

Frank Driver, SX23025 Army Service WWII

10/48 Infantry Battalion, 281 L. A. D. (Mobile Workshops)

As told to Ken Hayes.

Edited by Paul Spencer and John & Christine Hancock.

As a result of a visit from Ken Hayes (Almoner, Brighton S.A. RSL Sub Branch) in early January 2011 and subsequent visits Ken asked if he could interview me regarding my military involvement during WWII. I agreed and this is my story.

I was born on the 8th March, 1923 at Rose Park Hospital, Adelaide, and grew up in Knoxville (Glenside) & Brighton and was educated at Rose Park & Glenelg schools. I am the oldest of five brothers and sisters.

After I finished school I commenced working with my father who owned the garage (now a crash repair shop) on Brighton Road, Hove just to the north of the railway crossing. Below is a photo of it, taken in 1950. The garage was purchased from M Bree in 1937, enlarged to accommodate a workshop area and hydraulic hoist and an increased number of petrol pumps.



Garage on Brighton Road, 1950

I enlisted at Warradale Army Camp into 10th Battalion Army Military Force (AMF) and went through the usual training including equipment. I then transferred to the Transport Section and was given a 15 cwt International truck in the Motor unit. I was sent to Morphettville Race Course and did a course on vehicle maintenance and qualified as a Driver Mechanic.

The 10th AMF Battalion was then sent to Warrawong NSW (near Wollongong) for further training and teaching others to drive the trucks with which we were being issued. While at Warrawong the army decided to increase the number of AIF Battalions and called for volunteers to transfer from the Australian Military Forces (Units only to be employed in Australia) into the Australian Infantry Force. (Units that could be sent overseas).

Most of the 10th volunteered, so the unit was built up from the 10th and the 48th Battalions of the AMF. As there was already established the 2/10 AIF Battalion then serving in the Middle East they called our unit the 10/48 AIF Battalion. This procedure was carried throughout the army and so increased the number of AIF units. Other units were established such as 27/43 in South Australia and also others in other states by combining AMF units into AIF units.

When the 10/48 AIF Battalion was finally assembled to full strength it was announced we were to be sent to Darwin. The first bombing of Darwin had been on the 19th February 1942 and the number of military units was being increased as the authorities feared the Japanese may invade Australia.

Our unit returned to Adelaide, then went by troop train to Terowie (made famous by General McArthur) and then changed to the narrow gauge Commonwealth line to Alice Springs. There was a large camp established at the old Aerodrome to accommodate troops arriving by train and next morning we were loaded onto trucks for the long trip north. Daily Routine: After an early breakfast the convoys left at about 07-00 hours and stopped about 1700 hours. There could be several dozen trucks in groups.

I think a lot about the names of camps and staging stops on the way north. Many were named for local Cattle Stations etc. and I can't remember all of them. Some that come to mind are Barrow Creek, Banka Banka, Newcastle Waters, Pine Creek, Fenton, Adelaide River, Eliot and Larrimah, which was the train terminal. We were transferred to the train which consisted of cattle trucks with canvas curved roof (Spirit of Protest) for protection.



In uniform

Leaving the train we were placed in tents overnight then took over the camp site and equipment at the 39 mile camp, formerly held by the 19th Infantry Battalion. There were many damaged trucks there as a result of the bombing in Darwin. We later built camps at the 51



Truck inspection

mile camp, and obtained the replacement trucks: Army type 3 ton 4 wheel drives. Another driver mechanic and I were sent to Larrakeyah Workshops for training and we were passed as Engine fitters and returned to maintain and repair the unit's vehicles. During the three years the unit was in Darwin we became the official duty unit for the Darwin township, centred at Parap Army Camp for three months each time. We had the council area for our workshop. The unit was scattered all around Darwin guarding the Power Station and other important areas.

Food cookhouse transport supplies: We used metal "dixies" etc. to eat from after standing in a queue where it was dished into these containers. There was quite often tinned fruit, occasionally some fresh. Most of the food came up by train or road from the south e.g. Potatoes and other vegetables etc. We had very little contact with the Americans, saw them going up and down; but that was about it, similarly the aborigines. As far as entertainment was concerned I played the banjo and even made one. We played for concerts etc. including at the Darwin Hotel for the nurses. There were many from different groups that formed the bands.

I waited nearly 18 months before coming south for my first lot of leave. Progressively the road to Darwin (that is from Alice Springs to the rail line that ran south from Darwin) improved over time. It usually took two weeks plus the transport time at either end. I forget when the road was finally sealed but it was done by Australians not Americans. Many of the men who were unfit for WWII were former local council men who worked on the roads and had this knowledge and experience.

Whilst in Darwin I came under fire from bombing by the Japanese, I think it stopped in about 1943. The Japanese would have flown from Rabaul and other islands north of New Guinea until the islands were recaptured by the Allies. Targets included Vestey's Meat Works, Power House, High School, Airfield and other strategic places such as council areas. Incidentally there were more bombs dropped on Darwin than at Pearl Harbour. There were lots more killed than was published in the media. The raids led to a repositioning of armed forces in the region with a major increase in Australian and American forces. Adelaide River became one of the most important bases.



Frank with some mates

RAAF spitfires landed on the main road and were then pushed into roadside aircraft dispersal tracks (sealed) for servicing etc. Airfleets of Spitfires were on main road detection, subsequently when convoys were en route on the road they had to be stopped, then moved off the road for safety. These sections of road were known as Roadside Fighter Strips. e.g. Livingstone, Strauss etc. Livingstone airstrip developed considerably over the three years from March 1942. The overall site consisted of: 49th Fighter Camp site, Boom Gates, Anti-aircraft positions, Control Tower, Machine gun positions, Sentry positions, Dispersal Tracks off the main sealed highway and Aircraft Revetment.

During my stay in Darwin I was sent for a Diesel Correspondence Course and the papers went to the Captain of 281 L.A.D. attached to us. One day he called me and asked if I would like to relieve the Diesel Fitter at the Katherine (Manbull's butchery) camp for three months while the fitter was on compassionate leave. I took the job to gain experience on diesel engines, then returned to the 10th/48 unit.

I knew of the Northern Australia Observer Unit known as "Nackeroos" or "Curtin Cowboys" including a Jack Holder from Brighton. Ken mentioned a Doug Kerr from Hamilton (his home town) whom he knew as a Rifle Shooting Champion after the war and Doug was one of them. They became a sort of legend because of their particular involvement in the war. I later enjoyed reading books which told of their activities.



Frank & Peg in Uniform

In late 1945 the 10th/48 unit left Darwin for Brisbane and was passing through Alice Springs when the war finished but went on to Brisbane to wait for demobilisation which was done according to a points system). While I waited my turn I was sent to the Toowoomba Workshops where I spent the time repairing Jeeps until my time for discharge and in early 1946 returned and demobbed at Hampstead Barracks, Adelaide, and then went on leave.

I married Peggy Anderson when on leave in 1945 and have two sons Alan & Ian. My brother Eric William Driver spent time in Borneo with the 14 Works Company and two Uncles, Norman Harvey (RAN) and Clyde Harvey (RAN) attached to the American Navy.

At the end of 1946 I was able to start a job at Port Adelaide as a Marine Engine fitting and servicing mechanic repairing

ketches. This lasted for 8 years. In 1955 it was time for a change with ketches and other small craft on the way out. Due to the new bulk silos the ketches were no longer needed as the grain trade was all bulk.

I then was able to get a job at the Islington Railways Workshop in the Motor Shop. In mid 1955 the railway began the construction of the 300 class Railcars and I fitted the engine under the first few and tested them. At the end of 1955, 3 x 3 car units were manufactured and were sent to Adelaide to be put into service. A temporary depot was provided at South Car Sheds and on January 1956 with a few other men I was sent to service and maintain the railcars at the Adelaide Suburban Railcar Depot. In 1961 I sat and passed to join the Diesel Engineers of Australia. The fleet kept expanding and more staff were needed so the depot was rebuilt twice. During that time as a Sub-foreman I relieved the Railcar Inspector, Foreman, and then became the Railcar Inspector. After the State Transport Authority takeover of suburban railways, I was appointed Mechanical Inspector. I turned 60 in March 1983 and took retirement being an ex-serviceman. Thus I spent 28 years as a Diesel Fitter and Supervisor with the South Australian Railways.



Frank with Grandson, Caleb

I am fortunate to have many books written by former service people about Darwin during WWII. I have revisited Darwin three times but many of the old sites and landmarks were destroyed by Cyclone Tracey in December 1974. I have quite a collection of photos of Darwin including the 50th anniversary of the Japanese bombings in February 1992.

I was a member of the Railways RSL and became President until the finish of that branch because there were only 3 members and 3 Associate members left. I then joined the Brighton RSL Sub-Branch. One of my younger brother's, Herb plays for the Brighton Bowling Club as does my son Alan.

I mentioned to Ken about the Honour Boards at the Adelaide Railway Station because of my special interest. He knew nothing about these. Ken and his wife Barbara visited the station and were quite surprised at the number, and the size of them. The names included those railway employees who joined the services in WWI and WWII.