

HORACE RUMBLE
FIRST WORLD WAR

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

START OF AWM TAPE 1
(Microcassette Rumble 1 29/3/86 following the John Norris interview)

Unfortunately they took my driver's licence away when I was 93. I drove until I was 93, which was pretty good.

Yes.

But then they took the – I passed twelve annual tests no trouble at all.

(Break in interview)

As I was telling you on the phone, I am writing a book about the 4th Brigade.

4th Brigade. Yes, 16th Battalion. What made you think of the 4th Brigade? Did you say your father was...

Yes, my grandfather was in the 15th and he was captured at Bullecourt.

Was he. Did he get back?

No, he was captured.

No, but did he come back though?

Oh yes, yes.

As I say, a lot of them died there you see.

At Bullecourt?

No. There's a monument at Bullecourt there in the first of the attacks of that line –10,000 Australians dead. I've got a history of the 16th Battalion. It gives you the figures there.

Yes, I've got one too. But I understand you were a 20th Reinforcement.

I was really a 19th. I switched over on the way, and I took a lot of strangers over. I had a nice lot of fellows whom I trained with, you know, and when I got to England, they wanted - I was only a sergeant - and they wanted a couple of sergeants for the 19th, which was about to embark for France. That was in 1916. And a friend of mine, who was a West Perth footballer, and I - we were two sergeants - we got taken away from the fellows we knew and put aboard a boat taking the 19th reinforcement away. We took them over there, and we had a very rough passage across the Channel. But that was a good idea because it kept the submarines away. It was too rough for them. We had an escort. Anyhow you don't want to listen to all that.

Oh yes. That's just what I want to hear.

At Bullecourt we made an attack on the 10th and something went wrong. We were supposed - they had a new idea - usually they put - outside the Hindenburg Line - it was as you know - like the Maquiot Line in the next war. It was a major line of defence of the Germans. They had concrete dugouts 60 feet deep there! Sixty feet deep! You couldn't hear anything when you went down there.

You went down some of them did you?

I went down trying to get this (his hand) bandaged up. Our stretcher-bearers started to - we had a terrible lot of casualties. The whole thing was a mess-up from the start to the finish. The idea was that instead of having a good barrage - in front of that Hindenburg Line there were *acres* of barbed wire - extending for ages. Laid yards and yards and yards out. Terrible. Never saw such a - it was their strongest line which they held onto in the first war. And we, the 16th, the 4th Brigade had the first attack on it. Now what they did was - our artillery never fired a shot! They decided they would send over English tanks, and the English tanks would carve through the wire. Now first of all - the English tanks when they came over, they were supposed to lead us. We lead them! And when they came up to us they started to fire on us! We had to bang on the tanks to stop them. Well then - all the tanks got knocked out. What they did was - they cut a straight line through the thing, and we were all banked up going through these tunnels through the wire that they had made. They made things no wider than this room (about 15 feet) and we were all going through there and bodies were strewn on the wire each side. Percy Black, who was in charge of the 16th Battalion - a very well known soldier he didn't get half way through - and he was strewn all over the wire. That was the end of him.

Did you see that happen?

Yes.

You did see Percy Black killed?

Oh it was terrible. Then my officer - he was an old friend. He was the son of Glowery, the proprietor of the Palace Hotel in St. Georges Terrace - old John Glowery.

How do you spell his name?

Lindsey Glowery. GLOWERY – Lindsay Glowery, he was my platoon officer. He got shot. He got two. He got shot and the stretcher-bearers picked him up. He was shot in the leg, and the stretcher-bearers picked him up and were carrying him into a dugout or something, into a hole, and he got one through the head, and that finished him.

Oh dear.

But the trouble is, we lost too many people by having no artillery support and just relying on these tanks. Now *all* the tanks were knocked out. They didn't know what they were doing. They were young inexperienced Englishmen. I went into Germany with one, on the train afterwards. We took two lines of their trenches, and it was between the two lines of trenches that I got this (hand) blown to bits.

What happened?

It was all blown to bits, you see. I've got nothing left. I've got nothing left bar that. I've got no wrist (functioning). It was all shattered. That doesn't work. That doesn't work. I've got no wrist. The trouble was it was all shattered up. And I couldn't find any stretcher bearers to tear it up. So I put a handkerchief in here and I put a cord around here and tied it up. I only had my field dressing here. Not much bigger than that. So I put my field dressing all around this wound as I could. Of course, it bled like a tick. I was losing so much blood I thought, I must stop this. And I got the other fellows to give me a help by putting a piece off my gas helmet around it and tied it up. And it just formed a big red blob, and it all went numb then. Well now, later on, when we settled in to the trench, I went down and found out where our stretcher bearers were established down one of these 60 foot deep dugouts.

They were concrete were they?

And I went down there, and there were wounded fellows all down the steps and dead fellows down the stairs going down too, and fellows lying everywhere dead. And then I went down there, and they had a lot of wounded fellows down below there, and I said, "Can you do anything for this? Make an improvement - it's only rough." I said. All this was shattered bones you see. It was just like a pound of sausages mixed up with bones. And they said, "Oh we haven't got a bandage left. We're right out of everything. You'll have to make do with that." Well do you know I was running around with that for five days. I thought now the only thing to do is - when darkness falls - you see, between us and our lines we're we'd come from was a sheet of white snow, and I thought - there's no chance of getting across that. And there were shells flying everywhere and machine gun bullets. There was no chance of getting back to our lines. I was good on my legs you see. I thought as soon as it's dark, back I go. And before dark, the Germans - we couldn't get any support from our artillery. They couldn't fire a shot.

No, I know.

Then before the nightfall – it was getting dusk - the Germans bombarded us themselves. They opened up, and we hadn't got a stitch left. We had no ammunition. Nothing. Then they came over.

They blew hell out of the place, and then forced the others down into this dugout. I was still trying to argue with these fellows to see if they can't spare a bit of bandage. And the next thing I knew - I couldn't hear the sound right down there – next thing I knew there was a whole pile of Germans coming down the stairs armed. And they came down and said - all those who can walk come up on top! All those who could walk. And I went up and the place was a shambles, worse than ever. And they walked us out. I had a chap I was helping who had been shot in the head, and he had his head tied up. And I hung onto him with my left arm and I had this one tied up here with a blob of snow on it like a blasted soccer ball. Well then we walked back into the - we were marched back under guard into the next village on the German side. Riencourt I think it was.

Yes, that's right.

We marched there, and were shoved into an old church and locked in there for the night with nothing. The roof was a bit better, but it was a hole. We were locked in there. And in the morning they sorted us out. And all those who were not wounded were kept working behind the lines - never went back into Germany.

Horrie Ganson worked behind the lines.

Yes, they worked behind the lines. Ganson did, and I know another man who worked behind the line. There were two H. Rumble's in the 16th Battalion, one from up Geraldton way, and – I'd never met him. And there were two John Brennan's. John Brennan was captured with me, went into Germany with me. He looked after me, and helped me a bit. Because when we got there, when we did get to Germany, we went first of all to Munster Lazarette in Hannover. The lazarette was a...

A hospital.

...a wooden - it was supposed to be a hospital, but it had no proper sanitation. At the end of the ward there was just a piece which had been walled off which had a long seat with holes through, and those went down into a pit which could be emptied from outside. It was open. It was half under the wall. Now every now and then they'd get some fellows down there shovelling it all out and take it away in a cart. But there were no showering arrangements. You know I didn't get - after I was captured and got into Germany - it was five months before I got a shower. Five months! I tell you what they did do. When they got us all assembled in there in this particular hut. Everybody was wounded you see - it was only for the wounded.

Yes, well my grandfather, he was shot through the shoulder, and I think he may well have been in your group.

I wouldn't know.

He wrote a little bit about that period, and he does mention being on the train, and he next to him was a West Australian fellow who had been shot through the hand.

What was his name?

Ernest Chalk?

Yes, oh I don't remember him. I don't think he was in the hut I was in. We had two or three huts and it was only a small enclosure of barbed wire. Steel fences and guards around it. And a cookhouse in there. All they were cooking, though, was manglewurzels. Boiling up great big mangelwurzels about this size.

About a couple of feet across.

Yes, and they'd chop those up and bung them in. When they got us in there they made us strip right off, all of us. Stripped clean of everything, and they took all our clothes, everything. And they got hold of some Russian prisoners, and they made these Russian prisoners - they brought in a tin bath about that size.

About three feet long.

Now it was dirty water. No towels. They had some paper. Now, they made everyone of us, wounds and all, wash in this stuff. And there was blood and puss and all sorts of stuff there. We all washed in that and dried down. But before we dried down two Russians got through and shaved every one of us all over. Completely. Every bit of hair came off.

How did they do that?

They shaved us with an open razor. A pretty rough one too. They made cuts all over us. but we had no soap. Nothing. They just slapped water on us and shaved us. Well then they only gave us a thin cotton gown. They took away our uniforms and clothes. Put them all in a fumigator thing. I had sheepskin coats and those things, all ruined. The whole thing was ruined. They gave them back to me five months later, and there wasn't anything you could wear. Then they gave me a cotton gown, and I wore that cotton gown for the next five months. And that bath in that tin - the whole lot of us - they repeated that once more three months later. Brought the tin bath in again, and we all - the fellows went for some dive to get out of the process. And they all had to go through it. See we were all only plank boards with mattresses stuffed with straw and there it was. Now about a week after I'd got - an old doctor cleaned this hand up - and he shook his head when he looked at it. Of course, it was all rotten. There was gangrene everywhere. It had been tied up for nearly a week. When he opened it, it was all black. He just shook his head like this. And he didn't speak English. But he then gave me a whip, and tidied it all up. And that's the only time I had a bandage on it, a real bandage. Now after that we had to bandage our wounds month after month - week after week - with just paper. They gave us rolls of paper - nothing else. We had fellows whose gangrene smelled while they were there - one man there - he was out like this (spread-eagled) with paper on his legs and head. And he'd only had a shot through there. Gangrene set in and it went all over his body.

The gangrene did?

We tied him up to here and there was just his eyes and nose sticking out. He was all paper - just paper - with rolls of paper.

He was spread-eagled.

Rolls of paper. Now we just helped one another. Now unfortunately, about a week after that I developed tetanus. I got tetanus, you see, and my jaw shut up with a bang. I bit my tongue. I couldn't open my mouth. I couldn't bite anything if I had anything to bite. I was weighing 14 stone then, and the old doctor who looked at me, who'd stitched my hand up - he reckoned - he gave me 24 hours to live. That's all. I gradually got thinner and thinner and thinner, and I got bed sores lying there. I wouldn't move. I had this hand bandaged lying there...

Across your stomach.

...and I just lay in bed there. And my spine was trying to break. That's the trouble with tetanus. I thought I must keep on my back. If I roll on my side my spine will snap. And you know I dwindled down from 14 stone to 6 stone then. My shoulder blades came through.

Good heavens.

They came right through the skin.

This is all at Munster Lazarette? Is this all at Munster?

Well what happened. Instead of pegging out, there was a young doctor, a fellow with a big sabre slash across his - a big tall doctor who was in a hospital nearby, and he'd been wanting to have a go at an experiment with a tetanus case. So this old doctor told him about me and he came over to this lazarette where I was, and he brought two Russian prisoners with him and put me on a stretcher, and took my from here over to his hospital and put me on the table. And he put injections into the lumbar region of my spine. And then they just brought me back again and put me back in my old plank bed - straw bed. This fellow repeated that. He repeated it, and you know, five months later this thing healed. It took five months to heal this. I was just going to have it chopped off there. I said they could chop it off there, because it was so bad. And in five months it healed. At the same time this fellow cured me of this tetanus. He helped me up. He'd given me lots of this treatment. He'd never made any arrangements about feeding me. None. And I got one of our fellows to write from this lazarette to London headquarters where one of my pals was a warrant officer. He'd been a Light Horseman, and I wrote to him. I couldn't write you see.

No, your right hand had gone.

But I got this man, John Brennan, who was captured with me. And he only had a shot through the leg. And he didn't get bad. He tied it up with paper you know, and he went along alright. But he used to come up and pour water through my teeth. And some of this blasted vegetable matter, the liquid of these mangelwurzel soups. And he would pour those through. And I got this John Brennan to go and write to this friend in England, and he was an old pal of mine, and he told him that I had tetanus, and couldn't open my mouth. So he got the Red Cross to send through a dozen tins of milk. And they never got to me.

Didn't they?

No. They were a big prize in Germany. Germany was very short of food - terribly short of food.

They usually left the Red Cross parcels alone, didn't they?

It was a long time before I got a Red Cross parcel there. And I didn't get any clothes from the Red Cross. I still had this cotton gown. But just before, when I did heal, they brought me along a parcel with a nice - two sets of grey flannel underclothing and boots and socks and things. And a cap made in England to the design of the Germans for their prison uniform. And they were black and brown. And a proper double-breasted coat. A decent button-up tunic and pants.

They were good, weren't they.

They were good, but it was five months before I got those. And when I put them on I was terribly prickly and hot. I thought, What goes on? Anyhow, when I was cured there - when I'd got those and got fitted out, they sent me down to a working camp. See I was healed. I went off to a big working camp.

They were actually going to make you work?

And that was at Soltau.

Oh, I know Soltau, yes.

They must have had about 30,000 prisoners there. Portugese, French, Belgians. There was one Belgian who was a millionaire, and he'd got one of his huts there finished off. And you'd never know it. Inside it was beautifully furnished. I went there one night to a party, and we had weak beer and everything. We had a sing-song. Some of the fellow Belgians were in female evening clothes and everything. But this fellow had imported all this into the camp. His money bought things. He was living in comfort in the camp.

He was bribing the guards in other words?

Oh yes, he'd bribed somebody, but he managed to get everything in because he had tons of money. When you were there, you wouldn't think you were in a camp. We had a really good evening there one time. I only went there once. But there it was. In the working camp I wasn't required to work on account of my hand. But I was pretty knocked about then, you see then.

Well, you were only weighing six stones, or a bit more.

The Red Cross sent through - I got parcels there fairly regularly too, you see. I didn't touch - I got fresh bread from Berne in Switzerland - nice little loaves. And so I jumped along there for some months and then they decided that fellows like myself that weren't working, they didn't want to keep them. They arranged an exchange - and I think they exchanged one Englishman for four Germans. What they did with me then, we had a football there. We had no grass in this place. I remember there were a lot of Russians there. When we made any tea and threw out the tea leaves on the ground, the Russians prisoners came along and ate all those tea leaves. They ate everything, and even picked over the dirt. There was no grass grew in that big camp, because as soon as any grass appeared the Russians ate it. Their Red Cross business was poor.

They didn't have a Red Cross, did they.

Very poor it was. But getting back to that first lazarette, there were lots of fellows there who were recovered. There was one fellow there who had a hole in his chest about this size. We had to tip him up to tip the puss out.

About three inches wide.

And put more - a big swathe of paper around his chest. He was Queenslander, and he was always talking about going back. You know, he died after about five months with this huge hole in his chest. There was never any nursing or anything like that. If we had too difficult a bandage to put on, they had two Russian stretcher-bearers who were prisoners, and they used to send them in to see if we had a good bandage. Most of us were bandaging ourselves, but if we had any difficulty, these Russians - one was a very big chap - and there was a little one called Ivan. No Ivan was the big fellow. And they came around to help with the bandages. They'd come along and say, "Good bandage?" And you'd say "Yes." The paper was easy to bandage, and I used to burn the paper in a little pot-bellied stove in the middle -where we burnt all the bandages. I tried to warm things up in there by burning bandages. And the fellows said, "You'll never heat that." I had a little - the Red Cross sent me a little piece of bacon like this.

About two inches square.

And I found a jam tin and put it in. We weren't allowed tins. The first tin of bully beef I got from the Red Cross - I had one little tin of bully beef. A small thing it was. And they told me it was there, and I had to go down to headquarters of the camp. And about four or five Germans undid this bully beef tin and cut it all up to see that there was nothing in it. And I also had a loaf of bread. They chopped up the loaf of bread. They wouldn't give us cigarettes. If we got any cigarettes, they pulled all the cigarettes to pieces. And all the bread was hacked in pieces. When that bread first came from Switzerland, they'd packed it warm and it came perfectly green right through. Green with mildew. Bright green! And the Germans opened the parcel, put it on the counter and they had a thing to go along there and chop it all up to see that there were no revolvers, or ladders, or rope inside it. The first lot we wrote - we had a card with it from Berne in Switzerland and they wanted to know if it had arrived all right. So we wrote back and told them that it was all mildewed. And the next batch came along - occasionally - it didn't come very regularly. But they came along. At times we had to make do with the black bread. And then, that came along well, and when that came along I wouldn't bother with black bread. In the working camp I ran a batman. And I gave him my black bread, and he used to wash my shirt out in the snow.

You were an officer at that time were you?

No, I was a sergeant. That was a fact which mitigated against my exchange. They didn't - they wavered with me a lot because they reckoned I could go on training people. But eventually they agreed to exchange me.

Was it the case that the NCOs had to work too, or not?

I would have had to work, but for my hand. I wasn't required as - the camp commandant - when I walked around I had my hand tucked in my coat, and I went passed him one time and I didn't salute. You are not allowed to salute with the left hand. And he pulled me up and came back. And I showed him this, and he saluted me and went on.

Did he.

Yes, he was fair. He started to shout at me you see.

This is at Soltau is it.

Of course, in that five months when I was sick there, oh it was a bad time for me.

My word it must have been.

I got right down and I didn't care whether I died much or not. I got so thin. I got bed sores all over me, and all I could do was to scoop holes in the straw. I wouldn't get off my back with the strain. You know when you put a fresh fish in a pan, how he curls up. That's how my spine was going. It's a rotten feeling. So all told, I was lucky to get out of that. Very, very lucky. Here they make such a fuss over us, and everyone has to be quiet, and a lot of nursing and everything. But I never saw a nurse there at all.

You didn't see a nurse there at all? Only the Russian orderlies?

When I did see a nurse - eventually, in this working camp I had met a fellow from what had been my office in Hobart, Tasmania. A fellow named - he had two good legs, and we used to walk around this big camp - three miles around - inside the wire - we walked around for a constitutional.

What was his name?

We were getting our parcels then, and we were living fairly comfortably. This fellow's name was Rose. I don't know what became of him. Eventually - he was still in the camp when I went and got exchanged.

You were exchanged from Soltau?

Yes. They started - there was rumour of an exchange. They were going to arrange an exchange of four Germans for each Englishman. It was all fixed up, and we had to go up before a board. All those - they picked out some of them - those people who weren't working. And we went up before a board, and they passed me, after a bit of hesitation about the sergeant business. Well then there was a business. Eventually they decided that they would let a certain lot of them go. Some of them had no legs, and legs off. It was rather funny - the way they - the transport they gave us. We were three miles from the siding at Soltau, out in the woods. Just trees. No houses showing. All you looked out at were fir trees. They decided to let us go by train to Holland. Now they supplied us with a great big farm wagon. You know these things they have to put pine logs they put around the beaches and so on - this wagon was made out of these big pine logs. And it had a lot of chains. And it had no traction. Nothing to pull it. And we had to - those of us with two legs - had to go and get hold of these chains, and the fellows with their leg injuries were all stacked into this, and away we went. At the crack of dawn, from prison camp down to the siding - three miles. And we were all singing "It's a long way to Tipperary" and just clanking along with these chains. It was a terribly heavy wagon. A hard job. And we pulled that wretched thing right down into the village of Soltau, which was a pretty little village, with nice flower boxes in the windows. I always used to like the German architecture and their little cottages. And all these heads came out the windows to see these mad Englishmen. We all went down there, and they bundled us into a train, and that's the last we saw of it. Then away we went to Aachen, on the border. And we went across, and from Aachen eventually, before the day was out, we went across - got out of this train and went across the border into a Dutch train. And that's the first time we had ever seen any nurses. They were rosy-cheeked Dutch nurses there, and they gave us chocolate. We'd never seen anything like that. And then we went down to a hospital fairly close to the border, beautiful hospital, and we arrived there about 10.30 in the morning. And we were all there. We had to wait there, and go before a board again. And some were returned back to the camp.

Some of them were returned to Germany?

They had a second meeting there. I don't know whether it was the Germans or what, but there was a second board that you had to go before. Some of them were absolutely raving mad there, you know. They were useless. Some of those fellows whom we had dragged down in this wagon. They were as mad as hatters. They had gone right off their heads. Anyhow, when we got there, it was rather humorous. These girls had all these nice clean wards with nice sheets, beds, and everything, and all those who could walk rushed out and had a nice shower, and hopped right into bed. We'd never seen a sheet you see, and these girls came around and laughed at us. They thought we were all mad. We moved on from there. We didn't stay there long, and then we moved on from there to Rotterdam, and we were parked there for some days waiting for a Dutch hospital ship to go to England. It was a lot of fun. Most weekends and that in that working camp there would be some very good professional football.

Would there?

And we had no grass. We only had the flat mud, hard mud. And the Red Cross sent through goal posts...

Did they?

...and footballs. And the fellows - a lot of professional footballers from England were in the army, and they used to get up a good match every Sunday afternoon. We weren't required to work on Sunday unless there was an emergency. I used to go down and watch these football matches there. It was quite good. On rare occasions a guard came in armed to the teeth and wanted a working party. And you ought to have seen all the spectators scatter.

No-one wanted to be in that.

They all rushed out of the huts and came around. And they'd tear around with fixed bayonets to get their working party. But that didn't happen that often because they were against working on Sunday. That made a little bit of fun. And the Red Cross sent us through some books too. In the working camp our bunks were terrible. We had - a think they were just galvanised iron boxes. They had these sheets of galvanised-iron up in two tiers. And that's all they were. And we only had a thin palliasse on the damn thing, which looked to have road sweepings in it. And then we only had one very thin blanket. We went through the winter with that. And the snow used to seep through the hut wall. They were not lined! We had no lining or heating.

There'd be freezing.

It was pretty tough. That's why we used to go for a walk around the camp to get our circulation up.

And did you know Edwin Sadler. He told me...

Oh, he was with me. A thin little chap. He's got an arm off. He's younger than I am. He's about 90. He doesn't get much out of life. See, he never married. He was near to his sister at that Salvation Army home. And she died a few years back, and he was on his own there. But he was always a very quiet chap. But he was in that Munster Lazarette with me,

Was he?

Yes, he was there with his arm off. But he was always - he never smiled much - he was very quiet. But the fellow, Brennan, who looked after me, I dug him up here about 50 years later. I went and got hold of the 16th Battalion - what's the name of the secretary?

Horrie Ganson.

Ganson. I got hold of him, and he said there were two. There was a John Brennan who looked after me, and he was an engine driver. And he gave me the address of a chap out in East Perth. I went out there. And John Brennan I knew as a fellow as tall as I was. So I went out to this chap at East Perth, and I saw him there - a white haired chop, getting on in years. And I said, "Are you John Brennan?" And he said, "Yes." Were you captured at Bullecourt." And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Do you remember me?" And he said, "No." "Well," I said, "I was captured at Bullecourt, and I'm looking for a John Brennan who was with me, and helped me bandaging, and pouring liquid through my teeth when I was really ill." "Oh, no," he said, "I never got back. I wasn't wounded and I was kept behind the German lines for the duration of the war." But he said there was another John Brennan who was an engine driver. He said, "I'll tell you why I know, because we are both retired

and we both belong to the Union on account of the sickness benefits. So I thought I will have another and I got onto Ganson again. And he said, "Well, there was another Brennan and we lost the run of him ten years ago." I said, "Well, give me his address from ten years ago."

(Interruption by his wife – incidental conversation)

When we got to that working camp, that's when I had my first shower. I got there, and of course, I had got the new uniform. And I felt terrible with all these clothes on, prickling like anything. And when I got there and met up with some of the fellows - our accommodation there was poor - very rotten.

These were the galvanised-iron bunks and so on?

No, they were flat wooden slats with the small palliasse in, one above the other. Well one time there we had a lot of soup we wanted to make, and we cut up one of these bunks completely and made a fire in the hut. And we combined a lot of soup packets and we made a nice big bowl of soup. And there was smoke belching out from the hut, and we cut a hole in the floor, and we stuck all this bed which we had cut up with knives and things in under the floor. And we made a lovely thing. And then the alarm came. So they chucked the fire out the window and the Germans tore through the place with fixed bayonets trying to find the fire. The whole place was full of smoke. And when they eventually got going, we got the thing going again and had a good feed of hot soup. It was hard to get things hot you see. Very hard. When I got to this prison camp - it was a big camp - and the chap said, "You can have a shower here every Saturday if you line up at the gate. After your midday meal, line up at the gate there with your towel and soap. We'd got a small piece of soap." You couldn't get soap in Germany. A small piece of soap and a towel from the Red Cross. And we lined up there, and the guard marched a party of us about a couple of kilometres to a great big galvanised iron shed and inside were showers all over the room. There were Portuguese and Russians and Frenchmen and Belgians. We all got in there. And the engineer turned on the water, just nice and warm, and we all got underneath there and had a soak down. And I stood there. And then they turned the cold on. And all the foreigners squealed and rushed out and left me there. I stayed there hot and cold the whole afternoon till the thing closed down.

You really made up for it.

I was going to risk that. This is - I've just healed up for the first time in five months, and I'm having my first shower, and it was going to be a good one! I never missed after that. What I did bring back with me - I've got it here (a small lump of German POW black bread - now donated to the Australian War Memorial). When we went out with this wagon - when we were in the chains - they gave us all some of this black bread, and I brought a bit back.

END OF TAPE ONE (Microcassette)

START OF TAPE TWO (Microcassette - Side A of Whittington 2(Side B) Tape)

I got a hold of this other Brennan.

Yes.

I took up a couple of bottle of beer of course, and, when I went inside, here – he was living with his grandchildren. Some of his – well his wife died – but there were about three generations there. A lot of kids there. And I said, “Does John Brennan live here?” “Yes.” I went inside, and he jumped up, and stood looking up me. And I said, “Do you remember me?” “No.” “Don’t you remember me. You should. You were captured at Bullecourt weren’t you? You were at Munster Lazarette. You’d also been shot through the leg.” “Yes.” And I happened to have my hand in my pocket. I pulled it out, and he looked at it, and said, “Horace Rumble.”

Oh, I see.

John Brennan was one of the few fellows who was healed up quickly. And he was sent to a working camp practically right away. In fact, he told me afterwards that he’d been out of a farm. There was a connection with him. My old man was a civil engineer from London. And he came out here in the early days - about 1897. I was born in England. He was a civil engineer working with C. Y. O’Connor, building the Fremantle harbour. And then at the time I went to the war, my old man was a resident down at Bunbury building the Bunbury harbour. Now it appears this John Brennan was one of his engine drivers running up to the quarry. He had a quarry where he had put in the biggest blasts that had been put in in Australia, brought down the whole of the cliff there in one hit to build the Bunbury breakwater. Photos of that were sent all around Australia. It was the biggest blast they had put in in those days. That was in the time of the first war. There have been a lot of big things since.

What were you doing at the start of the war? Where were you when you enlisted, and what were you doing?

I was in Perth. I was in one of our biggest life insurance companies here. I got leave to go to the war. I’m still on their - I’ve retired from them. I rose from the bottom to the top there, and I retired on a pension 31 years ago. And they very kindly adjusted that pension every year for the cost of living. I’m a dead loss to them. They just gave me a cost of living allowance the other day. Another one. Every year they come through.

Yes, that’s good of them.

I put 50 years in with them. I did every job from A to Z from the bottom to the top. I was actually manager when I retired.

And did you have any other members of your family in the 16th Battalion? Any brothers, or...?

No, there was nobody else.

Just on your own.

My next brother, he was a married man with a family. He didn't go to the war. I left my yacht with him.

You had a yacht at that time, did you?

I had three. I first sailed over to Rottnest in 1899 as a kid. I went with my father who was a young engineer in the Fremantle harbour works. He got interested in fishing, and he bought me a rod too, you see. The harbour wasn't built then. In 1897 there was a rock bar across, with only a small hole. No mailboats. Mailboats then would only have been about 6,000 tons. But in those days too, but when I first started – 81 years ago last January I joined my firm here in Perth. Now all our mail went per the *SS Mongolia* or something, by sea. The mailboats weren't very big then. But when I came here you couldn't get a big ship into the harbour. They'd only blasted out a bit of the thing then. The boat my father used to go fishing in was round. That land behind – across the bank of the river where the wool stores are – now that's all been filled in. And in those early days there was a railway station down at the Round House. And then there was the water. So it was a funny old place in those days. And there was a big long jetty a mile out into the sea, out where the Fish Markets are. It went out to sea about a mile. We used to walk out there fishing, out to the end of this jetty. That was the old days.

You trained at Blackboy Camp, I suppose?

Oh yes. I was up there in Blackboy Camp. I was engaged to be married then, and I used to come down every night to see my future wife. And then my family were all down at Bunbury then. The boys were all working down there. I had four brothers, and my father and mother and my three sisters were all down at Bunbury. And when he finished that job, when I came back from the war in 1919 he was still down there. But I had a good look around in England when I was there. I'd read so much about England. My father had told me and I knew my way about there. I had an uncle who was also a civil engineer up in Scotland. When I was in hospital - they were mucking around with this hand. I was waiting for a hospital ship for a long time. And they were still working on this, and I'd applied for a week's leave to dash up to Scotland - or dash all round the place. I had more relatives there, and I had none out here. All the various Rumble families were in England. Some were living in London and some... My granny lived in Blackheath, which was quite near the Greenwich University.

The Naval College.

The Observatory. There was a pond there where my brothers and sisters used to skate in the winter - in Blackheath. My father came from London. He was a civil engineer on the London County Council. And of course, when he came out here, he was in his 30's. He married about 21 or something. About 21, and I was the first born. And my next brother was born in England too. All of my brothers are dead. None of them got passed 82. My father died at 82. The last job he did was building the Geraldton Harbour. He built that and then he retired after that. Pottered around.

And when did you join the Battalion in France? Can you remember the month?

Oh it would be in 1916. It was the coldest winter we had in France for 30 years.

I think even longer in fact. It was a very cold winter.

It was the coldest winter that France had had. All our drinking water was frozen up. It was terrible. We lit fires over our things. But I know this. We had a wow of a Christmas dinner in the sergeants' mess there. I was back behind the lines for that.

What happened?

Oh, we had a wow of a dinner. We had the sergeants' mess, and were drinking our heads off. Champagne and turkey and everything. Finished up by – we all went to bed with our boots on. All in the sergeants' mess. It was a wonderful feed. It was the last decent feed I had anyhow. It was really - I know the 14th and the 16th were fighting a lot, between one another. There was some grudge against the 14th. They didn't have any grudge against the 15th, but they had some grudge against the 14th. And there were all these fellows standing up on the Christmas dinner table with their boots on fighting one another. It was a funny thing.

And what company were you in, Mr Rumble?

D Company.

And were you a specialist at all? Were you a bomber or a Lewis gunner? Or were you just a plain infantryman?

I was just plain infantryman. I was an infantry sergeant. Yes, we didn't have any machine-gun companies, though. Well, we had machine-guns attached to each...they had machine-gunners.

The Lewis gunners.

But in this attack there, we had no ammunition of any kind left. And we couldn't get back. Now there was one fellow, a fellow named Dan Aarrons, who was a couple of years older than I am. He would have been the oldest man had he lived, but he died a little while back. And he got just to 98, he was older than I am. He was in Melbourne. He was knighted after the war. He was in an oil company, and I remember years before the war he was captain of a lacrosse team down in Fremantle and I was captain of a lacrosse team up in Perth. And we used to meet frequently playing lacrosse in the winter time. In the summer I always used to sail, and in the winter I used to play lacrosse. And was a keen lacrosse man too. But he was in an oil company, he was, and later on, I think he got mixed...when he got back from the war. As a matter of fact, he got out of that Bullecourt business.

He did, yes.

He did, he got out and got back. I don't know how.

No, he was lucky.

He dashed off and got back to our lines, and he didn't come back again. He was going to get help and he didn't get it.

He was going to try and get the artillery to open up, wasn't he.

He did. We reckoned he was going back to get the artillery to do something for us. Tell them where we were. But nothing ever happened. And we never saw him come back afterwards. I never heard of him after that until I got back here.

No, he stayed with the Battalion.

Oh yes, he stayed with the Battalion. Oh, I think he was an oil company man. I knew him well before the war.

And how much of the fighting at Bullecourt did you actually see? You took the first line, and you were wounded getting between the first and the second line, you said?

That's right, yes. We got the second line too.

Yes, I know that.

And they were back in Riencourt. And from there they just blew a lot of the remnants to pieces. And then they just scraped the lot of us up. But that was a rough journey. See we were locked in a covered-in truck. Now one of the English tank crew was with me. He'd been shot through the bottom and he couldn't sit down. He was standing up for about four or five days. There here was no room to rest anything there. I sat down there. But it was a bad journey that. We didn't know where we were going, and they'd shunt us into places at night and just leave us there. Occasionally they'd put in a little bit of black bread or something. But it was a poor old journey for a sick man.

Yes. No, you had a difficult time.

Yes, it was.

And how did you get through the wire? The first wire?

Well, I went through a gap in the wire which the tank had made. It was a death trap really. I don't know how I got through it. Some of us got through, but not many. It was terrible. It was just like a hailstorm of bullets. Machine guns there. You see just bunching up together. It was a rotten arrangement. The most fool attack ever I've seen. They just sacrificed all those men. See it happened twice. I met some West Riding regiments in Germany, where was that? Yes, I met them in Germany in a prisoner-of-war camp, and I said where were you fellows captured. And they said

at Bullecourt. They said, "We suffered the same as you fellows did. Didn't do any good at all." It was a very strong line. It was their big line.

Well, you did an amazing thing, I think, to get into it, I think, and just stay there.

It's a wonder we got in. It's a wonder we took it, but we drove them out.

Did you see any of the Germans retreating as you were coming in to the first line?

They did the best thing. They got out of the first one when we got there. When we charged with bayonets, they got out of it. And they were firing until the last minute with machine guns and retreated you see. And then they just waited for us. They got us in their helpless and they just blew us to hell afterwards. Oh it was no good.

They knew the trenches, didn't they?

They knew the range to an inch from Riencourt. They were well dug in there.

And then I think, once the Germans had captured you, and you were going back towards that church, the English barrage started, didn't it?

Yes. Oh, it was bad. It was a complete mess-up. The tank fellows didn't know what they were doing. They weren't fit to come over. And they were supposed to lead the way. They certainly did...one tank went right through a lot of - I only saw one cut through there - and the tank was right out the other end of it. All the tanks were knocked out. Those tanks were just left derelict. But they did make some holes. You see, we were accustomed to a barrage. Oh no, they didn't know what was doing. Aarrons went back, and he was supposed to tell them where we were. But nothing happened. It was too late before anything happened. There were two or three attacks the same. They ended up by putting up a monument at Bullecourt to 10,000 dead men. 2500 bodies couldn't be found. There was 10,000 killed, less 2,500 who couldn't be dug up anywhere. They have got the rest of them under this monument there. I went back into Germany, but I didn't go to any of the battlefields or anything. I went over there with my wife in 1955. See her parents were English, and she'd never been out of Australia. She was born here.

And you went back to Bullecourt at that time, did you?

No, I didn't go anywhere near Bullecourt, but I went to some of the battlefields. Most of them were grown over, and there were farms and things. I went around a lot of the old places, but not too many. I was more interested in showing my wife around England. Her parents - who mother was born in All Souls College, Oxford.

Well, that's a famous college.

And of course, I still have a few relatives left. I didn't go back there for 38 years, you see. It was 1955. All my male relatives had died off. I think I had two aunts left, that's all.

(Break in interview)

(Incidental conversation)

About Germany again, when did your parents know you had been captured? How soon after you had been captured?

Oh, it was a few weeks. First of all there was a thing came through that I was wounded and missing. Then it was reported that I was a prisoner of war. Eventually I got the address through to them. But my mother copied out a letter I wrote to her on the first Armistice Day in London. I was in London Hospital then, and I dashed out of hospital. All those who could walk went down. The letter might interest you. I don't know.

(Break in interview)

Well I described the day there.

What did you do that armistice day?

Well, we were in the West End of London in the Number 3 AGH, at a place called Southall. We lived there. It was an old school, and it had almost 700 amputations there. All Australians. In the other hospitals...I was put in a London hospital - English - and of course they gave me nightshirts, and prayers at 9.00 o'clock. No talking. And I got moved out of there to an Australian hospital pretty quickly. They put me there when I came back, because there was another prisoner of war in there already and they put me alongside his bed. I was in there looking around for pyjamas. I said where are the pyjamas? Oh, we don't wear pyjamas here. Nightshirts. So I got into that thing. And the Sister had prayers about 9.00 o'clock and lights out. And nobody was allowed to talk. So I promptly applied to be shifted to the Number 3 AGH in the West End. There were Australian doctors and nurses. And they said, "You want to go there?" They reckoned it was a rag-time place. I met an old sister back here, an elderly one who had come back here after the war here, and she had been there, and she said it was a rag- time hospital. "Oh," I said, "it was good." I said, "I used to go to the theatre without a pass. Into London." See, we had to be in by ten o'clock if we had passes. I and another fellow - I'd had my money transferred to London while I was a prisoner-of-war, and I had money - money - money coming back from my office. I was on leave during the war, and I had my salary transferred to London all the time into the Commonwealth Bank, Perth. Another pal of mine with a leg off - he was a station owner up north - I used to go into my bank account in London, and he'd go to Dalgety's. We were both in 'blues' and we went to the West End and we had uniforms made - tailor-made uniforms - the both of us. And we used to go shows there and dinners in town, and then when we came back we'd have to crawl into the hospital somehow. Put something into our beds there. Put kitbags in the bed and trust to luck. I got found out a couple of times, but then I got leave there. No hospital ship. They weren't sending me back until I got a hospital ship. So when I got a bit of a break then from this physiotherapy, I would be able to get leave. I got to the stage then when I said. "Look, I'll ring you up every week and if you want me back you say so. And I'll go off." As I said, I had relatives in London and down south. I came from Eastbourne in Sussex. It's a very nice place. I had people there, and I had an uncle up on the Forth. On war-work there. He had a whole lot of women working for him there. He was a civil engineer, and I went and stayed with him. He was only recently married. He'd been all around the

world travelling for Sir John Jackson. He was a partner of Sir John Jackson of Victoria Street. London. He'd been all around the world and never settled down and married until he got there in the wartime. I went up there and I stayed there some times. See, I knew my way about – by the time I took my wife back there in 1955 all these uncles had died off. There were only two aunts left. In the wartime, my mother's mother was alive. She had a four storey house in Blackheath. And my mother's bedroom was still there. I saw my mother's bedroom when she left home at age 21 to get married.

That would be interesting.

And my father, with his wife and two sons, set sail, first of all for Hobart, and from Hobart he came over here. He came out on the *Tanui*. That's a New Zealand name, isn't it. TANUI.

It sounds like it. And what happened on Armistice Day when you...?

When we got the news in the hospital in the morning - about 11.00, all those fellows who could walk - we didn't have any leave - and nurses too - we all went out. And we flocked down to Trafalgar Square. Now when we got there it was a terrible jam. All the red buses were stationary. They couldn't move for the people. It was a riotous day. I think I'd gone in my uniform. I'd put on my uniform on the quiet. I wasn't in blues. And my pal was down there too. And we could go and get drinks. And I know we went to the Criterion for dinner, and had a champagne lunch or something. But back in Trafalgar Square it was terrible. There was a fellow near me. A woman had fainted in his arms. And he said, "What can I do with this woman who's fainted." "Well." I said, "you'll have to hang on to her. You can't put her down. There's no room to put her anywhere. You can't get her anywhere, unless you can get her onto a stationary bus." But I said, "I can't help you." Oh, the whole day went by with celebrations. It was a wonderful day. Then I went back to hospital and I wrote a letter to tell my mother all about it. And she thought so much of it – of my scraggy old writing – you know I was only just learning to write you see. I had a job – when I went back – I had a right-handed signature there, and I had bandages here, and I had to stick a pin in here and try and write my right-handed signature. And the Commonwealth Bank said that they saw the characteristics of it, and then I signed with the left-handed signature. It was nothing like it. Then I got by, and I could go and draw money when I wanted it. You see, I didn't worry about drawing any pay in the hospital. I would sooner go and get my own money. So there it was. I had quite a bit too transfer back. Because my own pay was going on in store for me.

Yes, they were paying you while you were away, were they?

Yes, my office paid me all the time I was away. I withdrew my salary for about the three years I was away. I was away for three years, and I got my salary drawn. They're still paying me now every month. And they looked after me. I retired 31 years ago. I joined the staff there 81 years ago last January, when St. George's Terrace wasn't even sewered! We had only a three storey building there then. Now we have about a 12 storey building.

That's a big change in that time.

And when I joined - there's hundreds on the staff now - when I joined I made number seven on the staff. From the manager to the office boy there were seven of us. And we had a sandy backyard going down some steps from the Terrace. Our offices were on the steps – the terrace level, but we

had to go down steps down to the basement and out to the backyard – where we had three dunnikins stuck up in there with pans in them. We rebuilt the whole building for five storeys, and even put a bath and a shower in it. I think we had the Agent-General there for some time.

(Incidental conversation)

After we came back from the POW camp they put us on a nice dinner at the Roscarti. I think it was bombed in the second war. It was a big restaurant in London. And they had a slap-up feed there for the returned POWs.

Did you go and see Nurse Chomley at all?

Who?

Nurse Chomley?

Nurse who?

Nurse Chomley was in charge of the Prisoners-of-War Department of the Red Cross in London.

I don't know whether I saw her there or not. I knew some of them. We had a lot of outings organised for us. I went out to Windsor for afternoon tea with one of my friends with his leg off. Remember when I was telling you, the station man up north. He and I were taken out to this, and I think Princess Alice was quite young then. That was in 1918, you see.

When did you get back from Germany? Do you remember the month?

I got back in 1918. I can't remember the exact date, but it was before the Armistice. And I was there in hospital for the armistice, and I'd been having a lot of physiotherapy on this when the armistice came. But during that time we went out to Windsor Castle and we had afternoon tea there. There were a lot of ladies there, and we didn't know who was Princess Alice you see. My friend, who was a fellow named Don Beaton from Thundulara Station up north - and he, afterwards, he asked the lady who he'd been talking to, and who had been monopolising the two of us, he said, "I've been wondering," he said, "who is our hostess." And she said, "I am." And he nearly fell over backwards. He left me going on talking. He was dumb after that. But she was quite young then. But the last time I heard of her, well I remember her dying. But we had a wonderful time out there. They arranged a lot of things for the POWs. I went to about 30 live theatres while I was in hospital - for nothing.

They let you in free.

The Red Cross gave me the tickets. The Anzac Club in London gave us free tickets. We'd go in there and they had tickets given to them. We used to avail ourselves of these and go and see the

shows. I saw the "The Better Hole" three times I think. Bairnsfather – it was 'The Better Hole' in those days. It was a really good laugh. A great laugh. He was a wonderful fellow.

I've heard of some of them, like Chou Chin Chow, and so on.

Oh, it was good. But the Australian hospital, compared with the English hospital, was pretty slack. And we used to climb over fences and over roofs and everything to get back into bed. And wander around the place. We used to get into a train there and change out of our blues into our uniform. I'd park the blues uniform in a parcel in a hedge somewhere, and come back and change back into blues again, and wrap up the thing and cart it all home. Oh we had a good time there.

And what about any escape attempts? I don't suppose you really considered it in Germany, but do you know anything about that?

We had two or three escapes, but they didn't dig out. Soltau had two big lines of steel fences around them. They were a good distance. Well they would be from here to the other room there, apart.

That's about fifteen or twenty feet.

Not a blade of grass or anything grew there, and every now and then they would have machine gun platforms. Now that was lit up at night, and you couldn't very well dig under it. Working parties used to go down to the siding to work at the siding. And sometimes when they were working there, they'd make arrangements to pack somebody or a couple of fellows into one of the luggage trains with the cases and things. And they'd been saving up a bit of food to take. But when they got on the train they didn't know where the train was going. But they took compasses and away they went. But they were all caught and brought back, and put into a cell then, on just bread and water for a time. I don't remember anybody actually getting free without being caught. But that was the only way I saw them get out of there.

Yes, it was very difficult to get out of Soltau, or any of the big camps, I think.

They could put a guard right round it. But they were all decrepit looking fellows, about C3's or something. They looked a starved looking lot. They didn't fare as well as we did when we got some parcels through. The parcels we got were very good. Even the 16th Battalion put in and sent us an extra bit of Christmas pudding in Christmas 1917. They took the hat round and they sent us an extra parcel in.

You were in Soltau for Christmas 1917, weren't you?

Yes, I was there.

What happened on that day? Do you remember anything about the celebrations or..?

Oh, no we didn't do much. It was much the same as any other day as far as we were concerned. We had no celebrations. We weren't near any habitation you see. We were out in the pine forests. All you could see outside through the fence were pine trees. On one or two occasion some kids would be wandering through the bush and they'd come down and look at us through the wires. But there was nothing exciting. Although at one time, we did get out. There was an Anglican Church about three miles down the road, and they called for applicants who wanted to go and attend an English service. So I put my name down for the walk. We went out, about twenty of us. It was a fair walk down the road, and the poor old guards, we were walking them off their feet. And they were standing in front of us calling out "Langsum. Langsum, " to try and stop us pushing ahead. We wanted to stretch our legs. Well we went down to this church and had a Church of England service there. A fellow, a parson who spoke perfect English, and that was about the only outing we ever had while we were there. We had one outing and it was quite enjoyable. Otherwise we only had a football match occasionally, and there was nothing much else.

They sent you books, you said. The Red Cross would allow you books.

They sent us some books to read. They sent a few books through.

And what about card games, and things like that?

Well, I wasn't feeling like cards because I couldn't shuffle or deal cards. I couldn't handle cards.

No, well that's the sort of thing you don't think of.

But I got some books to read. We were a mixture there. I had a fellow next to me, he was one of the Irish Fusiliers or something. He could sing, and we'd have sing-songs at night sometimes.

Did they have any concerts in Soltau?

Only at times. As I say when we went to this millionaire's hut. Inside. Where they had womens clothes and everything. Some of the fellows were dressed up quite well. All made up. He paid all the bills for all of those things. And he had some weak beer, like the soft beer you have here. We had a wonderful evening. A lot of singing. Where or how he got all this stuff I don't know. But it was money. Money counts, you see. He had pots of money this fellow. He'd been captured in the forts of Liege I think, very early in the war. I was actually teaching one of these fellows English. He used to come up and make conversation with me. And he was pretty good on it. He wrote to me from Belgium after I got back. He was a ladies tailor. Only he was very boastful. He kept on telling me all about his conquests among his female clients and everything. And he was married too. I said, "Oh, go easy. You're making it pretty thick." Anyway, the very first word of English he learnt began with four letters and an F!

Yes (laughs).

He was telling me all about these things, and I said but - he'd put through several ladies in his business, and when he'd get home he'd settle down to a bit more with his wife. I said "Don't you ever play any sport or anything like that? Do you play golf, or anything like that?" He said "No, No.

Conserve the energy.” He said, “When I can no longer do the act, you can kill me!” He was a good tailor. One of our fellows there – this man from Tasmania - bought a very nice patched-up old overcoat, which he got back. It wasn't damaged, and he got it back. And he handed it over to this tailor chap, and by hand he made him a beautiful coat.

This is Rose, is it?

A beautiful coat. He sewed it all up and cut it all out. Cut it all into pieces. It turned out to be a wonderful job. All my clothes were ruined when they put them into the incubator thing - whatever it was.

No, I've heard about that.

I had lovely sheepskin coat - ruined! Nothing was any good at all.

Were you wearing – did you take your greatcoat with you when you went across at Bullecourt, or not?

No.

It would be too awkward, wouldn't it.

We had sheepskins, and we chucked away our blankets. We didn't take them over. Before that we were equipped - in that winter of 1916 - with three blankets each. But we threw two away, Wouldn't couldn't carry them.

Why? Too heavy?

Too heavy. And we were throwing tins of bully beef away. We had to carry emergency rations of 'bully'. Once place there in the mud I found a complete dugout made of full bully beef tins. I remember once when we were further out and we were running short of food, I said “Oh, I know where there's a - I'll take a sugar bag.” And I went back to this place and pulled out a sugar bag full of bully, and brought it back to my platoon you see. And we had bully again. But some of them wouldn't carry their rations of bully beef. They were too heavy.

What platoon were you in? You were in D Company, which platoon were you in? Can you remember the number of your platoon?

I was D Company, but I'm damned if I can remember.

That's OK.

I might have it written down somewhere, I don't know. I still have one old pocket book.

That's OK. Can you remember any of the other men who you knew when you were in Germany.

No, oh, yes I remember Brennan, and I remember Sadler.

And Rose, you were telling me about.

Rose was from Hobart. He was the one who the tailor made a nice coat for. It was a beautiful coat he turned out for him, all made by hand. But I can't remember who else we had there now. We had a sergeant. I remember we had one sergeant-major, I can't think of his name. It's a long time back. I can't remember now. I knew everybody in there.

That's OK.

I knew everybody in that hut at one stage, the whole damn lot. I know the fellow who had the big hole (in his chest). His name was Nicholas. He was a Queenslander. He had a big hole blown in his chest. He was all rotten inside and he lasted for months! Poor chap He was always talking about getting back, and then he petered out. I had one of them dead alongside me, and the Russians came in and wanted to know whether I wanted him moved. I said, "Oh it doesn't worry me." I was getting better then.

This was at Munster.

This was at Munster Lazarette. I hadn't quite healed up then, but I was very nearly getting rid of the tetanus. The fellow next door petered out, so one of these Russian stretcher bearers who'd been helping with the bandages all round, he came along and he said would I like them to take him out overnight. Oh I said, "I don't mind sleeping alongside of him." The last sleep I had, before the attack. It was the night before, and we were in a sunken road. And there were no decent dugouts or anything. And a German grave with a fellow in it, and the bloodstained thing. And another chap of mine, I can't remember his name, I think his name was Devine. He was a South Australian. He was in D Company, and he had a cake from the nurse. And he wanted to see whether he should eat the cake that night or save some until tomorrow. And we looked around to see where we could get cosy, and there was this German down there with a bloodstained thing in a shallow grave. So we tipped him out into the snow, and we hollowed it out a bit more so we could both get in there and eat the cake. And we decided then - and we put the bloodstained blanket over the top.

The German was in a grave...

And we sat down in this grave and we ate the cake there. We decided to eat all the cake because we mightn't be alive in the morning! So we ate that. That fellow, I met him again years later here. He came over to some reunion from Adelaide. And I think his name was either Devine or Levine. But he has since died. He came over from South Australia. We brought a bundle of them over, because D Company had several South Australians in it. And we got them all over one year.

Yes, I knew that.

I'm hazy on his name, though.

And the German who you saw in the grave, he was lying in this shallow grave with a blanket over him?

Yes, he was down a hole. It wouldn't have been any deeper than that.

Yes, only about a metre deep.

I immediately put the blanket over the top, and chucked him out in the snow. It was all snow covered. And we got down there with the cake and had that, with a bit of a stub of candle, and went off to sleep.

And what do you remember about actually going across that plain?

Oh, there were a lot of shells going across that plain. It was completely level - snow. But it was daylight when we got there.

It was daylight when you got into the German trenches.

Yes, we got in there. And the tanks came up too and mucked about. Oh, it was a real hash-up. It was not a proper attack at all. It was just a waste of life.

No, you never should have gone.

The machine guns were going like hail. They just mowed us all down. How I - I don't know how I got through into the first line of trenches, I'm damned if I do. And that's why I kept this in the first line of trenches, I got this. I didn't realise I was hit, I suddenly felt a bang, and I looked down and there was this thing all shattered.

What do you think hit you?

I thought it was a machine-gun bullets. It might have been something from a bomb. I don't know. All I could feel was a wall of machine gun bullets whizzing passed me like hail. It made a proper hash of it. It just knocked it all - it was all sharp bones. I can feel the sharp ends of bones in here now. In there.

No, it's a dreadful wound.

I sometimes knock and it starts off. It had a rough spin this. I can't close anything you see, but I can put that on the handle of a shovel, and use a shovel like this. I can push on that. And I used to coil ropes round there, round there on the boat, and back through there, and have a hitch round here. When I was pulling up the anchor I did the hitch round here. It was heavy work pulling up a 36 pound anchors, I can tell you. But there were a lot of funny incidents when the German came dashing around. They used to get very excited when they wanted working parties. But most of the fellows had no wounds. They all went off working and we didn't see them during the day. They'd go working either in the carpenter's shop or out in the field. Some went to farms. My friend John Brennan, he told me he had a very good time. He went out to a farm and he got pretty friendly with the farmer's daughter. Probably too friendly! Because he said, "She used to go and cook rabbits for me, to feed me up, unknown to her father."

They did quite well on the farms.

He worked on the farm for some time, and the farmer was responsible for keeping him there. And then he went back to a working camp afterwards.

And according to you, NCOs were required to work, were they. It was only officers that were not required to work.

I don't know. We had some officers in Munster. They were in a special hut there, and they were getting better treatment than we were. I think they were getting better food too. There were two or three officers there in one small hut. And I didn't even know who they were. We never bothered about them. But sergeant-majors and sergeants and so on in the main huts there - there were two or three huts there full of wounded chaps. But at the Number 3 AGH there was every imaginable amputation there. We had one ward full of fellows with no legs. Now they used to come down to...

You mean, they had lost both legs?

Both legs cut off there. And some had one arm only. And in one place we had one chap with all four limbs cut off. He had a body and a neck and head. Nothing else. And he was really in the bed in cotton wool. And he didn't want to come back to Australia, but they shipped him back. But in the ward full of fellows with no legs they made a little stumps to go down about a foot. And they used to go out on the tennis court drilling one another. Somebody would be calling out "Quick March." And they'd march along on their stumps, on the little wooden stumps. And then they'd say "Change steps." And they'd all fall over. But while they were all together there they had a lot of fun. Quite a lot of fun. And we had a canteen there where we always adjourned at 11.00 for a cup of coffee or a scone or biscuit. And a yarn. We had plenty to yarn about with one another. But mostly of a morning I was in this physiotherapy place. But they finished with that. They gave it up as a bad job, and they decided then - that's right. I used to go to the hall where all - the London limbmakers. We could pick our own. I had a beautiful hand made for this. Oh, a beautiful hand, and I used it in my office. I couldn't do anything with it, although it had an arrangement to hold a knife and a fork or a pen. But by that time I had learnt to write left handed so I didn't worry. This hand was made out of English willow, and it had every little joint all fixed up out of English willow. And all the nails cut into it. What they did, they came down - we were allowed to - we used to go along with the meetings and see what they were making for other people. Legs, arms and everything. Some were aluminium. Some were wood. There was one person who was doing very nice arms, or legs, and

hands. And I decided I would have mine made by him. They let us choose. So what this fellow did, he put that hand down on a slab of water and covered it with plaster completely. Got the whole thing. And then he made me put this one under and covered it with plaster. And I didn't see him until he brought back the hand. But everything - the nails - were exactly the size of these, all cut into the willow beautifully. And you could put these - the fingers wouldn't go further back than that. But you could put them anywhere you liked. Anywhere you liked. And you could put your hand in your pocket, and a nice glove fitted onto it, and a strap around here. And I used that all through my life - in the office. I used it to hold my papers. I had another friend who was a public accountant in the building next door. He'd had his hand right off, and he'd made a wooden affair with a hand on it on the side of the toe which you could put anyway to hold papers. And then he wrote with this other hand. I could hold papers with mine beautifully. I never had any trouble at all with it. But I put it into this damn Repatriation Department to repair once, and they absolutely ruined it. And I said, "What's the matter with you. What they did was make all the fingers stiff... made it all one piece. I said, "I can't even get a glove in between here." So they got a saw and sawed through there and they then put a glove on it. But I have never used it.

What a shame.

It was a waste of time. But my job was beautiful. I know what it cost too. It cost me 13 pounds 17 shillings when it was made, and I had my pick of any of the best in London it was a really fine thing. The only trouble was I couldn't bend my wrist. I had to keep it bent there. It was down a bit, like that. But it worked all right at my desk. I had a table in my own office there and I could hold all my papers down there. And I did a lot of signing cheques and things, and signing - I used to attend board meetings there too with the directors, and keep the minutes of the board meetings and things like that. For the last few years I was assistant manager, and acting manager.

(Incidental conversation)

END OF TAPE TWO (Microcassette)

START OF TAPE 3 (Microcassette 2A)

Identification: David Chalk interviewing Horace Rumble, Perth 30th March 1988

Was the...your early life, your background. And what I thought I might do first of all is just get your birthdate from you.

My birthday is the 18th June 1889.

1889.

Yes.

And whereabouts were you born?

In Reading, in England.

Were you, yes. Who were your mother and father?

They were – my father was a civil engineer. He came out here from England, and joined C. Y. O'Connor – staff, building the Fremantle Harbour. They had little old offices there with an old-fashioned lounge right on the water's edge. And the harbour wasn't open because no ships could come in. There was a bar right across the mouth of the river, solid rock, and it came up within about a foot or so from the surface. And they had to cut all this out. My father – we came out in 1897.

Did you, so you'd be about eight years old then.

Yes. He came out here, and after – my father, he was only just a qualified civil engineer, and he must have been only in his late 30s, and he brought out two sons with him. Both born in England, and we lived in a two-storey house in Fremantle in those days. And he worked in these offices right on the sea coast. And he and a lot of the younger civil engineers got very interested in fishing. And they even got me into it too. Bought me a rod. I used to wag it from school and go fishing. I remember I – they had a small sailing boat, and in 1899 when I was ten, we sailed across to Rottnest Island. That was the first time I had been to sea under sail.

That's a long time ago isn't it.

A long time ago. But the island was then a convict prison, and the prisoners were all black. They had a white staff there. We were only allowed to anchor in Thompson's Bay, which faces north-east. We were only allowed to anchor in Thompson's Bay, about 300 yards from the shore. But it was lousy with fish. Over a leisurely lunch we caught a tub full of fish. And then we sailed back to Fremantle in the afternoon with a fairly howling sea breeze. And I was put up forehead, with this arm around the main stay, hanging on. And I got – collected every wave all the way to Fremantle. And when I got to the shore at Fremantle, when I went home, the house rolled about all over the place like this. And when I was going up to bed at night, the stairs were rolling around. But the next morning all that had disappeared. But that gave me a taste for yachting. And by the time of the first war I'd had three yachts of my own, and one, I'd only just put in the water, and hadn't raced or anything. And I started to race it. I kept it in store when I went to the war. I kept it in store under my brother's care. I put a shed of my own down there to keep it intact. Unfortunately the Council said they hadn't approved this, and it had to be taken down. So my brother took it down, and he then started to use the boat himself.

What was the name of the boat?

Mercedes.

Oh, you always called them Mercedes, didn't you.

(Incidental conversation)

What was your father's name?

He was Harry Humphrey Rumble. He had been the London County Council as a civil engineer.

He came from Reading too, did he?

Oh no. We were only happened to be there temporarily. Our home town was Eastbourne on the coast, Sussex. That's where the Rumbles had a big three-storey home there. I've forgotten the name of the street.

And what was your mother's name?

She was a Miss Knight, and she was Katie Roselly Knight. And she and her sister, there were only two sisters in the Knight family, and they married two Rumble brothers.

Did they. Oh that's interesting.

One came out here, and the other stayed in England. So we had no relatives out here from England at all. I didn't actually go and meet any of my relatives, although I had met them when I was a baby. I went home, and I went round in the first war. I dug them all up then.

This would be 1919, I suppose.

I remember one aunt of mine looking at this (his hand) and saying, "To think I washed this little hand when you were a little baby. I borrowed you from your mother." She was a specialist nurse, who made quite a lot of money travelling with rich people on the Continent, and doing all special work like that. She retired pretty early. When I got back there in the war she had retired, and she had plenty of property, and she was well-off. She'd only been going out with rich people travelling the Continent. She showed me some of the rings they gave her. She had diamond rings worth a couple of hundred pounds. She'd done very well. But they all died. I took my wife back there in 1955. Her parents from – her mother and father came from Oxford. I took her round to see that University, and – I bought a new car for delivery in London. That was in 1955 and I drove 6,000 miles around England.

That would be a good way to go, wouldn't it.

Oh yes, it took me nine months. In the meantime, I went across to the Continent. I visited France, Belgium, Austria, Germany, and Italy. I went down as far as Rome. No further than that. I went to Monte Carlo, and all those places. And drove my wife around. But she was Australia, but her parents were English. She liked driving around seeing England. We took a leisurely course, and just pulled up at some comfortable hotels at night, and stayed one, two, or three nights, just as we fancied. Then we went around exploring the neighbourhood.

Why did your father come out to Australia?

I don't know. I've never found out why, because he had a good job in the London County Council. And I met his old uncle, who was a doctor, and he told me he could never understand why. This old doctor, he got on well with the Rumbles womenfolk, but he didn't like men. But he took to me. He used to me in and we would have a bottle of wine and a few drinks. And he said he could never understand why my father went to Australia. So I couldn't find out either.

How many of there were you that had come out? How many in the family?

Only the two boys.

You had a brother?

I had a brother born in England.

What was his name?

His name was Eric. He founded that firm of Rumbles Limited, wholesale chemists in Perth. A good business, but he was killed in a car accident. My other brothers – my father lived to 82, and two of my other brothers died at 82. That's funny. This fellow, he was younger, and he had this car smash, and smashed himself up badly, and he never really regained consciousness.

And so when your mother and father came out, there were the two boys, yourself and Eric. And they had more children here in Australia.

They did. They had five more. I was the eldest of seven.

Are any of them still alive, or not?

There is one still alive, only one, the youngest. She is in her early 80s.

And where did you go to school?

Oh, all over the place. My father had to travel round a lot. When I went to the war he was visiting engineer in Bunbury building the Bunbury Harbour. And he was getting all these ballasts or out at Allen Rollins, where he put in the largest blast in one hit in Australia. He brought down enough granite in one blast to build the whole of the breakwater at Bunbury. I went all round, to all sorts of schools.

How long were you at school?

Oh till about sixteen, that's all. In 1905 I joined the staff of the National Mutual Life Assurance. I joined them and I stayed with them for fifty years, and I worked from the bottom to the top. When I

retired I was acting-manager of the WA branch. It's a Melbourne firm, created in Melbourne in 1869. I worked through everything. When my typist used to complain about the typing or anything. "No use worrying about that," I said, "when I joined in the head office in Melbourne, and in Perth, we had no typewriters whatever." And I said, "I operated the first typewriter in the WA branch, and I typed the first letters." In the early days the general manager in Melbourne wrote by hand to us. And for a long time it went per *RMS China*, which was the mailboat coming through from London. Mails were very infrequent, and we had no telegraph lines.

It would be isolated.

In my first year we had I reckon some of the best directors in any company in Australia. We had Sir John Forrest for a start. He was the chairman. You've heard of him, have you.

No, I haven't, no.

Oh God, he was premier of Western Australia.

I'm not a Western Australian, although I should have heard of him.

He was the best premier of the lot. He was our chairman, and we had Charles Harper. He was the owner of the *West Australian* then. And then we had Septimus Burt, who was a KC, one of the top lawyers. There is a whole family of Burts. But I stayed with that company right through for fifty years. I'm still on their books. They pay my cheque every month. It was the second oldest company in Australia. The AMP would be ahead of it by about twenty years.

Whereabouts were they in Perth at that time, before the war?

St Georges Terrace. They had a three-storey building there when I joined, and that was the highest building in Perth. It was built in 1887, which was before my time. It was the highest building in Perth, and they had the fire brigade down to see if the hoses would reach the top floor, and they just did. Well I started work in that old 1887 building.

That was your first job was it?

Yes, and my last!

How did you get the job?

Well, I just applied for it. Wrote a letter, and I went in and I was interviewed by the manager, and then I was appointed. And the day I should have started I went off fishing. I caught a lot of fish too. But I went through that office from A to Z. I am the eldest retired man. I retired from there in 1954.

So that trip you had to England was after you retired.

After I'd retired. Well, of course, I had been there before. I got leave of absence to go to the war, and I had my pay continued, and transferred to London during the war. I had money there in the bank in London, without drawing on the small pittance you got when you were in hospital. Because I was in hospital for about a year in London. I came back on the old *Karoola*, one of those ships which were turned into a hospital ship. She was only about 3,000 tons or so, or might be 5,000 tons.

It was a hospital ship.

Fitted out beautifully as a hospital ship, all painted white with red crosses and everything. A big nursing staff on board. I was waiting in hospital in the West End of London for some time to get onto a hospital ship to come home. And I got back here in 1919, and I promptly went back to my old office. After taking enough time to purchase a house and furniture, and get married.

Whereabouts did you meet your wife?

I met her on this third yellow line, just before the war. The last one I built.

That was Mercedes.

I met her on that. I built that when I was 24, and I met her on board, in a little sailing party that we had on the Swan River. She was 19. And there it was. And we had four kids of our own, two boys and two girls. The two boys went away to the second war. The younger one was in the Navy, and the older one was in the Artillery.

And the boat that you built, can you describe the Mercedes, the third boat that you built? What was she like?

Oh, yes was a plumb stern-and-bow boat, 27 feet overall, and 9'6" beam. But she was a heavy boat. She carried a ton of ballast. She was an eight ton boat, and she one a lot of races. And she was a beautiful sea boat.

What did you call it? A plumb..?

A plumb stern-and-bow boat. The stern was vertical and the bow was vertical. She had a ton of ballast in her too. I used to carry a crew of six. Pity I haven't got that photo here. I got a – the Royal Perth Yacht Club – last Saturday my son was sailing down there, and before the presentation of prizes, they presented this picture to my son to take home to me. Because I'm still a...

You're a life member.

I've done all sorts of jobs out at the Club in the past. But I haven't been sailing actively since 1977, on account of both my legs were going bung. I had rheumatoid arthritis in both of them, and this one was very bad. In fact I'd been in here (hospital) in traction for three weeks – head down and feet up in the air, with lumps of lead on the end of them. I've had a lot of trouble over these legs, and they were getting progressively worse as I got towards the end of 1977, and I had then taken home all the sails. I used to take it to pieces every year. Take home all the bolts. Get the crew to take out all the bolts, repaint it before we went back. All the wire rigging was taken down and put in oil for the winter. I used to look after her alright, and do an immense amount of work. I did all the wire splicing with this one hand. I was splicing six strands of wire, and I put every strand through three times, that's eighteen times in every splice. It was heavy work for this. But I had a nice bench at home with a nice steel vice in place of my right hand, on the right-hand end of the bench. And I used to work quietly in there. They were all done very methodically. I fancied myself I could splice a wire rope as fast as a man with two hands.

No, you develop new skills don't you.

Oh yes, that was a nice hobby, being an office man all my life. But earlier, before, I started sailing, I used to play lacrosse. I was captain of the lacrosse team here years and years ago. I think I played lacrosse up until about 1912. In 1912 we started building the Mercedes, and I sold my second cruiser. I had two cruisers, before that I sailed. And I sold those.

But the last one you built yourself.

Partly. I had an offsider with me too. See you want two men for rivetting. One's inside the boat and one is outside.

What kind of timber was it built out of?

New Zealand kauri. All New Zealand kauri. The spars were American spruce.

What kind of rig did it have?

It had various rigs. The very first one was a jib, and a mainsail, and a topsail. From then out, I amalgamated – I had a boom on the boat twenty-five feet long. I gradually cut the boom down until I got it over the years down to twenty feet. And then I got the sail much higher to include the topsail in the mainsail, and the sail was pretty well straight up and down the mast, like a modern sailor. When I came back in 1919, I designed new sails and made frequent alterations. I went taller and narrower.

What were you being paid in your first job?

I can't remember. I'm being paid quite a lot of money now every month. I'm getting more money now than I was getting as acting-manager. No, the firm's been very generous, and its 33 years since I retired, and they give me a liberal cost-of-living allowance every year during that time.

They had a cadet training program before the war?

No. When I joined the staff in Perth I made seven on the staff.

Yes, but I mean, I was talking about the army cadets. They had a training program for young men, were you involved in that.

No, I was not involved in that. I had never had anything to do with the army until I joined. I got leave of absence from my firm.

Why did you join up? What was the reason?

Oh well, all my pals were joining up you see. And I wanted to be in it too. The same in the second war, my youngest son went into the Navy when he was seventeen – on his seventeenth birthday. And he came to his mother, and talked it over with mother, and his mother talked it over with me. She said, “What do you think?” He was going in to the Navy with a bosum pal of his. He was also going in to – they had been pals all their lives. And they were going in together. “Well he’s going to go into something similar later. He might just as well go in with his pal.” He went in fast destroyers. He was sailing with those.

What was your parents attitude to you joining up?

Oh I don’t think they cared a damn. It was up to me, you see, I was...

Were you living at home then?

No, my father had moved down to Bunbury. I was still living in Perth, in a boarding house. In a place near the Swan River. I was sailing a lot again.

When did you first join the Royal Perth Yacht Club?

Oh, only when I came back – in 1919. I’m the oldest member there now. I’ve been an honorary life member for at least thirty years. (Incidental conversation about the RPYC).

Whereabouts did you enlist?

I went to the drill hall in Perth. Then I was in Blackboy Hill Camp, and I was in NCO school down at Claremont.

Did you?

I finished there as sergeant. I was hoping to go further, but they were short of sergeants, and there was a reinforcement just going, so they bunged me on to that.

That was the 19th wasn't it?

Something like that. Yes. John Brennan used to pour liquid through my clenched teeth, and he used to eat my two slices of black bread. He had four and I had none. And I just dwindled down then from fourteen stone to six. Oh I was a wreck.

(Break in interview)

What did they get you doing when you went up to Blackboy Hill?

We were marching and drilling all over the place there in the hills, shooting and everything.

Did you go for any route marches?

Oh plenty. I was a sergeant then, you see, and I had a platoon to take round.

How many men would that be? About a hundred I suppose.

Not quite a hundred. About eighty. I would take them out on physical jerks before breakfast, and around the hill and had to bring them back them. We marched on a route march from Blackboy Hill, which is up beyond Midland, and we marched from there right through to Nedlands. Right through Perth to Nedlands. And we all camped in the bush out by the Nedlands Hotel, and I handed my blankets to some of the men in my platoon, and booked in to the pub for bed-and-breakfast. I know in the evening I came into Perth to see my intended.

What was her name at that time?

She was Vera Louise Glover. And her father at one time was secretary of the stock exchange.

They used to get leave into Perth of a night, didn't they?

They had buses right out, and taxis. Broken-down things. I used to run into Perth nearly every night I could. Every night from there I used to run into Perth, until the last few days when we were approaching embarkation.

Did you go down to Bunbury to see your father before you went?

I went down to see the family there, yes. I had my father, mother and three sisters there. They were all in Bunbury. They had a house there. It was quite an historic old house. It used to belong to Sir Newton Moore, who was a well-known resident of Bunbury. He had that place and from there

he had a quarry about ten miles out where he brought down all the granite. And when I came home in 1919 he was still down there doing the job. He hadn't finished. And I went down there on my leave as soon as I got home, and then he was up in Geraldton to build the Geraldton harbour.

Did you have any friends at that time at Blackboy Hill? Was there anybody that you knew well who joined up with you at time, or not?

I suppose I did, but I can't remember them now. The Lieutenant Colonel – in command of the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion. He was killed in Singapore. He was with me up at Blackboy. I can remember him before the war. There were three brothers.

How do you spell their name?

ANKETELL. I believe the eldest one was Mick Anketell. He stayed in the army after the first war. He rose to be a lieutenant-colonel and went back in charge of the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion to Singapore. And he was killed there. When my wife and I were going to England we went out to Changi graveyard, and there on the side of the hill was Ankatell's grave looking out on all the members of his battalion who were buried there. They had a bad time. He was a bright chap. I've forgotten his brothers now, but we knew them pretty well. They used to be keen on yachting down the river.

What was it you did when you went on leave with your fiance? Were you engaged at that time, or not.

I was engaged before I went to the war. We were married as soon as I came back. I didn't go straight back to the office, which they thought was a bit tough. I had leave and I have to find a house, and they were hard to find in 1919 with troops coming back. I bought a place in Nedlands from the Roman Catholic archbishop of Perth. It wasn't for sale, but I got hold of the land agent and I got him to go and persuade him. I said, "I can't find a house, anywhere, but I'll go and see the archbishop and see if he will sell his house. It is not for sale. But he was using it as a rest house in the summer." We were on the side of the hill with a nice view. And he agreed to sell, and I lived there for 54 years, before I came over here to Dalkeith.

Yes.

I can't do anything around the house now. I've got no wrist there. That's all solid. This was rotten right up to about here. Gangrene, and it took five solid months to heal that. But in the prisoner-of-war camp I had to tie that up with paper. That was pretty rough. It was hygienic. We were tying it up with our naked hands. We had no antiseptics. Nothing at all. Nothing to put on. Just to put the rag straight on.

What kind of treatment did that Russian doctor give you?

Oh it wasn't a Russian doctor?

I thought it was a Russian who came...

No, he was a young...he did nothing beyond putting injections into the lumbar region of my spine. He did nothing at all else. And he didn't make any arrangements about feeding me anything. All he did was come over. He wanted to experiment. He had nothing to do with us. He was an army doctor.

He was a German.

He was in a German hospital, but he hadn't any experience of a tetanus case. He asked the old doctors – and the fellow who told me I had tetanus, he couldn't do anything for me. He said that I would only last 24 hours. Well, he met him one day, and this young fellow said he was looking for a tetanus case to experiment on. So the old boy told him he had one, and put him on to me. He was very pleased when he had me up before a big German board of old – elderly doctors with Iron Crosses on their chests. And he had a book like this – bigger than this.

Yes, a big book.

And he read it all out what he'd done to me. I was exhibit A, and then he turned around then and tapped me on the shoulder, and he said, "You are very lucky, Rumbley." I didn't even know his name. I never saw him again after that. Then I was sent post-haste to this big working camp, which had 30,000 people in it.

Was that at Friedrichsfeld? Where was that?

That was at Soltau. I was out at Windsor once talking to one of the princesses...

(Break in interview)

Yes, you played lacrosse in the winter.

Then I sold my yacht in 1912, and started in on this third boat. That didn't come into active use until 1919 when I came back from the war.

How long did it take you to build it?

Oh, about twelve months.

Oh, that's not that long is it.

Oh, there were a couple of us going on. We had a lot of the wood on hand you see from a boat builder who had gone bankrupt. And we used his shed too for a while, rented it.

Where were you building it?

Just by the jetty at South Perth. Where the ferry goes across. As soon as we got the hull watertight, no deck, we took it around to a private house in South Perth and we put up a shed there. And we finished it there without paying any rent.

(Break in interview)

Identification: Horace Rumble – Tape 1 Continued 31 March 1988

You were telling me the other day that you switched reinforcements, didn't you. You were a 19th Reinforcement.

I took the 19th to France. They were short of sergeants you see.

You were a sergeant when you went away were you?

Yes.

I think you were telling me there two of you?

Two what?

Two sergeants.

Oh, they had a sergeant for each platoon. There were four platoons. Each reinforcement has four platoons, and four sergeants and four corporals, and four lance corporals. And each platoon had a commissioned officer too.

What caused the changeover from the 20th to the 19th?

We were training on Salisbury Plain, and they found that when the 19th was ready to go across there, they were short of sergeants for the 19th, and so they switched me over to a new mob altogether. The fellows I had trained with in Perth, well I left behind in England.

That would be hard. And you wouldn't know any of the new...

I didn't know any of the new fellows, but that didn't matter. I knew some of the older hands.

Whereabouts did you join up with the Battalion? Can you remember the month when you went across to France?

Oh no. I know it was winter. It was terrible weather. We had a shocking night crossing. I had to put one of my platoon in hospital from seasickness when we got across.

The whole platoon?

He was – the boat was swept with waves. Three destroyers escorted us across, and the destroyers were heaving out of the water, showing a third of their keel, and then they were plunging in and the next wave was going right over the bridge. Oh they were having a hell of a time. I thought of my son. He served in destroyers in the second war. One time he was out there a big wave washed eleven fellows overboard. They never saw them again. Over the side they went. But we picked a stormy purpose because we had a troopship full of troops, you see, and they reckoned that on a night like that no submarines would be out.

Yes, well that would be safer that way.

It was a filthy night. Oh, filthy night. One of the filthiest passages that I've had.

Were you seasick?

No.

No, I suppose you had been sailing. You'd be used to it. And whereabouts did you go to in France? Bologne, I suppose.

No, not Bologne. We went from Folkestone to Bologne. It was a fair trip across you see. It's not like the Dover to Calais. You can see across there. But Folkestone to Bologne is a fair distance. We waddled across there, and water ran everywhere. Down below it went. Nobody was dry anywhere. Terrible. There it was.

And did you go through Etaples? At the Bull Ring?

Oh yes, they had us there. That was a camping ground. Now I joined up there with another sergeant from Fremantle, and he said that the British army Tommies were taking charge of all this training here, and he said, "You don't want to go to it." March your platoon out there in the morning, and put your equipment down there, and come off to me into one of the villages, and we'll have some eggs or something else. Don't go through all these parades. Skip them." There was a lecture on war injuries. They'd tell you what to do, you see. To give you an idea, the only thing they didn't tell me was that if I ever had a tourniquet around here and I was supposed to move it every half-hour. They didn't tell me that. And I couldn't have, because I had my field dressing over this, then I had a big ball of snow over it and I wasn't going to touch it. But it had stopped bleeding, you see. It started to turn red, and then it all froze. It was damn near as big as a small soccer ball. I had another handkerchief with me, and I tied it across here.

Up above your elbow.

That's when I should have released this one.

Around your wrist.

Every half-hour. Of course I had no chance of it whatever.

And you went through the Bull Ring did you? Did you spend a couple of weeks training at Etaples, or not?

I didn't train there at all. I handed my platoon over to the British instructors, and picked my gear up afterwards, and I went into a sergeants mess, and waddled in drink and so on. And I was with a fellow named – I think it was Sergeant Pratley from Fremantle. He had been over there before, you see. He said, he advised me, "Don't go on these parades. But he said, the medical lecture is worth listening to." Well I did a real elope there, and I was pulled up by some of the British authorities who were running it there, and they hailed me one time, and wanted to know what I was doing. And I told him I was in the mess, you see. In the camp we had a wonderful Christmas dinner there. Oh fights and everything, fellows up on the tables afterwards.

This is 1916. Was that at Etaples, or was that with the Battalion?

It was sort of a staging camp. Everyone went to Etaples. They all went there.

So you joined up with the Battalion in early 1917.

They were right up near, not too far from the Hindenburg Line.

Yes, you joined them up when they were up there, near Bapaume and Norreil.

Bapaume they were, when I first joined them. And that was all blown to bits too. We used to camp in some of these broken-up towns, wondering whether they would go up during the night or not with explosions. But they were pretty safe. Nothing happened.

So not long after you joined the battalion you went up to the sunken road to attack the Hindenburg Line.

Yes, well we went out there first on the 9th of April. We got out there ready. And the tanks were supposed to come up and precede us, but they didn't turn up. And so we stayed there in the sunken road, which was in sight of the German lines, and at daylight we all bolted back to our own lines where we had come from, under fire. Nobody was hit. We all got back safely, but it did show – it

put away the show, that we were going to attack. And we went out to that sunken road again the next night, and 4.30 in the morning we went over to attack them.

That night you were with a friend. You had a cake didn't you?

Oh yes, that was the chap I was with. He was a South Australian. I can't think of his name now. He had a South Australian company. He was in the 16th Battalion. And this chap had got a cake from a sister in one of the hospitals in London. A cake to eat you see. And we were looking around for somewhere to sleep. And we were in a sunken road, from where you could see the Hindenburg Line across a thousand yards of frozen snow. It was just like a billiard table. So in the daytime you couldn't possibly cross this. You'd be blown to bits. We didn't know what to do there. We decided we wanted some sleep somewhere, and we found a grave containing a German bloke, who was dead. And he had a bloodstained blanket over him. So we tossed him out into the snow, and we kept his blanket, enlarged the grave a bit so we could get in there, and then we put the blanket over the top to stop us from bits of debris falling in, you see, when shells exploded. Bits of dirt and stuff. And threw that across the top to cover us, and he, poor chap, had to stay out in the snow. So we covered our bed, and we debated whether we would all the cake now, or we'd save half for tomorrow. And we then decided that we might not be alive tomorrow, so we went ahead and ate all the cake. At 4.30 this time, away we went, over the top. But the previous night, we had to get out of these quarters, with the ammunition boxes and god knows what, and rush back to our own lines. And we got shelled in the process. And not only that, we showed our hand.

The Germans knew you were coming?

Oh of course they did.

And then about 4.30 on the morning of the 11th, you went. What was it like going across those eleven hundred yards? It was dark wasn't it.

It was so white, the snow. It wasn't safe to cross there in daylight. If it had been I would have come back during the day. I wanted to get back to our own dressing station after dark. They wouldn't be able to see anybody running across this snow. I thought I could hobble across there. But one or two fellows did get across that night – before we were retaken. Before we were bombarded and counter-attacked, they got across. So there it was.

And how much shellfire was there as you were going across towards the barbed wire at the Hindenburg Line.

Plenty. More than shellfire, there was machine gun fire. The whole place bristled with machine guns. There was a whole concrete fortification. It was the Germans strongest line to fall back on, the Hindenburg Line. It had been put in some time before. Although the top was just mud and rubbish. They didn't have any concrete on the top, but they were well made. But when they got back a bit, they had concrete entrances – in the second line, they had plenty of concrete entrances going down, fully sixty feet.

Yes they were deep weren't they.

As a matter of fact I was down there when the Germans counter-attacked. I was waiting. I thought, well very soon I'll go up on top and hop across. While I was arguing the point with the stretcher bearers to see if they could use a bandage for me – they couldn't. They'd used every bit. Down the steps came a platoon of armed Germans. They had already taken the thing back. And they said, "All those who can walk come on top." So all of us who could walk came up top, and then they marched us back to Riencourt, which was the first village back behind their line. And they shut us in the battered old church, with the roof half-smashed. They locked us in there all night, and the next day they sorted us all out at daybreak. And they kept all the unwounded fellows there, and formed them into a working party to work behind the German lines for the rest of the war. That chap was working behind the German lines when the war finished. He never saw Germany. Never went into it. Did you see him?

No, I haven't seen him, but I will be going to see him.

It will be difficult to talk to him. He has a spring thing around him with two earpieces, and then from here it goes to a metal, and you have to speak into that. It's a hard job.

How did you get through the German wire?

I went through a hole cut by the British tank. But you see the British tanks weren't wide. They wouldn't have cut a hole bigger than between that door and that.

About fifteen feet.

They went straight through acres of wire. All our fellows were strewn dead all the way through, over the wire. About 75% of those going through there were killed getting across. It was a real slaughter.

Did you see Percy Black killed?

Yes, he was half-way across there. About half-way across. He was in charge of the Battalion. Colonel Margolin was in charge, but he was sitting back at headquarters, you see. He didn't personally go in the thing. Later on he was president of the local sub-branch of the RSL.

END OF TAPE THREE

START OF TAPE FOUR (Microcassette 2B 31/3/88)

It's a wonder I got through. But you had to get through, you see. And after we got through there we had to capture two lines of trenches.

Yes.

But we had our 4th Brigade and the 16th Battalion.

Did you see Black at all? Or did you just hear that he had been killed?

I didn't see him after he was killed, no. Because I was pressing on, we were carrying on. And my commanding officer was a fellow named Lindsay Gowery, who was the son of the then proprietor of the Palace Hotel in Perth. And when we got through – he got shot in the leg. I think a couple of his men picked him up. And then he got shot through the head. He was killed. He didn't last at all. He was the man in charge of my company – no, my platoon.

How many men were there down in the dugout that you went down into?

Oh, I don't know, but it was packed full.

Would there have been fifty, or more?

Oh, more than that. There could have been one hundred down there. You see, a lot of the fellows had gone down there to get their wounds bandaged. And the stretcher-bearers established down there, but by the time I got down there they hadn't got a bandage left. Not a stitch. So they said, "You'll have to make do with what you've got." But I had to make do for the next five days, and when it was taken off everything was black.

No, that was extraordinary, wasn't it. When you got into the trench at Bullecourt, did you seek help for your wound straight away, or did you just try and bandage it up yourself.

I started to bandage it up myself. I bandaged it up myself before I went down there. I was bleeding like a pig. Before I – I didn't even know where the stretcher bearers were. I had to enquire. They were in the second line of trenches that we got, not in the first line.

You were hit between the first and second line weren't you.

Yes. And I spent my time – with another fellow, tying things round here. I tied it up as best I could. Then I thought, well I will find the stretcher-bearers. I wanted to stop the bleeding. It was pouring with blood, you see. Well, that's no good, I must stop that. And I stopped it alright, because it had a ball as big as that, red snow, when I finished. Snow something, all turned red. Oh, it's a long time ago now.

And they took you back to the church. And you stayed there overnight.

Yes, it was an old church. We all sat in the pews there. We had nothing to eat or drink. We just sat there with our elbows on the pews in front, and rested as well as we could during the night. It was nothing to laugh at. Most of the fellows there were wounded. There were only a few not wounded, but swollen up and sick.

They would all have been in pain generally? Were you in pain, or was your hand numb?

No, it had gone numb then, you see, with the snow on it, and it got frozen. But it was painful in the ward. Oh yes, it was a kick when I got it. It was a hard kick when I got it. I didn't know what had hit me. I looked down and I found the whole hand in pieces. All splintered into bits of bone. None of the fingers were intact. They were all in knots of about five or six pieces each. All bits of bone. It was a hell of a mess to tie up. Very hard to tie up too. It wasn't easy. It was a very difficult thing to tie up.

And from the church, you went by train to Munster didn't you?

We went by train to Munster, where there was a lazarette. That was a small enclosure. I don't know how big it was now. But we only about a couple of hundred wounded in there, and they put us into hard bare wooden beds. When they got us there they stripped us of everything, stark naked. Whatever bandage we had on came off too. And they put two Russians to shave us all over. And we had one tin bath to wash in. And that was filthy. There was all blood and rubbish, you see. The Russians shaved us with an open razors from head to foot. And they took our uniforms, shoved them into an incinerator or something, into a...

A fumigator.

They gave me my uniform back, and I had a sheepskin coat, and that had all been through the heat, and they weren't worth a damn. A wouldn't have anything to do with them. At the same time, they gave me this parcel of clothing from the Red Cross which was good stuff like this.

That was at Soltau, wasn't it? Oh no, that was at Munster, wasn't it. You got the Red Cross clothes at Munster, didn't you.

Before I left, yes. Because then I had to go down to the siding – this siding at Munster Lazarette which was about three miles down. And we marched down there. All this clothing was new, so it was terrible marching down there. And then we were put in the train. There were quite a few troops, you know. And some had legs off too. And do you know they gave us a big heavy farm wagon, with no power, and we with legs had to pull chains, and pull that damn wagon down to the station, about three miles. It was heavy going, but we went through the village at Munster, or whatever it was, all singing like fun. People opened their windows, and thought we were a lot of mad Englishmen. From there we got into this train and off we went.

When you were in Munster you dwindled down to six stone. You told me last time that your shoulder blades came right through your skin.

My shoulder blades did. Prior to that though, some parcels of stuff had arrived from England. The first parcel – I wrote a card to a friend of mine who was a commissioned chap in Horseferry Road, which was the headquarters of the Australians. I wrote to him and told him my plight. I couldn't write, I got this man, John Brennan, to write a card. And he threw the Red Cross sent to me a parcel of twelve tins of condensed Nestles milk. They never reached me. They would be worth a lot in Germany. They never reached me.

You think the Germans stole them do you?

Oh yes, somebody got them. They were pretty short of food, the Germans. Twelve large tins in a parcel was too good, and somebody latched onto those. But the other thing, when were handed parcels at the other parcels. The parcels came through intact, and they were opened by the Germans. Anything he could snatch without being chopped about, well he did.

The parcels came to the German store first did they?

They were delivered to the Germans, or into German hands, and they put it into a store in the camp, with shelves, and all the parcels were on the shelves. And when we came down to get a parcel, they plonked the parcel down in front of us, opened it up and censored everything. Tore everything out of every packet. They tore – a tin of bully beef, they would cut it out. Chopped it up too. Chopped everything up. They used to chop up everything. Open tins, packets, cigarettes. They chopped it all up. They wouldn't give us anything intact. And they wouldn't let us – we weren't supposed to take any tins, but as time went on we accumulated several tins which we would snatch from under their eyes. Tins with lids to keep stuff in. Oh it was a funny sort of business. We had to be pretty alert there. I didn't smoke there anyhow. When I had tetanus I couldn't smoke in any case. I was too far gone then.

You were telling me yesterday about the doctor who helped you from tetanus. He was a German wasn't he.

Yes, he was a German in a German military hospital near by this lazarette, which was full of a couple of hundred Australian prisoners-of-war. Wounded. He wasn't anything to do with us, but he met this old doctor – they were both in uniform, of course. He was young, and he met this one, and he said he was looking round for a tetanus case to experiment on, because he had never had one. And the old German said, "Oh, you're lucky, because I've got one over here in the lazarette." So it was lucky for me. Very lucky. I'd have been dead meat otherwise.

And he gave you these injections in your lumbar, or your spine.

Into the spine, the lumbar region of the spine. Always into the spine. And after a while you could feel these injections starting to move into my body.

Could you?

And I began to look forward to them. And he spent a lot of money on injections.

How long was he doing that for – a month, or two months?

Oh, more than that. A fair time.

Three months?

Well, he didn't have me up before a board with his big sheaf of notes he had made of me until the end of five months.

And he had a big sheaf of notes?

He had a big thing – it took time to read it all out to these old cows. And when he had read it all out, he just turned round to me, and patted me on the shoulder, and he said, "You are very lucky, Rumbley." That's the only time I ever heard him speak a word of English. He said, "You are very lucky, Rumbley." Well he sent me back to the camp, and the camp then dishd up the clothes from the Red Cross, which they had had waiting there for some time for when I was healed. And I got into that immediately, and was sent down to the railway, and sent by rail to this Soltau place.

Did you go on your own?

Oh no, they took a party. We took a party down there in a big farm wagon, towed by hand. It was a great big heavy thing.

That was when you were repatriated wasn't it, back to....

No, no. We then went to a prisoner-of-war camp with 30,000 prisoners in it. That was at Soltau.

Oh I see, I thought....

No, I spent the rest of my time there, until they decided then on an exchange. And a board came round and they examined all the fellows like myself, who were knocked about, and with limbs missing. They didn't want me to work there you know. As a matter of fact, I was walking there one time in the camp. I had this hand in here, you see.

Inside your coat, yes.

And the camp commandant came along, and we had to salute with the right hand. I didn't salute him, you see. So he barked at me, and turned round. And I pulled this out. And he saluted me, and walked on. He was alright then. But he raged - they wouldn't salute with your left hand. I was carrying this hand in my coat.

I thought that when you were going down to the station pulling that wagon, that that was when you were repatriated to Holland?

Oh no.

That was when you left Munster.

That was when we left Munster. And we had to put all our fellows with no legs in this big truck. All those with leg troubles got into this thing, and all those with good legs had to start towing the damn thing. It was a tremendously heavy wagon. It was made out of young trees. It was high up, with great big wooden wheels too. It took a bit of turning round. It was a hard pull to get it down there.

And you went from Munster down to the railway station.

Yes, about three miles.

Was it, three miles.

Oh yes.

Some of them were mad, weren't they? I think you were telling me some of them were a bit crazy?

Some of the guards?

Some of the prisoners, they'd gone a bit crazy.

Oh yes. Some of them were a bit touched.

You had a batman, didn't you, in Soltau.

I had one of the Russians as a batman.

You had a Russian as a batman?

Yes. I gave him a slice of black bread. I had a couple of bowls of food that I had bought at the canteen. A couple of bowls and a spoon and a knife. And I used to give him this bowl to take out into the frozen snow and wash it. I also gave him my spare shirt. See, I had two shirts, two underpants, two socks. I gave him one of my shirts, and he'd battle about in a pool with ice to wash it. Hang it out. It would be absolutely frozen stiff. He'd bring it in, and I'd hang it up from the roof above my bunk. It would be days before it started to drip water down. It was hard to get anything dry there.

Why did you have a Russian batman? Was that to help him, or was it just to...

Well, they were starving. They were looking around to get bits of bread. And this bloke came to bargain to get some of this black bread we didn't want. They knew we had plenty of stuff from the Red Cross and we wouldn't need the black bread. They had it in there, and they tried to trade with us. Some smoked herrings they had. And I saw men come round with one smoked herring apiece. Probably the equivalent of their Red Cross must have sent them a few red herrings.

You used to go for a constitutional walk, didn't you, around the camp?

Oh it was a big thing, about three miles round. I walked round every morning with a fellow from Hobart. I don't know what happened to him eventually. Well eventually from there they decided to pick me eligible for exchange. And my friend from Hobart was picked. He didn't have any visible wound. But you see, I had a piece knocked off. And they were a little bit dubious about exchanging me, because I was a sergeant. I wasn't a sergeant then at all. After I hit the Battalion I lost my stripes.

Did you?

Yes. They told me to take them off. They didn't count there. I took them off. When I was exchanged, they hesitated about me, because they thought I could be used to train troops, being a sergeant. I got cards from home occasionally, always addressed to Sergeant H. Rumble. They looked at that and they didn't like it. But anyhow despite that they actually agreed to exchange me. And that's when I went through across the border at Aachen, went through parts of France, and into Holland. And down to Amsterdam, I think. It's a big seaport there. And the queen of Holland came down to see us all when we were there, with her daughter.

END OF INTERVIEW