

ASCM interview with the Rev. Dr Gordon Powell by Jane Yule, Melbourne, 18 March 1997.

Q: What school did you go to and were you involved with any Christian groups while you were there?

A: First of all I went to Malvern Grammar here in Melbourne, when I was quite young, [and] in 1926 I went to Scotch College. In due course I was ... secretary of the Christian Union, as it was called then, [which was] associated with the ASCM. I remember getting a bit embarrassed because the SCM used to send me notices for the school noticeboard, [which] were usually about days of prayer, and I got it into my head that a day of prayer was when you spent all day on your knees. [The idea of this] wasn't that good, and I didn't feel it right to call upon my fellow Scotch collegians [to participate]. Any rate, we used to have some tremendous responses at times for the speakers we invited week by week to the Christian Union meetings.

Q: Do you remember who any of [the speakers] were?

A: Yes, I do. [I have] a collection of *Scotch Collegian* magazines which lists them, ... and it only occurred to me last night as I read [them], that [there was one in particular who] probably changed my life in an unexpected way. [This] was Dr John Mackenzie—I don't think he was even doctor by then, but he was the minister of Toorak [Presbyterian]—[who] was a great enthusiast for the SCM. He talked about how Professor Henry Drummond of Scotland, the scientist who was a Christian leader in about 1890, and John R. Mott ... had come here. We were interested in the story of the SCM as he told it, but I realised only ... last night, seventy years later, that that was my first contact with John Mackenzie ... [when] I was secretary [in] 1929. [In] 1936, while I was in Scotland, he was ringing up my mother and asking if I had plans for when I returned. He wanted me as assistant minister of Toorak, [which might never have happened had I not met him through the Christian Union at Scotch.]¹

Q: ... Did you have any missions or campaigns at Scotch as part of the CU?

A: Yes, we did. It must have been 1929 that the captain of the school [Colin Meares, though we called him Mick], ... and two of the others started a clean-up campaign

¹ However, in the meantime, a bigger factor might have been my series of weekly articles in the *Presbyterian Messenger* which narrated my experiences in Scotland.

among the boys. [We] tried to get rid of bad language in particular, [and] the school took it up with some enthusiasm. One chap used a naughty word so they threw him in the [Yarra] River, [as part of this] ... moral campaign.

Q: ... Was it quite an evangelistic group?

A: Alongside the Christian Union was the Crusader Union. ... Eric Clarke, later Dr Eric Clarke, was a member of that. [In those days] they were the ones who today would be called fundamentalists, accepting the Bible literally and so on. Some of them were very earnest people. Later on they grew stronger than the SCM [in Scotch College], I believe, but in those days the Christian Union was the strong group. ... I became interested in a PLC girl called Gwen Gilchrist and I invited her father to come and speak about [a trip] he'd organised. [He had taken] six hundred Scots [people] to Scotland ... [on what was called the] 'Scottish Delegation'.

Q: For what purpose was that?

A: It was like a present tour group. In those days there would be very few organised tours and in this case it was for Scots people, or people of Scottish descent, to ... rediscover their homeland, go back to their roots and so on. When [Mr Gilchrist] returned I invited him to speak [at the school and, as] I was trying to link it up with religion, [asked him to comment on] the ethics of the Scottish delegation. (I wasn't sure what ethics meant but it sounded good.) At any rate, he came and talked about the tour to Scotland. I don't remember much religion in it. That, unfortunately, was one of the less successful days; not that there was anything wrong with his speech, he was a great speaker.

Q: Why was it less successful?

A: Mr Gilchrist ... was a fascinating speaker at any time, that was his profession really. He went to America later and did it professionally. [However] it was one of those days where it was cold inside, but a beautiful, clear sunny day outside, and you couldn't blame the boys for wanting to go and have their lunch [in the sun] and not come into the assembly hall. Normally, we'd count on three, four, five, six hundred boys to come to these lunch-hour meetings, so that day [when] there were only 120, I felt very frustrated and disappointed. [Admittedly] even that's a reasonably good congregation [today]. We [also] had people like [Ren] Roscoe Wilson, the Anglican minister of the church at Camberwell, and Frank Nelson, an old boy who became a [judge of the Supreme Court], ... [come and speak to us].

But John Mackenzie talking about the origins of the SCM is the one that keeps coming back to me.

Q: When was that?

A: That must have been early in 1929.

Q: So he was quite involved with the SCM?

A: Yes, he was. In the 1923 debates in the [Presbyterian] Assembly on Church Union, it was [Mackenzie] who moved the motion to have union. Dr Larry Rentoul, a most eloquent preacher, was his opponent. He made the speech of a lifetime and blocked Church Union in those days.

Q: At Scotch, the headmaster when you were there was Dr Littlejohn?

A: Yes.

Q: Did he support the Christian Union?

A: Very strongly, yes. He was session clerk of Scots Church. What disappointed me was to find [this out later], after I'd left Scotch. He was the leading layman of our city church and yet none of us knew [this] while we were at school, [a time when] we needed role models. [Another churchman was] Mr W. F. Ingram, we called him Bumpy Ingram for some reason, [who] was the headmaster under the principal. He was an elder ... at College Church in [Parkville] and we knew he was a Christian. Bit by bit, we [also] realised the History master Mr Clayton was a Christian. ... He was a leader of the Crusader Union at Scotch and ... [taught] Ancient History. ... [Many other teachers also went to church, but didn't talk about it.]

Q: What about the chaplain, McNeil; ... was he a supporter of the Christian Union?

A: Yes, Rowan McNeil ... [was, though] we didn't see all that much of him. I don't remember him being a power in the [group]. He had the sense to leave it to us boys. [When] you had people [on the committee] like, for instance, Russell Love, who became dux of the school and later Professor of Mathematics at Melbourne University, and Cliff Menhennitt, who was among the top scholars at the time and [later] became Judge Menhennitt, ... you didn't need to interfere too much as they

did the job. Russell was a retiring sort of chap [though, and] like myself he couldn't sing a note, but he was there and he was respected as dux of the school.

Q: ... [Did] Scotch ... have a cadet corps, ... [or was there] military training at the drill hall in Hawthorn [as] part of Universal Military Training?

A: ... In those days there was compulsory military training. I remember having to get into uniform and wear terribly heavy boots and be a soldier. It was while we were there that the Labor government wiped it out.

Q: Was it run from the school or [held] in the Hawthorn Drill Hall?

A: It was in the drill hall at Hawthorn. We'd [also] go down to Williamstown [for] rifle shooting, [which] was quite a good bit of fun. In addition, I think there was a voluntary cadet corps. I wasn't interested in that [but] other people were.

Q: Was there a Scout troop which McNeil set up?

A: Yes. McNeil was very keen on that and they had some big Scout camps.

Q: Do you think he saw that as an alternative to the militar[ism] of the cadet corps?

A: I suppose he would, really.

Q: Was he in World War I ?

A: Yes, he was very much in the first war. He was still pretty much a returned soldier [when he was at Scotch]. I don't know that he was a chaplain in the first war, I think he was in the ranks. I remember he announced a series of sex lectures at the [school]. ... Looking back on it, it's a great pity he didn't give us much more detail sexually. He began by saying, ... 'Well, I'm going to call a spade a spade or rather a bloody shovel'. We were shocked at the start, [because the word bloody was a 'no-no' word in those days], but it was the only shock we got out of the sex lectures.

Q: So he didn't demystify the whole process?

A: No, he didn't. He didn't tell us very much that we hadn't sort of talked about ourselves, [and the lectures] were a bit disappointing. We expected something much more exciting and much more informative, really.

Q: Do you think McNeil was fairly anti-war because of his experiences in the trenches? ... Was he a pacifist?

A: I can't answer that one, [but] I don't remember being impressed by anything like that. Later on, of course, it became a hot topic at the university.

Q: But it wasn't talked about at school?

A: Not in 1929, [as] we were coming up to the Great Depression. [Besides,] ... World War I had been fought to end war and we assumed there wouldn't be any more. [However] by the time we were at university and Hitler had come into power, we realised that things were different.

Q: At Scotch, did Littlejohn instil in the boys a sense of duty, service and responsibility to your country?

A: Yes, that was his line. ... We used to call him Old Bill and we certainly were afraid of him. He had a bellow like anything. He'd stand in the middle of the quadrangle and [if he saw] a boy trying to duck down and pretend he wasn't late [for class], or pretend he wasn't there, [or try to] hide from him, ... he'd bawl [him] out in the middle of the quad. When I went in to discuss with him whether [or not] I'd switch from Engineering to the ministry, I went in fear and trembling. But he was quite gentle, really, and began to talk about his own religious belief ... in God. He said, 'My belief is that everything is an idea of God. That table is an idea of God, that telephone is an idea of God, I'm an idea of God'. For some reason it struck me as funny that [Old] Bill was an idea of God, and I was laughing inwardly but terrified to laugh openly. He was a man who didn't hide his light under a bushel as far as his Christian faith was concerned, every day.

Q: Was it very Presbyterian?

A: Yes. He'd get up in the pulpit in the assembly hall, with a thousand boys in front of him, and we'd sing a hymn and have a [Scripture reading]. He'd [also] have a few words, but I don't remember them being spiritual sermons. [He would] give the usual announcements at that time. ... You always remember the things you shouldn't, [and I recall a story he told in one of these talks]. He was a great disciplinarian. ... [He began] describing how he was walking past an [apparently] empty classroom one day, and [heard] a group of boys who were ... [in there for a] free period. [He said,] 'They were talking and using [bad] language and didn't ... [see me] there. So I stood there and listened and [then] said to them, 'What are you

bloody fools using that damn language for?'. A shock went through a thousand boys [at assembly]. It did sound terrible coming from him, but he got across the message that some things do sound terrible.

Q: Was there also an idea that you were part of the ruling class of Australia and there was almost a *noblesse oblige* [responsibility]?

A: I don't think consciously in that respect. Naturally we looked down on all other schools and were very contemptuous of Wesley and [Melbourne Grammar]. Xavier was beyond the pale. ... To some extent, I'm afraid, we were a bit snobbish about those who were not public school boys or girls. There was a pride in the school [which was emphasised by the school song,] 'We are Scotch collegians all, and we rally at the call,' and so on. [We were also] brought up very much on the contribution of the old boys in World War I, [men like] J. D. Burns, son of the minister who wrote the hymn 'Hushed was the evening hymn, the temple courts were dark'. J. D. Burns [himself] had written the song, 'The bugles of England were [blowing] o'er the sea, as they had called a thousand years, were calling now to me. [They woke me from dreaming in the dawning of the day; the bugles of England!] How could I stay?'. I think that [song] prompted hundreds of us later in World War II to get into uniform.

Q: Because of that idea that it was a noble thing to do?

A: I don't know about noble but, yes, I suppose you could say that. It was **the** thing to do. Regularly on Anzac Day, [Bill] would read out the names of the fallen, and when he got to J. D. Burns, who had written about the bugles of England and was killed at Gallipoli, he'd always choke up. [He] couldn't go on for a while and that was pretty powerful, actually. I don't think he did it deliberately, [rather] I think he really had great hopes for J. D. Burns and couldn't get over the loss of him.

Q: Even though he couldn't get over the loss, ... you weren't taught that war was wrong and should be avoided at all costs? ...

A: There was a great emphasis on remembering the fallen and [having] respect for them. ... We used to sing about ... 'Generals Monash, Smith, McKay, [with you wet or dry', who] were all old boys of Scotch. We felt a special pride in them. The school gates were the Monash gates and there was Monash House. There was a good deal of pride in the achievements of the war, but I think most of us, especially

in the Christian Union, realised war was most un-Christian and a terrible thing that shouldn't ever [happen again].

Q: World War I was very much a crusade still, wasn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: The 'filthy' Hun and having to save England and Australia from the Germans. It wasn't a just war, as such, but the last of the big crusades?

A: Yes. The terrible Hun had attacked little Belgium and we had to go and rescue [it]; ... all the usual propaganda that you get with war time and it was pretty well done. [It enabled officers like] General Haig, [to appear as] a great hero to many of us, [because] he was a Scotsman and a Presbyterian [and had commanded the Allied forces in the Somme]. ... [When] I stayed with [Haig's former] chaplain, Professor [George] Duncan, at St Andrew's University, he was ... [still] very proud of a letter that Haig had written to him saying he was a great help to him in the dark days of the war. [But], of course, Haig had a lot to answer for as they were losing men by the thousands. ... [Altogether four] million [on both sides died at] the Somme. Haig's idea was to send more [and more] men in ... [regardless of how many were] killed.

Q: But at Scotch in the late 1920s, those sort of issues, for instance, that General Haig had done the wrong thing, weren't being discussed?

A: No. That was never questioned in those days, [at least] not that I remember. [You remembered the heroes.]

Q: You were in the SCM at Melbourne University as well?

A: Yes. I was in the SCM from the start [of my university course], and by 1932 or 1933 I was midday secretary. I was rather thrilled [at] being a bit of a king maker, [and] ringing up important Christian leaders and having them address the university midday meetings. We had some wonderful meetings and people were very ready to come. The only refusal I ever had was when I was still in charge of the Christian Union at Scotch, and I rang up Sir Harry Lauder, who was in Melbourne at the time.² I thought [that, as] he was a good Scot, [he] ought to know something about religion and asked him to come and address the boys at Scotch

² Sir Harry Lauder (1870–1950) was a world-famous Scottish entertainer.

College. [However, in] his lovely Scottish voice, he was very kind but said, 'My manager wouldn't permit it'. ... I think he was a bit afraid to do it but I'm sorry I missed on Harry Lauder.

One of the most memorable addresses we had [at the university] was when Professor Angus from Sydney was up before the General Assembly of Australia ... on heresy [charges]. He was very liberal, far more liberal than I ever was, but, at any rate, he was in Melbourne to face the Assembly. Of course, [that business] eventually killed him. ... But he came up to the university on this day, and I have a picture of Frank Engel, Ken Beckett of Queen's College, and myself talking to Professor Angus before this meeting. That created a lot of interest.

I remember another time when the Anglican, Archbishop [Head], was the preacher. ... He did quite a good job, ... [though] I never think an archbishop feels very free in the atmosphere of students. [There was] a bit of heckling, but at the finish he said, 'If you'll stand, I'll give you my blessing'. That was a mistake, [as some] students weren't quite sure he had a blessing to give them.

Q: D. K. Picken was the Master of Ormond ... [and] a big supporter of the SCM?

A: Yes. He was chairman for Australia. That was another memorable midday meeting ... [when] I got him to be the speaker. It gave me a sense of power to ask the Master of Ormond College to come and do my bidding at the meeting. At any rate, he came, God bless him, [and] being D. K. Picken, he put an enormous amount of work into preparing that address. ... [However, not only was it] very heavy stuff, but what he prepared would have taken about an hour and a half to deliver. Instead of pruning his manuscript, he decided he'd get it in anyway, [and] he read [it] at [tremendous] speed. It was hard enough to understand at any speed, but when it was three times [faster than] it should have been, it was impossible to understand. He at least made the point that he was the master of a university college who was [also] the chairman of the [Student] Christian Movement.

Q: Were a lot of Ormond [students] in the SCM, like Weary Dunlop? ...

A: He and I led a study group. ... During the winter term, once a week, we'd meet after supper and have a [discussion]. In 1934, ... when I was in charge of that for the SCM, Weary and I led a group which was pretty lively. Weary was a very good Christian thinker, really. ... [Later] they called him the saint of the Burma Railway, or the Christ of [Thailand], and, in practical terms, he was. ... I've got him in my

Famous Birthdays book, where he says there's a bit of God in every man and that he regards the Sermon on the Mount as the supreme explanation of man's relationship to God. Sir John Frew, as he became later, was a leader with another group ... [which] discussed Christianity and sex, but we were on something else. One night, we invited D. K. Picken to our group. ...

End of Side A: Side B.

Q: You started at Ormond College during the Depression. Was there much going on in the SCM ... about helping people who might be suffering?

A: There was not so much [direct help for those] suffering in Melbourne. ... We used to [go around instead and collect] threepence, which was a big amount for a student [then], ... to help some overseas missions for the SCM; it was definitely an SCM project. [I remember a famous occasion when] I got into one medical student's study, who was the son of a wealthy judge. He decided he wasn't going to give to this [cause]. He became a wonderful doctor later, but he was stubborn and I got stubborn, and we spent the whole evening [arguing] over that blooming threepence. I had to admit defeat in the end, [and] I never got it. [As for the Depression,] there was a lot of talk about changing the system.

Q: Was it a communist influence?

A: Yes, very much so. I remember walking all around Royal Park one night with one of my fellow theologs, ... Alan Nichols, [who] was secretary of the Labor Club, in other words the Communist Club. He realised that he could hardly go on with both [commitments, and] that he had to choose. We walked around Royal Park [until mid]night discussing this. I look back and think it was one of my great failures. I should have influenced him to stay in the ministry, [because] he would have been a [wonderful] minister. He finally decided he'd have to give the ministry away, which he did, [and] became a journalist. ... He was a very nice chap. A lot of us were influenced [by communism, as] we realised there was something badly wrong [because of] the Depression. The communists were very ardent in telling us Russia had the solution, so in 1936 I went to Russia. I hadn't been there more than a few days when I realised they didn't have the solution. Certainly, there was no unemployment in Russia but the misery of the people and the fear in the atmosphere was palpable.

Q: Was this the time of Stalin's purges?

A: Of course, we knew nothing about the purges at the time, [only that] Stalin was top dog. [Propaganda extolling him was on every side.]

Q: What about other later issues like the Spanish Civil War; did that divide the membership with some people being pro-Franco because he purported to be a Christian?

A: From the top of my head I can't recall the Spanish Civil War having any influence [when I was at Melbourne, because] I think that was a bit later ... [in 1936]. I was in Scotland by then, [and there was much talk, but no division]. ... I remember, in fact I was still at school, when Hitler was coming to power, and I [said] to one of my best friends something about Hitler, and he said, 'Who is Hitler?'. [But] bit by bit he became more prominent. At first, we rather favoured Hitler [because] we believed ... [that] he was restoring some sort of self-respect and prosperity in Germany. Then I went through Germany on that same trip that [took me] to the great World Student Christian Federation conference in Switzerland in 1936. ... While we were impressed [by Germany], we were not impressed by the enormous amount of militar[ism, nor] the German youth ... marching up and down with broom sticks [because they were not permitted to have rifles].

[However], there was not much outwardly that you could see about the oppression of the Jews, but I did souvenir a notice in a cafe window in German, 'Jews not admitted'. ... I [also] travelled alone on a train in Germany and the only other occupant in the compartment was a Jew. He couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak German, but we somehow managed to convey what we meant. I said to him, 'What about Hitler?'. His eyes blazed and he said, 'Hitler!', and he drew his hand across his throat. There was no doubt about what he [thought] about Hitler. ...

Q: Was there much talk here about Hitler, or were most Australians unaware of what was happening in Germany?

A: No, it was talked about quite a bit even then. I remember a university review [in which they did a skit on Hitler]. (At one stage I was stage manager for it, but fell ill with a whole series of boils and had to resign.) ... In the review ... [there was a] very funny [part] where Hitler did a Nazi salute and fell flat on his face down a flight of stairs. We had a good laugh at Hitler. But behind me were some new Australians, [I don't know] whether [they were] Jewish or not. They were very

upset, [and] said, 'The fools, the fools, they don't understand'. They knew what Hitler was on about.

Q: ... When war did come was it seen as a just war because Hitler was so bad? [Had] the churches got beyond the idea of [war as] a crusade?

A: Of course, [men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller,] the famous young German theologian who was executed eventually, ... impressed us very much ... [through their] writings. [Niemöller] was involved in ... reconciliation through the churches. [In] that movement [he had gone] to England for a couple of years [before the war].

Q: The Fellowship of Reconciliation?

A: Yes, that's right, [and] we believed in that. I was in Port Adelaide in [my] first church ... when war broke out. I remember [that] after Munich I [had] personally rejoiced ... because I thought Chamberlain was sincere and [that] he'd [avoided] war. Of course, we know now that he hadn't, but to me it was a big victory. He [also] gave us breathing space, as it turned out, for Britain at any rate to get armed, ... [because] she wasn't [prepared] enough. ... That was [also the] time when the students at Oxford and Cambridge carried a resolution that they would not fight for King or country, ... a great encouragement to Hitler, of course. It was a very difficult time [and] there was a lot of controversy.

Q: ... What led you to [join up as a chaplain in the RAAF, because] as a minister you were exempt from the war, is that right?

A: ... Yes. I was minister of Port Adelaide, and for [many years it had been] taken for granted that the minister of Port Adelaide was the local naval chaplain, part-time. ... [However,] all [that] meant was that if a war ship was to come in, which wasn't very often, you went and played a courtesy call as chaplain. I suppose if I'd done my job [more diligently,] I would have entertained some of the crew, but they [preferred to go] off up to the bright lights of the city [rather than] ... to hang around Port Adelaide. That was [largely] a nominal job.

Then I got this strange invitation to go to Scots Church, [Melbourne,] in 1940 as preaching assistant to [the Reverend] Golder Burns. [He] badly needed an assistant. ... He'd come out as a special preacher, [and then] the war [had] broke[n] out and he couldn't get back home. He had no sermons with him or books or anything, and he was in a bad way. It was a great opportunity for a kid [like me,

who] ... was exactly thirty [years old, to be] ... preaching once a Sunday in Scots Church, [as well as] doing [other] jobs as the minister does in between. In a way, it was a war job, because the church was half full of men in uniform, especially Yanks that year. We had a ministry to [service]men. ...

Then, in the middle of [1941], Ewing Memorial Church in East Malvern signed a call—I've still got it—[and] without asking me whether I'd consider it, they called me. It came as quite a shock and quite an embarrassment. I finally said to them, 'Look if I leave Scots Church, I'm going into uniform. I just don't feel the call in the middle of a war to go to a comfortable job in East Malvern.' That sort of unsettled me a bit. [Before I left Port Adelaide, the Rev.] Irving Davidson, who was Chaplain-General, needed ... [a] principal chaplain for the Air Force. I'd never been in uniform in my life, apart from a short period at school in the Melbourne University Rifles. ... At any rate, I was nominated for this job ... [along with] Adam Marchant ... [and several other nominees]. Eventually, the committee ... put my name before the Air Board, and they put Adam Marchant's [too]. Adam Marchant was forty-six and, believe it or not, he was [thought to be] a bit old, [which is why] they put me up. I had no experience at all and, fortunately for me, they chose Adam Marchant. That [also] unsettled me a bit, [though] I might say the pay was £600 [or so] a year, [and as] I was on £6 a week then, ... it was double my stipend. [However,] I tried not to let the financial side influence me, but it did indicate a change of responsibility.

Towards the end of 1942, Irving Davidson said to Golder Burns that he needed a chaplain and would he release [me] to do this. Golder was very good about it, [and] left it open to me, but made it clear that in his view the time had come ... [for me to do] my duty. ... I was pretty torn about it because I wasn't quite sure [what to do, as] I had a very fulfilling job at Scots Church. [I was loath] to leave it when it was going well, [especially as] I'd [just completed a series of addresses on 'The Christian Basis of New Order', which was the topic every young person was talking about at the time. We started, ... believe it or not, with about a couple of hundred kids who stayed behind [after the evening service], and week by week it grew until there were four hundred attending.

Q: So it was hard to leave that behind?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: Were you at all influenced by the ideas of pacifism?

A: Yes, very much. I was very sympathetic to the pacifists, but I suppose, to be honest, I didn't have the courage to be a pacifist in the middle of a war. In the end, there's always a bit of family background, too. ... My father couldn't go to the [first] war because he was the only male left with a widowed mother, a widowed sister, two unmarried sisters, ... and a heavy responsibility of family. [My mother was one of ten,] and [of] all [her five] brothers, [who] were [mostly farmers], only one of them went into uniform. ...

Q: ... Was there pressure on you to become part of the war?

A: ... There was no family pressure on me, but, in myself, I felt that somebody [had] to do his duty in this family.

Q: Has that a lot to do with [the ethos] you found at Scotch that you had to serve your country?

A: Yes. Again and again, J. D. Burns' song came back to me: 'The bugles of England were calling, o'er the sea as they'd called a thousand years, were calling now to me.' I was very patriotic and still am. I'm a constitutional monarchist, [which] is a bit embarrassing, [as] I've just edited my father-in-law's book on John Dunmore Lang, the first republican; ... I've tried to be fair to him.

Q: That was the overriding influence rather than any sympathy you might have had with the pacifist stance?

A: Yes. [Recently] I came across a long letter I wrote to a chap, who had a German name. [He] was a member of the [Presbyterian] Youth [Association] in Adelaide. ... This chap, ... was a pacifist and he was very upset when I went into uniform. I tried to explain to him [in this letter] why I'd gone [into the forces]. Looking back, I'd do it again because it was good for me. I lived [only] with men for three years and I saw the rough side of life. But I also saw a lot of the very good side, and had a wonderful ministry among the[m]. ... [It also enabled me to write] my book, *Two Steps To Tokyo*.

Q: Where were you stationed?

A: Mostly in Australia. I started in Western Australia at Busselton, but then I went to New Guinea for a year [and,] physically, that was pretty rough. Once or twice we were bombed by the Japs [which] was a bit dangerous, [although] it was more

dangerous from my own side, [with men] letting off bullets at odd moments. But it was the mud and the heat and the humidity that made me more homesick than anything. [Despite that], living with those chaps in those conditions was a marvellous experience and I've got friends to this day from [the war]. The nearest Japs [were] the ones overhead in the air, [except for once] up in the Admiralties [when] I was in the landing there. That was pretty dicey. [Then] we had to sleep in the open for a week with the rain coming down.

Q: It was a very active ministry for you, and one you wouldn't have had otherwise, living with your parishioners in such a way?

A: Yes, it was an experience, [even though] I was homesick all the time and I didn't like the rough side of life. The human relationships were marvellous and I made wonderful friends. I just felt that I was really ministering to chaps. ... [For example], I think of a fellow, a sergeant, from another unit [who came to see me]. His hand was shaking [as] he [held] an envelope [containing] a letter he'd just got from his wife. He said, 'My wife's just written to say we're going to have a baby'. I said, 'That's wonderful, congratulations'. [But] he said, 'I'm not so sure'. 'What's wrong?', [I asked]. 'Oh', he said, 'I want my son to be proud of me'. I said, 'Why shouldn't he be proud of you?'. 'Oh', he said, 'Can I trust you?'. I said, 'That's what I'm here for'. He said, 'I deserted from the Army [because] I hated it, ... and I joined the Air Force. I've got on alright there', and he patted his stripes and said, 'I'm a sergeant and I love it'. But he said, 'If they catch up with me they'll shoot me at dawn, won't they?'. I said, 'I don't know about that but I'll find out'. 'Oh', he said, 'be careful'. So I said, 'I don't even know your name or what unit you come from. I won't tell them any ... details but [just] find out what happens.'

So I wrote off and they replied eventually saying that they recommend [he] throw himself on the [mercy of the] provost marshal, ... [who] is the head of the Service Police. He came back in a week's time and I gave him this [news, and] said, 'The only thing I can suggest is that you take their advice'. The following Sunday we got half an hour's notice to pack up and leave for another island. I had to go like mad to pack everything I had and get on board a Liberty ship and go off to the Admiralty Islands, so ... I lost sight of him. A year and a half later, I was back in Melbourne and an airman came up to me in Spencer Street Station and said, 'How are you padre?'. I said, 'I'm sorry I don't remember you'. He told me his name and it was this chap, [and] I said, 'How much weight have you put on?'. He said, 'A stone and a half'. I said, 'You don't seem nearly as worried now as you were then,

what happened?'. 'Well', he said, 'I stewed over it [for] ... weeks. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat and finally I decided to take your advice. ... The so and so's kept me waiting for six [weeks], and then they sent me a letter [which] said that as I'd joined the Air Force the same day as I deserted the Army I wasn't technically a [deserter]. They [even] paid me ten pounds back pay [from the Army].' You ... were there to help a bloke who wouldn't talk to anybody else, who couldn't talk to anybody else.

Q: [Because] World War II was seen as just by most people, did pacifists have a hard time, ... [especially] when Japan [attacked] and Australia was under threat?

A: I think it's the same [as] with everything else, [in that] it all depends on the individual. You'll get a lot of muck thrown at you by some individuals, [but] most people are decent about it. For instance, my friend in Sydney (Sir) Alan Walker ... was an ardent pacifist. He had a terrible struggle with himself coming back from Britain about the time the war [broke] out, [but] he decided he'd be a pacifist. You [would] go into his office and ... he [had] a cartoon on the wall with Jesus breaking a rifle over his knee. He stayed a sincere pacifist right through and [still is]. I don't know how much he suffered for it, but it certainly didn't interfere with a great career in the church eventually.

Q: Basically, within the church and the SCM, ... there was no antagonism about what [others] decided [with regard to the war]? ...

A: I don't remember anything like that [happening]. I do clearly remember in 1936, before ever the war started, when I went to this conference in Switzerland of the WSCF, [that] there were twenty-one nationalities there. In those days, the French and Germans hated each other and yet, in that Christian atmosphere up in the Alps of Switzerland, [they] ... were brothers. The best sermon was given by a German and some of the best study group lectures were given by [Pierre] Maury, a Frenchman. [This] just showed, [as] the German preached on the pearl of great price, [that] the kingdom of God is big enough to overcome all national tensions. It's a terribly difficult thing and I'm quite sure that the force of arms is not the way to settle international disputes, but when you're in the middle of it what do you do? Do you say [that] we've all made a mistake and we shouldn't be involved in war? You can't just step out of war. ... [I felt] called to minister to [men] where they [were], and I had a wonderful time doing that.

Q: Did the SCM at all influence the way you conducted your professional life?

A: Yes, it did in a big way. [The SCM] had leaders of the ... university, like D. K. Picken and Professor [G. V.] Portus in [Adelaide]; I went to a conference at Ballarat once and the outstanding speaker was Bishop [E. H.] Burgmann. When you had men of that quality it gave you a strength in standing up for the Christian point of view. The other great advantage of the SCM was that it brought us together with the leading theologians, [both current and] future, of the Methodist and Congregational [churches], in particular, [as well as] some Anglicans [like] (Bishop) David Garnsey ... [who] was an outstanding leader at that Adelaide conference. [So] when it came to the point of Church Union, it all seemed so ridiculous that there should be any division between us [because] we had so much in common. I regard the Student Christian Movement as the main factor in making Church Union possible when it did come. I still have problems as to whether we timed it right. I think if we'd left it another ten years that influence would have been so much greater and there would have been far less division among Presbyterians, in particular. Of course, there were [also] divisions among the 'Congos' and, to my surprise, last week somebody said it that would have been far better if the Methodists had had the same choice too. [Apparently] the ones who were opposed to union [and] got kept in union didn't like it, and have been a disturbing influence. I don't know whether that's true or not, [though] in one case I'm sure it is true.

Q: So the Uniting Church was [formed] through links and friendships made in the SCM?

A: Yes. We had some very strong friendships, [such as] when I was up in the islands with Keith Ditterich, [Rex Mathias and Stan Weeks], for instance. ... It was just natural to me to form a friendship with other like-minded Methodists, Congregationalists [and Anglicans]. Henry Wells, the great Congregationalist ... hymnologist [whose] name is in the front of the *Australian Hymn Book*, ... was one of my closest friends [and] is in this picture [I have] of the [1932] Adelaide conference. That [SCM contact] formed a solid base for, in my mind, Church Union. [There were] a lot of other good reasons for Church Union too, of course, especially John 17, but [the SCM] was a very big factor.

Interview ends.