

Excerpt of oral history recorded on Tuesday 13th February 2018 at Ballarat Ranger Military Museum as part of the Veterans Heritage Project.

Interviewee

George Prolongeu

Transcript

It was four, about four o'clock in the morning and someone came near the kitchen so that it would be quiet to hear this little simple, little radio that they had and they said "The war's over. The leaders of the Japanese are signing" and so on "and within an hour" or something of that nature "the war with Japan will be over." And that was about four o'clock in the morning.

There was a great jubilation, of course. The men usually had to get out of bed, they usually got out of bed at the last minute, but this morning they were out and about and cheering and saying what they were going to do in the future.

Some of the men got home pretty well straight away because they had families and they had a job to go to. I didn't have any job. I was only, what, 26 or 28 at the time, heading towards 28, and I didn't have very high numbers. And because of that I was there at least two months after the war, and there was only a few of us there. And I got another extra medal for that eventually – I've got five war medals instead of four.

Came home on the Van Heutsz, a Dutch ship, and when we were at the wharf the officer in charge said, "Now, you're the only MCO. You're in charge of these 12 men." He said, "You look after them and keep –", he said, "and you'll end up at the staging camp in Sydney." So I said to the men, "Once we're on the boat, I don't want to see you anymore." And I went down to the galley and stayed there and helped with the food because once you leave –when the war was over and we were coming home – the currents of the sea between New Guinea and Bougainville were just like very turbulent. And the ship would roll to some great extent and that didn't worry me in the galley because you're in the centre of the ship, but a lot of the men were seasick and so on.

But when we got to Sydney, there were big busses there with plaques on them –"AIF men returning home victorious." It's a wonderful experience, really.