

Joyce Gordon Thomas

I was born on the 29th March 1919, the first child of Catherine and George THOMAS, in ALBANY, W.A.

My mother was the daughter of Harry WILEY, born in Wolverhampton, England. My grandfather (H. W.) brought his three children to Australia after his wife died, to make a new life. He established himself in Albany in later years, was a builder and together with another builder were responsible for the construction of the first Middleton Beach Hotel. He was also involved with the Picture Theatre, Service Station, business and small park in York Street adjacent to St John's Church in York Street bears the name – WILEY PK.

My father – George Gordon THOMAS worked in the post office, in his early working years, born in North Fremantle of a large family, was working as a messenger boy at North Ftle. Post Office before being transferred to Eucla, later Kalgoorlie and then worked the Morse code on the Perth to Wyndham line and was held in high esteem.

I attended Highgate Primary School 1925-1920 then became a student of Perth College (still existing in Mt. Lawley at corner of Regent St./Beaufort Street).

I commenced work at GOODE, DURRANT & MURRAY – a Warehouse in William Street, opposite the Palace Hotel.

As the advent of the approaching war in 1939 I joined a V.A. Detachment (512 Dalkeith) my choice of 'war effort' and was called up for service in the Army and was posted to 118 Aust. General Hospital (Military) in Northam on 31st July 1942.

It was a 1,000 bed Field Hospital and was an 'off-shoot' of the 110 A.G.H. (Hollywood Hospital) in Nedlands. Our hospital catered for the long-term patients. The Australian soldiers returned were from Middle East, Borneo, Malaysia at the time. I spent until 1945 working as a Nursing Orderly in the 118 A.G.H. We were permitted two days leave, once a month, worked long hours, were housed in tents (2 to a tent) until a bad storm passed through the area and totally demolished 'tent land' and we were moved to huts.

In March 1945 the whole Hospital were posted to Punchbowl in Sydney N.S.W. to relieve a Unit that was leaving for Singapore. Quite unexpectedly this did not eventuate and my Unit (118 A.G.H.) was equipped with tropical uniform and we embarked on the TAROONA for preparing and establishing a Hospital in New Guinea following the Coral Sea hostilities. We were ready to disembark at WEWAK but were moved on up to Jacquinot Bay to relieve 2/8th A.G.H. and shortly after flew by New Zealand Catalina to RABUL where we were in a tent Hospital until 1946/7. This was a very 'fiery' atmosphere within site of active volcanos, tropical atmosphere and still a danger area. We enjoyed attending the local markets and the natives dressed in their colourful attire were a delight to observe on festive occasions.

On discharge from the army in 1947 it was a time to look back on the years spent in the Army. It was a wonderful character building – the closeness to

your fellow work mates and respect and care for each other, stories will be told over and over.

We still arrange reunions of 118's. Unfortunately many of our members have now passed on, but any meeting immediately reverts to those first years when we were in Northam – early mornings on parade, the duties in the Wards – our leisure time in the Town with the Win the War Café (that sought after meal away from Army fare), the dances where there was no trouble for partners (the Northam Camp – 5 miles out of town was a training Centre) many of our Hospital participated in local events – i.e. Swimming Carnivals, Tennis Tournaments. Tent life was interesting – slit trenches were a danger – we were proud of our tents and cultivated gardens around. Ward duties were full on – night duty we did the autoclaving and boiled up bandages, early morning sponging, so very different to present day! There were compulsory attendances and also opportunities to learn.

During the period many attended 'Rooky' schools and N.C.O. Schools, some in Perth but others Interstate.

The country life was a complete change for many – but we seemed to thrive, there was little sickness. I marvel now at Spring time we were surrounded by dandelions – allergies were unknown.

The 'mateship' is something that cannot be described it is very similar to an extended family.

Back in civy street again – I travelled extensively, worked in Melbourne, then overseas in England with army associates, returned to Australia in 1952 and worked for 28 years with Local Government. On retirement continued travelling from Alaska to the Antarctic, but now content to live on my memories in my 100 yr. old home and work on keeping fit.