

ALRED 'MOE' RANSLEY A LIFE

Based on 3 July 1996 Interview with John Ransley

I don't actually know what dates I left school or what year it was. I was 14 years old when I left school—1931. I left home when I was about 15 and I visited with my uncle George Ransley who had a farm in Llandilo [a small farming settlement on South Creek east of Penrith and north of St Marys.] I got my first job on a poultry farm at Revesby. I worked there for about twelve months.

Then I got a job on a poultry farm just inside Llandilo, owned by Mrs Garlick. I lived in the Garlick's house; they had chickens and 4 acres of grapes. I worked there for about two years and then I went and stayed with my uncle George Ransley and worked there for a few months stacking eggs all day.

[George Ransley was married to Evelyn Hawkins, sister to Lucy Hawkins who was married to George Thomas Ransley, George Ransley's nephew. Lucy and George had four children, Judy, Marjorie, John (interviewer) and Robyn.]

George already had a family of four girls by the time I went to work with him. [Joyce, Betty, Rona and Daphne]. He had about 300 white leghorn chooks. He never used to kill the chooks, just sell the eggs, that's all. Besides poultry, he had fruit trees, peaches, nectarines and plums, oranges and mandarins. I wouldn't know how many exactly, could be about 30 trees altogether I suppose. And he worked occasionally for the Llandilo Shire Council on the roads. He had no machinery, just an old horse and cart I think, probably the Shires. He used to drive to work drive the old sulky to work, and he never used to work for the Shire more than 2 or 3 days a week, that's all. The rest of the time he looked after his fowls and worked his farm. At night they read books and listened to the wireless. There was no TV in those days just a wireless. They had no piano or other musical instruments.

My grandmother was living at Carlton [suburban Sydney] and my older sister Olly was staying with her grandmother. Olly was working in Sydney city and my other sister Lena was working in Sydney too [north shore]. I didn't go there often but when I wanted to visit I would ride a push bike from Llandilo out to Carlton.

Then I came back up to Woodburn again, back up the coast. I worked in the Woodburn quarry, the blue metal quarry, for about 6 or 8 months I suppose. I used to push the quarry stone down the chute with a pole/stick to go into the crusher. Other jobs I did around Woodburn were a bit of timber falling to cut railway sleepers. The sleepers were all hardwood, iron bark, gum, any kind of wood at all. We cut the sleepers with a hand saw. The timber was just timber for cutting sleepers that's all, not for house construction or anything. Sleeper cutting. That would be about 1930 or 31.

I also did odd jobs around the place, I done a bit of fishing and all that kind of stuff. I didn't have regular work, just odd jobs. I used to do a bit of gardening myself and sold a few vegetables. This was just at the start of the Depression. I was living at home at the old place out in the bush. The vegetables and fish mostly went to my family.

I used to sell a few fish around town. Not very much but my uncle Bob Moss from Kyogle had a big net and he used to come down fishing now and then for himself like. He used to come down and all of us kids would help him pull in the net with fish. This was in the Evans River, at the top end of the Evans River. He used to take the fish up to his Kyogle farm and smoke them. He was married to Mum's sister Jane Grissell. I've been up to his place a couple of times, went up there for a holiday. I used to go up there and poke around with him and do odd jobs and help him cut the cane and that sort of thing. He used to milk 60-odd cows, he had fairly big acreage. He grew the sugar cane for his cattle.

That's about all I can say about that before the War. I was just living there in Woodburn with my mother, I didn't pay any board. I used to get a few bob for meself. I can't think of the date I joined the Army, but it is up there.

[Alf's army records state he had his preliminary medical examination in Woodburn 8 June 1940 and enlisted at Newcastle 11 July 1940. At the Newcastle medical examination he was classified as Class 1 fit. From Newcastle he was posted to Rutherford, , where he stayed till the end of August. From there he was transferred for more training in Tamworth.]

I joined up at the first opportunity, as soon as I could. They came to Woodburn and I was with my mate Jacko and he talked me into it. So we both went down. Mum reckoned it was a good thing. She didn't seem to worry about it.

I enlisted in Woodburn but I went to Newcastle. I went to Newcastle the day I joined up and then we were transferred to Rutherford, just out of Maitland. We did a couple of months training there and then they transferred us up to Tamworth. I don't know how long we were at Tamworth.

[Service Documents say Alf was transferred to 214 Field Company of Engineers in December 1940 at Tamworth and then granted pre-embarkation leave on 18 December just before Christmas and then was embarked to go to the Middle East on the 3rd February 1941.]

We embarked from the Sydney Showgrounds. The training was pretty tough. It wasn't so tough at Rutherford but when we got to Tamworth we done a lot of training around up in the hills, round the hills there. Marching and running and bivouacs, all kinds of bivouacs. No rifle shooting, just training, that's all. Like, they'd send you out, you had

to scout around in a small company and get back to a certain point at a certain time. We had all our different Companies, A, B, C and D Companies.

There were all different kinds of blokes you know. Some of them were funny, some of them were bit hard to get along with. Probably a lot of them would have been unemployed that's why they joined the Army, like me. I was glad to join, yeah. I didn't mind it, I thought it was alright. Once we got into the training and that, it was a bit hard because of not being used to it. I was pretty fit, although when I went to see the doctor at Newcastle they hummed and haahed there for a while. They reckoned I had something on me chest, crook on me chest or something, and they wasn't going to let me go through for a while and then they said, oh let him go. I suppose they put me down as fit. They reckoned I had a weak chest or something.

[Alf was classified Class 1 Fit]

Before I went overseas I went back home to Woodburn for Christmas. I think Lena and Ollie stayed working in Sydney. I seen them in Sydney before I left, they come down to the boat, seen me off, the *Aquitania*.

[Service documents say Alf embarked Sydney on the "A" on the 3rd February 1941 and disembarked in the Middle East on 23rd March 1941, a journey of nearly seven weeks.]

We didn't go straight across to the Middle East. We embarked in Sydney on the *Aquitania* and it went across to Western Australia. We pulled in [at Fremantle] in Western Australia but they wouldn't let you off. They put the anchors down out in the Bay and you couldn't get in, and they brought all the Western Australian blokes out on the boats to travel on the *Aquitania*. And the rest of them on the *Queen Mary* that had joined us there. We went across towards the Middle East and the *Queen Mary* left us. She went up to Singapore and we went over to India.

[The *Aquitania* and the *Queen Mary* were part of Troopship Convoy US9. The other troopships in the convoy were the *Mauretania*, which took on troops in Melbourne, and the *Nieuw Amsterdam* which had collected New Zealand troops in Wellington. The *Queen Mary*, *Aquitania* and *Mauretania* were the cream of the Cunard fleet. See Attachments A and B.]

We got off at Bombay and got on the train and went up to Pune. We got off at Pune at the camp there. We camped there for six or seven weeks training at Pune. Bridge training and all that kind of stuff like the engineers do. I was the 2nd 15th Field Engineers. The reason why I think I was in the Engineers when we was at Tamworth they picked all the best, what they reckoned were the best men, and put them in the 2nd 4th Infantry. And all the stragglers like us, all the no-hopers, they put us into the Engineers. They reckoned we weren't the best fitness for foot soldiers. Done most of us into the Engineers. I dunno what happened to Jacko, he went into another unit. He was riding motorbikes, despatch riders. He went into that. I don't know what Unit he went into or

where and I don't know what time, he went to the Middle East but I don't know how he got over there or what boat he went on or anything.

I had other mates, the mates you'd already made up with, from different ... when we went down to Newcastle and caught the train to Lismore, most of them were all Lismore men, North Coast men, we had a train full of them, my recruitment group. Some of them ended up in the Engineers and some of them were good enough for the Infantry, the 2nd forces, but they left before us. They went over there before us. We went to Sydney, the showgrounds, and we did a lot of training from there, out at Casula. We was camped in the horse boxes at the showgrounds.

In Sydney you could get leave and go where you wanted. You'd get your night leave, if you wanted to leave, if you wanted to go up town, you had to get a pass and hand your pass in when you get back. Go to movies or dances. I didn't go to the pub, I never used to drink much then.

The last time before we went away on the boat they give us leave to go home. They took us out to Casula and they give us a fair bit of training out there and we marched from Casula back to the showgrounds, and then they sent us home on two weeks leave. Casula is out from Sydney, I can't tell you exactly where. I know it's a fair march from there into the show grounds, about a day's march; we had blisters on our feet. We only had to carry backpacks and a few things, no guns.

I don't know how long we were in Pune but we were there for a fair while. It might have been 2-3 months, it might have been a month. We left Pune and come back to Bombay and caught the *Johan de Witt* across to the Middle East. I think *Johan de Witt* has been sunk since then. (Attachment C)

[The next entry in the service documents say Alf was evacuated per Australian Field Ambulance with diarrhoea in November 1941. There is a big gap in the service documents between March and November 1941.]

The *Johan de Witt* took us up the Suez Canal and we got disembarked there—I can't think, it might have been Cairo, I don't actually know—and went across to Palestine; we was camped at Hill 69 in Palestine. [almost certainly disembarked at El Kantara/Al Qantarah and taken by train to the Hill 69 camp (near Gaza). Attachment D].

The Hill 69 camp wasn't far from Jerusalem because we used to go to Jerusalem for leave. Jerusalem was pretty busy. We went out to Bethlehem and had a look at the ... where the whatsiname, where Jesus was born in the manger [Bethlehem], had a look at all a few of the things there. Went out to the Dead Sea and had a swim in the Dead Sea. Went all through the temples and churches. Seen where they let the dove go and where he bought the, what the ... the laurel leaf back with him.

We used to go on bus trips around the place. We used to go to Tel Aviv and we done a bit of training just out of Tel Aviv, an old foot bridge that was there. We done a lot of

training pulling the old bridge down at Ramagat I think it was Ramagat, the name of the village. It was like a Jew village, it was. [Ramat Gan?]

There were hundreds of Arabs there, all kinds, Jews and Arabs. As far as I know they did get on alright. But there were big orange orchards there, around Hill 69, used to grow oranges. We used to go for training all out through them villages, them old Arab villages. It was terrible to go through an Arab village you know, the stink. They used to have big walls all round their village. They used to use that as a latrine, I think, outside of their wall. They had no septic system, none at all. Dirty! No one cleaned it up.

I never seen any pigs there at all. They had plenty of goats, donkeys, camels. They used to feed, come in around the camps and feed around the camps at nighttime. I heard some of them say they used to run the camel in underneath an empty tent and then they'd let the tent down on top of the camel and away they'd go. Pinched.

I never seen it myself. But I seen some of them shot, like the blokes out on the outer perimeter, the guards, I seen them shoot Arabs at times, thieving. They didn't bring them in for trial, they just 'bang'. I've heard they've come into the tent at night time when the blokes are asleep and took their – they used to use their kit bags as pillows, see – pinch the kit bags from underneath them. They used to come there with oranges for sale, they used to bring chickens around for sale. Bottles of soft drink. They would have the chicken sitting on top of the bottles of soft drink, no hygiene at all (laughs). I was pleased to get rid of them.

We didn't get involved in any fighting in Palestine. No. We went from Palestine across to Syria where the Vichy French were fighting. We all went out to, went across in troop transport trucks and the night we got there, they was, they told us to camp here under these olive trees, and we camped there. The next night we busted the camp not far behind where the artillery was and the next thing 'bang, bang', woke us up. We used to go out everyday then, out in the trucks, we used to go out and do a bit of road work and stuff and that in the trucks. The first day we went out there were two or three Vichy French lying dead on the side of the road and we went past them. They had been fighting the day before. We used to go out, mostly night time, and do a bit of work on the roads and put barb wire up and different things, widening roads, that's all we done.

We never used mines. We had a lot of, cakes they were, like explosives, that's all we used. We never saw any fighting and no one ever shot at us while we there. We only had our .303 rifles, that's all. We didn't have any machine guns or anything like that.

We saw shells, that's all, artillery shells.

We camped out one night in what they call, we call them a gully, but they call them a waddy, we camped in a waddy one night. Didn't get dug, we were a bit late, we camped there, we had, there was only about half a dozen of us I suppose, only had the one truck then, and we camped in this waddy that night and next morning we got up and about half a mile down below us there was English heavy guns, artillery mob, just camped down

below and the next minute we heard this loud noise up in the bloody mountains and the next thing the whistle, and the next minute we see, looked down and see the bloody Pommies all diving for their little holes. We are all standing there laughing at them, and next minute the bloody, the gun goes 'boom' up in the hills and the next minute you heard the whistling and the whistle stopped right on alongside. We dived for our little trenches, dived in, but we were just lucky never, none of them hit the big truck. If it had hit the big truck it would have blew us to smithereens with all the explosives that was in the truck see. We had big holes dug all around the truck but it missed, but about 4 shells landed about 50 yards away from the truck I suppose, exploded.

Shell exploded, it was shrapnel alright. We was laying in these trenches, what we dug ourselves. Little slit trenches and the bloody hot shrapnel, we had shorts on, and the hot shrapnel used to fly, would come down and burn your legs because the shrapnel used to come off the shells.

Shell exploded, just blows it up, and it falls out and falls out. And the red hot bloody stuff used to land on your leg. But ahh, they only fired half a dozen shells at us, and give the old Pommies a bit of going. I don't know if they killed any of them, I never heard, but we got out after that. Took off, back to the camp we were camped in, towards Beirut up in the hills. I can't think of the name. But anyway we shifted from there into Beirut. Not Beirut, further, what's the other big town inland from there, I can't think of it now. A big place. We went into there [possibly Baalbek]. We camped there for a good while and then we went to ... we split up some of our Unit and they went up further north, towards Turkey. If I had a map I would have soon showed you. It will come to me.

It was winter then, it was snowing like hell. We stopped in this place till afterwards the snow went away. I had 2 weeks leave in Beirut, me and two or three other fellows. Stayed in a hotel and we walked around. Went to different ... had a look at different sites and that. We come down by train from where we were staying. I can't think of the name of the place we stopped at. I can't even think of the name of the hotel.

There were a lot of army people there, a lot of the 6th division provos—Military Police—were there. They used to take us around and show us a lot of the out-of-bounds places. Probably if they wasn't with you and you were there you would probably get pinched. There were a lot of brothels out there and they was all out of bounds.

I did meet some local people. Some there speak English, most of them were all wogs. Syrians and all that kind. Sometimes we used to eat the local food, but mostly we used to go to the Australian Canteen there, you could go eat all-Australian food and Australian beer. There was only the one big Canteen there in Beirut. It was free.

[Alf's service documents say he was evacuated to Australian Field Ambulance for diarrhoea on 18 November 1941 and then returned to the Unit on 27th November.]

I got crook there in Syria where I went up to the doctor; I got that dysentery. I had it for about 3 or 4 months I suppose, chronic dysentery.

[Service documents record an offence: ‘neglect to the prejudice of good order in February 1942’ and a fine.]

That was in 1942 in the Middle East. It was only, they took us for a route march out on, over on the sand hills and they give us certain things to carry, light things, we never bothered putting them in. Tinned stuff, emergency rations they call it, bully beef. Some of us didn’t carry them and when I came back they searched our bags and they give us drill there for 2 or 3 hours drill, marching up and down and up and down the parade ground. That was all.

Then we came back to Hill 69, back to Palestine. Hill 69 was a staging camp, a big camp. And we came back to, back down on the canal again, camped there and we caught the transport. The *Melbourne Star*, we caught it back to Adelaide.

[Service documents record Alf boarding the *Melbourne Star* on 28th March 1942 and then disembarking on 20th April.]

They didn’t tell us why we were going back to Australia. All they said was that the Japanese were fighting Australia then and the war was on with Japan, so they brought us back. Just the Captain told us. We landed in Adelaide and went to private homes, we were billeted out to private homes in Adelaide. Wayville Park.

[There is a big gap in the Service documents after April but Alf’s grading as group 4 Cook was confirmed 1 December 1942. He was evacuated Kapooka 25 February. Alf was investigate for ?appendicitis 28Feb-4Mar43. Rejoined unit 4 March. Granted home leave 13-19 March 1943.]

Then they sent us home on leave. A couple of weeks I think. It was just the same as when I left. Mum was pleased to see me, pleased (laughs), ‘cos oh, I was, I was getting 6 shillings a day and I used to send 3 shillings home for Mum every payday because money wasn’t much then. We were only getting 6 bob a day, seven days a week.

I didn’t have a girlfriend then. When I was at Tamworth I used to go out to Manilla for a weekend, me and my mate, picked up a girlfriend, I had a girlfriend there for, while I was still in Australia [before the Middle East], Ivy Mulholland. I used to write to her. I took her out to [my brother] George’s place at Hornsby once. ‘Cos you was only a little fellow then. Ivy wrote me a letter just before I came back from the Middle East, she wrote me a letter, [or] her mother wrote a letter, and said Ivy was married to a Yank. That’s the last time I’d seen her. Oh it didn’t worry me. I hadn’t intended to get married, it was, ah, just a friendship that’s all.

When we came back from home leave they sent us to Wagga for training. Kapooka was a training camp, just out of Wagga. Ordinary engineers training. Then we went from there back to Adelaide and then up to Northern Territory. A camp at Tenants Creek, we

camped at Tenants Creek. From Tenants Creek to Newcastle Waters ..., and then from there we went across to Mt Isa.

Our unit was camped out at Mt Isa on an old cattle station. We camped there for a while, about 20-odd blokes I suppose, don't know for sure. We just had ordinary picks and shovels and all that kind of stuff. But the other blokes were camped in Mt Isa. We went from there, I forget where we went from there, whether we went back on leave again or whether we went to the Atherton Tablelands or not.

[Service documents: in early August 1943 he sustained a kick in his neck playing football "knocked him silly, but not unconscious". On 25Aug he was admitted to field hospital reporting "neck has been increasingly sore since and patient cannot hold head straight". MO could find "no bony injury or displacement." He was discharged 13Sep with a diagnosis "fibrositis neck".]

The next lot we was up at the Atherton Tablelands, training up there. Jungle training. That's where I had my football injury.

For our jungle training it was like you would go out at night time and see the jungle and carry some, it was just seeing things you had to carry around. You had your own rifle, single shot with 5-round magazine underneath. A few spare rounds in pouches, 5-10, not many, not while in Australia.

After the jungle training finished they took us down to Townsville. We camped there for a while, at the barracks, then we embarked, they put us on this Yankee boat, although I can't think of the name of this boat. We disembarked at Morotai, camped there and did a lot of training there, training all the time (laughs). We camped just inside the perimeter of Morotai.

[Service documents offences. AWL 1600 hrs 30April – 1800 hrs 10May44 total forfeited 39 days pay. Drunkenness 14July 1944 fined £1.10.0. AWL 700-1900 hrs 4Dec1944 fined £1 by OO 2/15 Fd Coy.]

I took up drinking while I was in the army, when I was in Tamworth. I suppose because the other blokes, me mates did. We used to go on duty, and after the duty was over they would give you a few free beers. That's when we started drinking. Anybody that wanted it, a lot of them wouldn't drink beer. They used to give you tickets see, a roll of tickets, and you could go into the canteen and get a glass of beer for a ticket. Some of them who didn't drink they used to give their tickets to the other fellows. You'd also get a free issue of tobacco, a 2oz pack and a packet of papers, I think it was every week, I am not sure. In the Islands they used to give you I think 3 large bottles of beer a week.

Oh, most of it was Melbourne beer, Melbourne bitter, Melbourne Abbott's Lager. Sometimes it was Sydney beer, Sydney bitter, but we always used to go for the Melbourne bottled beer because we reckoned the Melbourne was the best. I had a mate up there in the Islands he never drank, he never smoked, he used to give me his share. I

don't know of anyone who traded with it. Anybody who didn't drink theirs give it to their mates.

[Service documents: embarked Townsville per *David Shanks* 11 April 1945 and disembarked Morotai 19 April 1945.] (Attachment E)

In Morotai they used to put pictures on at night time, open air pictures. Japs used to come in, sneak in and go to the pictures. I'm serious! Not kidding. They come in from out in the perimeter and come in, watch movies. I didn't see them myself but I heard the blokes telling us. The blokes that were there before us. There were a helluva lot of Yanks there too.

[Service documents: "embarked Morotai for service in Borneo" 1 June 1945.]

We went from Morotai across to Labuan Island. We landed on Labuan Island on the first day they took the island. They were still dive-bombing and still bombing the shores when we got off the boat. We went in on the big barges, what they call them, can't think of it now. They couldn't get in very close and so they put down the landing barge there was one in the front and we had to jump off. Up to your waist with water. No one was shooting at us. All the shooting that was going on was from the barges and from the big guns out at sea. They were bombing.

A lot of infantry had landed there. There was a little bit of a town there and they had it blown to pieces. We got onto the beach and then went up behind the beach and put up a camp there. It was pretty rough.

Couldn't do much there because there wasn't much to do. Just engineering work that's all. All the infantry blokes they were camped not far from where we were. All the Japanese were up in the hills beyond and the tunnels, where they was camped. There was a fair sized aerodrome on that Island.

They couldn't get the Japanese out, they were all in these tunnels and that, in the island hills, all the Japanese were in them, and we were camped there. One night there was a platoon of Japanese, they broke out from up in the hills and they come down through the camps and raided the camps and our blokes just shot them, they shot dozens. I think a few Australians were killed; they were speared in their sleep through the tents. We went down the next day and had a look at them. They had the Japanese bodies all lined up on the ground where they'd shot em. After that I don't think there was many Japanese left, might have been one or two you'd see, used to get around.

The big warship *HMAS Shropshire* was anchored out there in the bay there, she used to fire the big shells over the top of where we were, and you could nearly see the bloody shells going through the air and you could hear them going woof and they would bust up in the hills, burst up in the hills but it didn't worry us.

We went from Labuan Island over to British Borneo then and across to Beaufort. We landed on the coast and went up the Beaufort River, that's north Borneo. When we landed at Beaufort they were still fighting up in the jungle there from where we were.

The Japanese surrendered after that but they [the Australian officers] didn't say anything about the atomic bomb. When the war finished they brought ... they had a big Japanese prison camp there just out of, ah, I can't think of the place, we went down and we was camped not far from where they had the prisoners of war. I used to go out every morning, out to the prisoner of war camp, and get about a dozen Japanese and bring em back to our camp and make them work around the camp cleaning up around the camp and digging holes.

They were getting well fed, they were looked after. They didn't worry. They wasn't ill-treated or anything, they were just, you know, they were happy as Larry. I think some of the blokes in the camp met a couple of the Japanese that they knew in Australia before the war. Like Japanese that had left Australia and went back for the war. I seen a lot of Japanese nurses there, they came in from out in the jungle, from Beaufort. When they brought em in, they brought hundreds of them in.

Nurses and soldiers they brought after the war was over. They used to bring them in, in droves. Some of Japanese died in the camp, got crook with malaria and the other diseases they had. We used to watch them, they would come in, bring em in the boson and then take them in the ferry across to the other side, to the Japanese camp they had there for them.

All the blokes were well behaved. I used to go out every morning and pick up a dozen or so and bring them back. All I had was a revolver, that was all I had on me, no worries. Just an ordinary military revolver with a cylinder. I never ever used it, never fired a shot out of it. The Lieutenant gave it to me but they were no trouble, I brought them back to the camp and gave them their tools of trade.

[Revolver was probably a Webley Mark VI Military Issue Revolver.]

[Service documents: Alf embarked at Labuan per *Lake Charles Victory* 11 January 1946 and disembarked at Brisbane 21 January 1946. Discharged "On account of Demobilization" 1 February 1946.] (Attachment F)

We left up at Labuan Island, and we come back to Brisbane. We disembarked in Brisbane, that was a staging camp there. Stopped there overnight or it might have been a couple of days I don't know for sure. I know we used to go into Brisbane and have a few beers at night time. Then they put us on the train and sent us down to Sydney at the showground for discharge. Didn't take us long for discharge and out, we were out. Medical examination had me A1.

[Service documents: his medical examination prior to discharge was conducted on 15 October 1945. It notes he did not want to claim a war pension.]

I'm not sure if I went home in my uniform or not. They paid you all the time every week, every fortnight, and the maturity money didn't come along for a long time after. I think I got about 450 quid there, maturity. It took a few months to get that.

I went home and I didn't do much for a few months. Me and my mate Doug Cummins went out and fell a few trees for the sawmill bloke around Woodburn, out from Woodburn. I knew Doug before the war; he was in the army too. We went out and done a bit of tree falling and in the finish we felled some logs for a bloke and he never ever paid us. We were done out of it, so I give that away and then went into the mill, Broadwater mill. I only done two seasons there.

I left there and I joined the railway then, in 1948 or something I joined the railway. Stayed on the railways for 30 years. It was bit alright, the railway, a bit hard. Fettler, pick and shovel work. I was in extra gangs.

The first camp was this side of Grafton, and then we camped on the other side of Grafton, all along the coast, up to Casino and nearly up as far as Kyogle. I worked all the way down the coast there, right out far as Singleton, out to Tamworth and different places. One time we had a trolley out here from Nambucca Station. The train hit us that day but didn't hurt anybody – we jumped off. The trolley was smashed. I don't know what happened. They made a mistake somehow on the times or something, and it came through a bit early than it shoulda done. It just came round the bend and our driver said whoops, and there were blokes going everywhere.

I have been in 1-2-3-4, four times I've been hit with a train. Different times. Another time I was hit by a motor tricycle was out at Bowen Junction. There were hot springs a few miles out of Bowen Junction. We came in from work this afternoon and it was pretty hot and decided to get on the motor trike and go out to these hot springs. In the meantime, that day, one of the station blokes was chasing cattle and he fell off his horse and broke his arm. They brought him into Bowen Station but there was no doctor there. So they went down to the Fettler's shed, and they took him into the next town on one of these fettling machines they drive along the lines. We didn't know anything about that. It was just on dark and we got on the motor tricycle and were going out to the springs to have a swim and coming around the corner this bloke, this fettler, is coming back and we ran into one another. I was sitting on the tray and I went over the bank with the machine and the machine went over my right arm. Cut right through there, and busted my hip, badly bruised it.

No one was bleeding and I couldn't get to see a doctor after because there was no doctor there at Bowen Junction. The only way to see a doctor was to wait for the next train to come down from the town down further and that was only coming in 2 days time. There was a bush nurse on the train and she gave me first aid and took me into Narrabri, the hospital. By then it was too late to stitch it up. Two days see, and all the proud flesh. So

my arm is all numb down there, all me arm. Cut the nerves. I was in there for a couple of weeks and they sent me down to Newcastle to recuperate, down to my sister, Mabs, who lives at Patterson. I had to be careful. I used to go and see the Patterson Doctor. It had got infected.

I had another accident just up from Nambucca Station. I was going down the hill, train came round the corner, bang, knocked us again. Injured me shoulder then, that shoulder there. And then another one out there where the Abattoirs are, just out of Macksville. The ganger he forgot about this train coming through and the next minute it just come around the corner, bang. The train was going full speed. We never got hurt, we got off then, both of us got away from it. We jumped. The ganger said jump, there was pieces of trike flying everywhere so we jumped and went, dived.

I was working at Worrall Creek on the railway and I was doing a Sunday morning run between Eungai and Nambucca Heads. I pulled up at the plug-in where you put your phone in, rang up Eungai and I said, he didn't say anything about the train. So I got on the trike and kept on going and only got about 100 yards and around the corner comes the train again, bang again. (laughs) I jumped off. As I jumped off I was running down through tall grass and there was a big stump there and I hit the bloody stump fair in my chest. Jarred me up a bit. Had a few close calls on the trains.

I used to go with an old girl at Kempsey, name Veronica Dobbs. Oh, well after the war, years after. I joined the railway in 1948 so this was 1954 when I met up with her. I met them at Kempsey. I was in the railway working at Worrall when I met them.

[Service documents: when he applied for a permanently incapacitated service pension in late 1977, Alf's railway employment was recorded as "Railway Fettler 6 June 1951 – 26 October 1977"]

She was living with a bloke before that. And she'd had about half a dozen kids before from him. The first kids had all grown up, just about, the youngest one was about 8 or 9 year old. We had two children, a boy and a girl, born around 1955, 1956 or 1957, something round there. The boy's name was Chris, the girl's, I can't think at the moment ... a bloke's brains, a bloke can't think. They took their mother's name, Dobbs. I wasn't actually living with her. I used to stay there but it wasn't much of a, you know, sometimes she'd be alright, sometimes wasn't. On and off as we all do. Kay was the girl's name.

Kay was married and got 5 kids and she is up in Queensland, up at Beaudesert. She left this bloke and she is living with another bloke, not married. She worked all her life. She was working in a chemist when she left school. She worked in some big factories at St Mary's there, they used to live just out of Penrith near Llandilo.

Chris is married he has 3 kids, and lives at Sandy Beach, this side of Coffs Harbour. He works at a banana plantation. Veronica died 10 years, 8 years ago. [shows photo] That's me. Those are her two kids, a boy and a girl. That little girl is married now. That's her baby over there (points).

I started playing lawn bowls in 1959, started playing down here at Nambucca. I used to play carpet bowls before then, in the Nambucca RSL. An old bloke told me, he said look, why don't you come down and play on the green. So I went down and he kicked me off playing bowls. Second year I played bowls I won the B Grade championship, Club championship.

Then I've won quite a few since. Won the state triples, a team of three. Won the Club A grade singles, B grade singles, fours, triples. State triples once, only tried it once. And won the State number 3 Pennant bowls fours. We won that in Sydney. I won a few other trophies you can see there looking around [the room]. A few bottles of beer. Bottles of wine, whisky, a few bottles of whisky.

During the war I used to play football up in the Atherton Tablelands, rugby league [but not afterwards]. I like fishing and shooting, used to do a bit of shooting, for rabbits. I used to do a bit of horse riding before the war, up around Woodburn, before I joined the army. But we only had one horse there at home, Chubby, for the sulky. When we got rid of the sulky my sister had one horse there, I used to ride to town. Only horse we had, and a milking cow.

When mum moved to Nambucca, I moved with her. I think it was 1952. We left Woodburn and got a block of land in Raleigh Street, down at Nambucca, a 99 year lease. It was only Teddy, myself, Mum and Charlotte, Beryl, that's all. When I moved out – I got kicked out of Raleigh Street. When I left there I went down to [Pelican] Caravan Park down by the River there, bought a caravan and lived in that for a while, and then I put in for this place and got this place. Mum was dead by then. I retired in 1977.

They kicked me out of Raleigh Street because they reckoned I wasn't paying enough. Beryl made the bullets and the old bugger would fire them. Jack and Beryl both of them. I got out, I got me money, got me 2,000 dollars and got out. Mum left half the house to Beryl and quarter to Teddy and a quarter to me, and poor old Charlotte never got nothing (chuckles). She'd done all that, she'd looked after Mum for years, Charlotte.

I was about 9 or 10 I suppose when my father died. Oh I can remember him well. He used to sit out on the back verandah there at home, front verandah. Reading, he couldn't do much, too sick. He used to talk to us and tell us what we should do when he passed away look after our Mother and all of that, he used to lecture. I can remember him just before, it might have been a day before they took him away, he lined us all up on the

verandah and give us a lecture. I remember him he used to walk Teddy and Mabs there and they were only that high [indicates]. He'd be walking down towards the river bank with them, [a little] one in each hand.

I don't know what happened to him, I think he died of cancer I think. He was in a lot of pain, terrible pain. Used to hear him all night singing out.

[John: his death certificate says something about a crush fracture, it's a bit vague but I think it is talking about a crushed chest. Dad told me your father was working with a couple of other guys digging out a big stump and he was in the hole and they were supposed to be holding the stump and one of them let go and he took the whole weight of this really big stump and it just either broke bones or crushed his chest. Happened about a year before he died and he never recovered from that.]

I dunno, I didn't ever hear what he died from but I know I used to be lying in bed at night time and you could hear him singing out. I don't know if he had any pain killers, aspro but I don't think so. The doctor used to come out to him. I couldn't tell you if the doctor gave him anything. I remember him singing out 'get an axe and hit me on the head', he was in that much pain.

I was closer to me mum, 'cos I didn't know my father that much. I was only 8 or 9 year old. He was working away in the Quarries up other side of Lismore. I dunno what kind of work he was doing.

I knew my grandfather, TR Ransley, a great old fellow. Yeah, he was a great old bloke old TR, liked to talk. I don't think he was interested in races. I used to go to Carlton, I used to ride a bike down from Penrith. I couldn't tell you for sure now how long it took. I know I was riding home just about dark one night going towards Penrith and the coppers pulled me up. No lights and they give me a bloody lecture and let me go. Two of them in a car.

At Carlton they listened to the radio, that's all there was in those days. They had a piano. Auntie Olly she used to play the piano. I saw her play it. It was probably just something to do. It wouldn't be a special occasion, it was just ordinary, everyday. The old grandfather he used to grow fruit trees. He had a few fruit trees up there in the backyard. He had his own little vegetable plot. A few fowls.

I knew Phil Brooks too. He was only a school kid when I was there. They lived next door to their father. I knew the old fellow Brooks, he only had one arm, other amputated. I don't know if it was in the war or not.

TR didn't ever say what his politics were. He took me down to St. George where they had just started to build a Leagues Club there then. He used to take me down there and show me around. I suppose he would be a St George supporter. I didn't go to his funeral. But I went out to Grandma's when she was dying. When I got there I just went in and said goodbye to her, that's all. She didn't know anybody.

John: I will leave it there then. Thanks very much.

PUNE:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pune>

Attachment A: Convoy US9

<http://www.230battalion.org.au/history/training/voyage/convoyUS9.htm>

Convoy US9

Introduc	Train	W	P.O	Return
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[Training](#) | [Recruitment](#) | [Training in Australia](#) | [Voyage to Singapore](#) | [Training in Malaya](#)

Departed Sydney 4/2/1941; arrived Singapore 18/2/1941

Troopship to Singapore

- [HMT QX - Queen Mary](#) (also known as HMT XT or HMT X)

Troopships to Bombay

- Aquitania
- Mauretania
- Nieuw Amsterdam (N.Z. Forces)

In Sydney, embarkation of the troops onto *Queen Mary* (HMT QX), and *Aquitania*, commenced on 2/2/1941, and continued until 4/2/1941. *Nieuw Amsterdam* had departed Wellington on 1/2/1941, carrying New Zealand troops, and *Mauretania* was in Melbourne taking her troops on board.



At anchor in Sydney Harbour, 20/10/1940. Queen Mary is about to transport troops to the Middle East. Australian War Memorial - ID No. 004298



Members of the 22nd Brigade, aboard the troopship Queen Mary en route to Singapore, 4/2/1941. Australian War Memorial - ID No. P03478.001

Queen Mary (HMT QX), with nearly 6000 troops on board, and *Aquitania* departed Sydney on 4/2/1941 and joined up with *Nieuw Amsterdam* off Sydney Heads. They

Bass Strait and headed for Fremantle.

Convoy US9 arrived in Fremantle on 9/2/1941 and departed on 12/2/1941, escorted by *HMAS Canberra*. The troops on board *Queen Mary* thought they were heading for the Middle East, but a few days out of Fremantle, *Queen Mary*, which was at the head of the convoy, swung around behind the other ships, came up alongside them again for a farewell pass and then turned for Singapore. The other three troopships headed for Bombay, where the troops were transferred to other smaller ships for the remainder of the trip to the Middle East.

HMS Durban had come from Singapore to escort *Queen Mary*, and the two ships arrived there on 18/2/1941. *Queen Mary* entered dry dock on 21/2/1941, and remained in Singapore until 22/3/1941. She then returned to Sydney, arriving on 1/4/1941, ready to become part of the next convoy to the Middle East, US10.



Queen Mary berthed at Singapore on 18/2/1941. A group of senior British and Australian officers, greeted the troops on arrival. Australian War Memorial - ID No. 005907



In dry dock in Singapore, August 1940. Australian War Memorial - ID No. 128444

(NAA: B883 Service Records; Australian Army War Diary 1/15/14 - District Records Office Eastern Command January-April 1941)

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Last updated 07/04/2014

Appendix B: Aquitania

Australian War Memorial: Aquitania photo [US3]



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

302931

SS Aquitania: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/302931/>

1940-05-05. AERIAL STARBOARD SIDE VIEW OF THE TRANSPORT RMS AQUITANIA AS PART OF CONVOY US.3 TAKING TROOPS FROM AUSTRALIA TO THE MIDDLE EAST. THE AQUITANIA WAS PART OF EIGHT OF THE US SERIES OF CONVOYS, TOOK AUSTRALIAN TROOPS TO SINGAPORE AND PORT MORESBY AND ASSISTED IN THE RETURN OF AUSTRALIAN TROOPS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST. IN NOVEMBER 1941 SHE PICKED UP SURVIVORS FROM THE GERMAN RAIDER KORMORAN AFTER HER ACTION WITH HMAS SYDNEY OFF THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COAST. (NAVAL HISTORICAL COLLECTION)

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/302931/>

Appendix C: Johan de Witt

<http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/descriptions/ShipsN.shtml>

NEPTUNIA / JOHAN DE WITT 1919

10,519 gross tons, length o'all 523ft x beam 59.2ft, one funnel, one mast, twin screw, speed 16 knots. Built by Nederlandsche Scheepsbouw Maatschappij, Amsterdam and launched on 2nd May 1919 for the Netherlands Steamship Co as the JOHAN DE WITT with two funnels and two masts and accommodation for 197-1st, 120-2nd and 36-3rd class passengers. Her maiden voyage started 27th Jul.1920 when she left Amsterdam for Southampton, Suez and the Dutch East Indies. Sold to Compania Maritima del Este, Panama on 15th Dec.1948, she was rebuilt and renamed NEPTUNIA with accommodation for 251-1st and 563-tourist class passengers. In May 1949 she started her first voyage from Genoa to Lisbon, New York, Naples, Piraeus and Haifa. Her last sailing for these owners commenced 9th Apr.1951 from New York to Boston, Cherbourg, Southampton and Bremen. Sold to the Neptunia Shipping Co, Panama in 1954 she sailed between Bremen and New York or Quebec/Montreal with intermediate calls. On 2nd Nov.1957 she struck Daunts Rock at Cobh and was beached in sinking condition. Refloated in March 1958, she was towed to Holland where she was scrapped. [North Atlantic Seaway by N.R.P.Bonsor, vol.4,p.1655-6] [The Centenary of Stoomvaart Maatschappij Nederland by G.J.de Boer]

Appendix D: Hill 69 Camp

<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/COXYCjQXAAA6sg9.jpg>



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

040412

https://static.awm.gov.au/images/collection/items/ACCNUM_SCREEN/040412.JPG

AWM ID number 040412

British Mandate of Palestine: Palestine

PALESTINE. 1942-03-10. AN AERIAL VIEW OF TWO OF THE A.I.F. CAMPS IN PALESTINE; KHASSA, IN THE FOREGROUND AND HILL 69 CAMP IN DISTANCE.

Attachment E: David Shanks

<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/OnlineLibrary/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-d/ap180.htm>

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY -- NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER
805 KIDDER BREESE SE -- WASHINGTON NAVY YARD
WASHINGTON DC 20374-5060

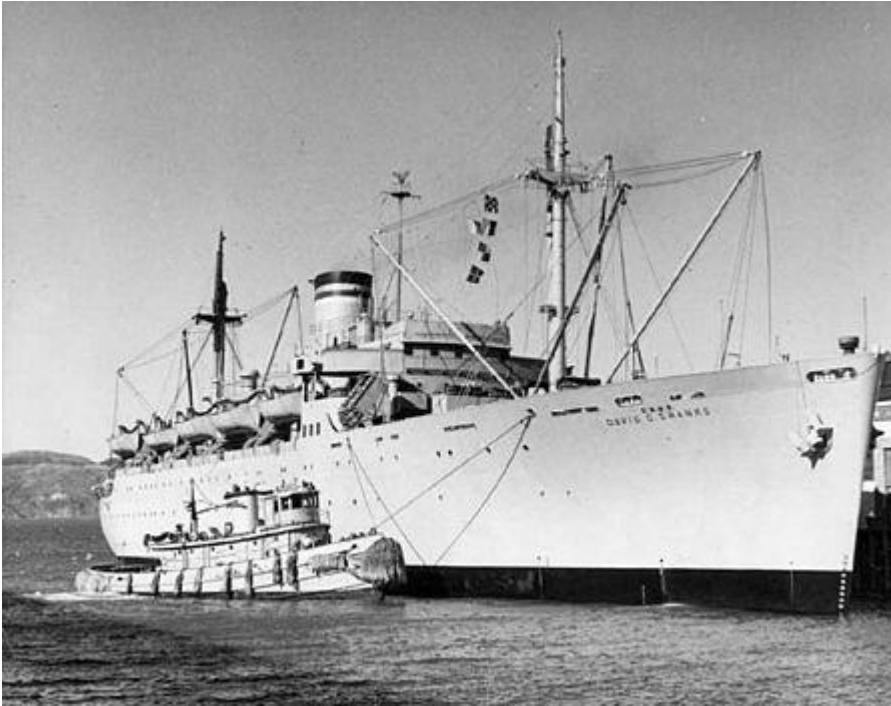


Photo # NH 103783: USNS David C. Shanks alongside a pier during the 1950s.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/6b/USNS_David_C._Shanks_T-AP-180.jpg/450px-USNS_David_C._Shanks_T-AP-180.jpg

-- U.S. NAVY SHIPS --

USNS David C. Shanks (T-AP-180), 1943-1973.

Originally U.S. Army Transport David C. Shanks

USNS David C. Shanks, a 10,556-ton George W. Goethals-class transport, was ordered in 1940 by the Maritime Commission to its C3-IN P&C design as American Farmer, a combination passenger cargo liner for the United States Lines. She was requisitioned as a troopship in 1941 by the Maritime Commission, purchased by the Army, launched in 1942 at Pascagoula, Mississippi as Gulfport, and delivered to the Army in April 1943 as David C. Shanks. To offset the weight added during the troopship conversion, the outer casing of her funnel was not fitted, leaving only an ugly eight-foot diameter "smokestalk" or "midgetstack".

USAT David C. Shanks arrived at San Francisco, California in June 1943 and during the rest of the war supported Army forces in the Southwest Pacific and in the Pacific islands. In July 1945 she departed San Francisco for a brief tour in the Atlantic. Leaving Norfolk, Virginia in December 1945, she returned to San Francisco in February 1946 carrying troops from the Philippines. David C. Shanks then underwent a one-month conversion to a combination troop and dependent carrier. Between August 1947 and May 1948 she underwent a much more extensive refurbishment for peacetime service, which included restoration of her funnel casing and the cutting of over 200 portholes.

Along with most other large Army transports, the ship was transferred to the Navy's Military Sea Transportation Service in March 1950, becoming USNS David C. Shanks (T-AP-180). In 1951 she shifted her homeport from Seattle, Washington to San Francisco and for the remainder of her career transported personnel between that city's Fort Mason and locations throughout the Pacific basin. Her most frequent ports of call were Honolulu, Manila, Guam, and Kwajalein; she also made voyages to Alaska, Japan, and Taiwan. David C. Shanks completed her last voyage in Los Angeles in September 1959, moved to San Francisco in October 1959, and was deactivated and laid up in the reserve fleet at Suisun Bay, Calif. The ship was permanently transferred to the Maritime Administration in November 1960 and was stricken from the Naval Vessel Register in July 1961. She was sold in June 1973 for scrapping in Taiwan.

Attachment F: Lake Charles Victory

<http://www.usskidd.com/ships-lakecharlesvictory-usmm.html>

LAKE CHARLES VICTORY

During World War II, approximately 531 modular-designed Victory Ships were mass-produced by the United States for the war effort. These cargo ships moved the airplanes, tanks, ammunition, and men overseas that were necessary to win the war. One of these vessels had the honor to bear the name of LAKE CHARLES VICTORY, named for the 5th largest city in the State of Louisiana, located in the southwest corner of the state on the shores of Calcasieu Lake.

LAKE CHARLES VICTORY (February 01, 1945 ~ May 05, 1969):

Laid down under Maritime Contract on December 05, 1944, LAKE CHARLES VICTORY was the first Victory Ship to be named for a Louisiana city. Built by Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard in Baltimore, Maryland, she was launched on February 01, 1945. She was christened by Mrs. Robert F. Rader. The vessel was delivered to the U.S. War Shipping Administration on February 28, 1945.



LAKE CHARLES VICTORY as she appeared in 1945. Photo courtesy of Nol Staas.
<http://www.usskidd.com/images/ships/Lake%20Charles%20Victory%20Akkrumdyk1945.jpg>