

EDWARD PINNELL
FIRST WORLD WAR

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD PINNELL, 16TH BATTALION, 4TH BRIGADE,
FIRST AIF; Recorded by David Chalk

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: David Chalk interviewing Edward Pinnell, 16th Battalion, Thursday, 31 March 1988,
in Perth.

We'll start with your birth date. I might get your birth date from you.

Yeah, well, my birthday is the 22 January, 1895.

1895?

Mm.

Whereabouts were you born?

In Perth.

In Perth?

Yeah, I was born in Aberdeen Street.

In Aber ...?

There was a nursing home there, many years ago.

Was there? What suburb is Aberdeen Street in?

Well, they call it Northbridge now, but it was always Perth.

It was known as Perth?

Mm. Everything over that side of the line now they call Northbridge.

I see, yes. What were your mother and father doing? What was your father doing at that time?

My father was a carpenter.

Was he?

Mm. My mother - in those days we were round the bush a fair bit too. Round Mornington, Nelson, Collie, Worsley, and Donnybrook, and all these places.

Yes.

And my mother used to work pretty hard, really. It was a pretty hard life.

How many were there in your family?

Three of us - two girls and I was the only boy. And the two girls were both younger than me.

So you were the eldest?

I was the eldest.

What was your father's name?

George Pinnell.

George Pinnell?

Mm.

Was he English? Did he come out from England?

Yeah, he come out - he must have been out here about five years or so before my mother came out. He knew my mother there. He had a brother that came out, but his brother went to New South Wales. He got off in Sydney, and he was there.

Was he?

Mm.

And whereabouts were you living in Aberdeen Street? You had a house down there, I assume.

Well, it was a nursing home actually.

It was actually a nursing home?

Yeah - that's where I was born. But my parents, they actually lived at Sawyer's Valley.

Did they?

Mm. That's where one of my sisters was born actually, in Sawyer's Valley.

How do you spell that - S-A-W-Y-E-R-S?

Yes. It's still a place, even now, you know, Sawyer's Valley.

I'm not from Perth so I don't know the area well.

No.

And whereabouts did you go to school?

Well, in several places, really. I started in Sawyer's Valley. I think I was about five years old when I started school there. From then on we were around several places. We were at Green Bushes, we were at Donnybrook, and we were at Worsley - and Mornington Mills. We were five years there. That's where I joined the Post Office. I was a telegraph messenger.

When did you leave school?

I left school, I suppose ... I suppose ... oh, at Mornington Mills, that's right, that's when I left school. I was a telegraph messenger then in the Post Office in Mornington Mills. When I got transferred, of course, when I was due for - to be a letter carrier. They used to call us in those days.

Not a postman?

They didn't call them postmen.

Letter carriers.

It was always letter carriers. I was told to report down here to Perth. I came down from Mornington Mills and I went into the GPO which was in St George's Terrace in those days, on the corner of Barry Street. The old superintendent, he was a little bloke, he had a little beard. He was rather a - oh, I wouldn't know how to describe him, but he wasn't very big. And he looked at me, and he said, "Oh, I don't think you could take the loads out that they take out, the postmen. I don't think you are big enough for it. So anyhow I will ring the man in charge of the postmen." So he rang him up and he came down, and he told them that I was reporting for work. But he said, "I don't think he is big enough." And the other man, who was a supervisor, he said, "He'll be alright. I'll put him on the horses. There were two horse rounds in Perth." We got two horses a day. We went by contract. So I was riding horses there for some time. I suppose I was on them for about three years, I think. The war broke out, and when I enlisted I thought, I'll go to the Light Horse, which I volunteered for. And I got into camp and we used to form up separate from the others. They'd say the Light Horse applicants were to form up to the left or right, or whatever it might be. We were doing that for some time. About a fortnight, I think.

You went into the Light Horse, did you?

No, I didn't get in. I tried to get in, but then they'd just left Gallipoli, and those places, and they had a bit of an accumulation they found over in Egypt. So that cancelled us out, so we went into the infantry.

When did you leave school? How old were you when you left school?

I was just turned fourteen.

Had you?

Yes.

And you went straight into the Post Office, did you?

Yeah - and I was in there until I retired, counting the war service, which was about three-and-a-half years. That's right. When I retired.

Were you?

You were working in the St George's Terrace - oh, no, not - which post office were you working in?

In that one in St George's Terrace.

Were you?

Yes.

You were doing the horse rounds?

Yes - there were two horse rounds, one was called East Subs and the other was called West Subs. The West Subs took in most of them, around the monastery and around that part. East Subs used to be round the old Eastbourne Cemetery.

And you used to switch around, did you, and do different routes each week, or something?

Well, we used to do that, yes, keep us in - give us our knowledge of the places, and the people, and all that.

And when did you enlist?

I enlisted - I got in there ...

You enlisted on 2 February ...

Yes.

... 1916, that would be.

That's right, 1916. And this is where I made an application for recognition of the pension. And there's some of the engagements, I think, there, that I was in, the different battles I was in.

Oh, yes. You were in A Company, 16th Battalion?

That's right. Then I went from that into the scouts. I was in the scouts most of the time. Your father, he was at Gallipoli?

My grandfather.

Oh, it was your grandfather.

He was in the 15th Battalion.

They were Queenslanders.

Yes, well, one company was a Tasmanian company - D Company. And he was a Tasmanian.

Oh, I see, yes. Yes, when I enlisted, there was one company, at least, from South Australia, was put into the ... they became the 16th.

You enlisted in February 1916?

Yeah.

Whereabouts did you go to enlist?

Er ... just up to Francis Street, that's the military place here now.

Oh, is it?

Francis Street, yes.

Why did you join up?

Oh, I reckoned I should, I suppose. I didn't have to, not in those days. We didn't have conscription.

How old were you then? You'd be about twenty, I suppose.

I'd just - I turned twenty-one on 22 January, that was when ...

Oh, yes, yes. So you were twenty-one.

As soon as I was twenty-one, that's what I had in mind. I thought, well, as soon as I'm twenty-one I'll enlist. And that didn't put any obligation on m mother and father. Otherwise I'd had to have got their permission to.

Yes.

I had two goes before I enlisted.

Did you?

Yeah. The first time they knocked me back.

What, on medical grounds, or because you were too young?

I couldn't quite do the expansion of the chest.

Oh, yes, the chest.

The chest, but they wiped that off ...

Did they?

... after a while.

I suppose they were looking for men, weren't they?

Yes, that's right.

And what did your parents think about your enlisting?

Oh, they took it pretty well. They didn't really try to stop me, no.

Did you enlist with a friend, or ...?

There was George Anthony and myself.

He was also from the Post Office?

That's right, yes. He was younger than me, he was a couple of years younger. He was only nineteen.

I see.

And when we eventually got to France, he was only there about ... oh, about three months and he got killed.

Oh, did he?

Yeah. I've got a photo in the garage out there of him and myself.

I'll have a look at that after. When you went up to Francis Street to enlist, did you go straight into camp, or not?

We had so many days before we had to go in.

Did you?

Practically we all went in within a day or two of passing the ...

Medical?

The medical.

Where did you have your medical?

That was up in Francis Street. Yes, it was very - oh, there wasn't much to it really, as long as you could that main ...

Expand your chest?

Yes. And in the early days we had to do training, you know. It was compulsory. When you were fourteen you went into junior cadets or something, and so on.

Yes.

I was at Mornington Mills in the Post Office at the time, but I didn't bother to enlist.

You didn't bother to go over to the cadets?

No. I had to register, but there wasn't enough of us there to form a drill squad or anything like that.

No, I see.

And when I came down to Perth, as a letter carrier, I didn't report to the drill people. That drill hall was down in Leaderville.

Leaderville?

Not very far from where I was living. It was only about two or three hundred yards, but I didn't bother to go in. And when I actually enlisted and they asked me questions - and that one chappie was a major. And he asked me why I hadn't enlisted, and I said, "Well, I was around the bush and all that sort of thing." But I should have enlisted in that at Leaderville.

In the drill hall at Leaderville, yes.

Yeah. So he said to me - I can remember it very well - he said, "Yes, well, alright." He gave me a pass to be examined, but he said, "If it was found to be untrue," he said, 'You'll have to bear the brunt of it'. So I said, "Righto." Anyhow, it wasn't untrue, because I was never queried any further, because I went into camp.

Instead of telling him you were at two or three hundred yards down ...

(Break in interview)

Okay, you told him that you'd been round the bush?

Yes.

Instead of ...

Yes, I never, ever, did any of that, the cadets or anything like that.

No. And you went up to camp at Blackboy?

That's right.

Were you in tents up there, or in huts?

Mostly in tents.

Were you?

They had the fairly big marquee kind of thing, and then they had the smaller ones that ...

The bell tents?

Yeah. I think they got about eight of us in one of those, from memory.

And what did they get you doing at Blackboy Hill? What did your training consist of?

Yeah, well, we used to do the routine, you know. Up in the morning, and I think we used to have physical training before we had breakfast. Of course, we'd have the procedure of having our wash, and getting warmed up for the day's drill.

Did you go on any route marches?

Yes, we did one right from Blackboy Hill to Subiaco.

Did you?

And we went there. We took the day for that. The next day we marched back.

Oh, yes, you camped overnight?

That's right.

Whereabouts did you camp?

We camped at the drill hall. There was a drill hall there, at Subiaco, and they made sort of provision for us there.

Did they?

Yes, the captain.

Who was the officer in charge of you at Blackboy Hill, do you remember?

I know him well, but I forget the names.

Yes - was he the lieutenant who went away with you?

Yes.

I can soon check up who that was.

Yeah, there were two officers, one was named Watson. He was the junior one of the two. They were second lieutenants. And the other one, the one that was actually in command of that reinforcement – I just can't think of his name. But he was a very nice chap.

Where did he come from?

I think he was English.

Do you?

Mm, I think he was English, but Watson, he was Australian. Funny how that other one slipped out of my mind. He didn't reach the battalion either. He got sort of more or less - he wasn't physically a strong man and he never reached the battalion. I never saw him in the battalion. And Watson, I've got an idea he might have been one that got caught up in that Bullecourt business.

I think I may know the name. And what were the cooking and food arrangements like at Blackboy Hill?

They were pretty good, really. Yes, they weren't too bad. We used to get a lot of bread and jam, and things like that. You didn't get as good a meal as you got in France, for instance, no, with the stew and all that sort of thing. You did get your stew every day. Your breakfast and your tea at night, it wasn't very substantial. Not as good as they were in this Second World War.

No, that's right, that's what I've discovered. I think they issued you with blue overalls, and so on, didn't they, to start with?

That's right. Sometimes you were there in those for two or three weeks before you got your other ...

Uniform.

Proper uniform. Of course, that's something you wanted. You were anxious to get in that.

Yes, you wanted to look like a soldier.

That's right (laughs).

You'd have had rifle training, I suppose.

Oh, yes, we did - .303 rifles. Yes, we had those.

What kind of a shot were you?

Well, I was pretty good because I'd been round the bush and that.

Had you?

Yeah. I always had a .22 rifle when I was a telegraph messenger at Mornington Mills.

Did you?

Mm - because you could buy a .22 rifle for round about fifteen or sixteen shillings in those days.

What would you go shooting? Rabbits, I suppose?

Well, we used to go out kangaroo shooting. We'd shoot mostly parrots and different things like that. That was one form of ... it made the bush a little more attractive, to get out and do it. Although I went out several times, and I've seen kangaroos in the bush and that, but I never ever shot one.

Didn't you?

No.

It was George Anthony, wasn't it?

Yeah.

He was working with you at St George's Terrace?

Yes, he was from the Post Office actually. He also took over my job as a messenger at Mornington Mills.

Did he?

Yeah, when I came down to Perth, he got into that job. But he was a couple of years younger than me.

Did you talk about joining up together?

Yes, as a matter of fact, he joined up before I did. They used to exam you and one thing and another, but they didn't swear them in when they examined them. He came down to Perth. I remember getting a telegram from him, and it had 'What-ho, Turks'.

What-ho, Turks?

Yes. And he sent that to me. And he said, well, there was a little - two or three other fellows enlisted from Mornington Mills. He came down, I suppose, two or three days after I got this telegram, he came down. He stayed with us, in Leaderville. But by the time Monday came he'd had it. And he wasn't sworn in, so he just went back to his job. They had nothing on him, because he wasn't sworn in. But they altered that afterwards, and they used to swear them in when they enlisted.

Did they?

Yeah - but when he first enlisted ... But then, of course, when I did enlist myself, he enlisted with me, and he came in with me.

You both went in together, did you?

That's right, yes.

So he'd been to a medical to enlist?

Mm.

And he sent you a telegram to say he was going to enlist, or had enlisted?

Had enlisted, yes.

And he changed his mind, did he?

Well, he didn't like it when he got in there.

Oh.

He didn't like it at all, so he went back to his job. But then, when I enlisted, he did enlist again and he came in on the same day as I did. We both went in together.

Did you?

Yeah.

And did you get leave from the Post Office to go to the war, or did you have to leave your job?

No, I got leave.

Did you?

Yeah.

Did they pay you while you were away, or not?

No, we didn't get any pay. The only thing they did for us ... We had to be, in those insured in those days. There wasn't any superannuation.

No.

And we had to insure ourselves for £150, to draw it at 65, I think, was the ... And what they did do, you could, when you enlisted, you could increase that to six hundred, and they'd pay it. The Post Office would pay that while you were away.

Oh, would they? If you were wounded or killed. If you got killed?

If you got killed, well, your people got it.

Yes, I see.

It wasn't paid for wounds or anything.

No, no, just if you lost your life.

I increased mine. I put mine up to the six hundred, but my mate, George Anthony, he didn't do that and he got killed. Well, his people did get a bit of a pension after he was killed.

Did you go home on your last leave? I suppose you would.

Oh, yes.

Your parents, they were in Perth, weren't they?

Yes. Yes, my mother and sister were in that. They came down to Fremantle and ... The troop ship didn't sail that night, but it sailed early in the morning. But they did come down. Because I was - I don't think I had the last night was one of them, No, I didn't ..We went down to Fremantle. It was a poor old ship. It was called the *Seang Bee*. It was a cattle ship.

I've talked with a 15th Battalion man who was on the *Seang Bee*. That was off Gallipoli at the landing?

Was it?

Yes. They used to call it 'The Hungry Goose'. It had a goose painted on the funnel, apparently.

Oh, yeah.

When he was on it, it did. The food was so bad they called it 'The Hungry Goose'.

Yeah (laughs). It was really rough, you know. The old hammocks, and you were pretty crowded out. Still, we accepted all that in those days.

Whereabouts were you on the ship? Where were you stowed or berthed?

Well, you know, where the dining room was, where you used to have your meals, that was where you used to rig your ...

You'd rig your hammocks across the tables?

That's right, yes, that was the idea.

And take them down during the day.

Yeah, and eat out of a container or a sort of a rack you used to put them in.

It had been a cargo boat, hadn't it, the *Seang Bee*?

Yes, it might have been a cattle boat. I've got an idea it was a cattle boat. Yes, I forget how many of us was on it now.

You were in the 18th Reinforcements, weren't you?

Mm - yes, I was in the 18th. We was a fair little while getting away from Blackboy Hill.

They didn't want reinforcements badly, did they?

No.

In Egypt, no.

No.

Did you have any special training? Like, were you ... a trained infantryman, or were you a signaller, or ...?

When I couldn't get into the Light Horse, myself and my mate, we thought about joining the signallers. And we were pretty sure we would do that. But there was so much talk about the signallers being wiped out, and all that sort of thing, we got a bit breezy. We just went into the ordinary infantry.

Why didn't you get into the Light Horse?

That was on account of the chaps from Gallipoli, because the Light Horse was on Gallipoli - not with horses.

No.

On account of that accumulation there.

They had so many men over in Egypt?

That's right.

Yes, they didn't want reinforcements.

Yes, that stopped us. But that was my intention when I went into the camp. But my mate, he couldn't ride. I don't know how he would have got on, but some of them seemed to get through there.

What happened on the day of departure? There must have been a big crowd down at Fremantle when the boat went.

Oh, yes, but they did give us a bit of leave. But we had to be back on the boat. But yes, there was a fair crowd there. There was a school on that main road down to Fremantle, and the kiddies were all lined up along the fence, and that, and gave us a good send-off.

Did they? You were marching, were you, down to the wharf?

END OF AWM TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF AWM TAPE ONE - SIDE B

Yeah - no, we weren't marching, we were in the train.

Oh, you were in the train? You went past the school?

That's right.

What kind of activities did you do on the ship? I suppose they had you training most of the time.

Yes, they had sports and that on the ship. As a matter of fact, I won the quoits. I got a pound, I think, for it. That was the prize. And in there you can see the what's-a-name there.

That certificate?

Yes, that's there - certificate of ...

Service.

Of service, that's right. Yes, I got that here, from the RSL here. I think on the back of that there's quoits too. That little one there.

Oh, yeah, that cup?

I got that for quoits.

Is that on the ship, or not?

No, that's after I got back.

Oh, you used to play quoits, did you?

Yeah. In the Post Office there we used to get broken time a bit, and we'd fill the time in by quoits. The others I got for tennis.

Oh, did you?

Yes - the other two small ones.

Where did they hold the quoits?

In that post office in St George's Terrace there. There was sort of a cellar there, and we used to have a meal there, we'd have our dinner, lunch, or whatever it might be.

Whereabouts did they hold them on the ship?

I think they were just sort of on part of the decks somewhere - I just forget now.

They used to have boxing matches on the ships too, didn't they?

Yeah.

Did they have any on the *Seang Bee*?

Yes, there was boxing. One or two of them were really sort of professional boxers too.

They'd hold concerts of an evening, wouldn't they?

Oh, yeah.

They did on some ships.

Yes, we had more of that when we came home ...

Did you?

... than going over. The boat I came back home on was the *Brehmen*. It was a German boat that was in one of the ports that was held up while the war was on. Well, then they turned them into troop ships and that to get home. And that was pretty lively, we had a lot of fun on that. And of course, we were coming home and were a lot happy.

Yes. Did you do any guard duty on the ship?

I can't remember any. We might have had some form of ... but I don't think so, I don't remember that, no.

What about seasickness? Did you suffer from that at all?

No, not really. Just sort of the normal. You do get a bit sick sometimes. We did strike one or two rough days.

Did you?

Yes.

You, of course, went via South Africa.

That's right.

Yes. You went to Durban and Cape Town, or Freetown.

Yeah. On the way over we went to Cape Town.

Did you?

Yes. Coming back home we called in at Durban as well. We stayed at Durban. As a matter of fact, we were at Durban for nearly a week because it was the official signing of the peace.

Was it?

Yes, when we came home. That was in July, I think, or something. But it was the official signing of peace. That was why we had about a week there, in Durban. It wasn't a bad sort of a place either, Durban.

Did you have a party when you were crossing the line? They usually have a ...

Yes.

Did you?

Oh, yes, you have a bit of a show there. Duck one or two perhaps.

I suppose it was the first sea voyage you'd been on.

No, I went to England in 1911.

Did you?

My mother and father, and my two sisters, and myself.

Did they?

All went over.

Gee, that would be good.

Yeah, but I was a telegraph messenger at that time. I had to get special leave.

Did you?

Mm.

Whereabouts does your family come from in England?

Oh, my mother and father, they were both born in Brighton.

Were they?

Mm - that's in Sussex. And I still keep up with some of them.

Do you?

Yes ... they'd find a good place for me, when I got leave or anything like that, I used to nick down to Brighton. When I got my ten days' leave, I think, from France. I went down to Brighton then for most of the time. I've never forgotten how good they were to me.

How long were you going from Fremantle to England?

Well, I'd say, from memory, be five or six weeks.

You'd expect it to be that long, wouldn't you?

Yes. We were held up for a while in one of the islands off Africa. I think it was a Portuguese place - and we were there for a few days because the submarines were supposed to be about.

Yes, that's something I've known at other times. Where did you go to - Portsmouth, did you?

Ah, yes, it was Portsmouth, that's right, we did go to Portsmouth.

You would have gone out to Codford or somewhere like that.

Yes, we were at Codford for a little while. When we got to Portsmouth we had to go in the train and went through Exeter. I remember going through that, up to Rollistone Camp. That was on Salisbury Plains. And we weren't there very long and the officer in charge there, there were so many of them- I think about 40 - wanted, and we would have to go out to France immediately. Those big battles were on at the time, Mouquet Farm and Pozieres.

So this would be about August '16?

Yeah. Anyhow, I was a bit disappointed about that because I wanted to see these relatives.

Yes.

Anyway, it was extended. We did get our four days, I think.

And you were going to Brighton?

Yeah.

Whereabouts did you go down there? Who did you know down there?

Well, my father had sisters there, and a couple of brothers. My mother also had relatives down in Brighton.

Your mother and father both came out from England together, did they?

No. My father was out here about ... oh, about three or four years - at least that - and he went to Sydney for a start, and he was in there, had a job up on the Blue Mountains, carting trees and one thing and another. Then eventually, when the gold was discovered up in Kalgoorlie he decided to come over here. But he never did get to the Goldfields, although that was his intention I think. But he was able to get work as a carpenter and wheelwright. But he was out here at least four years before my mother.

And how did he meet your mother?

Oh, he knew my mother in England.

I see, and he wrote and asked her to come out, did he?

Yes. Oh, yes, they were corresponding.

Oh, were they?

Mm.

You stayed with one of your aunts or your uncles, did you, in Brighton?

Yes, my aunt mainly.

What was her name?

Her name was Jeater - J-E-A-T-E-R - that was her married name.

Oh, yes.

Her other name, of course, was Pinnell, same as mine.

Whereabouts was she living?

She was right in Brighton. I'd go there when I was on leave.

I suppose you would have met them in 1911, wouldn't you?

Oh, yes.

So they knew you?

Oh, yes, they knew me pretty well. I bought a bike, too, and I rode with one of my uncles from London down to Brighton on the bike.

You bought the bike in London?

Yeah, bought it at Gammages in London. I brought it out on the ship to ride it out here.

Did you?

Mm - had it up at Mornington Mills for decades. That was a good old bike.

What make was it?

I forget the make. It was sold by Gammages. They were a big store in London. It was a very good bike, and I think, from memory, I think it was about £3-10d.

Did you go off to the theatre, or plays, or anything like that, in Brighton?

No, no, not - of course, I've been to England since the war. Since I came out, I have been to shows then. And, of course, when I was in hospital in London we used to be entertained by different ones. That's when we were recovering, we were in these VAD places.

What does VAD stand for?

Voluntary Aid Detachments.

Was it?

Yeah. You were usually getting fit, when that happened, and I was in that hospital called Edmonton Military Hospital. That was an English hospital - not Australian, it was English. But they used to do that, they used to send some of us to some of the English hospitals.

Whereabouts was that in London?

A place called Edmonton.

Oh, it was actually in Edmonton - the suburb there.

Yeah, right in London. After you had the treatment there - it might be - it depended on what it was - you'd be sent out to one of the VAD hospitals. And I got sent out to one at Hampton. And we were only, I suppose, only about four or five hundred fellows from Hampton Court Palace.

Were you?

Were able to get over. It was during the off periods when we were allowed out to see various places like that. There was a chappie that came from Queensland too, and I mated up with him. He was rather a nice fellow, and we were both booked out from this Edmonton to be discharged, and we had to report to Horseferry Road. That was the Australian headquarters. So we arranged that that night - I wouldn't be going to Brighton until the day after - that we'd go to a theatre. But when we got to Horseferry Road we still passed an examination. They examined what we had been treated for. He was OK. He was marked for discharge, but they knocked me back.

Did they?

Yeah. I had to go down to Horseferry Road - to Harefield – and have special treatment for this foot. It was frostbitten. It took a while to get it right.

So you were ... what was the name of your Queensland friend? Can you remember his name?

No, I've been trying to think of it, since you said that I knew a relative. He was a nice chap, I liked him. What they used to do there, when he got down to Salisbury Plain - he was sent down there after he'd had his bit of leave - and you'd have a week soft training and a week medium training, and a week tough training. Then you were on a draft out to France. When I joined the Battalion, when I'd done my three weeks - of course, he was already, when I got down to Salisbury Plain, he'd already gone. And when I joined the Battalion - I hadn't joined it very long – and someone was saying that the 15th Battalion was just in the vicinity there. And I thought, oh well, I'll see if I can dig this chappie up. And I went over to dig him up, and I found out he'd been killed.

Oh, dear.

He lasted just a week or two when he joined them up again. He was a nice chap, and I've forgotten his name. I was trying to ...

So when you first arrived in England, you went to Codford Camp, and you were training there, I assume, were you?

Well, we went through Rollistone first.

Rollistone?

Yeah. But they did shift the Australian camps and that to Codford. But I was only at Codford for about a week, I think. That's when I went back to France.

So they called for the forty-odd volunteer for reinforcements for the 16th Battalion?

Yeah. We was at Rollistone Camp when they did that.

Yes, and then you went down to Codford, did you?

When we got that four days' leave, then we had to report to Codford.

When you came back?

Yeah. I was only at Codford, I think, for about a week. It was a good camp that one, but the Rollistone one was only a tent ...

Was it?

... and when we got there we found that there was no provision for us or anything. Food or any jolly thing. We'd been marching all night. Of course, we got into Portsmouth, and then we went

through up through Exeter, up to Salisbury Plain. We did a fair bit of marching from a place called Gainsbury, I think it was called. It was daylight then, when we got to Rollistone, we found that we had to rig these tents ourselves.

That wasn't unusual.

No.

That tended to be what the army was like.

Yeah. This officer that was - I've forgotten his name - he said, "Oh, when we get to England everything will be different. You'll have the proper set-up and all that." We didn't anticipate tents.

No, I don't think he did.

No, he didn't.

And so you went across to France? Can you remember when that was?

When I went to France?

Yes.

I wasn't in England very long after we got there.

Be about September '16, I suppose.

Yeah. We got to France in September. We joined the Battalion in about September.

Did you go through Etaples, or not?

Yeah, Etaples - yeah, Etaples.

You did? You went there for a week or so, did you?

That's right - probably a couple of weeks there.

Was it?

Yes. But that was our base, the Australian base, at Etaples.

Was it?

Etaples, yeah - spells Etaples - they used to call it 'Etaples'.

Yes, well, I don't know quite how it's pronounced in French, but I usually say Etaples because that's what most people say.

Yes. Well, we went to Folkestone, and from Folkestone across to Boulogne. That's when we had to climb a sort of a pretty steep sort of a hill, and there was tents or something there. They used to call it 'one blanket hill'. That was the place. Of course, in the morning we were up early to go to Etaples. And after we got going a while, we came to a cemetery there. And there all these wooden crosses from the – because there were a couple of fairly big hospitals around there. And that soon made us – I don't know how it made us – but it looked pretty sad with all these crosses there. Wooden crosses of course.

And what did you do at Etaples?

We were there for a couple of weeks, I think. At least a couple of weeks - might have been three.

And they fitted you out at Etaples, I suppose?

Well, we had to have sort of special training. I remember we went through a sort of a little passageway that was a sort of - it was doctored up in some sort of stuff that would make your eyes a bit sore. They'd give you that sort of treatment.

That was for the gas attacks?

That's right.

You had to wear your gas masks, did you?

Yes. At that particular stage, these gas masks, they fitted over your head. They were a material, and they fitted over head. You just tied them around. But the other ones came in later on.

You were telling me about the gas masks.

Yes.

They had two different types, didn't they?

That's right.

What was the first one.

The box one, the main one ...

That was the later one?

Yeah. The other one only had a couple of eyes in this material, and it was sort of gas-proofed by some chemical that was in it.

How did you use those?

Mm?

How did you use the first gas mask, the one. It was like a hood?

That's right - it was right over you - you put it right over your head.

Cloth, was it?

Yeah.

Where did you put that - over your mouth?

Well, that was sort of, more or less, you could breathe through that, that cloth.

And that was sown into the hood, was it?

Yeah - into part of the hood, it came right over your head.

The later one was the box respirator, and that was a mask, wasn't it?

Yes. It had a sort of a square box too, and tubes and that came up, and that fitted over your face. That was the mask that you had.

Did you ever have any gas alarms?

Yes, we did, and, of course, the Germans started to bombard us with gas shells.

Was this at Pozieres, or Mouquet Farm?

Just after that - it was at Flers.

At Flers, yes, I know that.

I missed Mouquet Farm and the other.

Pozieres?

I just missed it by a whisker.

Well, you were lucky.

I was, yes.

Whereabouts was the Battalion when you joined them?

They'd been down - they'd had a bit of a spell, and they'd been down to Ypres, and they were on their way back, up to the Somme.

Were they?

Yes - and I joined them - I think it was called Reninghelst

Yes, I know Reninghelst.

I think that was the one. We de-trained then, from where we got in at Etaples and went to this place.

How rigorous was the training at the 'Bullring' as they called it?

Well, it sort of had a reputation for being pretty sort of trying. They were really trying you out, but I don't think it was that bad.

It would give you Mills bomb throwing experience, I suppose.

Yes, all that. The old Mills bombs.

How far could you throw one of them?

Well, you couldn't throw them very far, but I suppose I might have been able to throw them about twenty-five yards. I just forget now.

They issued you with helmets, and webbing, and so on, there, I suppose?

Yes, you got issued with all those. Of course, a lot of your stuff that you carried in your pack, when you went up into the line, well, you left that back.

In your kit bag?

Yes, your kit bag. Around Flers, it was a very bad winter there.

Yes, it was a dreadful winter.

Yes.

So you arrived, let's say, in early September, or something like that?

Mm.

Probably late September, wouldn't it, if the Battalion had been up to Ypres.

That's right.

And was then coming back down - it would be late September, October, wouldn't it?

Well, it was in September some time, I think, but it would have been towards, as you say, towards the end.

How long were you with the Battalion then? I mean, you were wounded, weren't you?

Well, my left foot.

It was trench feet?

Yeah.

Was it? Well, that's interesting.

They was frostbitten too. That was more than just the trench feet. With frostbite sometimes you could lose your foot.

Yes, it was serious.

Because the doctor in Edmonton, when I got over there, he said, after he had treated me for a week - might have been a week or two - he said, "I won't have to take any of that foot off now."

Oh, that's good.

So it was just a matter of getting it right.

What happened exactly? You were round Flers for weeks, weren't you?

Yeah.

I think the Battalion was doing a lot of labour work, wasn't it, unloading shells?

Well, you did get that, and you got the unloading of the, what's called 'A-frames'. They were sort of like an 'A', and they fitted into the trench, and then boards were placed across those. They had to be A-frame only, supported the duck boards.

Oh, I see.

Supported the duck boards.

So they came down either side of the trench?

Yeah.

And they put the duckboards on top of these supports?

Yes, that's right - supports.

I've never heard of them.

No. Of course, it was such a bad winter, there was so much mud around, that it was pretty bad.

All the men say it was the hardest experience they went through.

Yes. Yes, from the weather angle it would have been. I don't think there'd be anything worse than that.

No. You were allotted to A Company?

Yeah.

Who was your company commander at that time?

Ah, he was the – the commander...

I can soon find that out. Do you remember your platoon?

I think I was in Number 1 Platoon.

Who was the lieutenant in charge of the platoon?

Some of these names are ...

It's not surprising. I ask because you may know; if you don't know, I'm not surprised.

No, it's so long ago.

Yes, exactly.

I should remember that company commander.

The equipment you were issued with consisted of webbing, didn't it?

Yes.

Can you describe that webbing?

That webbing held about 150 cartridges.

Did it:

But we used to have only 120. The 120 was a normal thing, although that webbing equipment would take 250.

Why did you not have 150 in it? Why the smaller number?

Well, I think it was probably chafing you.

It was too restrictive? And they were in pouches. I suppose you would have the ammunition in clips would you?

Yes they were in clips of five. They did fit into these pouches.

You'd have five or six clips in each pouch, would you? Six clips in each pouch is 30 isn't it. So if you had four pouches you would have your 120 rounds in it, wouldn't you.

END OF AWM TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF AWM TAPE TWO - SIDE A

Tape Two: Was the rifle a very useful weapon? Or was it the – I think it was mainly the Mills bombs, which were the...

Yes, of course the machine gun that used to be used was the Lewis. Well, the Lewis gunners usually had two or three others. That would be the crew of the gun. And but as far as the actual rifle shooting was concerned, you didn't get such a great lot of that. But you carried your rifle. You had it with you, and all that.

Did you get any training on the Lewis gun?

Yes, I mean we used to get a bit. I was in the scouts, as I've said. The scouts consisted, when I was there, of round about fifteen - fifteen or sixteen - that's for the whole of the battalion.

They were in their own section, were they, the scouts?

Yes. We had an officer in charge and a sergeant.

Did you?

Mm.

And what was the task, or what were the tasks of the scouts?

Well, you could get all sorts. An officer might want to go and see round the outposts. I remember Wadge, a man named Wadge, was the adjutant of the battalion. He was a good soldier, but he'd been adjutant for so long that he got a bit breezy on account of being sheltered you see for so long, and when he got on top. Well you'd get – he might want to see round the outposts. Usually you could only get out to those at night-time. I remember I was in – there was myself, and there might have been one other scout, and a lieutenant, an officer. And we got out – this was at a place near Zonnebeke, a town up north.

Yes, I know.

And he said he'd like to see round the outposts. Well, we had fourteen. There were fourteen outposts. There was that canal running down to Ypres - the Ypres Canal - and there was a sort of a bridge, you know, over, and there was about seven outposts on one side and seven on the other. And when we got out there this night you could hear the bullets hitting into the mud and that. It was quiet when we started out, but it started to liven up a bit, and Wadge, he didn't want to go any further. He didn't want to see them. So he asked me, "Do you know the way back?" And, well we'd been walking in different directions that I couldn't say, yes I did.

It was easy to get lost.

Yeah. So anyhow, he wouldn't go any further so he did half of them, and then he wanted to go back. To get him back we had to go along the banks of that canal for quite a distance to let him out. There was a lot of bullet fire that night, and I remember some went very close to me. I finished up missing one of my puttees. I'd lost a puttee in the business.

What happened when you got frostbite? You were stationed around Flers, were you?

Yeah.

How long had you been with the Battalion when that problem developed?

I stayed with them until they got relieved. I suffered a lot of pain with that foot, and I couldn't keep it still.

What's it like to get frostbite? What's the effect?

Oh, it's just very sort of painful. I remember, we were sheltering in a sort of a bit of a dugout, and we were being relieved that morning. We were going back to Albert, and my foot, I couldn't keep it still.

It was hurting so much?

Yes.

Which foot was it?

This one.

Your left foot?

Yeah. And one fellow there went a bit crook on me because I was disturbing his rest by making a movement of my foot. I can remember that. Yes, we went back to Albert, that's right.

What kind of precautions did you take to try and avoid frostbite?

Well, some of them used to try and put their foot in one of the sandbags. Those bags - and get their feet in them, sort of attach it around so that it wouldn't come off. Some used to do that.

What was the benefit of that?

It kept them warmer. Kept the feet warmer and you didn't get the trench feet like ...

What actually causes the trench feet? Is it just the damp - the wet - or is it the frost as well?

Oh, mainly the cold.

Is it?

Oh, yes, it was the cold. Yes, if you could keep your feet warm, and all that sort of thing, that was the best guard.

They used to issue a whale oil, didn't they?

Yes.

Did you use that?

Well, I had used it, yes. You used to rub that into your foot.

Did you take your boots off, or did you leave them on all the time?

Oh, you used to leave them on. You never knew when you were, you know, was going to be attacked, or something like that.

No.

You might be on an hour, or two hours, on certain times, but in the daytime you didn't man those possies like you did at night.

No.

In the morning - pretty early in the morning - you'd have to stand to, the same as you did at the night. Yes, with those trenches and that, you'd have to sort of stand up on that bit of a step there and keep a pretty good watch.

I suppose it was standing still so long that would cause the trouble.

Yes, because you didn't have enough room to move around in. Some of the places would take about four or five chappies. They would be in that particular part, where it had been excavated out, but even so, you didn't get much movement at all.

No.

That was one of the main causes, not being able to move when you got into an outpost.

And to keep the circulation in your feet?

Mm.

Yes. Everything froze, didn't it. The ground just froze solid?

Yes, oh yes, it would sort of melt and be all wet, and then that would freeze, and then you were sort of walking on ice, and it was easy to fall over. By Jove, it was. You would be marching along a road that had frozen up, and all of a sudden you would find yourself lying on the ground there. You'd come down.

How did you keep warm, if you did keep warm?

Oh, you sort of - we had those what's-a-name...

Sheepskin coats?

Sheepskin coat.

They were good, were they?

Yeah - oh, yes, we had those. They were the real thing, you know. They slipped over you like a ... over your other gear and that.

Pretty miserable, up in the front line, in that kind of weather ...

Yes.

... in those conditions, wouldn't it?

Yes, oh, yes, they were pretty bad alright, especially round that Flers and round there - the mud and all that sort of thing.

How deep would the mud be?

Well, of course, the old duck boards and that saved you a bit, but still, you still had to go over parts where there was no duck boards or things like that. And you could go about a foot down into it. It was over your boots and that sort of thing. You would be marching along a road that had been shelled, it would have mud and water, dirty water, and that, all over the road. Well you could slip into a bit of a hole too. It was like that.

Your feet got frostbitten, or just one of them got frostbitten?

Yeah - this one.

The left one.

Yes. He was the only one that was frostbitten; the other one swelled and all that.

Did it?

But it wasn't like this one.

What happened to this one? It was your toes, was it? Was it your toes which became frostbitten?

Yes.

What was the extent of the frostbite?

Yes, yes, it was mainly the toes, although this part down here ...

Under the soul of your feet?

It was there, yes, that used to be affected.

It went black, did it?

Yes, it did go black. Yes, that was nasty.

(Break in interview)

Tape Two continued, 3 April 1988. We can start today by going through the trip over on the ship.

Yeah.

Which ship did you go over on?

On the *Seang Bee*.

That's right, you were telling me that, yes. Do you remember the day of departure?

No, I wouldn't know anything about it. It would be some time in July, I think, wouldn't it?

Yes - I could soon find out the date, but do you remember the actual day when you left? Did your family come and see you off?

Yes.

They did, did they?

Saw me off down at Fremantle. We left there some time in the afternoon. The military were pretty good about it. They let us go off until almost the sailing time.

Did they?

Yes. The sailing time didn't turn out to be until next morning, very early.

Oh, I see.

But my people were allowed to stay with me. I had two sisters and my mother, and they were with me until - from memory, it was dark. I would have been about 8 o'clock or something like that.

And the *Seang Bee* went out into the harbour and anchored, did it, for the night?

Well, she might have, she might have even stayed at the wharf. She got away very early anyway

When you woke up you were out in the Indian Ocean somewhere?

That's right, yeah. Yes, we were on our way.

Did you suffer from seasickness at all?

No, I was pretty good as far as that went. I had a trip over to England.

That's right, you were saying.

Yes, some few years back now. That particular one, out through the Suez Canal. But I returned home via the Pacific - Panama Canal.

That would be a lovely trip.

Yeah. I had a week in New Zealand, and I did all that trip around, and I didn't get seasick until we left New Zealand from - left Auckland for Sydney - and in the Tasman Sea there I was seasick.

It was rough?

Yeah.

Whereabouts were you sleeping on the *Seang Bee*?

Oh, it was just our what's-a-names over the meal tables.

The hammocks over the mess tables?

That's right. Yes, that was the complete - that was all you got on the *Seang Bee*. And the same thing applied on the way home after the war. Yes, it was a matter of ... that's when we had a week in Durban too.

Coming back?

The official signing of peace.

Yes, that's right. Did they get you doing any guard duty on the ship?

If they did it wasn't very much, but I'll tell you what did happen. When we were - oh, we'd left Cape Town - some of us developed German measles, and I was one of them, and we got put in isolation while on board.

Oh, did you?

Yeah - and we were anchored in that port on the west African side.

Freetown?

I forget the name of it now. We were there for a few days because of the submarines, they were supposed to be round about that particular harbour. It was a Portuguese possession. It's funny how ...

How long did you ... What happened when you got the measles? I mean ...

Oh, we were put in one or two of the cabins there, and we had to stay there for a few days. We were alright by the time we got to England. The German measles, I don't think they are as severe as the ordinary measles.

Aren't they?

I don't think so.

They were an epidemic, I think, the measles. There were a large number of troops who caught the measles. I think it was because, in Australia, at that time, people tended to be isolated and measles didn't travel. there wasn't the spread of measles as there is today through the schools and so on, so many of the young boys didn't get it, did they.

No, that's true. No, not many of us got it anyway. I think there wouldn't have been more than about half a dozen of us.

What kind of training did they get you doing on the ship?

Oh, from memory it was sort of physical training, but we didn't get a great deal of it because the weather was pretty rough.

Was it?

And a couple of days between here and Cape Town, I think you'd only get about twenty-odd knots each day, not for a lengthy period. But it was pretty rough. And we had nowhere to sleep. There was no hammocks put up or anything during the daytime, so we just laid around wherever we could find a possie.

What did they do, the men? Play cards, I suppose.

Well, they didn't have sports. That's when I got the quoits.

That's right, you were telling me that.

Yeah. But apart from that, I can't ... I think that there was a bit of a sing-song of a night-time.

Yeah, they'd have a concert.

Yes. A lot of these were the old songs. They are old now, but they were new to us then.

Do you remember the names of some of those songs?

No, I just ... I'd know them if you mentioned them, but I just can't recall them myself. But I know we used to be sitting round the decks and singing, but that might have been when we came home too.

Yes, well, I suppose both ways you would do it, wouldn't you?

Yes. But coming home, I think we put more into it when we were coming home. But the number that came back that I knew, or went away with, was only about ... Most of the others were casualties, a lot didn't return, of course.

You went to England, of course; you'd have arrived in Portsmouth. Was that where you went?

Mm - it was Portsmouth, and we went to Exeter, I remember that. And we got out of the train at Exeter to - it will come to me. We marched from there then to Rollistone on Salisbury Plains. That was when we arrived then. There was nothing there, but we had to even rig our own bell tent.

When was that? That would have been, what ...?

That would have been some time probably in July. Yes, I think it would have been - that wouldn't be far out.

What kind of training did they get you doing at Rollistone?

Oh, you know, the usual pattern of ... out on the parade ground and all that - marching and all ... One chap in particular, he lived in the country. Well, he was a little bit dopey, really. He wasn't very alert, and he could never keep in step. He was always out of step, and while he was here they put him into duties that didn't conflict with this marching. But when we got to England and they were English instructors, not those blokes from Perth that we were placed under, and they used to get us out there on the parade ground drilling. And this poor beggar that couldn't keep in step, he was in this bit of a crowd that I was in too, and he - of course, the sergeant-major, he didn't know anything. He started bullying him around like they usually do. And he started to cry. But the sergeant-major sort of melted towards him then. But eventually, I saw him in France, eventually. And they had him in the artillery.

Did he?

Mm - so they must have found out he was no good for ...

Infantry, yes. Did you go on leave up to England - up to London?

I had four days leave, that was all. We didn't know we were going to get it. We were told when we got there that they wanted volunteers. There were so many going out to France, that Pozieres and..

Mouquet Farm?

Yeah - they were over. But they were filling the gaps.

And you got four days leave to London. Is that where you went, to London?

Well, I went down to Brighton.

Oh, that's right, your parents ... your family were at Brighton.

Yes, that's right. Yes, I used to go down there whenever I got any leave. They were very good to me. I still get letters from some of them.

Whereabouts did you stay in Brighton?

Well, I stayed with these relatives. Yes, the first one, I remember, was Round Hill Crescent, that was in Brighton.

That was with an aunt, was it?

What?

Was that with an aunt?

That's right.

What was her name?

Her name was Jeater - J-E-A-T-E-R.

Oh, yes, you told me that, yes.

She had a family of about six. Of course, some of them were only little when I was there, when the war was on. But they were a nice family. They had one boy, the other five were girls, and today

the five girls are still living. The boy died - well, he was a man when he did die, but he's been dead some time

What kind of activities did you do when you were in Brighton?

Oh, it was a matter of sightseeing, you know, going around.

Did you go to any plays or theatre at all?

Oh ... I did ... but I only went to about one in Brighton. Whether that was on some other visit, or whether it was ...

Yeah, this time, you don't remember.

Yes, the one I was in most – the VAD hospitals. Usually they used to put some shows on, you know.

Did they?

Yes, they were very good. They had one at Hampton Court. They used to put a show on there.

What kind of a show was it?

Usually a sort of a concert, you know, different items. It wasn't a sort of a play that went right through.

When you came back to the depot again at Salisbury Plain, at Rollistone, they called for volunteers, did they, to go across to France, or were you selected to go?

No, they called for volunteers. I think they wanted forty, and the officer, who was a Queenslander too - Cecil something. I forget his surname now.

This is the officer in charge of your reinforcement?

No, he was in charge of where we went at Rollistone on Salisbury Plain.

Do you spell Rollistone, R-O-L-E-Y-S-T-O-N-E?"

Yes.

Is there a 'Y' in it, or not?

A what?

Is there a 'Y' in Roleystone, or not? If it's spelt R-O-L-E-Y ...

Oh, I think there's a 'Y' in it, yes. The volunteers, I think they got nine. They wanted forty.

And there were nine volunteers?

Yes, he got nine.

Did you volunteer?

No, I didn't, I was too anxious to get down to Brighton to see them there.

Oh, yes.

I thought, well, if I get picked I will go without any protest because they had to detail some of them off.

To make up the forty?

To make it up. And I did get in that part that was picked to go.

You were selected, were you?

Yes, through being one of the detailed. They detailed me. And the reason I got that was that we didn't get away quite as quickly as we thought that we got - it was a few days.

Oh, I see, so you still got your leave anyway?

We got it.

So you went across to France?

Yes.

This would be about September or October 1916, I suppose?

Yeah, would be in September, from memory.

Where did you go across to France from - Folkestone?

Oh ... yes, it was Folkestone to Boulogne; yes, that's right.

Did you go through the 'Bullring', or not?

Yes.

You did, you went through it?

Oh, yes, I had to go through that.

How long were you at Etaples?

Not very long ... it would have been probably round about a week - it wasn't very long though.

And they issued you with equipment there, did they?

Yeah, we got the gas mask and - I forget about the rifle and that part of it. But we would have had that anyhow.

Did you have any speciality at all, or were you simply an infantryman?

No, at that stage I was simply an infantryman.

Did you have any rank, or were you a private?

No, I was a private right from the start to the finish.

Were you?

Mm. I was in the scouts, of course, and that was something that was ... you wasn't confined to a trench all the time. You were more mobile, you got all sorts of jobs. But it was more mobile. And I think you were asking me if we had any casualties. We had one chap killed named Morgan. But we had three or four injured. A chap named Skinner was hit in the head. He was on an observation post, and I was on that same post. There were four of us on that. And the sergeant in charge of the scouts, well he was in the scouts. He was wounded in the arm. There were several casualties like that.

END OF AWM TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF AWM TAPE TWO - SIDE B

But we did, more or less, have a bit of a choice about our accommodation. I remember we were in the line down at Ypres, and we had pretty good billets, the part of France we left - that's when we left to go into the line. There wasn't a great distance between them. When we got relieved, at night time of course, we made for that billet where we had been before. But it was occupied by boxers. There was a boxing tournament amongst the troops, and these fellows were boxing, so we got away from there. There was no argument!

What were the billets like, generally, that you were in? Where were you generally billeted?

Oh, you got all sorts really, some of them were very rough. The ones nearer the line were the worst, of course. But the other ones were usually on farms and things like that, and we got into these different farmhouses. They were a big rough alright.

Were you sleeping on just straw, were you?

Yes, any old things like that. Straw and stuff. Yes, some of them used to stow their - the farmers had some of their produce stowed. It might be sort of wheat, or oats, or something like that. And, of course, some of our fellows would get at them, because you weren't feeling too good, especially after you got your leave from around the Somme. We were at a place called Mametz. That's not far from Albert, and I know there was a bit of an argument there amongst the farmers and the troops. They reckoned that we had no right to do that.

The farmers reckoned you shouldn't take the produce?

Yes. They had a bit of an argument with them. It was pretty muddy all round that part at this stage.

Yes. How deep was the mud generally?

The mud?

Yes - how deep was it?

Well, it'd be - would depend on the amount of rain you got, but I would say, generally, about nine or ten inches.

Deep, isn't it?

Yes, yes, well it was thick sort of mud. Of course, where there were shell holes and things like that, even on the road and all that, you could walk into a pool of water, mainly.

(Break in interview)

Were you in France during the winter of 1916-17, or not?

Ah, yes. We got to France, from memory, some time in September, and I was all round that Mametz, close around Albert, we were. We weren't actually in the front line, we were more or less, improving the trenches and things like that. I must have been there until we got relieved and went into to the line at Flers. And I was on an outpost there, and that's when I got the trench feet. And one was frostbitten pretty bad. And I got right to England. I went from Calais to Dover.

How long would it take for that frostbite to develop? I mean, had your boots been wet, and you'd been cold for weeks, and it suddenly just became so bad that you ...?

Yes, you couldn't stay in that particular part of it, the weather was so bad. It was so cold. But from memory, I think we had about a fortnight in there, in the front line. That's when I stayed in until we were relieved. Had I been there another day I wouldn't have ever gone back, I don't think. Because my foot was on the verge of losing its circulation.

Yes, so you were evacuated. You were there until you were relieved, and then you came out?

Yeah.

And by that time your feet were so frostbitten that you had to get medical help?

Yes. We went to some clearing station, I was there for a while. I forget the name of that. It was that painful and that that they, more or less, put us in this different parts of this clearing station, and didn't worry too much about us because there was other fellows that were worse probably.

Yes, who had been wounded.

But mine got that painful that I had to get them out. The orderlies had to come out and dress it properly. That was when I got put on a train to Calais. I was in Edmonton Military Hospital, and I spent Christmas Day. I was there Christmas Day.

Were you? So you were evacuated in December some time, just prior to Christmas?

Yes. That's right, yes - not very long before Christmas.

You think if you'd stayed in that front line another day, your frostbite would have been so bad that you may have lost toes or something?

Yeah. As it was, see, it took a fairly long time to get right enough for me to get sent back to France. That's when I had to go down to Harefield. I was in Finchley, a VAD hospital there. That was a very good one too. And from there, out at Hampton Court, not far from the Palace. There was a VAD hospital there. And from there back to Finchley, I think. Oh yes, this doctor asked me, he said, "I think I'll have to send you back to Hampton Court." And well I preferred not to go there if possible. I didn't like the old matron.

Oh, I see.

And he said, "Oh, I thought that was a wonderful place." I said, "No, I'd sooner go to Finchley." I had been in Finchley for a while. So he agreed and sent me there.

What kind of treatment did they ... did you when you had trench feet?

It was mostly massage type things. They had specialists ...

Did they?

... who used to come. they were mostly women, and they would massage the affected part.

Did your feet swell up? What was the effect of the frostbite? The feet went black, did they?

Yeah, they did sort of swell. I had to walk with a stick.

Did you?

Yeah. And, of course, when I met ... I was mates with that Queenslander. That was at Finchley, and we decided that the doctor was marking us for discharge which meant that we had to go and report to Horseferry road. When we got there they wouldn't let me go on leave. I had to go down to Harefield. My mate, he was marked for leave, and then report to Salisbury Plain.

His name, do you remember it, or not?

No, I can't think of his last name. He was a very nice chap. That's when we were billeted somewhere near the Queenslanders, and I thought to myself, well, I'd like to meet him. That's when I went and made enquiries, and he had been killed. He got killed about a week or two after he got back into France.

He was from the 15th, was he?

Yeah - he was a Queenslander.

The treatment that they gave you, the massaging, they did that every day, did they?

Just about ever day, as far as I remember, yes. And when I went to Harefield, they had a different form of treatment. They had a sort of a bucket, and you had the water, and you had to put your affected part in that, and you'd have to leave it there for so long. Probably for half-an-hour or something or like that. But I had that treatment there at Harefield.

How many weeks or months were you in hospital with trench feet?

Well, I went in the hospital there towards the end of December, and rejoined the battalion, and it was just after Bullecourt.

So that's mid April. So you were four months, or three to four months, in hospital.

That's right.

It gradually improved, the circulation came back into your feet?

Oh, yes. From then, when I rejoined them, I was with the battalion until the war ended. I was in the scouts, and four of us, including the officer, went from Piquinny -that was a place in France - we went the day before the Battalion was to go there. But while we were there, this Armistice came on.

Oh, did it?

So the chaps at Piquinny, with the battalion, instead of being there for one day, they were there for another two or three days.

This is at Piquinny.

Yes. And we were up at this Hindenburg Line, and we had no provision made for our rations, and all that sort of thing, on account of overstaying the time. So the officer had to scout round and try and get it from some of the towns around.

So when the Armistice came, the battalion was at Piquinny?

Yes.

And you were scouting ahead for another place for them to go to?

I think we went by train. I think that was nearly up to where the Armistice took place. I wouldn't be quite sure of that because...

Where were you when the Armistice was actually declared?

In this place, in the Hindenburg Line.

Whereabouts in the Hindenburg Line were you?

Well, we were very close, but the ... name of it ... We were that close that we could see the provisions the Germans had made for defence, and all that sort of thing.

What kind of a day was it, the Armistice Day? Did you have a celebration?

We couldn't up there, but the other chappies, down at Piquinny, they did, they celebrated. And that had something to do with them getting a few days over.

Piquinny?

Yes - because they were celebrating. But we had nothing to celebrate with. We were too close to where it ended, and never even had a drink.

No. How did you feel about the end of the war coming?

Oh, we were delighted. It was like starting your life over again.

Yes.

We, as the Germans retreated, we had to, more or less, follow them up because they could have turned round and come at us again. So there was that following them up. And we went from over the French border - I think there's a place called Sains - S-A-I-N-S. We crossed over there. Those French people, living around there, they had a very bad life from the Germans. The Germans requisitioned their different things that they had. Their utensils, and just left them with the bare necessities. And at that particular part there was a marble works somewhere. And the Germans had made little marble crosses and that, and had them on each grave.

Did they?

Even – there were two or three Australians who were there, and they even had the marble over them too. And then, when we crossed the line at Sains, we were in Belgium territory. And the Belgians got different treatment altogether. There was beer in the cafes...

Was there?

.. and all that, but you couldn't get it in France when we were there.

No, I suppose the Belgians fraternised to some extent with the Germans.

Oh, yes, they had a different go altogether to what the French had. And we went from there to a place called Florenz, and there was a monastery there. Most of us were billeted in the monastery. The monks were still in occupation, but they had their separate part. And they would just have a walk around the different parts. We were there for a few weeks before we were put into what they called quotas. The quota I was in was the 19th quota. And we went from there down towards the coast to go over to England. Because we all had to go to England. We couldn't go from France to Australia.

I know that.

I remember one incident at the monastery. They had a sort of a statue of Christ - it was supposed to be - and his arms were out. And one of our fellows came in, and he was drunk ... straight up to this monument, knocked it over. I can still hear the row that it made now. Of course, when it crashed down, he made himself scarce. We were all lined up in the morning and they asked for the chap responsible to be a man and step out and admit that he did it. But there wasn't a sound from anyone. You know, it was pointed out that the sentiment and the value that the monks had placed in that.

What were relationships with the French like generally?

Oh ... we didn't consider them very considerate in a lot of instances.

In what way?

They didn't try to help quite you a lot with your accommodations and things like that. Of course, they had a bad spin from the Germans. There were occasions when they were good to us and, more or less, gave us a bit of a reception, when we came to those particular parts.

Did they?

Mm.

What about the estaminets? Did you spend much time in them?

Well, usually when we weren't on parade and we were out of the line. When we were out of the line, yes, there was a fair bit of custom there for them, especially when you started to be winning, you know. You only came into contact with the estaminets when you were out of the line for your spell. Round Armientieres I believe they were fairly close there. But most of the parts around the Somme and all that sort of thing..

You wouldn't have really had much to do with them, would you?

No, no, we didn't have very much to do with them.

When you were in the billets on the farms, did you ever have much to do with the farmers at that time, or not?

Oh, the most we had to do with them was round Villers-Bretonneux, when the Germans broke through - the 5th Army broke through. And they got right back into the farming areas, and that was at Villers-Bretonneuw. And the crop was fairly high, was about, oh I suppose three feet in a lot of cases. And you could hear the bullets and that, whipping through the crop.

Could you?

Mm. At Hamel we saw that too. Of course, Captain Wadge, the adjutant, I was detailed not to take him out at night - he wanted to visit the headquarters for some purpose, and we had to go through some of those crops. Went a certain distance and he said, "No, I don't want to continue." So I had to take him back.

Did you?

Went back.

It was too dangerous?

Yes, too risky for him. And he used to be a good soldier, but being in the dugout, being an adjutant, doing the clerical work, and all that, I think that does have an effect on you. Going into the line round Flers - that was pretty well the first real time that I got in the trenches - and it was terrible that place.

Was that the worst experience you had during the time around Flers?

Oh, from a physical point of view it was bad. Bad there because of the terrible mud and all that sort of thing - from that angle - but as far as the battle itself was concerned ...

There wasn't much fighting, was there?

No, not then. But where the fighting was, was in those big battles, particularly the 8th August. All the fighting from there on, until Armistice Day.

What kind of feeling was there in the battalion about Bullecourt? When you came back to the battalion, just after Bullecourt, what did you hear about it?

Well, of course, most of the chappies were taken prisoner or killed there, and it's fearful for chappies to think of that happening, and that's when they introduced the nucleus. That meant a third of the battalion didn't all go in at the one time, into the sections. But three-quarters of them did. But they had that other quarter to rebuild the Battalion.

So what you are saying is that at Bullecourt there was no reserve?

No, no, there wasn't. That's why the casualties were so heavy too.

Yes, but after Bullecourt they kept a reserve back in all cases?

Yeah.

How did you keep warm when you were around Flers? What clothing did you wear?

Well, some chaps, to keep their feet warm, and they used to put sandbags round them. Put their feet in a sandbag and sort of ...

This is a sandbag - an empty sandbag, obviously.

Yes. And, of course, we used to have that whale oil and things like that.

Was that effective?

It might have been, I suppose, but you couldn't always ... you couldn't do it as regular as you wanted to, and things like that. There was always some obstacle in your being able to give it proper treatment.

Does that mean you couldn't get to the whale oil, or you ...?

Well, from what I can remember, it was, more or less, you couldn't keep a regular program. You might have tonight, for instance, you might be able to give it a good massage and a bit of treatment. But when you are in the line and that, you couldn't always do it.

No, right. And what caused you to get trench feet? I mean, why did you get it and some other men not?

Well, I don't know why that was, but when we came out...

(Break in interview)

My foot was terribly bad, I had a Dickens of a job to get back to Ribemont. That's where we stayed when we moved back from the line. My foot was that bad that I couldn't walk down to the aid post. I couldn't walk down. The doctor had to come up to me, which was unusual. But it was very painful.

And your other one, your right foot - it was your left foot, wasn't it, that was affected?

Yes.

And your right one wasn't affected at all?

Oh, well, it would have been affected a bit, but not to the same extent. This is the one that gave me all the trouble.

You just lost circulation in it?

Yes . But that was the main cause of it. It sort of causes the foot to die, actually, without getting proper circulation.

That was from being constantly in the mud, and the wet, and the frost, and the cold?

That's right. That's when you had to go out on ... you were in the line - I was in A Company in those days, and you'd have to go out of a night to get your rations in, usually in the dark. Because you could be seen otherwise. That made the mud more difficult to combat.

Because you're in the dark?

Yeah, you couldn't see it properly. You'd get terrifically tired. I had been out with one party there at Flers - I think the ration party. You would have to go out and get your stew and your tea, and all that sort of thing, and carry it up to the front line. It was all done during the night.

You'd sleep during the day, would you?

Well, you could do. Your chaps are sort of on guard. We'd have to take up our positions at early morning.

Yes, stand-to.

Yes, stand to - and at night, and just when it started to get dark and that, and you'd all be on the lookout then too, because you probably had to withstand a counter-attack.

What about the issue of rum they used to give you? When did they give you that?

Oh, usually, mostly in the winter time.

Was it?

Yes - mostly in the winter. You got about a desert spoon full of rum.

Did you?

Mm. Of course, some fellows didn't take spirits, or rum, or anything, and they'd exchange it for one of those green envelopes. The green envelopes, you'd be issued with about one of those a week. Whatever you wrote in that letter didn't go through the censorship from your own officers.

Oh, I see.

But it was liable to when it got to the base post office. You could get caught up then - you might be divulging information you weren't supposed to. But at the battalion – so as to keep your business private - the officers didn't have to censor your letter.

Oh, I see. And they were issued to some of the men who didn't want to take the rum.

Well, I think they usually used to get both. If they were drinkers they would get both. But if they didn't want it, they could accept, but they'd give it to someone that liked it, and wanted it.

Right.

But it was issued more in the winter time when you needed it, or even when you were going in to an attack, and you knew you were going in. That's when you really needed it, but you didn't always get it then.

You had it would you? You had the rum?

Oh yes, I had it on occasions, but I didn't crave for it.

END OF AWM TAPE TWO - SIDE B

START OF AWM TAPE THREE - SIDE A

Tape 3. You had a friend, George Anthony, didn't you?

Yeah.

And he was killed.

Yeah.

Where was he killed?

At Flers.

He was killed at Flers, was he?

Mm.

And how was he killed?

Well, actually, the Germans used to raid the trenches from the air - you know, they'd come over and drop bombs, even on the front parts of the line.

Would they?

Well, our guns - anti-aircraft guns - would keep these Germans away by firing stuff up at them. Well, he was killed by some of that that had to come down.

He was killed by anti-aircraft fire?

That's right.

Which dropped on him?

Yes.

Oh, dear.

See, all that stuff there that you'd see bursting in the air, well, that would have to come down.

Yes.

From what I could find out, I was away - I had been in there with him, but I was away - that was when I got the crook foot. He got it in the chest, I believe. A lump of shell came down and killed him instantly. He was a young fellow then, he was only nineteen then. He didn't like war.

Didn't he?

No, he was very nervous.

Was he?

Mm.

You used to discuss that when you were there? The feelings about the war. I mean, by that time you must have been aware of what it was like. What was your morale like? Was it good or not?

Oh, the morale was pretty good, yes, it was good. I didn't see any instances of anyone sort of giving away to it. We did get fellows that used to desert.

Did you?

We had deserters, even at Villers-Bretonneux there was two or three. We had twenty-six days in the line, and that was a long time without a relief. And there were three or four chappies that reckoned, you know, that was over the fence, really, and they deserted.

Really?

And some of them got right down to Paris and those places.

Did they?

Mm.

Did you ever know any of the deserters, or see them at all?

Yes, I knew some of them. One fellow from the Post Office that I'd worked with, he deserted. He was up in Paris with some other one. And they brought him back and he was in the clink. Each battalion used to have its clink. He was in the clink there, awaiting a court martial. And I remember seeing him there. We were out of the line, I think it was at Piquinny too. And he held up his hand to indicate – well he got ten years. Well, that poor beggar, he died with the flu before he had time to get home.

Did he? - oh dear.

He got that flu that was round about.

Yes, I know.

A real character that bloke. His name was Whitton (?). I remember him very well. He was in the Post Office too, and he used to ride the horses too, the same as I did.

Did he? And he was the same reinforcement as you, was he?

No, no, he came after me, a considerable time after me.

That used to be the punishment, did it? If they deserted and were caught, they'd get something like ten years gaol?

Yes.

Did they ever serve that, or not?

Oh, no, I don't think ... no, they didn't. When they got home - of course, they didn't get much pay. They got practically no pay at all.

Yes, they lost their accumulated pay.

Yeah, they lost that. But when they got home and got discharged, I think all those sentences were all wiped off.

Did you see any of the dogfights, the aerial combat?

Oh, yes, oh, you'd see that frequently.

Would you?

Yes. hey wouldn't get up high like these blokes do today. You could even see the bloke in the plane sometimes.

Did you ever go scrounging for food, or anything like that? It seemed fairly common, the army food was generally stews and so on, and you'd get very tired of that, wouldn't you?

Yes, that's right, you didn't get much variety. But no ... of course, you had to carry twenty-four hours rations, you had to cart that around with you. You would only use that, you know, when you're really ...

What did it consist of, the twenty-four hours rations?

Oh, mostly cheese and bread, and those biscuits, and things like that. There wasn't any variety amongst that. There wasn't any food that could go off, it would last you. It was cheese, bully beef - there was always plenty of that.

Yes. How would you cook bully beef? Did you ever try ...?

It was always in those tins.

You would eat it cold, would you?

Oh, yeah. There was always plenty of that, and there was always plenty of cheese.

Was there?

Mm.

What about eggs and milk, and that kind of thing?

Oh, they were strangers to you altogether.

Were they?

Mm.

Did you go looking for ...? I mean, some of the men used to steal chooks, or pigs, or something like that.

I never saw any of that happening, no. No, I never saw any of that. Generally the Australians were, more or less, attack troops.

Storm troops, yes.

Yes. I think we got more of that than any of the others did. I don't know about the Canadians, or those - but the English, they didn't get thrown into great big battles like we did.

What was the general attitude towards the English?

Well, you never heard them spoke of in any form of great praise, or anything like that. Some of them - for instance, the Portuguese, they had an army there. Not a lot, I think they had about 10,000. But they were considered the worst of the troops in France.

Were they?

The Portuguese, yes - Pork and Cheeses, they used to call them.

Pork and Cheeses?

Mm. They always looked very neat and tidy with their uniforms, and that was usually a sort of a blue colour. The Germans - there was a story going round, the Germans raided the trenches to get information from troops, and when they got over there and grabbed two or three of the blokes to take them back...

This is the Portuguese?

And the Portuguese. And when they found they were Portuguese, in one or two instances they sent them back without doing anything to them at all.

What about the equipment which you had? You'd always be carrying a pack, would you, I assume? Would you take a pack with you into the front line, or not?

No, you didn't. It was always left back.

Yes - in your billet?

Yes, in the headquarters, wherever they were. No, we didn't ... Of course, you had your ammunition and your rifle.

How much ammunition would you be carrying?"

Oh, 120 rounds. You could carry 150 with the provision that was made, but 120 was all they used to have.

How fast could you fire the .303? How many rounds would you be able to fire in a minute, do you think - rapid fire?

Well, it wouldn't be very fast, not like a machine-gun. See, the Lewis guns and all that, they would fire them at probably 300 rounds a minute. But with your .303, well, it's more or less taking a sight on to the object. Although you had your rifle with you and all that, it didn't get a great lot of work. The machine guns and the field guns, and all that. But you had it there with you of course.

The Mills bomb was a particularly useful trench weapon, wasn't it?

The what?

The Mills bomb.

Oh, yes, yes, that's right. Of course, you had those too.

How many of those would you be carrying?

Oh, you wouldn't carry more than two or three of those. They had five seconds from the time that you threw it.

Did you?

Mm.

They had rifle grenades too, didn't they?

Yes, there were. I never saw any of those very much, but they did have them where they fitted onto the rifle, onto the barrel somewhere there.

How effective were the steel helmets that you were issued with?

Oh, they were pretty effective for splinters and small stuff. You had to wear them. If you were wounded and you were in the ordinary hat, you would be charged with ... giving yourself a wound.

Self-inflicted wound?

Yeah, you'd be charged that way, but it may not have been meant that way. The chappie might have ... didn't just have his own felt hat with him – or it was more comfortable. But if he did, well, he was charged with having a self-inflicted wound. But that didn't happen very much either. I didn't know anyone that got charged with it.

They used the tanks at Hamel, didn't they? Which was the battle which they used the tanks in? It was Hamel, wasn't it?

Hamel ... Ah, yes, there where tanks used there.

How efficient were they at Hamel? Because at Bullecourt, of course, they were a failure.

Yeah. I think they were efficient at Hamel. There was a wood around Hamel called Vaire Wood. We didn't go through - well, although that was the Battle of Hamel – we went through the wood.

Yes, that's right.

But I could see Hamel not far away, might have been half a mile, might have been a mile. You could see it all on fire.

Could you?

Yes, they set alight to it. You could see Amiens Cathedral - at Villers-Bretonneux - Villers-Bretonneux was on pretty high ground.

You could see Amiens Cathedral.

That's right. I think that was about nine furlongs.

Did you ever go into Albert Cathedral?

Which one?

In Albert?

No, that was the one where the ...

Yes, the ...

Statue and that got knocked. You could see it lying on its side, but up in the air. No, I didn't go in it, but I'd seen it. Used to see it there.

You weren't wounded when you were in France?

No, I wasn't, but I got very, very close there sometimes.

Did you?

And one was that close that it made my steel helmet ring without penetrating it. It must have just got a very light. But I was exposed a bit - it was night-time - and this sound whizzed across the steel helmet.

Across the side of it.

But no mark on it.

It made it ring

Yes, made it ring.

What was it, a bullet or something?

Yes, a bullet. Yes, it was a bullet of some sort. Yes, I got attached to the New Zealanders for a week. They were on our right. They sent us scouts down to us, and we sent one to them. That was the for ... if the communications broke down - we had some form of communication. I was with them for a week.

Were you?

Yes, the New Zealanders. And they were attacked while I was there. They didn't gain any ground.

Did you have any other narrow escapes?

Oh, several of them really.

Did you?

Mm. Yes, we detrained or debussed at a place called Arras - A-R-R-A-S. While we were there the Germans made a big - the 5th Army - made a big attack and they gained a fair bit of ground. And we were at Arras. We'd only got there - I think we only got there that day. And the news came through that he was already in Albert. And the Colonel said that we would have to move off

within twenty minutes. And he wanted the scouts to be about 100 to 200 yards apart out in front, because the main thing is we don't want to run into something.

No.

Well, I was one of those that was out in front, and we went some distance. We came across some Tommies there all lying out on the ground, so we thought, well, we'd better support them. We took up a position just behind them. And we were there for, I suppose, about a half-hour. Our officers reckoned that was no good staying there, so he moved us off to meet the Germans. We went about a mile after that. And I was with the scouts when they decided to stop. There was an officer and about three or four of us scouts would continue on to where the Germans were contacted. To see where they were. But there was supposed to be an attack that night. We were supposed to re-take this place. We set out to go forward, the four or five of us, and we struck the brigadier - Brigadier General Brand. He was in charge of the brigade.

Where was he? Out in Front?

Yeah, he was on his horse. And we struck him, and he said to us, "Oh," he said, "We won't have to attack this place tonight." He said, "We've already got it, we are already there." So coming from him we thought that was okay, so we got on to an old sunken road and we went down there for probably half-a-mile and we passed a German patrol. And what the old Brig, how he ended up, we never knew. So what we had to do was to turn around and scamper back, because we'd come passed them. And it was in a sunken road. They came across to the road too, and fired. But we got into the side of the sunken road as much as we possibly could. So that was a pretty narrow escape, I thought. Another one was when a bomb was dropped, it was what we used to call a 'daisy cutter'. They did take the tops off without going very deep in the hole. There would only be a little jagged sort of a hole. I was on the (inaudible), the only one I was ever on, and the Germans came over and bombed that night. We got a position which was below the surface of the ground, and got into that. One of the bombs, one of the daisy cutters which dropped was only as far as from here to that chair.

About six feet.

Yes. In the morning I had a look around...

You were down under the ground?

Yeah, I was down and it went over me, you see. You used to learn sort of things like that. Actually, the job we were on was, the engineers were building a dugout for one of the generals, and we were there to carry out the stuff as they got it and lined it. We had to carry it out, I suppose about 20 yards from the mouth of that dugout that they were. They had some candles burning to just give them an idea of the track. And that's when the German plane came over and....

Oh, I see, yes.

Numerous times, when you do that, you know, chaps next to you got knocked and killed, and one thing and another.

The Salvation Army used to have canteens, didn't they?

Yeah. They were well back.

Were they?

They were very good though.

Brigadier Brand used to have a canteen, didn't he. A brigade canteen?

Oh, he probably did have. He was in charge of the brigade. He was a very nice chap. He had very funny ways sometimes. I was out with a party of the 16th, we were practising an attack that was going to come off. I forget that officer's name that was in charge of this group that I was in. We were supposed to be advancing and getting down taking cover. And the order was given to advance, or do something. The old Brigadier lined the troops up afterwards and he explained that they were all dead. That they didn't take cover. They more or less, it was a very clumsy sort of – but that is in fact what he said. And he said to that officer, he said, "Call all these men all up. Form you men up, and take them back to where we were camped. They're all dead." And he had to do it. But he did have some funny ideas like that. He would probably come up pretty close to the front line, like that, and when he left to go back he used to be carrying a rifle or something salvaged from the Germans. He reckoned that it was a good idea to salvage what you could. It was unusual to see a general to doing that. But he would do it. Yes, he was the general who told us the Germans weren't in that town. Yes, he was right to a certain extent, but it was very lightly because we captured it that night. We did have to go over.

And Christmas 1916, that was in Edmonton Hospital, wasn't it?

Yeah.

What happened on that day? What did you do that Christmas Day?

Oh, well, I was in bed, I couldn't do anything else. Yes, that Edmonton was the main hospital, the VADs that they'd send you to were...but if you were in that hospital you needed treatment, and that's where I was. And I still have a lot of pain, even after I got into that hospital.

How did they relieve that pain? Did they give you an injection?

No, you didn't get those sort of things like you do. You just got sort of bandages and one thing and other. But you had to suffer the pain, whatever it might be.

Did you ever use the bayonet with the rifle much at all? I mean, you were saying that the rifle was not used very much; how often would you get an order to fix bayonets?

Well, in an attack you'd go over with a fixed bayonet, but you didn't always get much use for it because when you got that close to the Germans they surrendered.

Did you?

In the Battle of Hamel, I was in that, we were taking the ground. That was very successful that day, and there was one chappie there, a German, with his hands up, making a bit of a noise. The Aussie then was picking up the pieces of that white chalk that was there from when the trenches were dug. And he was throwing at this German instead of – although the German had his hands

up. He didn't shoot him or anything like that, but he picked us those things and started throwing them at him. And I shouted at him. I told him to cut it out. The bloke was surrendering. And the chappie, the German, rushed up to me with a cigarette case open to have a cigarette.

Did he?

Yeah - and I just pointed the way that he had to go back.

Who were the scouts reporting to? Were you under the company commander, or were you attached to headquarters?

Oh, no, we were attached to the battalion, the battalion commander.

Headquarters, the colonel?

Yeah. Yes, the colonel would have the complete say. There was usually an officer in charge of the scouts.

Who was in charge of your section?

Ah, there was a Captain Kerr, he was one. Their names have slipped out of my mind.

How many were there in the scouts?

Well, usually round about fourteen, fifteen, probably sixteen, and you'd have one or two casualties every now and again.

And that section of sixteen men were under the command of a captain?

That's right.

Not a lieutenant, a captain?

Yes. Well, sometimes he was only a lieutenant. Captain Kerr, he used to - well, he was both while I was there.

Was he?

Yes. He was a very big man, about six foot six - good soldier. He was captured at Bullecourt and he got away.

Was he?

Yeah - there were two or three of them that escaped. He was one of them.

You were in the scouts right from the start, were you, when you joined the battalion?

Only when I came back from ...

From England?

Yeah - when I came back from that, I went into the scouts. Soon after that we got a chap, a sergeant, in these scouts at that particular time, was a chap named Bloom, Albert Bloom. And I went to school with him.

Did you?

And he asked me if I'd like to go in the scouts, and I said yes. That's how I... Most of those fellows, you know, that I knew years ago have passed away.

Yes, they have.

END OF AWM TAPE THREE - SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW