

Cecil “Mac” McSweeney – his story



Cecil McSweeney, known to our family as “Mac”, was born in Coolgardie on 8 September 1906 to Michael Walter/Walton and Amelia Ellen (nee Potter) McSweeney who had migrated from New Zealand. The family moved to Collie about the mid-1920s. I understand he was employed in the forest industry as a Fire Fighter from then until he joined the army in 1941. Sometime during this period, probably 1926, he has lost his right leg above the knee, in a forestry accident¹. He was fitted with a “peg leg” which did not bend at the knee. He had this until sometime in the 1950s when he was fitted with an articulated prosthesis, which he could not cope with so he fixed it so it would not bend.

Mac enlisted² on 18 August 1941 to the 110 General Hospital (Hollywood, Perth, Western Australia) assessed as fit for Class IIb for special appointment. He was classified as a Nursing Orderly TG III. He was detached to Railhead Supply Depot, Norseman in August 1941 until June 1942. At the time (July 1941 – June 1942) the “East West Highway”, now known as the Eyre Highway, was under construction³.

C. McSweeney, Donnybrook, 1936

Mac took photographs of camp life, individuals and road construction activity notating the subjects in detail on the backs of the photographs.

In September 1943 Mac was sent to Exmouth Gulf “Potshot” submarine base where he worked with my father⁴ Captain Philip Atkins the Regimental Medical Officer⁵ at the Australian Hospital attached to 4AA Battery, before being sent on to Broome in April 1944.

In October 1944 Mac was sent to the Marrinup PoW Camp where he was promoted to Corporal. While at Marrinup he took some photographs of some of the army medical staff and two Italian PWI Medical Orderlies.



C. McSweeney, Norseman 1942

¹ Westralian Worker paper 18 June 1926 page 5; TROVE Newspapers National Archives Australia.

² Personnel Service Records, National Archives of Australia NAA: B884, W16376

³ The Army was responsible for fuel, food, and communications, while the state government departments of Main Road Department (Western Australia) and Highways (South Australia) managed the actual construction (Wikipedia)

⁴ Army Days a personal Memoir, P.W. Atkins, unpublished

⁵ Personnel Service Records, National Archives of Australia NAA: B883, WX31110

Cecil McSweeney was discharged from the Army on 12 November 1946. My father, Captain Atkins, had been discharged in March 1946 and had bought a medical practice in Newcastle Street West Perth. He came across Mac in Perth on the day of his discharge. Mac started work for father the following Monday, which included board and lodging as the surgery was in the front rooms of our house. When we moved to a new house in Floreat Park in 1956, Mac moved with us.



C. McSweeney east of Norseman, 1942



Mac with my brother and our dog at Floreat Park

He lived with our family until he went into the War Veterans Home in about 1977. His photograph collection⁶ was given to me after he passed away on 4 August 1982.

Written by Robert Atkins
Mundaring, Western Australia,
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⁶ The photographs of the East West Highway and Marrinup POW Camp have been donated to the WA Army Museum, Burt Street Fremantle.