Robert Charles Woodley

My name is Robert Charles Woodley, and I was born in Bunbury, W.A. on April 6th,1928. My parents were living in Perth but my mother went back to Bunbury for my birth so that her family could look after my sister and brother as my father was working shifts in the Police Force. For most of the time in the 1930's we were living in East Victoria Park and the three of us kids went to the East Victoria Park State School in Albany Highway at Basinghall Street. It has been long gone but we were told at the time it had about 1,700 children, the highest number of all other schools, because it had the infants school attached as well. In 1938 we moved to Douglas Avenue in South Perth on the eastern side of Canning Highway, not far away from the pine tree forest which was planted there, but only remnants of it now remain.

In 1939, as we know, England declared war on Germany and it changed our lives for ever. It wasn't that we in Perth began fighting in the war immediately because we are a very isolated state of Australia and Perth, as a city, seemed to be a long way away from anywhere. But we certainly knew that we were in the fight because we were part of the British Empire and, in those days, it was always shown in red on a map of the world.

It wasn't long before our soldiers were shipped away and, in those movements, two of my father's brothers went, soon after war was declared, to the Middle East to Egypt and Palestine, and later to Java. I clearly remember Uncle Cliff (Clifford Woodley) and Uncle Billy (William Joseph Woodley) coming to our home in Douglas Avenue to say 'Cheerio.' They left and never came back. They weren't in the same battalions then but, when they were in the Middle East, Uncle Cliff, being the elder of the two, was able to claim his younger brother to his 2/3 Machine-gun Battalion. After Japan entered the war with Germany by bombing Pearl Harbour in the Hawaiian Islands on December 7th, 1941, they were sent to Java only to be taken as war prisoners by the Japanese to Thailand to work on the Thailand-Burma Railway, or better known as the "Death Railway," where they both died. Unfortunately, advice of Billy's death came by telegram in about March or April, 1945 because Dad was his next-of-kin, and Cliff's death later in the year to his family in Bunbury. My wife, June, and I were to later visit their graves in 1996 at the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery about 115 km's from Bangkok. Uncle Cliff had served in The Great War of 1914-1918 and lowered his age to go to World War 11. My father, Charles Edwin Woodley, would have enlisted early in the war but he was man-powered in the W.A. Police Force after a number of members resigned to enlist in 1939 to join in the fight.

After completing 6th standard (as it was called then) at the EVP school I went to Kent Street Junior High School in 1941 and spent 2 years there. After Japan entered the war in 1941 zig-zag trenches, about one metre deep, were dug between the pine trees which surrounded most of the area of the school and, to my knowledge, they were only used once. It was either in '42 or '43 in about May or June when suddenly the siren at school went at about 10 am and created an immediate scattering of teachers and students from their rooms and a 'scoot' for the trenches – and we could have done without the rain. After we were all crouching, to avoid getting wet, one of the teachers called on a number of students to run back to the school verandah and gather all the coats which were hanging on hooks outside on the wall of the class-rooms. This they did quickly and

came back with them only to whirl them to any body and every body. Students were yelling everywhere and coats were flying this way and that way, but we didn't worry at the time as long as we had something to hold over our heads. To my knowledge we all managed to reclaim our coats. I think we were only in the trenches for about half an hour before the siren gave us the 'clear' sign and then we were all sent home to change into dry clothing. As you can imagine most of us did not go back until the next day. Incidentally, the call was a false one.

Another incident occurred in 1942 that I will always remember. I was 14 years of age then and, like most of the other boy teenagers, I enjoyed the movies about the war because we weren't seeing much of the action for the reason that I mentioned before. We were in a very isolated part of the world. Anyway, I had just arrived home from school on my bicycle at about 3.45 pm when I heard a loud noise in the air. A noise I had never heard before and I looked everywhere to see where it was coming from. Then all of a sudden a squadron of American Marauder Fighter-Bombers flew over the city at a low level from the east towards Fremantle. It must have frightened hell out of a lot of people at the time, including me, but when I saw the American star icon on the wings and the body of the planes I yelled out, 'Yippee, the Yanks are here.' I think it was the first real thing I had seen in Perth that indicated to me that we were in the war. From then on of course there was great action here with ships, submarines and sailors, and the Catalina sea- reconnaissance planes placed at Crawley Bay. The 'Yanks' were well and truly here and we called them all 'Yanks,' not knowing the real reason for their nick name.

Perth then became a different place during the day and at night. Night Clubs 'popped up' all over the place and sailors caught every one's eyes. They came from New York, California, Chicago, Indiana and other places all over the United States that we had heard about and seen of in the movies. They also gave us a feeling of confidence and security in our future.

When the war in Europe ended we knew that it wouldn't be long before the Pacific area would also see peace and, when it did, Hay Street in Perth couldn't have held any more people in a happier feeling.

We had had six years of war that we could have done without. I was seventeen then and I had followed my father in the Police Force at sixteen as a police cadet, and I eventually served a total of forty-four years retiring in 1988.

During the war most people in Perth had cooperated by assisting in many ways to support our servicemen. We didn't need a uniform. If we could help we did what we could. Even children at school helped by knitting scarfs and writing letters to people wounded in the war.

To those who experienced World War 11, and suffered from it, they will never forget the bombing of England in the beginning and our victory in the end. But, looking at the deaths, casualties and damage, does anyone really win a war?