

The following story has nothing to do with Survey but perhaps something to do with those uncertain times of WW2 and what is often called 'the fog of war'.

Wendy and I were touring in far North Queensland recently and in our group was an old bloke called Hugh. We got talking and Hugh said he had had 34 years of army service joining in 1941 at the age of 17. At that age Hugh could hardly wait to join up and go to the Middle East so he fiddled his age a bit and got into Engineers.

By the time Hugh had finished his recruit training Japan had entered the war and Hugh's hope of going to the Middle East was dashed and he found himself training recruits at Kapooka. He said that on one occasion they were doing a fire and movement exercise with live rounds and a group headed by a sergeant had fallen behind and Hugh felt his blokes were in danger of collecting so he ordered the sergeant to order his section to ground arms and after some altercation the sergeant complied – at least that was Hugh's story.

Hugh kept applying for overseas service, by now to New Guinea. They sent him to the north coast of Brisbane near Caloundra on construction work. One job involved pulling out old telephone poles and inserting them in the ground at an angle of 45 degrees at a metre or two apart as coastal defences to discourage beach landings. Another was the building of an underground RAP just south of Caloundra and another was the erection of an anti-submarine barrage from Caloundra to Bribie Island. On all of these projects Sapper Hugh played an important role; for instance, swimming the lead line for the barrage net across to Bribie – at least, according to Hugh; and no doubt he did.

Finally Hugh got his wish and he was sent to New Guinea on the *Manoora* and he joined his Engineer unit at Seventeen Mile out of Moresby. Fighting was raging on the Kokoda and Hugh now a Corporal was engaged on track and bridge work, improving access to the Kokoda Track and improving the 'Golden Staircase' rising up from Owers Corner. Unfortunately Hugh, now 18, fell crook with appendicitis and had to be hospitalised at Seventeen Mile where his appendix was whipped out. While Hugh was recuperating he was visited by a padre who asked him who his NOK was and Hugh said his Mum and gave the padre her address and thought no more about it. The padre did the right thing and wrote to Hugh's Mum and told her that he had visited her son Hugh who was just fine recovering from wounds.

Mum, believing that her son was still in Australia since he was under age for overseas service, was somewhat distraught and the upshot was that Hugh was returned to Australia and discharged. This resulted in Hugh being manpowered and was assigned to a well known engineering firm that was engaged on army contract work on the basis of cost plus ten percent. Hugh rankled at this and could see that it was all one big rip-off. He desperately wanted to get back into the Army and having reached the age of 19 applied again and again but couldn't get a manpower release. Finally he fronted up to the manpower authority (wearing his 'active service badge') and threatened to pull the plug on the engineering firm ripping off the Government and got his way – he was back into Engineers and his old unit, but as a sapper again.

But it was not back to New Guinea. He was sent to Kapooka training recruits and it was not until the push to Labuan that he saw active service again. By now Hugh was a

sergeant and he survived that campaign and then the war ended. Because of his early enlistment, Hugh was demobbed fairly quickly and he became a civilian. His Mum was ailing and Hugh looked after her, perhaps until her passing. Then it was time for Hugh to look at the Army again and he enlisted into Infantry and was sent to Japan with the BCOF. The Korean War started and Hugh went to Korea but I think that is another story. Back from Korea he continued in the Army rising in rank to Warrant Officer Class One – served in Vietnam I think and finally retired in the mid '70s. So that is Hugh's story – more or less.

Why have I told it? It gives an interesting perspective on WW2 service. At times it was all pretty confusing and lacking purpose and logic. But for Hugh it was central to his life; not much else mattered. Hugh lives in Kingaroy country and heads his RSL sub branch and local Legacy.