinot Bay to sign the local treaty of surrender

On another trip further east we spent a lovely afternoon at the mouth of a small river with a strong flow of beautiful fresh water from the rain forest emerging between two long sand spits into the ocean. We all enjoyed an hour or two swimming, and it was thrilling to plunge into the river and be quickly washed down to the mouth where we met the waves of the salt water. The difference between the buoyancy of the fresh and the salt water was quite noticeable and after surfing back to the beach at one side of the river's mouth, we were able to repeat the exercise several times.

At this time of our movement in the tropical climate we had all discarded our socks and wore our army boots directly on our feet. I remember when crossing a gully nearby we had to carefully walk on the trunk of a tree from one edge to the other. It was a curious experience because the trunk bent below the surface of the water and consequently our army boots were drenched with water. But this was no real problem because in the tropical heat the oily leather dried very quickly. I also remember when exploring the deserted army encampments, feeling how much unrecorded history was elapsing in these corners of the New Britain islands. We went through one of the big kitchens and saw many utensils and unopened tins of food lying about. Army movements are always very hurried affairs. We saw all the deserted facilities where thousands of men had been previously living. We also were shown a spot a short distance from the encampment where regular machine gun patrols had been set up among some trees and noticed the piles of empty brass shells from the machine gun used in warding off Japanese groups.

At this stage the Japanese surrender[23] had taken effect and contact had been made with the local Japanese Commandant of each of the numerous forces scattered throughout the south western Pacific. In each case a high ranking officer of the British or American armies was required to officially accept the surrender from the local Japanese commander and in a public ceremony officially accept his sword as a token of surrender. It must have been terribly humiliating to the proud Japanese and many historic samurai swords were handed over in this fashion. As a result of the Japanese code of war, all officers and NCOs were also required to hand in their swords to the allied army groups. In this way there were piles of swords for distribution to the Australian troops. I was allotted a dilapidated officer's sword, and I also purchased a mass produced NCO's sword from another soldier who didn't want it. This type of sword had a cast-metal handle instead of the more elaborate wooden handles with braid and other decorative devices that characterised the samurai swords. The sword allotted to me was in its long sheaf and had a very fine undamaged blade. I gave the simple NCO's sword to one of Joan's boys who was very keen on possessing one and sold the better Officer's sword among saleable things when we left Essex Street Wembley to live in Karrinyup. The original surrender of the nation had taken place on the 2nd September 1945 and was signed on the deck of the U.S.S. Missouri, one of America's greatest battle ships - in Tokyo Bay. This had been arranged in a spectacular piece of wartime theatre by the famous General Douglas McArthur, General Blaimey being the Australian representative who signed for Australia. An interesting feature of this ceremony was that it was signed for America by one of the leading Admirals of their fleet, and was not signed personally by the famed General McArthur. He stood nearby watching everything with an eagle eye. He was noted for his

[23] 15th August 1945 was the date the Emperor ordered troops to surrender. 2nd September 1945 was the date the surrender was signed on the U.S.S. Missouri.

imperious bearing and speech, and was later to be appointed as the Supreme Generalissimo of the future Allied Forces to occupy Japan.

After two or three weeks pausing at this delightful spot on the south coast of New Britain, we were surprised to learn that instead of setting up our hospital there we were to be transferred immediately to Rabaul, the great harbour and principal town at the north tip of the island. We had to move by small ships, and most of the personnel were taken by ferries. But with others I was appointed to look after the more important parts of our hospital equipment which was to be transported in a motorised barge. We supervised the loading of our equipment and five or six of us with our personal gear quickly went on board as deck cargo for the 30 hour journey up the north east coast to the famous harbour of Rabaul. We had to look after ourselves on army rations while on board and since this vessel was only designed to carry goods, no provision for the toiletry needs of deck passengers had even been considered. All we could expect was to have our hip water flasks refilled with drinking water. Fires were unthinkable so there was no tea or coffee. In order to meet demanding toiletry needs we had to remove our scanty clothing and climb over the sides onto the external whaling piece and while clinging to the rail in an acrobatic manoeuvre, satisfy our needs. There were buckets with a rope on the handle so that we could pull up buckets of sea water for washing ourselves on deck. In the tropical climate this was no hardship, but in climbing across the stacks of marque poles lashed together on the deck my head on one occasion collided with a heavy swinging boom swinging from one of the masts. However, eventually after an interesting trip in quiet coastal waters which did not cause sea sickness we moved in to the great harbour of Rabaul.

The skyline was dominated by three huge volcanic cones, the central peak being the highest and this was called "The Mother" mountain. The others were the "south" and "north" daughters respectively. The Mother was still active with a thin column of smoke curling upwards from its crater. As we approached closer to the township the result of the devastating wartime bombing of this town became apparent with the destroyed buildings and wharves in the foreground. The Japanese had made Rabaul one of the chief centres of their military activity early in the war years, with the result that it became a prime focus for aerial bombing. It was later revealed that there was still nearly 100,000 Japanese troops concentrated in the vicinity of the Gazelle Peninsular. At the surrender only a small group of Commandos had gone to Rabaul to commence the taking procedure. We eventually were taken by truck northward to a site chosen for our hospital by the Commandos in an extensive coconut palm plantation. This was adjacent to a lovely beach facing west. A few cleared spaces were made by an engineering company so that clumps of large marques could be erected for hospital accommodation. The advance party of men were accommodated in an army marquee while all around us tents and small structures for army purposes were being put up. Our tents were erected with the poles on small stumps in the ground so that the canvas at the sides did not meet the ground. This was to provide continual air space for coolness. Mosquito netting over each individual stretcher was compulsory and a further feature in the fight against malaria was the administration of atebrin tablets which were distributed and swallowed at the early morning parade at 6.00 am. These tablets eventually made our skin take on a distinctly yellow hew.

While waiting for our gear to be transported to this site we spent two or three days exploring the surroundings. Nearby in one of the ridges leading from the lower parts of the North Daughter, we discovered some tunnels dug by the Japanese for the storage of ammunition and bombs. We had to

use our torches to explore these tunnels and toward the end of our first expedition I was surprised to brush against a large bunch of ripe bananas hanging from the roof of the tunnel. It was in pitch darkness and I quickly surmised that the Japanese must have lodged it there for the fruit to ripen. So I unfastened the wire holding it up and laboriously carried this find back to our marque. It was shared around and the bananas were delicious.

The next day when we explored a little further from this tunnel we were surprised to find some Australian army tents only a short distance from the other entrance of the tunnel. One of the Australian soldiers told us they were members of a commando company which was arranging for the imprisonment of the huge number of Japanese soldiers in that area. While talking to him I suddenly realised that it was probably these Australian fellow soldiers who had carefully deposited the bananas for ripening in the tunnel. We did not let on to what had happened and I often chuckle at what their probable reactions must have been about the thieving compatriots in the adjacent hospital unit.

There were a lot of tunnels dug in the soft volcanic earth and it was very exciting to explore a few. It turned out that the Japanese had excavated many kilometres of similar tunneling for the storage of their limited accumulation of army supplies in reaction to the terrible bombing of earlier times. They had been cut off from all contact with Japan, and had existed for three years on supplies which they had brought with them. Their only food supplies had been vegetables locally grown by conscripted native people, whom they had typically bullied and enslaved. We later saw many cases of native men with severe wounds on their legs and buttocks inflicted by enraged Japanese guards who accused them of laziness, seized their shovels and slashed them with the sharpened blades.

At this stage the hospital gear commenced to arrive intermittently by motor trucks from the wharf some eight or ten kilometres away. One particular night we were all on duty because the trucks were arriving throughout the night. The engineers had supplied some electric lighting to a large open space adjacent to the road, and when a truck suddenly appeared we had to help unload the packages and stack them in heaps according to their contents. In between times we stretched ourselves on some trestle tables and managed to doze before the next truck arrived.

On one of our rest days three of us decided to climb the North Daughter. It was quite a formidable mountain with smooth sides of volcanic soil covered with dense tropical growth. This volcano had been inactive for a long time, and the tropical soil resultant from the old deposits of ash together with the regular rainfall made the whole area very fertile. However in the flat areas adjacent to the mountain slopes where the natural jungle had been cleared for coconut plantations and gardens the volcanic soil during dry periods became an intolerable source of dust. For our ascent of the extinct volcano we had put in our pack tins of bully beef, some carrots and a tin of fruit for our lunch. There were regular paths upwards and we made good progress toward the top. Every now and again we would have to halt because our clothing had been hooked by the large pointed barbs of the "Wait awhile" vine. It was very aptly named and all you could do was to immediately stop, grope for the hooks and careful free your clothing from its clutch. It was a narrow path and the tendrils of this vine just waved around and were difficult to avoid.

The thick undergrowth cleared a little as we approached the top and we discovered a large tree with wooden ladders attached to the trunk leading up to some small wooden platforms constructed

under the top foliage of the tree. From these somewhat rickety platforms we had a panoramic view of the harbour of Rabaul, and the ruins of the township. Our high viewpoint encompassed the whole harbour and the neighbouring hills. It was obvious that this hidden platform had been set up by the Japanese as one of their key observation posts during the period of the incessant air raids. They must have had portable radios so that they could alert machine gun posts and search light facilities with information about the incoming planes. The Australian Military authorities had been very surprised at the enormous number of Japanese soldiers concentrated on the north tip of New Britain - it far exceeded their expectations being close to 100,000 men.

On another visit we discovered how cleverly the Japanese had used the volcanic peaks for the defence of Rabaul against allied assault. We inspected a very heavy artillery gun captured at the fall of Singapore cleverly set into a dug out emplacement on the hillside overlooking Rabaul harbour. It was roofed with heavy coconut-palm logs with earth and vegetation covering the whole site. The muzzle of the gun was directed toward the shipping approaches of the harbour with only a moderate elevation above the horizontal and it was not observable from the air.

At a neighbouring site we discovered a short curved tunnel through a ridge on the mountainside. Light curved rails had been laid through this tunnel to small platforms at either end on which they moved a steel carriage for an anti aircraft gun. They could also move a powerful search light fed by a diesel electric plant set up in a cave a short distance down the hillside. This enabled them to use the gun and search light on either side of the ridge, or if attacked by a war plane the weapons could rest safely out of site in the centre of the tunnel. We were astonished at the ingenuity of the Japanese fighters, and the skillful engineering enabling them to outwit the usual aerial attacks. This anti aircraft gun and supporting searchlight for night operation could function on either side of the ridge, or disappear entirely from view.

Most of our party indulged in exploration of these Japanese military arrangements, and the evening discussions about what we were finding often were very lively. We also had observed the barrels of heavy artillery guns which had been captured at Singapore, or elsewhere which were lying in the grass at certain points along side the main road. Many reports came to us about what others had found in the districts around Rabaul. My boss, Major Norman Long, took me in a jeep to a nearby Japanese Hospital where we were cordially welcomed and shown through the buildings by a smiling Japanese officer who spoke fluent English. This collection of huts demonstrated the sad end of modern warfare. They had not been able to take any X-ray pictures for over 2 years as they had no film supplies. Likewise, they were cut off from drugs and medicines, and sterilising solutions, so they could only do superficial patchwork surgery.

We both brought back two or three small souvenirs from this excursion. The Major retrieved a small mobile X-ray Unit which could be carried and used at the bedside. It was very neatly built and since all this material was going to be abandoned it was of not further interest to the Japanese who were to be shortly shipped back to the Japan mainland. We observed how poor the performance of the Japanese army was in maintaining equipment in working order. Trucks were abandoned by the roadside when they broke down and in many places they had no electricity supply because of the lack of gasoline for their generators, or because of break downs which they could not fix. Our soldiers came across some big diesel sets which were not working and some were trying to devise some

scheme of returning to these islands after their discharge from the army in order to take possession or such valuable engineering units for profitable disposal down in Australia. I didn't think much of their chances of carrying out such a scheme as army engineering units ordered to clear up the Japanese camps would certainly prevent anything of this nature.

It was in this interim period before our hospital was set up that some men from an American submarine came along our road in a jeep and asked us to guide them to any interesting sites in the locality. Some of us volunteered to be their guides and I took one who wanted to see the Japanese tunnels. It was a hot day, of course, and by the time we reached one of the most interesting tunnels in our neighbourhood I paused and told him I was thirsty. I was unfastening my water flask hanging from my belt on the right side, when he came back with his flask and urged me to drink from his. As a hospital worker I felt it was unwise to "mix the germs" so to speak, when each of us could use his own water container. But he continued to press his upon me. By this time I had got my flask out and I thanked him while explaining my reasons. He laughed heartily and took an enormous drink from his large flask, and it turned out that his contained beer and not water. However, he was very impressed with the tunnel and its military items stored here and there and although the dark tunnels were a poor substitute for the open air which the submarine men always looked forward to, he enjoyed himself very much.

As our hospital equipment was brought from the wharves we were kept very busy arranging our facilities to be in working order before the arrival of patients. It was decided to set our X-ray equipment up in a suitably arranged tent rather than wait for the building to be erected where it would eventually be installed. The poles of the tent were fixed to tall stumps set in the ground so as to give us plenty of head room and it was easy to set our machine in position on the flat ground. I had planned to place our portable dark room a short distance away under the shelter of some palm trees and had been working since my arrival at gathering bits and pieces which would enable my plan to be quickly put into effect. In early walks I had picked up a piece of wooden grating lying on the beach which had been washed up from one of the half sunken ships which littered the shore lines of Rabaul harbour. I had also retrieved from the burned out power house of the Rabaul township some workable switch gear to handle the electrical supply from the hospital generating plant. The switches were known as "knife" switches heavily made with all the live parts quite open, and while somewhat dangerous for the uninitiated person, were very convenient to use. I bound it with electrical wiring to one of the posts of the tent and when the electricians brought in their supply they connected it to this switch. I was able to connect the X-ray machine in the proper way to the same switch. The blades of this switch were a very heavy copper bar and would carry a very heavy current.

As was customary, I usually went for a swim at 4.00pm in order to be clean and cool for the evening meal in the Sergeant's Mess. Imagine my frustration when returning to the X-ray set up after the evening meal to see that the Major had been busy and had started to erect the dark room right adjacent to the X-ray tent where it would sit in the hot sun all day and where the X-ray films in the dark room would be fogged by the side scatter of the X-ray plant when it was used with a patient. I felt very cross that the radiologist never bothered to consult his technician in these technical matters. There was still an hour of sunlight remaining so I furiously unbolted all the bits and pieces and transferred the panelling over to my clump of trees where I had already dug a U shaped trench with the wooden grating over the end where the dark room would be built. I reconstructed the walls before

dark descended upon us. Next day I continued to cover the rest of the tent with odd pieces of sheet metal and palm branches so as to exclude sunlight from bouncing through the wooden grill at the end of the trench. I also arranged light proof outlets in the ceiling and put a large tent fly on posts over the whole contraption to shed the rain. In this way cool air would pass through the cool ground along the trench and up through the grill to ventilate the closed room during the development of films.

The Major was quite put out that I had dismantled what he had put up, but I patiently pointed out how inappropriate it was to have our supplies of X-ray films in a position close to the X-ray machine where they would inevitably fogged by the X-ray rays. Moreover he had not given a thought to the conditions in which his technician would have to operate in a small airtight enclosure in the hot sun. It was necessary to arrange for ventilation and much better to have it in the shade of trees. I used heavy seisalcraft supplied in large rolls to completely surround the four walls of the dark room (with the exception of the doorway) so that light could not enter between the joints. The doorway was covered with a heavy divided black curtain and the dark room proved quite a successful structure.

One of the difficult factors that we discovered was that our apparatus had to work in a dust laiden atmosphere. The fine volcanic soil sent clouds of dust into the air whenever it was disturbed by human feet or wheeled motor vehicles. Our X-ray set up was right beside one of the internal roadways, so that patients could be brought by ambulance for X-ray. Every time a vehicle passed by we were covered with a cloud of dust. When you wiped it off the polished top of the X-ray table to be ready for the next patient it would become dust covered again in the next two or three minutes. The authorities had to get water tankers with sprays at the back to continually move around these driveways spraying the soil in order to minimise the dust hazard.

Imagine our dismay after a few days operation with the watering helping to keep the dust down at finding one day that all the water tankers had disappeared. We made immediate enquiries, and were informed that they had been told to operate at the aerodrome where General Blaimey was to land that morning. They had to minimise the dust for the comfort of the General, while the staff and patients of the hospital worked in a cloud of volcanic dust. We were notified that the General would arrive at the hospital at a certain hour and we assumed he was coming to inspect our set up. It was supposed to be an important occasion so some of us went to the far side of the main road where the great man would arrive at the entrance to the hospital. A large marquee had been erected just off the road where the senior medical officers of the hospital would meet the visiting General. A red carpet had been laid out for him to walk from the car to the marquee and it was obvious that he was to be given a reception with refreshments in this marque. Presently the big car with the important flag of the General arrived and he was ushered into the marquee by the Colonel of the hospital. We continued to wait expecting that he would be proceeding to some of the wards where patients were being nursed and we were dismayed when after about half an hour he returned to the car and departed. He obviously was not interested in the patients, and the staff were quite disappointed.

Our first patient was a Japanese soldier who had been injured on the wharf while helping to unload the heavy bundles of canvas for our hospital. They had a team of POW's helping to handle our heavy gear and the Japanese supervisors where in charge of the arrangement. The trucks could not be brought right up to the stacks of material, and the way they operated was to have a couple of Japanese soldiers on the high stack passing each bundle of canvas downwards to the shoulders of a soldier

standing ready on the wharf. He then would stagger over to the truck with the load on his back and dump it onto the tray for others to handle. This poor chap had been waiting to receive his load when his colleagues at the top of the stack decided to test his strength. They tossed the bundle into the air so that it would fall upon him with quite a thump. He was quite unprepared and it caught him off balance, flattened him to the ground crushing his chest. He was obviously in terrible pain, but never uttered a sound. We had to take several pictures of his chest turning him onto each side as well as lying on his back and then on his chest. These manoeuvres with broken ribs are terribly difficult and we felt awful at asking him to do it. Eventually he returned by ambulance to the ward and I proceeded to develop the films. Imagine my dismay at finding no images at all on any of the film. All the exposures had been faulty and I closely examined the machine to find the reason. Presently I discovered an isolated switch on the frame of the machine in the wrong setting. This switch was very rarely used and I had neglected to check its position. We had to get the poor patient into the ambulance a second time and come for a repeat of all the painful movements. I felt positively awful at subjecting this quiet sufferer to this additional agony. The films showed that he suffered several broken ribs.

We also had among our early patients some Catholic nuns who had been captured at their mission by the Japanese and who had been subjected to a lot of shameful mishandling while they were prisoners of war. Several native people who had been injured while in work parties for the Japanese invaders were also treated for injuries at the hospital. And of course, there was the sprinkling of injuries received by our Australian army people since their arrival after the surrender.

After a few weeks of operation we were able to pack up our gear and move in to a building which the engineers had prepared near the operating theatres. It was a repetition of my procedure when moving into the new department at Northam. I spent my rest day (a whole Sunday) setting up the control of the X-ray machine behind a special lead lined screen, so that the operator was protected from physical damage from radiation scatter. We were kept busy examining many sick POW's who had been rounded up during the takeover from the Japanese. There was quite a large number of sick and injured Japanese soldiers among the ninety thousand who were now our prisoners. Until shipping could be organised to return these large numbers back to Japan our Australian authorities were responsible under the Geneva Convention for their welfare and treatment.

After moving in to the timber building erected by the engineers we settled down to a routine of handling the X-ray cases. We had a regular morning session for the examination by barium meal of stomach and bowel disorders. This involved the patient swallowing a quantity of powdered barium sulphate mixed with water to form a porridge. Because it is opaque to the X-ray beam it gives a very clear image of the outline of the stomach or bowel which is being examined in the darkened room by means of a fluorescent screen. The radiologist can manoeuvre the patient so that any anomalies are clearly obvious when the screening in the dark is interrupted and an X-ray picture is taken which clearly displays any abnormal outlines. When these films are developed the radiologist can compare his notes of the patient's replies to his questions with the evidence now available from these X-ray films. Gastric ulcer was a very common complaint among the older soldiers and when discovered would be the reason for the patient being returned to Australia forthwith for medical treatment. The afternoon was filled with minor casualty cases involving broken bones, injured spines and other

standing ready on the wharf. He then would stagger over to the truck with the load on his back and dump it onto the tray for others to handle. This poor chap had been waiting to receive his load when his colleagues at the top of the stack decided to test his strength. They tossed the bundle into the air so that it would fall upon him with quite a thump. He was quite unprepared and it caught him off balance, flattened him to the ground crushing his chest. He was obviously in terrible pain, but never uttered a sound. We had to take several pictures of his chest turning him onto each side as well as lying on his back and then on his chest. These manoeuvres with broken ribs are terribly difficult and we felt awful at asking him to do it. Eventually he returned by ambulance to the ward and I proceeded to develop the films. Imagine my dismay at finding no images at all on any of the film. All the exposures had been faulty and I closely examined the machine to find the reason. Presently I discovered an isolated switch on the frame of the machine in the wrong setting. This switch was very rarely used and I had neglected to check its position. We had to get the poor patient into the ambulance a second time and come for a repeat of all the painful movements. I felt positively awful at subjecting this quiet sufferer to this additional agony. The films showed that he suffered several broken ribs.

We also had among our early patients some Catholic nuns who had been captured at their mission by the Japanese and who had been subjected to a lot of shameful mishandling while they were prisoners of war. Several native people who had been injured while in work parties for the Japanese invaders were also treated for injuries at the hospital. And of course, there was the sprinkling of injuries received by our Australian army people since their arrival after the surrender.

After a few weeks of operation we were able to pack up our gear and move in to a building which the engineers had prepared near the operating theatres. It was a repetition of my procedure when moving into the new department at Northam. I spent my rest day (a whole Sunday) setting up the control of the X-ray machine behind a special lead lined screen, so that the operator was protected from physical damage from radiation scatter. We were kept busy examining many sick POW's who had been rounded up during the takeover from the Japanese. There was quite a large number of sick and injured Japanese soldiers among the ninety thousand who were now our prisoners. Until shipping could be organised to return these large numbers back to Japan our Australian authorities were responsible under the Geneva Convention for their welfare and treatment.

After moving in to the timber building erected by the engineers we settled down to a routine of handling the X-ray cases. We had a regular morning session for the examination by barium meal of stomach and bowel disorders. This involved the patient swallowing a quantity of powdered barium sulphate mixed with water to form a porridge. Because it is opaque to the X-ray beam it gives a very clear image of the outline of the stomach or bowel which is being examined in the darkened room by means of a fluorescent screen. The radiologist can manoeuvre the patient so that any anomalies are clearly obvious when the screening in the dark is interrupted and an X-ray picture is taken which clearly displays any abnormal outlines. When these films are developed the radiologist can compare his notes of the patient's replies to his questions with the evidence now available from these X-ray films. Gastric ulcer was a very common complaint among the older soldiers and when discovered would be the reason for the patient being returned to Australia forthwith for medical treatment. The afternoon was filled with minor casualty cases involving broken bones, injured spines and other

Mail from home was fairly regular and the arrival of letters was the high light of the week. The sergeants' mail was always delivered to our mess tent and placed on a large table where we could pick it up as we came for our midday meal. Imagine my excitement when on one occasion when I entered our "dining room" I instantly detected the sweet aroma of West Australian boronia. It was a beautiful reminder of my home state. I found a letter on the table from my wife, Flo, and inside was a small sprig of our boronia. Other West Australian servicemen gathered around to share my delight and there was much animated talk around the dinner table of how we would enjoy these simple pleasures when we got back home. The news from my home was that our two boys were bright and well and the eldest was asking "when would Dad come home?"

Most of us were keen to get home, and as a married man with two children and over five years of army service, I had accumulated a large number of "points", which each individual earned and which determined the order in which Australian personnel were to be returned to Australia. Shipping was scarce and the Australian Government at the end of hostilities had a very difficult task to suddenly find available ships which could be converted to carry troops back to their State. I was able to train a bright young woman from the Auxiliary Women's Army Service Unit who had been allotted to our X-ray Department as an assistant. Major Norman Long, the Radiologist, and I both undertook to give her a "crash" course in radiography and in patient care. We never had to repeat our instructions and soon she was skillfully undertaking most of our x-ray procedures. I had learned that my departure was close at hand because of my high tally of points. I had packed and posted most of the items of Japanese gear which I was sending home as war souvenirs. These included the two Japanese swords which had to be specially packed in thick cardboard for transport through the post. Flo later told me how she had been notified by the local Post Office of some parcels there to be collected, and she and Robert with a hand cart had made two or three trips to the Post Office to pick up these things. I kept my own gear and clothing ready for instant transport when the great day arrived.

One day in March 1946 [24]I received the curt instruction to depart at 5.00 am on the following morning for transport to a local coastal beach to be ready for the boarding procedures to a troop ship returning to Australia. Of course there were the usual army delays and a few of us from the hospital were among many similar groups at this beach point assembling there to be finally transported by small ferry boats to the freighter anchored off shore.

Everyone was happy and excited about returning home and there were many jokes and much laughter particularly about the long delay that was then taking place. We were told that the ship was not quite ready to take troops on board due to some failure with the fresh water system of the ship. Later we learned that what had happened in the hurried conversion of a freighter for the transport of troops was the unfortunate mix up of pipes from bilge water pumps with the fresh drinking water system which had to be suddenly installed for the troops. This was quite a hitch in the usual efficiency of army arrangements. None of us had been supplied with breakfast, there was no drinking water available and tiredness from our very early start was catching up with everyone of us. Some were trying to sleep in the hot sun on the beach.

---

[24] This date is incorrect. Army records show that I left Rabaul on 8th January 1946 and arrived in Sydney on the 18th January 1946. I was discharged from the army on .....

Eventually after a tiresome delay of several hours we were organised to move in numerical order onto small boats which then transported each small group to the ship's side. When my group finally approached the ship we could see members of the previous group slowly climbing a rope ladder hanging over the side of the ship. Each of us was wearing our webbing to which was attached our back packs and side packs with drinking flask on our belt and extra gear hanging from our shoulders. These included a folded army stretcher and in my case as a paramedical person, a fair sized Red Cross medical kit, together with a spare pair of new army boots. Each of us had to use both hands plus our legs to climb the vertical rope ladder. I was determined to see it through and eventually to my surprise was able to reach the top rail with all my luggage intact. On the ship's deck there was a handful of smiling Japanese POW helpers to help us over the rail but I waved them aside and climbing over the rail found myself standing on the deck of the ship

We were all terribly thirsty after the long delay in getting aboard the ship so everyone of us made a beeline for one of the water taps newly set in position around the deck of the ship To our disgust the first mouthful of water was so foul that it had to be spat out onto the deck immediately. We later learned that the fresh water drinking system installed on the freighter for the needs of the troops returning to Australia had been mistakenly connected in the pumping section to the bilge water discharge system and bilge water had been pumped into the fresh water pipes. Finally we were directed to a particular outlet of fresh water which was not contaminated and there was a long queue waiting to refill their water flasks. We then descended into the holds of the ship by steep ladders where we were apparently expected to sleep. But the congestion and awful foul air was so nauseating that I stacked my gear in a corner and collected together necessary items and headed back up onto the deck. Many were doing this and we arranged ourselves with little sleeping positions where we could enjoy the fresh air from the ocean. It was very good weather and we all had a comfortable trip right down to Sydney. The tropical evenings were delightful and fortunately we did not experience any bad weather.

During our service in the tropics we had always received coupons for two bottles of beer each week which could be purchased from the quartermaster's store. This was the army's way of ensuring that the distribution was quite fair and square for all personnel. I had always quietly passed my coupons over for others to enjoy, but on this journey with the limited availability of fresh drinking water I did on one or two occasions keep one of the coupons and purchased some cold beer. I tried to spin it out over the day time period and of course it didn't stay very cold for long. It was quite enjoyable but of course the coupons usually ended up being passed over to others.

The meals were fair enough being standard army food. We always enjoyed three good meals a day in the open air on the deck of the freighter. We called in at Milne Bay for water and tied up at one of the old wharves used in the early part of the war when this area was used as a huge supply base by Australian and American Forces. There were large pipes with suitable hose outlets on the wharf carrying fresh water from a dam in the adjacent hills which had been constructed by the American engineers to supply adequate water to their naval units. But now the pipes were leaking and there were spouts of fresh water here and there along the pipe line on the wharf. Our ship was taking on fresh water from this piping system and we were all given leave to go ashore and enjoy the freedom from the congestion on board the ship. A lot of us had quickly sized up the opportunity of a fresh water shower under the squirts from the leaking pipe system on the wharf, so we took our towels and

proceeded to enjoy the luxury of cool fresh water so refreshing in the tropical heat. There were no fresh water shower facilities on the freighter and only make-shift toilet facilities for the troops.

We had been notified of how many hours shore leave was possible so most went for short walks on the very good road systems spreading in all directions from the wharves. There were large heaps of old war material which had been abandoned when the armies had moved north in their drive toward Japan. All the buildings had been removed but walks in this area left each of us with a vivid realisation of the immensity of the Pacific war effort. Some of us ended up inspecting a large number of landing barges which had been hauled up on the beach and which were tilted to one side. They all looked new and each barge had two large diesel engines and all the engineering facilities associated with the huge ramps at the front-end. Each of these engines had an elaborate tool panel nearby, but of course all the tools had disappeared.

When we were about to return to the ship I was clambering over the small sloping deck when the metal heel plates on my army boots slipped on the steel decking and sent me flying into the scupper. I fell on my right wrist and a sharp pain alerted me to a probable injury of the wrist bones On returning to the ship I reported to the medical officers who examined my injured limb but he could only apply a splint to my wrist to prevent further movement until an X-ray picture could be taken. So for the rest of the trip to Sydney I was handicapped by being unable to use my right hand. I had to wear my arm in a sling but was still able to enjoy the experience of a sea voyage in these once in a life-time conditions.

Finally we saw the Sydney heads and eventually moved right into the harbour. As always, the civilian Aussies were keen to give all returning troops a wonderful welcome home. Ferries and small ships blew their sirens and crews and passengers waived and called out constantly as our troop ship moved slowly into the harbour areas. The huge bridge was an impressive reminder that we had returned to Australia and we could admire it afresh as we slowly passed under its decking. We eventually berthed at the adjacent harbour and soon there were lines of motor trucks with seating in the back to transport us to our various destinations. I was seated near the back in one of these covered trucks. Our slow progress through the busy city streets was accompanied by the incessant cheering and happy shouts of welcome from people on the footpaths. We all smiled and waved and it was really a very humbling experience when we realised that these citizens of Australia had really depended on us and were trying to express their appreciation. I felt quite a fraud because with my arm in a white sling I was probably being looked upon as having a war injury, when it was only the result of a nasty fall on a sloping deck. Our hospital personnel were taken back to the Herne Bay depot which we had left several months earlier. I was admitted as a patient and my wrist was X rayed and my right forearm was encased in plaster. Interstate transport was immensely overburdened and I just had to wait until a berth on the overland train to Western Australia became available. I could not write so I got someone to come to the Post Office where telegrams could be sent and dictated a short telegram to Flo. It was very boring as I had no books and we had to endure a very hot summer spell And since there was no airconditioning it was a very uncomfortable time. As the ward had been built on sloping ground with one end on high stumps the walking patients were able to rest in deck chairs under the high end.

After about ten days several of us were notified to be ready the following day for transport to a rail terminal for a train trip to Melbourne. The newspapers had informed us that the hot spell on the eastern coast had included Melbourne and that people had collapsed in the streets with the hundred degree f. temperature. It was still hot in Sydney so we dressed in shorts and open neck shirts for what was likely to be a warm journey on the train. When we reached Goulburn I suddenly found I was feeling cold. I remember searching for a warm pullover which I had never used since leaving Australia. It was a long tiring train journey and we could only try to sleep during the night hours while sitting in our seats. Reaching Melbourne we were taken to a local army camp where we were notified that we would commence the overland trip on the following day, and were given leave of several hours to see the sights of the city. I wished to contact an old acquaintance in the firm of Watson Victor (x-ray supplies) whom I had known in Perth, and who was now manager of the Melbourne branch. I wished to explore the possibilities of future employment in that firm. So I proceeded to the Collins Street address and he was very helpful. I was still dressed in shorts and as we continued speaking outside the entrance he suddenly stopped talking and remarked "You're shivering". A cold spell had followed the heat wave in this southern city and I was not suitably dressed.

Next day we were taken to the rail terminal for the first section of our trip, to Adelaide. The following stage was to Port Augusta where we transfered to the Trans Train. We were all engrossed in our conversation and thoughts about what our plans might be for our future civilian life. I cannot remember any details of this long train journey except that we eventually arrived at the Claremont Railway Station where our troop train was shunted onto a side line.

There we were all dealt with by local army officials and most were given 28 days leave which was the usual gesture after returning from overseas service. But being a hospital patient I was allocated to an ambulance to be taken to the Hollywood Military Hospital. I remember arriving there before lunch and being allotted to a ward. They could not deal with my wrist that day so I enquired about leave to go home and see my family. Imagine my dismay at meeting the curt rejoinder "there is no leave". I attempted to point out that it was only a simple wrist injury, and that I was not a patient with an infectious disease. But all I received was the same rejoinder that there was "no leave!". One of the procedures for admittance to the ward was to prepare for wearing "hospital blues" (simple blue clothing that could not be worn outside of the hospital). I took my gear to the equipment store but retained my army uniform and other necessities which I placed in a convenient spot near my bed. I asked to see the surgeon who was in charge of my treatment, but he was not available. Every official I consulted was obstructive to my desire to visit my family. I became rebellious to all this unreasonable official attitude.

During the afternoon I found a private phone and rang my old friend, Alec Innes, at his place of work. He agreed to pick me up in his car after he knocked off and take me home. I inquired of the Sister of the ward about the morning routine and she indicated that it commenced at 7.00 am. I told her what I intended to do and said I would return in the morning to fit in with their arrangements. Alec duly called and took me back to Wembley where I was reunited with my family. My eldest son, Robert, 4 years of age knew me immediately, but Graham (under 2 years) did not know who the stranger was. My arm was still in plaster and it was one of the thrills of my life to be reunited with my loved ones after a long spell away.

I had to make special effort to return to Hollywood early the next morning. But with the limited local transport that was available I only just managed to get there by 7.00 am. When I entered the ward the Sister cheerfully greeted me with the announcement that I was on an AWL charge because of my absence from the ward during the night. I eventually was seen by one of the surgeons who removed the plaster and sent me for an X-ray examination. My wrist was adjusted in a splint which I carried in the normal sling around my neck.

The following morning I had to proceed to the orderly room where on an official hearing my AWL was dealt with by the Commanding Officer, a very elderly Perth Medical man. He imposed a penalty of one day's pay and three days leave because of my twelve hours absence from the ward.

My next move was to be transferred to a rehabilitation centre at Point Walter. I and a number of others were taken by army transport to this centre with our gear where we were received extremely cordially. The procedure and routine was explained for repairing damage to muscles and joints and all the many facilities outlined to us. We were then directed to catch a bus which would call within the hour returning us to the City of Perth for weekend leave. It was Friday and I eventually arrived home again to enjoy two days with my family.

We had been informed about the bus services to and from this depot and so on Monday morning I was on my way back. A doctor examined my wrist and prescribed some work in the carpenter's shop to strengthen the muscles and ligaments and which would restore movement in the wrist joint which had been in plaster for three weeks. It was all very pleasant and there was a great spirit of friendly cooperation with the staff going out of their way to meet every need of the men in the camp. I enjoyed the spells in the carpenters' shop making some small wooden items using the hand planes and other tools which would restore the flexibility of movement and strength to my injured wrist. I had brought home from Rabaul two metal quadrant scales from a large field gun which the Japanese had set up in a hidden dug out high up in the side of one of the volcanoes. They were chrome plated and engraved with curved lines on a mathematical graph which were used to set the angle of the gun. I discussed with one of the instructors how I could mount these curved plates and a simple design of two book ends each with a heavy metal quadrant was worked out. So I became busy making the jarrah pieces for a pair of book ends holding these attractive souvenirs which I still possess today. The jarrah was from some old off cuts of timber from demolished buildings and when shaped and smoothed it displayed wonderful grain and lustre. During the week there were lectures and talks that helped returned soldiers face the transition to civilian life.

I enjoyed this rehabilitation camp for three weeks when my wrist was assessed as being back to normal. I was then referred back to the AAMC (Australian Army Medical Corp) Headquarters and was interviewed by the DDMS (Deputy Director of Medical Services), who asked whether I would return to the Hollywood Hospital working as a relieving Radiographer while staff members caught up with accumulated leave. With the return of Australian service men from overseas the hospital was a very busy organisation so I accepted this appointment in order to brush up my radiography at a base hospital with all its superlative equipment. I had been working hitherto with a Field Hospital with its simple transportable X-ray unit.

When I reported for duty I was faced with an attitude of suspicion and hostility about my purposes and was later even challenged about hidden motives for joining the staff. I could only guess that since I was the most senior and experienced Radiographer at the hospital and had returned from overseas service, the local staff had decided that I had come to disturb their comfortable local arrangements. The hospital Sergeant Major held it against me that I had been charged as an AWL so he also was suspicious about my every movement and treated me as a convicted criminal. All the staff were supposed to live in the hospital quarters, attend all parades, and take their part on the evening duties when they were "orderly sergeants". Transport between the hospital and my home in Wembley was quite difficult so I was unable to get home very often.

The armed services were putting on a "Victory Parade" through the City of Perth and a large squad of hospital personnel were put through several practice marches around the hospital block in readiness for taking part in the city march. On the day of the parade Flo took the boys into Perth to a pre-arranged spot and they saw their Dad in the hospital column and I was able to wave to them. After the march we were disbanded and I met them and we took the boys to Queens Gardens near the causeway. Flo had brought some lunch and we enjoyed a picnic in the cool gardens and I remember telling the boys about the statue of Peter Pan which is prominent in those beautiful surroundings.