

VICTOR GROUTSCH
FIRST WORLD WAR

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR GROUTSCH 13th BATTALION, 4th
BRIGADE, FIRST AIF; Recorded by David Chalk

START OF AWM TAPE TWO

I must say I am very incompetent about this matter.

I don't think you need to worry about it.

(Incidental conversation)

I usually have a few things to show people. I have a photograph of my grandfather, and I have a big square piece of embroidered satin, which my grandfather sent back from Heliopolis, in Egypt. But since your eyesight is not the best I didn't bring them in. It's interesting that you are a 7th Reinforcement, the same as Mr Fraser.

That's right.

I started off with him, getting his first - like right from the start, what he was doing when he enlisted, and the trip over and so on, so I thought we may as well do the same with you. So whereabouts were you when you enlisted?

Tocumwal.

You were at Tocumwal. What were you doing there?

Farming. I went to Melbourne. You enlisted in our local areas of course. And all the people from Tocumwal, all the young blokes, were going to Melbourne to - because that was our centre.

That's the closest. Sydney is a bit far away.

I enlisted at Cobram and I went to Melbourne, and was rejected promptly by the 'medicos' there for having a weak heart. The same one as I've got now! (laughs).

They didn't know much, did they!

That was their story. So then I had to enlist again in Tocumwal.

When did you first go to Melbourne? Can you remember what month that was?

It was early in April 1915. It was just a bit before the Landing. I'd been reading about the doings of all the boys in and around Cairo and round about, and it all sounded very attractive, of course at that time.

I'd read about it in the newspaper?

Oh yes.

And it sounded really attractive.

So I went to Sydney then, and I was gladly accepted there.

If you had been in Melbourne you might have been in the 14th Battalion perhaps?

Yes, most likely. No, I doubt that. The Second Brigade was just being formed at that time.

So you would have been in the 8th, perhaps.

Yes, about the 8th.

When you went to Sydney, was that more or less straight after you came back to Tocumwal?

Oh well, within a week or so of coming back from Melbourne. It might have been a little bit longer. Remember dates and days....

If you can get the right month, that's enough. What were you doing in Tocumwal then? You were farming, but were you on your parents' farm?

Yes, my father was alive and we had a little property.

And did you have any brothers and sisters.

I had one brother.

Did he join up too.

Yes, he was in the 19th Battalion. He went to Gallipoli. He was very badly hurt a couple of times. Once on Gallipoli and once in France, and he later died here as a result of his injuries.

So when you went down to Sydney, that would be the end of April 1915.

It could have been May. About that time, anyway. April, May.

Had you heard about the Landing at that time, or not?

I'm not sure.

It took a while for the news to get back, didn't it.

I'm not sure whether the Landing had taken place. I suppose it must have, but I just don't remember where we were when we got the news. Probably at home, or probably at camp in Liverpool.

So you went through Victoria Barracks and Liverpool Camp, and so on? Can you remember much about Victoria Barracks?

No. Oh we only went up and were paraded on the ground. We didn't go through the barracks. You enlisted there, I don't remember even what it was like inside. Enlisted there and were told to report next day or the day after, or something like that. We were then marched off to Liverpool. Brave soldiers, you know! A bloody rag-tag mob too!

Did you have any friends at that time? Did you know anybody at Victoria Barracks, or not?

Very bush boys from way down at Tocumwal.

Was it the first time you had been to Sydney?

No, I had been to Sydney before.

You must have been about 22?

I was, 22.

That was the same age as my grandfather? He died in 1963(1964). He's been dead a long time.

Strange that he was a 7th Reinforcement too.

No, he wasn't, he was a 13th.

That's Fraser, yes.

Yes, that's Mr Fraser.

Who was it went on the *Shropshire*? Was it Fraser or your grandfather?

It was Mr Fraser. He was a 7th Reinforcement too. I did mention your name to him but he – sort of could remember it, but he didn't know you.

I don't know him either.

No, well he has always lived at Bourke. He has a grazing property up there, although his sons have taken it over now.

Yes, well we sailed from Sydney, and we didn't stop until we got to Suez.

I think you called in at Colombo.

No we didn't. If we did I must have been asleep. My recollection is that we sailed direct. We didn't stop at Melbourne or Perth, or any of these places.

Which way did you go? Did you go down round Melbourne and across the Bight?

Yes.

What was Liverpool Camp like?

Well it was a camp! When we got there - there had been troops there before, you see, because we were only the 7th or 8th Reinforcements. Oh no, it was very ragged. When we came in the first thing they had to do was put up tents of course. And then they had to prepare a kitchen with a trench dug in the ground, with iron bars over it. That's where the cooks prepared the meals. We were issued with tin mugs and tin plates and all that sort of stuff. And our washing up place was a heap of sand down near the latrines.

A heap of sand?

A heap of sand.

No water at all?

No water. Newspaper. You'd get newspaper and you'd scrub your tin plate clean. So you can imagine that that wasn't very hygienic.

No, it wasn't. And Liverpool Camp, was that near the river?

Yes.

That would be the Parramatta River?

The Georges River.

I've lived in Sydney, but I'm not that good on geography.

Yes, I'll always remember that. Washing up. Take your tin plate down to this bloody heap of sand, and we're all round it like a heap of ants, cleaning our plates for the next meal. It was very novel, of course, and that sort of thing.

Did you make any friends at Liverpool Camp?

Oh yes, oh yes. You got very fond of the blokes in your tent.

What were there names?

I can't recall them now.

I think you had rifle drill, didn't you?

Oh yes.

What was the training like there at Liverpool Camp?

Well we were pretty ragged, of course. But the training was quite proficient we thought. It was something we had never been subjected to before.

And you thought it was deficient?

Efficient, oh yes. The staff sar'majors who did our training called us warriors, so we really were warriors!

They called you warriors did they?

Oh yes, you know how the sar'majors deal with raw recruits. We did quite a bit of rifle shooting. We used to go out to a range at Long Bay.

What sort of a shot were you?

I was a quite good shot - of course. I'd been handling rifles on the farm, of course, shooting pigs.

Were they mainly country men that were in your reinforcement?

No, they came from everywhere, but there were a large number of country blokes too. A big percentage. Oh it's a long, long time ago.

It's a long time ago. And I believe that near the time you were leaving Sydney, Mr Fraser was saying that you had to take part in a mock attack, which was filmed. Do you remember that?

That's right. At Middle Head. That's true. That was the landing at ANZAC or something. I remember that. That was at Middle Head, on a little bit of a beach. So we were still in camp then, after the Landing, weren't we.

Yes, well that's correct, yes. Yes, well I think that the *Shropshire* left 22 December, not August – I had it wrong before. It must have been August, sometime.

That would be more like it.

It couldn't possibly have been December. I've met another 13th man, Mr Frank Massey.

Oh little Frank.

You know Frank, do you?

Of course I do, yes.

He's living with his daughters at Old Bar, near Taree. He was living down near Kiama.

He was a very good soldier. He picked up a couple of decorations.

Yes, well he was a 12th Reinforcement, and it was he who on 22nd December. But the 7th, I think – I'll have to check the date.

I don't know when it was, really.

It would have been August, or thereabouts.

It must have been August, because we joined the Battalion in October on Lemnos Island. They were out having a spell. So it must have been before December.

Yes, obviously.

Yes, the battalion was resting on Lemnos Island. They were off the Peninsula for a week, the whole Battalion. Then they picked us up then and took us back to the Peninsula.

When the *Shropshire* was sailing can you remember if there was a big scene on the wharf at all, or not? When the boats used to leave there used to be a lot of people who came.

Well, we sort of sneaked away. The *Shropshire* was out in the bay, and we got on the ferries at Rushcutters Bay. They took us out in...

So the ship wasn't alongside the pier?

No it was out in the harbour. We had to climb up the side. It was quite new to us country blokes. The old *Shropshire*.

And when you were going either the Great Australian Bight or the Indian Ocean...

We had a storm.

You had a big storm? What happened at that time?

Well I know that they had been carting horses, of course, previously, to the Light Horse. And there were a lot of horse boxes all along the deck. They were all swept away, and being a cargo boat - it wasn't a passenger ship at all - to get the troops down onto the bottom decks the hatches were all covered over. But they built a timber doorway so that we could close the door. Well it swept all of those away, and we got about two feet of water in our hold. We were about on the third hold below the water level, or something. We were below the water level anyway. This bloody water poured down! And it did a lot of damage on the deck, even bent strong iron frames and splintered timber like matchwood. So whoever told you that was...

Well Mr Fraser told me.

Well he'd know more about it than me.

Oh no, you know as much or more. And what did you do? I think you had to form a bucket brigade, didn't you?

I'm not sure what happened to tell you the truth. I know our rifles were swimming across. When the boat rolled the rifles would swim over here.

You'd have had a bit of a clean-up afterwards.

I don't remember it. But of course we'd be helping. I don't remember how we emptied it.

According to him you had to form a bucket brigade. They started the pumps, but the pumps didn't work.

That would be right.

And so you all had to form a bucket brigade.

That would be right.

Were there any injuries at that time?

Not that I know of. I don't even remember the bucket brigade.

No, well that's OK. Don't worry about not remembering anything. It's a long time ago.

But I do remember the damage being done.

Whereabouts was that?

I couldn't tell you. It was out in the Indian Ocean somewhere. I couldn't tell you how long out from Sydney, or ...

I just wanted to know if it was in the Bight, or in the Indian Ocean.

Oh it was in the Indian Ocean.

And what sort of a seafarer were you? Were you ill?

The world's worst! I was sick for about six or seven days.

After you left Sydney.

After I left Sydney. I couldn't go down below. I was lying up on deck on top of the hatches, watching the stars go like that!

Swinging about!

God did they travel! I was very sick, very sick. I'd never been to sea before! It was all these stars moving. Have you seen them moving?

I can imagine it?

I used to go from one side to the other! Took about looking for Haley's Comet, that was nothing to the scenery that I saw! No, I was very sick, very sick. I wasn't the only one, of course. Yes, the old *Shropshire*.

And well, Mr Fraser seemed to have the impression that you did stop at Colombo, but were not allowed ashore. But you seem to think this wasn't the case.

I don't remember.

No, I'd say you may be right. He couldn't remember anything about it anyway?

Oh no, I think it's pretty definite that we went straight up to Suez.

Can you remember your first sight of land? Or just Port Suez or Aden?

Oh yes, Aden, that's right. We did see lights at Aden. That's true isn't it?

Well Mr Fraser didn't mention that, but he did mention Aden.

Well I suppose different people saw things from a different angle, anyway.

Well, that's what I'm doing, you see. Everybody I meet gives me a different aspect to the story, and I put them altogether and I get a really interesting tale. For people like me who have difficulty imagining the story, I'm able to develop a picture. People can imagine what is happening. What was Suez like?

Just an Arab village, of course. It's a town, of course. Port Tewfik is where we tied up. Tewfik is the port at Suez.

How do you spell that?

T-E-W-F-I-K.

I've never heard of it. And what happened when you tied up?

The troops apparently got out and went into a train up to Heliopolis, not Heliopolis...

Zeitoun.

Zeitoun, thank you very much! I happened to be one of the bodyguard. We had a lot of ammunition on board, and Comforts Funds and stuff, and the troops went. And I, with about I suppose seven or eight others were left behind as guard for the stuff. And we went up by train a couple of days later, and delivered our ammunition at an old magazine they called it in Cairo. And Comforts Funds officials came to the wharf, including Norman Brooks, who was tennis champion of the world at that time. Our Norman Brooks.

Was he serving, was he?

No, he was a Commissioner for the Comforts Funds, or something. A good safe job, like that.

He was Australian I take it?

Oh yes.

I've never heard of him I'm sorry.

Oh Norman Brooks, and you don't follow tennis.

Well, I do. I love the tennis, but – it's a long time ago, that tennis. Bjorn Borg and John McEnroe are my generation.

Well, he was a different type to John McEnroe! Yes, well we delivered our ammunition, and then we went down to Zeitoun.

What was Zeitoun camp like?

There were big long huts there with palm roofs.

Did they? They had palm roofs? Like a thatched roof?

No, no.

Sort of palm fronds over them. And they were temporary.

Oh yes, well put it this way, they were new. I don't know whether they would be temporary or not. They'd been recently put up to accommodate the Australian troops. It never rained there, so they didn't have that worry.

Did you have any friends at that time that you can recall?

You mean their names?

Yes.

No, I don't think so. They were all friends. We were all friends. And we mostly had nicknames. That's how you knew them, was by their nickname.

Yes, everybody had a nickname. You of course went into Cairo I assume?

Oh yes, one had to do Cairo.

Can you remember the first leave you got into Cairo?

Not the first, no. I know we were there fairly frequently. We'd go in on a tram from Heliopolis into Cairo. Oh yes, you had to see the sights of Cairo.

Which places did you go and see?

You're trying to find out about Sister Street. Oh that's Alexandria, isn't it. (laughs)

The Wazzir, you're talking about.

Yes.

I've already got some good descriptions of the Wazzir actually. I've met a 15th^t original, Mr Bill Bradnock from Beachmere, which is just north of Brisbane, and he was actually detailed to go in when the riots were on, and round up some of the troops, I think it was. But no, not really, I was just wondering whether you went to see the museums or the Pyramids, and so on.

Oh yes we saw all those, of course. The riots were all over before we got there.

Yes, that's right. That's before they went to the Peninsula. That was before the Landing.

All that trouble was over before we got there, so don't blame us for that!

And did you go down and have a look at the Wazzir, or not?

Oh yes, of course. As a matter of fact, when we were at Zeitoun, pickets were detailed from time to time. That would be a body of a platoon, probably, who had to take up picket duties assisting the military police in Cairo. I happened to be on one of those pickets, and we were billeted at the Kasr-el-Nil Barracks, which is right on the banks of the Nile. And we were in Cairo I think for a couple of weeks. So during the course of our duties, blokes were detailed to be in some of the houses of ill-fame where brawls had occurred. I spent a fair bit of time there.

What was the name of the barracks?

Kasr-el-Nil.

How do you spell that?

K-A-S-R-E-L-N-I-L.

Because I have to write everything out you see, and sometimes I come to a word and there is no way I can...

Well you had better try and find out. I'm pretty sure that's right. It's an old British garrison barracks.

And what were your duties while you were there?

We had to break up brawls, if there were any, or just march down the street in a body. That was often sufficient.

How many men are there in a platoon?

Four platoons in a company. About 50. Between 40 and 50.

Did you climb up the Pyramids?

Yes.

What was that like?

Well you can imagine what it's like.

What can you see from up the top of the Pyramids?

Sand.

How much of Cairo can you see from up there?

Oh you can see a lot. It's about 400 feet high, I think. It's a huge thing. I have been back since. I went on that 1965 tour of Gallipoli.

That would be interesting.

And we included Cairo in our itinerary.

How much has it changed since you were there?

Oh you wouldn't know it. It has changed a lot.

Has it improved?

Yes, it's cleaner. Alexandria is a place that's just as dirty as it was when we were there, fifty years before. Cairo has got some good hotels in it now.

What sort of training would you have done at Zeitoun?

We did bigger stuff, like exercises, company exercises, battalion exercises, out in the sand. You'd go out perhaps for a night or two nights on an exercise.

What sort of exercise would they be?

Well attacks, of course. We hadn't learned to run away then! Brigade exercises. big stuff.

And what would happen during those Brigade exercises? How would they be organised?

Oh well, that's the staff's job.

What would you do?

Oh well, you'd run around, and lie down in the sand, and shoot 'Turks', or whatever appeared on the horizon. Actually I think the main thing was sort of a toughening up period. That was the main thing. Getting the blokes terribly fit. And of course, there was a lot of rifle shooting done, as well, with targets stuck up in the sand.

What other weapons were you trained on then?

Oh the .303. It was an infantry unit. I was just a private, an infantry soldier. All my equipment was, was a rifle.

They didn't have the Mills bomb or the Lewis gun at that time.

No.

Were you able to operate the Vickers gun, or not?

I think when we went over there, there were two Vickers guns to the battalion. But the ordinary bloke couldn't work the Vickers. You had to have a bit of training. Later on they made the

machine gun battalions, as you know. In fact Colonel Murray was made the commanding officer of the 4th Machine Gun Battalion. Harry Murray.

The lieutenant in charge of the 7th Reinforcements was Lieutenant Henley. Can you remember him?

Yes, very well.

What sort of a man was he? Can you give a description of him?

He was quite a boyish young fellow. His father was the Member of Parliament for Parramatta or Burnley. They lived at Burnley. How I know that it was Burnley, he was our OC and before we embarked on our voyage the Henley family gave us a public farewell for the whole of the 7th Reinforcements in the town hall at Burnley. So I remember Leslie very well. He was very young, very boyish. Of course, everybody was young, but he was very young I thought. He had been to Rabaul with the contingent that went there. And he told us how he spent all his night, the first night he was there, firing at bloody Germans. And in the morning they turned out to be little orange trees! Unfortunately he was killed at Pozieres, in that area.

What happened to him, do you know?

I think he was hit with a shell. Yes, I knew Les Henley very well. Well we all did. We thought he was great. He was great, too.

How many men were there in the 7th Reinforcements roughly?

Oh, a couple of hundred men in the 7th Reinforcements – 200 or 250. That was a monthly supply of reinforcements for a battalion.

A monthly supply? Really, 250 men.

Yes, I think I'm right in saying monthly.

You may well be. And from Zeitoun, where did you go? What happened after Zeitoun?

We went on that ship, didn't we?

Yes, I think Mr Fraser caught the mumps, and he went into Heliopolis General Hospital, and he came after you a few days. So you went up to Lemnos and then across to the Peninsula.

I don't remember very much about the way we went up there. It would have been on the old Gyppo train, I suppose. Flat-tops.

That would have been to Alexandria. They were big flat-tops, were they?

Well, that's what we got, on this occasion anyway.

And by that I mean that they were just a flat deck, were they?

Yes.

Just a goods train?

Yes, well all sorts of conveyances were used. All railway types. But we were unfortunate enough to not have a proper car. We were on flat-tops. And yes, we went to Alexandria, and we were boarding a ship. I couldn't tell you the name of it.

No, well I would have the name of the one that Mr Fraser went on.

It would be the same one, wouldn't it, the *Karian*.

As I was saying, he caught the mumps, and he went a couple of days or a week behind you. He was in isolation. You didn't catch the mumps.

No, but quite a number of our fellows did. When I say quite a number of them - some of them. When we arrived at Lemnos Island we were isolated there. We were not absorbed by the battalion straight away. We were put in a camp on our own, because somebody had the mumps. Of course, the story got around that it wasn't the mumps. but that disease you pick up in Cairo!

Oh right!

But I know it was the mumps, because I knew some of the fellows that were in it. Yes, we were not allowed to join the battalion until we were going back to Gallipoli. We went back with them then. It was only about a week I think.

What do you recall of Gallipoli? You were there – October. You'd have been there two months or so?

That's all. We were only at the one post. Durrant's Post they called it.

That was after the CO, wasn't it? Or was he the adjutant at that time?

He was the adjutant at that time. Yes, we were only in that one position.

Can you remember when it got very cold?

I do. We had a snowstorm in November.

What happened at that time? Can you remember what you did at that time?

My word! Stood up in the trench with your back against the wall. From where we were you could see the hospital ships down in the harbour. We used to look at them of a night time. They would be all lit up and looked lovely. And this particular night they gradually faded out, and you couldn't see them at all. The snow was falling. I'd never seen snow before then. And oh God, it rained and rained. Oh it was a terrible place.

What did you do to keep warm?

What could you do to keep warm? You couldn't leave the trench. Oh no, we weren't always warm. That was in November.

I think there were some quite big seas too weren't there, waves that came in?

It gets very rough. I remember the night when we went from Lemnos to go over the first time. We were on a ship called – I don't know. I'll think of it later and probably tell you. And they came out in little 'tenders'. Little troop carriers made of iron.

Like a barge?

Yes, only they were covered up. You'd get in and they'd pull the door shut so that any bullets or shells that hit the top wouldn't get in amongst the men. And I think each one of those would carry about 100. And I was on - I was the first, or one of the first to go ashore, and we only got about 20 aboard and they got the signal to piss off, because the sea was too rough. A storm was coming, so away we went, and we used to go like that. I don't know whether we made a complete circle, or only 180 degrees.

You mean sideways?

No, she was rolling! The sea was so bad, that they didn't load it. She only had about 20 on it.

There wasn't enough in it to settle in the water properly.

No, and we had about four goes at the jetty. We'd hit it, and then bounce away back again, and have another few rolls. And then come in again. I remember quite well all I could do when I got onto the jetty was just lie down for a while. That's the sort of traveller I was.

The jetty felt like it was rolling also.

I remember that quite well. Yes, about 20. It should either have been 100, or 150, or something. All right, well were on Gallipoli aren't we. And we didn't do any actual battling with the Turks. Just firing a few shots at them.

Well most of the battles were mercifully over by that time, weren't they. No, it was a bungle the Gallipoli campaign, wasn't it.

But every campaign's a bungle really.

When you came back from Gallipoli you spent Christmas at Lemnos, didn't you?

That's right.

Well, my story starts about that time. Can you remember that Christmas Day?

I can remember that Christmas Day. We got our Christmas Billies. We all had a Christmas billy from the Comforts Fund.

What did yours have in it?

Oh, I don't know! (laughs). Same as everybody else's. I wouldn't hazard a guess at what was in it now. The usual thing. I suppose a little Christmas pudding, and a few nuts and things. I know we all got a Christmas billy. We were there for a few days. I don't know how long.

And then went back to Alexandria? What was Lemnos like as an island?

Well from what we saw it looked like pictures that I'd seen of Switzerland. Straight up! Rocky! Tall cliffs. That's all I saw.

Did you see any of the villages there?

In 1965 we were there for a while, and I had a look around and saw some villages then. Maidos and a couple of others.

I don't suppose it had changed very much since you left.

No, it hasn't changed since the Crusades.

What did you do on that Christmas Day?

Oh, I don't know.

There was a German plane which came across, according to Mr Fraser. Can you remember that?

I can, and it dropped a little bomb or something. Yes, I remember it. They were only playing bombing in those days. Yes, I can remember that. If that was the extent of our bombing it wouldn't have hurt us very much, I can assure you. Have you read any of Bean's works?

Well I have Volume 3 and Volume 4 of the Official History, which is the period France 1916 and France 1917. But I haven't read The Story of Anzac, and I haven't read these volumes either. Just the section that relates to the Fourth Brigade. They are very good aren't they.

Oh yes. Far more useful than trying to depend on somebody's memory 70 years later, isn't it.

Well, no, not really. Because you know, I'm really more interested in the personal side of it than I am in the official histories. I'm really just trying to do something that develops a picture for young people, more than I am to do an official history. You can't do it at this stage, and it has been done anyway. There is the Official History, and there are the Battalion Histories. What I'd like to do is to take up to about twenty men like yourself and make them the central characters in the story. And I am going to use a lot of letters and diary extracts from the Australian War Memorial library.

Oh good.

There is quite a lot from there.

That's the place to get it.

But I'm taking this central story, which is the 4th Brigade in Egypt and France in 1916 and 1917, and the story of the POWs in Germany. And I'm just getting recollections from men like yourself who served with the Brigade or who were POWs during that time. And I'll be describing the story from all points of view. Like if I'm describing Pozieres for example, I'll be describing what the attacks were like, what the objectives were, what the strategy was, and so on, but through all that I will be adding a lot of letters and a lot of personal recollections, like those which you have. And that way people can relate much more to it. The Official History is a very good book, but it's a bit difficult for people to read it. Because it's not a personal story.

Yes. But it was very interesting to those people who were there at the time.

Yes.

It's still very personal to them. And it's so accurate, that's the point I'm trying to make now.

Yes, well that's the case, you see. The story which I'll write about the 4th Brigade will be accurate, because I have the Official History, and I have the Battalion Histories, so there is really no question about that. It's just developing the *picture*, more than it has been previously. What was Alexandria like in 1916, 1915.

I didn't see it in 1916.

Well in 1915 you came back from Lemnos to Alexandria.

I don't remember much about it all. We didn't stay there. We just got on the train on the wharf, I think, and went away down to Moascar, or Ismailia.

What sort of a place was Ismailia?

It was a French town, right on the Canal. It was two towns really. The European part of it was beautiful built and designed, and clean. Then you had the Arab part on the other side and that wasn't quite as good.

Ismailia sort of straddled the Canal?

No, it didn't straddle the Canal. It was on the Egyptian side, but it was right on the Canal. As far as I can recollect it didn't straddle it. I could be wrong there.

No, you may well be right. I don't know.

The only Ismailia was on the Egyptian side.

And the border was the Canal?

Yes.

And what was on the other side, Syria.

I don't know what it would be. Must have been. I really don't know. I know there were Turks there, because we had to go out and put up defence posts on the other side.

So you had to dig..

Yes, and build up with sandbags and timber. Might have still been part of Egypt. It is now isn't it.

Yes, it's part of Egypt now, I'm sure. How long were you at Ismailia, do you remember?

Not very long. It would be in that history. You've got it there. Not very long. We went from Ismailia up to Tel-el-Kebir.

Yes, that's right.

Went up by train from Moascar. Moascar is a few miles out from Ismailia.

What's Moascar like as a town? I sort of have to mention all of these towns, and I'd like to be able to give a description of them, so I have been asking everybody what they were like.

Well if you write you'd have a very indistinct picture of these places.

Well if I add everybody's view together I get a fairly good one you know.

No, Moascar was an Arab village. I don't know what it's like, of course that is 70 years ago.

Well, it will be sort of 70 years ago that I'll be describing. What were the houses made from, were they stone or...?

No, a sort of mud brick type of thing.

There'd probably be a reed or something in amongst them...

Yes, to bind them.

They'd get a lot of mud from the Canal.

Speaking from memory, that's what I think they were. Mud brick type things with a flat roof. From there we went up to Tel-el-Kebir.

Well, that was the old battlefield, wasn't it.

Yes, and they reformed the troops there into two fresh divisions.

That's right.

The 4th and 5th were created there.

The 13th I think took two companies and just went across to form the 45th, didn't they?

That's right, that's correct.

What was it, C and D was it?

I don't know. Don't know. I know it wasn't A Company. Do you have it there?

I'm just looking.

That's the way they did it. Some battalions...

B and D. What happened with Mr Fraser was, he'd have gone into the 45th, but he was ill, and so what happened was, he went home, but when he was posted back, he was a 19th Reinforcement, and he was still detailed to B Company, but of course, it was the new B Company. Do you remember much about that time, when they were changing the battalions, when they formed the 12th Brigade?

Not a lot. Not a lot about anything, really. I do know that the two companies marched out and formed the 45th.

What was the feeling like amongst the men at that time?

Very sad, very sad. You get very attached to your own battalion, because that's pretty well drilled into you. And whatever you do, it's for the battalion. Oh, and you make a lot of friends, made a lot of friends, particularly the blokes that had been with the 13th from the beginning, and had been through all those hard-fought accidents that happened over there. Well, yes they formed a very good battalion. The 45th was a very fine battalion.

Yes, they had the same colours, except in a circle.

We retained our own old colours. We were the odd men out in the 4th Division, our Brigade.

Yes, that's right. What were relations like with the New Zealanders?

Very good.

How much dealings did you have with them? Did you see them much or not?

We had a lot to do with them. On Gallipoli we were in the Australian New Zealand Division under Alec Godley. That division was formed from the 4th Australian Brigade and the rest were New Zealanders. Then of course, when we got to France, they had their own division, but they were always close handy, and we were always very pleased to have them on our flank, because we knew that that flank would be very solid. You couldn't depend on some of the other regiments.

No, that's right. The history of the English battalions is very much that way, you know. You know, like at Pozieres, I know reading about the 15th History, it was always the English who were letting them down on their flanks.

Of course it was.

And because of that they just couldn't keep – they were being enfiladed, and they had to come back.

Yes, that is only too true. We liked to have the New Zealanders on the flank, or the Canadians. The Canadians were very strong too. I don't - not speaking in a racial way, but a lot of the English troops were well - very young and inexperienced sort of - they acted that way, anyhow. If there wasn't somebody there to tell them what to do, well it just wasn't done. There was only one thing to do, and that was to get out of it.

No initiative.

No initiative, or that's the way it seemed to us.

I think that's general, you know, everyone says that. You found yourself still in the old battalion, that would be A and C Companies. What impact did the new reinforcements have on the Battalion? I mean how....

Quite good. They were Aussies. That's all about it.

No difficulty at all...

No fear. No, they were members of the battalion, immediately. Oh no. They didn't like losing our old companies, but the blokes who came in, they were Aussies too. They proved themselves too.

They were just as good as any of the other companies. Every bit. You really ought to be in the police department, I mean, investigating crime.

Do you think so. (laughs) Well, it's the first time that I've been doing really, any interviews, you know. I've done, oh I don't know, approaching a dozen now I suppose. But the material that I get really is valuable. Honestly. I've got about eight hours on tape from Mr Fraser. Of course he was a POW you see.

Yes, he's got a story to tell.

Yes, and his service overlaps, with the exception of missing on Pozieres, a real – I mean his story is the full book, particularly with the POW period, I wanted to get as much I could from him, and I...

You'll get a lot from him.

I've been fortunate in locating three POWs, so far. I think I will probably find more than that.

And what did they do after they got back to Germany, or wherever they were?

Well, some of them attempted to escape. Jim Wheeler, who was the 15th Battalion corporal, he made three escapes, but he didn't get away..

Very hard to get out of the prison camp. Oh you can imagine it.

And Germany didn't have any food. The only way they survived was on their Red Cross parcels.

By God, they were lucky to get them.

They were. That was the only way they were kept alive. They'd have died from starvation, no exaggeration.

And what about the poor old Hun?

Well, he was about the same, you know. They used to be envious of the Red Cross parcels, although they apparently never touched them.

No, well that's good.

Oh, they had some varied experiences. Mr Fraser worked down salt mines in Germany.

Go on.

And Jim Wheeler, he was an NCO, and so he wasn't required to work, but it was impossible to get away from the large camps, and so he got himself transferred out onto farms. He was cutting pine pit props.

Oh yes.

On the farm it was much easier to escape. And he did. He got away. He was away for about a fortnight each time.

He'd have an interesting story to tell.

He did. I've got quite a lot on tape from him. And I've got to go and see a Mr Albert Marshall. He was a captain in the 15th Battalion signallers. He's in Tasmania, in Ulverstone. I've got to go and see him before Christmas.

The 15th was half Queensland and half Tassie, weren't they?

Well three companies were Queensland or Northern Rivers, New South Wales and D Company was Tasmanian.

Oh just the one company.

The 4th Brigade's quite a good brigade to choose because it covers all the States.

That's right.

So it's pretty representative of you know, everybody.

(Incidental conversation)

I believe you must have gone on the desert march from Tel-el-Kebir, and I've been asking everybody who I can find who went on that to describe what happened. What do you remember about it?

I remember everything about it I think.

Well, you started off at – you were at Tel-el-Kebir. I think it was early in the morning that you left.

Oh bound to be. We struck our tents and rolled our blankets. And of course, we carrying full kit, plus 20 rounds of ammunition.

20 rounds?

200 rounds!

Yes, that's OK. And were you carrying your rifle as well? Oh everything, full marching order.

Yes, except that my ammunition got mixed up with my blankets and came on the camel.

Oh did you do that intentionally, or not?

Oh!

You did?

Oh, you wouldn't do that intentionally, you know that!

Oh right. (laughs)

Each tent rolled its blankets. You had your blanket roll and you'd put your tent name on it, and that was carried by the camel. And it was most unfortunate that my 200 rounds got mixed up with my blanket. That was only so I would know my blanket when I got to the other end! But oh it was cruel. It was hot, and the sand was up to your boot-tops. It was a terrible turn-out. Stupid really. Stupid.

Can you go through it day by day, generally?

I think so. I couldn't give you the name of the village area where we stayed each time.

I'll be able to find out that. I've known but I can't remember now, but anyway.

As far as I can remember we did it in three stages.

Three days, wasn't it.

That's right. And the first day the blokes managed pretty well. But we were under a tremendous difficulty because at that time we had - we were issued with our new Tommie uniforms. You know these white - not white - khaki callico-type things that the Tommies wore with jackets and that sort of thing, with the pith helmet.

You had the pith helmet as well?

We didn't look like Australians at all.

Was the whole brigade like that.

Yes. I think so. I won't vouch for the rest, but our battalion was.

Yes, I reckon everybody was,

I think so. And I was going to tell you about these new pants. Blokes were chafing after the first day in these new pants. They were chafing, and you know how –and you were in pain all the time. It was a shemozzle. They looked like a mob of sheep going to a dam for a drink. You've seen them?

Yes.

That was what the march looked like. And yet I did notice in Patsy Adam-Smith's...She has written a book. Have you seen it?

Yes, *The Anzacs*.

And she shows them on the march with Aussie uniforms and rifles up on shoulders.

So that obviously wasn't....

Wasn't true at all.

That's what I thought, because I couldn't – you're the first person to really describe that to me.

It's a wonder Taylor didn't tell you that.

END OF SIDE A MICROCASSETTE (AWM TAPE 2)

START OF SIDE B MICROCASSETTE (AWM TAPE 3)

And as I put them altogether I get that picture.

Well that's what we looked like - in an English summer uniform, you know like they used to wear in India, and all that sort of thing. And a pith helmet. And she shows them dressed up with their jackets buttoned up and everything. Anyway, that didn't matter, we got through the first day alright. Then the next day, oh there were stragglers dropping out, even on the next day. And on the third day - well it was a real shemozzle. A real shemozzle. We were getting back on our way, and we were nearly back to Moascar. The New Zealanders were camped there, and they came out and helped lots of our blokes to get in, to get down to the...Oh it was a shemozzle.

Did you get all the way, or not? Did you fall out?

I didn't, no.

No, you got right through.

Oh yes.

You did well. There were a lot of men who fell out, particularly on the last day.

Well, bear in mind that a lot of these chaps were brand new to that area. They'd been waiting in Egypt for us to come back. And we reckoned that we were pretty tough by that time. And these younger fellows - I suppose some of them were younger, or perhaps some of them were older - the older ones would find it worse. But I believe they were coming in for the next 24 or 48 hours. I can't swear to that. Didn't see it myself.

No well you're right, because that is what I have heard. They were coming in for a day or more afterwards.

We marched to a place called Serapeum.

That 's right.

Which is a little village. It's a railway siding that's about all.

There's a pontoon bridge.

There's a pontoon bridge, and we crossed over there and formed a camp on the other side.

How did you keep going? I mean, was there any particular reason that made you keep going?

I wasn't the only one! (laughs) I wasn't the only one that would go.

Well, the 4th Brigade did better than a number of the other brigades, didn't they? The route was a little bit better planned, I think.

Yes, yes. Anyhow, it should never have happened. If they were going to march they could have made an extra day, and that would have made all the difference.

If they had just gone a shorter distance every day.

(Incidental conversation)

What was the reason for so many of the men falling out, do you think, and you not?

Oh well, you don't know how badly they were chafed, and they broke down too. There was a lot of them were weaker. They ran out of water, and all that sort of thing. No, it was only a percentage, of course, but it was enough. They were coming in 48 hours after. Well, the New Zealanders went out with ambulances and GS wagons, and that sort of thing.

What is a GS wagon.

A General Service wagon. It's a four wheeler with four horses.

So it's just like a lorry, only it's...

It was high, with a seat up in front. It's a general service wagon. The other vehicle that were used by the infantry we called limbers. They were just like two boxes, like a box on wheels, and a trailer behind, with a box on wheels. The advantage of that was that you could just turn it straight round. Which you couldn't do with a longer vehicle.

All of these things are important, because they help considerably in getting the picture right. Well you might remember Anzac Day 1916?

Very well.

You do.

Very well. I have a program somewhere. Don't say it's here.

I'd like to get a photograph of that if I may. I have just done an article for one of the national magazines on Anzac Day 1916.

Have you really?

And I'll send you a copy.

Well I'll try and locate that – I don't where it will have gone. It was raised as a sports carnival. It was the first anniversary. They had aquatic sports on the Canal. All the usual...

Could you go through the day more or less from the start? I don't know whether that is too difficult for you or not? Can you remember what the whole day was?

That's all as far as I can remember – the swimming. Aquatic carnival on the canal.

There was a service in the morning, wasn't there?

Not that I remember it.

There was. You got most of the day free I think. Well I know because I've found a letter written by a 14th Battalion man, and it was about seven pages long, and it described Anzac Day, what he saw.

Well, why are you asking me?

I want to get a sort of second opinion. Different view.

I'd take his if I were you.

Yes (laughs). Well I am, actually. But what did you do that day?

I took my clothes off and swam in the Canal, along with several thousand others.

Do you remember anything about the sports?

Only that it was just an ordinary swimming carnival, and a few canoe - accidents, sort of thing, you know, fooling around. I remember too that the Prince of Wales came down the Suez Canal on a barge showing himself off. And the troops were highly respectful to him too - climbing up on his

barge. There was a whole heap of naked blokes on his barge going down with him too! Of course, he was only a lad anyway.

You didn't go into any of the competitions yourself?

No.

How far away from the camp was the Canal?

Right on the Canal, right on it, on the Asiatic side. Our defences were out - like the defence posts were out about seven miles, into the desert. It wasn't a trench system. It was just a series of posts.

I think that – I don't know whether you have heard of this or not, there was some whiskey or spirits anyway...

There was a bottle of whiskey stolen from the Prince's tent, yes.

You know about that?

I wasn't in it!

What was the story that you know?

That's the only story that I know. I believe it is true too.

Well, the story that was told to me by Jim Wheeler was that there were spirits that were stolen. It wasn't just a bottle, it was a lot, like cases.

Oh well, it could have been, yes.

You were right that there was the Prince of Wales. And he was invited I think to the officer's mess for dinner. And there was whiskey and beer that came down specially for this – and the Australian troops of course, they stole it all.

Yes, well that would be correct. It was only heresay for me, because that was the story that you heard there. Someone's pinched the whiskey. Well he was near an Australian camp so he must expect that sort of thing. That's how respectful the Aussies were! Or are!

What was he like, the Prince of Wales.

He was a very immature young fellow.

How old would he have been?

Oh, about 19 or 20. He didn't appear that old, but you know how these young Englishman look when they brought up in a sheltered atmosphere like his Royal Highness would have been. He was actually a staff captain, or an aide of some description to the Commander-in-Chief.

Where was he stationed?

I don't know. I would think Cairo, probably. I don't know where the headquarters was, but I would expect it to be there. He did inspect us once in a camp at Zeitoun, I think. We also saw the Prince on horseback there. There was a review of the whole camp, and he'd go up behind some of the others inspecting us, trying to hang on as well as he could, sort of thing.

He wasn't the best of horseman you don't think.

No, he didn't appear to be. Yes, that was before we went to Gallipoli. No, that was after. Yes, the Anzac Day. The review was before Gallipoli.

And what did you do when you were at Serapeum? What was the order of the day?

Oh well, we were getting organised still. For instance, the transport people were getting more mules and trying to break them in, and that sort of thing. And we infantry people were marching around in the sand, as though we'd never done it before.

Were you sent out to any of the posts in the desert?

No.

My grandfather, for example, was sent down to Dervesoir, and Jim Wheeler went up onto Lake Timsah?

Oh did he. Well we were just near Lake Timsah. You know, Serapeum isn't very far from the Great Bitter Lakes there. No I never went out.

You were at Serapeum all the time?

At Serapeum, yes.

And what rank did you have at that time? Still a private?

A full-blown private, just a fighting soldier. The best soldier in the AIF I was.

Yes, that's right (laughs).

We did whatever we were asked to do.

What did you do of a night-time?

Nothing. Get to bed. We were usually that tired, and there was no where to go. As far as I can remember I never sat around playing cards, or any of that sort of thing. Probably did, but it never impressed up here. I haven't got it in the computer. Life was quite uneventful. Well it was uneventful. We were - all day long there was someone chasing us around, making us do something.

What were the defensive posts that you were digging at Ismailia? This was on the Canal was it?

Yes.

What would you have to do? Were you digging trench works? You were actually digging them were you?

Yes, you'd dig trench work and fill sandbags and built a parapet.

So you'd both dig and build up...

And you'd come down next day and they were all filled up again by the wind. And you'd have to dig again.

It was a waste of time. They were just keeping you busy.

That was the main object I think.

Did you see or hear of any of the Turks at that time? I think there were one or two raids, weren't there?

No, it didn't affect us at all. Some posts would report having seen men on camels or something, and they'd fire a few shots at them. They didn't know whether they were Turks or Bedouins, or even Englishman.

Bill Bradnock met T. E. Lawrence at Zagazig?

Did he, go on. Well that's something. Well Zagazig was half way between Cairo and where we were on the Canal. You changed trains there. Yes, well we don't know whether Lawrence was a hoax or whether he was what he's written himself up to be, or...

I haven't read any of his...or I haven't read the Seven Pillars of Wisdom.

I have, once.

What was Zagazig like? I'd be interested in an account of Zagazig?

I don't know.

It was a changing place?

I went through it a couple of times on the train.

Would the train come down, and then you'd get on a different train?

I thinks so, yes.

So there wasn't a train which went from Suez to Cairo as one train. You'd get to Zagazig, say, and then you'd change?

I think the train used to run along the Canal as far as Alexandria, you see. And at Zagazig there'd be a branch off to Cairo. That's my reasoning. I don't know. I've never looked at it on a map.

No I'll have to check that, but that's interesting. Do you remember any of the nights when you were on that march?

No.

Well, the reason I ask is because Bill Bradnock has given me a description – he was on the march also – of scorpions that used to attack the troops at night. Apparently there were these great howls the first night, and men were getting bitten by these scorpions.

Oh he'd be more gently bred than I am. I wouldn't feel a scorpion bite!

How many men were there roughly that came from around Tocumwal? Were there many that you knew?

In the 13th Battalion?

In the 13th.

Oh quite a number. I wouldn't like - just off the elbow say how many. I know one family. There were three brothers in the 13th. People called Cottle.

How do you spell their name?

C-O-T-T-L-E. and there were two Boyles. Two Medcalfes. I don't know where they - they weren't Tocumwalites, the Medcalfes,

They were around this district were they?

Somewhere, yes. Oh that's a pretty tough proposition you know, asking me to remember all these things.

Yes. I ask because sometimes I fall over backwards by the descriptions I do get from people. Because you know, it amazes me that memory can be like that.

Some people are very retentive, and very observant too. I'm neither.

I can tell if I'm getting the sort of material I'm looking for. I certainly am. What were the camels like?

Oh, you know what a camel is like. You mean to handle?

To handle, yes.

Well our blokes were handling our own camels. I don't know where they got them from at this particular stage. They were Aussies anyway.

I think they formed a Camel Corps, didn't they?

Oh yes, oh my word. There was a Camel Corps alright. Rex Hall - I had his book once, about the Camel Corps. He was in the Camel Corps. Yes, it was going for quite a while, and later on in the war, when we were in France, it was disbanded, and the coves who were in the Camel Corps

rejoined their own units. I know we had couple of officers came back from the Camel Corps to the 13th. And that would happen with every battalion, I think.

Well I've heard of that before too. Were any of the men attacked by the camels? I've got one description from the 15th.

Of course, it could happen. They're not as savage as they appear. You know, they'd open their mouths and groan at you. You'd be dead-scared of them. But the handlers didn't seem to be alarmed at all.

Do you remember the journey by train down to Alexandria to the *Translyvania*?

Not particularly. You mean any incidents that happened?

Yes, anything at all about that time. What were you doing when the order to move came?

Oh, we were ready to move. We'd been ready to move, of course for - we'd been expecting it. It didn't dislocate anything at all. It took no time to get ready. The First and Second Divisions had gone.

Yes, that's right.

I don't know what month it was.

It was the end of May.

The 1st and 2nd Divisions went in March, that's right.

Yes, I've been talking to a 9th Battalion man. Not in connection with this book, I simply met him through doing this book. George Jamieson is his name, and he was an original with the 9th, and landed at Anzac Cove.

They'd be the first brigade ashore.

Yes, in one of the first boats. He went right through on the Peninsula, and – he was wounded, he got a few wounds, but he wasn't evacuated with anything serious. He was wounded in France, though. But I'm doing an article on him for one of the magazines.

Oh yes, very good.

He went in about March.

When we got to France we went into the Nursery, as they called it, at Armientieres. The 1st and 2nd Division moved out, and we occupied their trenches.

Do you remember anything much about the voyage across the Mediterranean on the *Translyvania*?

Yes, I won 70 pounds playing two-up!

70 pounds!

That was a lot of money.

Good heavens! Gee, you must have started right from the start.

Oh, on. It happened anyhow. We were about five or six days on the ship.

Yes, you were, about six days at least. About a week, 1 June to 7 June, it was.

Well why are you asking me.

Well, I didn't know you won 70 pounds playing two-up (laughs). What was the story behind that?

Oh nothing, no story. I mean it was normal procedure of course.

Playing two-up?

Oh yes.

Whereabouts were you playing? This is on the ship obviously?

On the ship. Oh I couldn't say. It wasn't in the engine room, and it wasn't in the officers' mess, it wasn't in the captain's cabin. Oh no, you didn't have to hide anything. You'd get a group of fellows together and that was it. Highly respected personages. There were a lot of us - the whole brigade was on the *Translyvania*.

Yes, it was packed.

And she was sunk on the way back to Alexandria.

That's right, yes.

Well why are you asking me.

Yes, well I suppose I am getting to learn a lot about it now. Seventy pounds, what would the bets be for something like that? I've never played two-up.

Oh well, you'd play for a week. We were playing for a week. You only had to win 10 pound a day and you had it.

You were getting paid, about six shillings a day, was the private's pay. I suppose you had some sent home to your mother. That's what they used to do, didn't they?

Of course.

You did that too.

You were only allowed to collect at the outset, but the maximum was two shillings a day. You had to make an allotment, and you were allowed two bob a day, and that was all you could draw. You'd be a month without pay, perhaps, because you had no way of spending it. There was nothing to spend it on. We didn't go to the pictures on Gallipoli, or anything like that. Or to the pub! (laughs)

No, there's no way of spending it.

A lot of the fellows were only on a shilling a day.

That's true. I think Donald Fraser was on a shilling a day.

I was drawing one shilling and sixpence, but I think the maximum was two bob. I'm not sure of that.

And how would they pay you again? What was the procedure? You'd be paid every month or every....

Oh, I wouldn't know. I was only paid once on Gallipoli. I don't know. I suppose there was a set time. All we'd know was someone would say it was payday, and you'd fall in on parade and went up to a tent and got your money. I should imagine that it would vary considerably. There wouldn't be any set time, because you couldn't draw the program like that. You didn't know what the Hun was going to decide to do.

And so when you were paid the most that you could draw was two shillings a day.

Yes.

You could hardly go and draw two shillings a day, and two shillings a day, and two shillings a day, to add it up would you, to buy anything.

No. My salary was one-and-six. There was so much deferred pay, and you *had* to make an allotment to your family. Whatever that was. I think that was three bob a day, and a shilling a day would be deferred pay. If you got killed you wouldn't be able to collect that.

Probably the next of kin?

Oh I don't know. I think the next of kin would get it. I don't know. I really don't know. But it was deferred pay. It wasn't available to everybody. But your allotment was. You'd make an allotment, that would be three bob a day, and that would be paid to the credit of whoever your allottee was .

And how do you actually play two-up? I mean I know you use two pennies?

You just use two pennies to play two-up. Heads and tails.

Heads and tails. And you'd bet...

Heads. You'd bet that you'd get two heads, or two tails.

And if it came down two heads you'd take the pool?

Take the pool - and anything on the side. There might be some money on the side. You could bet on the side too. Or people on the side could bet with one another. Anyhow it was a very memorable trip. I was sorry to hear the old ship went down on the way back. I'm glad she didn't go down on the way over.

Was it weaving, like zig-zagging? As you were going across.

I don't know, I suppose it was. We usually did that sort of thing. The *Transylvania*.

What sort of a ship was it? Could you description, just of its colour, or its size, or how you lived on it? Whatever else there is. What colour was it?

Well, it wasn't a white one. Oh it was a brownish type thing, I think. I have postcards of it somewhere. It was a Cunard liner, and as you can imagine, it was a fairly extensive sort of a ship. There were 4,000 of us on it, the whole Brigade, without transport. Transport came on another ship.

And what were the sleeping arrangements? I suppose you were all in hammocks?

I suppose so. I remember we were all in hammocks on the *Shropshire*. I don't remember it accurately. I suppose we would be. You'd never get that many on unless they were in hammocks.

Do you remember coming into Marseilles?

Yes.

What was the harbour like there?

Well it was a friendly harbour. I mean, those times you weren't looking at the scenery anyway. You were sort of - your mind was on something else. Or you weren't attracted by scenery. I have no special recollection of it, just another harbour. We'd been in several. I can remember the South of France. The countryside was beautiful after what we'd been on in Egypt and that sort of thing. France was really beautiful. Fruit trees and crops. And people lining the railway lines on both sides, saying "Good old Aussie," sort of thing. They were very pleased to see us. They were having a very bad period in France at the time that we arrived. That Verdun affair was on. And they were very pleased to see someone come.

How did you travel north? It was in carriages wasn't it?

Yes, I think.

I've got some descriptions of the train journey north.

We did a hell of a lot of travelling in the horse-boxes as well, but I think on that train we were in carriages. Oh, I'm sure we were.

Were there any really memorable stories that you can recall of that trip north?

No, it was just another trip.

You went passed Paris, didn't you?

We didn't go through Paris. Versailles, or somewhere. I do remember that at several stations along the way the French people were there with loaves of bread and things you know, food and that sort of stuff. That seemed to be a permanent job for them. We didn't go through Paris. Actually I didn't go up with the battalion. That's right. I went on a later train, with the transport.

Oh did you.

Yes, with the transport, and we went to Abbeville. And at Abbeville we picked up mules. They didn't bring any mules or horses from Egypt. They only brought the wagons, and they picked up mules at Abbeville, and we went by road from Abbeville up to Armientieres. The battalion had gone on ahead. They were a bit ahead of us.

Why were you detailed to go with the transport?

I wasn't detailed to go with it - but that's the way I went.

Well what happened?

(Laughs) It sounds like the police, questioning a chap who may be able to help us with our investigations. Alright well now, I'll tell you the true story. When we arrived in Marseilles I had one stripe then. I was a fully-blown soldier. All our gear was unloaded onto the wharf. The troops were marched off to a certain railway station to catch their train. I with four or five others were detailed to be with the baggage cart, to remain with our stuff on the wharf, which we did. Very faithfully and correctly. And waited until such time as lorries came, driven by English troops to load our stuff. We loaded our stuff on the lorries, every bit of it. Never left any behind - and proceeded to get onto the lorries to travel with it - and the Tommies wouldn't allow us.

Why was that?

That was their drill. Don't carry anybody. So that meant that I and my blokes went down the street! And by the time we got to the railway station our blokes had all gone.

(Laughs) Oh well that happened a lot.

Anyhow we found the transport fellows.

They came in the next day.

They came in the next day. And they were going up, and we travelled up with them. That's how we came to be mixed up. We were the baggage guard, mind you. I know I lost my rifle. No, we put all our gear on these trucks with the other gear, and when we got up to Armientieres our gear had all gone – must have gone somewhere else.

What happened again? This is your personal gear?

Oh no, my military gear, my rifle and pack and everything. I suppose that's personal gear, yes. It was lost. And of course, the first thing we had to do was face the CO.

This is all four of you lost your gear, did you?

Yes, rifles and everything. I can remember that I was going to be charged seven pounds I think for the rifle. Anyhow, we told a story of it – made a good story of it, and everything went alright. We got another rifle. We lost our gear, just because this bloody Tommie - you know, that's there style. There's one driver and one jogging. Nobody else on it. Anyhow that's what happened.

Where did you stay in Marseilles that night?

I don't know. I don't know how it was or where it was. We did alright though, it wasn't in any of those houses of ill-fame!

(Laughs) No I wasn't suggesting that.

Yes, that was strange. That was my first day in France.

That's a good story.

That' show we travelled up by transport. Picked up mules at Abbeville.

And you joined the Battalion up there Bailleul, or Armientieres?

Ah St. Elois.

They did go into the line near St. Elois, didn't they?

Yes, not there though. Oh I'll think of it. It doesn't matter anyway. This was about four days afterwards. After we should have been there.

I'll probably be able to find it anyway in here. Up at The Nursery.

That's the place. It's a village.

Bois Grenier.

Bois Grenier.

Granary Wood it is, in English.

That's right it would be Granary Wood. We arrived there by road from Abbeville. I don't know how long it takes.

Sitting on the carts with the mules pulling them along?

Yes.

What was the role of the transport generally? I mean was it fairly dangerous, I suppose? They had to bring up the supplies, didn't they?

Oh yes. They used to have to collect the stuff from the divisional dump. The ASC would deliver it up to say a brigade dump, and then each battalion would have its own transport there to pick up whatever they had to do. And then it would be taken to the quartermaster store with the unit, and then divided up and put in sandbags to go to each little section. And that would have to be taken up to the line at night with the trenches. So they were really very busy people. Really very busy people.

I suppose they would take the same risks nearly as the frontline soldier.

Oh my word. Oh well not as much, but there were any amount of horses and lorries skittled. You've seen some of the pictures, I suppose, have you?

Well, I've seen some of the photographs of them bringing up guns and so on, but that of course is the artillery. But I didn't know much about the transport.

Oh well, yes they used to take the stuff right up into the front line, well as far as they could get. And then the fellows would carry the stuff up then to the very front line. Transport would take it up as far as battalion headquarters.

What was the scene like at Bois Grenier? What was the front line like there?

Oh it was a parapet. It was very low. The water was only about that far below the surface, so you couldn't dig a trench.

About a foot or so?

Yes, they had to build a parapet of sandbags and timber and so on, and a parados at the back.

What was at the back?

A parados, I think that's what they called it. That was built at the back and that was to prevent any shell splinters flying back. It would come over the parapet...

Parapet and parados. I never knew that, honestly. That's news to me. I've heard of the parapet, but the parados...

Well that's what it was like up at Bois Grenier.

I think there were a lot of rats there too?

Oh all through the trenches, everywhere.

Can you remember anything about that?

My word I can. I remember rats at night. I've been attacked by rats! Oh well, I had a rat bite my toe. That sort of thing. Well everybody did. Oh yes, there were plenty of rats in the trenches.

Apparently – Frank Massey was telling me about this. Apparently as soon as you got any food you had to eat because otherwise the rats would get into it.

Of course, and if you did eat it. The food that you got for the night, that would be the next day's ration, but you'd eat it at night, because you'd have it then. You were always a day behind! You'd eat it as soon as it arrived. You were hungry anyway, because you'd had nothing since the night before. I'm glad you saw Frank Massey. He was a brave little soldier.

He's had a stroke, unfortunately, and his memory is not as clear as it could have been, but he still told me some very interesting stories.

He's only a little bloke, isn't he.

Yes, I think he was five foot, two. He also was rejected in his first physical. He couldn't make a thirty-inch chest. Twenty-nine he was.

Oh he's only a little bloke. Oh think I qualified alright with me measurements. Oh, it might have been something, I don't know. But that's what they sent me home for - a crook heart. Which was just plain stupid because I'd been working on the farm grubbing trees and stumps, and falling timber. Well it's the same one I've still got I haven't had a replacement.

No, it's ticking very well, isn't it. I was going to ask you, the Battalion apparently had some mascots – some roosters, and...

We had a bantam rooster, yes.

What was the story with that?

The transport blokes had it. A chap called Tommy Igo was the boss of the rooster. I can remember a bantam rooster. That's all they had. And then later on this dog, that I was telling you about.

Oh that's the one taken at Stormy Trench.

The German messenger dog.

Well the bombers had a dog. Frank Massey was telling me about a little pup that they had, that was a mascot. But I'd be interested to hear about the rooster. Apparently it came from Australia.

I don't know where it came from? Didn't make any enquiries. Tommy Igo was the bloke in charge of the rooster. Oh he was a game little bloke. He used to stay around too. We'd put him down and that's where he'd stay.

What was the name of the rooster?

Oh god knows. I heard him called Bastard a lot of times, but I don't know whether that was his name !

How do you spell Tommy Igo? What's the last name?

I-G-O.

Sounds Italian. He was the sergeant in the transport?

No, he wasn't a sergeant, he was just a bloke with the transport. A little bantam rooster.

Who was in charge of A Company when you were in France, at that time? Harry Murray was in charge of A Company at Pozieres?

No, Toby Barton was our Company commander. Harry Murray was our 2 IC. But Barton was killed in Pozieres, the first stunt, and Murray took over from there. The very first night we were in

at Pozieres. Poor old Toby, we don't whether he was killed or what happened to him. But he and a sergeant completely disappeared. They were never seen or heard of since.

Something like this happened in all of the battalions.

Well, the ground was all torn up. A shell would lob beside them and cover them up, or blow them to bits, or something. Yes, well Toby Barton took us in first night, and he disappeared the first night. Then Murray took over until such time as they formed the Machine Gun Battalion, and he went to that.

Going back to Armientieres again, or Bois Grenier, there was an incident there with a Lieutenant Bocard. It's mentioned here in the Battalion History. I'm not sure what company he came from, but he went out after a flag.

Oh yes, Bocard. That's right. He was a Frenchman.

He was a Frenchman?

Oh well, you know he was of French descent. He lost a leg.

Did you see or hear of that?

Yes, I knew the man, yes of course.

You knew him?

Well you knew everybody in the unit. You knew all your officers anyway. Yes, Bocard.

And what happened at this time, do you know the story of his wound? What happened when he went out after this flag?

I think our blokes shot him.

Yes, that's what happened. There's an account in the history here. I thought you may be able to comment on it to some degree.

No not anymore than that.

Apparently when he came back Tilney, the Colonel, and he said, "I've got the flag, Colonel, but I'd sooner have my leg."

I'll bet he would.

Whereabouts did he come from in Australia?

Melbourne - I don't know how he came to be in the 13th. Perhaps I'm wrong. But I saw him in Melbourne after the war. You never know where these people come from.

What did you do while you were at the Nursery? Was it mainly just manning the front line, there were no raids were there?

Yes, there were, the 14th were raided. And the 21st lost two Stokes mortars there. Broke their orders. Their orders were not to leave them in the line. Fire a few shots and then take them back. They left them on the firing position, and the Huns came over that night, raided the trench and took the two mortars.

Did they? I suppose they would be interested to see what they were like.

It's a wonder you hadn't read that.

It's not in here.

No, it doesn't concern us. It was the 21st Battalion. That happened there, at The Nursery.

Do you remember when you were issued with steel helmets, and so on. And there was also a memorial service for Kitchener, do you remember that.

I remember the incident quite well. About Kitchener going down in the *Hampshire*.

Where were you when you heard about that?

It must have been in France, because Kitchener was on the Peninsula there before we got instructions to pack up. It was he who supervised the scene, and just said that we had better get out. No it would be in France, somewhere.

What happened when you were – just going all the way back to Gallipoli again, can you describe the evacuation as you saw it.

It is a very limited story. Well people went back in dribs and drabs. I don't know how many, the night that I came off. I came off on the night of the 18th. And it was just like an ordinary – going down to the beach, sort of thing. We were under very close formation, with definite instructions of what was to happen if we were attacked. How we were to deploy and what we had to do, which

didn't occur at all. That passed - and from there it was just a plain march down to the beach, onto the jetty, and onto a little lighter, and then we went out onto the destroyer, and that was it.

Did you take much part in the preparations that most Australians know about of the wiring of the rifles with tin cans, and so on.

No. I don't know anything about that. I've read about it.

(Incidental conversation)

Well beginning here at Pozieres, it describes here your train journey from Bailleul to Candas. Can you take up the story from around that time. This would be the 25th of July or thereabouts, when you are coming down to Pozieres.

Yes, well what have you got. We came down to a place called Domart.

You're right. That's exactly right. You did a tiring march to Domart, it says here, where a late issue of worn-out boots caused sore feet.

After that I don't know what happened. We moved down and camped at a place called Brickfield Hill. Have you got that there?

About August 4th it says, it took you to the Brickfields, near Albert.

That's right, Brickfield Hill. And from there we went up into Pozieres.

Did you see the First Division coming out of Pozieres?

Yes.

What were they like? I usually ask for a description.

They were worn out people. It was a depressing sight. Poor buggers, they looked terrible. They looked absolutely terrible.

They had suffered a lot of losses, hadn't they?

Oh it was murder. They packed men in so tight, which was a stupid way of fighting the war. We were that bloody tight, packed up like a mob of sheep, in case the Hun came through, sort of thing. But all they did was shell the position, and they killed hundreds. As a matter of fact, for our

first attack – you’ve probably got it there - we were in the position that we supposed to take. And when the barrage opened up - our barrage opened up - it opened up on us.

I've heard that before.

Because we were in the place where we were supposed to take. They belted hell out of us, our own people. So we were sort of buggered before we started.

When did you go into the front line? You must have gone in about August 10th?

Before that, wasn't it?

On August 9th A Company went up to support the 16th, it says, and on the 10th we relieved the 15th in Barton Trench. Barton's is obviously after your company commander.

Well that's right.

What was the scene at that time, how did you see it?

It was an absolute shambles. The village of Pozieres wasn't there at all. It was just heaps of rubbish. And it was wet, it was muddy. And it had been torn up by shellfire, and standing back and looking at the place it looked just like a cauldron of boiling water. You know, with the shell bursts coming up just – you know what I'm trying to describe?

Yes.

That's what it looked like to me.

Whereabouts were you when you saw that?

I was somewhere near the Windmill I think. Somewhere in there. It was a bit of high ground. Tom's Cut they called the approach to the place. It was in there. That's the way it struck me. You know, like a copper that they used to use for washing at one time, and you'd see it boiling. That's the way it looked to me.

That's a good description.

I got the wind up straight away.

How many of you were frightened at that time? I suppose all of you.

Oh everybody. But of course, it was the job you had to do. That was all about it. You must have an interesting book there.

Well this is it, this is the History. I've photocopied it?

And where did you photocopy it from?

Frank Massey, Frank Massey has a copy?

Is that the 13th Battalion History?

Yes, I've photocopied from Chapter 12, which Ismailia, Moascar, Tel-el-Kebir, and Serapeum, right through until Chapter 20, which is Bullecourt.

Well, why am I worried that I haven't got my history book here for you.

Well, that's what I was saying. Yes, I thought you understood. I've got the history here. I can help you....

Yes, you are helping me. I'm the one that's being helped.

No, no, that's not the case. Your descriptions are the ones that I'm after. I've already got this. I've got to come up with something original, you see. New material.

We lost Toby Barton, the night that we looked up and saw that - and his sergeant. He had a sergeant, oh I mentioned his name to you before. He disappeared too. He was never found. They never found a trace of him. Although they were only two, I suppose. There would be a lot of others. But they were in our company. Our sergeant, and he was my company commander.

I just check the tape every now and again to see that it's still rolling.

My god, you'll have a lot of rubbish on that.

No, I've got some good stories on that. No it's going to be a really interesting book for a lot of Australians to read, I think. You went in of a night-time I suppose? There was no way of getting in of a day, was there, to Pozieres?

No, oh no. Oh well, there was, up through Tom's Cut, of course.

It was too exposed of a day wasn't it?

Oh well, there had to be traffic in and out all the time. Well, you know what I mean by traffic.

Carrying parties, and so on?

People had to go in and stretcher bearers had to come out. All our stunts were at night of course.

Whereabouts were you? What trench were you in when you got into the frontline? It says, here – I'll try and find it – I reckon you'd probably be in something called Barton Trench. The problem is that they're given different names. This History was written before the Official History, but that's matter.

I couldn't tell the names of them now. Not those place there. Because you hardly ever knew where we were really.

No that's right.

I gave you an illustration of that when I told you how they bombarded us instead of the position that we were to take.

What was the sequence of events which happened then?

END OF AWM TAPE 3
(Microcassette 1: 15/12/85 Side B)

START OF AWM TAPE 1

The 16th did their job, and then we left from there and went up into – the next time, into Pozieres itself. It was very difficult to know just where you were under those conditions. I don't know the names of any of those trenches now.

They are written here in the history. I'll be able to find them out from other...

Half the time I wouldn't know what trench I was in, and I mean that.

Well, I'm sure, like take the 15th for example, when they came in on August 6th, they were lost, and they were lost all night. Even the guides were lost.

That's the way it was. Everything was torn up. No landmarks.

I didn't realise that the 13th Battalion had such a difficult time in Pozieres until I was reading the Battalion History just the other day, that you were in the front line for four or five days, weren't you, and under continuous shelling. What was the effect on the men?

Devastating. Absolutely devastating. You'd see blokes shaking and ashen-faced. It was very hard on the old human frame. Not through fear. I wouldn't say it was through fear. I mean they were there doing their job, but the old body was reacting all the time.

I think you were telling me before lunch that you were buried at Pozieres, weren't you. What happened. That happened to my grandfather I know.

We were in a trench. We were in action, and a bloody big shell lobbed into the trench I suppose about ten yards away. Just in the next bay. And it pushed all the dirt. You know what the trenches were like. They were zig-zagging a bit so that there would be no enfilading fire. And it pushed all the dirt in the trench on top of myself and two or three other blokes. That's what happened.

You were completely buried?

Yes, completely buried.

What was that like? What was your sensation?

I got a hell of a shock I can assure you. A big shock. Fortunately I wasn't seriously hurt. I was away about a week or eight or ten days, at a field hospital somewhere close handy. And strange thing, the battalion came marching passed that place a bit later. Whenever it was going out, and I joined them.

Oh did you, from the hospital?

And of course my father - created - a huge worry. They notified him that I was wounded, and he immediately tried to find out where I was, and how I was. And they couldn't find me! I'd pissed off. I'd gone back to the battalion. But it eventually came out alright, but it worried him at the time.

Yes, I can imagine. That was something that happened in a lot of families, wasn't it. They didn't know what had happened.

Of course, I shouldn't have done it. There are a lot of things I shouldn't have done. But when your own battalion was coming by, and you're feeling fit, well, what would you do? You'd go. You didn't let them get away out and try and find them again later.

So what happened was you were at the hospital and you just went missing from the hospital in a sense. And didn't sign yourself out, sort of thing.

Just marched out. You don't think about the people at home finding out about all these things. I didn't think they would know that I had been wounded and hospitalised. I'd be still be with the battalion. But I wasn't. They marked me off.

And who dug you out when you were buried.

Oh I don't know. Some of the mob dug me out.

And how deep would you have been.

Oh not deep. I suppose two or three feet perhaps.

You'd have to be brought out fairly quickly.

I don't know how long I was there - I was unconscious.

Anyway we won't go into details about that.

There are a lot of good men still there. It was a grim struggle, Pozieres. Well, the old memorial has been preserved as a memorial.

I've learnt that from Patsy Adam-Smith's book. It shows a picture of the windmill at Pozieres.

And there is a plaque there which states that at this spot more men died than in any other place on the front.

You've been there, have you? You've been back again?

Yes.

On the '65 trip.

No, it was 1968. The '65 trip was Gallipoli and Egypt.

Not many of the men have been back.

Well in '68 there was a gang of us went back and we did the battlefields of France. Yes we did all the old French battlefields.

When were you first buried by this shell? At what stage of the proceedings at Pozieres?

It was the first visit when we were there. It would be July sometime.

But it was the first, or second, or third day, or...?

I think the second day. I think so.

Did you take part in any of the attacks there?

Only the first one, the first night.

What happened?

I didn't know what happened.

Can you describe that first attack by the 13th?

I don't know whether I can. It was no different to any other.

What was the objective?

Our objective was the bloody trench we were in! That was corrected, I think. There were a couple of trees out there that were supposed to be landmarks, and we were supposed to get a post there somewhere. It was pretty hard to reconstruct it now, sitting here.

Have you got any memories about that first attack, anything that you can remember?

Nothing. Well nothing, you know what I mean, the job was there what we had to do. We had to occupy a certain position, which I believe we occupied. And the next thing I knew I was back in the bloody field hospital.

So you were actually knocked unconscious by the shell?

Oh yes.

And you woke up actually in the hospital.

Yes. Not in the hospital. I was on the way to the hospital. I was in a two-horse ambulance. No motor vehicle could get up into that country. It was horse-driven, with two horses.

What about the two fellows who were with you?

I don't know what happened. Oh she was pretty rugged.

No, it was a dreadful place, Pozieres. Mouquet Farm of course next door to it.

Yet it's a beautiful little village there now. It's amazing! Amazing! Well, it's twenty years since I was there, nearly. 1968 I was there.

I have been to France, but at that time I wasn't interested in the First World War and I went to the centre of France. But I would like to go and have a look at some of these places.

Well now that you have read that you have become quite interested in it.

Well it will help a lot in the descriptions of the country when I write this book. Because you can still get the lay of the land and so on, and understand what the points were.

It's very different looking country up in that area to when we saw it. God.

It would just be a sea of mud, wouldn't it.

Yes, it's a really beautiful country.

I think that, well after Harry Murray took over A Company...

He took it over the first night. Well, after Toby Barton went missing. We lost him the first night.

What do you remember about Harry Murray? You must have known him fairly well if he was your company commander.

I knew him very well. He was a friend to everybody in his company, not just the skipper. He was an older man than most of us.

How old was he at that time?

I couldn't tell you.

Would he be in his thirties?

I would say so. I would say so.

I'd be able to find out his age from records.

Oh yes, he'd be in his thirties. Oh, he was a tiger. A wonderful man! Harry Murray.

Of course, you were out on the second day, so you wouldn't know too much about it.

Second or third day. Second day, I think.

So you wouldn't remember Pozieres. What I'm trying to get from you I suppose, with Harry Murray, would be direct recollections, direct stories about him. What you can remember of him at Pozieres, or elsewhere. Of course, there is still Stormy Trench and so on. We might leave that for the moment and come back to that. Where did the Battalion go after you left the hospital. That must have been in September 1916.

Oh, I think it would be before then, wouldn't it.

You weren't at Mouquet Farm were you.

No.

No, you didn't go back to Pozieres. You were out for about a week or so in hospital? You must have joined them just after they came out of Mouquet Farm.

That's right, as they marched passed down the road I went with them.

It says here the second period up north.

We did Messines, didn't we?

Yes, but that's a long time after.

Is it.

That's 7th June 1917. That's outside the story that I'm writing. I go up to Bullecourt, and then I write about the POWs.

Oh I see. Oh well there was a lot happened after that.

Yes. Can you remember anything about Albert? The area around...

Yes, I can remember Albert very well. Brickfield Hill is almost a suburb of Albert.

What's Brickfield Hill like? That's not the same at Tara Hill is it?

I don't know. We knew it as Brickfield Hill. It is just outside Albert. It was sort of a mustering place. From there we went into that Pozieres stunt. Albert to us at the time was a nice town, totally deserted. Shops still had some clothing, and some of the houses still had some personal effects in them. People just walked out and left everything. I hope I'm not confusing my second trip to Albert. No at that time Albert was completely deserted.

Did you go and have a look around Albert?

Yes, I rode in. Borrowed some horses one day. Yes, just for a time. Got a couple of horses of the transport while I was at Brickfield Hill.

And what happened then?

Oh nothing much. A mate and I just rode around a little bit and back again. The town was deserted. There was nobody there. I didn't go into the cathedral. But it was very conspicuous with its statue of the virgin leaning over. We only went in for say twenty minutes or so. This time – in '68 we had a look round the place, but you are not interested in that.

Not really (laughs). I'll have a look myself when I go. What about souvenir hunting and so on? Did you have a tendency for that? Picking things up.

No I never did any of that. There wasn't a lot of that done, I think. Blokes had their hands full without souvenir hunting. Although some did bring home nose-caps and things like that. You had enough to carry when you carried your own gear.

Yes, that's what I think was the story. Do you remember General Birdwood at Pozieres?

Yes, I didn't know him at Pozieres, but we used to see a lot of him on Gallipoli. Oh, we saw a lot of him in France too, when we came out of the line. He'd come around and see us. He was a very casual, easy-going type of gentleman. He used to walk around among his troops.

Did he ever speak to you?

I don't think so.

What about the brigadier? I suppose you'd have know both Monash and Brand,

Monash, Colonel Monash, he took the original brigade onto the Peninsula. And he was with us for a very long time, until such time as they formed the 3rd Division, and he took charge of that in England. Then we had old Charlie Brand.

Do you remember the introduction to General Brand? When Monash was transferred to the 3rd Division, this is in July 1916, General Brand paraded the whole brigade and he gave you a talk.

I don't remember it.

Apparently it was quite a severe talk at which he gave the impression that he was going to be a very stern taskmaster.

I've no recollection of that, but I've seen him in tears after Bullecourt.

You saw that, did you?

Yes, oh he came around when we were back, he came round. He was just like a child. He was very upset. Poor old Charlie. The Brigade got very fond of him. Very fond of him. It's a terrible position to be in - to drive men into a situation where you know that they are going to be killed. God, what a responsibility!

Yes, that's interesting. Bullecourt is the main reason for doing this book, or it's one of the major reasons.

It was one of our great tragedies.

You were near Dead Frog Farm.

I don't know Dead Frog Farm.

I'm not as familiar with the 13th history as with the 15th. The 15th I started off doing and I had really no idea I was going to be doing a book on this, until the last twelve months.

I can't place Dead Frog Farm.

What about Swan Chateau?

Swan chateau is a beautiful big white chateau. It was battalion headquarters for a while.

It is in the Zillibeke area apparently.

You've got a complete history there. Why do you want to be talking to me?

Well, yes I've got a lot out of this, but I've been getting some good...

I'm getting it out of you.

What are your recollections of the winter of 1916? Did you go on leave to England in 1916?

I don't know about 1916. I'm not quite sure. I wouldn't think so. But I had a couple of leaves in England. I don't know about 1916, because we only got there in June, in the summertime, so we'd do that winter. That winter we were in France. Name some of the Flers.

Well you were around Flers and Gueudecourt most of the time.

Oh course we were. Well Gueudecourt is where Stormy Trench is. We were further up the line a bit too. Not far away. We did that winter in France, my word we did.

Can you describe some of the ways you kept warm, or something like that? What are your memories of that winter?

Well, it was a very cold, hard winter. I remember that the Frenchmen said at the time, as they always say, and everybody says, if anything happens, it's one of the worst we've ever had. That happened when the old *Shropshire* was going across the Indian Ocean. The skipper said "That's the worst sea I've ever had." That's where it started. And ever since then, everybody says that. But no, it was a very hard winter.

Yes, well it certainly was the coldest they had had for at least 40 years, and to spend it out in the open like that.

Oh you have agreed about that. But I can't ever remember the places where we were when that went on. We were in the front line for a time, or course.

Well I can check. It was around Melbourne Camp and Mametz, and so on that you spent most of that winter. And Montauban, and so on.

We were in tents there. That must have been a good way back, because I can remember being in tents at Mametz, and some of those places. I don't know where we had Christmas.

Yes, you had Christmas at Coisy, because Donald Fraser was, he joined the Battalion there. Because he went home with enteric fever from Egypt, and then he came with the 19th Reinforcements. Can you remember the Christmas at Coisy? It was in the schoolroom apparently, he was saying.

I remember having a Christmas in the cellar of some place - it wouldn't be that one apparently. I can't think.

Did you suffer from frostbite?

No, strangely enough I didn't.

What sort of precautions did you take?

Whale-oil.

You used whale-oil did you?

The whole battalion used to use whale-oil. It was compulsory, on your feet and fingers. Some people suffered very badly. Your feet would go all black, you know. Trench feet, I think they called it. It wasn't a very pleasant period of our lives. It was a ridiculous way of human beings engaging themselves, isn't it?

Yes, it is. It's just mad.

You're not put on earth to do that sort of thing. To kill one another. It's still going on.

I hope that I in doing this story can at least – well I'm not going to tell it from any particular bias, I'm just going to tell the story.

Tell the story, yes.

Tell the best one I can, but I hope in doing that it will become apparent that...

Well, you've undertaken a big task, haven't you.

Well, but it's a story well worth recording in that depth. When you start to pull it all together and just take that one period which is about December 1915 to April 1917

Two years.

Well it's not even that, it's about fifteen or sixteen months, and then there is the POW period which has never been written about.

Bloody stupid!

(Break in interview)

What do you remember about Stormy Trench?

In what way.

It was February 4th. Can you describe what you remember of the attack at Stormy Trench? You were in A Company, and I know the Germans counter-attacked on A Company the worst, didn't they.

Yes, many times. Out on the right flank.

Can you describe what happened then?

I don't know how you would describe it. I think you can imagine in your own mind what is happening.

You mean that it was that confusing?

Yes. See the 15th had already had one battle over the place. They did it a couple of nights before, but they had to retire. They had to vacate it. And we went up, and I can't even remember the time when it started now. I know it was all night anyway. It was a very wild night.

What, the weather was wild?

No, the Huns were wild! Murray was an inspiration that night.

Can you describe what – what did you see of Murray that night? What was he like? Because this is when he won the Victoria Cross.

Yes, I know. Oh that's terribly hard. I don't know how I can describe – you can imagine in your own mind what it was like. I don't know how I would describe it. Of course, we were in the position and the Huns made - I don't know how many counter-attacks they made. Time after time. They were very persistent. And they did a lot of damage too. They kept coming in from the right flank. That's where Murray was. And he had a couple of good NCO's there. One was a Corporal Robinson, and the other was big Roy Withers. He was a sergeant I think, at that time. Big strong young fellows. And Murray was the inspiration, and they did the work. Well, everybody did the work. I don't know how I would describe it. It was a free-for all with bayonets and boots and bombs. The whole works was into it.

It was hand-to-hand?

Oh yes, that's the point. Close contact. Oh yes, that's where the big strong men - that were so vivid in my mind. I could see what they were doing. Oh I can't describe it. Yes, it was a terrific battle. Oh well, Murray had been through a lot of battles - before and after, as well. He died as the result of a car accident.

Yes, Donald Fraser was saying that was the case. He went up to Winton in Queensland.

Richmond. He had a place up there.

Richmond. Is the family still up there?

Yes, his wife is there.

His wife is still alive is she?

I believe so. I mean she was driving actually when that accident happened. That is only a few years ago. She might be dead now, I don't know. He had a big job during the Second War. He organised what they called the Northern Australian Force. It was a huge manned contingent, and they were a sort of guardian of the north of Australia. Murray was in command. He was the Colonel in charge, and his 2IC was a VC as well. They were a pretty game bunch of people.

He was living at Richmond in Queensland? Is that near Winton? I don't know where it is.

I'm not sure either, because I wrote to his wife at Richmond. She replied, so it's up there. That's what it said in the press, at Richmond.

When did he die, what year?

Oh, I suppose three or four years ago. It would be four years. I don't like going back into details over that bloody scramble that night. It's just over Gueudecourt. Gueudecourt is down in a hollow.

It was the high ground, wasn't it.

Yes, and there was another trench behind it on the French side of Gueudecourt. Well, to get back to Gueudecourt, the Huns used to shell it every day, very heavily. And Murray was terribly worried as to what was down there. So he used to go down poking around just to see what they were shelling! Oh God. He'd take his runner with him. Oh yes, if they were bombarding a place, he'd have to go and see why! Talk about a cat with nine lives!

He led a charmed life I think, didn't he.

Oh yes. He had been hurt, of course, but I don't remember him being away for very long.

(Incidental conversation relating to photographs)

What was your first regimental number?

My regimental number was 2383.

You have a French background?

From Alsace Lorraine. Well you'll get the story of Stormy Trench out of the book there. What Murray did. By God he was a marvellous man. Working like a nigger too, you know, blocking up the trench, the end of the trench with bags. Anybody who showed himself he killed him. Oh God. Not a pretty picture. Not a pretty picture.

What about the withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, and going through Bapaume, and...?

We didn't take much part in that.

You just followed up, didn't you.

Yes. We didn't take much part in that until we got up to Bullecourt.

Do you remember anything about Bapaume and the booby traps which the Germans left behind?

Not a lot, no. I've seen an odd one but not a big one.

What would they look like?

Oh well. For instance, there could be a bayonet stuck in the ground, and you'd pull it out. And it would be attached by a wire to something else. Only little things like that I saw. There were some quite decent ones, of course, in buildings. But I didn't see any of them, just simple little things. You're not writing about booby traps, are you?

Yes, I am.

Oh well, I can't help you.

(Laughs) Well you did just then. You told me something that I didn't know.

Well there were quite a lot of them. You'd hear about them, but I didn't see them.

Of course, it was very cold at that time wasn't it?

(Incidental conversation)

Anyway that brings us up to Bullecourt, doesn't it. What can you tell me about Bullecourt? You were lucky enough to get out.

It started when we were in dugouts in the side of a sunken road. About seven miles from the sunken road - from where the Bullecourt attack started. And on the night of the previous - anyhow, the previous night, we marched from there up to the sunken road to where the attack was to start from, about seven miles - at night. And at dawn we moved up onto the starting line, and it just began to snow very lightly. Anyway before that we came to a village called Noreuil. And in that village there were four or five little old English tanks who were to be the vanguard of the show. We had no artillery. They weren't using artillery. They were using tanks to break the wire, and the tanks only got up just passed our hopping off line and they broke down. All of them. They broke down because they were hit by shellfire and that sort of thing. And our blokes, the whole brigade, - it might have been the whole division, I don't know how big this show was - they were going forward without artillery, through this wire. And you have seen pictures of what the wire was like. So that was a tragedy at the start. The tanks were supposed to break the wire, and the troops were going to go over it. Well, that didn't happen. But the boys kept going forward, and they got into the trench all right. And they held the line for as long as they could, until - I wasn't there at the time. I was carrying ammunition, and we couldn't get the ammunition up to them. They used all they got, and there was only one alternative. Come out. Oh it was a bad show. And as you know, the majority of the blokes were taken prisoner or killed. And the ones who were taken prisoner were all hurt. That's why they were taken prisoner, because the Aussies don't do it in big lumps like that. That's all I remember.

What were you doing? You were carrying ammunition?

Yes.

So you were in reserve when the attack happened?

Yes, that's right.

And did you get any ammunition across to the front line?

We did, yes. We did. They carried a lot forward in the first wave. I got a lot there, but once they became established, while the thing was moving we were able to get a lot of stuff up. But the way the Hun was coming, that was used up. And there was no possible hope of getting through. They tried it and tried it. And you couldn't get blokes half-way before they'd be dead or wounded, or something. So that from my point of view, that was the problem. I wasn't right up where the battle was. I would say when we went up we were about 500 yards behind I suppose. But it was open country. It was solid country. It was different to the Pozieres business.

It hadn't been shelled in the same way.

That's what I mean. It hadn't been battered about and turned over. Oh, the wire was terrific.

What was it like, the wire? I mean, can you give me some idea of how wide and how high it was?

You haven't seen the pictures apparently. The wire in front of that Hindenburg Line would be seven or eight yards thick, might be more, closely matted barbed wire of various heights, from that high to about that high.

That's from about two feet to about three feet.

No possible hope of getting through it, of getting over it without being destroyed. It wasn't cut. And the old Huns had it prepared so well that they had little 'shoots' running down which would run into the wire. That was a nice little alleyway for you to go down. But they had all their machine guns aimed at that. Oh, it was a terrible thing. I'm sorry you haven't seen some pictures of the...

These are photographs you are talking about?

Yes. You have to see the thing to believe it. Anyhow it's all taken up. There's no of it there now. Or none of it there when I was there about twenty years ago.

What was it like then? I'd like to go to that area too and have a look?

Yes, do that, but you'll have no idea what it looked like when the war was on. The Frogs have done a mighty job. It's all levelled off, and farmland. Except a big belt. There is a big belt that is sort of nothing but cemeteries. There is a lot of dead men there.

And you took ammunition into the front line?

Yes.

What did you see when you go into the front line?

A lot of dead men. A lot of wounded men. They weren't there very long. I'm trying to remember now actually when they came out. The first night was bad. I was in the show the first night, but nothing happened. The tanks didn't come up. It had started to snow, and we were coming back across the snow, and I'm sure the Huns saw us coming back. And they knew it was going to be on again, so they were ready the next night. But we went right back to our billets of the previous day, or the day before. It was six miles up and six miles back. And then the next night six miles up again – and then Bullecourt. It was asking too much of a human being. Anyhow, it's all over isn't it. We hope. That's where your grandfather got hit?

Yes, he was shot in the shoulder, and he was a Lewis gunner? Oh, they just ran out of ammunition. Most of them were wounded. They fought it out as long as they could, but they couldn't get back.

That's right. You just couldn't get ammunition up - because it was just like a scythe going across the open fields.

Was it. How would you see it, I mean, what would it look like?

(Laughs) I don't know what it looked like. It was a horrible sight, you'd see blokes trying to get back and being knocked down.

Whereabouts were you then? You were back in the British front line again, at the railway cutting?

We were in the sunken road where we started from.

And you made how many trips across, just the one, or...?

Oh no, we made a couple of trips across.

This would be before it got light?

Before it got light.

And you were carrying what...?

Ammo. .303 stuff, and Lewis gun panniers too. Whatever was there, you'd grab something and take it up because it would be used, be wanted. You didn't select anything. They'd be a lot of stuff, and someone in charge would say "You take that and you take this." But we only did a couple of trips.

And after that it became too difficult?

Too difficult. You just couldn't do it. You just couldn't get up. No artillery, it was shocking.

That was the problem? They might of stayed there if the artillery...

They would have. They'd have stayed there. The blokes would have stayed there - if they'd got some support.

And what happened when the men started coming back from Bullecourt? You'd have been in the railway cutting?

No it wasn't a railway cutting, no we were in a sunken road.

The sunken road, I mean. They came back about two o'clock in the afternoon.

I don't know what time it was now.

Can you remember them coming back?

Yes.

What did they look like?

They looked shocking. They were completely done. They'd fought hard and then to have to come back and leave so many of their pals between those two points. It hurts. It hurt. We shouldn't be talking about it should we.

Well, that's what I want to do. I want to get the story of it recorded.

Well, you'll get hold of some 15th blokes when you go to Tassie, won't you.

Yes, I've got three of them that will be able to help. Well there is more than that, but three of them I'm pretty sure will be able to give me a great deal. One of them was a POW, captured at Bullecourt.

Well he'll know what it looked like the other side.

And what was the general...I'd be very interested to get your description of the Battalion that night, the night of April 11th. What the general feeling was and so on.

Poor old Charlie Brand, he tried to see everybody. And he was just like a schoolboy who'd had his lollies taken from him. Really upset. Poor old Charlie. And we all felt sorry for him. It was such a strain. And we felt sorry for the blokes that were out there too, of course. We'd had a lot killed, and a lot taken prisoner. All mates of course, too. No it's very hard to describe it. I can't describe it. We were in a daze, you know, really in a daze for days afterwards.

Were you?

Anyhow, that's what war does to people.

END OF AWM TAPE THREE

START OF AWM TAPE FOUR

(Microcassette Groutsch 3 13/4/86 – the first part of which contains part of the interview with Fay Chataway)

But don't ask me where that was?

No, that's OK.

It's easy to be critical. We lost a lot of men there.

No, it was a bungle. The early part of the war seemed to be a bungle didn't it, in France, in 1916 and then right through to Bullecourt. A little bit after that it seemed to get more sensible.

They worked with fewer men in at a time, sort of thing. It's not a job that anybody would want to be proficient in, I think. You could find a more pleasant occupation than that.

You were a bomber, weren't you?

I was for a time. I was in the Lewis Gun Section under Lieutenant Smith for a while.

Was that early on in the piece, or – when were you a Lewis gunner?

After the Stormy Trench job. I couldn't put a date on it now.

No, that's alright.

George Smith was our lieutenant. We were around about St. Eloi and I was Number Two on the gun.

What was the job of the Number Two.

Oh get the panniers ready, and take over from Number One when he was hit, sort of thing. The bomb section was controlled from headquarters. Our officer there was Henderson, big tall Henderson.

Oh yes, I've heard of him.

I don't know what happened to him, whether he was killed or not. A good percentage of people...

This is at Pozieres? Yes, no it was a big price to pay for really nothing, wasn't it. There was nothing gained.

There was nothing gained. If you gained 100 yards, what was that. No, it was a war of attrition, that's what it was - what it amounted to at that stage. To see who gave up first. Anyhow, we go to Libya next week, I suppose. Regan is anxious to have a bit of a go at somebody.

No, it's a worrying thing, the terrorism. It's just daily isn't it. Every day, you see bombs here and bombs there. It's just becoming standard fare.

They even had it in Melbourne recently, didn't they.

Yes.

Yes, there are cranks about. They read and see on that thing (TV) all this excitement going on, and they just want to be in it I think. That plays a pretty big part in the whole show.

There must be something to that.

Yes, it's a long time – a lifetime.

Yes, seventy years ago is a long time ago.

Talking about Haley's Comet. Haley's Comet is everything now on this thing, and I can remember quite well seeing – we used to go out and see it at night-time. But there was none of all this public relations stuff we've got here now. You'd go out at night and say, "Oh there it is, up there."

I've got a great-aunt who is still alive, and she was telling me that she saw it.

Of course she would.

1913, or 1910, or something.

1910. We'd read about it the paper, and you'd go out and have a look. "That's it there." You didn't have to be told which one was it. Now it's all the news. Haley's Comet T-Shirts. Someone's cashing in on it.

When did you first get leave from France, because you would have been with the Battalion for a fair while, hadn't you?

Since October 1915.

So you'd have been due for leave in October 1916?

Oh no, I think we did twelve months in France before we got any leave. I was just trying to work out when it would be. It wouldn't be October.

Was it before or after Stormy Trench?

It would be after. That was in 1917.

That was February 1917.

No, it would be before that.

So you had leave before that?

I think so. Don't pin me down to it, or I'll give up.

What did you do on your first leave?

I went to London. That was the only leave which really counted. You could get a couple of days or a day when you were out of the line resting or something like. But every twelve months we were entitled to ten days Blighty leave, they called it. You know, you could get over to England. Then from there you could go anywhere. I've been to Scotland and Ireland. I think I had three leaves in England. I don't know whether it was two or three. I know – don't pin me down. I can't tell you.

That doesn't matter. Can you remember much about the first one? What did you do in London?

Well, we found some girls of course. That was the usual thing.

Did you?

Oh you know, just friendly. We did theatres and plays, and went for a punt trip up the Thames.

Did you? That would be nice.

Went through that place that was burnt only the other day.

Windsor Palace?

No, Hampton Court. I have quite a vivid recollection of that. I don't know why. I remember there was a big old grapevine there, and they reckoned it was over 100 years old or 200 years old at that time, planted by Cardinal Wolsey. No, stupid things, I can remember those quite well.

Who were you on leave with at that time?

Oh don't ask me.

It wasn't George Rooks, I understand.

No. Don't ask me.

And you went up – what was the trip up the Thames like on the punt?

Oh good fun. We all had girls and cushions and things.

Where did you meet the girls? Were they relatives, like family that you know, or simply girls you'd met somewhere?

Oh no, they'd have Australian soldiers. We were in the Australian uniform, of course. I'm not referring to the other type of girls!

No, I gathered that. I think a lot of men did go and see those type of women.

Oh yes, I know. But I was friendly. There was a couple of girls used to write to me when I was in France. In fact, some of them, I got - two of them were still writing to me after I came home. These were little French girls.

Do you remember the names of the English girls?

Not now. If you'd asked me sixty years ago I'd have told you.

(Laughs) I always ask, because sometimes I'm bowled over by the fact that people can remember things. Memory is a very funny thing. You remember some things, and other things which you think you would remember, you don't remember. That's what I find.

Oh no. It was a wonderful relief to get away. You could hardly hear the guns over in Britain, anyway. I know one time - one leave I had - it was July 7th I think, it was the attack on Messines. I was in London at that time. I think it was about the 7th of something. I could remember dates one time.

Well Messines was about July. Or June was the first attack, it went on for several months.

I mean the first time when they...

Blew the mines.

When they blew the mines.

That was in June.

The 7th it would be.

7th June? You heard that did you? You heard the mine go off?

Yes. Oh well, we knew it was going to go, because we knew what the preparations were, but we didn't know exactly when. Anyhow I was in London at that time. It was a very grateful thought, to have heard London to Messines.

Do you remember any of the plays you went to see? Did you go and see Chou Chin Chow and Maid of the Mountains?

I saw Maid of the Mountains, yes. I don't know about Chou Chin Chow, I might have too. But I remember Maid of the Mountains quite well. Our taste was mainly variety shows.

What were they like, musicals?

Musical stuff. It was a bit lighter than the big theatre stuff, but we did do The Maid of the Mountains. I can't think who the girl was now.

Oh I do know...I've got it on tape somewhere.

I don't know about Chou Chin Chow. I know the scenes and that, but I'm not sure that it was in London at that time that we saw it, or whether it was in Melbourne.

Whereabouts were you staying in London at that time? Were you staying at Horseferry Road, or wherever it was? There were beds, weren't there?

That's right. Now I'll tell you a very remarkable thing. On one leave I used to stay at the Shaftsbury Hotel.

Oh I know the Shaftsbury Hotel.

Do you?

Yes, I've been to London a couple of times. I've spent about six months in London.

Well I stayed there a couple of times, and on occasion I went there with a couple of friends, and they couldn't give us a bed. They were booked out. But the girl at the booking office gave us the address of a lady not far away who kept a rooming house. And when we got there - her name was Miss Jackson, and I got talking to her for a while, and I found out that she was an auntie of people that were living next to us in Ulupna. An amazing thing. A Miss Jackson. It was from there that I went on the tour of Ireland. And you know the Shaftsbury eh? In Shaftsbury Avenue.

Yes, that's right, in the middle of the West End. That would be a good place to stay for London, wouldn't it.

It was, yes. It was full of troops. The New Zealand All Blacks were there at the time. There were two or three of them there in uniform. They were in the New Zealand army, and they had been to London before, and they had stayed at the Shaftsbury Hotel when they were touring England with the All Blacks, the year before, or a couple of years before. So the world isn't as big as most of imagine it to be. I know the place at Horseferry Road, no, I never stayed there. I stayed at a place in the Strand, it was a hostel type of place run for soldiers.

Did you get out of London much? Well you went to Ireland.

I went to Ireland, and went through Guinness's brewery. Guinness has just been in the news a couple of days ago.

That's right, his wife has been kidnapped.

I might have told you about being in Guinness's before. We went in with the barley and came out with the stout on the river, floating on the barge. Had a very enjoyable day.

No, that would be interesting.

Did a few theatres in Dublin too. I can't remember what they were. We had girlfriends there too. Went out to their place and met Mum and Dad, and all that sort of thing.

The women were looking for men on leave to give them a good time.

That's right, to entertain them. Yes, that was their mission.

They would take you home to their parents, and so on.

Yes, oh yes.

That was good of them. Was there a sort of – I mean how would you be introduced to them, through a society of some kind?

No, we'd meet them in the street.

You'd just meet them in the street.

I there would be plenty of girls through that Horseferry Road thing too, you know. Plenty of people, not only girls, but I mean everybody would be there to meet. I remember when I was in Glasgow I stayed with a French family. I met a lady, a girl - a couple of us met a couple of girls, and they took us home to their place, and met Mum and Dad and all the little ones. It was a great help, I can assure you.

Yes, I suppose – what were your feelings at that time? I mean were you very depressed by the...?

No, strangely enough no, it was your job, and that's all about it. Oh no, I don't think depression came into it at all.

I suppose, like in this narrative that I was telling you that I found about my grandfather, written by Chataway, the second day that they were in at Pozieres there, it was obvious that they were getting very depressed by the situation they were in. I don't know if depressed is the word, but they were certainly feeling down.

Oh yes, naturally. Well I only saw a portion of the Pozieres stunt. I think I told you, I was buried and was carried out and went to a field hospital. So I didn't see a lot of it. I was there for a couple of days, that's all. Yes, but talking about our leaves, that was a very pleasant part of it. I've got some of the girls' photos. Life goes on.

Whereabouts did you get the punt from going up the Thames?

Oh there was plenty of there.

From London?

Yes.

And you went what up towards Oxford way, or something?

Oh I don't know where we went. No, just poking around, you know. You were at Oxford were you?

No, I've not been to Oxford.

Oh well, I have (laughs).

Have you (laughs).

I thought perhaps you might have. It's a wonderful place to go to.

Yes, no I've not been to either Oxford or Cambridge. I'd like to go one day.

Oh you will.

I know a lot of people who have been there and who say it's a lovely city.

Yes, oh Oxford, I was there in 1968, I think. Just went up to have a look. Went up with a chap who had done an officer's training course there during the war. And we stayed a few days in Oxford. It's a university town, of course. There are 34 huge colleges when we went up to have a look. Great big places, they looked more like gaols than colleges.

The experience is probably a bit like it too in a way.

(Incidental conversation)

And you were in Egypt too, so you would have gone into Cairo on leave wouldn't you.

Oh many times, yes. We weren't in Egypt that long really. Perhaps a couple of months before we went to Gallipoli, might have been more.

And you were on the march to Serapeum, weren't you? You told me about that.

That was after we came back from Gallipoli.

You're the one who put your ammunition up on the camel.

Poor old camel.

That was good thinking. Did you know I have come across some photographs of that. I've located a 15th Battalion – Captain Brettingham-Moore who was a 15th Battalion man, and he had a little camera, and he took photographs of that march.

And what sort of an organisation did they look like? Pretty straggly were they?

They looked pretty organised when they were first setting out, but some of the other pictures they are all underneath the trees flaked out like this.

That's right. Well, that's what I meant when I said it was all... oh we set off in fine style. There was no need for that you know. No need for that at all.

No, most of the war was like that wasn't it? Unnecessary?

Of course it was.

Whereabouts did you go in Cairo? Did you have any favourites cafes or (inaudible) or so on that you went to?

No, no. We'd poke about. You know how you just poke around having a look at everything. We went to the theatre there too. I can't remember what the play was or where we went to the theatre. It's too long ago. The fact is that we weren't totally impressed at any time, because there was so much going on everywhere else. All around. It was just somewhere where you went. If you went to Cairo on holiday you'd go to about three or four theatres and you'd remember things. We went into a lot of places. And there was plenty of entertainment for the troops, as you can imagine. we went out to the Pyramids.

Did you ever climb up the Pyramids.

Yes, I didn't go all the way though. I don't think I did.

Why was that? It was too difficult I suppose.

Yes, great big rocks. When we were there in 1915 the Pyramids were the Pyramids, away out on the sand. But when we went to the Pyramids again in 1968 – that's a long time afterwards – and there were bitumen roads and tourists. Totally different. A big old camel park there. You can hire a camel if you like the smelly things and go for a ride. Our blokes had been on them before.

Yes, I've seen a few pictures of people on camels. I located quite a nice set of postcards from Egypt, some of them with drawings on them. There is one with a couple of Australians up on top of a camel with this Egyptian hanging on to the camel, trying to control it. And there is one of one of the orange-sellers with his big cart, with all the oranges on it – "Very sweet, very clean."

"Orin-ges!" They called them. Eggs-a-cook. "Orin-ges! Very sweet, very clean." And "Eggs-a-cook." Oh, they used to parade their women "Very sweet, very clean," too. That was their story!

Yes, well anything but very sweet, very clean, weren't they. I think the oranges were alright.

The oranges were alright. Orin-ges. The 3rd Division was known as the eggs-a-cook division.

That's right, they had the ovals (colour-patches) didn't they.

And they wore it long point down. No, they didn't, it was like that (horizontal). They got to France in November.

Did you have a brother or something in the 3rd Divvy, or not?

He was in the 5th Divvy. He was in the 19th Battalion on Gallipoli. He was badly wounded a couple of times, and he was in Egypt twelve months or more before he recovered. And in those days they didn't send them home, they sent them back to a unit. So he joined the 55th Battalion in the 5th Divvy.

You were telling me before that Harry Murray and Percy Black were really good friends.

Real mates.

They knew each other very well.

Real mates. Harry came to us from the 16th Battalion.

That's right, yes. They knew each other before then, didn't they, before Harry Murray came across.

Murray enlisted in Western Australia. West and South Australia made up the 16th Battalion. I think Percy Black was killed at Bullecourt. I'm sure he was.

Yes he was. He was shot through the head. I'm wondering whether you would be able to tell me anything about one problem that I've got, because some of the men that I've been talking to me have told me that during the winter of 1916 when it was really cold, that the rum issue would freeze. Do you think that's true or not? Do you think that the rum would freeze?

I don't know. It never had a chance in our Battalion.

I suppose not (laughs).

I don't know.

Some of the men tell me that it would freeze, and you would suck it.

How did they get it out of the jars?

Well I think they probably got it out of the jars, I think it probably froze in their mess tins.

Oh I see, froze in your mess tin. Well, I never allowed mine to freeze. I can assure you of that (laughs). I've never heard that one. It's possible, of course, because everything was frozen. The

wood was frozen. The ground was frozen. Everything was frozen. The ground would be just like a block of iron if you tried to dig it. No, I don't know about the rum freezing. I don't think it did in our Battalion. If it came out of the jar, well that would be suicide. I'm not saying it isn't so. SRD.

What did that stand for, SRD?

Buggered if I know.

I don't know either.

The explanation would be quite simple, of course.

Standard Rum something, I suppose.

SRD. That was on the jars. I don't know what the word was. We weren't very interested what the meaning of the lettering was.

You used to look forward to getting a rum issue.

Oh yes.

It would warm you up.

Warm you up.

And when did they give you a rum issue? Everyday, like before Stand-to, or after, at dusk?

I can't remember.

I suppose it would vary anyway.

I can't just remember when it would come up. Whether it was before a stunt or after a stunt. It was just one of the ordinary things that happened. I don't think it was an everyday issue, but it was a reasonable thing to get in the trenches. I can't remember rum freezing. I never heard anybody complaining about that. It could be.

(Break in interview)

It was an Australian family, called – oh, I can't remember. Anyhow they were living in London, and down in Surrey. It is out a little bit. And they used to get – drag loads of Australians out there on there place, gather them up on leave and take them out there for the day. Give them a cup of tea and entertain them in their home, and bring them back again at night. And I wrote and

thanked this lady when I got back to France, and she used to write to me then. And about six months after coming home I got a letter from her to say that they would be in Melbourne on such and such a date, and staying at The Windsor, and they would like to see us. So I had the privilege of going down and meeting them there after just casually meeting them in England.

It sounds like there were a lot of contacts like that.

Thousands of them anyway.

And what about the French girls behind the lines too? You mentioned that you were writing to one French girl.

Yes, a little French girl.

How common was it for the men to have friendships with French families

There were all sorts of contacts as you know. How I came to meet her, I did a school, some sort of a school, I can't tell you the name, for four or five days, and I was billeted with this French family. And I couldn't speak French, but you know, you would get through. And when I got back to the unit I wrote to the lady and thanked her for the way she had looked after me and treated me while I was there. I wrote quite a long letter and we had an interpreter in the unit of course, and I gave him the letter and asked him would he mind translating it. So, he read it and he said, "Well, I'm be delighted to have the privilege of doing that." He said, "I get a lot of other letters to translate but they are a little bit different to this one." Yes, well the family, their son who had been killed in France somewhere, Verdun or somewhere down there. And I must have been in that place for a couple of weeks I think, thinking back now, because she used to call me her son, and I used to call her Mum, you know, like that. I couldn't tell you the name of the place now.

The attitude of the French was generally fairly good towards the Australians, wasn't it?

Oh yes, well why shouldn't they. It was there country that we were trying to keep the Hun out of.

And you weren't at Bullecourt were you? I forget just where you were, I'm sorry.

Of course I was at Bullecourt.

You were there?

Yes, I've explained.

Yes, it's all on tape. I just haven't played any of them. I forget everybody's story.

That was a horrible experience. It was also a horrible experience that we had to march seven miles up – I think I told you this too – and some of the others would have too. We were billeted in a sunken road about seven miles from our front line. The place must have been full of troops. So we went up one night, seven miles, struggled up there and got up onto the starting tape, which was away out in front of the frontline – to the hopping off position. And the tanks that were to support us didn't come up. And the whole operation was cancelled. And we had to go back to where we came from the night before.

It was seven miles back. This is up at Favreuil?

Favreuil, that's the place. How did you know? Well you're not bad. And the very next night we moved again. To go up to try and do the stunt. That was murder because the Hun must have seen us going back the night before, and knew we would be coming up again. So that was four 'sevens' – it's 28 miles we walked.

And what was the morale of the men going back again?

Oh the morale was very sour, very sour.

Well that was certainly the case with the 15th. I know they were same.

Well they would have to do the same.

They did. I think the 16th stayed up in the sunken road.

Somebody was in there.

But the 13th and the 15th came back, and I think the 14th did too, but I would have to check that.

You know more than I do.

And you went across to the Hindenburg Line, on the 11th.

Yes. I didn't stay there very long.

You were wounded, weren't you?

No, not there. No, I was sent back with a party to bring back ammunition. To try to bring up bombs and stuff, you know. It was going across open country, it just couldn't be done. There was a lot of stuff went through, but there were a lot of men lying in the trail of it.

And what happened? Can you go through that again for me, if you would, that period from about half-past-four on the 11th April? You know, the attack into the Hindenburg Line, and what you were doing at that time, up until when you were ordered back to get ammunition.

Oh god, well it was just the normal procedure. We went forward. I know we got into the line, I know we did that, through the barbed wire. The bloody wire was running like that in races running in, conducted the people into openings so that they could mow them down there.

Did you go in through one of those sally ports, they called it, didn't they?

Yes, that's right.

You didn't follow in where one of the tanks had gone in?

The tanks never went in at all.

Well, there was...

Not on our front.

There was one tank that did get in somewhere.

Was there.

But you didn't see that?

No, it wasn't on our front.

Some of the 16th Battalion...

It could have been where the 16th were.

And the way you got through the wire was to go down one of these pathways for patrols to come out from. God. And they of course had all the guns on that?

It was all covered by their light machine guns. It was a pretty hazy sort of set up too. But I was back long before the troops came out.

And what happened to you when you got into the Hindenburg Line? Did you see any of the Germans at that time, or not?

No, we dumped our stuff – talking now personally - we dumped our stuff at, you know, it was a little – we had a dump - had a place for a dump there.

What were you carrying?

I was carrying hand grenades, Mills grenades and Lewis gun panniers.

So you'd have gone across with somebody else carrying a box.

Yes.

You had a box?

Yes, carried it in boxes.

How many Mills bombs would there have been in those boxes? Twenty or...

I couldn't tell you.

There were two of you carrying them, were there?

Yes.

So there would have been a good twenty, wouldn't there.

There'd be twenty. Isn't it stupid.

Oh, I'm not surprised you don't remember it. But it's just interesting.

I couldn't tell you how many rounds were in a box of ammunition, and I've carried under peaceful conditions.

So that's interesting. At that time you were still in A Company, weren't you.

Yes.

And you would have been a standard infantryman, or a bomber at that time.

No, I was a standard infantryman.

And you were detailed off to take across with you extra ammunition.

A Corporal or someone would take us over. It didn't go on for very long, I can tell you.

That's quite interesting. Because in the actual attack you were bringing across ammunition, the first time you went over.

Yes.

I was under the impression that everybody would have gone across just with their standard 200 rounds, or whatever.

On no, I mean our job, there was a lot of us who were detailed to do this. Follow up with ammunition, because that was the thing. They knew we would need that.

So as soon as you got there you put it in a dump?

Put it in a dump.

Who were you with at that time? Can you remember any of the men's names?

No, I can't.

But nobody that you really knew?

No, I can't. Everything was so hazy.

It was still dark wasn't it?

Yes. I'm still confused. Still confused.

And you went back then? Did you go back straight away for more?

We went back for more, but we didn't go back again.

So when you got into the line, the first time, the first trench that you got into you dumped the ammunition there, and you turned round straight away and went back?

We went straight back. Our job was to get some more, you see. I don't remember going back with any more. I don't think we did.

No, so you go across.

The first time.

You got across the first time, then you went back to the sunken road, and then you tried to come back again..

Yes.

But you couldn't get there?

We didn't get back. I know we didn't get back. Many of the boys did, I think, but our little group, I know didn't. By that time, some of our blokes were streaming back a bit. Stragglers were coming back. They'd been ordered to return.

This is the wounded, I suppose?

It's amazing how confused one can get. Over something that you should know.

No, that's OK. I'm not surprised to hear that it was confusing? You didn't know what was happening, even at that time. You weren't told.

They didn't have time to detail anything to you. We knew what the job was supposed to be. We knew what it was on the bloody blackboard, and that sort of thing. But it didn't work out like that.

They actually did give you on a blackboard a description of what you were supposed to be doing, did they?

Yes,

This is just before Bullecourt?

Just before Bullecourt.

What was that about, because I've not heard before of anybody being given an account of the attack. You were what a Lance Corporal, or a Corporal, or something?

I was a Lance Corporal. No, I was a private then.

You were a private then?

Not much difference is there (laughs).

No, no difference really. A Number One private they called them. But anyway it's interesting to me that you were given a briefing on the attack. Whereabouts was that, and what did they say at that time? Can you remember anything at all about that?

Oh yes, I do remember something about it. It was the big plan of what was to go on, and then it was narrowed down to our little job, what we had to do.

So they were telling you? You did know when you were attacking what the big plan was?

Yes.

And what was that? It was just to get the tanks through, and you were to follow, and so on.

There was only half-a-dozen allotted to us, but they only got to Favreuil. Was it Favreuil?

Well they got up to the front line.

Well they didn't get – on our front, they didn't get through at all. None of them. I didn't see a tank, anyway.

Whereabouts was the briefing given? Was that at Favreuil?

No, it was further back.

So back towards Bapaume somewhere?

Oh don't ask me.

So that would have been two or three days before the attack?

Yes.

So you knew that there was a big...

When we were moving up we knew what was on.

When you were moving up towards Bullecourt, in other words, before you got to Favreuil, you already knew that you would attacking?

We knew that there was going to be an attack on the Hindenburg line.

So somewhere near Bapaume they gathered the men up...

I can't remember Bapaume anyway. I think Bapaume was after that.

No, Bapaume was before that.

Was it.

When the Germans pulled out from Gueudecourt, or Stormy Trench, they pulled back to the Hindenburg Line, and they went through Bapaume.

I don't remember.

It was the town where the Town Hall blew up.

I really don't remember.

No, well it doesn't matter. But I'm interested to hear that there was a briefing and so on? Can you tell me who came to that briefing? I mean everybody in the Battalion knew there was going to be an attack..

I don't know about everybody, but I know that our unit did, our company did.

And what happened? Did Harry Murray get up and talk to you? What actually happened?

Yes, well Harry Murray was the one who spoke to us about it.

So he got all the company together...

I wouldn't say it was all the company. But he had our platoon anyway, and I'm sure he'd have done the same to the other platoons.

But it wasn't – like they did have a blackboard did they?

Yes,

And they drew on it where the sunken road was and where the Hindenburg Line was.

Yes, that's right.

Yes, because the British would never do that. They would never tell the ordinary Tommy what they were doing.

Well for the attack at Messines later on we had a huge area fenced off and it was all done as a model. I can remember this other thing. It was only on the blackboard. It wasn't the whole scheme, if you can understand. You know, such and such a unit would be there, and such and such a unit would be there, and our task was here. We were just told what we had to do. Our job was to go in and hold the line. Actually it was supposed to go further. It was supposed to go up as far as Rencourt, I think. Somewhere up there.

Yes, well the 16th was to hold the line, and the 13th was to keep going through it.

That's right. But that didn't eventuate.

No, it didn't. And when you got up to the Hindenburg Line and you put your ammunition boxes down, do you remember anything about what you saw at that time?

Well, you can imagine what we saw. But we didn't stay too long to see what was going on. But you could see that it was vitally important to get more stuff up if we could.

The reason that you were stopped getting across no-man's land again was of course I suppose because it was now daylight, and the Germans would just see you with the machine guns.

Oh, and the troops that had started, I think they had started coming back anyway, by the time that we turned over. I think so. It was a death trap. A death trap. The poor old Brig was broken up. Poor old Charlie Brand, he cried like a child.

Did you see that?

Yes. He got all the troops together. But we went away out somewhere. And he came to try and help us a bit.

What did he say at that time?

His actual words I can't remember. He acknowledged that everybody had done all that was humanly possible. He didn't get the whole Brigade together, but he got little groups. He went round and told them. I don't know where we were at that time. We must have been....

I forget the name of the place too, but I can find out that. But he really did cry, did he? That's what I've heard. I've read it in fact too.

I was going to say, don't put that in your book, but he was a very broken man, put it that way.

Oh no, I mean it's already been published. I've got a 15th Battalion who wrote an article in the '30s, and he said that Brand was in tears. I can understand why too.

Oh yes. It is a terrible responsibility sending men into something like that, you know. But it was his job to do it. He was told to do it with his Brigade. But you can imagine the responsibility. How would you feel if you had to order a whole heap of blokes that you knew quite well, and who had been doing a wonderful job for you, to go into that? Anyhow, that's the army isn't it.

END OF AWM TAPE 4

START OF AWM TAPE 5 (AND CONTINUING INTO TAPE 6)
(Realistic MC90 Microcassette 4 1/3/87)

I made up a list of questions before I came as a kind of a guide, and I thought that we might start right at the beginning, and get some background on where you were in about 1914-1915. You were at Tocumwal, I think, weren't you?

That's right.

Your father and mother had a farm, did they.

I never knew my mother. She died when I was about three. Anyway, my father was a school teacher in Victoria until such time as - I had a brother - and we - he taught us - he was a Primary School teacher.

Your father was?

He taught us. We were always with him. He reared us and looked after us, and did everything for us.

He actually schooled you did he? Or not? Did you go to school?

I only went to school with him.

Do you mean that he schooled you at home?

No, no, he was employed by the Education Department. He was a school teacher, a school master.

This is in Tocumwal?

No, at a place called Fosterville, near Bendigo.

Is that where you were born, over there?

Bendigo, yes.

What is your birthdate?

9th April 1893.

And your mother died over there did she?

She died in the Bendigo hospital.

What happened to her?

Oh, it was a kidney problem. They used to call it Bright's Disease then. I don't know what they call it now. So she never had much pleasure out of us.

How many were there in your family?

Two just another brother and I.

What was your brother's name?

Frank, Francis.

And how old was he? Was he older?

Yes, he was one year older than me.

So you'd have been good mates, then?

We were, yes.

And what is your father's background? I think you told me before you come from Alsace-Lorraine?

I've got it here. I'll show you.

What is the town of Bouchepon? Is that where you come from in...

That's where my father comes from.

That's in Germany is it?

No, it's in Alsace-Lorraine. No, Lorraine, I think. One of those places.

And when did he come out to Australia? His name was Jean Pierre, and he was certainly in Australia in 1874?

I think the family came out in 1875. The story is over there a bit. It tells when he came out and when she came out, and the family. She had a whole heap of kids, which was popular in those days.

Your father also claimed French citizenship, it says here?

Oh yes, he was born in France.

He was born on the 20th March 1856.

Good job you've got it there, I couldn't have told you. He was Jacque.

Jean Paul, that was. He was Jean Pierre.

No, my father was Jacques, the second son. James in English.

Jean Pierre landed in Australia on 18 July 1861.

That would be his father, my grandfather.

And three more children were born in Australia - Victorine, Margaret, and John. John was your father was he?

No, Jacques - James. He was born in France. He was French.

Oh yes, here is Jacques, born in Zimming.

Yes, there is a little lady, a nun, she became very interested in family trees, oh some years ago, when it first of all became very popular, and she got all that together.

And she would be the person who would have this picture, wouldn't she?

I don't know where she got it from. She must have got it from some of the other...

It's a good picture. I'll see I think if I can find where it is. Is her name Agnes Murphy?

Yes.

And whereabouts is she?

She is in New Guinea. What have you got there?

Well that's a marriage certificate there. Yes, that's an interesting picture. I would like to find the original of it (the service photograph of Groutsch).

Of what?

Of you.

Have you got that photograph there?

She there it is there.

I can't see it.

No, it's a good picture.

It's very childish, isn't it?

Yes, you are young.

No doubt about you.

James (Jaques) was the second son born to Jean Pierre and Barb Groutsch at Bambiderstroff on 1st December 1853.

Bambiderstroff, that's correct.

He became a teacher, later marrying Jessie Turnball from Bendigo. Francis and Victor, 1892 and 1893. It records his arrival in Australia in January 1862 on the *Roxburgh Castle*.

I don't know what that has got to do with the 4th Brigade.

It's got some background to you, that's what is interesting. I would be interested to know where you were before the war. When did your father come over to Tocumwal?

In 1909. He gave up school teaching.

Why did he come over here? He gave up school teaching did he?

I was 16 and my brother 17. He was inclined to send us to secondary school, to college and we didn't want it. We'd had - actually he had a foot on the earth up here, because when the people at Runnymede were in there, and the land there, it was all Crown Land of course, and it was thrown open for selection in blocks of 320 acres.

This is all around Tocumwal?

No, no this is at Runnymede, near Elmore.

Oh near Elmore, I didn't realise where it was.

And although he was a schoolteacher, his brothers all got blocks of land around, and they suggested to him that he apply for a block. And of course, he got one there, but he leased it then to someone to fence it and look after it.

He kept on teaching?

He kept on teaching. So then when he decided to give up the teaching, we had that property to come back to. And how we boys, we liked the idea, because at every Christmas time we used to drive up. We've got other relatives in the area as you can imagine. We used to come up there and spend our Christmas holidays riding ponies and having a whale of a time. So that influenced our decision on what we wanted to do. So he sold that, must have 1909. He came up there in 1906. And in 1909, three years later, he sold it and we bought a block on the river at Tocumwal. I've got a son on it now.

That must be good land, down on the Murray?

Yes, it's a very nice little corner.

How big an area was that? What size farm?

It's not a big place. It's about 300 acres. It's right on the bank of the river.

And what was that like when you first went there? Was it cleared or not?

No.

It was all original?

No, it wasn't original. A lot of the timber had been ringed. It was dead. It was yellow-box country between the lagoon and the river. And we had to clear all that, of course. So that kept us quite busy until the war came.

That's what you and Frank, and your were doing?

Yes.

Right. And you didn't have a woman with you? Your mother had died, of course, so your Dad was looking after you, was he?

Yes, he reared us from the time we were little kids.

And what did you grow on the farm, wheat I suppose?

We were only getting small areas, and my father put in a steam-engine and a pump, and we developed a bit of country that we could water reasonably, and grew maize and other stuff like that.

It would be all irrigated land wouldn't it?

No, it was too uneven of course. At that time the only method of preparing irrigation country was to – with very primitive instruments at that time. We sort of graded it, and we were able to water a lot. But he put in a spray system, a big spray system that we could water I suppose 30 or 40 acres.

Was that before the war?

Yes.

That would be fairly innovative for the time, wouldn't it.

Yes.

And you built a house there I suppose?

We built a house there, that's right. He died there, my father died there in 1928.

And you went down to Cobram to enlist, I think you were telling me?

That's right.

Why did you go down there? Didn't they have anywhere in Tocumwal?

Cobram was in the Second Military District. The Murray was the border, and all the local boys from Tocumwal used to go to Cobram to enlist because they'd go into camp in Melbourne, which was close handy to home. You'd be home in a few hours. So they nearly all, well not all, but a good number enlisted there. But they didn't want me.

The railway came all the way out to Cobram, I suppose at that time, did it?

Yes.

And you would go down to Melbourne on the train?

Yes.

How many hours would that be, do you suppose?

Oh at that time it took about seven hours, I think.

Yes, on the train it would be all day, wouldn't it.

I think we'd leave Tocumwal about four o'clock and get to Melbourne about 11.00. Seven hours, mind you.

Four o'clock in the afternoon?

Yes.

Yes, seven hours.

Stopping at every little station.

It would be a good three hours now to drive it from here.

Oh yes, it is three hours.

So it would be at least twice that on the train.

Yes, about eleven.

And you went down to Melbourne, or course, and you went out to the barracks at St. Kilda Road.

Yes, that's right.

And you had a medical and...

That's right, and they didn't like it. They said I had a bad heart.

What did the doctor do to you? What kind of a medical examination was it?

Fairly thorough examination. Well, you stripped off and they did everything that they should do. Very exhaustive. It's a bit of a joke about the heart. I've still got it. It's done a lot of work since then!

No, I don't think he was too qualified, from the sound of it.

Oh well, I thought perhaps at the time - recruits were coming in very rapidly. And there were better types there than I was.

They were being choosy, you think? I suppose of course, you weren't very tall.

That's what I mean.

How tall were you then?

I was 5'7". Anyhow, they were rushing us through very quick. There were about three quacks in a row. You strip off and they weigh you and take your height and chest. Do everything for you. Anyhow, that's what happened.

How did you feel about that?

Very disappointed.

Where were you staying in Melbourne? Did you have relatives in Melbourne?

No, I was staying at a place that's not there now. It was the Melbourne Coffee Palace.

Whereabouts was that?

It's in Bourke Street, no, the Chrystal Palace. Parer's it was.

The Chrystal Palace. They did have coffee palaces, I know.

Yes, well it was a coffee palace. It was one of those places anyway.

What exactly is a coffee palace?

No licence.

So it's like a hotel, but it serves coffee?

Yes, oh well it serves anything.

Like a boarding house?

That's what it was - a boarding house. A coffee palace, they called it.

And how long did you stay in Melbourne? A day or two, I suppose.

I didn't waste any time there at all. I went straight back. Perhaps a day, perhaps two days.

The reason for joined up was because you'd been reading about it in the paper .

That's right. Oh well, most of us were very patriotic in those days. Very different to the mob that live in this country now, where we've got Greeks and Turks and Sudanese and all types. In those days we were all Anglo-Saxons, or mainly. And quite a large proportion of the First AIF was composed of young Englishman who had come out the year before.

Yes, quite right.

A big percentage of them.

And so you came back to Tocumwal and – what did your father think about you joining up?

Oh he was all for it.

And what about your brother, did he join at the same time?

Yes, the same time. He also served on Gallipoli. He was badly wounded there.

Did he go to Melbourne with you, or not?

No, he went before me. He went to Sydney.

He was a year older than you.

He was a year older than me.

Well how old were you at that time. About 20 I suppose.

I was 22, would I.

That was early 1915 that you went to Melbourne, wasn't it?

Early 1915. I'd be 21 - kicking on for 22. Anyhow that's near enough I suppose.

And so you went to Sydney then.

Yes, trained at Liverpool.

You got the train from Tocumwal, I suppose, did you? How did you get to Sydney in those days?

Train.

There was a train. Did you know anybody in Sydney?

Yes, I had my mother's brother was living in Sydney.

Whereabouts in Sydney?

In Surrey Hills.

Right in the middle of Sydney.

Right at the station.

You stayed with him?

I stayed there.

What was he doing? What kind of a trade?

He was an elderly chap. I think he was a night watchman.

And you went to Sydney on your own, didn't you? I don't think you had any friends that went with you, did you?

There were four or five other blokes from the 'Toc' area.

I think you mentioned before the Cottle brothers?

Cottle, yes.

What was there christian names?

Well, Bill was the eldest, and the next was Jim, and the third was Charles.

Were they farm boys, were they?

No, they were living in the town. Their father had an occupation. I don't know what they were doing. I know Bill, the eldest boy, he was driving a grocer's cart. The other boys were younger. In fact Charlie only got over there a month or so before the war was over, at the end of 1918. It's amazing how everybody from an area you know, you'd find one another.

Yes. Were any of the Cottles your friends?

Oh yes, I knew them, I knew them very well. In a small community like that you know everybody, don't you.

And you mentioned the Boyles, too.

Yes.

What were their names?

Cyril, Charlie, and Les.

There were three brothers?

Three brothers.

And they were all 13th men were they?

No, I didn't see Cyril, so he can't have been in the 13th, but Les and Charlie were in the 13th.

And did they join about the same time you did?

Oh yes, all about that time.

Did they? Were they farm boys too, or...?

No, their father had a sawmill, a Red Gum sawmill.

And the Medcalfes were others you mentioned before.

Did I. Medcalfes, not from Tocumwal.

It may have been around Cobram, or somewhere.

No, I don't know how I came to mention them. There were a couple of Medcalfe brothers – is that how I come to mention it?

Yes.

There were two Medcalfe brothers in the Battalion when I was with the Battalion. I don't know where they came from.

They weren't Tocumwal?

No. I think we were discussing the fact of brothers being together sort of thing.

We may have done, yes. And which Battalion did Frank go into?

The 19th.

Oh they had a difficult time, didn't they.

Yes, they had a very bad show. He got very badly wounded on Gallipoli and was in hospital for a long time, many months. Had he been a bit earlier he'd have been sent home, but at that time

they were patching them up and sending them back - where the guns were. So he got badly hurt again with the 19th Battalion. I think it was Flerbaix, no not Flerbaix. Fromelles. With the 19th Battalion, no wait a minute.

That was the 5th Division wasn't it, I think, Fromelles.

Yes, I'm a bit tangled up, but I'll straighten it out. He was in the 19th - the original 19th - and when he was patched up and sent back to the unit he became a member of the 55th Battalion.

You took part in a mock attack at Middle Head when you were in Sydney, didn't you?

My word we did.

I'd be interested to hear a bit about that. What was that? How was that organised?

It was some film company was taking a film of The Landing on Gallipoli, so where better place than Sydney Harbour!

How many of there were you that took part?

Oh, there'd be a company.

Were they all 13th men or...

No, nobody was attached to a battalion at that time. We were recruits just out at Liverpool.

And what did they get you doing?

Well, they took us from the camp, marched up to railway station and got on the train, and went to Sydney. All the whistles were Pop! Pop! Pop! Hooray! You know - off to the war! And everybody waving goodbye to us. And when we got to Sydney, I think we got onto - I'm a bit vague here. We would have got onto a tram, and at about Rushcutters Bay we landed on some of these ferries. And then from there we attacked Middle Head!

What, from the ferries? Did they put you in the boats, did they?

Yes. There was a little bit of a beach at Middle Head. Not a big one, but big enough, and we had to climb up, a fairly steep climb.

And they issued you with blank ammunition, and so on?

Oh a bloody great noise (laughs). You're taxing my memory. This is seventy years ago.

I know. I think you are doing well.

Yes, that was the first landing of Gallipoli, really.

And what, that was just all day you were doing that?

Oh yes. Just one day.

Did you ever see the film?

No.

And did you know you were going to be in the film or not? I suppose you must have done.

Oh yes, we knew what it was.

They briefed you about it, did they?

Oh yes.

And do you remember anybody from that time that was a real mate of yours at Liverpool?
Did you make any really strong friends at the camp?

Oh yes, I suppose so. We were friends with everybody of course, but our tent mates, we got to know them very well.

Who do you remember in your tent?

Oh God, you would have to give me time to think, wouldn't you.

Oh don't worry about that one? They were the sleeping arrangements though, weren't they?
They had you in these bell tents, didn't they?

That's right, yes, all feet to the pole.

It was the same in Broadmeadows, apparently.

Exactly. I think about thirteen to a tent. Just room to lie down. If one turned over, everybody would have to turn over.

Getting up at night-time to go out to the toilet wasn't too good, I don't think.

No, walking over them.

How many of there were you actually in the camp at that time, do you think?

I couldn't tell you that.

Would there have been several hundred?

Yes, well the whole 5th Brigade was there at the time.

The 5th Brigade?

No, it wouldn't be the 5th Brigade, that was in Melbourne, wasn't it. No it wasn't. The 5th Brigade was there. The 19th, that would be the 5th wouldn't it.

It would be 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th.

That's right. Victoria was 21 to 24, or something like that.

So your brother may have been in camp – oh no, he had already left I suppose.

No, he was there when we got there.

Your brother was in camp when you were there?

Yes, with the 19th Battalion.

So the 19th Battalion hadn't left to go overseas at that time.

No, they went to Melbourne originally. They marched out in great style, of course.

What about leave into Sydney? How often would you get that, or where would you go?

I don't think we got much leave in Sydney. We didn't have much money to go to Sydney.

I suppose you were on the shilling a day as well, were you? Or 1/6 I think you said.

I was on 1/6. Two shillings was the top limit you could draw. You were credited with a bit more into your pay book, but you had to put three bob I think into a bank account or to your relatives, and that sort of thing. And a shilling deferred. Oh big money!

I don't suppose you'd been paid before then, would you, working for your father?

Oh no, we didn't have a fixed allowance, but we had a few bob to go to the pictures and that sort of thing on the weekend. No, we didn't look for money.

And were you training in dungarees and so on at that time, or had they issued you with a uniform?

Oh no, dungarees.

What about a rifle and equipment?

That came along.

What were you like with a rifle?

(Laughs) You don't expect me to say that I couldn't hit a haystack from across the room. The country blokes were all good with rifles before ever they went into the army. There was no problem there.

What kind of a recoil did they have, the .303?

Oh a bit of a knock yes. Anybody who wasn't used to shooting would hold it a bit loose, and they'd get a kick. But all the fellows who were going in at that time were pretty adaptable. They were fellows who had been out in the bush and lived hard, and all that sort of thing.

How many bullets did the .303 take?

Ten.

So would that be in a clip of ten?

No, five.

So you would put five in..?

Wait a minute, I might be exaggerating. There's five in a clip. And perhaps that is all she'd hold.

I think it was.

Was it. You'd know anyway.

No, I'm not sure. I honestly don't know. I think that's right, there may have been two groups of five to a...

You check up with someone. I can't get away from ten.

What about the cooks and the food at Liverpool Camp?

The cooks were very original types. Very original types. Of course, you realise there was no such thing as a kitchen, or anything like that. How they - they dug a trench a couple of feet wide and about twelve or fifteen feet long, and four or five cooks on it. And they just put a few bars across.

So they would have big fire in the trench would they?

Yes, there was a big fire in the trench. A fire down there and they cooked over that. All open cooking. And the thing which I'll never forget - which always impressed me very much - you realise there was no water supply there either. And at the end of every line they used to dump a load of clean sand, and after you'd had your meal, you'd have a greasy old plate, and you'd get a piece of paper and get down on this sand hill. That was the washing-up! Pretty primitive. And the toilets, of course, were a deep trench with a couple of saplings across.

Were they? And was it just out in the bush, or was it a parade ground of some kind?

No, it wasn't out in the bush. It was just over from the bridge across from the railway station. Once you crossed that bridge you were in the camp. But they had hessian around it.

Hessian all the way around the camp?

No, just round the latrines. Two rows. You'd sit back to back, and if anyone had diarrhoea, well, you had a dirty shirt!

(Laughs) Oh dear! Yes, it was pretty primitive. What about the showers? Did they have anything? What was the washing arrangements?

Yes, we had showers. No hot water. Cold showers.

Did you have any barracks at all there, or was it all tents?

Yes.

Officers and all in tents?

Yes. No, there were no buildings there at all. See the thing grew so rapidly.

What had it been before the war?

Just been a big open paddock.

And you – what was the uniform like that they issued you with? Was it a good one or not?

Oh I don't know. It was our uniform. I don't remember a terrible lot about it.

You used to have these puttees didn't you, that you had to wind around.

Yes, puttees.

How effective were they? They seem an odd kind of thing to me.

Yes, well we only had short breeches. Your breeches used to come down here, and you'd tie them with a piece of tape. Therefore you had to have the puttees to go join them.

To go down to your boots.

Yes, puttees. That was the dress.

You left on the *Shropshire*, didn't you?

That's right.

You didn't get back to Tocumwal I suppose, did you? When you went to Sydney that was that. I suppose you didn't come home again?

Yes, I did.

You got a leave?

We got final leave just before we go. I think I had three or four days.

So you and Frank came home, I suppose, did you?

No, see I wasn't with him. He was in the 19th Battalion, and I was in a Reinforcement Company. As you came in you were just put in a company, and then later they came in and they went along and they said - "That's the 13th." And so on, and so on. I was with the 7th Reinforcements. And the 7th and the 8th went away together on the *Shropshire*. They were running out of troops on Gallipoli, so they had to gather up something to send them over to keep the numbers right.

So you came all the way back to Tocumwal to see your father before you went?

Yes I think it was about four days.

What did you do on your last leave?

Just called around some of the neighbours, and said hallo.

The officer in charge was a Lieutenant Henley, wasn't it?

Les Henley.

And I think you were telling me before that when you went away, his family had an evening of some...

That's right, in the Burwood Town Hall. His father, Henley, I can't think of his christian name, he was a member of Parliament, Les's father.

This is the State Parliament or Federal Parliament?

Oh I think it would be State. Yes, they gave us an evening, the whole reinforcement company in the Burwood Town Hall.

This is all the 7th Reinforcements?

Yes, Les' Company.

How many were there in that company?

About 200.

That's quite a lot. And what did they do? I mean what was the evening like. What kind of activities happened? Did they have a meal?

Oh yes, big tables, you know, trestle tables, three of four. We had a dinner and the Old Man wished us well, and all that sort of thing. And the troops responded by showing their loyalty for young Les. Well he was quite a young man, and most of us were his age, or a bit older perhaps. I think they carried him around the hall, and all that sort of thing. Esprit-de-corps, of course, was beginning.

You were very keen to get away, I assume?

Oh yes. Les Henley was an experienced soldier. He had been with the force that landed at Rabaul.

Oh I think you said that before. The first Expeditionary Force.

The first Expeditionary Force. He'd had a commission with the cadets and that sort of thing, and naturally he'd be one who wanted to go away. And then naturally being an officer in the cadets he would get a job in the AIF, because they were running very short of officers at that time.

I think you told me that when he was in New Guinea the first night they were firing at...

An orange tree.

He told you that did he?

He told us that story. He could see the bloody thing moving, see. And every time it moved he'd give it a burst! But you get like that. If you're watching something very intently and you're nervy, and all that sort of thing. Anyhow, I think he killed the orange tree. Yes, he thought it was a joke, and we all thought it was a joke. And we thought all the more of him for telling us the joke. It started a friendly feeling.

How many officers were there? Was there only the one lieutenant from your company or not?

Yes, there was only Les with us in camp, but another officer joined us for embarkation. He was a Captain Twynham.

Yes, I have heard of him I think.

He was officially in charge then, but we never saw in the training camp. But he was on the ship with us. And with the Battalion. He stayed with the Battalion.

So when you went back to Sydney from Tocumwal you had that last evening I suppose before you went away – with the Henleys, and the next day you embarked.

Oh I wouldn't say it was the next day. But it was a very short period afterwards.

And what happened then. They put you on the train and you went down to...

It was very similar to the way we 'took Gallipoli'. I don't know, yes I suppose we went down to Woolloomooloo, or somewhere down there. Our ship, the *Shropshire* was anchored out in the bay, and they took us out on the ferries.

And the *Shropshire*, it wasn't a battleship or anything was it. It was just a troop ship?

Yes.

It had been a passenger liner, had it?

It could have been. I don't know much about it. There was nothing to suggest that it had ever been a passenger liner. There were no cabins as far as we knew.

It was just a cargo ship, do you think?

I think so, yes.

You went out to the ship on ferries, did you, or barges?

Barges. No that's seventy years ago, so if I tell you a lie well it's your fault.

Fair enough.

It wouldn't be mine.

And you had to get up the side on rope ladders, did you?

I don't think so.

They had a gangplank, or stairs or something?

I don't remember that part.

So you were in hammocks, I guess?

Yes.

What were they like to sleep in?

I don't recommend them to anyone to sleep in. We'd never slept in hammocks before. They swung over your table. You'd have your table. We were in a deck, a cargo deck down below with tables across. And over every table there'd be hammocks. So you stood on the table to get in your hammocks. Oh, very hygienic!

Some of the men have told me that they couldn't sleep in those hammocks and they used to sleep on the deck of the ship.

Oh but you wouldn't sleep on the deck of this ship. There wasn't room.

Wasn't there?

Oh Lord no.

What was on the deck, a lot of furniture or...?

Oh no, but if you put a lot of blokes lying on the floor and see how much room they take up. On no, there was a big cargo. A big load of 'meat' on board. By Jove there was. Well I suppose those who could sleep on the deck did so, but I know where we were, we were all in hammocks. You would get used to them. That's sea life.

And what did Lieutenant Henley look like? Can you give me a physical description of him at all?

Yes, he wasn't a very robust type. He was a lad, I suppose, about 5'8" or 5'9". He was rather slight.

What colour hair did he have?

Oh light coloured hair. It wasn't real dark, I know that. He was a thin-faced lad.

What was his background? Did he – had he gone to university or college?

There is no doubt he must have come from a college if he had a commission in the cadets.

It was generally the way of it wasn't it. And what was it like, the *Shropshire*? I mean that they have a lot of decks going down?

Yes. I think we were on the third deck. That would be just below the waterline.

Were there anymore underneath you?

I don't think so. I think we were on the bottom. There was a load of cargo underneath. There was sheepskins and hides which used to 'odourise' the area.

What did they have those on board for?

They used to always use on those ships for ballast - the bottom deck would always be off pretty heavy stuff. And hides of course, as you know, are pretty bloody heavy things. Yes, it wasn't a very pleasant trip.

And did they get you doing lifeboat drill?

Oh yes, we seemed to have had lifeboat drill wherever we went. You'd know where your boat was. I can't remember much about it.

And you used to mess down on this third deck as well, did you?

Yes, although after leaving Sydney, I think for about four days or five days, I couldn't go down below.

I think you told me. You were up on the top deck all the time?

I was up on the top deck hoping that a bit of a wave would come over occasionally. I was lying up there. I couldn't do it down below. You've got no idea of the foetid nature of the atmosphere down there. All those bodies, and then the hides down below it. It was terrible. The poor old *Shropshire*. I think it was AE2 or something.

Did you have to do any guard duty?

On the ship? I don't think so. We did a bit of musketry. You'd throw a box overboard and you'd have to fire your rifle at it. Oh, that was to blow the submarines out of the water (laughs) - in case they should appear.

Were you in a convoy, or was the ship on its own.

Ship on its own, I think, yes, on its own.

She must have been a fairly fast ship then?

No, a very slow ship. We were 28 days on board between Sydney and Suez. I think you said that some of the 8th Reinforcements, the 15th were on that ship.

I'll check up on that.

But there was one point there that upset me a bit, this 15th man said that they had called in at Ceylon.

Yes, Colombo.

Well I'm quite sure that we didn't call in at Colombo.

Well you may well not have done. It was generally a place for re-coaling, Colombo, and you may not have had to do that.

We didn't do that, but I don't want to upset his story.

Oh that's OK.

But you said that he was wounded and he came back to Australia, and he went back again.

Donald Fraser, yes.

I thought that he might have just made a little blue. Anyhow don't worry about that. He's telling the story, and I'm telling mine. I don't think we stopped between Sydney and Port Tewfick, not that it matters anyway.

You may well not have done. I'll probably be able to check that anyway. And of course you struck the big storm in the Indian Ocean, didn't you?

By God we did. A big wave.

How long did it last for?

Oh not very long. I suppose 24 hours. Yes, it was a huge thing. Oh it bent big iron girders on deck. The ship had been used for carrying horses, and on the top deck there were a number of horse boxes. Well, they all went. It took them away.

They were swept off?

Yes.

How were the horse boxes fitted?

I don't know.

How many would there have been up there?

Don't ask me to put a figure on it.

A couple of hundred, I suppose?

I don't know, I didn't bother counting them. They were full of spuds – potatoes.

You lost all the potatoes?

Lost some, yes.

And I think you said when I was here before that the water came down to where you were.

To where we were.

Right down on the third deck?

Yes, well you see, the entrance to the deck – and they'd have a cover, and they'd pull a tarpaulin over it.

They would have the hatch covers over it?

Yes, the hatch, that's right. Well to get down to where we were they had to build a doorway. And that's got to be above the hatch. It swept that away, and then the water just came down in.

It left a big hole in the hatch?

I hope I'm making it clear to you now. It was a cargo ship and they had no reason to have a doorway. They'd just open and throw the tarp back and crawl down an iron ladder. But for a troopship they built a doorway like that, and then a stairway down.

How many of you were seasick? Were the majority of you seasick to start with?

(Laughs) I wasn't interested in anybody else. I had my own problems. I know I was sick. It was my first sea voyage, of course. I'd never been on a sea voyage before.

Was it the first time you'd seen the sea?

Oh no.

Of course, you'd been to Sydney, hadn't you.

And we'd been in Melbourne. My father used to take the two of us to Melbourne for the school holidays and we'd paddle around on the sand. But that didn't stop me being seasick.

I think you were telling me too that the captain reckoned it was one of the worst seas he'd been in.

Yes, I think that's the stock and trade of any skipper anyway. You'd hear from time to time - even now - a bloke says that's the worst crossing they ever had, or something like that. It was a matter for conversation, and it pleases the poor old people that have been inconvenienced. Come again next time, it will be beaut.

Were you lousy at that time on the ship? Some of the 14th for example, actually had lice before they left Australia.

Oh no.

It was only in Egypt or on Gallipoli?

Yes, we met them over there. Well people's experiences are different. They're not all the same.

Of course. How did you bail out the water from the hold?

They had pumps.

I suppose you didn't get any sleep for 24 hours or so.

Oh no. Yes, it was rough, but that wasn't the time that I was really sick. I was sick leaving Sydney.

What was the scene leaving Sydney? Did you get a big send-off from...?

No.

You were out in the harbour, so I suppose you wouldn't have...

Oh no. Anyhow, it was only so much carrion being sent away anyhow. Oh no, no-one was allowed on the little old landing place where the barges used to come in.

Did you march through Sydney at all?

Yes.

Do you remember the route, or some of the streets at all?

No.

Well I suppose you were given quite a send-off then?

Yes, of course, but I'm referring now to when the ship's going out. Oh yes we were marched through the streets from the railway station.

This if from Central Station?

Yes, from Central Station. I think I might have told you that we got trams. But we didn't get trams for that. We got trams when we went out to Middle Head.

You got the trams down to Rushcutters Bay?

Yes.

And then the ferries to Middle Head?

Yes, it was from there that we took off and 'landed on Gallipoli'.

How serious did you take that?

A day out, a day out. (laughs)

It would be good fun I suppose? (laughs)

Yes, a day out! We never saw the film, but anyhow, we did our bit.

What kind of efforts did they have to prevent seasickness on the *Shropshire*? Did they give you any tablets, or..?

Not that I remember. I don't remember.

I think you were telling me before that they had concerts and music and so on, on the ship, didn't they?

Yes.

How often were they organised?

I couldn't tell you.

They were fairly frequent I suppose?

Yes.

Did your company have a band.

No, our company didn't have a band. There could have been a band on board. I don't remember anyway.

What about the church parades? They would have one of those every Sunday I suppose.

Yes, church parades on the upper deck.

Did you have a strong faith at that time?

Oh yes, reasonable.

How important a role did the padre or the chaplain have?

Oh quite important in this way that he used to censor the letters. Blokes used to go to him and he used to organise the entertainments, the concerts.

The padre did?

Yes, my word.

What was his name? Do you remember the chaplain's name?

No I don't.

And what about crossing the line, do you remember that?

Yes, that's easy to remember. A big bath was prepared for all hands

And you all had to have a dunking, did you.

And got a certificate. I still have my certificates to say that we crossed the line. That old King Neptune came and made a presentation. We disturbed the old King a bit, I think, the bloody noise that was going on. But it all helped to pass the time and brighten things up a bit.

What was the general atmosphere on board?

Oh, good fun. Well a lot of young blokes out for fun. We had a lot of reading material and all that sort of thing, which all helped.

I suppose they got you drilling on the ship a great deal?

Not a terrible lot, no, but we did have parades just to keep us fit and smart.

They would have training lectures?

Yes.

Did you specialise in anything?

No.

You were given the general...

Just a rifle thrown at me and that's your present job. No, well not many of us were specialists there because they used to select the specialists when they joined the units. Actually the job of our reinforcement company to train us was to get a mob of blokes together, throw some clothes on them, and put them on a ship. Having done that..

That was finished.

Yes (laughs). Oh no, they did a few basic training. Quite a lot.

And you arrived at Port Tewfik? That's Suez isn't it?

That's Suez.

That would be a big port I suppose?

Didn't see much of it. We seemed to have pulled up at quite a small sort of a jetty.

The ship actually tied up alongside the jetty.

Tied along side it, yes. We had a lot of stuff on - ammunition and stuff like that. And Comforts - Norman Brookes was the Commissioner for the Comforts Fund.

Was he on board the ship?

Not he met us in Egypt. He met us on the pier at Tewfik.

He was a tennis player apparently, Norman Brookes.

My word he was.

Of what calibre?

He was the world champion. My word. He had a good, safe job.

And the ship had a lot of ammunition on as well, and that was all unloaded on the jetty I suppose?

All unloaded there. As a matter of fact, I was one of the guard told off to stay with it. We had to deliver it to a magazine in Cairo and we were two or three days there.

This is at Tewfik?

Yes.

Whereabouts were you put up?

On the ship.

So everybody else disembarked and caught the train, but you were left behind?

There was a gang of us left behind – eight or ten, perhaps a dozen.

What rank did you have at that time? Were you a private?

A full-blown private.

Does that mean you were a lance-corporal, or just a private?

Just a private.

Who was in charge of you?

Oh there would be a sergeant and a corporal, I suppose. I can't recollect.

What did he look, Norman Brookes? He was a young fellow at that time?

No, he wasn't a young fellow.

He'd been a tennis champion like years before? At the turn of the century?

That's right. Don't ask me to put a year on it. We all knew all about him, because of his tennis prowess.

And what did you have to do as a bodyguard? What were the duties you had?

Stop the wogs from taking it home.

You had to stay on the pier all the time?

Oh no, yes that's right, we did. We had a small guard on the pier, a couple of blokes. I think there were a couple on at a time, or it might have been three.

And you put this ammunition onto a train?

Yes.

Did you have to do the loading?

No.

The Egyptians did.

Yes.

This was rifle ammunition I suppose, was it?

Yes, that what I recollect. I think that's all it was. And Comforts Funds stuff.

What would they have in the Comforts Fund?

Oh God only knows. Socks and balaclavas, little packages. Whatever the Comforts Fund used to be. You'd get a bag of peanuts. A lot of people worked very hard here in Australia, working for the Comforts Funds, comforts for the troops. I know when we came back from Gallipoli we were on Lemnos Island for Christmas and we got a huge parcel of comforts there. A little billy. Everybody got a billy.

How big was the billy?

Oh about that high I suppose.

What about a foot high?

Oh no it wouldn't be a foot high, I don't think. A Christmas billy, and a plum pudding in it. You could imagine that was very welcome coming back from Gallipoli.

They used to put notes in them, didn't they?

Oh yes, the girls that packed them always put a note in them - their address and saying write to us. And blokes used to write.

You got a big parcel of things at Lemnos, did you?

Yes.

Clothing and so on? From your father, or relatives?

Yes, yes, but when you mention clothing, we got rigged out with clothing from the army.

After you came off the peninsula?

Yes, oh no you got a reasonable parcel. A bit of cake and a letter and a bag of peanuts, socks, things like that. You could live without them, but coming from home it just made that much difference.

You went up to this magazine in Cairo, didn't you?

Yes.

What was that like? A big old stone building I suppose?

Well it appeared to us to be stone and mud-bricks, and all that sort of stuff. A whole heap of Egyptian soldiers there on guard around the top. Every hour they'd call out the time.

Would they (laughs). I didn't know they still that?

They did then.

They really did? That's no joke?

Ten o'clock and all's well! So you could imagine the troops helped them with that! (laughs).

What do you mean?

They took up the cry!

Oh did they (laughs). To pass it along.

That was the first joke we'd had since coming ashore. That sort of thing. Ten o'clock and all's well. All through the bloody night too!

You stayed a night or two there did you in the barracks?

Just a night and a day.

Do you remember anything about the train journey up from Suez?

No.

You were on flat trucks I suppose were you?

Yes.

You went out to Zeitoun then, didn't you.

That's right, we trained at Zeitoun.

They were in reed huts weren't they? What were the huts like?

We had 'crow's nests' there for beds, you know, cane beds.

What did you call them, crow's nests?

Yes, built of cane, little strips of cane.

Were they like an ordinary bed, the same size

Same size. You could sleep in them alright. It kept you off the sand, you see. It would be nearly as high as an ordinary bed, but not as wide.

What about the width of a hammock, or something like that?

Yes, so you wouldn't be lying in the sand in the desert.

And everybody had those, did they?

I think so. We had them anyway.

You used to take the tram in from Heliopolis, didn't you?

Yes.

You'd have to walk up to Heliopolis would you?

I suppose so.

Could you describe the trams? What did they look like? Like a Melbourne tram?

Yes, something like that. I can't remember now whether they were electric. I think they would have to be wouldn't they.

Yes, I think they must have been.

But then again I don't think they were, because blokes were hanging all over them.

Everybody used to crowd onto the tram, did they?

Oh on top and inside and out the windows, everywhere.

That would cause a bit of a problem wouldn't it?

No problem, no.

Who was running them, the army or the Egyptians?

Oh no, the Gyppos. That's why there was no problem. Our boys wouldn't have a problem. One or two Gyppos and a whole team of Australian soldiers.

I think you spent time at the Kasr-el-Nil Barracks on piquet duty.

Oh yes, that's true.

I've heard a lot about the Kasr-el-Nil Barracks. That's right on the Nile, isn't it?

Right on the bank of the Nile, yes. We were on piquet duty. There's always a piquet on that, a fairly large piquet too. And we used to just go round the town and straighten things out if it got too tough. Or if it got real tough they wouldn't see it.

Was Les Henley still in charge of you or not?

No.

Well when you arrived in Egypt where did he go?

No wait a bit, I think he must have been. We didn't see much of him anyway. But he was with us when we went to Gallipoli. He went with us then, so he must have been in charge of us. I don't remember seeing him on a parade ground or anything, but he'd be there all right.

Who do you remember really as being in charge of you before you went to Gallipoli?

Captain Twynham was the boss.

What arrangements did they have for you at the Barracks in Cairo? That was a stone building was it?

Yes, it had been a British Army turn-out eventually. Quite a big area of ground and this big building – I think there was about three floors in it.

Was it fortified? Did it have walls around it?

Yes, I believe it had. There was a pretty wide gate that we used to go in and out. But you don't take much notice of those things at the time. It's just an incident in your life.

Yes, right. And on piquet duty you'd have to be looking for people who were drunk and....

Playing up, and making nasty noises, and that sort of thing.

What would you do with them? Put them in the gaol I guess?

That was the drill, but in most cases you just wouldn't see them. Just let them see you marching passed. The piquet would generally consist of about nine or a dozen people. They'd be marching all round the place.

Would you be armed, or not?

Sidearms.

You mean a bayonet?

Yes, more for the look of the thing.

And what about when they found a real trouble-maker?

I say you'd go straight on and leave him for the next mob. –

So you didn't really do much. You just made your presence felt.

That was the main object of the thing anyway. A little visual training for the troops.

What about your contact with the Egyptians as such? Did you get on well with them or...a lot of the fellows have told me that they were always trying to sell you something, or...

I don't think many of us let them worry us at all. You know they were just Gyppos there. You didn't want their 'eggs-a-cook' or 'orin-ges', or whatever they were.

What did they call them?

'Orin-ges' - that's oranges. 'Eggs-a-cook ' were boiled eggs. They had a huge supply of those things.

They were actually hard-boiled eggs were they?

Yes.

And were they popular to buy?

Oh yes, the blokes used to buy them.

The oranges I suppose...

The 'orin-ges'. They were very cheap of course.

And what kind of entertainment did you get up to in Cairo? Did they have any cinemas or...?

I don't remember much about the entertainments.

You would get an evening free and go into Cairo?

Yes. I remember going to some of those – sort of a cinema, or a bit of a show. Belly dancers and all that sort of thing.

They had outdoor cafes?

Yes.

The Ezbekiah Gardens were very popular, weren't they?

That's right, right in the centre of the city.

I think they used to have a band in the Ezbekiah Gardens. Do you remember?

Yes I do.

What about VD and the efforts that they made to prevent that in Cairo?

I don't know much about that.

Did they ever give you a lecture, or something like that on it?

Oh yes, I'm sure they did. Plenty of that. But I don't know whether they issued a kit or not in Cairo. I know later on in France there were places where they were issuing kits.

You mean condoms?

I don't know about condoms. But if you had a night out with a sheila and she had Aids or something (laughs) for your own sake they'd report to a position – whether it was a bloke with a syringe or...bloody rake or something. And they would issue you with a kit.

I think when you went across to Lemnos you were isolated because of the mumps, weren't you?

That's right.

You didn't suffer from the mumps?

No.

It was a fairly common thing though, wasn't it, the measles and the mumps?

Oh yes. Where did you get all that information?

You told me.

Oh must be right then (laughs).

How long were you on Lemnos before you went across to...The Battalion was out on Lemnos wasn't it?

The Battalion was out. Oh I don't know, it could have been a week. I don't think it would be any more.

And I think the landing itself was quite...

Turbulent.

Turbulent for you.

I'll say it was. Yes, there was a little vessel that was supposed to take 200 ashore. And there was only 20 of us got on it and they had to cast off on account of the weather battering it into the ship. It was a very turbulent little journey.

How far offshore would you have been, at a guess?

Oh I don't know.

Half-a-mile, or less?

Oh it would be half-a-mile, perhaps a mile.

Yes, it is a fair way to come in on a barge? And was this of a night-time?

Oh yes. It was midnight of course. Oh yes, nothing moved in the daytime out there. It would be about a mile. One incident that I won't forget is that one of our blokes was shot with a rifle bullet on the *Osmanieh* before we had a chance to get on the boat.

Really?

At night-time. It'd be a stray bullet, you know. But fancy - it killed him.

Was this one of the 13th Battalion men?

I don't know who. I don't know who it was. It was just a story. I didn't see the see the incident.

What did you do when you got ashore? I think you told me you lay down on the jetty last time?

I did, I lay down on the bloody jetty. I'd have fallen overboard otherwise.

Fallen off the pier?

Yes - bloody oath you would. That'll tell you how cranky one's legs and body were. I had to lie down. And I wasn't the only one either. Till a little bit of normality arrived. We then staggered off.

We went into a little valley and spent the night there. When the rest of the shipload came over the following night.

You were a day there waiting for them?

We were 24 hours ahead of them.

What did you do during that day, just rested up I suppose?

Oh yes, and cleaned up.

What did you think about being on Gallipoli? Was it exciting to you, or frightening, or...?

We didn't see a lot of action there. All the action was over before we got there. All the tough stuff. All we did was occupy the position and hold it.

Whereabouts did you live? Did you have a dugout on Gallipoli or not?

Yes.

What was that like?

We dug a little hole. I was a young – I can't think of his name now. Two of us. We tunnelled into the hill. The hills were very steep. We just tunnelled into the side of the hill.

Was this at Durrant's Post?

Yes, at Durrant's Post.

It was up that far? So you lived up there?

Oh yes. Well the front line was just a climb of about eight or ten steps. When you came out for your rest you'd get into this little hole on the side of the hill.

How big was it? Can you give me some idea? Would it be six feet or something?

It could be six feet wide, yes it would six feet wide, and I suppose seven or eight feet deep.

What was the roof made out of? Was that earth?

Earth.

So you actually dug into the hill?

Tunnelled in on the side.

Weren't you afraid it might fall in on you?

Well it didn't (laughs).

You didn't shore it up or anything, with timber and so on?

No, it was a pretty tough sort of area there.

And who did you share it with?

I'm just trying to think of his name. 'Macka' was his name. I know it real well, but I can't think of it.

He was a Scotsman, was he? Or he had a Scottish name?

Scottish name. Oh God. I've got his photo here and everything. Anyway, I'll think of it before you go. Not that it matters, I suppose.

No, I particularly want to know people's names. Were you in that dugout for the whole period?

The whole period we were there, yes.

I suppose you made it fairly homely, did you?

Oh yes.

You'd gather bits and pieces up to make a bed or something?

Oh no. It was reasonably comfortable. We were there about three months I think, that's about all. But all the heavy stuff was over before we got there.

It snowed didn't it, while you were there?

Yes, it was the first snow I'd seen too. Really getting an education, wasn't I. Everything was the first time.

What about the donkeys? Did you have anything to do with taking supplies up and down?

No, there was an Indian troop or company. They had the mules. They used to bring the tucker up at night, the Indians.

Did you do any patrolling?

Yes.

You used to go out, did you?

We had to patrol out in front.

How were they organised?

Small groups - about six or seven men, that's as many as there'd be, under a sergeant or a junior officer. Just to make sure that the Turks weren't climbing up our bloody hill (laughs).

And how far out would you go?

Not too far, no. Four or five chain I suppose.

That would be pretty nerve wracking wouldn't it?

Yes, the first time. We were doing it a few times. To get back to young Les Henley, he used to go out and prowl around, you know, hoping to meet them. And the rest of us used to hope that they were at home (laughs). Yes, poor old Les. He was very keen. He wanted to capture one. The trouble is, he might not have been alone. He might have had four or five mates. Makes it a good deal more difficult!

Were you in A Company at that time?

Yes.

You were always in A Company?

Always in A Company.

And what was the beach itself like? Did you spend much time actually down on the beach?

No, not a lot of time. Oh it wasn't a very big beach, not a big beach. They had a pile of stuff there of course.

Supplies and so on?

Yes. No, I was surprised when I was back there in 1965 to see that it was not as big as I thought it had been.

Did you go back up to Durrant's Post when you were there in 1965?

No, we tried hard. In buses we went up to - the New Zealand memorial is higher up than where we were. And I tried to get down to Durrant's Post, but it was too steep, and too rugged. So I didn't bother. And the next day we came back to Anzac Beach. And a New Zealander bloke and myself, we thought we would get up to Cheshire Ridge. That's where Durrant's Post was. But we couldn't make it either. Too old.

Yes, I suppose so.

Apart from that, we were afraid of missing the bus. We didn't want to be stranded up there alone. There might be some Turks up there (laughs).

What was it like when it snowed? One of the fellows from the 14th told me that when they woke up that morning, the whole dugout was completely snowed in. They had to tunnel their way out.

Oh well, it could have been. It wasn't that heavy. Well the 14th were right next to us. They were in Durrant's Post too. They were on our left. They joined us. But it could have been there. But where we were it snowed, but it wasn't heavy. About that high. Four or five inches.

I think that you were telling me that the hospital ship was out in the - you could see the lights of the hospital ship.

I think I told you that.

Yes, you did.

That was the first information we had that something was happening, or the first information I heard. You could see the hospital ships - they were nice and bright - something to look to - and you could see them getting cloudy and then they passed out.

Slowly getting hidden from view?

Yes.

How were your spirits at that time? Were you depressed by the place or..?

No. I was at first. I had a bad attack of dysentery, and I can remember sitting on the old latrines remembering that the South African war, the Boer War lasted for three years. And I thought, God in heaven, I'll never see three years out here! (laughs) I can remember that as well as anything. The old stomach was torn to ribbons you know, from diarrhoea. Three years! Gawd!

It was very primitive, wasn't it.

Oh yes, of course.

What about shelling and sniping up there? Was shelling and sniping a problem there or not?

Where we were it was very quiet. They used to fire a few shots at us, and our people used to fire a few shots back, just to let them know that the area was still inhabited. No it was very quiet.

What would be your strongest memory of being on Gallipoli? What would be the strongest opinion of it? What's the strongest impression, if there is any?

Just in what way?

Well, I've asked other people. For example, Bill Bradnock, to him it was the smell of the dead soldiers that stayed with him. He was there right from the beginning, and...

Well we didn't have that problem. There were a terrible lot of casualties in the earlier part, around about Quinn's Post, and some of the places around there. The cemetery at Quinn's has a huge number of 15th Battalion blokes, a huge number.

That's interesting. I know that it was one of the worst places on the Peninsula.

Yes, apparently. There were a lot of 13th there too, but the 15th lost more. Well they had more bodies buried there I think than any other unit.

And did you have any awareness that there was going to be an evacuation, or not? Did you suspect it?

Kind of, but we didn't know. There were rumours going about that the Canadians were going to relieve us and all this sort of thing that generally goes on. But towards the last week it was very evident what was happening.

In what way? What were the clues to it?

Well, for one thing, blokes would drift down to the beach in singles and twos. They'd be about half a company who'd be there. They'd form them up and march them up to take up a position in the front line, to give the impression that there were fresh troops coming in. And then they destroyed and burnt a hell of a lot of rubbish and everything down on the beach. They destroyed all the ammunition, and boxes of biscuits and you know, a hell of a lot of rubbish. Those fires were going for three or four days, which were very suspicious to anyone with any thinking.

I didn't realise they burnt anything on the beach.

Yes, my word. So we reckoned that we were on the move. We didn't know actually when.

And how did they organise you? I mean, what happened when you actually did evacuate? Was it at night? I suppose it must have been?

Oh yes, midnight, my dear fellow, midnight. Oh they drifted down in - they thinned the line out. You know what happened don't you. There's a few would go out here and a few here. They left a very thin line at the finish -

This is over a period of nights, is it?

Yes, well I think about three nights. We left on the 18th December, and the final night was the 19th. That was the final one that went out. But there was a mob went out on the 17th, I know. That was the night before us. But there could have been other places they could have been going out for longer than that. But we had it for three days, anyhow, from our area.

You went out on the 18th did you?

The night of the 18th. The 19th was the last night, the last batch went out.

And after Lemnos you went back to Egypt, and you were at Ismailia for a time.

That's right, as Ismailia.

Then you went over to Tel-el-Kebir.

Oh yes.

There was an old battlefield at Tel-el-Kebir.

That's right.

Did you ever find anything there?

We weren't interested in finding anything.

You didn't look for anything?

No, you'll have to dig up your Egyptian history.

I know a bit about it.

Oh you know about it. Well I don't. Kitchener was it? Or Gordon, or somebody?

I don't know who was in charge. I think it was Gordon. The same campaign.

That's right, the 4th and 5th Divisions were formed there.

How far was that from Cairo?

I don't know.

Was there a train going in?

Yes.

And of course you went on the march down to Serapeum?

Down to Serapeum, that's correct.

I think you told me before you had 200 rounds of ammunition. Is that right? Is it 200 rounds or 120 rounds?

I think it was 200. I lent mine to a camel that came along! I think it was 200.

Very sensible. I was talking with a Percy Bland in Melbourne a little while ago. He also did the march.

Percy Bland.

A 14th Battalion pioneer.

Oh no. I knew a Percy Bland, but that wasn't him, I don't think.

He lost a leg.

Oh no, it's not the one I knew.

They lost all of theirs in the sand. The dropped it as they went.

Oh, that was a pity. They might have been attacked! I think it was 200, but it could have been 120.

No I reckon you are right. How would you usefully carry that ammunition?

It was in bandoliers, you know, those cloth type of bandoliers.

Each bandolier would have ten or twenty...

Pockets. Oh they would carry the lot.

END OF AWM TAPE 6
(Realistic microcassette Side A)

START OF AWM TAPE 7

When you first told me about that picture (the photograph of Australians marching through the desert in Adam-Smith's book), I thought that was probably right. That's what it sounded like to me. And when I went to Tasmania not long afterwards, this would be January last year, I located a set of photographs by a Lieutenant Brettingham-Moore, and he'd taken these pictures in Egypt, and some of them were on the march. And you all had Tommy pith helmets, and the shorts.

That's right.

Yes, it wasn't anything like that photo.

Not like that picture at all.

I hope to publish some of those pictures, so this time we'll get it right.

It upset the New Zealanders, because we were straggling in. Well not we, but our unit was straggling in. We came first to the Canal, and there was a New Zealand camp at Moascar. We went passed there to Serapeum. And they thought we were Pommies! "Here's the Pommies!" But it was the poor old Aussies.

They came out and helped you, didn't they?

Yes.

With their water carts, I suppose?

Carts and transports.

Did they feed you?

I couldn't say what they did. They didn't feed our little group. We were pretty straggly you know, by the time we got down to there. I don't remember any feeding. They may have. Somebody must have fed us.

Did Harry Murray do that march too, or not?

Yes, he would have to, wouldn't he.

I think he did. He must have.

Unless he was away at school somewhere.

And they chafed, didn't they, these uniforms?

Oh yes. Well they were those cotton things that the Pommies had as a summer uniform.

Callico?

Yes, something like that. Not callico, more of a...I don't know. Anyhow, they did chafe. Some of the blokes chafed rather badly.

Around your crotch, you mean.

Yes.

And did you get new boots?

I suppose so. They wouldn't help much, would they. No, we would get fitted out when we came back to Moascar, I suppose, in the first place.

I think there were a lot of flies too on that march, weren't there?

Oh, there were always flies in Egypt. Oh the sand was our problem, bloody loose sand half way up your boots

It would get in your boots, would it.

I suppose so.

You mean it was just very difficult to walk in it?

Yes. That's where the 4th and 5th Divisions were formed, there.

Whereabouts was your brother, Frank, at that time? He didn't go overseas with you on the *Shropshire*, did he?

Oh no.

Had he left before you went?

Yes.

Did you see him on Gallipoli?

Yes, oh yes. He got badly hurt there, I don't know just when. But before the evacuation. He was back in Egypt when we got back there.

And what was the attitude of the officers on the march? Did they suffer as much as the men?

I suppose they did. Oh well, they were only the same blokes in different uniforms. You see them today in civilian suits, nothing to describe them as officers. Oh no, we were all blokes out of the mob. It could be anyone, providing you showed certain qualities that were required. It didn't alter his outward appearance very much.

You weren't supposed to drink any of the water from the Canal?

No, well it was like some of the water here. It had a good deal of bacteria in it, but I did see some blokes get into the water, but I don't think they died. Not from the water anyhow. Yes, it was a bit unfortunate because there was a Sweetwater Canal ran along our route, right like alongside the road. Very tempting.

Why didn't they give you enough water? What was the problem?

Oh well, we used too much I suppose.

You drank it?

Yes, got into it too early.

And you managed to keep up?

Yes.

And you got down to Serapeum?

We had a swim there.

As soon as you arrived I suppose you went in?

Straight in (laughs). Oh yes. We didn't have far to go then, on the other side. Our camp was practically on the bank.

What was the pontoon bridge like at Serapeum? Can you describe it? Did it float or not?

Oh yes. My impression was it was on drums.

Like 44 gallon drums?

Yes, that type of thing. They might have been bigger. Actually after that little bit of a walk, you don't go down and see what the bloody bridge is made of.

No, I know that.

Because we are taking those things, not only on that day, but every day we've got something if you're moving us around. But it carried us anyway.

So the pontoon bridge was floating on the Canal?

Yes.

And you had to go down to it and go across it and then up the other bank.

Yes.

How wide was it, at a guess?

I don't know. I suppose it would be wide enough to carry a vehicle, wouldn't it.

So it would only be say twelve feet wide?

Yes, it might be twelve feet wide.

And they would have to move it out of the way for a ship, I suppose?

Yes, just swung one end around.

For some reason I've always been imagining the thing was up in the air.

No.

It was just floating on the Canal. It was something the army had put there.

Yes.

What else was there at Serapeum? Was there a town?

No, there was a little signal box. There was a railway along the bank.

On the Asiatic side?

No, on the Egyptian side. But I can't recall ever seeing a train there. But I'm pretty sure there was a railway there. And then there was just a little bit of a place like a bit of an office which was the railway station. Something like the thing that is at Alamein, and those places.

And you used to go swimming, I gather?

Yes.

Whereabouts did you learn to swim, in the Murray?

Oh Lord no. In a little dam down near Fosterville near Bendigo. All the kids from the bush could swim.

And you remember Anzac Day, don't you.

Yes.

You're about the only person I've talked with really who remembers it very well.

Yes, I told you. I had a program, but I haven't found it. Well I can't do much finding anyhow. I can't see. But I know I had a program.

The Prince of Wales was there that day, wasn't he.

He was, yes.

He came down on a barge?

A barge of some sort.

And all the men got on top of it?

Not all of them, some of them. A few. Yes, the poor little Prince. Yes, it was the first anniversary of the Landing at Anzac.

The ships used to come up the Canal, didn't they...

Oh yes.

And a number of men have told me they used to swim out to get things from the ship. Did you ever do that?

No.

Why not?

I don't now, I just didn't. But I'd seen that too. I'd seen the fellows swim out to the ship.

Have you? It was a bit dangerous, I think.

Well I think it was too. You used to keep well away from the propeller. They'd want to do that. Of course the ships came very slowly through the Canal so that there would not be any splash up the sides. Very slow, oh I suppose four or five miles an hour. Yes, at Serapeum. That's a long way back, isn't it?

Yes. What do you remember about Anzac Day? They had a high diving tower didn't they? I've got a letter that describes it fairly well. They had competitions, didn't they?

Oh yes, oh my word. As I say, the program was about different races, and different items. I had a good day's entertainment. Well, it was a break from racing around in the desert.

Someone stole some whiskey from the Prince's tent, didn't they?

So the story goes. He had to go without it, the poor little chap. He was not a very imposing figure, the little Prince of Wales. He was a staff officer, a Staff Captain I think, on the General Staff, but I suppose in his case it was just a matter of being there. McFadden is the name of that lad who shared the dugout with me.

What was his christian name?

Ron - Roy we used to call him, but I think his name was Ron.

Where did he come from?

Oh, Sydney, yes Sydney.

He was a pal of yours, I gather.

Oh yes.

You all used to have nicknames, didn't you?

Yes.

Did you ever have a nickname?

I suppose I did. I can't think of anything that flattered me. No I was Grumpy, because my name was Groutsch, see. That's one I remember, but I had several others too.

What were some of the others you can remember? That's interesting, that.

Oh well, I'll leave it to you. You can put any name you like.

One of my grandfather's friends was Tom Chataway.

Oh yes.

And he was always Chatty by name, and Chatty by nature, he was.

Well that's going back a long way, isn't it. Seventy years. A lot of things have happened since.

And you had to create these defence posts out in the desert, didn't you?

Yes.

What kind of defences were they?

Well, they would dig a trench, you know, a sort of - a post they called it. And put the dirt in sandbags and build up a barricade in front.

How many would there be in a defence post, a company I suppose?

Oh no, well yes, there would be in a position, but there would be about ten or a dozen of these firepits as we called them. But we didn't have to use them because they had mounted patrols out in front too.

This is the Light Horse?

Yes. We never saw any Turks.

I suppose it would be fairly monotonous out there?

Oh very monotonous. You wouldn't stay very long. They had a light railway that they run them up from the camp. You sat there a couple of days and then they'd bring you back to the Canal. It was mostly shovelling sand out of holes in the ground that they had.

You didn't become a specialist? You didn't join the Lewis gunners or the bombers, or the signallers, or whatever?

No, I was a Lewis gunner.

Were you?

Yes.

What were they like, the Lewis gun? I mean, when you fired them did they recoil?

Not much.

They fired the same ammo as a .303

Same ammo, only it was on a rotary....

On a pannier?

A pannier, yes.

Some people have told me that they recoiled, and another fellow has told me that they actually would move away from you.

I never found that. If you hang onto them they don't move. I never had much trouble with them. They were not a bad little gun. That's all out. It's the Bren now isn't it?

Yes.

Well I don't think it is. You point something at somebody and press your thumb and a ray of light flies across and does the job.

Just about (laughs). You're not missing much.

You want to watch some of this - what do they call this stuff in there?

The Star Wars, you are talking about?

Yes.

Yes, I know what you mean. Did you every have much to do with the camels in Egypt? Did you ever go on them?

Oh yes, I've ridden them, but not much to do with them, no. Had a ride on them. The first ride on a camel was at the Pyramids before we went to Gallipoli. There was a herd of camels out there. You could hire them, and you could hire a Gypso to run along with it.

And you climbed up the Pyramids, didn't you?

Yes.

What kind of an effort was that? Was that a difficult thing to do?

Oh yes, but we were pretty fit and young and stupid. And everybody else was doing it so that's what happened.

Yes, you went across to Marseilles on the *Transylvania*? You sent me a postcard of that which I copied. You won seventy pounds didn't you, playing two-up?

Yes, that's true.

And then when you got to Marseilles you were left behind on the wharf, weren't you?

That's right. We were in charge of the baggage, and the Pommies wouldn't let us ride on the trucks, so we went the other way.

You walked, you mean, you walked down to the station?

Oh a different station. No, there's a story, you don't have to put it all in (laughs).

You told me about that one before.

We joined the transport unit, and went up to Abbeville. Picked up some mules there.

Where did you stay at Marseilles that night, do you remember?

No, I don't. I don't think we stayed in Marseilles that night. We actually went a bit further. We went up to Monte Carlo and stayed up there.

Did you?

That was the best way to go. The other train would only take you up to where the guns were going, so we thought we might never get to Monte Carlo again, this is the time to do it.

So you missed the train, so you had time, so you went across to Monte Carlo?

Yes.

(laughs) Good idea. What did you do there?

Not very much. They wouldn't let us – we didn't have much money. We had enough money, but they wouldn't let us have a bet there. We were in uniform see. In other words, we had no right to be there, and if anything happened they didn't want to know that we had been there.

These are the officials at the casino?

But we had a look through it.

You didn't waste any time getting over there (laughs).

Oh no.

You went on leave to England I assume?

Yes.

Did you have any relatives in England?

No.

So when you went across to England, whereabouts did you go? To London, I assume?

Yes. I went to London. I went everywhere really, well when I say everywhere, I didn't go everywhere.

This is in Scotland and England?

I'd been to Scotland, England, Ireland. When I say Ireland, I went to Dublin and a few little villages, a few little farms around Dublin. Fortunately I - on this little boat going across to Dublin, there were two other Australian lads who had uncles or something over there, and I tagged on with them and we stayed out at the little farmhouses for two or three days.

That would be nice. Did you spend much time in London?

I was there three times. No, not a lot. A week I suppose. See we only got 10 days leave at each burst, but I think I had about three of it might have been four burst there. I got up to Scotland, and to Edinburgh and Paisley.

Who did you go with? Did you have friends?

Well you meet people, or you have someone from the Battalion. You don't just wander up on your own.

Whereabouts would you stay in London?

The first couple of times I stayed in the Shaftsbury Hotel, which is in Shaftsbury Avenue.

I know where that is. I don't know whether it's the same one. I assume it is. In the front of that square.

Shaftsbury Avenue. And three of us stayed there for a couple of days, and the next time we came over I went to the Shaftsbury and they couldn't accommodate me. They were full up, but they sent me - the lady in the booking office sent me to a lady who had a boarding house not far away - a Miss Jackson. She said, "She might put you up because we do send people there." And when I get to Miss Jackson's, she's the auntie of a chap that I knew very well on our little farm over in Victoria.

Really, over at Fosterville?

Yes, it was amazing.

This is near Runnymede and Elmore?

No, we had this little farm near Ulupna, not very far from - between Nathalia and Strathmerton. And the Jacksons were there, and she happened to be the auntie of these blokes.

Isn't that strange.

Isn't that amazing. Tells you how tiny the world is. Yes, I stayed there for a while, and I met a couple of Yanks there, and we sort of knocked about together for a few days.

Can you remember the two fellows you stayed with in Shaftsbury Hotel?

Yes, Jock Mitchell and his brother. I can't put a christian name on them.

Were they were 13th men?

Oh yes. They were pals of mine. Three of us slept in a double-bed. That was the only accommodation we could get, so three of us slept in it. And we were there for about three days, and the girl used to come down in the morning and she said, "Who slept on the floor last night?" (laughs) She reckoned one of us had to sleep on the floor. That's in the Shaftsbury, I remember that. One was Jack Mitchell and the other was Laurie Mitchell.

Whereabouts did they come from?

Sydney. I'll tell you the suburb directly, not that it matters. Laurie's name was Jock. He was never called anything else, only Jock.

Jack and Jock?

Jack and Jock. Three of us in this double bed. I think we had three nights in it.

How comfortable was that?

Oh quite comfortable, although it's a lot in a bedstead.

And what did you do? Did you go and see any plays?

Oh yes, we saw everything.

Can you remember any of the plays?

Oh God, you're making it a bit hard.

Yes, that is hard. They used to have Chou Chin Chow.

I saw Chou Chin Chow.

What was that about?

Oh, don't ask me now (laughs).

No, OK.

We went to two or three variety shows too, the Hippodrome and a few of those other places.

What is a variety show? It's like a singing, vaudeville kind of thing?

That's the sort of thing, yes. Not a big long play, you know, different items. Short sketches, and things like that.

They'd have, what, magicians? Clowns or dancers, and so on?

Yes, that's the kind of thing. Well, you're taxing my memory?

No, I know I am there. That is difficult. I agree. Were you a drinker at that? I know a number of the men didn't worry much about it.

I didn't worry much about it, but we always had a drink. But we didn't spend a lot of time doing that. We'd have a drink in the evening, like when you've finished your day's work.

Whereabouts did you go in London site-seeing?

Oh well, where else would you go?

The general ones, I suppose.

The Albert Hall, and different places like that.

You went to the Albert Hall, did you. Some of the concerts, you mean?

Yes, Covent Garden's in there. I haven't thought of these things for many years.

What about Horseferry Road? What was that like there?

I heard something about Horseferry Road here yesterday. It's on one of the shows. Well Horseferry Road was where AIF headquarters was, and there was a big accommodation place at Horseferry Road too for the troops.

Did you stay there?

I never stayed there, no. I had a meal or two there when we happened to be at Victoria Street, up that way.

Did you have to have coupons to buy meals, or...?

I think so. I don't remember that now. I don't know really. I suppose we did.

Whereabouts did you go up in Scotland?

Edinburgh, Paisley, and two or three other places.

Who did you go up there with?

A couple of coves who I had never seen before, but they were in Australian uniform. I got to know a family in Edinburgh, a very nice family too. I don't know how it happened, but the young lady was managing an insurance office, and they took me out to their place several times, and even wrote to me since I came home.

Did they put you up?

No, no.

They just gave me a meal, or something.

They didn't put me up, although I had a room.

Yes, it's a lovely city, Edinburgh, isn't it?

Yes, it is too. Did you spend much time in Edinburgh?

I've been there twice, the second time I was there for about a week.

Nice people. They were very kind and nice people. I don't know how we came to meet this family. I don't know how it happened, but it just happened. And they were very kind and nice people.

What was their name?

Oh, I can't tell you?

That's OK. And how many of there were you that went across to Monte Carlo? The whole group of you that were left behind?

Yes.

Seven or eight of you, were there?

About seven, I think.

How long did it take you to get over there?

Can't tell you. It was not very far to go, you know, as distances go, when you've walked half-way round the world. It's easy to say it's not far (laughs).

Did you ever – in France some of the men used to have difficulty getting a good meal, or got tired of the army fare, and they would pinch a few chooks, or vegetables or something. Did you do that also?

Do I have to admit anything?

Oh you know, whatever the truth is (laughs).

Oh yes, everybody did that.

Did they? What did you take? Did you ever go into the chookhouse and pinch a couple of chooks?

No, but I did assist in the dismembering of them afterwards. Oh no, I never actually stole them, but I've eaten some that I knew was stolen.

What were the cooks like generally?

The army cooks? Well, I don't know that they were cooks really, but they didn't have much to cook.

It was all stew, wasn't it?

Yes, that was the only way they could make a meal of it.

I think you were telling me that when you first arrived in France you went up to Bois Grenier. You were attacked by a rat there, weren't you. Bitten on the toe.

My God yes, fancy you remembering that.

I've got it on tape (laughs). What's the story?

That's all it is.

You were asleep were you?

Yes, oh that's all it is. The trenches were full of bloody rats. See, the rations used to come up at night, and there'd be bread and cheese or something like that. The rats would be there before the bags got there (laughs). Yes, that's true. Fancy you remembering that. Fancy me remembering it. I don't remember it now.

Would you go down to the estaminets much?

Not a great lot.

What would they serve you?

Beer, a weak beer. No we didn't bother with them very much.

Did they serve meals also, or not?

I don't think I ever had a meal there. It's hard to say now.

I might get something more from you on Stormy Trench. I don't know quite how to start on it, but...do you remember D. P. Wells very well?

'Dippy' Wells, yes.

He was called 'Dippy' was he?

He later became the Registrar-General in New South Wales.

There is a diary of his in the Mitchell Library. He was taken prisoner at Bullecourt.

'Dippy', I don't think he was (laughs). Yes I'm mixing them up. 'Dippy' was taken prisoner there. He had charge of B Company. He's not the Wells I'm thinking about that was Registrar-General. It was Tony Wells. Yes 'Dippy' was taken – yes of course he was.

What about Shirtley?

'Bluey' Shirtley.

'Bluey' was he?

He was killed with the Yanks in September. What have you got about him.

He was a lieutenant wasn't he. I've got a lot of letters that he wrote.

Have you really. He was the Intelligence Officer. And I think I've told you that when the Yanks first came in, Monash gathered up a couple of divisions of them into his Corps. And he arranged for what they call a mission of Australians to go with these people, and sort of help them. And 'Bluey' Shirtley was with one unit, and he got killed. It was a pity that happened.

What about T. E. White, the author of the History? I think he used to be known as 'Windy' White.

'Windy' White, yes, he was a school teacher at Deniliquin.

And what about Douglas Marks?

A very efficient young man, very efficient. I told you he drowned.

He was only 24 apparently.

Twenty-four when he died, yes.

He must have been young when he was a Colonel.

A very efficient young man.

At Stormy Trench there was a really big barrage, wasn't there, before you started?

From our side?

Yes.

And there was a barrage from the other side too.

That was after you got in, wasn't it.

Well the 15th would tell you the story of that, the early part. I think they went over a couple of days before us.

That's right.

And the counterattack was so severe that they had to leave. Yes, well after those sort of things you don't know much about it. Everything seems to be happening at once, all over the place. I know they attacked us there very hard, and it wasn't much fun. There's a whole heap of places somewhat similar, unfortunately. Yes, Harry Murray won his VC there.

What were you – of course you were in A Company, and your role that night was simply that of an infantryman? You didn't have any particular duty, did you?

I was a runner.

You were a runner? Oh that's what I was trying to get at. Well that's an awkward job to be doing.

Yes. I was a runner that night. It was a pretty stormy night too.

Did you have anything to do with the German prisoners that were captured?

We did see some of them. Down at headquarters when we were there, there was a bunch of them, oh when I say a bunch of them, perhaps three or four were brought in, and afterwards one of them declared he was the Town Clerk of Munich or somewhere. He could speak English.

You were going between the frontline and headquarters all the time, were you?

Yes.

What kind of messages were you taking?

I don't know what they were really. They were just paper. It would be notifying headquarters of their position and how things were going, and what if any help was wanted, and that sort of thing. Incidentally we got a German message dog at that place.

When you took the German line you found a German message dog?

No, I'm not quite clear on this, but I think the dog came back to that place after the blokes were in there, to deliver a message. He'd been in the habit of delivering a message. I don't know, I didn't see the incident, but I saw the dog.

What kind of dog was it, a German Alsatian was it?

No, it wasn't an Alsatian. It was a non-descript sort of dog about that high.

About two feet high.

I'm not quite sure of his colouring now either. I think it was sort of a buff colour. Yes, he was at Battalion headquarters. Well I think they brought him home. Well I know they brought him home.

To Australia?

Yes, and he was in the War Museum at Canberra. Make some enquiries next time you are there as to whether...

They stuffed him, I gather?

Oh yes, I didn't see him, mind you, but I read in one of those little brochures that you get from Canberra describing the Memorial, and it mentioned the dog. Yes, that was a pretty wild sort of night really, but there were many nights like that.

And what did you do when you first arrived in the German line? Did you have to help construct barricades, and so on, or..?

No, I didn't. I don't know. I just ambled in there, and I had to stay near where headquarters was, where Murray and two or three other blokes were collected. Murray had his own runner, a little batman called Rollin. He was his batman, and he was his runner too. I think he got hurt that night.

Rollin did?

Yes.

So you took over did you?

Not me. I mean several of us did.

Acting as runners?

Yes. There were a little group at headquarters who were runners. It's a section of its own. You probably know that.

No, I didn't.

And there were quite a few of us up there.

And were you taking up ammunition as well?

No, not there. I took some ammunition up to Bullecourt.

That's right, yes.

No, I don't know why we didn't take it up there, but they had enough carriers, I suppose. We were just concentrating on getting word back as to what the situation was.

In the Battalion History, Robertson and Roy Withers are mentioned quite a lot, and I know you mentioned them when I was talking to you.

That's right, big Roy Withers, yes.

They were big men, were they?

Withers was a big fellow. We used to call him Big Roy. He got a commission afterwards, and he went to the Dunsterforce. A lot of our blokes went across into Persia to help some Townsend down there. He went there, Big Roy. Yes, they fought very hard. I saw some of their work.

What were they doing?

Oh, they were bombing and shooting and kicking blokes in the guts. Oh, like maniacs. It was a hell of a night. They were both concentrating largely on bombs. That's a great weapon under those conditions.

How potent were the German egg-bombs? They could throw them further, couldn't they?

Throw them about 50 yards. They were not very big.

I've seen one. Harry Townsend in Sydney showed me one.

Old Harry did. When did you see him?

In February last year?

Well if you see him again, talk about me.

I will.

I knew Harry very well. He's two years older than I am.

Well, I believe he is still alive. I haven't been told otherwise anyway.

I think he finished up as regimental sergeant-major.

Yes, he did I think. He was certainly a company sergeant major anyway. The Germans started shelling you, didn't they? The Germans started shelling Stormy Trench not long after you'd taken it.

Yes they did. They knocked one end of it nearly out. But it wasn't only just after, they kept shelling it. Oh that was a popular pastime really. Well fancy you knowing Harry Townsend, oh that's good.

I've got a good picture of Harry, a good colour picture.

Have you. Yes well he's no chicken now then.

He's still living at home.

Well done.

What rank did you have at Stormy Trench? Had you been promoted or not?

No.

Still a private.

I got a couple of stripes when they went with the Americans. Big time Corporal.

Did you see any other German prisoners up in the line at all, or not?

In the line?

Yes, I think there were about seventy-odd that were taken there that day.

I didn't notice any. Not at our end at that particular time. No, I must have been down at headquarters then, because I did see that German officer, the town clerk.

What were they doing, the Germans? Were they actually in headquarters being interrogated, were they?

Not all officers, no, but there was a bunch of them, and there was this officer.

What were the dugouts like at Stormy Trench? Were they really deep?

Yes, they had good deep dugouts. Yes, the old Hun did know how to build a dugout. God, you could put a company in them. Yes, we had an officer killed there too. I've been trying to think of his name. It was most unfortunate. He was a Light Horse officer, joined the unit, and then when the Camel Corps was formed he went into that. And after the Camel Corps was broken up he came back to the 13th Battalion. And he came to the Battalion about a day or two days before Stormy Trench. He went up there and he was killed. I can't think of his name.

A Company had a lot of casualties. In the History it said about 150 of you went over, and I think there were only about 65 of you who were not hit or wounded.

Not hit, yes. Well that sort of thing is finished now isn't it. Or is it?

Pretty much. Well I mustn't keep you for much longer. I have been talking to you for a couple of hours.

Oh it's wonderful to have you to talk to, or have you to talk to me.

Well just on Bullecourt, I wouldn't mind getting a little bit more on what happened afterwards. Because, I know you mentioned before you saw Brigadier Brand, and I know that everyone was very upset by what had happened. Where did you go after the attack? It was the 11th April, so you were back with the Australian lines that night, when all the other men had been captured. What did you do then? Whereabouts did you go back to?

I don't know. It was a big open field. It was a long way back. You mean where poor old Charlie gathered us up and told us how sorry he was over the whole incident? I couldn't tell you where it was.

What happened at that time?

Well that was all. There were a few sort of huts there, I think. I'm not sure of it. But I know how upset he was. We all were. Yes, but it was a terrible show. But our blokes had such a doing before they got there. They'd been up the night before, and then right back about six miles.

Then back up again.

Then back up again. Quite unfit, and yet they fought on.

What did you see when you first got into Bullecourt? Did you see any Germans at all, or not?

I saw some, yes. I didn't take a very active part. I brought some stuff up to them.

What were the Germans doing that you saw?

They were rushing down the trench throwing bombs, and that sort of thing.

This is back towards Bullecourt?

Yes.

What could you see of Bullecourt and Riencourt from the trench?

Nothing.

Didn't you?

I didn't see anything, no.

Was that because it was dark?

Because it was dark, and we weren't there long enough to go looking around in daylight. No, I didn't see anything, only these men struggling in the bloody trench. And trying to get back through the wire. That was the sad part.

This is after the withdrawal?

When they had to withdraw.

You were back at the Sunken Road, I suppose.

Yes.

And you could see them trying to get back?

Yes, I'd just been up there anyway. I knew who they were and where they were. Yes, it was not a pretty picture. Good blokes every one of them. That's it. 'Dippy' Wells was one. He was in charge of B Company. Tony Wells was the one I was thinking of. He was an A Company man.

How well was it remembered – the Battle of Bullecourt – afterwards in the Battalion? Was it just forgotten and you go on with the rest of it...of was it something that they always..?

Oh no, it was an incident, a very nasty incident. But it was done with, wasn't it. No, I never heard anyone debating it afterwards. There'd been so many other things, and things in front and everything.

It was snowing wasn't it, at Bullecourt?

That's why we didn't - the first night it snowed, all the way back to this little sunken road business where we were. Favreuil, or some place like that. Is that the name of it?

Yes, it was – Favreuil. There was Noreuil.

Noreuil was closer up. That was only about a mile from where we were.

Favreuil was where you were...

Yes, well that was about five or six miles back, wasn't it?

Yes, it was a good six miles. I think it was even more, about six or seven miles.

We went up there that night, and out into position.

What was the position? You were all lying in a big line?

Yes, waiting for the tanks to come up.

Were you part of the attacking force then, or carrying ammunition?

I was carrying stuff then.

And what happened?

The tanks were supposed to come up and take - there was no artillery at all. In other words, the wire was intact. The theory was that the tanks were going to knock the wire down so the troop could get in, but they never turned up. Then just before it got daylight, they decided they'd have to go back. The tanks couldn't get up. And going back through the snow was like telling the Germans what we are going to do tomorrow.

Is that what you thought at the time?

Yes.

You were really aware that that was what going to happen?

Of course, without much thinking. You'd know that they would see us going back across the snow, the white snow and just coming daylight.

So the Germans from the frontline at Bullecourt would be able to see right back towards Favreuil?

Yes. Oh no, not that far back. But between the trenches and the sunken road, where we started from.

So from the German trenches they would be able to see where you started from?

Yes.

Could you see them?

We could see their wire. We couldn't see any Huns of course.

So when we were lying ready to attack you were able to see the wire?

Yes. Just before daylight, it was.

So you got up and pulled back, and the Germans must have been able to see that.

They'd see us going back over the snow! See the khaki uniforms on a snow background would look like black figures. Well that's what I think, anyway.

Yes, they certainly saw you. I know that that is the case.

And then to go up the very next night. It was shocking.

You didn't expect to go up again did you?

No.

You thought that was the end of it?

Well, for the time being anyway. But the troops were completely exhausted, as you can imagine. Wandering back six miles. Up six miles. Lying in the snow all night.

No sleep.

Oh no, Christ no. And then back the next night. It was just asking for them to be killed.

What was the morale like then? I suppose it was...

Pretty low, pretty bloody low. Yes, anyway we shouldn't discuss it. It's not a very pleasant thing to be talking about.

No, I've got the story pretty well on tape.

END OF AWM TAPE 7

START OF AWM TAPE 8

Identification: David Chalk interviewing Victor Groutsch, Sunday 25th September 1988 in Finley, Tape One

And I'll ask you some of the questions about – I don't know when the last time was that you read this diary.

Oh I haven't read it since I brought it home.

Whereabouts did you get it from? It's a 1917 diary that you've kept.

It come from a Comforts Fund, or something. Did you see the book?

Which book is that? I've seen the diary of it, yes. This is a photocopy of it.

I used to write little scraps in little books at different times. And then go for a month without writing anything at all. I can remember my main feature was, it's raining, or it's a fine day. You can't write home or even in your diary, anything that someone else will read about what was going on, on the battlefield.

No, I find that too...

But that's not the thing you want to talk about.

But in the first reference you have got here, you say 'brigade sports' and that's the 1st of January 1917.

I know what happened there.

What happened?

I was a wonderful athlete. My pal and I, must be. You listen to our achievement, we won the three-legged race. Is that there?

No.

Oh well they were all gone.

That's what I would like to know about, because...

That was at a place called – no it wasn't Piquinny. There were towns just across a little creek, one on each side. Anyhow you had better tell me what you've got. I remember the Brigade sports, yes.

How were they organised, the Brigade sports? I mean, you're talking all the four battalions together, and they're competing against each other?

Not a whole battalion, just representatives.

They'd be volunteers, I suppose?

Volunteers, yes, of course.

And they would come from the various companies.

Yes.

What kind of games or sports would you be playing?

Oh just the same as they used to play in the bush before they went there.

What kind of things? Running...

Yes, running and competitions. As I said, we won – and I and another mate - we won a first prize which was presented to us by Sir John Monash. The Brigade commander was presenting the prizes.

Really? Was that in France or in Egypt.

In France. Oh now, what's the date?

This is the 1st January 1917.

Oh well that's in...

Monash wouldn't have been in '17, because he went across to the 3rd Division in about July 1916.

Anyway, he presented the prizes, I know that.

And this was in the three-legged race?

Yes.

What's a three-legged race?

Two of you stand up side by side and you tie the middle leg together.

Who was your mate?

Oh, a chap named Jack Vensell.

How do you spell his name?

Oh now, don't get into this. I could be wrong.

V-E-N-S...

Don't put that in your bloody book, for Christ's sake. I'm not sure of it. The 1st January '17.

Well, I'm just going on this, but it's whatever you remember that I'm interested in.

Oh well, of course the war was half-over by then, wasn't it. We went to France in May 1916, and there's only one Brigade sports that I know of in France, and that was when we were out having a bit of a spell, just out of the line. Not very far from Albert. If I saw the name on a map I could tell you what it was, but you don't want to know that.

What other kind of games did they have?

Oh well lots of things of course. They would play football.

Each battalion had a football team didn't it.

Yes, I had a picture of one. I gave it away to....Harry Townsend. Did he show you a picture.

I have a copy of a 16th Battalion football team. Harry showed me some, but I don't think it was that one.

No, this was the 13th. Yes, well they had football competitions and cricket competitions. When you were out of the line, and we weren't playing cricket or football with the Huns.

Right (laughs). And they were simply just to keep you occupied and fit.

Oh, to get your mind out of the trenches. And to get you fit of course too. But the main thing was so you could relax and get back to normal after being up in that bloody place for weeks.

How far did you have to run in the three-legged race?

Oh (laughs) about one hundred metres. Yards, it was then. But there were a lot of competitions like that. Kid's stuff it was.

And what did John Monash say to? Do you remember anything about that?

I do. He said, "Do you know what this is...." Did I tell you what he gave me?

No.

He handed a razor, you know, one of the old blade razors, and I hadn't had a shave that morning of course. And he said, "Do you know what this is for?" I said, "I think so, sir." Yes, we got a razor each.

Did you?

It was in the days of blade razors, well you can imagine what sort of a trial it was for blade razors under those conditions, that we were in. You know, big, rough, muddy, dirty places. Yes a Bengal razor. Yes, it was John Monash alright. I remember how he gave me the razor.

It may well have been on this 1st January – he might have been in France. Well he would have been. Third Division was in France in January 1917.

Oh yes.

You also say here that you went down to Amiens with two people called – one's Gerrard, or Stebble, or Treble, or someone like that. Do you know who they are?

I know Joe Gerrard, yes.

He was a 13th Battalion man?

Yes, of course. And what was the other one?

I'm not sure – it's Steele, that's who it is.

I can't place him.

No, this is seventy years ago. I'm not worried if you don't (laughs).

I remember doing the tour in Amiens with a chap called Shaw from Tocumwal. The Battalion was up at Mouquet Farm at that time.

Was that Albert or Amiens? Because you told me on one occasion that you went into Albert on horseback.

That's what I'm trying to think of now. With Shaw. That was Albert. Albert of course was badly knocked about by shell fire, and all that sort of thing. There were no people there. There were no citizens there.

There'd all just left?

The shops were all there, with all the material in them, and all that sort of thing.

Did you ever go poking around in some of the houses?

Yes, we did. It was quite sad. Even at Amiens, which was well behind the lines at time, the people had all gone from the outer suburbs, and they had just left their houses as it was when they were living in them. You know, big photo albums on the tables, and all that sort of thing. Just got out of it, and left it. And that was well behind the lines, but of course things moved pretty quickly. Well the Australians' job was to stop the Huns, which they did.

So they felt that the Germans were coming more or less immediately, and they had just fled.

That's right. We stopped the Huns just at a place called Villers-Brettonneaux.

Yes, that's in 1918.

It was several miles up the road from Amiens. Albert was further north, a little bit. Yes we had our – when the troops were in the line, our headquarters, not our headquarters, our transport and communication units were all back in Amiens. Or in villages thereabouts. And I know part of the job of our transport was if they brought ammunition or rations or anything up into the frontline for the troops, they'd always take a load of salvage back. Like, there were a lot of factories there, woollen factories, which created these things.

Jumpers and so on?

Yes. And that was the job of the transport. They would take shells and ammunition up at night, and then when they got back to Villers-Brettonneaux they would load up with all this material, and that would go back to French salvage.

What would you do when you went into Amiens with people like Joe Gerrard? Would you go to some of the estaminets?

You know this is seventy-odd years ago! And we went to so many other places (laughs). Yes, we did. I remember Shaw coming home with an evening cloak on, you know. With a dress cloak to go to the theatres, and one of these hats that you press down.

A top hat?

Yes.

Like, what, the real top hat?

A real top hat.

Where did he get that from?

From out of some of the houses. But there was a lot of that went on.

Where did he come from?

Tocumwal.

He was John Shaw, was he?

No, Harry Shaw.

What was his family doing in Tocumwal? Were they farmers too?

No, his father had been a mail contractor. He was driving the mail coach. The mail used to come from Denilquin by coach, you know, by horses. And that was his job. He was a coachman. He used to bring the mail from Denilquin to Tocumwal and probably go on further.

This is Harry's father?

Yes.

Was Harry working in the same business?

No, he was a drover. He was in the stock business. He was a well-known stockman at that time.

Yes, you used to be able to find some things in the villages that had been deserted.

Well everything was all. On the outskirts of that city of Amiens, which was well-back behind the lines, the Huns were coming so fast that the people just went out and left them before our people managed to get them stopped. And in those places, well, it was just as though they had walked out of it. They had left all their things on the table. Moved nothing.

On the 2nd January – you moved out from wherever near Amiens on the 1st January and you went from Coisy down to Ribemont, which you got to about four o'clock. And you were in the same billets as last time.

That's correct.

Where were you billeted?

Ribemont

(Break in interview)

We are in Ribemont, and you were telling me about the billets you were in.

Oh yes, well Ribemont was a place where we used to billet. We'd go in the line for perhaps a week or so, and then they would take us out to billets. We might get a week's spell out of the line. And we were billeted at Ribemont. That was in the cow pens and pigsties. You know, all those sort of things.

Do you remember Incinerator Kate?

Of course I do. Everybody know Incinerator Kate? Have you got a picture of her?

I know about her. I haven't seen a photograph of her, no (laughs).

She was a lady that used to poke about the incinerators. She used get boots, and any clothing that she found there, she put in.

Any rubbish and so on, she'd collect it, would she?

Yes.

She used to have a wheelbarrow, didn't she?

That's right, that's right.

You say here that 'all last night's reinforcements fall out along the road', you say. So on the march from Coisy down to Ribemont there must have been a new bunch of reinforcements that joined the Battalion.

Probably.

And they all fell out along the road.

Yes, they couldn't take it. They retired (laughs).

How much of an effort were they, those marches, from village to village? Did you enjoy them, or were they a real...

Going back to billets, you'd enjoy immensely. You were coming out of the frontline and going back to a place where you could take your boots off.

It depended where you were going?

Oh, it was only about seven or eight miles behind the line, and we used to go back there, and mostly – we knew the place so well that we would be relieved – a section in the trench would be relieved by a section coming in, and that section would go out and back on their own without forming up and forming a group for the Huns to drop shells on. Anything on. So we were billeted there many times. We knew the place, we knew the people.

You'd get to know the French people of each village, wouldn't you? Or some of the places.

Oh yes. Like we knew the people in whose place we were billeted.

So you were on a farm around the outskirts of Ribemont somewhere?

Yes.

You note here on the 3rd January that Colonel Durrant gets the DSO and he showed me Upton's DCM.

Well if I said that, that what happened.

It was raining in the afternoon.

That's the kind of thing....

Yes, that's what everybody put in there diaries. Most of the diaries that I find are like that. They are useful for that purpose, because few other people tend to record the weather (laughs), and it gives a great...

I know looking through some of the things I wrote. I'd write, you know "Came out sunny. Been raining all day." Gawd strewth! That will tell you how dull life was.

Some of the troops were cleaning up the town, you say here.

Well that would be right.

What kind of a job was that?

Oh well, there would be a fair amount of rubbish lying about the place. Troops would leave a lot of material behind at times. So I presume what the fellow wrote there would be correct. Tidying the place up.

Who were you attached to at this time, because if you – you go on to mention that Major Locke goes to the Anzac headquarters. Were you attached to headquarters time, or not. You were a runner about that time.

I had a variety of jobs there. And Major Locke – I knew 'Lockey' – yes, well that would be with headquarters of course. What did I say about Major Locke?

You said that he went up to the Anzac headquarters.

Oh yes, well he would be one of our senior officers, second-in-command I would think. W.J. M. Locke. He's an old St Patricks' Ballarat boy.

You received a very fine parcel from Auntie Kate on that day. Whereabouts was Aunt Kate? Was she in Australia?

Yes, she was.

She was from around Tocumwal, was she?

No, they lived in Melbourne – three old aunties.

Oh did they.

Fancy you finding all that out.

And you went to a concert at Mericourt?

Yes, Mericourt was a little village, not very far away. Four or five 'kilos'.

What were the concerts like? Were they put on by the troops?

By the troops, yes. Exceptionally good. There were a lot of very fine performers in the army, you know. Musicians, singers, a lot of very fine talent. Well they had a lot of people to select a few from.

And they would put the best of them together. Did they actually form a troupe?

There was a troupe, yes, but I don't know whether that came from it. Yes, there was a concert troupe, and entertainment troupe. Yes of course there was. 'Digs' Patterson and his mob.

They'd be held of a night.

This would be while we were at Ribemont, wouldn't it.

Yes, you were still at Ribemont. What kind of things would Aunt Kate send you across. Food was it, or was it clothes.

Yes, that kind of thing. Socks and singlets, and things. The army found us all those, but I suppose there could have been a packet of lollies or a packet of biscuits, or something. I have no idea at the moment. If you'd seen me 80 years ago, I'd have told you more.

(laughs) You're telling me enough now, thanks. On the 6th January you say here that B Company is inspected by General Brand.

Yes, that was our new Brigadier.

What were those inspections like? How would he carry out such an inspection?

Oh normal military inspection. Troops all on parade. They generally just ride a horse up and down instead of marching. Inspect the tents to make sure that living conditions are still hygienic.

You mention someone here called H. Shaw. That must be the person we have been talking about.

What's here done there?

You just mention that you met him?

Well, he was in the 14th Battalion, Shaw.

Oh was he. He wasn't a 13th man?

No.

Did he come back?

Yes. He beat us all back.

Did he? On the 7th January you say here that you left Ribemont at eight o'clock and you marched to Mametz, and the guards were billeted in villages we passed through, and you arrive in Melbourne Camp about one-thirty, and there is plenty of mud.

No trouble about mud. Any dates on that?

That 7th January 1917.

Is there anything about Ribemont? Is there a date on that?

Yes, Ribemont is....well you arrived in Ribemont on the 2nd January. You came up from Coisy.

Where are we there?

You have moved up to Melbourne Camp. You're in Mametz. What was Melbourne Camp like. It was nissen huts wasn't it?

Could have been. Must have been. We moved into lots of camps that had nothing at all, and we had to put up tents to keep the rain off, and then scoop the mud away so that you could lie down in it.

Did you have any stretchers...?

No.

In France you were sleeping on the ground all the time?

Yes.

Even in the billets? You'd get a bit of straw would you?

You're right. We were on straw in the billets, but on the ground. No groundsheet.

You'd get used to that I suppose?

Well, there were many thousands of troops there, you know, and no room for beds.

Well you had a splendid night's sleep anyway. That's what you say here. On the 8th January (laughs).

Gawd, that must be a mistake! (laughs) We were out of the line there, you know. We were out poking about getting ourselves fit for the next attack on the Hun.

It was a very cold and windy night, that's what you've got here.

That could have been any night in January in France.

It says here that someone called Book and I get coal, you say. Do you remember anyone called Book. It looks like...

Rook.

Rook it could be, yes.

What did we do?

You went to get some coal.

Yes, we pinched some coal. Our cookers, you'd be surprised at the coal. The supply would be at the transport dump, and you know, we probably took a couple of bags down there to get some coal to put in the brazier.

The braziers would be in the huts in Melbourne Camp. Yes it was certainly cold. This is the winter of 1916-17 of course, and it's just starting to get cold. You were all working hard improving the camp over the next few days.

Oh we were having a great old time.

(Break in interview)

...ago when the Huns started that row down at the Somme. The second period.

Yes, in '18.

Yes in 1918. And we had to stop our bloody sports meeting and get ready to move within an hour. And the thing that I have always remembered, we were training, or our unit was training, and one of our officers called Jack Brown had a team of big strong hefty fellows training for the tug-of-war. We used to have tug-of-wars. And a shell came over and skittled the whole – killed the whole bunch of them.

Really.

Jack Brown and his ten or twelve men on the rope. That was at Neuve Eglise.

You'd think you would be further behind the lines than that. Or at least out of the range of shellfire.

Oh no. Well we were out of the range of some things. They couldn't throw a hand grenade at us (laughs). Yes, it killed the whole team, and Jack Brown, the officer in charge. And then the next day, or a couple of days afterwards, that we had to pack up and move within an hour.

What kind of things would you be taking with you – if you are ordered to prepare to move...

Well you are ready to move. You've got all your gear.

You've got a pack.

A pack, what?

A pack that would go on your back.

Oh a pack, yes. Well that's it. That's it. Everything goes in that. Oh and of course, you have got to have a rifle in case you might see a Hun.

It wouldn't take you long to prepare to move would it?

The troops could move rapidly. Headquarters would have some gear, of course. And the kitchens, and all that sort of thing. But that would be a job for the transport. Yes that was when the Huns broke through at Villers Brettoneaux. We only got half-way. We got to a place called Hebuterne. This time we were travelling by bus. We got to a place called Hebuterne, and we were stopped there. They stopped the buses. The Hun had broken through about half-way down to the Somme, or just in the northern portion of it. And we stacked our packs on the side of the road, and went forward like brave soldiers to stop the enemy. They held him too. The 1st

Division, they were called down too. And they went by train. And they had just got out of the carriages, and they were packed up on the railway station ready to move off. And they got the order to re-train and go back to where they came from. That's how quick the movement was.

So they had gone somewhere, and then they heard that the...

They were down at the Somme. They'd come down from the northern area, the Messines area, up that way. And they'd gone down to the Somme. They were behind us, as a matter of fact, so you can imagine the mess that the whole thing was in really.

They didn't know what was happening?

Well there were French civilians and farmers and everybody running that way, and we were supposed to go this way, and...there was a great deal of confusion. But we managed to hold them where we encountered them. And they kept us in there for six weeks or more. We were attached to a British Army, and they wouldn't let us go, because we were the people that held them.

Well you've got here, on the 15th January, 'all braziers out by eight last night.' You must have turned in pretty early.

Well we had a tragedy there. I don't whether it was in that camp, it might have been in that camp. Where there was a tent full of twelve or thirteen, about ten blokes I think, in a tent. We were all in tents. We'd come back from the line and we were camping there, and these people took a brazier into their tent and closed it up, and they didn't report for parade in the morning, and they went to dig them up, and they were all dead.

Really?

A complete tent-load of them. A full tent.

What had happened?

The fumes from the brazier. The smoke.

The carbon dioxide.

The carbon dioxide.

Really, this is during the winter, when it was really cold.

It would have been that time of year.

This is during the winter. And they are 13th Battalion men?

You'll read about them in that book of Tom White's. Yes, a complete tent. Not one of them moved.

You wouldn't know about that happening, would you? You'd go to sleep and that would be the end of you?

Yes.

What were the braziers like? They were little stoves...

Oh well, they were usually old kerosene tins. Or any sort of a tin that you could get and punch holes in it, and put some fire in the top of it. They'd be made out of anything. They were home-made.

They were home-made?

The army doesn't supply you with those sort of things. The blokes would have to resurrect some old tins, or something. Yes, that was a very sad thing. You'd wonder they did that.

And you'd be burning any wood and so on you could find anywhere to put in it.

Anything that you could get, yes. But as I say, there was a coal dump in every area where the transport would go with their stuff, you know, from the ASC, and they'd dump it in the area somewhere as fuel for the cookers and that sort of thing. And then the troops would get busy with their sandbags, and pinch – or in other words – steal enough to warm the place. But it ended very tragically for that mob.

Well the Brigadier was entertained to dinner that day.

That would be at headquarters.

Well you thought that was noteworthy enough to put down. On the 16th there were diphtheria in Hut 22. Snowed heavily during the night, and everything was covered in the morning, and you had a great day sports-snowballing. The officers and runners and the batmen have a great battle. You were obviously a runner attached to headquarters at this time.

Yes, that's right.

Well what would you be doing? You'd be available to take messages, and the officer would give you a written message, and tell you to go and see such-and-such an officer.

Give it to so-and-so, yes.

And you'd go and do that, and then you would come back?

That's right.

Whereabouts would you wait, actually in headquarters?

At headquarters, yes.

Do you remember this day when they had this snowman and the...

Of course I don't.

At the foot of the line, the snow fight and so on.

I can remember pitching it about.

You note here that Captain Bean came to lunch. You must have obviously seen him at times coming around the Battalion.

Yes, when I was round headquarters, Bean used to come there. Put it very well didn't I – 'came to lunch'.

Well, 'Captain Bean to lunch', you say. 'Very intense artillery fire in the early morning and during the afternoon.' It was snowing all the time. This is mid-January and it's starting to snow a lot.

(Incidental conversation)

This is in January '17.

'Rain, hail, sleet, and snow', that's what you've written. That's on the 13th, and on the 12th you've written 'sunshine, rain, hail, and snow. Very cold day.' It must have been quite interesting for you though. Well you had snow on Gallipoli of course. It wasn't the first time you had seen it.

It was the first time.

Well yes, it was the first time on Gallipoli.

It was the first snow I had ever seen. You know when we were young, young people didn't get about like they do today. We never travelled because we had no money to travel with.

The ground started to freeze hard, you say.

What do I say?

'It's a fine day. Rain, but cold, and the ground has frozen hard.'

Yes, it always was. You used to put spikes in the shoes of the mules so they could walk along. Otherwise we'd put a load and their old legs would go back.

And they would fall?

Yes. Everything was frozen hard. Wood, water, mud.

It must have been pretty miserable.

I'll say. I don't know where you found that old diary. I didn't find it. John (his son) found it somewhere. Well they said I didn't have a diary.

You mention here that there is a balloon exploded by Fritz or our own shrapnel.

It was a most exciting experience, these two balloon boys had had. You know they had a series of observation balloons well back along the front. And the Huns used to take a great delight in shooting them down with the aeroplanes. This balloon, I think this will be the one – the only one that I wrote about, I'm sure. A plane came over. They generally fire a incendiary, and that just sets it up, but apparently what happened there, they fired at it, they hit and the bullet went right through it. And you know what that would mean. You see all that air rushing out a small hole would throw it over that side, and as it turned round it would throw it the other side. God, it was fun for us to see it before the two blokes got out of it. You wouldn't credit that it could do it. It covered a huge orbit. Oh as big as a city block.

Did it? The balloon was out of control?

It was tied down to its tether, but the air rushing out this small hole would just drive the balloon you see.

It was going around in circles?

Yes, throwing itself over. God how a fellow managed to get out of it, I don't know.

How high up would they have been at a guess? Five hundred feet, or more...

Oh more. Say a thousand feet, might be more.

And there were two fellows in it, and they jumped out with their parachutes?

Yes. But we used to see quite a number of them shot down by incendiaries. That was easy. They would just burst into flames, and remain there. All the boys had to do was to flop out. But this was – oh it was a mad thing. I think that's it. I wouldn't have noted it if it was just an ordinary one.

Yes I'm pretty sure that's it. You say here that it ducks madly, or something like that.

God it did go mad. They got their money's worth that day (laughs). There are some things that you remember aren't there.

That's what I'm trying to see if I can find. Frank came over to see at Mametz.

That's my brother.

He was the 19th wasn't he?

That's right. Well he was with the 55th in France.

And what happened to Frank? He died from injuries, didn't he?

Yes, from war injuries.

Here you are, you went to Flers with Vensell for water, and the track was all ice'. What was his first name again.

Oh I'm buggered if I know.

Oh you told me anyway. I've got it on tape. Whereabouts did he come from?

Sydney. Oh he and I were great mates, but I don't remember. It will come to me of course, but at the wrong time.

Was he a 7th Reinforcement too?

No. He wasn't. I don't know how long, but he came later than I did, I know that.

You went down to Longueval and...

Who was minding the homes while we were doing all this.

I don't know (laughs). You went with Rook for coal again anyway.

Oh did we.

You'd take some sandbags down would you?

Yes.

And you'd fill them up with pieces of coal, and you'd bring them back to your tent.

Of course.

Was Rook with the runners or was he...

He was a batman for Marks. Oh he used to do a bit of running too.

You say here, 'Fritz gets onto the train at Longueval with heavies.'

What gets onto the train?

Fritz, so that's shellfire.

Oh well, he had no right to do that. He ought to have known better than to do that (laughs).

When you say 'heavies', what calibre shell are you talking about.

Thick, not just one, one, one. Heavy like that. Heavy shellfire, that's what you mean. Is that what you are talking about?

Well I interpret that to mean high-explosive shells.

It would be high-explosive shells.

You'd be talking 12 or 15 inch shells?

Yes, oh a bit smaller, perhaps 6 inch stuff. They didn't have many of the 12 inch guns on the front, only a few.

Yes I've seen the big guns. They had one that used to shell Paris, didn't they?

That was about 70 miles. That was a long way then, but now we do it at about 40,000 miles (laughs), and hit the thing they are aiming at. It's become very scientific.

You watched an 'Archie' battery that day. You're talking about ack-ack aren't you?

Yes, we used to call them 'Archies'.

They'd be quite interesting to watch I'd imagine.

Oh yes, we had a bit of spare time on my hands there.

You went down to Flers with Vensell for water. How would you be doing that? You'd be going down with cans, would you?

Yes, with cans. Petrol cans.

Jerry cans.

Little two-gallon ones with a handle on it. That's the way all the water used to come up into the frontline, in petrol cans.

You were in Switch Trench at that time – this is 24th January. You leave Mametz about 10.00, and you arrive at Switch Trench at three o'clock, and you get settled down. It's freezing hard, anyway, that's what you've said. Very cold.

There's no telling lies. I think in Switch Trench, before we got settled down, somebody brought a stove out of one of the houses, and we were cooking our dinner on the stove, sitting around it, and a bloody shell came and scattered our dinner all over the place. Blew the thing away. I might have mentioned that there. That was in Switch Trench. We were sitting around the thing, and away she went.

No-one was hurt?

No-one was hurt.

It was just a piece of a shell was it?

No, the complete job.

You think it would kill somebody if it...

Quite easily.

You say here, 'Rook and I explore Flers thoroughly. The town was very much damaged'. You note here too that a couple of planes were brought down. You'd see them come down obviously.

That was a common site. We must have been out on a picnic those times.

You had a good time sliding on the ice on Flers Road, anyway. 'Good sliding on ice on Flers Road.' That's what you wrote that day. 'Shell about a yard from where we are sitting in cookhouse.'

That's it. It must be. What does it say?

'Shell about a yard from where we are sitting in cookhouse.'

Blew the cookhouse – it wasn't the cookhouse, you know, a couple of stakes stuck in the ground just a cover for the stove. The cookhouse. You don't have cookhouses up in Switch Trench. I'm supposed to have made a very unnecessary remark. When we recovered they all say that I was the first to speak, and all I said was "Finish dinner!"

What kind of a shell was it, do you think?

Oh, it was an 18 (pounder) of some sort. Or it could have been a badly timed shrapnel. A lot of the shrapnel was badly timed and instead of exploding where it should, they used to hit the ground first. So it was a small one.

Yes, a whizbang?

Oh near enough. Somewhere in between a whizbang and something else. Oh well, so I made a note of it. I remember that. We were sitting round the bloody thing. The dinner was getting cooked and this bloody shell came and dissolved the whole thing.

What were you cooking?

Oh I wouldn't know. It wouldn't be much to cook.

Was it of a night-time?

I don't think so.

During the day.

Dinner in those days was at midday, not night-time where you toffs eat. Breakfast, dinner, and tea.

Well that's what it was where I was born from. It certainly snowed a lot. You make a note of it nearly every day. You buried a B Company man about then.

That's not an incident. Christ I....

Plenty of them. You received letters on the 31st January from Lil, looks Eily..

My wife. She became my wife.

And Bert, pater – that's your father, and Uncle.

No, how do I spell Bert.

Who's Lil'?

Lil' was a young lady that I used to know. She's dead a long time.

She was from the Tocumwal area, was she. She was a girlfriend.

She was a girlfriend.

And the girlfriend was Eily.

Eileen. She became my wife.

And she was writing to you regularly in France.

Yes.

Were you engaged at that time?

No.

Just a friendship. Whereabouts was she from?

Tocumwal, across the road.

Across the road from your farm. She was the girl next door was she (laughs).

That's right, the girl next door.

What was her surname?

Turner.

Eileen Turner. Where was she working? Was she working in a store?

Girls didn't work in those days.

She wasn't working, no. She was at home.

Women didn't work, you know, before. They all stay at home until they were married. Someone would come and take one away for a housekeeper, or something. Now the girls all get work don't they. I've known very big families, eighteen and nineteen, and half of them would be girls, and they never left the place until they married.

That was the case with Eileen was it, your wife?

Oh no, she only had one sister.

And she stayed at home until you were married?

That's right.

How often would she right.

Well it's none of your business is it?

(laughs) Fair enough.

Oh pretty frequently.

One of the men I've met, Charles Devers, he met a girl about a week before he went away. He was a 15th Battalion man, and he subsequently married her. He was a very love-sick boy. I've got all of his letters while he was away.

Oh well, it was good too. You needed something like that to think about instead of bloody stoves being blown over.

That's right. Of course, this is the time just before Stormy Trench. You note here about the 15th Battalion's attack, on the 1st February.

Fancy me writing all that rubbish.

You moved up to – it looks to me to be Possum Reserve. Is that a place?

Oh I suppose it is. If it is written down there it's got to be.

The trenches were greatly improved since you were there last. That's what you have noted.

Can't recall it. But if I wrote it down it's got to be right. That was all written at the time. You don't depend on your memory to write anything like that. I had no idea I wrote all of this. No idea.

You note on 4th February, 'it was beautiful weather, and you are preparing for the attack tonight.' That was just prior to Stormy Trench. What were you doing, preparing.

Now what would you be doing.

Well priming grenades...

Make sure your rifle was clean, and you'd get your grenades all primed, and all those sort of things. When you say preparing, it's not just a personal preparation. The whole unit is preparing. Some would have to carry water, and some have to carry ammunition, and some had to clean the rifle. Some had to carry Lewis gun panniers and make sure they are all clear of mud. Well what happened after that?

There were huge stores of bombs and ammunition and flares at Chalk Pit.

I think that was advanced headquarters.

What was Chalk Pit? How big a place was that?

It's just a cavity in the side of a hill where somebody had been carting chalk out of. Pipeclay sort of stuff. It would be quite a good place – they used to set up the RAPs – that's the regimental aid posts – used to be set up in places like that. That would be a central point for the stretcher-bearers to carry there loads.

Harry Murray was A Company's captain at that time. What you've noted here on the 5th. The 4th of February was a Sunday. The 5th was a Monday. 'Attack last night very successful' you say. 'Enemy fight stubbornly. Make three counterattacks during the night. A Company very heavily engaged. 14th Battalion suffer heavily in support. 70 prisoners, and best observation during advance captured.'

You say you can't understand it.

I'm not quite sure what is being said there.

What does it say?

'14th Battalion suffer heavily in support.' They were shelled weren't they?

Yes.

They were the company in support. '70 prisoners and best observation during advance captured.' That's what it looks like.

Seventy prisoners captured there. That would be right. Yes, the 14th Battalion were in support that night. That was – I've got muddled up on – I sort of half-told you about it previously didn't I, when we were talking about Wadsworth.

That's right, the 16th you mentioned. It was the 14th.

It was the 14th there, but the 16th were in support of us somewhere else. I can't place them just now, but that's right. The 14th came up. As we moved out they moved in, you see, in support. So that's that.

'Heavy shelling on new position. A Company relieved by D Company of the 16th'

Well there you are.

Yes, you're a day out.

But we never stopped very long on reporting those things.

No, well for an all-night attack, you are writing this I presume the same day or the following – it says 'last night' so you are writing it on the 5th February. 'The Brigadier was greatly pleased'. That's what you note here.

Well, he would be. The unfortunate thing about that Switch Trench business. The 15th had taken it the night before, and they were hunted out. The old Hun used to come back early in the morning. Yes well I had no idea I had put all that on paper.

You were a runner that night, weren't you? You were going backwards and forwards from A Company?

END OF AWM TAPE 8

START OF AWM TAPE 9

Identification: Tape Two

How many times would you have gone back to headquarters, half-a-dozen, or less or more?

Oh it would be less than that, I think. Oh it could be four or five. I mean you don't count them. You go like hell, and stay away as long as you can, sort of thing (laughs). Well we used to guide a few prisoners back occasionally too. My God, I had no idea I wrote all that sort of stuff. I must get it and read it myself. We can't have been doing much fighting can we.

Oh it wouldn't take you long to write a little bit like that.

Oh no, of course not.

You had General Birdwood at Battalion headquarters on the 14th February.

He used to come around occasionally.

'Walked to Meaulte'.

Meaulte. That's where divisional headquarters were. Birdwood had the division.

You went down with Joe Gerrard and Eastey.

Bill Eastey.

It's not just Bill East, it's Bill Eastey.

Yes, Eastey. General Birdwood used to do his walks of a morning too.

This is around the Battalion you mean?

No, this was away from the Battalion a bit where we met him. Out on the route. I don't know where we were, but we – Meaulte was only a few kilometres, perhaps two, from where we were. Where were we at that time?

You were at Mametz. You'd gone back to Mametz camp after Stormy Trench. And you met General Birdwood on a route march, did you?

No, just an exercise march. There was a couple of us just going for a walk to get the smell of the place out of your system, and he was doing the same thing.

Was he? And you passed him on the road?

He just stopped and had a word with us.

He was generally fairly popular, wasn't he?

Very popular officer. He was our original commander.

The artillery seems to have been all the time firing – you know, everyday.

Well, that's what they are for.

Yes.

It was like a thunderstorm. That's what it sounds like. If you are a distance away from the place all you can hear is a rumble, a big rumble, just like a heavy thunderstorm.

And that was going more or less all the time.

All the time. All the time, while the ammunition lasted.

You went back to Ribemont again in February...

We were there several times.

You were attached to headquarters so you knew more or less what was happening. Because General Brand, you note, went on leave, and Colonel Durrant took the Brigade, that's right.

That's right, oh yes, keep your eye to the ground. Ear to the ground. Oh no, I was around headquarters.

How many staff would there have been at headquarters?

Oh I couldn't tell you.

Would there have been twenty?

Oh more than that, a lot more than that. You see there were stretcher-bearers and signallers, and runners, and you know, Q store, a lot of...

All the administration staff.

Yes, all the administration staff.

You went on a church parade on the 25th February.

Where to?

You don't say, but you are still in Ribemont, so you went on church parade somewhere. That's Sunday 25th. That would be a morning service somewhere I suppose. Were they compulsory to go to?

Oh no. It was not compulsory, but more or less they were, if you didn't go on church parade they'd find you something to do that would be a lot worse than church parade.

What were the church parades like? They'd have hymn singing and a service, obviously.

Oh yes, very similar to what we have in our Christian churches here. It was all denominational. Jews were not forced to go to Christian services.

You went to the pictures at Mericourt on the 27th February. They had a picture show.

What was the program?

Doesn't say.

Oh Geez, I should have put that in!

Charlie Chaplin, I gather.

My God, I don't know where you found that book that I wrote all that rubbish in.

'The 4th Machine Gun Company defeated the Welsh Guards at rugby 3 – 0.'

Well done.

'The German retreat continues', you note on the 28th, so the Germans had already started to pull out.

Where were we then? They were not in the Mericourt area were they?

Well you must have still been in that area.

Oh we had the Huns on the run. They didn't like the look of us.

Do you recall that period when the retreat started? It obviously took everybody by surprise.

What, the German retreat?

Yes, when the Germans pulled back to the Hindenburg Line. Did you think at the time that it was a tactical withdrawal?

Oh no fear. Oh the preparation was too great. Have you ever read General Monash's book.

I've got it, but I haven't read it yet.

Well, you ought to have a look at that, and have a look at the battle plan that is published at the back of it. And you'll realise what sort of a show it was. It's not getting a handful of gravel and rushing in and throwing it in their eyes. It was a gigantic affair, that. The Australian Army Corps, the Canadian Corps, and the French Corps, and British units too, all made a move at the one time.

Colonel Durrant was still the acting brigadier. You walked to Healy with Vessell and O'Keefe.

Yes, my God. What kind of a book would it be?

Oh it's only that big. 'Went for a route march on the 6th March'. You were inspected by General Holmes. This is out from Ribemont.

I've no recollection of that. Poor old Holmes was killed later.

Was he. 'General Brand returns looking much better', you note on the 7th March.

Well done, poor old Charles. Poor old fellow. That 11th April job played hell with him. I told you the tears streamed from his eyes when he addressed us afterwards. When we got back to the camp. Where we moved to. You know, it's a terrible thing to have the responsibility of ordering men to go into a situation where he knows that half of them, or more than half of them, will be killed. That's a tremendous responsibility. It's a responsibility if you only have half-a-dozen blokes. You tell them, you do this and you do that, and I'll do something else.

Yes, it must have told on them. They must have found they couldn't sleep, and so on.

Oh God, yes. Yes, they were working on the thing all the time too.

A divisional church parade at Bresle, and General Birdwood presented ribbons on the 11th March.

Oh 'Braille' I think they called that. Yes, I remember that.

'4th Division staff and COs meet Secretary of State for Colonies.'

We're not a colony here!

'And you first heard of Captain Murray's VC.'

Oh yes. Is there any date on that?

Yes, 12th March.

When did he earn his VC? On the 4th February.

When did you first meet Murray? That would be in Egypt wouldn't it.

No, on Gallipoli. He came to us on Gallipoli from the 16th. I think that I told you that we didn't have anyone to properly instruct our machine gunners, and he was a trained machine gunner. A lance corporal, I think, or something. And he came and took over. We had two machine guns, I think. Two Vickers guns, and then it became built up into a section. And he had that, and then later when they formed the divisional battalion of it, well he got that too.

You've got here, 'There's a Brigade stunt. Australians clear the board at Mericourt boxing.' And Joe Daniel and Tony Batters come to see you. Who are they, 13th blokes?

I don't know particularly – Daniel was an engineer, and Batters was in another battalion. He was killed, I think, the next day, or the day after. He was a lad that I knew at home at Tocumwal.

There's a brigade exercise on open warfare on the 14th March. What actually – do you know what that was about – open warfare?

That's preparation for this attack that they made later on.

This is the April attack, yes.

Open warfare means moving on, out of trenches.

Yes.

We'd been doing nothing else but trench battling. Killing and being killed in trenches. Open warfare means clearing the ground, advancing over open ground. You've got a plan for your field guns, and everything else in open warfare.

'Captain Murray dines with Birdwood' happened on the 14th March.

Oh does he. Good old Murray. I was Murray's off-sider, one of his runners, that's why I'm telling all these tales about him, apparently.

What was a company commander's job generally involving? How would they organise a company? You had the platoons, and you had a lieutenant in charge of each of the platoons.

That's right. And the captain in charge of each company. Well, that the way it's organised.

What would be their duties as company commanders?

They get their instructions from the adjutant, from headquarters, to say they had to attack a certain job. And after taking that, you've got to move on to something else. All that sort of thing. Get your orders. And the company commander calls his platoon commanders together, "Jack you've got to do this, and Bill you'd better do that." That way. "And when he does that you do this." We don't seem to have done very much fighting have we?

Well you haven't recorded it much, but I think enough happened...

Bloody church parades, and things like that (laughs). Sounds a bit suspicious to me.

On the 22nd of March you left Ribemont at ten o'clock by motor lorry to Albert, and you walked from there to Fricourt.

I have no recollection of that. It's getting into dangerous country there. That's going back towards the Hun.

It was cold. You keep referring to the cold wind all the time. Joe Daniel came to dinner with you on the 23rd March.

Jack Daniel, well done.

Someone called Scotty came to see you.

Not at this stage. If you'd asked me that eighty years ago, I might have told you.

You've got here, the clocks were put on an hour on the 24th March.

Daylight saving, of course.

And you went to something called a pieriot show.

Pieriot, that's a French pieriots, you know. They dress up in uniforms and perform on the stage. Dancing and all that sort of thing.

It was in the canteen building. I've never heard of it.

Well, you want to move about a bit. I think they still call them pieriots, don't they?

Yes, they may well do. I might be just displaying my ignorance.

It was one of the concert parties.

You went to 'a grand bath' at Fricourt. I'll read you what you say for the 25th of March. It was 'a cold windy night, but a beautiful sunny day. Grand bath at Fricourt.' Baths.

Oh yes, I know. Bathes. Well it's a huge factory or a mill, whatever it is, and they've gathered up about fifty or a hundred big wine casks, cut them in two, and they fill up this place, and then they are filled up with warm water. And everybody has a bath. Talk about a bath parade! Well, well. That was at a place called Fricourt, was it? They had a few of those. You realise that by this time you are very lousy, you were as lousy as possible. You have a bath, and they give you fresh clothing altogether. A complete outfit of clothing, and the other stuff is gathered up and sent to a fumigator, where it's fumigated and then it revolves again. Somebody else gets it.

You went over the old German cemetery at Fricourt, and you went to a picture show in the evening.

My word.

And then you say, 'the Brig gives us the dinkum oil'.

Oh did he. Oh, that's how we won the war, I suppose (laughs). Oh yes, well they used to tell us, keep us as well informed as they could, I suppose, of what we were to do.

They would give you a lecture would they, and tell you what was happening?

Yes. And if there is something on tomorrow or the next day, they'd make you wise to that.

You refer to this mine that exploded in the Town Hall at Bapaume. That's the 26th March.

I don't remember that. They were exploding Town Hall's every other day too.

On 27th of March you leave Bazentin about half-past-nine and you march along slushy roads through Martinpuich and Le Sars to Warlencourt. You had a cruise around the famous Butte, shellholes full of water blood red.

Yes.

'Ground torn up very much. Several dead Fritzies lying about. Sleet and very cold, rain. Two planes close by.' You move off again at nine-thirty and march to somewhere – I can't read it – through Bapaume. There are three large holes in the main road.

That's not too bad. Only three holes.

'Headquarters in an old German dugout with a glass door.' That's where you were, I think.

What, in a glass..

So you are still with the runners?

I was on headquarters until I came away.

You were on headquarters until the end of the war, were you?

Yes.

So when did you join headquarters? This would be 1916 then?

Yes. I had various jobs around headquarters. I was with the Lewis gunners for a while, and with the bombers, the hand-grenades, for a while. And then I was in a gang of runners. There was a big heap of runners there. There were 'sigs' there too, but the 'sigs' were flat out repairing telephone lines all the while, so they couldn't get many messages through from them. It all had to be carried. Yes, it was quite an experience. Well where are we, where are we up to? God, it's about time we got home isn't it?

Well, the 14th Battalion headquarters was blown up last night, you note on the 29th March.
This is in Bapaume.

In the town?

In Bapaume.

Oh Bapaume. Oh yes, no I don't know much about that. I must have...

You saw parties of cavalry going up Arras way.

Oh yes. What's the date of that?

29th March.

When did we go through Bapaume?

You went through Bapaume at the end of March – this is 28th – 29th March.

Alright, well go on. I can't remember that.

You had a look around the village of Sapignes.

Sapignes, yes.

You remember that?

Oh there is a village every mile over there.

They certainly had a lot of mines. There was a mine that exploded in the church in this village.

That sounds to me as though – when did we start our push at Bapaume? Villers Brettoneaux, that was in April.

That was '18.

Where are we now?

'17, before Bullecourt.

Before Bullecourt. Keep going then.

This is going up to Bullecourt, up through Bapaume.

Yes, I don't remember them.

You note there was another balloon – this is 1st April, a balloon brought down in flames by Hun airman this morning.

That was common, yes. This one with the hole through it, that was the one to see. You try it with a little toy balloon. You blow it up hard and then put a tiny little hole in it. And put it up at the end of piece of string. You'll see it going for its life. It was not an unusual sight to see a balloon come down in flames.

You seem to be able to get around a fair bit to look in some of the places, like some of the nearby villages and so on. How much free time would you have generally? I mean, were there set hours that you had to be available?

Oh yes. But when we were out of the line in the villages it was just a matter of get back to normal, get your washing, get your clothes clean, and get back to normal. Parades were at a minimum, but there was plenty to do. See that your rifle would work, and all those sort of things. Mend a hole in your pants.

On the 2nd April you went through Favreuil and you saw a large Fritz cemetery. And you were caught in a storm of snow and sleet on the way home.

That's not unusual. It's hardly worth recording.

You saw another plane that came down with engine troubles, and a Hun plane brought down two balloons just at our door. 'Very daring bit of work', you note. (laughs).

(laughs) Is that what I said. Well, it must have been.

You moved to a muddy road near Favreuil, and you 'fixed up nicely in a dugout with a grand little fire.'

Oh, some of the villages, if we moved there, in some of the villages we'd be lucky enough to get a billet in a cellar, you know, under where the house used to be. And we had a fireplace in there, so that might have been one of those places. Throw a few coal fires, and....

You knew that you were going to be attacking. This is the 5th April, and you've got 'Brigade in a big attack in a few days with gas and tanks.' That's what you have written here.

Is that before Bullecourt?

Yes, this is 5th April.

Oh yes, we'd been briefed about what we were to do.

Well this is a week before it happens, so...

Yes, well there is a lot of preparation for an event like that. Unfortunately they couldn't get the tanks up. The stupid bastards, they didn't give us any artillery at all! It was all going to be a surprise. God strewth! Terrible mistake.

Jack Daniel seems to have spent quite a lot of time with you. He's mentioned here quite a number of times.

Yes, well he was a friend of ours from Tocumwal.

He was from Tocumwal, was he?

Oh yes.

Where did he come from? I mean, whereabouts – he was a farmer?

No, he was a baker.

He was the baker, was he.

Oh, they were all bred round about somewhere. But the 'Toc'ites would be the only ones that you'd mention, otherwise you'd have a sheet full of names.

No, that's right, yes. Yes well you note here that you are expecting to move on the 8th April, Easter Sunday, and you prepared for Fritz with the Vickers gun. You weren't on the Vickers gun, were you?

No.

You were waiting for the people up Arras to be at it. You were already here for a big stunt, different to any we have yet had.

That's it.

You got papers from Surrey Hills. That would be newspapers, wouldn't it?

Yes, I had an uncle in Surrey Hills.

Yes, I remember you were saying. He is the uncle whom you refer to now and then. He was writing to you?

Bill Turnbull was his name. My mother's brother.

Here you've got 'Favreuil at 10.00pm, arrive Noreuil 2.00am. Attack at 4.30am'. This is 9th April. Owing to the guide the tanks went four miles out of their track and did not make Noreuil until 4.00am, too late to act. So attack was postponed. 12 tanks in the village'. It was snowing and bitterly cold all night. You've written a lot here. 'Tired and worn out.'

As you can imagine. Not in very good form for an attack, but we had worse than that to follow, and still mud.

You note here 'Fritz shells village very heavily. Lively machine gun fire on troops coming back. Returned to our old quarters rather disappointed. Hope we are not called up again tonight.' Yes, this is interesting isn't it.

There wasn't much time for writing then.

No, there wasn't. You've got here 'the Battalion loses 21 officers and 500 other ranks at Bullecourt'. That's what you have written. And 'small arms ammunition runs out. Impossible to get it up across the open. Huns attacking heavily. By noon back in our old position. Machine gun fire terrific.' That certainly accords with everything I know about it (laughs).

You don't go into a lot of detail.

You've certainly gone into more detail there than you generally do, of course. It was a big event, wasn't it. The other thing I might ask you – I might skip on a bit.

(Break in interview)

You left at noon by car to Hazebrook, and then – where you had a good lunch – and then you left by train at 4.00pm, 'very slow, weary journey to Bologne', which you got to at eleven

o'clock, and you were directed to a hotel, the Hotel Blighty it was, a place without any character. You left Bologne at eleven in the morning, 'fairly choppy passage across, and you arrived at Victoria Station at 4.00pm. Booked in and had bath at the War Chest, then you went to Zig-Zag. What's that?

Oh don't ask me, I don't know.

And you had supper in The Strand.

You know there is a Strand in London?

Yes, I know The Strand, and you saw Archins, Boyle, and others.

Yes.

Are they 13th men?

They're service men, yes, of course they are.

13th men I mean?

No, they are not 13th men, but they are people that I knew. They are Tocumwalites, mostly.

And you had a good night's rest, and Shaw was looking for you. So Harry Shaw must have been in London.

Yes, he was in London too.

And you went on a bus tour of the city.

Go on, keep going.

I'm hoping you might...

I'm not going to contradict you.

I'm hoping you can tell me some more about this, but I'll read you what you've written. You visited Albert Hall, and The Monument, and Hyde Park. And many other places. You saw Butler and Hardy, you got some money at the bank..

Fancy putting all that in (laughs).

You went to a musical comedy G. Theodore & Co, at The Gaiety, very good show. Left the War Chest by drag, whatever that is.

By what?

A drag.

A drag, yes, well that's a coach. A couple of horses, and a landau type.

You visited the Tower of London. You saw the changing of the guard at The Place, and you returned to the club for lunch in the afternoon. You went through the Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, and Royal Stables, left London six-thirty for Brighton.

Bank holiday.

Was it.

Yes, bank holiday. Everybody was going to Brighton, so we went to Brighton too.

Did you?

What else? Now come on?

This is Sunday. Very pleasant evening on front. This would be the waterfront I suppose. Went for a walk along Madeira Promenade in the morning. In the afternoon you have a bus ride to Port Slade, and the electric railway to Black Rock. Stroll along the beach in the evening, and you had a very pleasant time with disabled soldier and an old chap at a hotel. Do you remember that?

I do, yes. And he took an arm and a leg off.

This is the disabled soldier.

I think so. Does it say that?

No.

Well go on. We're still in Brighton are you. I don't remember all the detail.

And you walked along the front, and Palace Pier, which was a great place. There was a grand band.

God, I must have had plenty of lead pencils to write all that stuff.

Enormous crowd boating and bathing. Gorgeous weather – this is the 28th May. There was a rainstorm in the afternoon, and you returned to London by the 6.00pm train, and you spent the evening in Hyde Park. Whereabouts were you staying in Brighton?

Oh we didn't stay at Brighton. We only just went down for the day.

Yes, oh that's right.

I think.

You left London at six-thirty for Brighton.

Yes, I think we came back the same day. I'm not sure. I don't want to say to you, "That's eighty years ago."

No, I know that (laughs).

But I remember it was a Bank Holiday, the first Monday in May.

The last Monday in May.

All London shuts up and goes to Brighton, so we went to Brighton. Why not?

Who were you with? Were you on your own?

Oh no, I wouldn't be on my own. Some of the others would be with me. The place was full of Australians, as you can imagine, or someone on a bit of leave.

Where was Madeira Promenade, is that along the waterfront?

It was the in-thing, to go to Brighton. Today it's the in-thing to go to the North Pole or the South Pole, or somewhere. Like Dick Smith.

(laughs) Yes, that's right.

Come on.

Well when you got back to London, which is the 29th May, you stayed at the Aldwych YMCA. Visited St Paul's and Madame de Tussards waxworks. There wasn't much you missed out on, was there (laughs).

No, of course not.

Bus rides to many places. London Bridge, etcetera, and you went to see something called the Bing Girls. Do you remember that?

That's a play.

Can you describe the play?

Oh no, I can't.

I mean was it...

Remember the old song, the Bing Boys. There was a party, the Bing Boys, they were the rage in those days, and this was another party called the Bing Girls.

I don't know anything about it.

Don't ask me to describe it, because I have no recollection. I remember going, that's all.

What were the Bing Boys? It's a song, is it?

Yes, it's a song. It was a group of fellows with a band and they put on a good entertainment sort of thing. In a big way, not the little old bands you have today, with about three drums, and nothing else.

And you met E. Huxley in Piccadilly.

Yes, that's Ernie Huxley. He was an Australian horsetrainer here in Australia. He had quite a noted sort of a career really. I've got the impression that in London he just attached himself to 'Aussies' and he would show us round. And we'd pay for his entertainment sort of thing.

He was well-known, was he?

Oh yes. He is well-known in racing circles here in Victoria.

And you just bumped into him in Piccadilly? Well he found us, you see. The uniforms, you see.

Oh I see, he was a civilian?

Yes. Oh yes, I should have told you that.

He showed you old houses of London. Cheshire Cheese, that's the pub.

Cheshire Cheese, that's where Dicken's used to go and have his morning tea, and all that sort of thing.

You had dinner at Dicken's table.

I have no recollection of putting all that down on paper. None whatever.

You took an afternoon bus to Putney. You picked up a Canadian officer with one arm.

That's nothing unusual either, at that time.

You were staying at the Imperial Hotel in Russell Square.

Yes.

That's still there I think.

We stayed at the Shaftsbury also after that. Well, well, well. God I didn't think I had written all that rubbish.

You went to see something called 'Undercover', in the evening. What's that?

I haven't any idea. It must be a play. We were in and out of lots of things in a short period of time.

You went to Hotel Windsor and you saw Major Murray and you got an extension of leave until the 11th.

Who did I see?

Major Murray.

Oh well, that's our Major Murray. That's Harry Murray. Would that be the time he got his VC.

This is after that. This is the 2nd June.

The 2nd June. No that would be it. The Messines stunt was on.

Yes, that's right, just about, anyway.

It was 7th June, Messines. No, well we in London when that was on. Harry Murray was there. There was a – I dressed him for his presentation to the King to get his VC. It was in Hyde Park. It was in right out in the open, the first public investiture that had ever been held in London, and it was held in Hyde Park. I should have picked it up before, because Murray was with our party that booked in at that hotel at Bologne. You said it was a questionable place or something.

That's right.

Well it was Murray that found it out for us, because we travelled down with him. And he found it out, and he came in and warned us, don't take our clothes off, and don't get into bed. You might get venereal disease. So we did as he said. We slept on top of the bed, which was no hardship for us. Now that you mention Murray, well he and I and a couple of others were in London at that time when the Messines stunt went off.

And what were you saying about Murray's investiture with the VC. You helped to...

I dressed him. He was an untidy dresser, if you know what I mean. Like a lot of very good soldiers, you know, anything was good enough. But we were putting him on a public display there, and we smartened him up a bit. That's how I got the extra leave you see. Does it mention it there does it?

You went to the Hotel Windsor, that's where Harry...

That's where he was staying, I think.

And you got an extension of leave until the 11th. You say also you met White at noon. Is that Tom White? Somebody White, anyway.

Probably was, I've no recollection.

Yes, well this was a big thing in Hyde Park. There was a whole heap of people got decorations. It was the first public investiture that was ever held. It was held in Hyde Park and a proper business was made, up on a platform so everybody could see what was going on. It was a big day.

And this was the King.

Yes.

How many Victoria Crosses were there?

Oh, I don't know. A lot of them. There were several anyway, old King George.

You mention here the day before you went through Hyde Park and you saw a rehearsal of tomorrow's show.

Oh well that was it,

And you went to the Hotel Windsor and saw Major Murray. He'd obviously been promoted. And you got your extension of leave, and then you went to Hyde Park in the afternoon, and you saw the procession and investiture. Beautiful weather you said, and enormous crowd.

Well done. Oh, it's almost the same as I told you (laughs).

You must have know Murray well then to be dressing him, and so on.

I knew him very well. As a matter of fact, I told you, we went on leave with him, or he came with us, same thing. A couple of us, and Murray, and when he got his room, and we got ours, he rushed in to tell us...this is the house...

This is down near Bologne?

Yes. He was a man of very high moral principles, I would say.

You went to the Hotel Blighty, a place without any character. This is in Bologne, not in London.

No, that's in France.

This is Hotel Blighty in Bologne. That is where everything...

Where he warned us not to get out of our clothes. Keep your clothes on and don't get into bed. You might get a dose of venereal diseases. He was very proper like that, old young Harry Murray. I dressed him – well, I didn't dress him – I had to straighten him up, because anything would do with him. You know, he was sleeper cutter sort of thing. He'd throw his Sam Brown on. It wouldn't matter if the buckle was in the right place or round the back, or where it was.

And what did he think about the investiture? Was he please about it?

Oh he wasn't a man who went in for ceremony at all. Oh naturally he'd be very pleased of course. Wouldn't you be?

But just referring to that letter which I read you to begin with (Battye Library – letter to Longmore April 1917), where he said about 'getting that VC being all rot.'

It was not all rot. You ought to see him in action!

Oh I know that.

Oh well I'm glad I've made a mention of that. I've forgotten all of that, you know. I didn't think I was such a wonderful writer.

Well you were certainly with Harry Shaw in London, because you met him and you went by taxi to Victoria – this is the day before the investiture. You certainly made the most of your leave didn't you.

Oh yes, well that's the idea. Really our time was taken up, or it was fully occupied once you got into France. Oh no, we had a good leave.

You went down to Hampton Court on the 31st of May.

Yes, the biggest grapevine in the world was there, planted by old Henry VIII. Henry VIII built that thing, Hampton Court.

You had lunch at Mitre Row, downstream for a while, and then up to Tagg's Island, or something like that.

What did we do there? Would you mind reading it again?

Well you trained out to Hampton Court, and you had lunch at Mitre – no – row downstream for a while, then up to Tagg's Island. This is obviously on the Thames.

Yes, that's right. We got on one of these little pleasure boats with a couple of girls, and a pole, you know. You push yourself.

Out in the Thames.

Out in the Thames. Oh it was the in-thing. In among the white swans and all that sort of thing.

Sounds very romantic.

No trouble to get girls. I mean, there was so many of their boyfriends were over in France, and we were Australians, and they were prepared to show us around and help us spend the day. Because they knew we would be going back into this other bloody business the next day.

What do you remember about the Cheshire Cheese? Do you recall going into that at all?

Of course I do, yes. One of the blokes wanted to pinch the salt cellar.

On the table?

Yes.

As a souvenir?

But I didn't approve of that sort of thing. Somebody else could do it, but I didn't want to be carrying salt cellars about. You've got enough to do to carry with your rifle. Yes, that's right. That's where old Charles Dicken's used to go for his potted ale.

No, that would be a thrill.

Well this fellow, he knew where to take us to get to those places.

Who's this, E. Huxley?

Huxley. Ernie Huxley, that's right. He knew where the place was.

Did you know him personally?

No.

You just knew him by name?

I knew him by name, yes.

And you actually bumped into him?

No, he bumped into us. Australian uniforms, and he was an Australian.

And he saw you, and introduced himself, and he offered to...

Show us round.

Show you round, yes. Oh well that would be good. He'd know everywhere.

Oh yes, it was he who took us up to Hampton Court, and two or three other places there. Oh we moved around, I tell you.

And you went to – this is after the procession in Hyde Park, you went to The Pavillion in the evening, that's a...

A variety show.

Is it. There was an excellent show there. Stayed at the War Chest again. What was the War Chest – that's the War Chest Club, isn't it? That was a service club?

That was a service club, that's right. Oh it was an Australian service club, put it that way.

Who was running it? The AIF or...

The Comforts Fund. Oh and the AIF. The AIF owned half of Horseferry Road. All of the headquarters were there.

That's where the War Chest Club was, was it? In Horseferry Road?

Just across the road from AIF headquarters. Oh yes, we did other things besides killing Huns.

You certainly did here. You went all over London.

Yes, I think it was in about seven days, and I got an extra three or four days. I think that was my first leave, or second leave.

You went down to the Anzac Buffet in Victoria Street. I've heard about the Anzac Buffet.

Well, the War Chest Club is all part of it.

You went to a picture play that evening called 'Daughter of the Gods.'

I don't remember it. If I wrote it, it must be right.

You went out a fair bit.

In London? Well what do you think we came there for? Gawds strewth! We were kept in enough when we got back to the unit. A little hole in the trench and you're looking over it. You've got your bayonet fixed. And that raining and snowing and all the rest of it.

No, I understand.

Well there was a couple of years yet to come, isn't there.

This is just '17.

There is a couple of years, yet. I got home in June 1919.

Yes, you were a long time away. You met Harry Townsend. 9th June 1917, you met Harry. That was a Saturday.

Well, well.

You met him in the morning and you went down to Bank and Broad Street. That's in London, in the City.

That's right. Yes, I had a bank draft there. Well you don't get a lot of money in, you know, in the army. Our pay was pretty big really, we were getting five - six shillings a day. I'm just trying to work it out. You had to make a – there was a definite three shillings a day which was kept. That was deferred pay. Well that left you three bob, didn't it. Anyhow the maximum you could draw on

your pay was two shillings a day. I was drawing one-and-six a day. So I didn't have a lot of money, so I sent my father a message that I'd be getting leave and could he help me.

Did you?

And he sent a bank draft to the bank. That's how I came to be going to the bank. It wasn't that I did any banking. There was some money there for me to pick up. I can't think how much – we got six shillings a day, and one shilling was deferred anyway, and three was compulsory banked for you, and that left a maximum of two bob.

That was your allottee, wasn't it.

That's right, allotted. One shilling deferred, three bob you had to allot, and you were permitted to draw two shillings. That was the maximum.

When you met Harry Townsend, how well did you know Harry at that time?

I don't think I knew him at all. Oh I suppose, I did. Yes, I think I'd seen him around headquarters. Harry was with the bombers.

It's a long time since I've talked with Harry.

It was one of those units.

He was a bomber. I think he was.

A bomber, that would be right. There were a lot of odds-and-sods around headquarters.

He wasn't a good friend of yours at that time, he was an acquaintance?

No, that's all.

After lunch you went to a musical program at Sun Hall.

Oh are we still there, in London.

And you heard the band in Hyde Park. This is on the 9th of June.

Messines blew up on the 7th June.

That's right. You note here, 'news of stunt at Messines opening up.'

We weren't at missing that.

No (laughs). Walked all through the markets at Petticoat Lane, and your comment on that was that it was a real Egyptian scene.

Petticoat Lane was a very famous possie.

Returned to city and booked at the War Chest Club to be called at 6.00am to return to France. And in brackets you've got, 'hard'.

END OF AWM TAPE 9

END OF INTERVIEW