Matthew Reynolds

BORN CUNDERDIN 24TH SEPTEMBER 1914

FIRST FLEETER – DESCENDANT OF FREDERICK MEREDITH HMAS SCARBOROUGH JANUARY 1788

I was born into a family of eleven – three sisters and seven brothers – of Susanah and Alfred Reynolds.

I reached 7th standard of education at Cunderdin school which was like all country schools with small populations – males and females were in the same classroom and took classes together but the schoolyard was divided into two for playtime – girls one side – boys the other. At 14 you became eligible to leave school and go into the workforce. The day I turned 14 I went to school and stayed until playtime – picked up my books and went home.

Most of my working years as a teenager were spent working for one of my brothers and manning the weighbridge during the wheat-carting season, as he was agent for John Darling and Son. I also controlled the weighbridge of Wesfarmers who had the major holdings of wheat received in the Cunderdin area. I was also employed as a farmhand in nearly all sorts of work that is done on a farm – hay carting, shearing, storking, wheat carting etc.

Another job was the re-construction of the pipeline that carried the water from Mundaring Weir to the Goldfields, between Meckering and Cunderdin – 14 miles – and it was all manual labour – no machines, bulldozers, forklifts etc. It was damn hard work but rewarding to see the construction of the pipeline completed knowing I was part of it. The completion of the job meant it was the severing of my life in Cunderdin and the beginning of my Army life.

ARMY LIFE

I went to Fremantle to become a fireman but there were no vacancies so a friend said he would introduce me to the Commanding Officer of the Artillery at the Fremantle Barracks. He did so and my name was put on the waiting list. Fortunately, there was a letter in a couple of days telling me to report for a medical, which I passed with flying colours. On the 5th May 1936 I was sworn into the army and became a permanent army soldier.

In joining the permanent forces you had to sign a guarantee to serve for six years and if you wished to continue with it sign on for an extra three years successively. You were also given a three month probation period to see if you liked the army and wished to make it your career and when this was up you had to make up your mind and sign on the dotted line or just walk out the gate and forget all about it. I can honestly say in those three months I was sorely tempted many a time to walk out that gate – what with the discipline and conditions that were applied. It was hard, especially coming from a free and easy lifestyle like I had in Cunderdin.

Having signed on for the six years and by paying superannuation, if you qualified for a period of twenty years you became eligible for a pension. If you never had

any black marks against you in that period, you also qualified for a 'Long Service' and 'Good Conduct' medal, both of which I qualified for by serving 21 years and 2 months continuous – including the war years.

I reached the rank of Staff Sergeant in the Army but that was after the war back at Artillery Barracks. I was a Sergeant during the war years and had overseas service in Milne Bay, Port Moresby and Bougainville and in the Solomon Islands. I was stationed at Lae for a period awaiting transfer to Bougainville, a trip I will always remember. We left Lae on the 'Duntroon' at dusk to sail over. During the night my mate and myself were up on the deck before going down to the lower decks to bed. There were quite a few troops up there as it was a moonlit night and it seemed so peaceful – but all of a sudden my mate, who was a heavy smoker, lit up – and boy – how he never got thrown overboard was a miracle. The troops rushed at him, grabbed the cigarette and threw it in the water while giving him a piece of their mind – unprintable!

Having retired from the army in 1957 I started receiving my pension. I am still receiving it today in 2005 at the age of 90 years.

As my new lifestyle now lay ahead of me and as it was to become a permanent job, I made overtures to my future wife to marry me and on being accepted we were married on 2 January 1937.

In the period from 5 May 1936 to the day we were married I had to live in the barracks at Fremantle and our hours of work were 9am to 12 noon with the rest of the day to yourself unless you were drilled for some sort of duty. Wednesday afternoon was always a must for sport training – whatever sport you played but you always had to apply for a leave pass and to be back in the barracks before 'lights out' at 10 o'clock. If you weren't you could always be sure you would cop extra duties the next day.

If you intended to marry the rule was you paraded before the C.O. and informed him of the date and get his permission to live out of the barracks, which was always granted, but you had to make sure you were in barracks in the morning for the first parade.

After we were married we decided to live in Mosman Park and in the period from our marriage until the outbreak of war, we lived in rooms in other people's houses or in our own house until 1940 when we decided to buy the house we now still live in.

I rode a pushbike to work everyday and the traffic in those days compared to today on Stirling Highway was NIL. Sometimes I would ride home or to work and practically have the Highway to myself. Of course it was not a highway in the sense it is today. It was only a two-lane road with just one traffic bridge over the river. I came a cropper one day riding home from work. I decided to hang onto the back of a truck that was going towards Mosman's and get a tow along and a quick ride home, but he decided near Leighton to speed up. I tried to let go and grab the handlebars with my two hands but in doing so swung off the side of the road and ended up in the gravel alongside. When I arrived home the wife wanted

to know what happened, as I was bruised and bloody from head to toe, so decided from that day on never to try that again.

Traffic lights were nonexistent – any change of direction or stopping was all done by hand signals – no indicator signals in those days. I could just imagine the chaos that would eventuate if that system was about today.

After the war I was stationed back at Fremantle Barracks and I was still riding my bike to work and I used to take approximately 10 minutes to a quarter of an hour to ride the distance, depending on the direction of the wind. Anyhow, this day I had a bet with my C.O. who had a car, that I could ride from barracks to my place in 10 minutes as the sea breeze was in and pretty strong. We left the front of the Barracks together and he was to wait in front of my place and check the time. We both checked our watches at the start – when I arrived at my front gate he looked at his watch and I had taken exactly 9 minutes – so he lost the bet. I don't think I would like to try that again in today's traffic.

Whilst living in barracks the daily routine was the usual routine in all army units – fatigues such as cleaning toilets (one I hated doing) – peeling spuds – emu parade – cleaning windows – sweeping rooms – then an hour or two parade drill – lectures and any Military Parade we had to give for any ceremonial occasions.

Then there was the initiation ceremony to all members who joined the Permanent Forces. I will never forget mine. As I have stated earlier, I was a bit fleet of foot and took a bit of catching. Once I was chased out of the barracks into nearby streets, but managed to elude my chasers. But when I sat down for my dinner that day there were a few furtive glances cast my way and I realised something was going to happen, which it did. As I was getting up from dinner about half a dozen of the chaps made a lunge at me and overpowered me out on to the lawn outside the mess hall, and stripped me naked and coloured me black and tan from head to toe with nugget. Boy did it sting in the usual places.

It took me about an hour to wash it all off under the shower. All that sort of thing in the Army in those days was taken with fun and never any malice towards the perpetrators. Not like today's soldiers where I read in the paper some time ago, a similar thing happened and the soldiers complained to their C.O. and almost a court case came of it because they thought it was a bit demeaning to their character. God help us if we had to go into battle again with that type of soldier.

I eventually finished my Army training and got a posting to the Forts at Arthur's Head down the end of Fremantle as a caretaker. There was a married man in quarters stationed there and another soldier – old Bill – and our job was to maintain the guns and the Fort's precincts.

Any time the resident caretaker wished to go out, one of us would remain on duty until he came home – sometimes as late as 10 o'clock at night, and if it was my turn for duty I would have to ride my bike home, but as I mentioned earlier, in those days traffic was at a minimum and I never had any worries about riding home. This job went on lovely until the 3 September 1939 when we received the message over the air that we were at WAR.

From that moment everything was turned upside down! We were immediately put on a war footing and all leave was stopped. The residents wife and children had to leave the Fort and the house was taken over by troops who manned the Fort and then the Militia was called up and there was enough troops to make three detachments – one on duty for eight hours at the Fort – the second one in reserve and on call at all times – the third one on standby if needed but could have a few hours leave, or go fishing etc (as I have mentioned earlier about my fishing episode).

Each detachment was turned around so that they all got a duty at the Fort. If you were the Fort duty detachment you were allowed to sleep, but guards were posted and changed during the night. Sometime's you would get a full night's sleep, but we had a C.O who liked to play his tricks and it wasn't any surprise to hear the alarm for any hour of the night and everyone had to stand by their posts.

I was taken of Fort caretaker and allotted to a detachment to become an instructor on the six inch guns and later in the command post to all the Militia who had been called up and who were selected to become gun layers and command post specialists. The irony of all of this was the Permanent Forces personnel had the job of training the Militia who came into the war on the AIF rates of pay, but we remained on our peace time rate of pay right up to the time the Japanese came into the war and then we were paid the same rates of pay as the Militia.

To add insult to injury I was a specialised gun layer and was only receiving one shilling an eight pence above my normal rate of pay per week, but once a militia man qualified he became eligible for an extra one shilling a day on top of his normal pay.

It was only when the Japanese entered the war that the Permanent Forces became eligible to serve on overseas service – we all volunteered to go overseas – and were given a badge to say we had volunteered (I still have mine, an antique by now.) When the time arrived to have the chance to go and see a bit of action a call came for volunteers to go with a machine gun outfit to Singapore, but all they wanted were specialists – gun layers, NCOs, etc – so you can imagine the rush to be given the positions. I volunteered as a gun layer but the job was given to one of the Militia I trained, so I missed out again and to this day I am glad I did because everyone knows what happened at Singapore and where the Australian troops finished up.

It wasn't until the Americans entered the war our opportunity came as they wanted volunteers to serve in the Islands on American equipment and eventually detachments were made up and posted to Townsville to train on this equipment. The mob I was with consisted of personnel from all the different states, numbering approximately 120 in all – of all different gun and command post positions.

Every member had to have a knowledge of each post position and it was eventually that I became a specialist in the Command Post. After we became proficient in our training we were posted to Milne Bay in New Guinea and it was here I received my first introduction to what war is really like. We sailed from

Townsville on the Dutch ship 'Van Hurtz' and had an uneventful trip up to Milne Bay.

We arrived in the middle of the night and the scene that presented itself to us was all but a welcoming one. The first thing we noticed was a ship ('Anshun') lying on its side against the landing wharf. With floodlights on to show us the way we pulled alongside the sunken ship and we had to make our way down this rope mesh onto the side of the sunken ship, then make our way onto the wharf the best way we could – believe me it wasn't an easy task. When all of our unit was ashore we were allotted an area where we were to camp down for the night.

Next morning we were taken to where we would set up our defence position which was in a coconut pine plantation at Gilli Gilli, and to reach there we were driven by American trucks with our gear along the beach front as it was impossible to get there by road on account of heavy rain making what road there was to the site impossible.

To make things worse, our site was alongside a river, which entered into the sea and on account of this heavy rain the river flooded and some of our gear was washed out to sea. We had the 'Fuzzy Wuzzy's' – who were attached to our unit for general-purpose work and to build our accommodation – and they were either swimming out or going out in their canoes to retrieve what they could. Most of it was recovered but a few things were lost.

Incidentally, the boat on its side was the 'Anshun', it was sunk during the Japanese raid on Milne Bay which was the turning point of the war where they were driven out by the infantry and militia units stationed at Milne Bay. This was the Japs first defeat and from then on it was all the Allies' way. They had only been gone about a week when we landed and the infantry was still in the process of mopping up any pockets of them left behind.

As our unit was a heavy artillery set-up for the defence of the Bay, we were required to have outposts plus a command post and a lookout, which was fitted with a range finder, which was connected by field telephone to the command post and the outpost. This outpost was situated approximately a mile and half from the camp and it served as a lookout, as well as the one in the camp. This was set up at KB Mission where the Japs landed and did some atrocious things to the inhabitants.

One has been discreetly told after the war in newspapers etc, but having seen the locality from which these things happened it made your mind boggle that they could be such animals. This site was selected because it gave a complete view of the Bay and some facilities remained after the attack that could be used.

How it came about was the C.O. and his Adjutant and the NCOs of the Unit drove out to where the main force of the Japs landed and I think a few of us were keen to procure a few souvenirs of the battle – which we did – and in the area there was a vacant piece of ground with no trees etc on it, but it was covered in kunai grass which can grow taller than a man. As we were going through it we came across a fully clothed Jap soldier laying there with his equipment still on and his revolver still strapped around him and he had a lovely watch on his wrist. I bent

down to souvenir it but was jumped on by the C.O to leave it alone as he could have been booby-trapped and blown us all up. So we left him lying there and as far as I know he could still be there. Even though the battle had been over about a week he looked pretty well preserved and a couple of us wanted to make sure he was dead and not foxing, by putting a bullet into him, but once again the C.O had his way.

I was given the task of setting up this outpost with the assistance of three other rank members of the unit which was our duty to be on guard 24 hours a day – at night each man took his shift of two hours on and four hours off. The set-up was a small ramp had been built out into the water and a shed was built on the ramp, which we used as a kitchen etc, and a tent was supplied to sleep in. But it became more of a general use tent than a sleeper as we set up our whole sleeping gear in the hut, which gave us more protection.

We were eventually relieved of this job by another detail from our unit and it was always changed from time to time. On our rest days in camp I used to make a trip out to the outpost as sometimes some of my best cobbers were there and I would spend the day with them, and sometimes have a look around the jungle for bananas and pineapples etc. I never used to have much luck as the Fuzzy Wuzzy's got in before us and we used to have them come to the outpost trading them for bully beef of which we had plenty, and that was about all we lived on for the first three months before we started to get some substantial food – never saw bread in that time – we were issued with hard dry biscuits with your meal and believe me they were hard. Some of us used to soak them in water and take an onion from the mess, cut it up and mix it with the bully beef and cook it – anything for a change of diet.

Anyhow, this one time I went to the outpost I was on my way back to camp and down came the rain and as anyone who has been in the tropics knows the amount of rain that can fall in a few minutes. Between the outpost and the camp were two creeks and the river that ran alongside the camp.

When I arrived at the first creek it was running a bunker and I had to wade through it and negotiated it ok, and the same with the second creek. But when I arrived at the camp the river was overflowing and running very fast. As I couldn't swim, I didn't know what to do, so I fired my rifle so the troops in the camp could hear it and investigate – which they did – and some stood on the other side while I tried to wade my way across. I had a few anxious moments crossing but eventually made it, but the water was almost up to my armpits and I had to hold the rifle above my head during the crossing.

Speaking of the river in flood, one day we were having a bit of a splash on a water hole that the river left behind after flooding – it was very clear and almost fit enough to drink. We were messing around and someone said, "What is that roaring noise?" We knew it wasn't a plane and looked around up the river towards the mountains from where it all comes and about a hundred yards from us was this great wall of water coming straight for us – you have never seen troops move so fast as we headed back to camp.

Incidentally, we were all in the nuddy and it must have looked funny to see us hurtling through the jungle at breakneck speed. I have often heard the expression 'wall of water' but it is the first and only time I have seen it and I can tell you it is a frightening experience. Anyhow, we all made it back to camp, but any time we ever went there again we always kept our eyes in that direction. Evidently it had rained heavily in the mountains but we never had anywhere we were, so we weren't prepared for it.

Life in Milne Bay was quite a hectic time; there was good and bad times. The good times by making the best of comrades living together knowing you had mates who would always be your mate and we were all in it together. We had some great shows and concerts come to the Bay and if you weren't required for duty you could attend these shows – believe me they broke the monotony of camp life.

Two shows I remember quite well was, one where George Formby visited the different camps and having seen him in pictures it was quite an occasion to see him in the flesh as his name was a big hit in those days. The other concert I went to was being held at the Anti-Aircraft unit adjoining our camp – from which we were separated by barbed wire. As a matter of fact, there was barbed wire all around our camp too and you had to know the entrance to tem or else!

Anyhow, this night half a dozen of us decided to go over and watch the concert and we managed to manipulate the wire in the darkness. The stage was set up just inside the Ack Ack boundary with a tent for changing scenes etc, and a floorboard set up outside for the stage. The concert starts and all are enjoying it sitting on petrol drums and cases and anything you could make as a seat when about half way through the concert there was a bit of a bang and a flash of light and men flew in all directions thinking we were being fired at.

As it turned out the boys had been smoking during the performance and one of them dropped his cigarette on the ground, and as he had been sitting on an upturned petrol drum some had leaked out. We didn't worry getting through the barbed wire – we cleared it in one bound. One of the poor blighters landed in a hole and twisted his ankle and the rest of us had to help him back to camp.

As I mentioned earlier, we arrived in Milne Bay in September 1942 with approximately 120 personnel and by December of that year our unit was down to about 30 personnel. This was brought about by the incidence of malaria in the Bay. It was in the percentage of 80% severity and it was because nothing was known about it and, as there wasn't any hospitalisation or cure known, troops were being sent back on hospital ships to the mainland. It became more controlled as Atebrin was issued to all troops. This Atebrin was a yellow tablet and tasted terrible – you eventually started to turn a yellow colour in your skin. Some of the boys decided they wouldn't take it but somehow the C.O got to hear of it so we were lined up each day and he would watch you take it in front of him. I never contracted malaria while serving in Milne Bay, but when we shifted around to Bora Bay – outside Moresby – we were only there about three months and I contracted it. Whether it was the change in climate and it was in my system all the time, which brought it out.

I think the bad times in the Bay were the night bombings by a single Jap bomber who came on moonlight nights and it was always when the moon was dead above the Bay as a moonlight night in the tropics is almost like a sunny day anywhere else. We gave it the name of 'Betsy' – I don't know why, but it had an unusual drone about it and you could always hear it from miles away. Being camped alongside the Ack Ack unit they would always have the early warning for it, would sound the alarm and everyone would up and out into their slit trenches.

It got that way the Ack Ack wouldn't open up on it as it became more of a nuisance raid and anyway, nine times out of ten his bombs would either fall into the ocean or in the jungle and never any damage to our unit was reported.

But this one night he somehow found his target and it happened to be our camp he dropped one of his bombs on. We used to listen to them falling and if you heard a swishing noise you knew you were in the clear and we would get out of our slit trench and go back to bed. This night we heard nothing, only the crunch of a bomb about twenty yards away from the slit trench we were in – about four to a trench – we were covered in dirt from the explosion and we didn't know whether the next one was in line to where we were – but it turned out he was flying away from the camp and the next landed behind us in the jungle.

When the all-clear siren sounded we crept out and went to have a look where it landed. As it happened it landed in the area where our transport was situated at the back of the camp and didn't even hit any of the vehicles we had. But, it certainly made a big hole where it landed at the back of one of our trucks – the force of the explosion had blown had blown the dirt into the tray of the truck and it had to be shovelled out back into the hole to fill it up again. The size of the hole was that big that our Adjutant – who was the only one in camp who was allowed to have a camera – got us all to stand in the hole while he took a photo. He also took a photo of me holding two slivers of the bomb that was dropped and I took one of him holding them.

My theory of why we copped it that night was – we had been out most of the day working with the truck and as it was always hot, we used to put the windscreen up to let the air through and let it down at night so as the rain wouldn't get into the cabin. But this time it wasn't put down and with then moon directly overhead shining on it, it became a bright light to the pilot of 'Betsy' and he almost scored a direct hit.

I think the biggest experience of my life in the Army and being in a war zone was the hundred-plane bomber raid on Milne Bay. We were advised that the raid was going to take place and it would enter the entrance to the Bay at 11.40am on this day. We all lined up on the front of the Bay, and sure enough, at 11.40am we spotted the planes making a turn towards the Bay, and they flew in formation with their fighter planes escort above them.

We immediately went to ground in our slit trenches and waited for the outcome. As our unit and the Ack Ack units were positioned alongside one another right on the beachfront and the airstrips behind us, we were to take the full impact of the raid. It was a frightening experience believe me – a hundred bombers loaded with bombs, and you wondering whether your name was on one of them.

They flew in flight formation and did not break it – continuing on their way, dropping bombs all around us while the fighter planes were engaged in dogfights above them. As luck happened, both our unit and the Ack Ack did not receive any direct hit but we were both straddled by bombs and the nearest one to fall was almost on the beach in front of one of the Ack Ack's rangefinders. It did not cause any damage even though everything was covered in mud and dirt thrown up by the bomb.

After the bombers had passed we crept out of our slit trenches and watched the dog fights between the Japs and our boys, and we were cheering our boys on. We witnesses on of our victories with the Jap fighter coming down in the Bay and another one brought down into the hills around us. When it was all over I went up onto a lookout we had built between the tops of four coconut trees. It was our lookout for enemy shipping etc and it was built so that we had a small hut erected on it and was equipped with an Azimuth instrument for takings bearings to pass onto the command post for plotting of any vessel that came within its range.

As we had seen the plane come down in the Bay I decided to look through the telescope and search the Bay for what I could find. Sure enough I came across some debris and in amongst it was a person with their arm in the air. As we were in contact with the Navy who were stationed just down the beach from us, I rang them and gave the bearing of the arm. They picked up the bearing and a launch was sent out as I watched through my telescope. When they returned with him they rang me up and advised me it was a Jap airman, who was immediately taken into custody. If I had known it was a Jap I would have kept quiet about it and left him there to drown.

Later, a few of us went to see how the airstrips and the planes had got on. As the fighters were up engaging the Japs, all that was left on the strip were the torpedo bombers who did most of their raids at night. They copped a bit of a hiding and a few were put out of commission for a while, but there wasn't any damage to personnel. The whole exercise was a reprisal raid by the Japs for their first defeat of the war at Milne Bay.

On investigating around the area we found we had a near miss, as one bomb landed on the outside of our perimeter near the Officers mess, but no damage was caused by it. Today, you hear of adults and children being counselled for any tragedy or mishap or accident – but we were never counselled, nor were any of the servicemen during both world wars – don't tell me the Anzac's didn't need it and the troops on the Kokoda Trail – as a matter of fact, I am sure there were many times that some servicemen needed it at one time or another. They all had a job to do and did it with honour, putting their lives on the line to do it, not only their own lives but also those of their mates.

After the big raid things settled down to normal camp life and the only time we were disturbed was when 'Betsy' made her usual nuisance raid on moonlight nights. But it got that way we didn't pay much attention to them and as the Japs were driven back further and further to Japan itself, they petered out altogether.

As the threat to any more landings of the Japs at Milne Bay was no longer possible our unit was moved around to Bora Bay outside of Port Moresby and our

defences were set up there as the Kokoda Trail offensive was being bitterly fought with the Japs trying to take Moresby, which if they had, would have been the jumping off point for them for the invasion of Australia.

Life at Bora was a lot happier and healthier as the climate was much clearer and no humidity like it was at Milne Bay, where you are always in a lather of sweat. As I have mentioned earlier, I think it was this change that brought on my bout of malaria. I was taken into Moresby and whilst in there I also had an operation for haemorrhoids – and to this day I haven't had another operation like it – although I had a second such operation at Hollywood Hospital back in Australia after the war – the conditions, procedure and the result were a lot different and much more comfortable.

In Moresby I was taken into a room and laid on a table with no anaesthetic only a needle poked into my back and it took about three jabs before they found the point so as to deaden the pain, and boy, did the pain come on again after the operation! I was sent to a convalescent camp at Koitaki and spent about two months there before I was mobile enough to rejoin the unit.

It was at Bora that I received word from my sister that my mother wasn't well and could I get special leave to come home and see her. This leave was granted on compassionate grounds and it was while I was back on the mainland that our unit was broken up and returned to the mainland for re-drafting to other units.

It was a marvellous feeling to be home again as I left in July of 1942 to go to Townsville for training on the Yankee equipment and as mentioned before, left in September of 1942 to embark for Milne Bay. And it was not until December 1943 that I saw my wife and two children – Janice and Valerie – again. Val was only about 7 months old when I left home and after I came into the house on return, she was following my wife and myself around saying "There is a man in our house." – but we soon became reconciled to the fact that I would be living in the house.

The leave soon went, but one incident I remember quite well. Whilst on leave I went to Perth to see a couple of my mates who had some home for re-drafting and we did the rounds of the hotels. Not having had the taste all the time we were in New Guinea, we were soon high and dry and it was in the old 'Central' that I went down the lane alongside the hotel to relieve myself. The next thing I knew was my mates lifting me up from out of the urinal and saying, "Come on, we will put you on the train for home, because everyone is pissing all over you."

I can remember them walking me down Forrest Place – one either side – and they said "Keep walking" as there were two Provosts near the entrance to the railway station. They put me in a carriage with a couple of other soldiers and said would they make sure I got out at Mosman's.

In those days the trains consisted of a steam engine with about four or five carriages attached – which we all called dog boxes – and I was sitting near a window, which you had to put up and hold it with a catch to keep it open. Somewhere between Subiaco and Daglish I leaned out of the window and boy was I crook! I often wonder if anyone back along the train received any of my

backlash. I eventually arrived at Mosman's and got out on the station – but to this day I do not remember getting home.

When I did eventually arrive home, I was that crook that I went and lay on the bed in the front bedroom and then everything went haywire. I started moaning and yelling and the wife, who knew nothing about what malaria symptoms were like, rang Hollywood Hospital and the next thing I know I am in and ambulance headed there, still moaning and yelling. When I arrived at Hollywood I was put in the yard with other troops and there were not too many in those days who knew what malaria was like – it being a tropical disease.

The sister of the ward gave me a dose of quinine – and if you have ever tasted quinine you can imagine how I felt taking it on top of a belly full of grog. This made my yelling and moaning louder and the other troops in the ward said, "Sister, for Christs sake give him a needle so we can get some sleep." – which she did and I soon passed out and came to the next morning feeling very sorry for myself.

They took a few tests to see if I had had a relapse of malaria, but when the diagnosis came through, it was 'alcoholic poisoning' and I was allowed to go home. So no more beer was had for the rest of my leave.

Talking of beer – all troops were entitled to a bottle of beer in their rations if they were not in a combat zone, but it was saved for you at later dates when you were in a reserve camp etc and the one I bring to mind quite vividly was when we were stationed in Lae awaiting transport to Bougainville. What would happen was, all troops were put on parade and had to queue for their bottle, which cost 1/- and then had to sit on the parade ground and drink it. But what was happening, you would have the cap removed by an officer and they would stay on parade making sure you drank it, because if you didn't drink it, or could get it for your mate who did, they would pay you 2/- and they would re-cap the bottle and take it down to the Yanks who were camped just down the road from us. They would sell it to them for 5/- and make a big profit, as 5/- in those days for a soldier was a lot of money.

The Officers soon gave it away waiting on parade as the troops just paid them out and they would leave and the re-capping would begin. It used to be a funny sight to see the troops sitting around in groups, making out they were drinking from their bottles.

Another funny episode of beer distribution was when we were in Bougainville and we got the news to say the War was over, and an Army truck arrives at the camp loaded with crates of bottled beer. It worked out that most of us were entitled to almost a full crate of 4 dozen bottles. The truck was unloaded in haste by the troops, but instead of being issued with your quota it was stacked in a tent and you could have a bottle when you liked as there were a few who did not drink – and you can imagine what went on with those who did.

A couple of bottles was enough for me as it was that hot to drink, being in the tropics, and no cooling facility for it. It tasted like hot vinegar (I could say something else) Some of the troops wrapped the bottles in wet rags etc and

buried them to try and cool them off – but this had no effect – so they just lapped it up as much as they could. Just as well the war was over as the Japs could have just walked into the camp and taken it over.

After my compassionate leave was over I was drafted to the East and was stationed in staging camps until a position was found to post me to. But, being a Permanent Force Soldier who was only seconded to the AIF during war time, I was entitled to and Public Holidays – plus Sundays – plus annual leave of three weeks which was the maximum in those days. So another PMF chap who was in the staging camps with me decided to apply for his leave – which was granted – and we had that much leave accumulated, that we were backwards and forwards on troop trains across the desert until it all ran out.

Eventually my mates and myself were sent to this hellhole they call Canungra. It is still in operation I believe, but I hope those who are doing the courses now are having a better time than we had.

One of the incidents I remember quite well was when we were on a three-day bivouac and we arrived for lunch at a rendezvous point where the truck with our meal was to meet us. It was alongside a running creek where you had a chance to freshen up and fill your water bottles etc. We all selected somewhere to sit and eat our meal, when one chap was about to sit down on a big boulder and a shout came from our Sergeant in charge, “Don’t sit down” – and we looked and there was a dirty big carpet snake coiled around in about six circles, lying on top of the boulder.

One of the boys picked up a large stone to drop on it, but the Sergeant said, “Leave it alone” and he came over with a sugar bag and slid his arm under the snake and put it in the back. He was a snake lover and already had a couple he had caught back at camp, so he sent this one back with the truck to put with the others.

There is so much to tell of that 30 days I had in the hellhole, that it would create writing a book of its own about the place. Boy, when that fateful day came to leave it, not a word was said, because it was one of those places, if you said anything about it, you would be kept there to do the stint all over again. Two particular happenings that were related had occurred when two chaps had misbehaved – one of the punishments was to wait until dark and send them up a very steep hill with a lantern and when they arrived at the top a signal was given for them to return to camp, but this night the two who were sent up placed the lantern on a rock and kept going down the other side. We were never told whether they were caught and brought back.

The other event was – when you arrived at the camp by train – you were lined up and marched about a mile to where you actually did your training and where the main camp was. Anyhow, one detachment, we were told, when they had finished their stint at the camp made a lot of row and gave a few fingers up to the NCOs who were in charge of the camp. As the train pulled out to take them away from the camp, the NCOs jumped into a jeep and took off after the train, stopped it and made it back into the siding and off-loaded all of the troops and marched them

back to the camp to do another turn. So you can see we were like little mice on that train until it was many miles away from the camp.

I always smile to myself when I see people doing obstacle courses, because compared to the obstacle course we had to do at Canungra, other courses always seem very simple and easy to manipulate. One of the obstacles we had to do was cross a river with full backpack on and carrying your rifle. There were two ways to cross and you could select which one you liked. One was where you stripped naked, wrapped all your gear in your ground sheet to stop it getting wet, swim it across the river to the other side, pushing it in front of you and holding your rifle above your head to keep it from getting wet. You can imagine what sort of feat this was and when you arrived on the other side you got dressed and with all your gear came back again to the starting point on a flying fox.

The other one was where two wire hawsers were stretched across the river – one above the other so you could just reach the top one to hold onto. Seeing as how I couldn't swim, I selected this one and away I went. It was hard enough trying to get on the thing, let alone walk on it, but as before, it was done with full backpack and carrying the rifle, and the river being about 100 yards across you can imagine what a feat it was. The method of crossing was to slide your feet and hands along the wire and not lift them off at all because if you did you would get a swaying effect along the whole wire. Another couple of chaps came across with me and they got out of rhythm a few times and it was quite frightening trying to hold on while the swaying went on.

None of us fell off and we all made it to the other side, but if we had of done so, there was a boat patrolling the river to pick up anyone who had got into difficulties or fell off the wire. We came back to our starting point by the flying fox. All the exercises on the obstacle course had to be done with full gear, plus the rifle and it was no mean feat doing them, believe me.

After we finished Canungra we went from staging camps I Brisbane to Townsville, to Cairns and back to Moresby where we boarded a Sutherland Flying Boat to go to Lae. It was quite a sensation flying over the Owen Stanley Ranges in a flying boat and we wondered if anything went wrong, where could we land in a flying boat? There were no seats in it and we had to sit amongst the cargo it was carrying to the troops at the front. We landed at Salamaua and it was an experience landing on the water and as you looked out the window there was water all around you.

We were taken off by boat and landed on the shore and then went aboard an MTB for our trip across to Lae. Salamaua was bitterly fought for and the aftermath of it really showed. Sunken Jap ships and derelict hulks in the water and on the point of the land was a steep hill into which the Japs had built their main defences and to get them out, the hill was pounded by warships and land assault before the place was finally taken by the Allies.

Coming into Lae harbour we passed a Jap hulk lying on its side and very close to the wharf and at a later date we waded out into the water and crawled all over it just to see what sort of ship they made. This was quite and experience. Nothing much happened in Lae, just hanging around in the staging camp waiting to go

across the Bougainville. Mostly playing bridge amongst ourselves or exploring some of the place, then the day came for us to leave.

I have explained earlier of our crossing, about the chap lighting his cigarette. On landing at Bougainville we were taken ashore in a landing barge and we set up camp near the wharf for the night and were taken by MTB across to a place called Motupena Point, where we were picked up by Army transport to be taken to the unit. We were posted out in the jungle at a place called Maman-Gatta Junction, which was on the Buin Road, which was where the main fighting was occurring.

By this time the Japs were well and truly being beaten and the remnants of their Army left in Bougainville were gradually being pushed into the sea by the infantry and life wasn't too bad. On one occasion our unit had to lay down a barrage for the infantry for them to attack. It was the usual day to day camp life and one of my duties was to take a platoon out just around dusk to set our booby traps around the outside of our perimeter and then at dawn go out again and unset them and bring them back into camp.

I remember one morning we went out to unset them and on the way back to camp I stepped across this log that was in our path and almost stepped on a hand grenade. We all froze until one of the chaps searched around, looking for a trip wire, as we thought a trap had been set by the Japs, but nothing could be found and we made our way back to camp and reported it to the C.O who sent and engineer out to check. It turned out it was harmless as someone evidently dropped it out of his gear whilst on patrol – but the grenade was defused and destroyed, so it never became a hazard in the camp.

One exiting duty I was given – about a mile from our camp was an abandoned Jap camp and I was to take a detachment to this camp and set up a 'Listening Post' that is, we were driven to this site at dawn and were to make ourselves invisible and then to see if any Japs made their way back to this camp, as they had grown a bit of a garden of corn etc. As we knew, they lived like foxes in holes in the ground and this camp was no exception. It was in a bit of a gully and they had cut holes into the sides of the hills surrounding it and lived in them.

We examined the gully before taking up our position for our silent watch, which was on top of a hill opposite the camp, in a crop of Kunai grass, which was about man height. We crawled to the front and could see the camp through the grass. The exercise was to lay there all day and not move about and keep talking to a minimum – believe me it was damn hard to do in the heat with things crawling all over you. We had to stop there all day and had taken something to eat from the camp and at dusk the truck came and picked us up to go back to camp. It turned out to be a fruitless exercise, as no one or no thing was seen entering the camp.

With the end of the war it was all speculation as to when we would be going home, but it all came down in the finish, of who had the most points which were given for length of service, where served, and for how long. Being a Permanent Force Member, having been in the whole length of the war with service in Milne Bay, Moresby, Bora and Bougainville, I had accumulated a number of points and with a couple of other Permanent chaps, was among the first to go. We went

back to Morupena Point where we boarded a Martin Mariner flying boat and flew to Townsville, where we entrained to Brisbane, there to Sydney and home to Fremantle aboard the ship 'Maloja' experiencing a pretty rough trip across the Bight before arriving in Fremantle where we were greeted by a very big crowd of well wishers and family and friends – and to think this was home for good and no more sad farewells.

We were not allowed to mingle with the crowd as a train was stationed alongside the boat ready to take the troops back to Claremont Show Grounds where we were to be either given leave or demobilised – or in my case, sent back to my peace time unit in Artillery Barracks in Fremantle – which still stands today, and where I spent the next twelve years before taking my discharge and going out into civilian life. There I worked in the Commonwealth Public Service for another 18 years before retiring to a well-earned rest from the rat race of life – and to enjoy time with my family.

Having reached the age of 90 years, a bonus of 20 years from the average life expectancy, I look back over my life and I seem to always go back to my place of birth and my own family at Cunderdin. As the sole surviving member of a family of 11 children, upon my death will end an era, an era that began with the family arrival in Australia; on my mother's side – in the 'First Fleet', and my father's from Ireland.

It was during this last leave that I had been drafted to return to the Eastern States to join the draft that was to take me to Lae. We were all paraded at the Showgrounds and our names called off and passed all present and correct and as the troop train would not be leaving until about noon that day, we were stood down but had to be back in time to board the train. As my wife was pregnant, I caught a train back to Mosman Park to make sure everything was ok, but there were complications setting in as she was almost due to give birth – as it turned out – to our son Ross.

I called the ambulance and took her to the Tresillian Hospital in Nedlands where she was admitted and the baby had to be brought on. I deliberately missed a train so that when I arrived back at the Showgrounds the troop train would have gone. As it turned out, it was still at the siding platform that used to be alongside the main station, but the troops were all aboard and it pulled out as my train pulled in. I made sure I could not be seen when I got off the train and when it was out of sight I made my way back to the Showgrounds and there in the middle of the parade ground stood a solitary kitbag (mine).

I reported to the orderly room and was immediately put under arrest for missing the draft – which in wartime was a serious offence. Being a Sergeant and a Permanent Force Soldier it had the powers – that – be worried what they could do with me – whether they could put me in detention, strip me of my rank of Sergeant or try any other type of punishment.

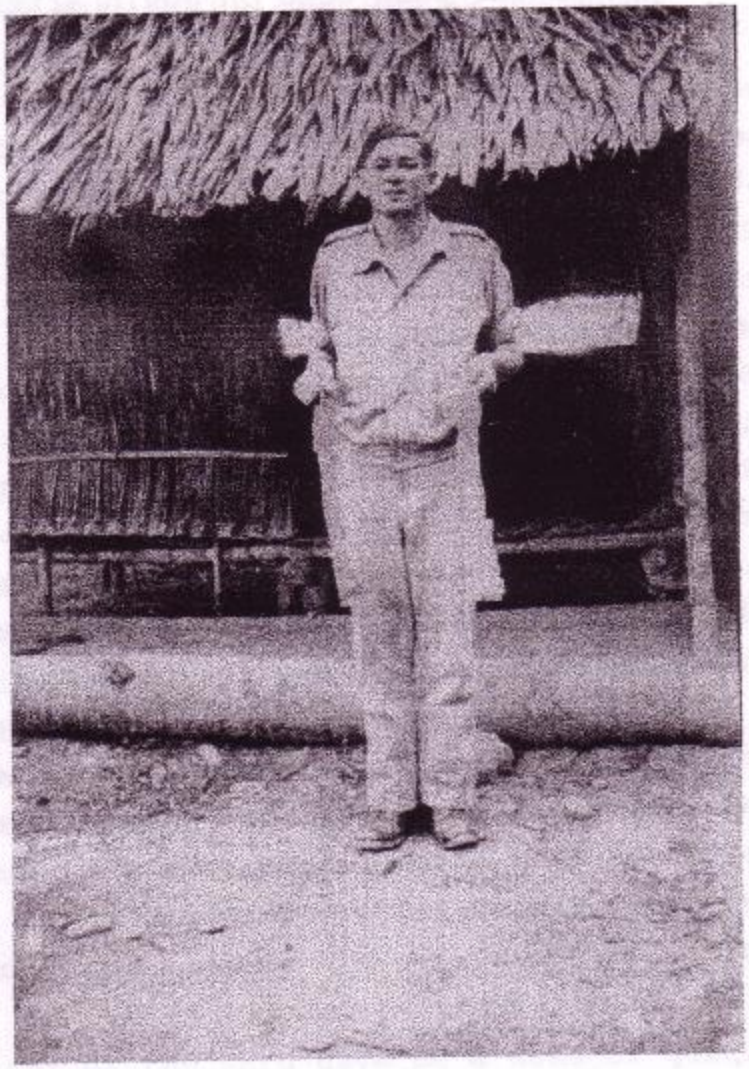
As it all turned out I was paraded before the C.O. of the depot and he asked me my excuse for missing the draft and I told him of my wife being pregnant etc. He was a most compassionate C.O. as he turned to the Adjutant and asked him why I was put on the draft in the first place, and told him I should not have been and

the charge was thrown out. He attached me to the Orderly Room for duties until the matter with my wife was cleared up and was to be given leave each day to attend anything that was required to be done at home with my other children and the welfare of my wife.

Incidentally, the Sergeant in charge of the Orderly Room with whom I was to work with was Jimmy Gordon, the Victoria Cross winner and I have never worked before or since with such a genuine person as Jim – we made great friends and continued it after the war.

Arrangements were made with my wife's sister, Myrtle, to look after my other two children, Janice and Valerie, until my wife was home again with the new baby. Ross arrived on 6th October and once the family was home together again I was re-drafted again to the East, then on again to the Islands.

I never came home again until the War ended the following year in 1945. So you can see, I never had much of the upbringing of my children during the war years, it all fell to the wife to do, and what a great job of it she did too.



Matthew Reynolds

New Guinea - 1942 - pictured holding shrapnel after a night raid and a direct hit by a Japanese plane which the Australians had named "Betsy"