

**ALBERT MARSHALL**  
FIRST WORLD WAR

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH ALBERT M. MARSHALL, 15<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION, 4<sup>TH</sup> BRIGADE FIRST AIF; recorded by David Chalk

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

... a number of men.

Yes.

I've located men from the 13th, 14th and 15th Battalions, and in the process of talking to men from the 16th - WA and South Australia - but I haven't got them organised yet.

Ah.

But you'd be interested to know that I've located two other POWs.

Yes.

A Mr. James Wheeler, who was a 15th Battalion man, and a Mr. Donald Fraser of Bourke; he was a 13th Battalion man. Both of them were captured at Bullecourt, like you.

Yes.

Yes. And I've been meeting some of the other 15th men in Brisbane.

Yes.

And there will be an article that will be coming out in one of the national journals in March, this coming year, on Anzac Day, 1916, which was at Serapeum, on the Canal. But you've been in touch, I believe, with the secretary of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> in Brisbane, you wrote now ...

Yes, what's his name, Soden.

George Soden.

I've never ... well, I did meet him a long time ago.

Well, if I remember correctly, you came up to Brisbane to see Colonel Cannan, or General Cannan.

Yes, I did.

Well, that's marvellous. Well, the book that I'm going to be writing will start in December 1915. I won't be writing about the Gallipoli campaign - just a few stories, perhaps. It starts when the battalions returned to Lemnos and Egypt in December 1915, and with the departure of reinforcements for Melbourne in the same month - December 1915. And Part I will be about Egypt through until the end of May 1916; Part II will be about France - the Brigade in France - from June 1916 through to the Battle of Bullecourt in April 1917; and Part III will be about the story of the POWs in Germany. I know the story fairly well; I've read the Battalion History, and, of course, I've been talking with a lot of men now.

Yes.

Well, I believe you enlisted in October 1914, or thereabouts.

Yes.

It was October, was it?

October, yes, two months after the war broke out. I was in Launceston, enlisted. I was in the Post Office. I worked in a post office - and I enlisted - I was in Launceston - and that's when I joined up.

Are you a native of Launceston? Were you born there?

Yeah.

You were born ...?

I was born at Latrobe.

Were you?

Mm.

And how old were you at that time?

Sixteen.

You were only sixteen?

Mm - eighteen.

You were eighteen?

Eighteen rather - yes, eighteen.

So you had to get your parents' permission, did you?

I had to, yes.

You were working in the Post Office?

In the Post Office.

What made you enlist? What were the reasons, can you recall?

Oh, well, a lot of young fellows was enlisting, and you was asked to enlist, you see, in the papers and different things, so you enlist. Your country needs you, or something. Well, instead of getting a white feather I thought I'd better get into it.

Yes.

Some of them got white feathers, you know, for not enlisting.

I've heard about that, yes.

Yes, they did. Well, I didn't want to get any white feathers so I wrote and told Mum and Dad that I wanted to go, and they gave me permission, and that was it.

Did they?

Yes.

And they were living in Latrobe, were they?

No, here, at Ulverstone.

They were living at Ulverstone?

They were living at Ulverstone. I came here, I was only two years old when I came here.

Right. And what work did you have in the Post Office? Were you a postman or just behind the counter?

I started as a telegraph messenger.

Did you?

Yes. And then I was on the counter.

Did you have any friends at that time who enlisted with you? Were there any friends that you can remember?

No, because I was in Launceston, you see, and I didn't know too many up there.

No. What happened after you enlisted? Did you go down to Claremont Camp?

Went down to Claremont.

Yes.

They shut - they had it at Brighton, wasn't it?

Yes, well, it may have been Brighton first, yes.

It was Brighton, the first camp, wasn't it?

Yes.

And they closed that for some reason, I don't know, and went to Claremont where Claremont factory is now. that's where the camp was.

Yes.

I wasn't there very long. I couldn't have been there very long because we went to Broadmeadows in Melbourne, just out of Melbourne. They had a big camp there, everyone was over there. That's where the first camp really was – Broadmeadows. And then we went from there to Heliopolis, just out of Egypt - just out of Cairo.

Out of Cairo, yes. When did you sail overseas? What month, do you know?

Oh, just before Christmas I think it was.

Was it?

I think we left just before Christmas.

And that was with the first transport, like the first 4th Brigade troops to go?

No, we was the second. The first lot went before we did, we was the second lot.

Yes, that's right. What ship did you go on? Do you recall the name of the ship?

Well, in those days it was a big one. I can remember the one I came home in - and the other one was - it was an 18,000 ton ship, and in 1914 that was a big boat. I was lucky to get on a big boat, some of them had little ones.

Did they? I suppose the little ones were pretty bad for seasickness.

Oh, yes. I've been trying to think, since you wrote to me, if I could think of the boat.

I'll be able to find out the name from the rolls in the Australian War Memorial library.

Yes. I've forgotten it now, but the other one was the *Orca* - O-R-C-A, I think - and that was 15,000 tons.

Was it?

I had a real good trip there and back really, because they were big boats. In those days an 18,000 ton boat was a big one. Of course, there was a lot of troops on it, of course.

There's not many of them left now. I know a Mr. Bill Bradnock, he went on that ship. He was a 15th original. He was in C Company, I think, to start with. He was from Coomera, just near the Queensland/New South Wales border. And there are a few other men that I've met. James Wheeler was a 4th Reinforcement, and there's a Mr. Charles Devers still alive in Brisbane, he was a 4th Reinforcement. These are all 15th men.

Of course, I didn't - as I say - I didn't know really many of the infantrymen. I only knew the signallers.

Signallers, yes. Well, that's right, and even if you knew infantrymen, you still only knew the men in your company.

That's all.

You didn't know anyone else.

There was a few thousand men, of course, you couldn't.

Well, that's right, yes.

You couldn't.

Well, I actually have located a Mr. Frederick Febey. He's ninety-five, and he's living in Melbourne - sorry, in Launceston.

Febey?

Febey - he came from Sheffield. There were three brothers, and he's ninety-five. He's still alive, of course. He was a 13th Reinforcement with my grandfather.

Oh.

And, of course, there's Mr Alec Campbell in Hobart. I've got to go and see him. There are not many other 15th men alive in Tasmania that I know of.

There wouldn't be, no. They only had one company, you see, out of ... the rest was Queenslanders.

Right. My grandfather, he died in 1963, so a lot of them went then. What was the Brighton Camp like? What did you do at Brighton when you first went there?

We didn't do a great deal really - at Claremont.

At Claremont, yes.

We didn't do a great deal. As I say, we wasn't there very long, for one thing.

Well, Broadmeadows, of course, was a very large camp outside Melbourne.

Oh, yes, a big camp.

What can you recall of that place? What sort of training did they get you doing there?

I don't know what we done there. As I say again, we wasn't there for very long, you see.

You were in bell tents there, I think, weren't you?

Tents, yes.

When you arrived in Egypt, or Port Suez, it must have been the end of 1914, early 1915.

Yes, yes, early '15. Left in - oh, I think it was December. Just before December we left Melbourne.

It takes about six weeks, didn't it, to get across? Or something like that, I think.

Oh, I suppose it would, I've forgotten now, of course.

Well, that's right. Well, it's seventy years ago, it's a long time, I know.

It's a long time, yes it is.

And you were in Egypt for a few months. Did you go across with the Brigade for the April 25th landings, or not?

Went in with the landing.

Did you?

Yes. I was in the landing, yes.

So you are certainly an original then.

I am.

What was your regimental number?

I didn't have one.

You had a rank?

In the first place, I was 1215, and then when I was made a lieutenant, for a start, I didn't have a number. All officers never had a number.

No, I remember that, yes. And you became a captain, didn't you?

Yes.

You were a captain at Bullecourt, weren't you?

I was discharged as a captain.

Were you? Well, you'd be interested to know that there's a Colonel Wadsworth, a 14th Battalion company commander who is still alive in Melbourne.

Wadsworth.

Wadsworth. He was a company commander with Stanton, Orr and Williamson. They were the four 14th Battalion company commanders at Bullecourt.

I knew some of them, you know by - I've forgotten them now - but I knew some of the commanders in the other three battalions. I was in the 15th, of course - the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th was the 4th Brigade.

Yes. How did you fare on Gallipoli? Did you stay until the evacuation, or were you wounded, or what?

I was wounded in August.

Oh, right, yes.

I went to hospital in Egypt till the end of October, and then went back again to Gallipoli.

Did you? And then you were evacuated in ...?

At the evacuation.

And you stayed in Egypt right through until the Brigade left on the *Transylvania*?

Yeah.

And what about in France? Did you get through until Bullecourt without being wounded, or not?

Yes.

Oh, well, you promise to be a marvellous source then, Mr Marshall.

I was all over France in different places, you know, till we went to Bullecourt. They was supposed to break through there, you know. They had the cavalry behind us to go - they were going right through. But, of course, things didn't turn out that way.

No. Well, that was where my grandfather was captured, at Bullecourt, and that's the story that I'm going to be writing, about what happened to the men after Bullecourt.

Oh, it was a hopeless turn out. It was exactly 800 yards from where we started . We was in bivouacs in a French railway cutting. That was our headquarters, and it was just 800 yards to the German line. We went out one morning in thick snow, and it was supposed to be four tanks arrive to cut the wire. It was all barbed wire, of course - and, of course, they never arrived. And we was halfway there, and got word and had to come back. Went out the next morning and they said to us - one tank, but I never saw it. Only one tank got there, but I never saw it.

One tank did get into the start of the wire, I think, but it got tangled up in the wire and it never got to the trench.

No, I never heard what happened really there. I know that four tanks never got there. I don't know where they got to, whether they was ...

Most of them were knocked out, or had mechanical trouble, before they even got past the French railway line. And you were at ...?

You see, 800 yards is a long way.

And it was flat, wasn't it?

You see, they had no hope of getting any reinforcements, or any ammunition, in the daylight of course.

Yes.

We was out early in the morning, and then in the daylight you had no hope of going across. We run out of ammunition, and running out of men, and the only thing to do was to surrender.

Yes. I know the story very well, and, of course, it was a salient too. The Germans were on three sides of you, weren't they?

Oh, yes.

With the machine guns, or the artillery.

Well, you see, they had big dugouts down, and they went underground to their support trenches.

They had tunnels, did they?

Tunnels - you see, they didn't have to go over the top. They just went down - it was a fair depth down, these tunnels - back into their support lines.

And when they counter-attacked, did they come along these tunnels?

Yes.

And you were at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm as well, I gather.

Yes. If anything, if the Germans made sort of a big attack anywhere, the 4th Brigade was always being sent down to give them a hand, so we was all over France really.

Well it was. Other men have told me that it was more or less a mobile brigade.

Yes.

Of course, it was a very fine unit, and so it tended to be put in some of the worst spots, didn't it?

Yes.

Well, James Wheeler was wounded in the August attacks on Gallipoli.

Yes.

He went across to England. What were you doing at that time? Were you a signaller on ...?

I was a signaller all the time.

Yes. When did you first become a signaller?

When I started.

Did you?

Claremont.

Down at Claremont?

Yes.

What was the task of a signaller? What sort of duties did he have?

Oh, they would do anything that they were told. Any messages, or sent messages.

And you had what, morse code?

Morse code – flags. You to have the flags - and Morse code. And they had what they called ... heliograph, wasn't it?

Yes, I've heard about that, that's using mirrors.

Mm?

Using mirrors.

Mirrors.

Yes.

You had to be accurate with them. You had to - they were a good thing. If I was standing over to there, you couldn't see it unless you was behind or at the thing - it's a great thing, without a doubt, but you had to be accurate. If you wasn't accurate, they wouldn't get it on the other end. It was alright in Egypt in the sun, when the sun was out.

Did you use it in France at all?

No.

Was it all field telephones in France?

Telephones and ordinary flags, signalling messages.

At what stage did you get the field telephones? Did you have them from the beginning, or not?

Oh, I suppose they would have had them then, I should think so, yes.

And what rank did you go overseas with?

I was a private.

You were a private.

I was just an ordinary private.

And when were you commissioned?

After Gallipoli.

After Gallipoli.

When I came back from Gallipoli.

So that would be, what, early 1916?

'16.

And what rank did you have prior to being a lieutenant? Did you go straight from the ranks?

I was a corporal - I went up, yes.

Well, you must have seen quite a lot on Gallipoli. You'd have been at Quinn's Post, wouldn't you?

Yes, that was really the front line.

Oh, it was one of the worst places to be.

The worst places - you could put your hand up and shake hands with the Turk, with his hand poking out. I know when we first got there, one of the captains said, "Dig like blazes because you will get hell in the morning." Well, of course, we didn't get hell in the morning, because they couldn't shell us because the trenches were too close. We were only, oh, just no distance at all between the front line. They couldn't shell us, and of course, we couldn't shell them - so we didn't get hell.

Still, they certainly attacked Quinn's Post a lot, didn't they?

Oh, yes. They blew Quinn's Post up, of course.

They mined it, did they?

They mined it, blew it up, and that's where Major Quinn got his name from, where the post was.

Hugh Quinn, yes, that's right.

Quinn, he was killed.

He was shot by a sniper, wasn't he?

I don't know really how he got killed - he could have been.

Yes, he was sniped, I remember reading that in the Battalion History. You've seen the History, I assume, the 15th Battalion History?

Yes, I've got it here.

Oh, have you, yes. Yes, it was a pretty hectic place to be in, Quinn's Post - a lot of men ...

My word.

Well, the 15th Battalion had the most casualties of any battalion on the Peninsula.

I think so.

Oh, they did.

Oh, Gallipoli was awful, without a doubt. And two of the worst things was dysentery and lice . Every one was lousy. Didn't matter whether you was a colonel, or a major, or a brigadier, you was lousy. You couldn't get out of it, had no hope. Well, I was nearly black on the Peninsula.

What, from the sun?

Yes. All they was wearing was a pair of boots, a pair of shorts, and a hat. That's what we got down to. That's what I started on. And I was black . I was, I was really black.

You mean, not only sunburnt, but dirty?

Yes.

And you'd be taking messages, and so on, as a signaller there?

As a signaller, yes.

And how did you use the morse code? I mean, you'd have a key, and a line that would run back to HQ, would you?

Yes, yes.

You'd remember some of the men from that time, wouldn't you? Do you remember Percy Toft?

Yes.

Did you know that he died in February this year?

No.

He died in February this year.

Mm. I don't get a great deal of news, you know; I get a bit on this ...

On the radio.

But I get no other news - you see, I can't read.

No.

I can't see to read.

No. It limits you a great deal, doesn't it, when you can't read?

Oh, yes, no good.

And I believe that Mr Marcus Trappes has died.

Has he?

I've been told that, yes. And a Mr Cliff - who was the other 15th Battalion man in Hobart? - Cliff somebody.

Cliff?

Cliff.

Oh, I couldn't tell you now.

I'll see if I can find out anyway, what his name was.

In the signallers?

No.

Oh.

He died recently in Hobart anyway. Do you remember much about the Turkish attacks on Quinn's? I'd like to find out a description about that. Mr Wheeler was at Quinn's for a short time. He was a 4th Reinforcement.

Well, they made a tunnel - the Turks, you see - down, and our people - we had miners with us, you see, they knew all about mines and tunnelling and that - and they heard these fellows digging, so they dug as well. But the Turks got in first and they blew it up.

When was that? When would that have been? Oh, I'd be able to find out that from the History, I suppose.

I've forgotten now whether it was 19 or 29 prisoners they got out of that - Turks.

Did they?

Out of that, yes, when they took it. That was when Major Quinn was killed.

Was it?

When they took it back. Yes, they could hear them digging. The miners, of course, knew what they was up to.

What were the signallers attached to? Were they an independent section attached to headquarters?

Yes, to the 15th Battalion Headquarters.

You weren't in one of the companies, for example?

No.

Yes, right. Who else can you remember who was in the signallers at that time? Who was in charge? If you can't remember names, and so on like that, I'm not worried about it.

No - I don't know whether they are in that book or not.

They may well be.

They would be in the 15<sup>th</sup> History, I think, in there.

And what happened when you were wounded in the August attack? That was August 8th, wasn't it - the 6th to the 8th?

We went out on the 8<sup>th</sup>. We left Anzac here on the 8th, went away round here - the night was the 8th - took get up to where we wanted to on the 9th. And on the morning of the 9th - of course, we was all mixed up and everywhere - and I went out to find the headquarters. Or tried to find where they were, and that's when I got it.

What happened to you?

Shrapnel.

Shrapnel wound?

Shrapnel burst. I was very lucky. It evidently went a bit over the front of me instead of right over the top of me. If it had been on the top of me, of course, I'd have been killed.

Yes. And you were wounded in the hand, were you?

That's one there - I don't know if you can see that.

Oh, just, yes.

And the other one was there.

Yes.

It come out there. They took me down to the ... I don't know whether I went on to a Red Cross ship, or another one. I couldn't tell you even that now. All I remember, I was laying on deck next to a wounded Turk.

Were you, oh really? They took the Turks out.

Yes, they did that. I was laying along here, and he was along there.

I think there was quite a wait for getting the wounded off at that time, wasn't there?

Yes.

I think Jim Wheeler was telling me, he was wounded then, also by shrapnel, and he was three or four days getting off the Peninsula.

Well, I couldn't tell you how long I was there, I don't know now. It's funny, I don't remember leaving Gallipoli and arriving in Egypt, and I don't remember leaving Egypt and going back. Now, then, you think you'd think of those things, but I don't - I can't.

No. Well, the boat voyages - the ship voyages - tend to be fairly monotonous anyway, I mean, much the same.

Yes.

And if you are wounded, well, you are obviously on your back, you can't get about at all ...

No.

... so there's not much to remember.

No.

Well, everybody is a bit the same with that sort of thing.

Yes.

Still, you must have been back on the Peninsula when it got very cold - that would be November.

It must have been just about the end of October, I think, before I got back. Oh, it was cold alright, my word - cold in France.

Oh, France was dreadful.

Yes, it was nothing there for taps to be frozen, and you wouldn't get any water. That was nothing.

No. Well, the winter of 1916-17 was the coldest in France for forty or fifty years.

Yeah, there was no doubt, it was cold, yes.

And you would have spent Christmas on Lemnos. Christmas 1915 would have been spent on Lemnos, I think. That was the year you all go Christmas billies.

You know, I don't remember getting them.

No.

I don't. And I can't remember going over there, to the island. I don't.

What can you recall about the evacuation itself? Can you remember anything about that?

Well, we were a fair way from the ... where we boarded the boat. We came down at night - and ... Well, I really don't know how far it was - it was a fair way down - to come down.

What was your feeling at that time? How did you feel? You knew you were obviously leaving, I gather?

Mm?

You knew that you were leaving, I imagine. What was your feeling about that?

We didn't know too soon. They didn't tell us too soon that we were leaving. And, of course, like everyone else, you wondered if I would get off. It's only natural, you see. But they seem to have ...I heard a story - whether it's true or not I don't know - they bribed the Turks - they paid the Turks. Whether that's true, of course, I don't know.

I've never heard about that . I don't know.

They gave them an awful lot of money to let them get away. But whether that's right, I don't know. What they did do, or tried to make out we was going to stay when we were up at this place. They had men, every day, carrying boxes into dugouts and that. They was empty boxes.

Were they?

You see, that was to let the Turks see that we was taking food in ready for the winter, but there was nothing in the boxes, they were just empty boxes.

There were quite a number of different ruses like that, weren't there?

Oh, yes. And, of course, they had these rifles, water dripping down, and when it got down it pulled the trigger to let them know that we were still there.

Yes, I've heard about ... actually, I've seen something like that in the War Memorial in Canberra.

Yes. Oh, there was a lot wrong with Gallipoli.

Yes, everybody's got ...

You see, they had no bombs, for one thing. They couldn't let them go from France. They didn't have enough in France. So they had to make their own bombs, made out of jam tins. Put anything in them. They was a pretty rough lot, I'll tell you.

With the trenches being so close, of course, bombing was one of the major ways of attacking, wasn't it?

If we'd have had bombs it would have made a big difference to us. There was two errors, in my opinion. Of course, I'm not a general and all that - but we had no bombs. If we'd have had bombs, it would have made a big difference. And then - I don't know whether you've been told, or not, whether that new landing that took place, you know.

At Suvla Bay?

Yes.

I've heard of that.

Twenty-odd thousand men. Instead of going, what they done - what they should have done, going into the line - they went for a swim. Well, you see ...

And this was while the Australians were trying to draw the Turks' attention, wasn't it?

Yes. Well, you see, the Turks knew all about that. They knew they was coming, they could see them. Instead of going ...And there's one thing I can't understand - the Turkish view - they torpedoed, you know, one of our battleships . I saw that go down.

Did you?

Mm. But I can't - the *Queen Elizabeth* was there, with her big 15-inch guns, of course. I can't understand why the Turks - they controlled the Straits, you know - why they didn't send a submarine down and torpedo the *Queen Elizabeth*. I can't understand, they should have - their brains, their army heads of brains, they should have known. They could have got down. There was nothing to stop them. They got down and sank the ...

It wasn't the *Renown*, or the *Repulse*, was it?

No ...

*Indomitable*?

They could have - if they'd have come down and got the *Queen Elizabeth* - and I think I've read, and heard, reports that the *Queen Elizabeth* didn't do the damage that they thought she would, with her big shells.

It's a huge shell, isn't it, a 15-inch shell?

Oh, godfather! I've heard - whether it's right or not, as I say - that they didn't do the damage that they thought that they would.

Well, they may not have been as accurate as they were hoping to be, they might have been shelling the wrong places quite a lot.

Oh, I think they was accurate.

Were they?

Oh, I think the navy knew their job.

Did they?

I think so. But of course, now they could put a thing anywhere - today - yes.

What happened when this battleship was torpedoed? Can you describe what happened then?

Every boat left the area.

Did it?

You couldn't see a boat.

Really?

They all went - I don't know where they went to.

All the other battleships and destroyers, and so on?

Everything went.

Did they?

Yes.

Did you see or hear the explosion, when the ...?

No, I was away up on the hill, and I happened to see it. I happened to see her go down.

Did you?

Yes.

Can you give me a description of Quinn's Post, what it looked like from up there, what you could see, and what sort of a position it was?

From up there?

At Quinn's Post, yes. Can you describe what it looked like to me?

Oh, it was - well, say, in the bush. You couldn't see nothing from Quinn's Post.

Was it on the top of a hill?

Partly on a hill, yes. When we got there this chap – a captain - told us to dig. Well, it was gravel and stone. You'd never credit what you can do when you've got to do - make a hole to fit in. You'd never credit it. I'd believe anything now – you said to go and do something, and I said I can't, and I could - yes. Of course, we only had little trenches, you know. We didn't have any - only a little hole about that big, and a little thing on it. It was only about that long altogether, what you had to dig a hole with, into gravel and stone ...

Yes, the entrenching tool.

... to make a hole.

It was only about a foot long, or less?

That's all, yes, that's all.

And what was it, like a bit of a pick or a shovel - a sort of a shovel?

It was like a hoe.

Like a hoe?

Mm.

Well, that wouldn't be much good against gravel and stone.

No. But you see, when you've got to do it, you can do it.

Yes. And did you get ill on Gallipoli? I suppose you suffered from dysentery and ...

Yes.

I suppose everybody did.

Everybody - and the flies was the worst . There was millions of flies - millions.

And whereabouts in Egypt did you go to hospital? You went to Cairo, I assume?

Oh ... Alexandria.

You were in hospital in Alexandria?

Alexandria.

And you were there, what, about six weeks or so? If you were wounded in August, a couple of months, perhaps.

Yes.

A couple of months.

Yes. As I say, I don't remember leaving and going back, I'm blown if I do.

No. Well, it wasn't a very long passage, was it? It was only a couple of days, if that, to go from Lemnos back to Alexandria.

I don't know. When we came back from Gallipoli to Egypt, we went up to - I've forgotten the name of the place - it was - it had something to do with the late Lord Kitchener. I think he was up there where we were. I've just forgotten what it was, but anyway, it was something to do with Lord Kitchener where we were.

This is in Egypt?

In Egypt - back in Egypt - way back. And of course, we had to march from there down to the Canal.

Well, the place you are talking about would be Tel-el-Kebîr.

That's it, Tel-el-Kebîr - that's it.

Well, when the Battalion first came back to Egypt, I think you were camped near Ismailia.

Yes.

And then you went to Moaskar, and then across to Tel-el-Kebîr ...

Yes.

... and then from Tel-el-Kebîr you marched down to Serapeum.

Serapeum, yes.

Yes, that's right, yes. You went on the desert march, I assume?

Yes.

What happened at that time? I've been asking everybody who I can find what happened, to give me a description of the desert march, so I would be interested to hear your account.

Well, you might ... it was hot, and you might know, if you'd been walking on the sand down there, what it would be like. Nothing but sand.

Yes.

Nothing but sand - and you had a water bottle full of water, and it wasn't five minutes before that was warm . Useless, no good.

Really, couldn't you drink it?

Well, you could drink it - you had to drink it. It was warm. They had canals over there, and they said, whatever we did, never to drink out of them. I did. I struck one and I had a drink. I had to - yes.

And how did the water last? Because I know that the water carriers were ... Well, I think that you got your water bottle, and that was all you had for a certain time, wasn't it?

That's all, yes. That's all.

And once you drank that, I suppose ...

You were finished. Yes, you could see the water tankers going by, but you couldn't get to them.

No.

You just had to wait till you finished the day's march.

Yes. I've been told that, at least the 13th Battalion, had Tommy tunics and the pith helmet on. What uniform did you have on at that time? Were you ... You were issued, I believe, with a summer uniform.

Yes.

A new summer uniform and the pants, and so on, were very stiff, and they chaffed.

Yes.

Is that correct?

Yes.

And did you have the pith helmet? The big helmet - not the slouch hat, but the pith helmet?

We had a hat - you know, cocked up at the side.

Yes - you weren't wearing the pith helmet?

No.

Did you make it through to the end of the march?

I finished.

Did you?

Yes, I finished.

Do you know anyone who didn't?

There was a few that didn't. They just couldn't do it, that was all there was to it, they just simply couldn't do it.

No.

But I finished. As soon as we got to the Canal, of course, we got into it and had a lovely swim. Ah! it was good.

Yes, you'd remember that one, wouldn't you?

My word, yes.

And the New Zealanders came out to help you while you were on the march, didn't they?

Yes.

That was near Moaskar?

Yes. I don't know why they went away up where they did. I don't know why back in from nowhere, you know. You'd have thought they would have taken us down to the Canal.

Do you mean, you don't know why you went down to Serapeum?

No, no.

And how did you keep up during that march?

Oh, I managed to finish the day. A good sleep at night. A peculiar thing about the sands over there - you've heard that song, I suppose, "When the sands of the desert grow cold."

No, I haven't heard it.

Have you heard that?

No.

Well, that's a song – "When the sands of the desert grow cold." Now look I honestly believe that when we was in camp at Heliopolis in Egypt, out in the sun, in the sand, I really believe that you could cook an egg on the sand. If you'd have broke an egg on the sand, it was hot enough to cook it. And at night, you freeze - you wouldn't credit it. At night you would freeze, and in the day you would cook.

I've located another man, Ernest Etchell - his nickname was Shiny Etchell. He was a 15th Battalion man, a D Company Tasmanian, and he told me that he'd dig a bit of a hole in the sand to sleep at night. Apparently the first few feet of air above the desert were very, very cold at night.

It was freezing. I never dug a hole or anything, it was just a – we had a little ground sheet. I don't know what it was made of - whether it was rubber or not - and a small blanket, and, of course, the overcoat. That's all you had.

And that wasn't enough to keep you warm?

Oh, godfather, no. You couldn't really understand it, the cold at night and the heat in the day. Another peculiar thing in Egypt was - of course, the flies was there and the lice. We was lousy. But when we was way out in the desert, of course, from nowhere, and as soon as we stopped to have our bully beef and biscuits, there seemed to be Arabs - Egyptians rather - come from nowhere. They seemed to come out of the ground, with bags of oranges. You couldn't see them when you was, oh, out drilling . You couldn't see them anywhere. And where they came from, I can't now find out.

I've heard about that.

Have you.

Well, not like that.

Out of the bloomin' sand - oh God! I don't know where they come from, but they came out with bags of oranges - yes.

Well, I suppose you'd like to buy the oranges, wouldn't you? They'd be welcome, wouldn't they, with the oranges, or not?

My word, they were good. Of course, we didn't have much money.

No.

Our money - I only had a shilling. You see, that didn't last long.

Well, I believe most of the men were on about a shilling a day.

Yes.

Do you remember Anzac Day 1916 on the Canal? Can you recall that day? There was a service in the morning to commemorate the landing, and in the afternoon there was sports on the Canal - water sports.

Oh, no I can't tell you, I can't, no.

I've located a letter written by a 14th Battalion man which is the basis for this article that I've written on Anzac Day. I'll send you a copy of that, and someone will read it to you, I'm sure. You'll be interested to hear. Did you go down to Dervesoir

Pardon?

Did you go down to Dervesoir on the Great Bitter Lake, or not? When you were stationed at Serapeum, whereabouts did you train? D Company was sent down to Dervesoir which is just below Serapeum, down towards Port Suez.

Mm, mm.

Whereabouts did you go?

We was at ... oh ... we was at Ismailia.

Yes.

I think there was a lot of the reporters now calling it Ismailia (Is-mal-ia)

Is it?

But it's not; as far as I know it's not Ismailia, it's Ismailia (Is-mail-ia). Ismailia, when I was there in 1915 - and I don't think it's been altered. Some of these reporters, you know, they get their own way and they call it that. I wondered what he was talking about, one day I heard him on the air, he was talking about Ismailia instead of Ismailia.

Everyone's always called Ismailia, Ismailia (Is-mail-ia)

Yes.

But some people call Serapeum (Se-rape-eum), Serapeum ((Sera-peum)

Yes.

Which is the right one, I don't know. I assume you went into Cairo on leave, like everyone else?

Oh, yes, went down on tram - on the bus.

Yes, on the tram.

On the tram rather. We wasn't far out of Cairo.

No.

I was in Cairo the night of that big turn-out.

The Battle of the Wazzir?

Battle of the Wazzir.

Were you?

Yes.

What happened then?

Oh, it got that bad that I got home, I got out of it.

Did it?

Yes.

Were you down in the Wazzir? You were in the Wazzir?

Yes.

Right. What can you remember about that?

Well, not too much because when it got like it did, as I say, I went back, I went back to camp.

What were you doing when it started?

Oh, I was just in the street, that was all. They got into this upstairs place - upstairs, you know - I think that's where it started. And they threw a piano, you know, out of the window.

Did they?

You've heard of that, of course?

Well, I think that there was more than pianos, I think that people were thrown out.

Oh, lord, yes. So I thought it was time to get out. They cut hoses, you see, that they brought to put the fires out, they cut them.

Who cut them - the troops - the Australians?

No, they - oh, I suppose they were in it - I suppose they were in it. Yes, the Battle of the Wazzir.

Yes. And that was caused by, you know, the fact that the Wazzir was a red light district, wasn't it?

Yes.

And the troops, of course, had caught gonorrhoea or something there?

Oh, lord, yes.

And it was to seek revenge for that, wasn't it?

Yes. I think I've only got one regret in my life. I never kept a diary. You know, from a kid, making notes of different things - people and things that happened. I've always regretted that.

Yes, well, I think it's a help because I've talked with some men who actually have sat down and written some memoirs about that time ...

Yes.

... and that's been of great help to me ...

It would.

... as it has been to them. You know, I've been able to ask them about various people, and they've been able to tell me.

Well, when we were taken prisoner we was taken into a yard in a place where we were interviewed, you know, and asked questions. Well, I've never seen so much paper torn - everyone, I suppose, they had notes, you know, and different things, and they tore them up into little bits and just chucked them on the thing. I never forget that. And I wish I had've kept a note of different things, but I didn't, and I've forgotten quite a lot of things that I would like to know.

Yes. Well, you seem to be helping me a great deal though, you are telling me ...

I haven't really told you much.

No, well, we've only started. When you were at Tel-el-Kebîr they broke the Battalion up, didn't they? I mean, they formed the 47th, didn't they?

Yes.

Can you remember anything about that happening?

No, I can't. A lot of the Fifteenth went to the 47th, of course. I didn't want to go. Being an original 15th, I didn't want to go. I wasn't told to go. I wasn't asked to go, but I didn't want to go anyway. No.

I suppose the feeling amongst the men who did go was not the best.

No, ah no.

What sort of a camp was it at Tel-el-Kebîr?

What was it now? Oh, I couldn't tell you now, I'm blown if I could.

I don't think there was much there, there was only just the tents.

Yes.

And when you were camped at Heliopolis, what was the camp like there? Were you in tents, or in ...?

In tents.

You were in tents?

In tents, yes.

And they had a bazaar, didn't they? Wasn't there a bazaar at Heliopolis?

Oh, I don't know, I don't. It was a big camp, of course - a lot of men there.

I was sent a postcard of the *Transylvania* yesterday, by a man called Victor Grouch who lives out at Finley, which is near Tocumwal on the Victoria/New South Wales border.

Mm.

Of course, I'll be writing about the trip from Alexandria to Marseilles. What do you remember about that trip?

Which?

The one on the *Transylvania*, from Alexandria to Marseilles - or Marseilles, I don't know how you would pronounce it. That was when you left Egypt.

I don't remember much about it now, to be truthful, honest. As I said in the first place, I don't remember leaving.

That was going up to Gallipoli again. But going up to Marseilles. You were a week on the ship. The whole Brigade went on the ship. Don't worry if you can't remember.

No, I can't. Was there a boat called *Ceramic*?

Yes.

Well, I believe that was the *Ceramic* that I went on. That's the big one – the 18,000 tonner. I believe it was the *Ceramic*.

I've certainly heard of her. But you can't remember going on the *Transylvania*.

I can't, no.

Well, it was pretty uneventful, going across.

TAPE ONE SIDE B (Microcassette)

Well, you probably remember something about the train journey from Marseilles, up to the north of France.

... No.

You were on these carriages, and it was quite a trip, I think. You had about three days, I think ...

Yes.

... and you went up to Bailleul.

I know when we got to France, on the train, all we had was two or three days in the train before we got to our journey's end.

Yes.

And going up we were able to buy some bread.

Were you?

French bread. It was about that long. It wasn't square, they was like that.

Like a circle - about eighteen inches wide.

And I reckon every man bought a loaf of bread.

Did they?

I reckon they did, yes. And the first tragedy in there which I saw - well, I didn't see it - it was going up on the train, we had some - what we call cadets here - and I don't know what they call them in France. They was only young kids. They got on top of the carriages ...

Did they?

Yes - and one poor little fellow was killed going under a bridge - under a - yes, under a bridge. He was on top of the carriages. Whether he saw it or not, of course, will never be known. It killed him. I don't know why they allowed him, really. I don't know how many was up there. He wasn't on his own.

No.

He got hit with this overhead ...

The steel part of the bridge hit him?

Yes. Some of the blood come into my carriage where I was.

Oh, really?

I'll tell you. He got hit, yes. But buying this French bread was, I'll tell you, was good (chuckles). I'm afraid I haven't given you much news.

Oh, yes, you have, yes, you're telling me all sorts of good things. When I put everything together, from all the men that I meet, plus there's a number of letters and diaries in the Australian War Memorial Library, I believe I'll have more than enough material to put the book together.

When are you going to start writing?

Well, not until I've done all my research . It will be a while yet. No, it was a slow journey, the train journey up, I think.

My word. Yes,

And can you recall the first billets you arrived at in France? I think it was Jesus Farm.

Yes.

Or La Maison Blanche.

It could have been Jesus Farm - it could have.

What was Jesus Farm like?

... Well, they were just French homes really, and outbuildings, and we was billeted anywhere we could get in, you see. In sheds. It wasn't in the house, of course.

No.

Oh, no. All the buildings on the farms and that, we were in. That was one of my jobs, at times, to go ahead and make arrangements for billeting - yes. You meet the chap that was there before they got out, you see, and get all the information from him.

That's the battalion that was leaving the billet?

Yes.

What sort of information would you want?

They'd tell you anything they knew. You couldn't talk French, of course.

No.

But they would tell you what they knew, and what to do. They had to pay for all that, you know.

Did they?

Oh, yes, the army had to pay for the use of the places.

Did they?

Mm - billets. Any damages, or anything done, the army had to pay for it.

Yes. Can you recall going into the line at - well, most people know it as Bois Grenier - it was the Nursery - it was where the Battalion first went in ...

Yes.

... in Flanders it was.

It was supposed to be a quiet place, you know, not much doing. There was plenty doing!

I think you made quite a lot happen, didn't you? There were a few raids, weren't there?

Yes.

What was your duty at that time? You were, what, a second lieutenant or a full lieutenant? And you were in charge of the signallers, were you?

In charge of the signallers.

You were in charge of them, yes.

Yes.

How many men did you have under you?

... Well, I couldn't tell you that now.

Did you have thirty?

No, it wouldn't be that many.

It would be about twenty?

About twenty, I suppose - signallers - yes.

And I suppose there'd be a sergeant and a corporal.

Oh, yes.

Can you remember any of the names of those men?

I can't now - I can't. Well there is one – Lockwood. He came from - I believe he came down from Penguin way, I'm not sure. And I think, when I went out that day to look where headquarters was, and was wounded, I think it was Lockwood was the next one to go.

Was he?

He went out and found them, I believe - found the headquarters.

Oh, right.

And they said, when we was there, they said we'd tossed up a coin to see who would go.

Yes.

Now, I don't think we did. I don't think there was any coin tossed to see who would go, I'm pretty certain I said I would go and find them - or try and find them. I don't think there was any coin tossed to see who would go.

And what sort of training did you undertake in the desert in Egypt? How were you training the signallers there?

They taught how to wave the flag, you know, and the heliograph. That was easy for me because I was in the Post Office and I was used to dot and dash.

Oh, yes. That's how you came to be in the signallers, I assume?

Yes.

Of course. Well, it was a pretty responsible job, wasn't it, to have to be a signaller?

In a way, yes, it was.

After you were at the Nursery for a while, or Bois Grenier, you went down to the Somme, of course. Before that happened, the command of the Brigade was transferred to General Brand, and there was a parade. It was in July 1916 - towards the end of July - at which General Brand was introduced to the Brigade. Can you recall that parade?

No ... Some of the things ... there's a photo in there, I think of the 15th Battalion, of the signallers. Well, I'm not in it, I don't know where I was. Different things in there - I was with the Battalion the whole time, but I don't know anything about what happened to 'em. Some of the things, of course, took place while I was in hospital ...

Yes.

... and I didn't see them.

Well, nobody - I mean, there would be a thousand men in the Battalion, wouldn't there?

Oh, yes.

And it would become very difficult to know just what is happening.

Oh, yes.

But I'm only really interested in your own personal recollections, that's what's of value to me. You'd have been reporting to Colonel Cannan, would you ...

Yes.

... or the company commanders?

Yes.

You would have been going back to the Colonel?

Yes.

What sort of a man was the Colonel?

He was a good'un, no doubt about him - he was a good'un, yes.

Well, the 15th Battalion was lucky to have both Colonel Cannon and McSharry as COs, wasn't it?

Yes.

Because a lot of the other battalions, you know, they had rather poor commanders on occasions.

Yes. McSharry was only a little fellow, you know, only about four foot (laughs). He was really a small - there was no doubt about him.

Ernest Etchell was telling me that he used to be known as Jocky Jack.

I'm not sure, but I think he went out of his tent to get a man who was wounded, or help with a man for his wounded. I'm not sure – but I think that was when he was shot.

Yes, it was something like that - this is in 1918, I think.

Yes. Of course, I don't know what really happened after I was taken prisoner, I never heard nothing at all.

What happened at Bullecourt, when you were captured? What were you doing?

Wasn't doing anything because we had nothing to do. The company had no ammunition, and couldn't get it, and we just had to wait. And the time came, of course, when they had to surrender. They had no option, no option whatever. And we was taken back and put into a big sort of hut for the night, and the next day we was taken and put on a train, and interviewed - that's where all this paper was torn up.

Did they only interview the officers, or did they talk to all the men?

They talked to all.

Did they?

To see what they could get, to see if any - like you, getting a little information from me; well, they were getting a little information from all - everybody. I don't think they would tell them much. They wouldn't know much for one thing.

I don't suppose the privates, or the NCOs, would know very much, would they?

Well, I didn't know much, I knew very little. I couldn't tell them anything.

Were you a full lieutenant or a captain at that time?

A lieutenant.

You were a lieutenant? You had two pips, did you?

Mm. I was in four camps in Germany.

Were you?

Mm.

Which camps were they?

Um ... oh, the first one - I've just forgotten the name - we wasn't there very long - and was transferred to a place called Karlsruhe.

Oh, were you in Karlsruhe? I've heard of it, yes.

You've heard of that? That was ... Karlsruhe was flattened in the last war, you know.

Was it - the whole town?

It was an engineering place - a big city - and they tell me it was flattened by bombs in the last war. Well, I wasn't there very long, and from there I went to a place called Strohenmoor.

I've heard of it.

Have you?

Yes.

I was there.

These are all officers' camps, aren't they?

Yes. Well, from there I was, in a way, lucky I escaped from there.

Oh, did you?

I got caught outside.

Did you?

Yes. I went down - there was three of us. I don't know where the chap got the wire cutters from . It's wonderful what you can get and do ...

Make up, yes.

He got a... Anyway, he cut the wires under a drain. We went down a drain. He got away, and the next got away, and I was seen. I got outside but I was seen.

Oh, no. Oh dear.

I was in an awful mess, down in this drain. And then I spent a week in jug on my own. And if you escaped from a camp, you never went back to it. You had to go to another camp.

Did you?

So I went from there, after I'd done seven days in jug, to a place called Holzminden.

Oh, were you at Holzminden too?

That's where I finished.

What month? Can you tell me the month that you were in Holzminden? Was it still 1917, or 1918? I could find that out actually, because the Red Cross has a file on all the POWs, and those files are available in the Australian War Memorial Library, and I'd be able to find out the dates that you were moved. Holzminden had that famous - or infamous - Commander Niemeyer, wasn't it?

Niermeyer

Niermeyer, yes.

He was educated in America, I believe.

Was he?

Niermeyer. That's where the big tunnel was - remember? You've heard of the tunnel?

I've heard about that, yes.

I had photos of that, you know.

Did you?

And as far as I know they are at St. Helens. My nephew's got them.

That's on the east coast?

Mm?

On the east coast of Tasmania?

Yes.

Are they?

Yes. As far as I know, he's got them. My sister-in-law, who used to live in Burnie, she had them. She died - and she wanted them kept in the family, in the Marshall family, so as far as I know - her - John his name is - he is a fisherman ...

John Marshall?

John Marshall - he's a fisherman, at St. Helens.

Well, I'll certainly see if I can find out where they've gone.

As far as I know, that's where they are . I don't know whether he kept them.

Oh, I'd say he would keep them.

I think he would.

I might telephone him. Well, the two POWs that I've met, one's Mr. James Wheeler - he was a corporal. He was a bomber.

Yes.

... and he was blown up and buried at Bullecourt, by a howitzer, and was dug out by the Germans. And he suffered internal wounds, and they thought he had TB, and they took him all the way across to East Prussia, and he was in hospital at Stargard for some

months, and then he went to Schneidemühl. And then from Schneidemühl he was sent all the way back across to Hanover to Soltau. He was an NCO, so he didn't have to work.

How can he remember all these names?

Well, I've been talking to them recently, you see.

I can't remember a lot of them.

And he wanted to escape, and the only way he could do that was to get out on to a farm, so he got sent out on an Arbeit commando, and he got away. And he was away for about a fortnight, and he was caught near the Dutch border, and he came back and he spent 21 days in solitary.

Yes.

And then he was sent to Soltau again - this was in Soltau, actually. He again got out on a farm, escaped again. He was away for, oh, about ten days. And he was caught again, spent another 21 days ...

(Incidental conversation and break in interview)

Well, time passes, doesn't it?

Yes, it does. My word, it's a long time for me.

Oh, it's a long time ago.

I live in here.

Yes.

Twenty-four hours a day.

Do you?

Mm - I don't work. I can't see properly, you see, and I'm no good at talking to anybody, I can't talk to anybody. If I could see, I wouldn't give a damn.

No. Well, I've found that the majority of men that I've been talking to are in a similar position to you. They also have failing eyesight, and failing hearing, and you actually look better than some, you know; you seem fairly well.

Well, for two or three weeks I've been good, but I'm alright today. Tomorrow I might be in there.

Yes. How old are you now, Mr Marshall?

Eighty-nine.

You are eighty-nine?

I'll be ninety in June.

Will you?

Mm - in April, rather.

In April, yes.

In April - my birthday is in April. I'll be ninety.

I was interested to hear that you had been in those four camps in Germany.

Oh.

You may be able to give me some descriptions of them because, of course, the other two men I've met so far, who were POWs, were not officers, so they went to different camps. As officers you didn't have to work, did you?

Didn't have to work. That was the only thing you had. But camp life was no good.

No.

Oh, no good. I've seen some wonderful escapes.

Did you?

Yes. Unfortunately they were caught.

Yes.

Well, to get out, you had a long way to go, you had nothing . I don't know really what they lived on when they got out, some of them.

No.

Some of them, of course, got parcels. I didn't get a parcel in Germany - some of them got Red Cross parcels.

But surely you got Red Cross parcels too.

No. The only reason I can find out is, when I went to - oh, I can't think of that first place I went to - damn it!

Well, it wouldn't have been Munster or Dulmen?

No. You see, when I went there, by the time the Red Cross knew that I was there - I'd been shifted, I went to Karlsruhe - and I suppose by the time they found out that I was at Karlsruhe, I'd gone again, to Strohenmoor. And then when they found out that I was at Stralenmoor - I suppose they would, I don't know - by the time they found out, I'd left there and gone to ...

Good lord!

Holzminden. And I was there a long time, but I never got any parcels. If they sent me any to these other places, the Germans never sent them on. They'd keep them, I suppose.

Yes. Well, the Germans were generally fairly good with the Red Cross parcels; I mean, they wouldn't steal from them, generally, would they?

I don't know - I don't know, I'm sure.

No.

Any parcels, of course, that came from the Red Cross, were always opened.

Yes.

Even tins were opened. If I had a tin of meat or something sent to me, and went down to their place to get it, they'd open it, tip it out, and cut it and see if there was anything in it. Everything was opened.

Well, how did you eat then?

Just what they gave us. I lived on what they called sauerkraut, and mangel wurzels. I think sauerkraut - I'm not sure - was made out of cabbages.

That's right, yes.

I believe it was. It was awful damn stuff. There was very little - no breakfast. I suppose they'd call it a stew, what they gave us. Well, if it had got a potato in it, I used to wash it, and then heat it up again on the stove. It was awful stuff.

Oh, dear.

You had to eat it, you had nothing else. And I'll swear that in their brown bread was sawdust.

Yes. You wouldn't be the first person to say that. Well, Mr Fraser, who was a 13th man taken at Bullecourt, he also reckoned that the bread had sawdust in it.

I'm sure - I'm sure there was sawdust in bread - brown bread - yes.

And at no time did you receive a Red Cross parcel?

Never – never saw one.

Well, that was about the only thing that kept most of them alive.

Yes. Well, that's the only reason that I know, you see. By the time that they found out I was at the first place and sent a parcel, say, I'd left there and gone to Karlsruhe. And then, when they found out that I was at Karlsruhe, I'd gone on to Strohenmoor. And then, when they found out I was there, I'd gone to Holzminden. And I was at Holzminden long enough to receive a parcel, but I never got one.

Couldn't you get a message to the Red Cross though?

No.

Well, what about uniforms? Did you ever receive a Red Cross uniform?

No.

So the whole time you were captured, you were still in your army uniform?

Army uniform.

Dear, it must have been pretty worn out.

Yes - oh, yes. Holzminden was a big camp, of course. I don't know how many would be there, but there was a lot – a big camp.

And were there Russians, and Belgians, and Poles?

Mostly English.

They were mostly English?

Mostly airmen in there.

Can you remember any of the other men who were captured with you at that time? I think David Dunworth was in Karlsruhe for a time - he was a 15th Battalion man.

Dunworth?

Dunworth.

Yes.

You can remember him, can you?

Oh, yes. And there's another chap that was in the 15th Battalion at Strohenmoor, where I escaped from.

Yes.

But I don't remember him being there. He escaped and was caught, but I don't remember him being there. Another man I remember well - he died not long ago in Western Australia - he was a prisoner of war with me in Holzminden. He's a Western Australian.

What was his name?

A fine chap ... oh, God love us. I went over there to see him.

Did you?

Yes - but unfortunately I don't think he knew me. He was sick - he was sick. I don't think he knew me.

Oh, that's a shame. Well, did any of the other officers share their Red Cross parcels with you?

Pardon?

Did any of the other men share their Red Cross parcels with you?

Oh, I don't know.

You don't remember?

No, I don't know.

And what was the camp at Holzminden like? What did it look like?

It was a big place – a big place. There was enough room in it to kick a football and have a game of cricket.

Was there?

Mm.

And they had a football field, and a cricket pitch, did they?

They let them kick a football, and have a ... oh, say you went out onto a place like this out here. But they had a place outside the camp where they let them go and have a game of football. I never went out with them, but they went out and had a game of football. I think they had to sign a paper that they wouldn't escape.

Oh, yes.

And, of course, they had the guards with them, and the numbers that went, and then the numbers that came back . And I think they had to sign a paper to say that they wouldn't attempt to escape while they was on this football match.

Did they sort of play against each other, different barracks?

Yes. Now when I reached Holzminden, and got out of the train and went to the camp - I had a guard, of course - and do you know, I wasn't allowed to walk on the footpath.

This is up the street?

I had to walk on the road.

Did you?

Mm - had to walk on the road.

Why was that?

Well, I don't know.

It was just the attitude of the guard and the German people?

German people, yes. I couldn't have done any harm on the footpath, you see. I couldn't have done nothing.

You were on your own, were you?

I was on me own, the guard with a rifle. What could I do? I never saw anything of Holzminden, I don't know how big it was - no idea. I just went straight from the station to the camp, and saw nothing.

You didn't see anything of the town?

No, nothing at all. And in the camp they had a big wall up, of course, right round.

It was a wall, was it?

Mm?

It was a wall, was it - was it barbed wire?

No - solid wall - oh, I don't know how high it would be. And then inside the wall they had a wire - only a thin piece of wire - right round it, and you wasn't allowed to go over that wire to the fence. Only about from here to that door, the wire was.

About six feet.

If the cricket ball went in, or the football went over there, you couldn't go and get it. You had to wait for the guard to come and give it to you - yes.

Did that happen very much?

Not a great deal, no. And that's where I saw ... two escapes, I suppose - people, if you told them, wouldn't believe them. In broad daylight, they went over that wire, over to the fence, and cut the wire - they had barbed wire on top of it - and got out. Now, that was in broad daylight, and guards inside.

And they didn't see it?

They didn't see it. But unfortunately, Germans down underneath the camp - the building - they were down there - they saw them.

Oh, dear.

Now, that was broad daylight. Really, you can't credit it, with Germans inside, and yet they went and cut that wire, went through the wire, over to there, cut the wire and got over the fence.

Yes. How high do you think the fence was - about eight feet?

Oh, it would be .. it would be a good six, seven, feet - it would be - solid wall.

What, made from timber, or was it brick?

It was cement.

Cement wall?

Mm, cement wall.

Yes, I see. Whereabouts were the Germans who saw them escaping?

They were underneath the building with their ... where we lived.

What, you were on the first floor or something?

Down below, yes.

So the barracks that you were in were, what, two-storey, were they?

Oh ... it would be more than that, I think - big - they were a big building.

What had they been before the war? Was it a proper prison, or not?

No, it wasn't a proper prison, it was just, I suppose, a troop barracks.

It was a barracks?

Barracks for troops, I should say - for German troops.

It was a brick building? It was a brick building, was it?

... No, timber, I think.

Was it?

A timber building, yes. That tunnel I told you about - I wish I had those photos, but I haven't.

I might go down to St. Helens. I've got a cousin at St. Helens, and I'm going to be in Tasmania for about six weeks.

I don't know whether he's got them there, mind you.

Well, I'll telephone.

John Marshall - he fishes.

What were the photographs of?

The tunnel.

Actually inside the tunnel?

When they discovered it the next day - when they discovered the tunnel - they dug it up, you see, and took photos of it. And I happened to get ... I don't know now how I come to get the photos, who gave them to me. They were taken by Germans, of course. I don't know now who gave them to me, or how I got them. I brought them home and had them framed. They were in a big frame, about that wide.

Oh, are they?

Yes, different ones. That tunnel, of course, was being built for a long time, before ever I got there, and they done it with a knife.

A knife?

A knife.

It would be slow work.

They were unlucky. In the first place they only had to go, oh, about from here to that door ...

About four or five feet.

... to get out. Well, while they were doing this job, another New South Wales man attempted to escape, from up there - that was the entrance, you see, over there, and he was up here and tried to escape from up here.

What, this is up near ... Where was the tunnel? What part of the camp was it?

In the front of the building.

It was in the front of the building?

And there was a little shed in front of it. And I'll never know to this day why the Germans never went in there and had a look in that shed to see if there was anything in there. But they never did, no. Well, this chap was up there on the building, attempting to escape - in the daylight.

How was he going to try and escape?

Mm?

How was he going to try and escape? I mean, what was he going to do - jump over the wall?

He was over the wall.

Was he?

Yes, and up in the building.

Oh.

And they shot him, they shot him through the jaw. Made an awful mess of his jaw - put him in hospital. Well now, if he hadn't tried to escape, that chap, the tunnellers would only have had to go from here to there, but when he tried to escape there, they put sentries on the outside of the wall as well as inside, and then they had to go, oh, fifty or a hundred yards, I suppose ...

Did they?

... further out. They had ... some green stuff growing. I don't know what it was - it would be about that high.

About three feet.

And they had to go right out to there, otherwise they only had to go just a few feet really.

Wasn't that a shame.

Just outside the wall. Of course, when this fellow tried to escape they put sentries on the outside as well as on the inside, and they had to go all that way - there was 29, I think, got out.

Was there?

I think it was 29.

And you were there when they escaped, were you?

Yes. They'd been on that tunnel for a long time, before ever I got there.

And how many of those men were Australians? Were they mainly English, or were there a lot of Australians working on the tunnel?

I suppose there would be Australians among them. Another place, at Strohenmoor, where I was, they used to give us a shower. You'd get a hot shower. But you had to go out of the camp, into another building, and you had to go through ... a wire, or fence, you know.

A sort of corridor?

Fenced off. They had to go through a gate, from the camp into this building. There were guards, of course, and that. Do you know, how they done it. I don't know, but you've seen these old-fashioned locks and keys, haven't you?

Yes.

Big old keys about this long.

About a foot long, or eighteen inches long.

Do you know they made one - made a key.

Did they? For this gate?

To get into the shower. Once you got into the shower, you see, you could get out, out of the building. Well, they made a key. How they made it, I don't know. Where they got the stuff, I don't know. All I know is that they made a key and got into there and got caught.

They got caught in the shower?

No, they got caught outside.

Oh, they got away somewhere?

Got away and got caught.

Yes.

Now, how did they make that key?

Well, they must have had a file, I suppose, from somewhere, surely.

They had to have a file, but then to make the key, though.

They'd have to get a copy of the original key, wouldn't you?

I think they took an impression of the outside with soap.

Did they?

I'm not sure. I wasn't in it. All I know was, they done it, they made this bloomin' key – oh.

What was Strohenmoor camp like?

No good.

What did it look like? Was it a barbed wire enclosure?

Oh, yes.

That was all barbed wire?

All barbed wire - sentries, of course.

And it had the sentry boxes up on the corners, did it, like ...?

Yes.

How difficult was it to get out of those large camps? The wire was lit up at night, wasn't it?

Oh, yes, it was all lit up - and sentries inside and out - yes.

So it was, more or less, impossible to get out of them, wasn't it?

In a way it was impossible, although they done the impossible. You see, those two blokes cut that wire on the top of that thing and got over, and wasn't seen from inside.

And what happened to them after they got over the wall and were seen? How were they captured?

The Germans caught them outside.

Did they?

Yes. I've always thought of their names - Medleycott and Walters - and that was their third escape. And they sent them from there - as I told you, you don't go to your same camp again, you are sent to another one. They sent them to another camp in Germany, oh, miles from anywhere. I don't think they'd ever get out of there, no. Medleycott and Walters.

What was Walters' first name, do you know?

No, I don't know. All I know was, Medleycott and Walters.

Were they Australians, I assume? Were they Australians, or not?

I don't think they were, no. I don't think they were. Where did they get the pliers to cut that wire?

Well, I suppose if you set yourself the task of finding something like that ...

They must have got them from the Germans. They must have got them from the Germans. They couldn't get them anywhere else, see. They wasn't allowed down town. You couldn't go down town and buy them, or anything like that.

You could bribe the guards though, couldn't you?

Well, evidently they must have, yes, they must have.

Well, the other men have told me that they could do a certain exchange with the Germans with food from their Red Cross parcels.

Oh.

Especially for soap or something like that which they may have been sent.

Mm, yes, they would, yes. Our interpreter, in our place where I was, was a waiter, in London.

Was he?

Yes, he was a waiter in London.

And he was the camp interpreter, was he?

Yeah.

Where was that? Which camp?

Holzminden - the big camp. Of course, a lot of them could speak English.

The Germans?

Yes – the Nieymeyers, you see, and his offsider, was educated in America. You never knew when you had to go out on the parade ground to be counted to see if there was anyone missing.

They used to have surprise roll calls, did they?

Yes. If you wasn't there, and I said you wasn't well, you were in bed, they'd go up and see. They wouldn't take my word that you wasn't well. They'd go up and see where you was.

Well, I'm amazed that you didn't get any Red Cross parcels, because you were, you know, it was eighteen or nineteen months that you were a prisoner, wasn't it?

Yes.

That's a long, long time to be on that German food.

Yeah. No, I never got a parcel.

Well, did you receive anything at all from home?

No, nothing at all, no.

Did you receive mail from home?

Oh, yes, but just, 'I am well', and 'hope you are', or something like that. No news at all. We had a card - printed card - to send home, with different things on it - 'I am well', or 'I am not well'. Different little things like that, and you had to scratch out what was what.

So you couldn't actually write letters home?

I reckon if you did they'd never go. They wouldn't go.

The other men, the privates and the NCOs, seemed to have had more liberty to have been able to write home, and to receive letters.

Oh. No, as far as I know I never wrote home - never. I had two brothers killed in France.

Oh, did you?

Yes. And I got word, in German, of one of my brothers - he enlisted in New Zealand - he was killed. And I got word in German that he was killed. The Germans let me know. I don't know how that came about. Of course, I had to get a German to read it to me to let me know.

And what about the other brother? What about the other brother? Did you find out that he'd been killed while you were a prisoner, or not?

No.

My grandfather lost a brother in the same way. He was in the 40th Battalion.

Yes, my brother was in the 40th.

Was he?

Mine was. He was supposed - I could never find out - no-one knew where he was. He just seemed to have sort of disappeared. No-one in the 40th that I knew - I spoke to them and told me they knew nothing, where he was, or how he was killed, or what happened to him. So I don't know what did happen to him. My other brother was shot. I found out afterwards, if the Red Cross, one of the stretcher-bearers, could have got to him, they would have saved him. He was shot in the legs, and no-one attended him, you see.

Oh, I see.

If they could have got to him they'd have saved his life. It's just one of those things. And of course, in France, of course, in the mud - up to your knees in mud - you've no hope there at all.

No, well, that's right, it was extremely difficult to get anybody back, wasn't it?

Yes.

Oh, no, it was a dreadful place at that time.

(Break in interview)

Well, of course, the 15th Battalion had to make attacks at Pozieres, didn't it?

Yes, yes.

Yes, Pozieres was an awful place.

Oh. There was nothing left of us ...

No.

... after the war, it was just ... just flattened - everything was shot and blown up.

Do you recall going into Pozieres in early August 1916?

I think I can. I think I went in. It's in that Tasmanian - where we went in. I went in with the - before the Battalion went in. I went in with the colonel and three or four other officers ...

Did you?

... into Pozieres, before the Battalion went up to have a look and sort of make arrangements.

Yes. And what did you see at that time?

See?

Yes.

Only - well, there was nothing to see, it had all been blown out, you see. Only dead trees , plenty of dead trees, yes.

Well, I know that when the Battalion came into Pozieres, that first night, it was August 6th, and they came in of a night time, and they had great difficulty getting in because of the shell fire.

There was certainly some shells there.

Yes.

They had some guns and ammunition, there is no doubt about it. They never stopped.

No.

You know, if you got behind a big gun, you could see the shell.

Yes.

Did you know that?

Well, I've been told before that you could see the shell.

You can.

Yes.

And you could see the Turks had two battleships in the Straits, you know, at Gallipoli.

The Turks had battleships?

Turks had two.

Did they?

And they used to fire them over, but some of the shells went off and some didn't. They were duds. But, you know, you could see those shells, you could see them coming.

Yes, I didn't know that. I've heard that you could see shells.

You could see shells, you could, and you could see these coming. Big guns - see 'em coming over, yes. They didn't do, oh - very little damage. Quite a number of them never went off.

Yes.

There is no doubt, the factories, both in Germany and England, done a good job, making what they made. Shells and ... They must have made, well, I suppose millions of bullets - machine-guns. You see, you had a machine-gun, it would fire about seven or eight hundred a minute.

Yes. It's a lot, isn't it?

That's a lot, it's a lot of shell, my word. An eighteen-pounder gun, that was an awful gun. You know, we had them, and you could fire them as fast as you could put them in. You didn't have to wait for anything. As soon as it went off - in - you know, just like this.

Could you?

Yes. They had their guns, and you could see a heap of shells, yes. And you never seemed to be short of shells or bullets. Where they got them from, I don't know.

What can you remember about Pozieres? Can you remember any of the attacks at all, or anything like that?

Oh, quite a lot, yes. It was mostly, I would say, in the mud. It was a muddy, muddy place, Pozieres, yes. And, of course, we was shelled day and night, yes.

What was the reaction of the men to the shell fire? How did they stand up to it?

Well, I would say they done a good job, they did a wonderful job. Of course, some of them went, of course - well, it was only natural, I suppose. They couldn't take it every day and every night.

Well, you wouldn't get any sleep, I suppose.

Well, you get used to it, like everything else, yes. And from Holzminden Camp, where I was in Germany, we could see the big - not aeroplanes - what is it?

Zeppelins?

Yes, you could see them going over. I don't know where they was going, but you could see them, quite low down - big things - yes.

Yes, well, some of the men that I've been talking to have told me about seeing them in Germany. I know James Wheeler saw them coming and going from an airfield one day when he was out trying to escape.

Oh.

And a couple of men have told me about being in London during air raids by those Zeppelins.

Yes.

What was the story behind the tunnel which the men got out of? Where was the tunnel from?

It was in front of the building where we lived, really. They had - oh, of course, there were different sorts of buildings. They were all together as barracks, but they had a little shed, as I said, in front of it, where our fellows went in. They had to take the palings off, you see, and put them back again - of course, when they got in.

And they went down from the floor of that?

Yes. Why, as I say, why the Germans never looked in that, I don't know - never know. Of course, they looked everywhere, looked everywhere to see if there was any way that they could escape, walking around the wall and looking at different things, and looking at our building, where we was, to see if we could sort of jump out of the window and things like that, out of the side. But they evidently never went into this little shed.

What was it for, the little shed?

I don't know - I don't know. That's where they put a lot of the dirt of the tunnel in it ...

Oh, really.

... when they got it. Well, you see, they got some bags. I don't know whether the bags was in there or not. They put dirt in the bags and put it in this little place, in a corner. But if only I could get this photo, I could explain it properly to you.

Well, I'll see if I can borrow it, because that would be worthwhile. And how long did it take them to make the tunnel?

Oh, I think it was over two years.

Was it?

I think so, yes. They had no tools, you see, to work with.

All they had was a knife?

All they had was a knife.

You'd think they'd be able to make some sort of tools, a bit more than that, wouldn't you?

Well, you couldn't, you see, you had nothing to make them with. Although they made that key as I told you.

Yes, but even though, a key is a bit different than making a tunnel.

My word.

And you didn't go on this escape attempt I understand?

No.

But you knew there was a tunnel.

I knew it when I got there. I knew it was on. There was a lot of them didn't know – oh hundreds. Knew nothing at all about it. Well, you never knew who was in the camp as a spy. Because they could speak English, and they could come in as a prisoner, and you wouldn't know. You had to be careful in that way that you didn't give any information away.

Well I know that Donald Fraser was telling me when he was at Soltau..

END OF TAPE ONE

START OF TAPE TWO (Microcassette)

When the escape was on, what happened that night? Was it a night-time, or during the day?

Night.

It was at night?

Night-time.

What time of the year was it? What season?

Well, it must have been summertime because ... I'm sure it was summertime, yes. I think in that red book there is a fair bit about it.

Yes, I'll have to have another read of that.

Have you got one?

I've got a photocopy of the section that I'm interested in, including the POW section in there, so I'll read that again.

Mm.

What happened to you when you went to Karlsruhe?

We just went into camp, into the camp, that was all.

Yes.

Saw nothing of it, of course, saw nothing of Karlsruhe - nothing at all, only straight into the camp.

Yes.

I'd like to go back to Germany.

Yes, to have another look?

I'd like ... Of course, whether the ... camp is still there. I don't suppose it would be now after all these years.

No.

It would be built on, like everything else.

Well, I've been told that Soltau is still there, but I don't know about the other camps.

I don't know at all how big Holzminden was, and how many people were there. I don't know anything at all about it because I saw nothing.

No.

Saw nothing at all.

You couldn't see out over the concrete wall?

Oh, no.

What was the view like from the top of the barracks?

You couldn't see anything, no. Yes, I suppose now those barracks would be fallen down, or perhaps houses built on it.

Yes, well, they may be, I don't know. If I find out I'll let you know.

Good. Because I wouldn't know. I'd know the camp, but I wouldn't know Holzminden because I never saw it.

No. But what could you see from the barracks? I mean, if it was more than - if it was, say, a couple of storeys high, or more, say ...

I never saw anything.

No. What was the surroundings of the camp like? Was it all fields and open country, or not?

It would be all open country, wouldn't it? Yes, I think, yes.

The camp, obviously, was out on the outskirts of Holzminden somewhere.

It wasn't far from the town.

No.

It didn't take long for me to go from the train to the camp.

Yes. Well, your clothes must have been well and truly worn out by the time the war ended.

Oh, yes, yes.

I suppose you were able to repair them yourself, were you?

In the camp?

Yes.

Up to a point, yes. You didn't really tear them or do much damage to them, you just wore them in the daytime and went to bed at night. Just walk around the camp in the daytime, filling in time.

How would you fill in time in the camp? What sort of activities would you organise?

They had some cricket - a game of cricket - and they had a football to kick. That was the main thing, and the other was cards.

Cards, yes.

You play cards all day and half the night.

Would you?

Mm.

Would you play cards?

Yes.

You'd play cards.

Yes.

What sort of games would you play?

Play bridge.

Was it? I've heard of bridge, yes.

That's the main game they played over there. Coming home - coming home on the boat I played every night.

Did you?

Yes, every night, four of us.

Did you?

Mm.

And what about other activities, like lectures and, you know ...

No lectures that ever I went to. I don't know if they had any or not, I'm sure. I don't know. I should have learnt German, or tried to. They would have helped me, I think.

I suppose you picked up a few words of German though.

I did, but I've forgotten them now. I got one or two, but I've forgotten them now.

Were paid while you were a POW? Did they give you a certain wage, or not?

Yes - the army?

Well, I mean ...

Our pay still went on, oh yes.

But I mean, did the Germans give you any money?

No. We had ... they gave us a cheque book, and we wrote a cheque. You couldn't write much, and you didn't want much really.

No.

You couldn't buy anything. I didn't use it much, no. I don't know how they fixed it up, how they ... between the two countries, how they sorted it out, I'm sure, because I didn't use mine very much - very little.

Did they have a canteen or something like that?

No. Any washing that you wanted, they had a list, you know, different names. All in German, of course. And they'd tell you if you wanted a shirt washed, if you had a shirt, or a pair of socks, or whatever it was. You put it on there and they'd take it away and that's how you'd pay for them.

Oh, yes.

You had to pay for them, of course.

You had to pay to have your laundry done?

You had to pay them for that. You'd do your own, of course - some of it. But some you couldn't do, no.

Did you know any of the men who took part in the escape from Holzminden?

I don't think I did. I don't think I did, no.

Who did you make friends with in Holzminden? Can you recall the names of the ...

This chap I told you a little while ago, a fellow named Lyon - Peter Lyon – from Western Australia.

Oh, yes.

He was my main mate.

Yes, right. And was he captured at Bullecourt too?

Yes.

He was a 16th man, was he?

He was a Western Australian, 16th, yes.

Did you have any other friends from the Brigade that you can recall in Holzminden or the other camp?

No, I can't, no.

What sort of a man was Peter Lyon?

Oh, he was a good fellow.

What was his physical appearance? I mean, could you describe what he looked like?

He was a big man.

Was he?

Yes - and he got a good job with the government in Western Australia when he got back. I've just forgotten now what it was, but it was quite a good job till he got on the sick list and had to give it up.

What did he do before the war?

I don't know what he was before the war, I don't, no.

What did he do in the Battalion? What sort of task did he have? Was he a bomber or a Lewis gunner?

Oh ... no, he was only in the infantry.

Was he? Well, he'd have been a lieutenant too, wouldn't he?

Yes, yes. Peter Lyon.

L-Y-O-N?

L-Y-O-N.

Can you remember any stories about him in the camp?

No, no. I just used to walk round with him. I don't think he played cricket or football.

No.

I don't think he did.

He was a card player?

Yes.

He was a card player, yes. What other amusements were there for you to pass your time? Did they sort of set up any ...

Nothing.

Nothing?

Nothing.

What about reading? Did they allow you books?

I believe they did, but I never read . I haven't read six books in my life.

Haven't you?

Never read books, no. My reading is the newspaper - or was - and the Reader's Digest.

Oh, yes.

That was my books. I never read any ... didn't seem to take any interest in any other books. I couldn't read.

No.

I think they had books there. I don't know what sort they'd be. All censored, of course.

Yes.

When the war finished, when we was going home, we went to Holland.

Did you?

And got the boat from Holland, and went in a train. I don't know how far it would be. We stopped at some place. And we had a fairly decent feed. They gave us a fairly decent feed, the best I had in Germany. And I went to Holland and got a boat from Holland. And do you know, I don't now remember arriving in London. I don't. It's not far, of course, from Holland. I don't know how long it would take.

No, only a few hours, wouldn't it?

I don't know, I don't remember going.

You'd remember the Armistice, I suppose, or you'd remember the end of the war.

Oh, yes.

What happened in - you were in Holzminden then.

Yes.

Yes. What happened then?

When the World War was finished, finally, then the oldest Englishman took charge.

Did he?

The oldest serving member. I don't know whether he would be a colonel or lieutenant colonel. He sort of took charge then . We finished with the Germans.

Did you?

I think we had to wait a few days before we got away. I'm not sure, I think we did now. Of course, they had an awful lot to do, thousands, of course, to shift from France to England, you see - thousands . They had a lot of prisoners to collect and transport over.

What were the barracks at Holzminden like - inside I mean?

Alright.

How were they organised?

Organised?

Can you describe what they looked like inside?

No, I can't.

How many beds would there have been in each barrack, for example?

Well, down below - that's on the floor - there was bunks down there for two. I think it was two. I was upstairs when I first got there. I forget how many was in there. And just before the war finished I got down in below.

On the first floor?

On the first floor. Instead of being upstairs I got down there.

And was there only the one barrack there, only the one building?

One building.

There was only one?

They were big buildings - different buildings, but big.

Big?

Oh, yes, big buildings.

How many, at a guess, would they have held, each building? A hundred or less?

Building?

Well, how many men would there have been in each building, at a guess?

Well, they all lived in the one building. I don't know how many - hundreds of them.

There were hundreds?

Yeah, there would be hundreds altogether, in a big barrack - big barracks.

And was somebody in charge of each floor? What sort of discipline was organised amongst the men themselves?

Well they had no-one, as far as I know, in charge. All the Germans was in charge. You done what they said, not what I said. You done what I say, not ... I think if I remember rightly, they did let one or two go down town, with guards of course.

For what purpose?

Oh, just to have a look, I suppose. I don't know. I never went. I never went out of the camp when I was there. Never went to the football when they went to play football. They had a place outside somewhere, not far away, where they played football. I never went. Never went out of the camp when I got there.

How difficult was it to stay reasonably well balanced and not get too depressed? Wire happy, I think, was the word they used to use, being confined for that long period of time.

After a while, of course, you got used to it. You couldn't do nothing. You just had to stop there and you got used to it. It wasn't any good, I'll tell you.

No.

But still, you stopped there. There is a lot, I suppose, I've forgotten to tell you, but it's a long time ago.

Yes. Well, there's no real rush. I'll come back and see you again, there's no rush, and things will come back to you anyway later on. It takes time. I've been going to see everybody, oh, a few times, you know, to get to ... and I usually make a few questions up too when I know what the story is - what your story is. That helps. What can you remember about Bullecourt itself? I mean, can you give me a description of what you did from the time the Battalion left the sunken railway and went across to the wire?

That was our camp in there, and that's where we went to the front line.

Can you remember going through the German wire?

Yes.

What happened then?

You got through the German wire, and then you got into their trench - their front line trench. Of course, it was all made a mess of, of course - wounded and dead, and everything in the front line, of course. Barbed wire is awful stuff. You got no idea - people have got no idea what it's like. You see a barbed wire fence, that's bad enough, but when you see yards of it ...

How did you get through the wire?

They had tracks through.

And you went down those?

Yes, down those.

I mean, I know the 15th Battalion had a lot of casualties there.

Yes, it did.

Whereabouts were those casualties caused mainly?

Going into the line, mostly, and when they was in the line, when the Germans counter-attacked.

Yes. How long would it have taken you to get through the wire do you think?

Oh, not long.

How long would that be - five minutes?

No.

Less than that?

Oh, yes. They had paths through, you see, where the Germans used to come out of, their own, you see. They were still left there.

And when you got into the trench, what did you do after that? There were two lines of trenches, weren't there, at Bullecourt?

As far as I know there was the front line and the supporting line.

Yes. Well, when you got into the front line ...

We stopped there.

You stopped there, did you?

Stopped there - never got out of it.

No. You were a signaller?

Yes.

So your task would have been to get messages back to the rear.

If we could.

Yes. And what happened? I mean, were you able to do that, or not?

Got nothing back to headquarters in the sunken road - got nothing back there. See, we had no telephone. If we had had a telephone it would have been alright, but you couldn't signal back, in daylight of course.

Why didn't you have a telephone? What had happened with the telephone?

Well, they would have had to have eight hundred odd, nearly a thousand, yards of wire for one thing.

And that was too far for the ...

Too far.

Oh. So before the attack you didn't go with field telephones?

With telephones, no.

No.

Oh, no.

So you were going to try and get messages back by signal, either with flags ...

Yes.

... or with runners?

Yes.

You used pigeons too, didn't you? Did you use pigeons, or not?

No, not where I was. They did use them in there, yes.

And I believe that the task of the 15th Battalion was to carry on from the front line and attack Riencourt, wasn't it?

Yes. As I said, they had cavalry behind. Oh, it was hopeless, they had no hope in the world of doing it with the cavalry. Well, they told us they had cavalry, I suppose they did.

They certainly did have cavalry there, yes, because I've spoken with men who saw Indian mounted troops and so on coming up, but that was later in the morning.

Yes.

They didn't get very far.

No.

Well, they didn't really attack. They did go out a bit, but they were fired on and they lost horses and men, and they left. From where you were in the front line, could you see all the way back to the sunken road?

Practically.

Could you?

Yes, because it was all level, and snow or course - yes, snow.

And was the task of a signaller to fire flares?

Mm?

Was it one of your tasks to fire flares? Was that a task?

No.

No.

I'm not sure, but I think ... oh, a good way out from the German front line, there was a big tree, and I've got an idea they had someone up top.

In the tree?

In the tree.

Really?

Yes. You see, on Gallipoli they had a big high wall, and they had snipers up there - on Gallipoli.

Yes.

I think they had someone up this tree.

Did they?

Yes.

And the whole time you were in the front line at Bullecourt you were being sniped at, were you?

I was what?

You were being sniped at, were you?

Oh, yes.

You were?

Yes, oh yes.

Whereabouts could you see the Germans from where you were?

Well, they were in their trenches. I never looked, I kept down. But I was with one chap - I couldn't tell you his name now - he got up on a bit of a bank, as close as I am to you, to have a look, and he said, "There they are," he said. He pointed. "They are along there." And you know, before he finished he was dead.

Was he?

Shot. He got up and showed himself, you see, and, of course, a sniper got him.

Goodness me. He was a 15th man?

No.

He wasn't a 15th man?

He wasn't a 15th.

He would have been a 14th man perhaps?

He could have been a 14th, couldn't have been a 16th, or a 13th.

Whereabouts were you when you started to consolidate in the front line there? What position did you have?

I was just in the front line, waiting for any orders that I was likely to get. But I never got too many because they couldn't do nothing. They couldn't do nothing. They couldn't advance and they couldn't get any reinforcements. Really just stood in the front line, that's all you could do.

Was this in the first line or the support line?

The first.

This is in the first line?

First line, yes.

That's the first line once you get through the wire?

Yes.

And did you go on to the second line, or not?

No.

The support line?

No.

No. And when you were captured, what actually happened then? You'd run out of ammunition and so on?

Yes. Oh, just put your hands up and follow on.

And who else was with you at that time?

Pardon?

Can you recall who was with you at that time?

No, I can't, no.

What was the feeling about being captured?

Well, I just wondered what was going to happen. That's what I thought. What's going to happen. I knew there was plenty of other prisoners before me, and I didn't know what they were going through or what happened, and I just wondered what's going to happen.

What did you think might happen?

Well, I didn't know really.

No.

You see, you all had different tales as they done different things, which wasn't true. For some of them, of course were. There's no doubt about that, they didn't play the game, they didn't. I suppose on both sides, I don't know.

Some prisoners were shot on the Australian side. I mean, the Australians did shoot some, I think, but rarely.

Yes, that's all. I just wondered what's next.

And you weren't wounded? You were not wounded?

Not in Germany, no - weren't.

You weren't wounded in France?

No.

Did you go up to Fort MacDonald? You might not remember, it was up near ... A lot of the men were marched up from Lille to a place called Fort MacDonald where they stayed for about a week. But you didn't go up there?

No. There was a lot of places there. I couldn't pronounce the names for one thing, and I wouldn't remember. There was one place in France where we went for a shower - stripped off and had a real good wash and clean up. I couldn't tell you where that was now.

No.

There was one thing I will always remember. We was in a camp. I couldn't tell you the name of the place now. And I went up to a house - a two-storey house - where some others was billeted, went up to see them. And they had a bottle of whisky. There was only four or five of us up there, I think - and they had a bottle of whisky. And you know, no-one would go downstairs to get any water and we drank whisky, and when I come out - it was good up there, it was like being here - when I come out into the fresh air I'd had it.

You'd what?

I'd had it.

You had it?

I'd had it.

What happened?

Oh, I was sick, of course. I got to me bed and that was ... I had an awful night. I was only a kid, you see, I was only about eighteen, and drinking neat whisky with these fellows. Just because no-one would go down there ...

Get some water.

Get a drop of water. Yes, that's one night I'll never forget.

Yes.

I never drank much champagne over there – wine. I never drank very much.

What about beer?

No, very little beer. It was mostly wine in France. Wherever you went was always wine of some sort, but I never used to have much. And when I got back to England I didn't like the English beer. I don't suppose you've had it.

Well, I've been there, yes - I have.

Whether it's altered or not, but, I don't know, it was ... I thought it was awful stuff - beer - I couldn't take it.

No. Yes, I think it might have changed somewhat now, but ...

I suppose it would - I suppose it would.

And you can get all sorts of beers in England now, including Australian beers.

Do they send Australian over.

Yes, they sell Australian beers in England.

What do they charge for that (laughs)?

Well, I don't know. I don't think it's too much.

Isn't it?

No. It's very popular.

Is it?

Yes.

Oh.

But, of course, it's mainly the English beer that's on tap.

Yes.

And that's still rather warm.

Yes.

It's not like our beer.

Well, they haven't learnt much in the wars, have they?

No.

Still haven't.

No, it's stupid, isn't it?

Oh.

Oh, well, I might be able to do a little bit with this book to help people to see that its a silly affair - silly business.

Why can't - It's impossible I suppose. But why can't, say ... the army from Australia go to Russia and talk to them, and then say, 'We are not in this. We wont fight.' What could they do if they would agree if all the nations' men wouldn't fight? What could they do?

Well, I can't see why they don't do that either.

No.

You know, it seems so logical.

Oh, yes.

And both sides tend to know that that's not really anything to be gained from fighting.

No.

But it just seems to go on and on.

Well, as they tell us, there's been wars since the world, and, of course, there always will be.

Well, I hope not.

Oh, there will, there's no doubt about it. There wont be a big war.

No.

There wont be a nuclear war.

Well, I hope not.

Oh, there wont.

I don't feel that confident, no.

I'm quite satisfied there wont be a war like that. I mean, they've only got to press a button in New York, and one in Moscow.

It's stupid, isn't it?

It's gone. Well, they go out into the ocean, you see, and a submarine can fire anywhere.

Yes.

And, of course, if one can do it, the other can. One starts, of course, the other will start. There wont be another big war.

Well, I certainly hope not.

No, there wont.

I don't think there looks to be ... it doesn't look to be that possibility. Oh, there's a possibility, but I don't think it's very strong.

No. Well, see, they are talking about ...

(Break in interview)

Right, well, here it says [Karlsruhe 24th April 1917 - Crefeld 1st May 1917 - Strohen 22nd May 1917 and Holtzminden 2nd November 1917 to 10th December 1918'. And you say that Crefeld was first.

What does it say? When did I go to Holtzminden?

2nd November 1917.

2nd November.

Yes.

I was there in November ... Armistice was ...

You were at Holtzminden for a year - twelve months.

Oh, that's something like it.

Yes.

I know I was there a long time.

Well, you were captured on 11th April ...

11th.

... and here it says that you were at Karlsruhe on 24th April, and you were there a week, and then you went to Crefeld, 1st May 1917. And then, two or three weeks later - three weeks later - you went to Strohen, and you were in Strohen through until November 1917. And then you went to Holtzminden.

I think me daughter-in-law would have done that for me. I suppose I gave her the particulars. Evidently I did, but she wouldn't know. But anyway, she done it for me.

Yes. I might get in touch with her, but I'll be able to check that, and if you were in Crefeld first, I'll correct it for you.

Yeah, I'm sure I went from there to Karlsruhe.

Alright, I'll find out anyway.

Good.

But thank you, that's a help. I'll put this back in here and I'll put them back in the drawer for you.

Thanks. That's my bit of private stuff that I've got there.

Yes. And you don't have any photographs of yourself here?

No, I've got no photos.

(Break in interview)

Is what I'm talking, is it going on the air?

Yes, I've got a little tape player, and I'm taping as I go. When I write this book I'm going to put ... the narrative is going to be in the men's own words as much as possible, and I'm just going to tape the stories you tell me and then I'll write them out. And I'll sort of edit them a little bit, so that everything reads very well. And then I'll tie everything together, including letters and so on that I find, to put together the story.

Oh, this will take you a long time.

It will take a few years, yes.

Oh, godfather, yes. I won't be here.

Well, I hope you are.

Oh, well.

But I want to do a good job.

Oh, yes.

So, you know, I'm going to take my time with it.

Yes. Oh, yes, it will take you a long time.

It will take - well, it will take three years, perhaps longer I'm afraid. However, I'm going to do an article on the three POWs that I've met, and I'm going to see if I can get that to come out in a magazine for Anzac Day 1987. That's the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Bullecourt.

Oh.

I'm very confident because I've already been doing articles, and one's coming out in a magazine this following April for Anzac Day, which is about Anzac Day 1916, and I'm sure the same magazine would take a story about the POWs for the following year.

Yes.

So I will certainly get that to you, so there's something to start with. I'd like to start more or less from when you were captured.

Yes.

How many were there with you when you were captured? Were you on your own, or was there a group of you?

Oh, a lot of us, a lot of us together, and we went, as I think I told you yesterday, into a shed - some sort of a shed - for the night. Put the night in there.

How far back from the front line was that?

Oh, not a great way.

A couple of miles?

... I don't think it would be a couple of miles. I don't think it would be, no.

Were you with all ranks, or was it only officers?

Oh, all ranks.

All ranks?

Yes.

And that evening the men tried to destroy all of their paper?

No, the next day.

It was the next day?

The next day when we went - taken away to different places.

Yes.

We went into a - oh, I don't know what it was. An officers' - where all the German officers were and that, and they were the interrogators, you see. That's where all the papers was torn up.

I suppose the Germans tried to stop you doing that, did they?

No, they didn't. It was done before ... just simply done and thrown, and that was the end of it. They couldn't do nothing.

Did you have anything that you destroyed?

No, I had nothing.

Didn't you?

No, I had nothing. That's what I regret, as I told you, that I didn't take notes of different things and have a diary, but I never had a thing, no.

Well, I actually have a sort of a diary here, in a way, that's been taken from the 15th Battalion history, which shows what you were doing, more or less, week by week.

Yes.

So that will be a help to us.

Yes. The 15th Battalion, you've got that, have you?

Yes.

It's really all in there.

Yes. Well, that will be a big help. I've actually been lent Colonel Cannan's copy.

Have you?

Yes. What happened when you were interrogated?

Oh, they didn't take long with me because I had nothing to tell them. I told them nothing, of course.

What did they ask you about?

Well, I've forgotten now, to be truthful - I've forgotten. I wasn't in there very long with them.

How long would that have been - ten minutes, or half an hour?

Oh, ten minutes at the most I suppose. I knew nothing - well, I did know nothing either - I didn't know anything. None of the privates knew anything. All they knew was that we was going into a battle, going out over eight hundred yards, and trying to take the line, and let the cavalry through. That's all I knew, and that's all we knew.

Yes.

No, I don't suppose this will be any good to you.

That's it.

Oh, no - where is that book?

Which one are you looking for? The Tasmanian War Record?

Yes.

Here, that's that one.

No, the 15th Battalion.

Yes, here.

Ah, that's it.

Well, I actually ... I do have a copy.

Oh ... Well, I don't suppose it's any good to you, but ... where it's marked down there, on there, is where I am mentioned.

Yes. Oh, well, I'll have a look.

I don't know what that will be there, for instance.

Yes, that's right. Yes, well, this mentions the Gallipoli period when you were ... the first one you've mentioned here shows when you drew lots to go back ...

Oh, yes.

... that's to find Battalion headquarters ...

Oh.

... and you were hit by a shrapnel burst.

That's it. There's some more in the front of that, before that, just where I happened to be mentioned.

Yes. I've seen the mentions made of you in this history. You are mentioned back here at Bullecourt where you were captured.

Yes.

It mentions - where are we? Well, it says up to ... when you were going through the wire the 15th had lost four officers: Captain McIntosh, Lieutenant Wilkins of D Company, and Lieutenant Drybrough, and Lieutenant Pedersen. Well, I think they were newcomers, weren't they?

Yes, yes.

You are mentioned here, you see: 'Those taken prisoner of war were lieutenants W. Missingham ...'

Yes, I know him.

'... J. Ingram, A. M. Marshall' - that's you, of course ...

Yes.

'... M. J. D'Arcy, A. V, Watkinson, and E. Binnington. Watson and Proctor were reported missing and POW, but they'd been killed.'

Mm.

You knew Lieutenant Missingham, did you?

I knew him, yes.

He was a Queenslander, was he, or not?

Yes.

Was he in any of the camps with you?

Pardon?

Was he in any of the camps with you?

Oh, he must have been ... in the first camp at Karlsruhe and Crefeld. He must have been there.

Yes, well, I'll have to see if I can find Crefeld on this map. Did you know Lieutenant Ernie Eibel?

Abel?

Abel, was it?

No.

E-I-B-E-L?

No.

He was known as Iceberg Eibel.

No. You see, there was a lot of men in the Battalion, and, of course, they were coming and going. They were killed and wounded, and new men come in. Of course, you couldn't know them all.

No. How did the other men fare during the interrogation that you had? What was the scene in the room where you were interrogated? Was there a number of Germans seated at tables?

No, only ... I think there was only a couple there. I believe that they had a typist there. I suppose she was taking down everything, yes.

And you went in one at a time, did you?

One at a time, yes.

And do you think the Germans got very much information from you?

Well, they couldn't because they had nothing to give them, you see.

No.

They had nothing to give them. Just say that they were ... We was going to take the front line or was going to have a raid, or have a go at the front line to get in. And that's all they were told, you see, they knew nothing. I knew nothing.

No. Do you think the Germans were surprised when you attacked on the 11th?

I don't think so.

You don't think so?

No, I don't think so.

No.

Of course, they had their spies and their men about different places, you see – getting information. I did hear - I don't know whether it's right or not - a Frenchman, he had two horses, different coloured horses. He used to go out into the field and do his ploughing and that sort of thing, and he changed the horses or something, and by changing the horses the Germans knew what was ...

What was coming?

What was coming to them. Whether it's right or not, I don't know.

It's an interesting story that, isn't it?

It is.

Well, I'm sure that there were certainly spies behind the lines.

Oh, no doubt about it. There was one at Bullecourt.

Was there?

At - not Bullecourt ...

Stormy Trench? Pozieres?

Pozieres.

Pozieres, yes.

Yes, I'm sure we struck one there one night. He spoke perfect English and he was asking a few questions, wanted to know how far it was or where was so and so, and that. I think they took him into the officers and they had a go at him. I'm not sure, but I think they did. It was night-time. He was dressed up as a major in English.

An English major?

Yes. And he was an English major, and he was a German.

Yes. Well, I've read a book called *Jacka's Mob* which was written by a sergeant in the - well, he was actually commissioned later in the 14th Battalion - and he mentions spies that he saw at Bullecourt - just before Bullecourt.

Well, I suppose we had them on our side, on their - you see.

There would have been both sides, yes.

On both sides, of course, yes. And, of course, they was in Turkey on Gallipoli.

Were they?

Oh, yes - oh, yes, they had them there.

What was the place like which you were taken to on the first night you were captured? It was a big shed, you said.

Big - the first night?

Yes.

Just a big shed.

Like a barn?

Yes, like a barn, yes.

And I suppose there were wounded amongst you too then?

No, there wasn't.

They were all unwounded?

All unwounded ...

Were they?

... that was in there, yes. I've forgotten how many was there now in the shed. They took them to different places, I suppose, you see. Some went here and some went there.

How many would there have been in the shed - one hundred or more?

Oh, no, there wouldn't be. There wouldn't be about twenty, I suppose.

Oh, only twenty?

There would be only about twenty, I suppose.

So they took all the prisoners to various places to billet them for the night?

Yes. I don't know where they went to. I've no idea, of course - no idea at all.

Did you see anybody else that you knew from D Company while you were a prisoner, or not?

No.

You didn't?

No.

When the 15th Battalion lost so many men coming through the German wire, did you have to assume control over a group of men, or not? I mean, there were very few officers left.

Very few. Of course, there was men everywhere - killed - everywhere.

And did you see anybody trying to get back after the decision to surrender or retire?

No, I didn't. I know there was quite a number went back, and there was a lot of them killed, a lot of them shot. But I think there was a fair few that did get back.

There weren't many I don't think. I think there were only about thirteen out of D Company who got back.

Mm. I don't know whether it tells in there or not.

It doesn't actually, no.

No.

It does as a whole, it says that there were 52, all ranks, from the 15th who got back - none of them officers. No officers got back.

Well, you see, of course, daylight, you see, you didn't have any hope. Well, they took the risk, and of course, as I said, they were shot.

Yes. Did you see Captain Murray - Harry Murray?

Yes.

You saw him there, did you?

Oh, yes.

What was he doing?

Oh, just his ordinary job, doing what he could for the men and the best for the Battalion, and that.

Whereabouts was he?

We had some good men, good officers, yes.

Were you speaking to Harry Murray at Bullecourt, or not?

No, no. There was some others there that I was with - other officers. I've forgotten their names now though. I was with them.

Yes. And you would have been in the line when the Germans started shelling it, wouldn't you? The Germans started shelling the line at Bullecourt, the actual Hindenburg Line ...

Yes.

... towards the end, didn't they? At all times, but towards the end I believe they really started shelling the trenches.

At the end?

Yes.

Oh, I wouldn't know. What would they shell them for? You see, we were all taken prisoners.

Yes, but just before you were taken prisoner.

Oh, yes, there was plenty of shells then. Of course, they had all the advantages. I told you, they went underground and got back to their support line, and, of course, we had the front line and that's where we got it.

Yes. And can you remember any of those counter-attacks?

No, I can't say that I do. It was fighting all the time, shooting at one another all the time. They'd attack or ... and be shot at, of course. We couldn't do anything. We never advanced past the front line.

No.

Of course, they had all their reserves behind - had everything they wanted behind them. We had nothing behind us.

What could you see behind the German line?

Nothing.

You couldn't see ... Could you see them regrouping, or not?

No, no. No, I stayed in the trench really. I had nothing to do. Couldn't do nothing. I just stayed in the trench with the other officers and men.

You'd have been armed with a revolver, I suppose?

Yes.

And a few - did you have any bombs?

No, that was our trouble. We had machine-guns, rifles, and bombs, of course.

But you didn't have a field telephone line back to the sunken railway?

No, no.

When you actually surrendered, what happened at that time? Can you give me a description of the five minutes, or ten minutes or so, just before you were captured and just after you were captured?

Oh, before we were captured it was sort of quiet in a way. The officers in charge of us - the big ones - decided, you see, that they couldn't do nothing. Of course, they had no reinforcements and no ammunition, and they decided they'd have to surrender, you see. It was no good just stopping there just getting men killed for nothing.

No.

So they decided then that they would give in.

Yes.

That was the finish. They collected us then and just told us, marched us away, and that was the finish.

And when you were going back, when the Germans were taking you back, didn't the English start a barrage, an artillery barrage, at that time?

Not that I remember, no. Well, they had nothing to shoot at really.

This was an English barrage though.

Oh, an English?

Yes. On the way back ...

Oh.

The English artillery finally opened up, didn't it? But when it started firing everybody had already surrendered ...

Yes.

... and it fell on a lot of the prisoners, didn't it?

I don't remember any English barrage being ...I don't know how many went into the line fight.

Well, in the Brigade there were about 3,000 men, and there were about 2,400 casualties.

Yes. I don't know what would have happened if the four tanks had arrived, if things had been different. But of course they didn't arrive, and it was just murder. Murder in the snow.

What were the German trenches like? Can you give me a description of the trench system?

Oh it was just an ordinary long drain – trench, thrown up in front of course. And sandbags.

(END OF AWM TAPE THREE - SIDE B)

(START OF AWM TAPE FOUR - SIDE A)

In this book the history of the 15th ...

No, in that red book.

Oh yes.

I think there is photographs of the trenches.

How deep were the trenches in the Hindenburg Line?

Fairly big. Fairly deep.

Would that have been, what, ten or twelve feet, or more than that, or ....?

Oh, about, I suppose they would have been ten or twelve feet. Yes. And of course they had steps on them too, so they could see over and shoot. It was on Gallipoli they had the rifles with a mirror.

Yes, the periscope rifles.

Yes. I didn't see any in France. I don't think they had they had them in France. I don't remember anyway. I know they had them in Gallipoli.

What happened after the first night? There were twenty or so of you in that shed, where did you go?

Mmm?

Where were you taken from the shed?

I don't know ...

Well, that was the day you were interrogated, wasn't it?

Yes ... No, the next morning ... I was taken prisoner, what was it, two – oh it would have been in the afternoon ...

It would have been about two o'clock when you were a prisoner?

Taken back and ... I don't know where we went from that. Went to a train or was taken to Crefeld, wasn't it? I don't remember now to be honest. There is a lot I've forgotten. Of course there's some I'll never forget. There's some things I can't think of.

Yes. The place where you were interrogated was a big yard, you were saying.

Yes, a big yard and a big house.

Yes. How far away would that have been from the barn that you stayed that night in?

Oh, a good way away, I think, before they started on the interrogation.

Yes, and had you been fed? Were you fed anything at this time?

Practically nothing. No. No doubt you've been told about biscuits and bully beef of course that we eat. Why they had those biscuits that you couldn't eat, couldn't break, I don't know.

No. These were the Army biscuits?

Army biscuits. Of course, they had a big job to feed all those men, there's no doubt about that. The cooks done a great job, what they did do.

Were you always short of food? I mean, ...

Yes.

You were always scavenging for more food.

We were short up to a point. There seemed to be always plenty of bully beef in tins. And in the hot weather that was all, you know, like a stew. Yes, you couldn't cut it.

Couldn't you.

Oh Lord, no. There was nothing there to cut. It was all like a, you know, all ...

All mushy.

Yes.

All the fat had melted, had it?

All melted. It was just ...

Goo.

Goo, that's all. Yes.

And can you remember any stories about scavenging for food? Trying to find something else to eat and something different?

We did get ... the first lot of stuff we got was on Gallipoli. It was stew and I tell you it was good. It went down well. It went down well. Oh, I don't what we had in France, blowed if I do. Mostly biscuits and jam and bully beef, that was ...

What about a porridge or something like that?

Oh no.

What did you have in the morning for breakfast?

Bully beef.

Oh Lord.

Bully beef and biscuits. Yes, there was some bully beef eaten over there.

Yes, I reckon there was.

My word.

What sort of recipes could you do with bully beef? Did you just eat it as the cooks gave it to you or did you try and do other things with it?

Nothing at all, just eat it.

Yes.

Just opened a tin and eat it.

Well, the first camp that you arrived in was Crefeld apparently. What was it like there? Can you describe Crefeld?

No, I can't. It was sort of, what I can remember, sort of a big house ... a big house. It was the first place I went to, you know. Even my daughter typed it out for us. I must have told her, but Crefeld was the first one there but it wasn't Karlsruhe. Crefeld was the first.

Well, that looks as though it was taken from something written in The Advocate in 1938.

It could have been.

That's what it had on the top of ... it was typed on that piece of paper. The Advocate ... or the newspapers often get things wrong, don't they.

Well, if Crefeld was the first place, that seemed to be where they went and then sent out to different camps from there.

Yes.

As far as I can find out.

Then you went to Karlsruhe.

Karlsruhe.

How did you go to Karlsruhe?

I couldn't tell you.

On a train I suppose.

I could be on train I should think.

What was Karlsruhe like as a camp?

No good, no good. None of them were any good. I wasn't there, of course, very long. I don't know what took place there. What the prisoners there had in mind, if they had any escape plans or anything. Of course it wasn't far from the border. You wouldn't have far to go.

No.

And why they ... some of them had been there, of course, all the time. And why they shifted me I don't know of course. I was the only one that went and I don't know. I went to Strohenmoor.

What happened when you arrived at Strohenmoor? Can you remember the day that you came there with the guard?

No, no I don't. I don't remember going there or leaving there and going to Holzminden, I don't.

What memories do you have of Strohenmoor?

Well, I don't know what I could say about that. I wasn't there of course for very long. I've really forgotten what Strohenmoor is like.

You were there about five months, I think?

Was I?

From the end of May through to the beginning of November.

Oh.

So you were there during the summer. Of course, you planned an escape at Strohenmoor, didn't you?

Yes.

Can you tell me what happened at that time in some detail? What was the plan you had etcetera?

Well, I didn't know too much about it. I was told that it was going to take place and I said I'd go. There was only three of us.

Yes. Who were the other two?

Oh, I couldn't say now.

Were they English?

I don't know even now, I don't. All I know is ... I don't where they got their pliers from to cut the wire. I went down in a drain from the kitchen, all muck stuff, you know, was in it. We went under this drain, a big drain, it went down. It went under the fence - the guard fence - and he cut the wire under the drain, where the drain was.

Oh yes. The drain came out and there was wire over the opening was there?

Yes. Oh yes. All wire.

How wide was the pipe?

The pipe? No pipe.

A drain.

It was an open drain.

So you sort of crawled along that.

Crawled along that.

Of a night time?

Yes.

Oh right. And how long had they been planning that?

I don't think very long, I don't think so.

And why did they invite you to come?

Well, I heard about it and I suppose I asked them.

Did you?

I don't know. He said it was on, and of course if there's anything on like that you were in it, or you tried to get in it.

What preparations did you make for that attempt? What did you take with you?

I had very little, very little. You had to live on when you got out whatever you'd find when you got out. Of course it wasn't very far you see from the border as it happened there. And we could live on anything. Some of them went out and they'd live on anything. They'd live on raw potatoes or they'd get raw potatoes and eat the potatoes. I never had any parcels, you see.

No, that's amazing.

I think if I remember right, I had a bit of chocolate. That's what I had. I had a map, I drew a map. They got a map into the camp, someone got a map in and passed it around. I copied where I had to go.

Did you have a compass?

I had a compass.

Where did you get that from?

Directly from Gallipoli, and they didn't take it off me.

Didn't they.

It must have been, I think.

What, was it a real army compass?

Yes, it was only a little one. You had to travel at night of course.

Yes.

I don't know whether I'd have got to the border or not, I don't know.

Do you know what happened to the other two men?

No, I don't, I don't know.

You never saw them again.

No. You see I was caught when I got out and done my seven days and I went to Holzminden and that was the finish. I never heard of the other two again. I don't know what happened.

When you came out of the ditch, the drain, and were captured, what actually happened then? You were following the other two ...

No, they'd gone.

You mean that you were a bit late after them?

I was late.

How long after they had gone were you? Half an hour, or ...

Oh no, it wouldn't be that long. They had plenty of time to get away before I got out.

You did that intentionally did you?

Oh yes.

You wanted to give them a chance?

Oh, give them a chance yes. I don't know whether they separated when they got out or whether they went together, I don't know.

Why didn't you go with them as a threesome?

With them?

Yes.

See, to get out you have to wait for the sentry, you see. You had your sentry inside and he walked up and down. You had to wait until he went away down here, this end of the thing, before you could get out.

And so they sent when the sentry was ...

Way down there.

And when the sentry came back you had to wait until he went back down again.

He went back again, yes.

And then you went.

Then I went.

And why didn't you get away?

Oh, I happened to be seen.

Who saw you?

Some Germans outside saw me.

Oh did they.

It was well lit up you know at night. Lights of course, they could see. I don't know whether the sentry saw me or the Germans outside, I don't know.

What happened. They shouted out I suppose?

I crossed the road and there was a single wire on the road and I knew it was there and forgot all about it and ran into it - across here . Ran into it and fell over and of course it was in sight of the road and they just simple come along and that was it.

Did they treat you roughly?

No, they didn't. No, they didn't. The fellows who were inside, I asked them to get me a towel and they let them give me a towel. I wanted to get a bit of a wash you see. I was filthy. And they let them bring me towel and I had a wash and washed the muck of me and of course they took me inside and put in a room the same as this and that was it.

I've spoken to a few men who've done ... well the other two prisoners all did solitary confinement. Wheeler did it for 21 days which is a very long time. They said he was an NCO and so he should know better. And Fraser, he spent 14 days - Donald Fraser - and you spent seven days. What did you do during that time?

What did I do? What time do you mean?

When you were in solitary confinement?

Oh, just in a room.

In the jug, as you called it.

Just in there. I had nothing to do, couldn't do nothing. Just had to do my seven days.

Yes. Were there any windows in the room?

You couldn't get out.

Were there any windows?

I think there would be a window there, but you couldn't ...

It was too high.

But you couldn't get out. There was a guard there anyway.

And did they black the room out? I mean, Donald Fraser, when he was doing solitary confinement, he spent three days in pitch black and one day with daylight in the room.

They didn't do anything to me like that. No, just an ordinary room and daylight and night - ordinary. Did you say what he lived on when he got out for those seven days?

Well, they were getting parcels and they also escaped from farms and food was more plentiful. But they did steal food, especially the Russians who apparently could get away and could live off the land no trouble at all. But it was a problem, you know. It was very difficult to save any food from Red Cross parcels, but they went with very little.

Yes,

Well, how did you survive on the German rations if you didn't get parcels?

Oh, I survived. I lost weight of course. I made up for it when I got to England.

How much did you weigh, do you know?

No. They never weighed us over there. You couldn't get weighed. I wouldn't have weighed very much I don't think.

No.

As I told you yesterday, I don't remember leaving Holland, I don't remember arriving in London. I don't. When I went to London, I don't know where I went to.

Did you go and see Nurse Chomley?

Who?

Nurse Chomley.

Chomley? Where was she?

She was head of the Red Cross, the Prisoner-of-War section of the Australian Red Cross in London. And you didn't go to see her?

No. I don't know where I went to. I don't think I went to any camp. I think I went off to Horseferry Road and bought some clothes. And I know I stayed at a hotel, one of the big hotels over there till I left to come home. I didn't go into camp.

Did you have relatives in England?

No.

You didn't?

No. Although my dad came from England, that was years ago.

What was the German food that you lived on? You were telling me something about it yesterday.

Sauerkraut and mangel-wurzel were the two things that we lived on. I think sauerkraut was made from cabbages. Whatever the other was, mangel-warzel, I don't know what that was. I've no idea. Brown bread, of course, with sawdust in it.

And did you have a sort of an achorn coffee? Did they give you a coffee?

What did they give us? They gave us something to drink. I don't know what we had to drink. But we did have something to drink. But that was the two main food.

You'd get terribly sick of that, wouldn't you.

Oh yes. Where do you go from here?

I'm going to go and see Mr. Fred Febey in Launceston. He's a 13th Reinforcement, the same as my grandfather. He's ninety five years old and he came from Sheffield with two of his brothers. They were all in the 15th.

I mean when you go to there, when do you go back home?

Well, I'm actually looking for work and I've been applying for work in Canberra and Melbourne and it depends on where I get a job as to where I go next. I've got men to talk

to in Sydney, but I'll have to go to Sydney. And at some stage I'm going to have to go to Perth and Fremantle.

If it's a fair question, who pays you? You pay your own?

No-one is paying me at all. I'm paying for it myself and I hope to recoup my costs when I publish the book. No, it's my own project. Well, it's my grandfather's story you see. So I've obviously got a personal interest in it.

Would you take a donation?

Oh no, no.

To help you?

No, I wouldn't. No, you are already helping me as much as I can expect now and that's all I would ever want. That's valuable as it is. That is very kind of you though.

I mean, you can't do these things on nothing.

No. I can afford to do it. Yes, it's okay. It's not that expensive and I've got to expect to put a bit in if I want to get something back. So, no, it's enough just to help me with the story. That is a wonderful help. Are you able to describe what Strohenmoor camp looked like?

Oh, well, say take a football field and you had huts and houses around it, that's all I could really say it was.

And that was surrounded by a barbed wire fence. How high would that have been?

I only really remember clearly Holzminden where they had the wall there. I don't remember much about Strohenmoor. And the first one I went to was a big house - well, I'd call it a big house - and never got out of there, never got outside. And I don't think anyone escaped from there. It wasn't far from the border. But I don't think anyone ever got out of there.

And what sort of treatment did you see at these camps? Did you see any brutality by the guards towards any of the men?

Oh, there was one incident in Holzminden. I think it was something ... we had what they call an appel, it was a rollcall. And I think one of the fellows done something that he shouldn't have done and I think he got a bit of a bayonet ...

Did he.

He got a touch of the bayonet. He'd done something that he shouldn't have done and the guard stuck a bayonet into him. And of course the other one tried to escape and he was shot.

Yes. That was the one that was shot through the jaw.

Yes. I never heard – he was New South Wales, I never heard any more about him. I don't know where he went to. I suppose he would get home. I don't know. And I don't know his name.

Was he from the 4th Brigade, or not? I suppose you wouldn't know.

No. If I could only get those photos that I've got, I could explain it to you properly.

Well, I'll go and get them and I'll bring and we'll have a look at them.

I don't know whether he's got them at St. Helens or not, I don't know. He came from Burnie, you see, and he went to St Helens. And as I said, my sister-in-law wanted them in the Marshall family so she gave them to, as far as I know, she gave them to him. And whether he took them to St Helens, they could be in Burnie. I don't know.

Who in Burnie could I get in touch with?

Ring my nieces. Two nieces live together in Burnie near the hospital - Mrs Munn and Mrs Hambleton - they live at 19 Strahan Street, South Burnie, not far from the hospital. Mrs Munn, I don't think wouldn't know, she hasn't been at Burnie very long at 19 Strahan Street. She was living in a flat and she went down to South Burnie to live with her sister. But Mrs Hambleton has lived there all her life and she would know.

I'll ask her when I go back.

She would know whether he took them to St Helens or not or what he done with them.

Do you know any other Tasmanian families whose relatives were POWs?

No. There wouldn't be many old prisoners of war.

No. You, of course, knew the Niemeyer twins, didn't you?

Yes.

Can you tell me about them?

They were no good. Put it that way.

What did they do?

Oh, he was boss, there's no doubt about it, he was boss.

What did he look like? Do you know his first name?

No, I don't.

There were two of them, weren't there?

Yes. All I know he was a Niemeyer and was educated in America,

What did he look like?

Just an ordinary civilian man, just an ordinary man.

But he was obviously in the army, wasn't he?

Oh yes. He was a major I think, in the German army.

And how tall was he. Could you give me a description of his physical ...

Between five and six feet. Well over five feet, he'd be.

What colour was his hair?

No ...

Did you ever have anything to do with him?

No, I didn't, nothing at all. No. We had to salute him of course.

Did you.

Oh yes. Salute all the officers. You were in trouble if you didn't.

He had a reputation for being something of a bully, didn't he?

Yes.

What sort of things would you do.

Oh, he didn't play the game really. I mean he didn't give a prisoner a fair go. After all, if you're taken prisoner and you were a prisoner and you should be treated as a man. Well, I think so. I think it's not your fault.

No.

They should be treated as an ordinary person. But he was the boss of the camp and what he said went.

And what sort of things would he do to the men? What would he do.

I don't know. I had nothing to do with him. He never done anything to me. I had no ... I kept out of his road. I really don't know what he thought or what happened when he discovered in the morning a tunnel, you know, they'd all gone. I don't know really what happened to him. He must have gone off his head I think. They were all missing and of course they had to look and find out then where they got out. And when they found out where they got out they dug it up.

The photographs which you have are of this tunnel.

Of this tunnel.

And how many are there, two of them or one?

What tunnels?

No, how many photographs?

Oh, I've got about four or five or six.

Have you.

Different ones, yes, of them. I had them put into a big frame about that wide I suppose, of the camp and the tunnel.

Oh, that sounds really good. Well I hope I can find them.

Yes, well, if you could and if I could only have them and show you.

Yes, I'll endeavour to get them. And you of course knew that there was a tunnel that was being made but you didn't take any part in the digging of it?

No, nothing. No, it was well on the way, you see, when I got there.

And so it was very difficult to get into the escaping party, was it?

Well, I never tried. They had their own working parties. They had everything you see. Everything was fix up like a big robbery. Everything was done to a ...

Plan. Everything well planned.

My word it was, yes.

How many of them got away? I think you said there were 29.

I'm not sure, I think it was. There wasn't many in charge or in it doing the digging. They only had a certain amount. Everybody couldn't go in and dig or ...

No.

And I think there would have been quite a number didn't know anything about it - didn't know it was there. Knew nothing.

Well I suppose for security it wouldn't be very good to tell many people.

No.

And did you want to go on this tunnel? Did you want to get through this tunnel too?

No, I didn't. I had nothing you see, and it was too far. I wouldn't know my way for one thing, and I had nothing to take and it wouldn't have been useless for me going out. They seemed to have saved up enough out of their Red Cross parcels. I don't know what they did take or what they had. I had no idea. All I know was that there was a tunnel and I knew about it and knew the men working in it. As I said earlier, why the Germans never looked in that place I'll know.

Yes, in that shed. Yes.

I can't understand it.

And the night that they escaped, did you know they were going that night?

I think I did. Yes, I think I knew they were going. Yes.

What was the after effect of the escape? What reaction did the Germans take to finding so many men missing?

They had the roll call of course and found out who was missing and let the world outside know that so many was missing and to look out for them. And of course that was near the end of the war, one good thing. It was a good thing it was because I think it wouldn't make a difference. The Germans I think knew it wasn't long before the war would be finished.

And you think that otherwise the Germans may have been very harsh?

I reckon they would have. Oh yes.

What sort of reprisals did they take?

Nothing, I don't think.

Didn't they.

No, nothing.

No.

They couldn't do nothing to see to those that was left. They had nothing to do with it. They were still in prison. They couldn't do nothing. And, and as I say, the war was more or less in our favour at that time and coming to an end. I think they knew it.

Do you know what month the escape was?

November, wasn't it. No, it must have been October. It's in that red book. It was not a great deal long before the armistice was signed. No.

And of the men who got out, do you know what happened to them?

No. No, I don't.

None of them came back?

As far as I know they didn't come back to Holzminden. No. Where they went to, of course, I don't know. They certainly planned it well. Like a big robbery. They planned.

What was the reaction of the other prisoners? I suppose everybody was pleased?

Oh, my word. How's the time going.

It's twenty passed eleven.

I was going say I'd give Burnie a ring.

Well, I could probably call in I think to save you the trouble of doing that.

To ask if she's still got it at Burnie or if my nephew's got it. If he did take it, she would know, Mrs Hambelton.

Yes. Well I'll call in there on my way back to Burnie.

19 Strahan Street. Not very far from the hospital - a few yards from the hospital. Mrs Hambelton, Mrs Munn wouldn't know. I don't think she would know. But Mrs Hambelton lived there of course and knew all about it.

Well I'll certainly call in there on my way back. What sort of listening devices and spying methods and so on did the Germans have in Holzminden to try and find out whether there were escape attempts?

Oh don't know what they had, I don't. They had no spies there evidently because that tunnel was going on for a long time.

You said two years, yesterday.

Oh, I think it must have been. I'm not sure. I know it was a darn long time and they knew nothing about it. Any prisoners that had to go there was taken there like me. They'd find out if I was a spy or on their side. You see, they'd find that out.

How would they do that?

I don't know but they'd find out. They'd know whether I was it or not.

Would they question you?

No. I don't know how they done it. I guess ordinary talking I suppose to different ones. And they knew of course that I escaped and was brought there. They knew that.

Was Holzminden a camp for officers who were former escapees or, you know, was it a camp for the worst type of prisoner?

No. There was an awful lot of airmen there then prisoner.

Did you get to know any of them very well.

I used to say good-day to them and say how are you, but I never sat down and had a talk to them. You'd always say good-day and how are you. One escaped from there. I didn't tell you about it. There was a young airman, he was only ... well, I'd say he was only a boy. I don't know how the devil he got into the air force. I don't know how old he was, but he was a kid. And he had beautiful curly hair, lovely hair. And he got in touch with an English captain who spoke German and there was two parts to the building. They lived in that part. And they got hold of some clothes from somewhere, I don't know where, and they dressed this young fellow up as a typist working in the building, you see. And he spoke German, the same as a German could. When they got away, I don't know what sort of uniform he had on, he wouldn't have an English one on of course, he'd have something on. But they came downstairs and got out and went out after work. See he was a typist and he was a German working there of course. And I never heard whether they got away for not. But he could speak German the same as a German could, quite fluent German. But the young fellow couldn't.

He was the typist.

He was the typist and where they got his clothes from to dress him up, I'm blowed if I know.

You're in such a desperate situation with practically no food and no clothing and so on, it was extremely difficult for you to even consider getting out.

Oh yes, it was.

Did you ever suffer any real emotional problems while you were a prisoner?

No.

You didn't get very depressed or anything?

Oh, young-hearted, you know. And just wondering what was going to come.

Yes. You had a friend at Holzminden, didn't you, Peter Lyon.

Peter Lyon, yes.

What was his circumstance? Was he getting Red Cross parcels?

I don't think so. Not that I know of. I'm sure he didn't. Well I saw him and got to know him.

Was he one of the bridge players? Did he play bridge with you?

No. I don't know who did now. Three of us used to get together ... four of us and had our things. And four of us coming home on the boat got together and found out they played bridge, you see, and said we'd have a game and that's what we played coming home, all the way coming home. That's the biggest hiding that I've had in bridge. Do you play bridge?

I don't. No. I know about the game and I think I've probably started to learn sometimes but I really don't get time to play. But I really love cards, they're marvellous. And bridge I know is one of the best card games.

Yes. Coming home on the boat I don't think the two of us won a game. Coming all the way home, we couldn't get a card. Nothing would go right.

What about music and other amusement in the camps. There must have been men amongst you who could play musical instruments. Did you have any concerts?

I don't know whether they had a piano there or not, I'm blown if I do. Or any other instrument. I don't know.

When you went missing and were a POW, how long was it before your family found out you were alive?

I don't know. I don't know. They got word that I was missing, believed prisoner ... at least when I was wounded, they got word to say that I was wounded, missing and believed to be a prisoner.

Yes. This is on Gallipoli?

No.

This is in France?

In France, yes. I don't know when they heard that I was a prisoner. I don't know. But when we were taken we were given a card to fill in to say that I am well or - I've just forgotten now, just what was in them...

Yes, I've seen one of them.

Have you?

Yes. I've seen them.

And whether they got that ... when Mum it I don't know. I never asked her when I got home. I don't know. All I know was that they told them I was wounded on Gallipoli and that in Germany I was missing, believed prisoner. The Army of course sent that out.

What was the daily routine at Holzminden?

Just to walk around the place. That's all you could do, you couldn't do anything else. Nothing to do. They did have a cricket bat and ball and had a game of cricket. And they had a football. We had a kick of the football.

This is all within the wall.

In the camp, yes.

What was the camp routine, I was meaning. They would have a parade I suppose every morning.

Well, you didn't know when they'd have a parade.

They didn't have a set parade in the morning?

No set parade. They had one in the morning of course but they'd have one any time.

They'd have one any time.

You didn't know when it was coming.

What time in the morning would they have their parade usually?

Oh, it wouldn't be early. No, it wouldn't be early. After you got out of bed. After you had your sleep. They'd rush in and appel. And you'd go down onto the ground and line up. They'd count you and call your name out and you'd ... And you might have another one before dinner. You might have one at any time to see if you was there. Of course, if you wasn't there and someone said you was in your room, they'd find out if you was in your room or where you was.

Whereabouts did you eat in Holzminden? Did you have a big mess or what was the eating arrangement?

I think ... in our room I think didn't we? Yes, where we ate - in our room. They had a fairly big stove where they used to do the cooking and that. We used to work on that, but we'd never eat down there. I think it was in our room we eat it. Yes.

And who would do the cooking? The men themselves or the Germans?

Oh, I suppose it would be the Germans I think it was.

What sort of fatigue work would they get you doing in the camp? Did they ever get you working at all in the camp doing anything?

No. It was really just like a big prison out here except that the men did work. It didn't matter who you was, I suppose, in there you had to do work. Just the same as a prison, all in a big yard. A lot of the soldiers, the others on farms and different places, I think. Working on different places.

Did you ever hear anything about the men having to work behind the lines for the Germans?

No. We got very little, practically no news in camp. You might get half a dozen words of something but nothing any good. No news at all.

Did you get any newspapers?

No.

No German newspapers.

No.

So you didn't know how the war was going?

Well, if Germany, say, had a good day and had won something, they'd let you know.

Yes.

They'd let you know.

If things weren't going well, they wouldn't tell you.

Oh no.

What was the account of the story which you told me before about the man who was shot in the jaw? What happened at that time? What was that escape about? How did that happen?

If I had those photos I could show you where he was, you see, to get out. I don't know where he is. I don't know how he expected us to get out where he was, I've got no idea what he was going to do.

Do you think he planned it, or was it just on the spur of the moment?

Oh no. He planned it. You wouldn't do nothing on the spur of the moment. You had to think things out before you done anything. My word you did. I suppose he thought, well, a sentry is down there and I can get up here and down here. I don't know where he was going I'm sure.

And the two men who got over the wire, that was at... what was their name, Mengal wasn't it?

Meddlecott and Walters.

Meddlecott and Walters.

Yes.

And what was the story of their escape then?

Well, I knew nothing about that except I was walking around with Peter Lyon and saw it.

And what happened?

They were caught. They were seen outside, you see, caught and brought back.

And they went straight up the wall and started cutting the barbed wire at the top.

There were three strands of barbed wire I think. They only cut the bottom one I think, enough to get out underneath it.

Oh yes. Broad daylight.

Broad daylight. Broad daylight.

At Holzminden, whereabouts did the Germans have their machine guns?

Where did they have them?

Yes.

Oh, I don't know. At Holzminden you mean?

Yes.

Oh, I don't know.

They didn't have towers at Holstvenden.

They never ...?

Towers. Like in most of the films or the stories about these camps, you see Germans with a machine gun up a tower.

Yes.

A watch tower. Did they have those at Holzminden?

I believe they did have one there in one of the corners over there. I believe there was one.

What about at Strohenmoor?

They had nothing there as far as I know, only sentries.

In Tasmania's War Record, that red book, there's a mention of a Captain Honeyset. Did you know him?

Yes.

What can you tell me about him?

Oh, I don't think I can tell you anything. I knew him.

What sort of a man was he? Can you describe him to me?

No I couldn't. There was a Captain Good was another man. Now his son has got a boot shop down here in Ulverstone.

Has he.

And the other son has got a boot shop in Devonport. He had a boot shop, Captain Good.

So he was a Tasmanian?

He was a Tasmanian, 15th Battalion.

Was he.

Yes. He went away. Yes, I knew him well. I knew him well.

Did you. Oh, that's interesting.

And his son's down here with the boot shop and his other son is in Devonport.

What can you tell me about him? What was he in, Captain Good?

He had a Company, in charge of a Company.

Was he captured at Bullecourt too? Was Captain Good captured at Bullecourt?

I don't think so.

He wasn't a prisoner?

No, I don't think so. They left a few... not many officers and men, they left them behind, you see they didn't go.

Left in reserve.

In reserve. They always had a reserve and he could have been a reserve officer. I don't whether he it would tell me in that...

It might do, yes.

Yes.

I'll have a look later. And you knew Captain Good well.

I knew him well, yes.

Was he an original or ...?

Yes.

He was. Well, do you know any stories about him?

No, I don't.

Here's the history. That's the War Record.

You'll find Good's name down in there. Here's something about him.

Right, well we've got Good. What was his first name? We've got a J. A. Good, Second Lieutenant, 15th Battalion. He's the only Good. The other's the 12th Battalion.

That would be him then. He was a Chaplain over there. He was in charge of the Company. Where is he there?

He's there, where my finger is. He was wounded.

Wounded, yes.

He joined 28/9/1914 and he served for one year and ten months and he was discharged as a Captain. You are quite right. So he must have been wounded in France.

Must have been.

Did the Germans ever comment to you about your being a volunteer?

No.

Some of the men I've spoken to stated that the Germans couldn't understand why the Australians were in the war.

Mmm. No, but they never asked me that, none of them. I think the Germans wouldn't have any choice I don't think. They were soldiers.

Yes, that's right. They were conscripted.

I should think so.

Yes, they were.

No, they never asked me why I joined or why I joined or why did I joined. They never asked me. I don't know what I would have told them. I suppose I'd say, well, all my coppers have gone, I'll go.

Did they let you out of Holzminden at all for any sort of – you know, to go out to the hospital?

No. I never left the camp the whole time. Except when they – I didn't go out when they had the football match.

The football match was at Holzminden was it?

Yes. Of course, they had some good footballers among them.

(END OF AWM TAPE FOUR - SIDE B)

END OF TAPE TWO

START OF TAPE THREE

(START OF AWM TAPE FIVE - SIDE A)

The whole of the Burnie Football Team volunteered?

Volunteered, the whole of them.

Did they.

Yes.

I'm putting one of these tapes back. They're very small little tapes. You feel how small they are.

Yes.

Isn't that small.

All I've been talking is on here.

Yes.

And how does it come out? How do you make that noise come out from there?

Well, I just play it back on the same machine that I tape it with, and I've got a pause button and as I play it back, I write out what was said, then I start it again and write it out and that way I get the story. There would be no hope remembering them. And the stories are so much better when you tell them, you see. I want to write a book that is full of stories which you said and in your words, the way you described them. So that's what people would prefer to read.

That's the wall.

Yes. There's certainly a wall there.

Well, just inside that wall is a wire, a single wire down there, and you couldn't go between that wire and that wall. I don't know whether you can see a wire there or not.

Well this is taken from the outside of the wall. It shows the tunnel that's been dug up. Now this one shows the tunnel again that's been dug up and there's a German guard there and behind that there's some German workers who were sitting down. They've been digging up the tunnel.

Yes.

And on this one, it shows the inside of the tunnel. There's some sand bags stacked up there.

Now, that's the start of the tunnel.

Is it, yes, the left hand one.

If I remember rightly. I think I can see it. That's the start of the tunnel.

Yes. That started in the shed.

In the shed. There should be a wall ... this wall should be here somewhere because it wasn't far from the buildings.

Wasn't it.

And as I told you, they didn't have far to go from the building to the wall to get out.

No. Well it looks as though, from outside the wall, this looks to be outside the wall, I'm pretty sure.

That's out ... they had to go a way out here to that ... where that green stuff's growing.

Oh, there was a bush or something.

Yes. You see, I think that's the start in there.

Yes. I looks very much like it.

I think so. And that's the wall. Well that's where they would only have to come out to there.

Yes. And which is the shed? Is that end building the shed or not? This one shows the back of Holzminden. This one's got a wire fence along the back, a set of brick piers and there's a wire fence all the way along. And on this one, this shows the front and this shows a white wall all the way along.

Yes. Well inside that white wall is that strand of wire.

Yes. How far out do you think they came with the tunnel? It looks as though they've come out about forty or fifty feet or more.

Oh, it must have gone about down to that car.

Yes, well that's a fair way. That would be fifty to seventy yards.

Oh, a long way.

They're marvellous photographs. They really are a great find.

I can't remember this here. That's the big building where we were and there's another one down there.

Yes, that's right. Well, you can see on these bottom photographs, if you can get enough light, you can see that there the large building on this end. I think that the escape was from the other end of this big building.

Yes.

And then there's another group of buildings here. That's just ... you were right. There's the wall and this was taken just on the other side of the wall where they've come out from this building. And it's just behind the wall there. It's very hard to see with good sight to see those. They really show the camp very clearly though. What did it use to be? It was an army barracks, was it?

As far as I know it was, yes.

It was Strohenmoor that was a lunatic asylum, wasn't it?

It could have been. That was the start. There, that's the dirt you see.

That's all the dirt that they've stacked up.

Yes, stacked up. Where they got bags from, whether they was in that shed or not, of course I don't know.

Oh, I understand.

I wasn't in the tunnel at all. I didn't see the tunnel. I wasn't in it. I knew all about it but I wasn't in it. But they told me they put some dirt down the sewer.

Did they?

Yes. Not a lot of course.

It would block it up.

Yes, that's true. I think that, this big building ...

It certainly looks like it because you can see ... if you can see there's a building behind there and you can see the same building there. So I'm positive it's just behind that gate. It may have been from this shed here. Or there's a smaller building, you can see that roof there, that's attached onto the end of the large building, they may have started the tunnel in there.

That's what it looks to me like. There should be another building here.

Yes, there would be on the other side. But you can't ...

Where that fellow was shot, the Captain was shot.

Oh, that's right on the left of the right hand spot ...

And that's what made them put a guard outside as well as inside. He's inside, this fellow.

Yes. He's inside.

They came way out.

That's exactly right, yes, out here.

They had to go out, oh it must have been, I don't know how far. But they had that stuff growing like out there.

Like a bush or something. What was it that was growing?

I don't know what was growing. It was growing and it was as high as this bed, whatever it was. And that's where they had to go otherwise it was unfortunate for them, otherwise they'd just have to go on outside this here big wall which wasn't very far at all. No distance at all.

Well it must have taken them months to do the rest of the tunnel, right out ...

Of course that was started before, as I told, before ever I got there. I don't know how far they were on it.

Were all these buildings here and here, they were all for the inmates, were they?

Yes. They were all with men in them.

It looks as though in the rear and at the front, all around Holzminden, there looks to be vegetable gardens, or farms of some description. Was there a vegetable garden attached to Holzminden, or not?

Not in the camp, no.

But outside the camp?

I don't know what was outside. You see, you couldn't see over that wall. And if you was in the building you couldn't ... I don't remember seeing any outside only ordinary countryside.

Yes. Flat countryside.

The best part of the ground I think. I was trying to find out ... I'm down the other side of this building, down there, is where the two men cut the wire and got out. The other side, way down there.

Yes. That would be down here somewhere. This is the back of that building and there's a wire fence all the way along there. They went over the back there.

Yes. That's where they went. If I could only see properly I could tell you more but I can't see properly.

What were the various floors of the buildings - there's four floors there, or there's a ground floor and the first floor, second floor and then there's a sort of top floor with a very small attic above that - were they all for the men?

They wouldn't be right up here I don't think. I was well up in there before I went down – I went down to where I was about there somewhere.

Did you, down under the ground floor. Yes. Were you actually in this building where the escape came from?

Yes.

You were.

Yes. I can't give you any more I'm afraid.

No. Whereabouts did they have the parades here? I suppose they had them out in between this building and this group of buildings here, there's an open grassed area.

Yes, that's where it would be.

Yes, in here, yes. That's a good help though. They are really interesting photographs.

Took them out of the frame, did she?

Well, they were still in the frame but they weren't mounted. Like the backing seemed to have gone and rather than take the whole frame and the glass, we just took this. It was easier. But we'll put them back in the frame when we go back. I'll take them back to her.

They'd get a bit of a shock to see you or ask you about this, didn't they?

Yes, they were a big surprised to see me. They were very interested. The silverfish have attacked a little bit down here and also here but they are still in fairly good condition and I've copied them onto film so they will be preserved now.

Yes.

Whereabouts did you get these photographs from?

Now that's a funny thing, I don't know.

You can't remember?

I can't remember who gave them to me. They were taken of course by the Germans.

Yes.

Wasn't taken by the prisoners, they was taken by the Germans.

Well, Honeysett was also in Holzminden. In that book Tasmania's War Records, he mentions having photographs of Holzminden. So somehow he's got the same or similar photographs. Oh no, they're a wonderful find. Now you can see how high that wall is because there's an iron gate there and you can just make out - or I can just make out - behind the gate there's a man standing and he's about six foot, let's say, so the wall would be about six to seven feet.

Oh, it would be.

Yes. You couldn't see over it.

I can't quite remember whether that's the entrance, is here.

Yes. Inside that building. It looks as though ... well, it's certainly in a building that's been plastered. I'd say it probably is. The guard is interesting. It's a really good picture of the guard. He's got his rifle over his right shoulder and you can see his ammunition box and his buttons, and he's from the 27th Regiment of some description. A really interesting picture.

Yes. I had them at home for years. I didn't know what to do with it.

Oh no. It's marvellous to find it.

My sister-in-law said she wanted in the family. I often go to Burnie down there but I thought it had gone to ... but he hasn't taken it. I was just wondering if they didn't want it, if the family didn't want it, would it be any good in Canberra?

I'd say they would be interested in it, yes.

In the museum, where they've got all the different things.

Yes.

Was there a paper on that, that told you all about it?

No, I didn't see that.

Oh, there's a paper attached onto the frame of that, told you about it.

Oh.

Whether they've torn that up or thrown that away, I don't know.

No. Well I didn't see that. I might ask them about that when I take it back.

Yes. They're leaving that house, I don't know whether they told you.

They've sold it. Well, I could see it had been sold.

End of January I think they've got to get out.

Do they. Yes.

I think so.

I've got a few questions for you today. In the Tasmanian War Record, in the section which writes about the POWs, it mentions that the men lost their military uniforms and they were replaced with a sort of prisoner of war uniform and wooden clogs. But I don't know how accurate that is because I know that men who were receiving parcels got Red Cross uniforms sent to them. And you were saying that you were still in your Australian uniform at the end of the war.

Yes.

So do you know if Germans ever did issue any military uniforms or prisoner of war uniforms?

No.

No. And what about wooden clogs?

No. None of the officers had them. Whether the men did, of course, I don't know. No I don't.

I didn't think it sounded right.

No.

That other nationalities were there in Holzminden? Were there any Russians or Romanians or ...

No, there was no Russians. They seemed to be all Australian and English. I must say an awful lot of airmen. I don't know why they took them there but there was a lot of airmen there.

What were the guards like generally? Can you remember any of the guards?

Oh. We used to see them of course every day and couldn't talk to them. You might say good-day but they wouldn't know what you was talking about.

No. Were they mainly old men, or were there some young men amongst them?

They'd be like that chap there.

Yes. He looked to be fairly old.

Yes. There'd be no young'ns there. As far as I remember, there were no young guards. They could shoot. It was necessary.

And what sort of contact did you have with the guards? Did you ever strike any friendships at all?

None. No, none at all. Not even with the interpreter.

Did you have nicknames for them?

No.

You didn't have nicknames at all?

No. Some of the prisoners of course talked to them or were sort of friendly with them. But I never bothered. I never worried them at all in any shape or form. I didn't.

Were there ever prisoners who sort of sort favours from the guards or were overly friendly with the Germans to try and get better treatment, or something like that?

I think there would be, yes. Oh yes. Well, they must have because ... they must have got some of these things from the Germans. You see that young fellow that had dressed up as a typist was for instance. They must have been friendly in some way with the guard to get what he had.

And you had a compass, you were telling me. And that was your army compass, was it?

I think my daughter's got it in Melbourne now.

Has she.

I think she has.

I haven't telephoned her yet, but I will. I'll give her a telephone call this evening.

What's today?

Monday.

You might catch her. I think six o'clock would be a good time to get her, tea time.

Alright. I'll give her a ring then.

Tuesday, that's tomorrow, if it's fine, she plays tennis in the morning and she gets home about twelve. So you'll get her about twelve o'clock tomorrow.

Right. That's good. Thanks. What's her last name?

Dunham - Betty Dunham.

Do you remember Christmas in Holzminden? I think you would have spent a Christmas there. It was the only Christmas that you spent as a POW.

When were we taken, in ...

You were taken in 1917.

Yes, in April '17. Well, I don't know where I would be for the first Christmas.

I think that you were in Holzminden. I think that you went there about December.

Did I?

Yes. You didn't have any special Christmas dinner or anything?

No.

How often did they undertake searches in these camps, the guards?

Oh, a good many times.

What would they do when they made their searches?

They'd look round, look at everything. Under your bed and in your bed and any room we had. Anywhere at all they would look for something.

At Holzminden, what were your quarters like? I mean, were you in a small room with one or two other men or were you in a large ...?

I was in a big room first. I forget how many was in it - quite a number. There was only two or three when I was shifted down below. Two I think. There were three of us in the bottom.

How many would have been above? About twenty or fifty, what do you think at a guess? Did the Germans ever find anything much during these searches?

I don't think so. You see you couldn't get anything for one thing. All you ever had, if you did have anything, you'd have to make it, whatever it was it would have to be made. I don't think they ever found anything at all.

What time did they have lights out at Holzminden?

When it was dark. It would be alright in the daylight or evening but it was dark – lights out .

You didn't have lights on until ten o'clock or something like that?

Oh, I ought to know these things but I've forgotten.

That's okay. They men working on the tunnel, did they work mainly of a night time or did they work during the day?

They worked in the day time but they had scouts outside. I read in there that they had a piano, an old piano outside. I don't remember it myself. They used to play this piano. And if the guards were coming, any Germans was coming, they used to play ...

The Campbells are Coming was one of them.

Was it.

Yes.

And the other one was Onward Christian Soldiers. It's in the book.

Did they use that piano for having concerts?

I never had any concert at all. I never even saw the piano.

Didn't you.

No, I didn't. As I told you there wasn't many in it that knew anything about it.

And did they all get away, all those who wanted to escape, did they all get away?

No, something happened. I think it says in that book, it tells you there was a holdup somewhere in the tunnel. I don't know what happened.

Has there ever been any books written about this particular escape that you know of, or not?

Not that I know of. Only in that red book. You mentioned Honeysett, didn't you?

Yes.

Well, I don't remember him. I don't know when he went into Holzminden. I don't.

I think he was there more or less during the same time as you were there.

He escaped you know. And they used to send in to camp and ask for different officers to go in to talk to the Germans. The Germans wanted to talk to them and said ... For instance, they wanted a Marshall and he said, 'I'm Marshall'. He was already to go and when he got out, he took off. He was shot at but he - according to what I've read there in that book - he said the Germans were a poor shot and he took the risk. But he was caught I think.

Yes. In the book it says he was shot in the leg. No, they did miss him a few times but eventually they got him in the leg.

Oh, in the leg was it.

And he fell down.

I don't remember him in the camp. He could be still alive, I'm sure.

Yes. It might be worthwhile trying to find him. I'll have a look in the phone books and see if I can find any Honeysett numbers.

He'd be in his nineties now.

You were living on the German food all the time. Did they ever vary the food at all?

No.

It was always the same?

Always the same.

Did you ever find ways of cooking it yourself or improving it at all?

No. As I told you, I took a potato out one time and washed it and put it on the stove and heated it up again, to take the taste out of it.

Yes. What was the procedure for eating? The Germans did the cooking I imagine.

They did the cooking.

And you had to all queue up outside the cookhouse.

Yes.

A bit like in the Army.

In the Army yes. I can't quite put this out yet.

(END OF AWM TAPE FIVE - SIDE A)

(START OF AWM TAPE FIVE - SIDE B)

I remember, that was it, on this building out here. It wasn't behind there, what I can remember of it, that scene there. If that was where they started, up here, that would be along there, if I remember rightly.

Well, I reckon that the picture is accurate. The building hasn't obviously been moved. But I'd say that that is where they started, in there.

Yes.

Just along a little bit from there, that was where that man tried to jump over, who was shot in the jaw.

Yes. I can't see this properly.

No, it's very small.

However you can see the wall. That's something you can see.

Oh, no, they're very good pictures.

It would be great to go back, you know.

To have another look. Would you, yes.

If it's still there.

Well, I'll certainly see if I can find out for you.

It seems to be a pretty solid building, doesn't it.

It could well still be there.

Of course, these days, they put up a building and pull it down tomorrow, don't they?

Yeah, they do. Yes.

And building something else.

I'd say there'd be a very good chance that it's still there.

It could be all houses.

Well when I do this book, I hope to go back to France and to Germany ...

Do you!

Yes, to see. To find out just what is left to get a bit more of an understanding of the various places I'm writing about and to see if there is anything still there.

We'd better go back now.

I'm told that Soltau is still there. That was one of the big camps which privates and NCOs were in. But I don't know whether that ... I think that's true. What was the general attitude of the men towards escaping? Was everybody keenly interested in trying or were they generally apathetic to trying?

A percentage of course was always looking for a way to get out, a big percentage. They'd do anything.

Could you give me some sort of an estimate as to how many you think that would be? Would it be fifty percent or forty percent or, at a guess?

To go out?

Yes.

Oh, I would say twenty percent, a good twenty percent I would say.

And then I suppose there would be others who would go if they had the chance?

If they had the chance, they would.

Then there must have been men who didn't want to go.

Oh yes.

Do you think there were men who simply didn't want to go back to the war or who perhaps had lost family members, say in your case for example, and simply felt to go back and risk life and limb again was really more than was asked for?

If I had escaped, if I had got out, I would have gone back again if they had let me. Gone back to my old mates of course. You had a lot of good mates. And whether they would have let me go back, of course, I don't know, if I had have got back to England. Although it was at the close of the war, the war was nearly over.

Do you think there were men though who felt themselves lucky to be a POW and not having to face being in the fighting again, or not?

They were certainly ... they did think themselves very lucky to be alive. That was the first thing, to be alive. I, of course, thought I was lucky enough to be alive. I didn't know what was in front of me, I had no idea. I knew there were plenty of prisoners, but what happened to them I didn't know, or we didn't know what was in front of us.

Did you think there was a possibility that you might be shot?

Oh Lord, yes.

You did?

Yes. Of course from there, really the only way to get out was a tunnel. Then where would you want to build it.

Well, as close to the wall as possible I suppose.

Yes, if you could get there. And what were you going to do with the dirt you see. All this you would have to worry about. You couldn't sort of walk out the gate when it was open. When trucks or anything came in they were all searched going out to see that there was no one in them or underneath them even. And from there, that was really the only way you'd get out was a tunnel.

Now how much warning do you think the guards would generally give you, for example, if you did step over the trip wire near the wall, would the guards shoot without asking questions, or what?

I don't know because no-one ever went in you see.

No-one did that?

No-one ever went under the wire, so I don't know. I suppose there would be some Germans who would shoot, there's no doubt about that. If they had the opportunity, if they thought you had escaped, they would shoot you. And of course there were others who were more humane and wouldn't. But there certainly would be some who would just pick up the gun and give you no warning or nothing.

No. What sort of things did the Germans provide you with? Like during the winter for example, it must have been very cold there, how did you keep warm?

In the room. I don't know what heat we had there but, as I said, we played cards practically day and night.

Did you.

Well, I did. I don't know what some of the other done. I suppose they did too. And of course there was reading matter in there - all censored. Of course I don't know what sort of book there were because I never read. I've never read, as I told you, books at all. I've only read the paper and Readers' Digest. I've never read any books.

Did they have work shops at all? I suppose they were not allowed to make anything of any kind so ...

Oh no.

You can't remember the names of any of your bridge playing partners?

No, I can't. I can't.

What about Peter Lyon? Was he a bridge player?

I don't think he was.

What did he occupy his time with?

I don't know. We used to have a walk in the campground. We had a walk the two of us.

That was part of your morning routine, was it?

Yes.

How did you keep pace with what was happening in the war? I know you didn't get any newspapers or anything, of course, even the German ones of course. How frequently were there new people coming in to Holzminden?

New ones?

Yes, new prisoners?

Oh not very often.

Wasn't it.

Oh no.

So I suppose when somebody new came in, you would find out the latest news from them.

The latest, yes.

Did the Germans provide you with proper beds? Or were you on straw palliasses or ...

Oh, I suppose you'd call them a bed. I was more or less on newspapers. There'd be all newspapers there. I remember that at Strohenmoor.

Would they provide you with blankets?

Yes, with blankets and of course your overcoat.

Yes, your great coat.

I still had me ...

When you went across at Bullecourt, you had your greatcoat with you.

I still had my greatcoat.

Whereabouts did you get your cards from? Did the Germans provide you with things like that?

Cards?

Yes. Or did you have to make them?

Oh no, they got them. They were selling a lot of them of course in our parcels.

What sort of things did come in the parcels?

Food.

It was mainly food.

Toothpaste, toothbrush and a cake of soap, as far as I know because I never got it.

But some of the others must have given you some things from their parcels so far as they could.

As far as they could. I think some of them got cigarettes too.

You were a smoker then?

I was a smoker, yes. I used to get some tobacco from Africa - South Africa tobacco. It wasn't too good, but it was tobacco.

And where did you get that from?

From a cobbler.

From a mate. From his parcels.

Yes. When you took those photos, would it come out all right?

Yes. I've got a close up lens and I mount that over the top and I can take them, the same as they are. I've actually taken them on colour film so the brown of the prints is even on film and I can get the same colour if I want to. But I'll ... you always lose a little bit of sharpness when you copy a photograph but not very much. And because those photographs are big, it's easier to get a nice sharp picture.

Will you put them in the book?

Yes, oh yes. Not all of them but three of them at least. And I'll be doing an article for one of the glossy colour magazines that come out every three months about the POWs and I'll get them published them in that too. And I'll send you that. And what other things did the Germans provide you with? Did they provide all the sporting equipment or did the Red Cross have to provide that?

I really don't know where the football came from or where the cricket bat and cricket ball came from. I don't know. They could have come in a Red Cross parcel to someone.

Whereabouts did they play cricket? Inside the walls, or not?

Inside the walls.

On the parade ground?

Yes, on the parade ground. Just the same as if you went out here and played it. Just the same.

And how often were they playing cricket? All the time or ...

They'd play in the daytime.

You can see here, there's an open yard there, in this bottom left picture.

Yes. This must be the ground I think.

Well it looks as though they'd farming there. You can see a horse and a plough there.

Can you?

Yes.

Oh, that wouldn't be it then. I've never seen them in there. It would be in there the playing ground where we used to walk round. That's right. There's a horse and cart there? There's a farm there, is there?

Yes, there's a horse there. There's a man behind it. It looks as though he's got a harrows or a cultivator or even a plough. You can see a horse and cart here, in this one.

Yes. At the end of this tunnel is where they finished. Out here where that green stuff was, I don't know what it was.

And they got away of a night time?

Yes.

What happened the next morning when they found out they'd gone?

Oh there was a roll call then to see who was missing. And how many. Of course they had to look where they got out and when they found it, they dug it up.

How long did it take them to find where it was?

I don't know. It must have been a while. It seemed a fair while before they found it. I'd like to go back with you and then I could show you everything.

Well, I've already got a very good idea of what it was like there and the photographs are a marvellous help. As soon as you see the photographs you can understand it very quickly.

I'll see if they need them at Burnie and if they don't want them, I'll see if they want them in Canberra. Ask them if they've got the paper that tells you all about it.

Yes, I'll ask that.

When are you going to take it back?

Well, they said that they might be out in the afternoon, so I'll call in on the way back today and otherwise I'll call in tomorrow afternoon to see them.

You wouldn't catch them tomorrow afternoon I don't think. Tuesday's their bowling day on Tuesday. That's the women's day.

Oh well, I'll catch up with them anyway.

They may not go away from home now they've sold the place, they might be getting ready to gather things together and getting ready to go. So they may be home.

What sort of role did the commandant have in either Holzminden or Stohenmoor? How often did you see the commandant?

Oh, I think he used to come out every morning on the parade.

Did he?

Yes, I think so. Yes, when they were lined up and rollcall, I think he came out.

This is Niemeyer, isn't it?

Niemeyer. Yes.

What were they like generally, the commandants? You know, I mean ...

We had nothing to do with them really, nothing at all.

Your contact with the Germans would mainly be through the interpreter, would it?

Though the interpreter, yes.

And how did they address you? Apparently it was common for the Germans to call all the prisoners Englishers. Is that true, or not?

I don't think they ever said anything to me or called me anything. No. I was just one of the few that wanted nothing and had nothing and I didn't worry them and they didn't worry me.

Yes, I see. The other men were always trying for different things, were they?

Oh yes, some of them. I suppose a lot of them would be trying to see how to get away or trying to get the Germans to help them in that way. I reckon they would. And they say they'd give them something if they'd let them do something.

Did they have a hospital at Holzminden?

No.

What was the procedure if you became ill or if you ...?

They took you down into the town.

Did they. Yes.

There again, you see, I don't think there were very got sick or were on the sick list.

How many were there amongst the men who had been wounded? Were there many who'd been wounded there, or not?

I don't think so.

No. You don't think that Holzminden was a sort of special security camp, or not? It was just a general camp for officers?

That's all, yes. Yes, I certainly would like to go back. I've got no idea how big Holzminden was.

The town?

Yes. None whatever. No idea.

I don't think it was very big.

I don't think so. I don't think it was but I saw nothing at all of it, nothing.

When the armistice was declared, what happened at that time in Holzminden? We were talking about this before, when did you first hear that the war had ended?

I think it could have been the day before when they knew it was finished practically. Of course, when the men got the news that it was over, the senior officers in the camp took charge.

Did they.

Yes.

What did they do with the German guards and the German staff?

They'd gone of course. We had no guards.

They'd all gone. How long did you wait before you went back to England?

Not very long. Of course they had an awful lot to do. I don't know how many prison camps they had. They had to take them all and transport and feed them or give them something. I don't know whether all went to Holland or not, I don't. But that's where I went.

How did you get to Holland?

We must have gone down by train I think.

You didn't do any long walks?

No. As I told you before I don't remember going. I don't remember leaving Holland. I don't remember arriving in London.

Did you all leave the camp together at the same time or were you with a smaller group?

I think the whole camp went.

Did they.

I think so.

Yes.

You see the Germans had to fix all the transport business up.

I thought I might ask you a few things about before you were captured too, today, particularly about Pozieres and Mouquet Farm and some of the other places in France. When I was here last week you told me that you went into Pozieres with the Colonel.

Yes.

When was that? Was that before the rest of the battalion came in?

Yes. We went up to sort of make arrangements to see what was doing and where we were to go.

Was that up in front of Mouquet Farm or was that Pozieres?

Pozieres.

That was the first time you went there?

Yes. Pozieres.

What memories do you have of Pozieres?

Not much, except the mud.

What was it like the mud? How deep was it?

Oh, up to your knees without any worry.

How far back from the frontline? You know, how extensive was the mud?

Oh, it was all mud. Everything was mud – front lines, back lines, support lines - all mud.

Yes. It must have been a great labour to get anywhere.

It was. Oh, it was awful.

Do you remember any of the 15th Battalion attacks at Pozieres? The first that the 15th went into Pozieres they had to make an attack, a night attack.

Well really, attacking all the time. You do your attack and then you get relieved by another battalion. And then when you had a bit of a spell, you'd go back again and start all over again.

Yes.

And if we took a hundred yards there, it was a big victory. A hundred yards was a big victory in those days. Yes. We lost hundreds of men in a raid when you went out ...

Do you remember going over the top?

Yes. Went up to one place - I've forgotten now the name of it, it's in there - and they told us over there or somewhere there was something to see. I don't know what it was. And of course a lot of them sent over to have a look. I went over, I was on my own and I got lost. I had a devil of a job to get back again because you asked any of the other soldiers you see, you'd say, 'Where's the 15th Battalion?', and they wouldn't know anything about the 15th Battalion. They wouldn't know a thing about them. And it took me all, oh I don't know how long before I found my way back again. I wasn't far away but when you can't see in the dark, and I don't know what I went to see. But someone said there was something over there and they went and saw it. But what it was, I don't know. And I went and I got lost.

Whereabouts was that?

Oh, if I could read that I could tell you.

This is on the Somme, was it?

Yes, on the Somme.

It would probably be around Flers or Gueudecourt or somewhere like that.

Somewhere up there.

Well it was terribly easy to get lost, wasn't it?

Oh of course.

Do you ever remember any of the Tasmanian officers like Goss?

Yes.

What was he like? What can you remember about him?

Well, all our officers was good fellows, that's what I can say. They were good fellows, they were. A lot of them came up through the ranks of course when there were casualties. They had to promote, and they came up. And they were quite good.

What about Brettingham-Moore? Can you remember him? He was wounded at Pozieres. He was a D Company - these are all D Company officers.

D Company, from Tasmania?

Yes.

Brettingham-Moore. I know him of course. I knew him. I can't just place him now.

He was in charge of the 10th Reinforcements so he wasn't on the peninsular.

No.

What about Blacklow? Can you remember any of the Blacklow family? There was a CSM Blacklow, I think.

No.

There was another chap, Archie Nevin who disappeared in no-man's-land?

Nevin? I wonder whether he'd be a relation to Reverend Nevin down here?

I reckon he would be, yes. What Tasmanian officers can you remember, who you knew well?

There was a 40th man who was there then.

I don't know very much about the 40th.

The 40th ... my brother was in the 40th. But I knew ... I don't know when they left. They left ...

About June 1916 it was, May or June. Who were your friends in the battalion? Can you tell me something about the friends you had?

A lot of them were signallers. They were all friends.

But did you have any special friends like men that you ...

Yes, I had two. One was an old chap. He was with ... Lord Kitchener. He was an old man but he was in the 15th Battalion and he was with Kitchener.

Whereabouts? In South Africa?

In Egypt, yes.

What was his name?

Tom somebody.

How long had he been with the Battalion?

Since it started.

Oh, so he was an original.

Yes. He could speak Arabic. He was alright in Egypt.

(END OF AWMTAPE FIVE - SIDE B)

(START OF AWMTAPE SIX - SIDE A)

And a chap named Hopkins I knew very well. I think he worked in the Post Office in Queensland.

Yes. There's a Sydney Hopkins or a William Hopkins, both very early men.

Great drinker.

This is Tom?

Tom. He'd drink anything.

What was he like in Egypt?

Good fellow. Yes. But he'd drink, he'd drink anything. He'd be right in the morning. Drink today and have a sleep. He'd be right in the morning.

How old do you think he was? Would he have been fifty or ...

Oh, easy. Easy, he must have been. Yes, he was with Lord Kitchener.

Do you remember anything about David Waterfield?

Yes. He was a 'rummin'.

What sort of things can you recall about David Waterfield?

Oh, he'd collect anything. He was a collector.

What, of souvenirs?

Souvenirs.

Did you ever go on leave to England?

Yes.

When was that? That must have been ...

Do you know, that's another thing I don't remember.

What did you do at that time?

What did I do? In England?

Yes.

I went to London and they gave us a free pass to Scotland. I went up to Edinburgh and stayed with a family there for a few days on my leave.

Did you?

Yes.

How long did you have? Do you remember vaguely?

No, I don't.

A couple of weeks?

It would be a couple of weeks I suppose, yes.

Do you go to see any plays or anything like that, in London?

No. I stopped with a family. I've forgotten. He was some sort of a businessman.

Yes. This is in London?

In London. No, in Scotland.

In Scotland, in Edinburgh?

I stayed at the hotel in London. One of the big hotels right in the middle of London. I don't know what the name of that was now.

Was that the first time you had seen London?

Yes.

What did you think of London?

Well, just a big city. I was interested in Madam Tussard. I was interested in her. She had some wonderful stuff there you know.

What sort of things?

Well, she'd have you for instance made out of clay or some stuff, exactly the same as you. You'd see them standing up and you wouldn't know that they were dummies. You'd think they were alive. They had all sorts of men. Murders there, they had that Crippen. Would you remember Crippen?

No.

The London murderer. They had him there. They had all the heads of queens and that. Oh, big place. I don't know what they were made of.

They're made out of wax, aren't they?

Some sort of stuff, yes. And if you saw them there you wouldn't know that it was a dummy. You wouldn't.

No.

That was an interesting place to me.

Did you go anywhere else in London?

Most of the places I went to in London was at night and have a good feed.

Yes, I suppose so.

Had a good feed of a night.

I suppose after Gallipoli it was about time you ...

My word. I had a dinner every night somewhere.

Did you.

Yes.

Did you have any friends with you then, or not? Were you on your own or ...?

On my own.

You were on your own.

Yes.

I suppose you meet a few other Australians.

I did, yes. Before I finished I did pick up Peter Lyon. That's where I struck Peter in London too. He was on leave.

He was a 15th man.

No, 16th.

Oh yes, that's right.

He's a Western Australian.

Well, I might see if I can find his family - find relatives of Peter Lyon. Whereabouts in Western Australia did he come from?

Perth.

Perth.

Yes. He was in the Agricultural Department, he was in. But he had some good government job and he used to send me reports, paper reports, you know, of where he'd been and what he was doing. And of course I haven't got any of them now.

And whereabouts did you meet Peter in London? What were you doing when you met him?

Well I couldn't tell you that either.

No. Well it's a difficult question.

Yes, I couldn't tell you.

Did he go to look at Madam Tussard's with you or not?

Oh, I reckon he would. Yes.

You didn't go and see any plays?

No.

No. Just had a good dinner.

A good dinner. No, I never saw any plays or ... I suppose there would be plays on at the time, I don't know, during the war or just after the war or during the war. I suppose they would have some amusement of some sort.

What was Horseferry Road like? You must have gone there I suppose when you were in London?

That was full of Australians all dressed up neat, you know, shiny buttons and that. They wasn't worrying about the war. They had a damned good time.

Did they.

My oath, in Horseferry Road. And an awful lot too. I don't know how many there would be but they done everything you see. All our work, all the army work - everything.

Yes. When you went up to Edinburgh, how did you meet the people that you were staying with?

They met me at the station. Yes.

How did you know them?

All the ... they told us in London the different places, you see, where we could go. And they'd make the arrangements where to stay. In London, I don't know who done it. They done it in London.

Yes. And it was people who were prepared to billet soldiers for a period. What sort of a place was it that you went to?

Just an ordinary homestead, English homestead. And he was in, I'm sure, it was some fair business that he had. And we'd just sit and talk of a night and bed. Up in the morning and porridge. We'd always have porridge for breakfast.

Did you?

Yes. I think everybody in England has porridge for breakfast. I don't remember even going much about Edinburgh, about the town. I think I wasn't there very long and used to talk to the wife. And they had a daughter and she worked somewhere. I don't know where she worked.

What else can you remember about the winter of 1916-17? The really cold one?

Oh, there was no doubt it was cold. There's no doubt about it. Frozen taps every morning. In the mud and frozen taps.

You were issued with a sort of sheepskin jerkin, weren't you?

Pardon?

You were issued with a sheepskin jerkin, weren't you?

Yes. My word.

Did you get anything from home, from the comforts funds to help you keep warm?

No. I got nothing. No parcels at all from anywhere.

I mean, during the time that you were in France, did the men get scarves and gloves and things like that from the comfort funds or ...?

I think so, yes. And socks. There seemed to be always plenty of socks, if you wanted socks. And women certainly knitted some socks.

What about frost-bite and trench feet? Did you ever suffer from this?

No, I was lucky. They gave us whale oil you know to put on and I never had that. I didn't take it.

What did you do instead?

I done nothing. Didn't do nothing and I was lucky in that respect. I got out all right. I was supposed to have had the oil though, and rubbed it all over my feet. I was supposed to but I didn't, I never touched it.

Why not?

I don't know. I didn't want it and I didn't take it.

Did you take any special precautions to see that you ...?

No, I didn't. I was just lucky - pure luck. I could have been perhaps the only one out of the whole lot that didn't do it. Brittany was cold. No doubt about that.

Whereabouts were you living at that time? What were the living conditions like?

Out of the line we were in the huts.

Were you, yes.

Huts or barns or ... it all depends where you were. If you stayed up on duty, like up in the front line, well, of course, you done your time there, whatever it was, two or three days, and then you'd go back to your hut or wherever you was.

Yes.

Go back to your dugout.

Yes. Were they any good those dugouts, or not?

They wasn't bad, you know, a hole in the ground you might say (laughs).

How did you come to be friendly with this elderly man, Tom?

He was a signaller ...

He was a signaller, yes.

... you see, and, of course, you got to know one another. There wasn't many of us, you see, and I knew them all, but I couldn't tell you now if you ask me.

And you were in charge of them all, weren't you?

Yes. I know his name was Tom, I ought to know him. A real old stick he was.

Was he English?

Yes, he'd be an Englishman I would say. A fellow named Hopkins, I knew him well. I think he was in the Post Office in Brisbane.

Yes.

Another chap was killed later on. He was a fine fellow - Captain - Mitchell, was it? - Mitchell, I think, a fellow named Mitchell. He left us and went to the 4th Machine-gun Battalion, I think - Mitchell. He was a Queenslander and he was a captain, and was killed.

Did you lose many of your friends, killed or wounded?

Yes, quite a number.

Can you remember any of them?

No, not now. One place in France, we was five or six of us having our bully beef and biscuits out there, and a chap - one of our signallers - was shot through the knee, and, you know, oil came out.

Oil?

Oil - there is oil in there.

Is there?

Well, there was oil in his - came out, yes. Somewhere in there - crippled him, of course.

Did it?

Oh, yes. But I don't know, but there's oil.

I suppose there's a joint there ...

Yes.

... so there may well be some sort of body oil.

That's where he was shot, through the knee, and this bloomin' oil - with blood, of course - wasn't only blood, it was oil. Sitting around the same as you and I are now, eating our bully beef and biscuits, and he got this shot.

It was a machine-gun bullet or something?

Don't know what it was - only one bullet.

That's from somewhere.

Wouldn't be a machine-gun.

No.

No, it would be a rifle - from a rifle. If I could have read that book before you came I could have given you some more information for you . If I could have read it. I have read it. It's a good while ago, of course, when I did read it. It reminded me of different things. I could have told you where I got lost, for one thing.

Yes, that's right.

It's in there, the place we went to.

Do you remember any of the villages that you were in in France, like Warloy or Ribemont?

Oh, there's a lot of them. We went to a lot of them in France. Albert - ever heard of Albert?

Yes.

That's where they had the ...

Leaning statue.

Yes. And they said when that fell it would end the war, but it didn't, it didn't fall.

No. Did you ever have a look in that cathedral?

Not in it, only on the outside. You could see that outside it ... that was outside, of course.

How much of Albert could you see from the front line at Pozieres?

Oh, you wouldn't see anything.

You wouldn't see anything?

Not from ... Pozieres, no.

No.

(Break in interview)

Well, I thought I might ask you a little bit more about Gallipoli - no, about Egypt rather.

Yes.

You told me a few things I know. When did you first arrive in Egypt? Must have been, what, May or June 1915?

It would be 19 ... 1915, yes. Went into camp in 1914, and was at Claremont, and went over to the south side of Melbourne - what is it?

Broadmeadows.

Broadmeadows, yes. And we left from - I think we left Broadmeadows just before Christmas, if I remember rightly - two or three days before Christmas - yes.

You'd have gone to Zeitoun, I suppose?

Mm?

In Egypt you'd have gone to Zeitoun, wouldn't you? Was that where you went when you first went into camp in Egypt?

No ... Heliopolis.

Heliopolis?

Heliopolis, yes - Heliopolis.

What do you remember about Heliopolis?

Flies and lice, mostly.

The camp was lousy, was it?

Oh, yes, lousy. That's where we got ... of course carried them to Gallipoli - never got rid of them - never got rid of them - no. They had a big camp. I don't know how many would be there, it was quite a big camp. That's where we done our training, you see, from Heliopolis. Used to go out into this desert - with bully beef and biscuits.

It was standard fare, wasn't it?

I think I told you, the Egyptians came out to where we were with oranges. Where they came from, I don't know - no.

It was quite a pretty place, Heliopolis, wasn't it? I've seen some postcards of Heliopolis.

Yes, yes.

What was the palace like there? Did you ever go in the palace - the Palace Hospital?

Went into Cairo, that was only a tram ride from our camp into Cairo.

Did you ever stay at Shepherd's Hotel?

I wasn't ...

You weren't an officer then?

No. Only the officers had that.

Did you know Brettingham-Moore in Egypt?

Yes. I think I reckon they'd get some information from that hotel, you know - the Germans would.

Oh, you mean listening there as spying?

I reckon, I reckon they would.

Did you ever hear any stories about spies in Egypt?

No, I didn't, no. I told you how the interpreter in the camp was a waiter in London.

Ah, no, I don't remember that.

Don't you?

No, I don't.

The interpreter we had in Holtzminden, he was a waiter in London. He evidently got out of London when the war broke out, or just before - I don't know, but I suppose he did. Well, he must have because he wouldn't have got out after the war broke out.

He was a German, was he?

He was German.

He was a German interpreter?

Yes.

I see. Do you remember anything about Brettingham-Moore and Corrigan?

No, no, I don't. Corrigan was a good fellow. They were all good fellows, no doubt about them, they were, yes, yes.

Did you ever go down to Deversoir on the Suez Canal?

Where?

Deversoir. After you'd been at Serapeum. That was after the march from Tel-el-Kebir.

Yes. We stayed at ... we stayed at the one place till we left.

You didn't go down to Deversoir?

No.

D Company of the 15th went down there.

Did they?

Yes.

Oh.

I thought you might have gone down there with them.

No, I stopped.

You were with the signallers at that time?

I stopped at Ismailia.

Yes.

Now, that's another thing. Ismailia, when we was there - and I've noticed at times on the ... the reporters here, they call it 'Is-mah-lia'.

Yes.

Well, it's not 'Is-ma-lia', is 'Is-maylia'.

How do you say 'Ser-apeum', or 'Sera-peum'? What is it?

'Sera-peum'.

'Sera-peum', yes. It sounds more Roman, doesn't it?

Yes.

It's a Latin word, isn't it?

Is it?

Well, I think it might be, yes. How often would you get into Cairo?

I had a few trips in there - yes, I had a few trips.

Where would you go? Did you go to any of the mosques?

Went down there to feed. Used to get a cheap feed there. I've forgotten now what it was - it was ... oh, a special place down there that had this special - it didn't cost very much, but it was a change from what we had.

What would they serve you? What sort of food?

I don't know what this was.

It was Egyptian food was it, or not?

It was just a one sort of porridge thing.

Like a stew or like a porridge?

Like a porridge - no meat or anything in it - it was sweet.

What friends did you have in Cairo at that time, or in Egypt? Did you have any special friends?

No, none whatever - no.

Did you go swimming in the Canal?

Pardon?

Did you go swimming in the Canal when you were ...

My word.

What was that like?

Oh, it was good. As soon as we got there we went out after that march, that's the first thing we done, entered this canal.

What do you remember about the march down from Tel-el-Kebir?

Oh, it was a cow.

Brettingham -Moore has some snapshots of that?

Did he?

Yes, he had four or five little pictures, about two inches square - little prints - showing - well, there was D Company on the march, and the other pictures were of rest stops under the trees, in the shade, or the men sort of lying in the sand.

Of course, it was all sand and it was heavy going, I tell you.

And you were one of the ones that finished it, I'd imagine.

I finished, I did, and finished in the Canal.

Did you have any punishment for that?

No.

Because Fred Febey in Launceston told me that when he went swimming in the Canal he had to carry a pack of sand around for a week.

I don't know what that was for.

No.

Oh, no, you went straight in as soon as we got there. As soon as I got there I did. I've forgotten now the chaps that I went with, you know. I've forgotten them. Their names, I think, are in that book, of course.

Do you have any special memories yourself of that trip - that march? Is there any story that you can remember from that?

It was a hard march, no doubt about it. I mean, you go down on the sand down here - not the solid sand, you know, just loose sand. You know what that's like, you can't go far.

No.

Of course, we had our pack up, had our gear to carry. But the worst things in Egypt was flies and lice, there's no doubt about it. And at night-time, freezing. You couldn't believe it. You'd never believe it unless you was there. But I told you, I think you could have cooked an egg on the sand out where we was in the desert. I believe it was hot enough to cook an egg, and at night it was just freezing. I couldn't make it out, I couldn't understand it.

Apparently it was quite strange of a night when the Moon was out. The moonlight, apparently, was quite ... you know, it looked quite special in the desert by the moonlight.

I don't remember anything about that, no.

You were a signaller after you came back from Gallipoli, weren't you?

Yes.

Well, were you a signaller right from the start?

Right from the start.

Right from the start?

Yes.

Well, can you describe the functions that you had, and the equipment that you had, and how your section was organised, and so on?

We had flags which you waved, and they had what they called a heliograph.

That's the mirrors, isn't it?

Mirror.

Yes.

A queer thing - it was very accurate. You had to be right on it or you couldn't get it at all.

You couldn't see it otherwise?

You couldn't ... no-one could see it, you had to be accurate. It was never used on Gallipoli.

Why was that?

No need for it.

No need for it?

No need for it.

You are never that far away from ...

No.

You could always use the flags?

Yes.

What flags would they be? I mean, you'd have different colours, would you?

Oh ... I think they were coloured, yes.

And different colours would mean different things?

No. You had to Morse code.

(END OF AWM TAPE SIX - SIDE A)

(START OF AWM TAPE SIX - SIDE B)

You used the flags to send morse?

Morse code, yes.

How would you do that?

Well, you see, you go down there - one - that would be A.

Oh, I see.

Down there ...

And you'd wave it and it would be ...

... it would be B.

So a sort of a quick movement would be a dot, and a big movement would be a dash?

Dash, yes.

I see, oh, that's interesting - I didn't understand that, yes.

The other flags is the same as they use on the navy - you know, little ones.

Little pennants?

They do these sort of things with them.

Yes, that's interesting. And how many were there in your section on Gallipoli - just as a guess, you know? Were there a dozen or more than that?

It would be a dozen, yes it would be a dozen.

And you were attached to the Battalion, not to a brigade?

To the Battalion.

To the Battalion?

Yes.

And did you ever have any field telephones?

Used to have telephones, yes.

What were they like?

Alright.

Can you describe what they were like as equipment? How would they operate?

Well, the same as they do here, really. You put it up to your ear - you had your wires, of course - you had to have wires - couldn't have the things they've got these days ...

Radios, no.

... with no wires - but they had wires. I ought to have been shot, really. I went to sleep one night. I was on duty. We used to get a noggin of rum every night, you know. Every night we'd get rum. Well, this particular night I must have had too much and I went to sleep.

Where was that - on Gallipoli?

On Gallipoli, yes. Yes, nothing did happen, I was lucky.

Did you take part in any of the actions at Quinn's Post?

No, not real actions, no. I never even went out when they went out to bury all the dead. You know, there was some 4,000, I think, wasn't it, or something, they buried?

I don't know the number, but I do know they had an armistice to bury the dead.

Armistice to bury them. I never went out after that. I did hear - I think it's right - that the Turkish general - what was his name? - Pasha, was it?

Yes, or Attaturk. There was Kemal Pasha was a ... I don't know the Gallipoli story as well I do France.

They tell me he was there when they were burying them, you know, having a look down to where we were.

Yes, down Monash Gully - Monash Valley.

Yes. They tell me that he was there and had a look down.

Did you ever have anything personally to do with General Monash?

No.

You didn't meet him sort of in the course of reporting, or something?

No.

How well regarded was he on Gallipoli?

Alright.

He was?

Oh, yes, yes. He was a man, he was.

He was a good commander.

Yes, he was. Yes, I'd give anything to go back there, you know.

To Gallipoli?

Have a look.

Yes.

I suppose it's all altered now though - a lot of it would be.

Well, yes. I don't think ... well, they've got a road that goes around above the beach now.

Have they?

Yes. It's been cut round, you know, a hundred or two hundred yards up from the beach, but the rest of it's very much the same.

I suppose it would be.

Yes.

Yes.

You knew, I suppose, that last year they named Anzac Cove officially Anzac Cove?

Yes.

They changed its name.

Yes. And you leave at Devonport, I suppose.

Yes, this afternoon. They've got a new ship running across now.

That's the one you are going on?

Yes. Well, I came across on it, it's called the *Abel Tasman*.

Yes.

I think it's going to be a bit rough.

A bit rough.

I think so. I'm not a bad sailor, but I'd rather it was flat.

I'm a bad sailor.

Are you?

Mm. Yes, I like to fly and it's only an hour.

And when were the field telephones introduced? You didn't have telephones on Gallipoli, did you?

Yes.

You had them there too?

Oh, yes.

So you always had the field telephones?

Yes.

Which did you prefer using, the telephones or the flags?

Telephone, yes. And they had the morse code there, you know, same as in the Post Office.

Yes, you had a key.

Key.

Were you attached to the brigade or battalion in France?

To the Battalion. Well, the Battalion was attached to the Brigade, of course - 4th Brigade.

Did you report back to the Brigade headquarters or the Battalion headquarters?

Battalion.

The Battalion?

Yes. Yes, seventy years ago.

Yes, it's a long time ago now, isn't it?

My word. It will soon be seventy-one.

Yes, it's going round again, isn't it? It's another year.

A couple of months, yes. Where will you be Anzac Day? I suppose you don't know.

Well, I hope to be in Canberra actually.

Canberra?

Yes. I'm hoping to get work there - that's what I'm hoping - I'm not positive yet though. I do have that article coming out in March. I'm sending you a copy of that.

Good.

Then I'll do another one on the POWs for Anzac Day 1987, next year. There's three of you and I'll do an article on the three of you.

Ah, good. And the other prisoners you met, did they know much more than me?

Well, you are about the same, I suppose. They had different experiences - one was a private, that was Donald Fraser from the 13th Battalion.

He'd have to work, of course.

Yes, well, he had to work mainly in the salt mines.

In the salt mines?

Yes. And the other man, Jim Wheeler, he was a 15th Battalion man, and he was a corporal so he didn't have to work. But he wanted to escape so he got sent out to farms to work cutting pine pit props. And he made two or three escapes, all of them unsuccessful.

There's one camp there. I don't think anyone got away from. It was way out away from from nowhere. I don't think anyone got away from that particular camp.

What was it called?

I tried to think of it, but I can't think of the name of it - I can't.

Whereabouts was it located? Do you know whereabouts in Germany it was?

No, I don't, it was well out of reach of everything, yes.

Well, they were scattered right across Germany, weren't they?

Oh, yes.

Did you ever have any close shaves yourself? You know, I remember John Doggett was telling me, when he was on Gallipoli that he was nearly shot, came very close to being shot during the August attacks.

Oh, yes.

Did you have any close shaves?

I had some close shaves, yes. I had some close shaves in France too. I was going up to the line one night with the crowd, and a bomb – gas bomb - exploded, oh, about 100 yards away. Gas. I just got a whiff of that.

Did you?

Only a little, but I got a little bit of it.

What did you feel like with it?

Mm?

Did it affect you?

As far as I know it didn't, I didn't get enough of it, you see.

What were they like, those gas masks, to have them on? You know, the ...

Oh ...

Bloody awful, I'd say.

They were, yes.

That was a dreadful weapon, wasn't it?

Oh, yes, yes.

What about at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm - did you ever have any close shaves there?

Oh, yes, yes. Of course, there was shelling from daylight you might say till dark. Yes. Where they got the shells from, I don't know. There was thousands of them, you know. These eighteen-pound guns they had - only little ones, you know. You could fire them as fast as you could put a shell in.

These are the Australian guns?

Yes - they were a great gun, my word they were.

Do you remember anything about the night attacks at Pozieres?

The what?

Any of the night attacks at Pozieres?

Yes, yes. All in the dark, you didn't know where you was, you know.

No.

Didn't know where you was.

What would your task be as a signaller? You'd have to, with your section, I suppose, take the telephones and so on across to the German lines.

Yes.

How were you armed at that time? I suppose you'd have a pistol and so on, would you?

Rifle.

A rifle?

Not a revolver. I had a revolver when I was promoted, but always had a rifle.

How useful were they, the rifles, in France?

Oh - in France?

Yes.

Oh, handy, quite good, oh, yes. Machine-guns were awful things, you know - seven, or eight, or nine hundred, thousand a minute - that's travelling - oh, murder.

They could really fire that many, could they?

Yes. I think the big machine-guns fired about eight hundred a minute.

Yes, that would be right. Well, I know the Lewis guns could fire seven hundred.

Lewis?

Yes.

Seven hundred?

Yes. So I'm sure that the Vickers could fire at least that, and more. And the Maxim, the German ... Yes, they are dreadful things.

I think I told you before, I don't know how they made the bombs they made on Gallipoli - made them out of tins, you know. Put stuff in them, but how they made them I'm blown if I know, but they did - yes, they did.

It was pretty primitive on Gallipoli. I think it got a little bit more professional, if you can call it that, in France, didn't it?

They couldn't spare them from France, the Mills bombs that we wanted. They couldn't spare them. That's what they wanted on Gallipoli, it would have made a big difference.

Did you ever see or hear of any accidents with the grenades?

Yes, when they were made.

This is the tin-can bombs?

Yes. One man had his hand blown off.

Did he?

He had fingers blown off - one had his hand blown right off down here, and some had fingers off - yes.

What about in France with the Mills bomb?

Oh, the Mills bomb, they had plenty there . Any amount.

Did they have any accidents with them much, or not?

Not that I know of, no. I forget how many seconds you pulled the pin out. You've got to hold them so many seconds . Not long.

No, it was only seven or eight at the most, wasn't it?

Wasn't very long, but my word, they were deadly. Oh, godfather. Yes, war, I don't know why they do it.

Doesn't prove anything, does it?

Nothing at all.

I've got a set of letters - a lot of letters - by a Lieutenant Wadsley who came from Cygnet, and he was in charge of my grandfather's reinforcement, the 13th, that arrived in Egypt at the end of January 1916, and he transferred to the 52nd. But he was killed at Mouquet Farm. And you read these letters and then suddenly it ends, and he knew that there was a good chance that he might get killed. His last letter was in case he did get killed. It's really just a waste.

Oh, God. Anyone that hasn't been and seen, after the war, he couldn't believe the damage that was done. I mean, you take Ulverstone - there'd be nothing there, not a thing - all gone, just flattened.

Some of the villages were like that, weren't they?

Oh, yes - nothing left at all - Pozieres was . I don't know how big a place it was, but there was nothing left there - Pozieres - no way.

How did you respond to being under shell fire? I know John Doggett found it too much actually and he was evacuated out of it.

Well, you got used to it, to the noise and the blasts . You got used to it alright, at least I did. Of course, you'd never know when your time was coming. Lucky enough, of course, I was to get out of it.

And when it became very cold during the winter, it must have been nearly unbearable to be out.

Oh, it was, it was, there's no doubt about it - it was.

Would you say that the winter of 1916-17 was one of the hardest trials you had, or not?

Yes.

Do you think it was worse than going through Pozieres or the battles, or was there just a different type of thing?

Oh, different type altogether, yes. And you always was, what you might say, dirty. You see, it was all mud, you couldn't get out of it. You just had to go through it. They finished up with having these duck boards, but of course, they sort of sunk in with all this tramping on them and that. You just had to live with it - wet and cold. We did get a couple of hot showers at different times when we went out of the line for a spell. You got hot showers. You'd get under them and had a damn good wash.

They'd be welcome, wouldn't they?

My word, yes.

What about getting different food and so on in France? Do you remember any stories about trying to get different food in France, like going round some of the farms or something like that?

No. We had ... we had really mainly bully beef and biscuits, it was. We did a stew now and again. I think I told you, we got a stew out of a tin that was sent to us. I don't know what it was now, but it was certainly very nice. But the main ...

It was a sort of ...

We lived practically on bully beef and biscuits, yes.

And were there many ways you could cook it, or not? Did you heat it up, or have it cold?

Have it cold.

Have it cold?

Have it cold. Of course, in the summer it was, as I told you, all a muck and warm.

Yes. The stew you were talking about that was nice, was that something that was army issue, or was it something you made yourself?

No, I think it came in parcels, or it came to the Battalion and the Battalion issued it out. We didn't get very many or much of it, but when we did it was good. I think I told you, didn't I, that one fellow sung out to another chap, "Tell what-his-name to come and get McConichie's] rations. McConichie - have McConichie's stew" And the fellow said, "Tell him to go and get his own bloody stew." See, he thought McConichie was the man.

Oh, right.

It was McConichie's Stew and he thought he was getting stew for McConichie (laughs) - yes.

And what memories do you have of Bullecourt? Again, you've told me a bit about Bullecourt, that's when you were captured, of course.

Yes.

Do you have any special memories of the fighting at that time?

Oh ... I can't say any special ... no. It was a cow. It would have been better, I suppose, if the tanks had arrived. Of course, they didn't arrive. It was just all wire as thick as this room, you see. Well, it was just all barbed wire, you had to get through that.

How did you get through?

I got through where they had - they used to have openings at different places where they used to come in and out, of course, themselves. And that's where I got through into the front line.

Had there been many men from the other battalion - the 14th Battalion - killed at that time there, or not?

A lot had - 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th - the Brigade, 4th Brigade, yes.

At that time were you with, more or less, attached with D Company?

Yes.

You were with D Company?

D Company.

So how did most of D Company get through the wire? In the same way that you did?

I suppose they did, yes - I suppose they would. Well, it was the only way ... They couldn't go over or through the ... it was too thick. You had to go through where there was an opening.

And did the Germans have machine-guns on that opening, or not?

I suppose they would have - sure to have, yes.

What did you do when you got into the German lines?

Well, we done nothing except keep our eyes on the Germans, you see. Shifting the wounded, what we could. Couldn't do nothing with the killed. Of course, they just had to stop in the trench. Trouble is, we had to knock off in the afternoon - finish.

What was the weather like then? It was snowing, wasn't it?

Snow.

Yes, the ground was covered with snow.

Covered with snow.

So was it all white?

It was.

It was all white?

All white.

How deep would it have been?

Oh, top of your boots.

Would it?

Oh, yes.

So it would be six inches deep?

Oh, yes, it was.

And that was all the way across the plain to the wire?

All the way across.

And the trenches as well, of course.

Eight hundred yards of it.

It was all snow?

All snow. I know this - I couldn't see, of course - I can't see properly - but I know this. I told you I went to Canberra - I noticed a painting, I suppose you'd call it, of Bullecourt. Have you seen it?

Yes.

You've seen the snow there?

Yes.

I couldn't see it properly, but it looked to me as though one of our fellows was shooting a German . There was three or four, wasn't there?

There was a model - are you talking about a model or a painting?

... oh, I'm blowed if I ... as I say, I can't see properly, but I could see this man shooting a German, and I thought that was wrong. There was four or five of our own around, you see. Whether he'd done something that he shouldn't have done, of course, I don't know. He might have just been in where he was, in his hole, just shooting. But the way they've got the photo, or the painting, to me, like what I could see, was totally wrong. There was no need to shoot that German, he couldn't get away, he was a prisoner.

Yes.

But he evidently done something that he shouldn't have done.

The German?

The German - and that's why ...

They shot him.

That's why they shot him.

Oh, it could have been a figment of the artist's imagination too.

Yes. That wasn't ... Of course, we know that there was a lot of mistakes made in ... I'm not a professional soldier by any means ...

No.

... but they didn't seem to realise that going eight hundred yards, early in the morning, that we must run out of ammunition or men, and they had no hope, I say, of getting ammunition or reinforcements over.

No - in the daylight.

In the daylight - it was just flat, quite flat, you could see. Evidently they - well, I don't know whether they thought that this would be a breakthrough.

Well, that's what they were hoping for, weren't they?

That's what they were hoping for, and they had the Light Horse cavalry behind to go in. But these army experts should have known - think of these things.

It was rushed, wasn't it?

You see, they had no hope in the world of getting reinforcements or ammunition in the daylight - of course, it was so flat.

Yes.

Of course, you stood out in snow, naturally.

Yes, you'd stand out. How dark was it when you got to the German wire?

It was light.

It was getting light?

Oh, yes, that's right.

So you started out in the dark, I suppose ...

Oh, yes.

... but it was getting through the German wire into the front line, it was dawn?

Oh, yes. You see, eight hundred yards is a long way ...

Yes.

... when you come to think of it.

Yes, it is a long way to walk.

A long way to go. And they said that one tank did get there.

It got into the wire, didn't it?

It got somewhere - I never saw it - I never saw any tank.

No.

I don't know where the other four got to, but they ...

They got hit or they broke down, and so on, yes. I do know what happened to them.

Yes, barbed wire's an awful thing. It's bad enough out here in the fields, and that, when you've been through it. Godfather, when you see it thick like we saw it.

How high was it, do you think?

Oh, as high as that bed, I suppose.

That would be about a metre - or a bit less, yes.

Some would be higher than that.

And what did you do when you got into the line? I mean, you'd have been trying to establish contact with headquarters, I suppose.

You couldn't.

You couldn't.

Couldn't, no.

What had happened?

Well, we just had to stop there and done nothing.

Were the wires cut were they?

Some of it, not all of it.

No, I mean the telephone wire?

Oh we had no telephone from there back.

Was it too far to go with it was it?

Oh, I suppose it would be too far, 800 yards. And there was really nothing to signal. You couldn't get reinforcements, and you couldn't get ammunition.

Could you see where you had come from?

No.

There was a bit of a rise , was there?

Yes. It was practically flat.

And what happened when the Germans came in?

Well, I wasn't in the first lot to go out.

(END OF AWM TAPE SIX - SIDE B)

END OF TAPE THREE

START OF AWMTAPE SEVEN - SIDE A  
(A Marshall 2/1/87 Microcassette Tape 4)

Just about your early life. You were in the Post Office, weren't you?

Yes.

Over in Launceston?

I was in Launceston when I enlisted. I started here, of course, at Ulverstone.

In the Post Office?

In the Post Office. I started - when I left school I was a grocer.

Were you? Who were you working for then?

The late A. S. Lakin.

L-A-K-I-N?

Yes.

Oh, yes, Lakin.

Lakin.

Whereabouts did he have a grocer's store?

Oh ...

This would be Main Street, was it?

In the main street - you know where Good's Shoe Store is?

No, I don't.

It's not far from - do you know the Commonwealth Bank?

Yes.

Well, when you go across the street, it wasn't very far - two or three - oh, it would be only about one shop, I think, on the left hand side going up.

I see.

That's where we was.

And how old were you when you left school?

I don't know.

Twelve or fourteen, I suppose.

Oh... I don't know, I don't. I finished up in whatever class I had to go to - you know, the last - I don't know what it was - fifth, or sixth, or seventh, or whatever it was - finished there and then went to the grocer's shop. And they had an exam for the Post Office.

Did they?

And I put in for that and got that, yes.

Where did you do that exam?

Pardon?

Whereabouts did you do the exam?

Oh, it must have been at Ulverstone somewhere.

Was it?

It must have been, yes.

Why did you go into the Post Office?

Ulverstone.

But why? Why join the Post Office?

Well, they had an exam, and I went in for it, and passed it. I thought it would be a good job. I got five shillings a week ...

Did you?

... as a grocer, and I got ten shillings a week as a telegraph messenger.

So double the pay.

Yes.

How long were you with Mr Lakin?

Oh, a fair while.

A couple of years?

It could have been, yes, it could have been. I got to the Post Office and then I was there for a fair while, and then I was transferred to Launceston.

Were you?

Mm. And that's where I joined, yes.

And whereabouts did your parents live in Ulverstone?

In Main Street.

Did they?

Yes - you know Main Street?

Yes.

Yes, in Main Street, yes.

What did your father do?

He was a labourer.

Was he?

He used to work on the bridges.

Did he?

Yes. And I only found out the other day, Dad came from England.

Did he?

And he was only three years of age when he came over. I only found out ...

Did you?

... or only just, not three weeks ago.

Really?

A nephew of mine was delving into things.

Has he?

And she found out that - a niece, rather - she found out that Dad came out when he was three years of age.

That's interesting. What was your father's name?

Enoch.

Enoch Marshall?

Enoch Marshall.

Yes, that's a good name.

Yes.

And what about your mother?

Well, it's rather peculiar, I knew nothing about Mum and Dad when I was young. That's all I know about Dad, he was three years of age when he came out. I don't know where Mum lived, I don't know where they were married, or when. Funny. You know, I suppose as a kid I didn't worry about those sort of things, but I should have done when I got older, but it didn't happen and I don't know nothing about Mum and Dad, nothing at all, except that they were the best.

How long were you with them? I suppose you must have ...

Till I left for Launceston, yes.

You were about seventeen or eighteen then, were you? How old were you then, do you think?

Oh ... I was eighteen when I enlisted - I was in Launceston, oh, could have been twelve months, I suppose.

Whereabouts did you live in Launceston?

It was really in Brisbane Street.

Was it?

It was a boarding house in Brisbane Street. I was in two places. The first place I went to was in Brisbane Street. I couldn't tell you now where it was - and I couldn't tell you where the other one was, but it ... You come along Brisbane Street - I'll show you - I lived there for a while, and then I come away up to here. That's about all I can tell you.

And what was it like working in the Post Office?

I was on the telephone exchange.

Were you?

I used to do work at night - different work at night. Answer telegrams up and look after the switchboard at night, you know.

Yes. And did you work during the day too, or was it only at night?

Daytime, yes, daytime.

How many hours a week did you work?

Oh, I'm blown if I know. I know one - working in the - I didn't go to sleep. I used to stop awake and went to sleep one night at work, in the Post Office. When the telephonist come up in the morning she found me asleep.

Oh, dear. Whereabouts was the Post Office?

Where it is now, if you know where it is?

Where is it? No I don't know.

Mm ... Brisbane Street.

Is it?

No, not Brisbane - Brisbane Street is there, and you go down there ... Would you know where the Cornwall Hotel is?

I've heard of it.

You've heard of it?

Yes.

I think it's in the same street as that, I'm not sure.

I can find out.

Yes.

Your Dad was a labourer on bridge work, was he?

On bridge work.

Who did he work for?

Oh, I suppose it would be Public Works. I don't know. I suppose they would have the job on the bridges.

Yes. And what did they think of you joining up? What did your Mum and Dad think of you doing that?

Of course, I had to get permission from them.

Did you?

They didn't worry.

Didn't they?

I told them where I wanted to go and they gave me permission.

Did they?

Yes. You had to be twenty-one, of course, in those days, before you could do what you liked. I passed the doctor in Launceston alright, and I thought I'd be right. I'm not sure, but I think it was the same night that I arrived at Claremont, I faced two other doctors.

Did you?

Yes - they had a go at me.

Did they?

Yes. I'm sure it was when I arrived, although I was passed in Launceston. Evidently they wasn't satisfied or ... wanted to have a go, and there was two of them there at me.

What did they do?

They had a look at me, went all over me, yes.

What was the verdict?

Alright.

Was it?

Yes. I think what helped me, I was in the - I suppose you'd call them cadets in those days, did they?

Yes.

Was it cadets?

Yes.

I used to go out training with them, you know.

Did you?

Yes - done a lot of training with the cadets. Didn't they call them cadets? I don't know - all young fellows, they had to do a certain amount of training every year.

Did they? Was that voluntary?

No, no. I used to go down to Sandy Bay to the rifle range.

Did you?

Yes. Of course, in those days I was really only a kid, you see. I was eighteen. They are different today, they are men today at eighteen.

Yes, that's right.

They wasn't in my time, they were boys.

And what did they get you doing at Claremont?

Pardon?

What did they get you doing at Claremont?

Oh, we used to go out of a night, route marches and that sort of thing.

Did you?

Yes.

Where would you go?

Oh, all over the place down in Hobart.

Did you?

Yes. They reckoned they had some Germans down there somewhere, we were supposed to go out and find them. I suppose there would be Germans there. Of course, they stopped the boat from going out, you know.

Did they? Yes, that's right.

They had a German boat there and they stopped that - took them prisoners, yes.

How were you on the rifle range? Any good?

Oh, I suppose you could say I passed.

Did you? And you were in the cadets while you were working in the Post Office, were you?

Yes.

How often would they meet - the cadets?

Once a week, I think.

Did you?

We'd go out of a night, yes, once a week.

Whereabouts did you meet?

In Ulverstone.

Was it?

Yes - all different - the old - I suppose he was a sergeant major in those days, I suppose, he used to take us out. If we didn't behave ourselves coming home, if we talked or anything, it was about turn and out again and then come back again. Oh, yes, he had us under control.

Did he?

Yes. I've forgotten his name now. He was an old soldier, of course. He was boss. Of course, as I told you before, some things you never forget.

No.

I never forget my first meal in Claremont, and that was sausages.

Was it?

Yes. You know, you've seen those big ...

Big vats, or tubs, or something?

Yes, something like that - he cooked them in that. Anyway, they wasn't bad, it wasn't a bad meal.

Whereabouts did they have you sleeping?

Tents.

You were in tents, were you?

In tents, yes.

And did you get leave into Hobart much?

I don't think we did. We wasn't far out, of course, in Claremont, as you know.

No.

No. When we went to Melbourne - Broadmeadows wasn't it?

Yes.

We used to go into Melbourne, and you'd give all sorts of things for tickets, you know. We had no money, of course, and if we wanted to go into Melbourne, you'd get a bit of cardboard and put something on, and give that to the collector. It usually worked. I remember one night I overshot Flinders Street and got out to Richmond.

This is on the train?

On the train. Anyway, I asked, of course, where I was, and what to do. A chap told me to go across there and get the train in, yes.

Did you get back to Spencer Street?

Oh, yes, got back to Spencer Street. Of course, it wasn't far, you see, from Richmond.

No.

Little things like that come back to you, you don't forget, but some things, of course, you do forget, no doubt about it.

Where would you go in Melbourne?

Just in the street.

Would you?

Yes. And I had a sister living in Carlton, I used to go and see her.

How many were there in your family?

Fourteen.

Fourteen kids?

Eight boys and six girls.

Were there? - gosh!

Yes, there was.

Whereabouts did you fit into that? How old were you?

I was the second youngest.

Were you?

Mm - my other young brother was killed in France.

Oh, yes.

Young fellow.

What was his name?

Sid.

Which battalion was he in?

40th.

And what were some of their names, the children?

Charles, Enoch, Abraham, Arthur, Sid, Tom, Jack - that would be about the lot, wouldn't it?

It's getting close to it, I think.

Yes.

And yourself.

And meself.

What about the girls?

Yes - Sadie was the oldest - as far as I know now - Sadie - she lived in Melbourne.

Did she?

And Bertha - she lived in different places in Victoria. Lettie - lived just out of Sydney. He was a miner.

(Break in interview)

We were going through your sisters, weren't we?

Yes.

You were up to Lettie, I think.

I think I told you the lot - Lettie and Florie, Sadie, and Nellie, Bertha, and Lucy. That's the six.

Yes. And where did you all live? How ever did they get fourteen children in one house?

Oh, we wouldn't all be there together, of course.

No.

We came from Latrobe.

Latrobe?

Yeah. I was only two years old, so I don't know ... The others were older than I was, and I suppose some of them had gone to work and gone away.

And how many of the boys joined up?

Four.

Four of you?

Mm.

And Sid was killed - the other two got back, did they?

Sid and Abe was killed.

Sid and Abraham were killed?

They were killed, both killed in France.

Were they both in the 40th?

No. Abe was a New Zealander.

Was he?

He lived there - enlisted in New Zealand.

Oh, did he?

He left home, I suppose, when I was about that high. I can just remember it, I was only a kid. I don't know how old he was - older than me, of course. He decided to go to New Zealand, and he went to New Zealand and he lived there ever since, of course, and then joined up in New Zealand. I was very lucky. I struck him in France - in Egypt one night - after Gallipoli. We came back and we was at Egypt.

Ismailia, I suppose?

And he happened to be there, or his battalion, and he found me out.

Did he?

Yes. It was real good, first time, of course, I saw him since he left home.

Was it?

Yes.

What did you do?

We just had a yarn, but of course, he had to go and I had to go, yes.

I suppose you'd hardly recognise him?

No, no. I was only - well, I don't know how old I would be, but I was only a little kid when he left. Of course, he wasn't that old, but he was old enough to go away.

And your parents must have had quite a big house, did they, or not?

Oh ... I think we had three bedrooms - three bedrooms, a big sitting room, kitchen and all that up there. The old place is straight down here.

Is it? Still there, is it?

Still there, but it's been altered, of course. hey tell me I wouldn't know it now.

It's weatherboard, is it?

Yes, weatherboard, yes. It was all big bush, of course, in those days. Big trees on it.

Were there?

Great big trees.

Big gums?

Big gums, yes. Dad had to clear a place for him to build a house.

Did he?

Yes, the bush was that thick.

This is in Main Street?

No, South Road.

South Road, oh, right.

Yes.

And that's where you were brought up?

That's where I was brought up. Used to walk to school every day when I was old enough.

Did you?

Yes.

How far was that?

A fair way in those days.

A couple of miles, I suppose?

Over the old bridge where the railway is now - it was a fair way down there. Yes, there were no busses in those days take you to school.

Whereabouts was the school?

Where it is now - all altered, of course.

What was the name of it?

Ulverstone State School.

Was it?

Yes. Well, we had some good days there. We used to play cricket, of course, in the dinner hour, and football. In summer we'd go down to the river and have a swim.

Would you?

Mm - it wasn't far down from the school, down through the bush.

Do you remember your teacher?

Pardon?

Can you remember your teacher?

The headmaster was named Finch.

Was he?

I don't know the other teachers now - no, I do not. Finch was the first one, and then Conroy ...

Conroy?

... afterwards, yes. But when I started we had slate ...

Did you?

... and chalk, you know.

Really?

That's what we had - no paper, or pencil, or ink, just slate and chalk. I don't suppose there's too many about here now went to school when I did.

No, not many, no.

Don't think so.

How often would you come back from Launceston to Ulverstone?

Not very often.

Didn't you?

No.

You'd come back on the train, I suppose?

On the train.

Yes.

Of course, as you would know, we didn't get much money those days.

No. How long were you down at Claremont?

Pardon?

How long were you down at Claremont?

Oh, it wouldn't be very long – wouldn't be very long down there.

You came across to Launceston on the ship, did you?

I'm not sure. I enlisted in October, and we went to - I think we went to Broadmeadows before Christmas.

Yes, you did.

So I wasn't there very long.

No.

No.

I think you spent Christmas on the ship, didn't you?

Yes, we would have - yes, we did. As I told you, I think, before, I was very lucky. I got a big boat. I've been trying to think of the name, and I can't. All I know was, it was an 18,000 tonner, and in 1914 an 18,000 ton ship was a big one - very big ship.

And did you get seasick?

Yes. About three days - three days. Of course, we had injections and all that, that didn't improve it, but after that I was as right as rain.

Were you?

Yeah, got over it - was right. I think, if I remember rightly, we did have good weather, you know, not big seas. I think it was alright.

Whereabouts did they put you on the ship?

Oh, you got anywhere you could get.

Did you?

Yes, I used to sleep anywhere, on deck, and under, down below or in bunks - get anywhere. A full ship, of course.

Yes.

Oh, you didn't worry those days. The cooks done a wonderful job, you know. It was a full ship - I don't know how many there would be, but there was a few on board, I tell you.

Yes, there would be a couple of battalions, I think.

There could have been, yes, there could have been.

And the cooks did a good job, did they?

Well, I would say they did, to feed that lot. You know, you have, say, a hundred - that's a lot of work.

Yes.

To cook for a hundred. When you get a thousand - a couple of thousand - yes.

Did they have any concerts on the ship?

Yes.

What were they like?

I've forgotten really. They put on something like. I'm not sure, I think they had a newspaper.

Yes.

I believe they did, going over. I don't know what news was in it now though. Used to have fights, of course.

Boxing?

Boxing.

Did you go in for that?

No, I didn't, no. I'm afraid I wasn't a boxer.

What were they like to watch?

Oh, you'd see some good fights.

Would you?

Oh, yes - good fights. Of course, they had fighters on board, you see - they were fighters.

Yes. And you went on the desert march, didn't you, down to Serapeum?

Yes, my word. It was heavy going in the sand, I tell you, heavy going. That was a long way out ...

Yes.

... from there, my word it was. And they told us when we left not to drink any water - any running water - but you had to. I don't know really what water it was. Anyway, it was running water and I drank it anyway. I don't think it hurt me.

No.

You know, you get a water bottle - you've seen a water bottle, haven't you?

Yes.

By the time ... five minutes on the road, that was warm. It was no good - no good. You had to drink it, of course, that's all you had.

Yes.

I tell you, it was good when we reached the Canal - straight in.

Did you?

Everything off - straight in.

Did you go swimming in the Canal much?

Swim? Yes, a lot. Oh, every day the Canal would be full of troops. You see the lucky ones going home in the boat.

Would you?

END OF AWMTAPE SEVEN - SIDE A

START OF AWM TAPE SEVEN - SIDE B

My word, they made an awful mess of the Canal, didn't they, during the last war?

Yes.

Sunk everything. They've got it cleared up now haven't they?

Yes, they have, yes.

And didn't they widen or deepen it or something?

They could have done, yes.

They wanted to deepen it and widen it for oil boats. It saved them a big round trip or something.

Yes, it could have done.

What's going to happen now with America and Russia?

I don't know. I hope that they become stronger friends than they have been.

Things are in a mess at the present time, there is no doubt about it. Your Mum and Dad is at Burnie I think you said.

END OF AWM TAPE SEVEN - SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW