

EUGENE ALFRED FATHERS

FIRST WORLD WAR

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

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

I wouldn't mind starting with your Gallipoli reminiscences too.

Difficult question.

Well, it's seventy years ago, I know that. I've talked so far with nearly 30 men like yourself that are from the 13th, the 14th, the 15th, and now the 16th Battalions. As I told you, my story will start about October 1915...

A couple of months before they withdrew from that.

Yes. And go through to the Battle of Bullecourt ...

I wasn't there then.

... April '17. Then I'm going to tell the story of the POWs in Germany. My grandfather was Ernest Chalk. My name is David Chalk. He was my grandfather and he was in the 15th Battalion.

In France?

Yes - in Egypt and France.

That's after Gallipoli?

After Gallipoli. He was captured at Bullecourt.

I had a brother who was captured at Bullecourt, his first time in the line.

What was his name?

Ernest - his name was Ernest.

You're Eugene, aren't you?

Yes. Horrie Ganson knew my brother, I think. I'm not sure about that, but I think he knew my brother. Of course, he's dead now.

What Reinforcement were you?

2nd.

You were a 2nd Reinforcement.

We joined up in Egypt. Well, what do you want me to say?

I know the story fairly well although, I suppose, with Gallipoli I'm not as familiar as I am with the story in France. But still, you would have been at the landing, wouldn't you?

I didn't land at the time - not till later. None of us did I don't think.

None of the 2nd Reinforcements landed on the 25th?

No. The 2nd Reinforcements, as far as I can make out from the fellows that I knew, we were sent from Egypt. We were in Heliopolis. That's where the Battalion was, and we were camped there alongside the New Zealanders. They were camped there, in Zeitoun - a bit further on.

Yes, I know Zeitoun.

We were sent up ostensibly to form, or to represent – oh, wait a minute. We were sent up on a boat called the *Clan McGillivray*.

Yes, I've heard of her.

That's where the 2nd Reinforcements were, and we were supposed to have been the ammunition party and water party. Unload the ammunition off the boat and unloading water in four gallon tins off the boat when they got to Gallipoli. We were at Gallipoli, but we didn't land till a bit later. I can't remember when.

So you stayed on the *Clan MacGillivray*?

Well, we stayed on while the landing was going on. The whole Battalion I don't think landed.

I think they were the 26th, weren't they?

Mm?

I know that most of the battalions of the 4th Brigade landed late in the evening of the 25th.

Something like that, yes. I had a brother in the landing, in the 11th.

Oh did you. Well they were one of the first ashore, weren't they?

Just about, yes. I think they were the first ashore. They went to Gallipoli from Lemnos Island on a warship called the *HMS London*. I'm pretty sure of that. I think the boat that the Battalion went on was the *Haida Pascha*. I'm not sure.

I understand that you were wounded or became ill on Gallipoli.

I was wounded. You can see one mark here for a start.

Oh dear. That's a bullet wound, isn't it?

Yes, came out there. It's a wonder I didn't lose my arm. I was also shot through here.

In the head?

It went that way.

That was close.

I've got my army discharge here where it verifies that I was wounded by 'Gunshot wound, left arm and forehead.'

When was that?

That was just before the evacuation. I don't know when. I think the evacuation took place - from talking to chaps afterwards – I think it was on 20 December.

Yes, it was very late in December.

I was in hospital then, just about.

On Lemnos?

No, no.

Alexandria?

Back in Cairo, in No. 2 General Hospital. My memory is quite good.

Yes, it is.

It's my eyesight, and my legs are not too good.

You're not alone in that. Most of the men that I've talked with have ...

Arthritis?

Oh yes, not very good on their legs and their eyesight is going. I'd say three quarters of them are suffering from ...

This one has gone completely. Well, that's not due to anything like that. I got something in my eye in Fremantle one day. I went in to do a bit of shopping and I got what I thought was a piece of grit in my eye. I put up with it - I tried to wiggle my eye and so forth to try and get it out, but no hope. When I came back home I went up to my doctor up here, and he said, "You've got a nasty eye there." I said, "Yes, it feels like it." He said, "I'd better send you off to Hollywood (Repat Hospital)." So he sent me out to Hollywood, and they told me the same thing. It turned out that I had an ulcerated cornea. All they could treat me with was put drops in my eye. I was there for about a month and then they told me they couldn't do anything more for me, and it's been like that ever since. I'm still getting treatment for it. I have to see the eye specialist every now and again. My next appointment is on 11th of next month. Perhaps this is getting away from ...

Well, you were on the Peninsula then right from the start, almost all the way through?

As far as I was concerned I've got one little ditty to tell you which can be substantiated by anybody who was alive at the time and posted in my section. General Birdwood - well, we used to go swimming, you see, in between ...

When you got a rest.

... and the rest of us used to go swimming. I was swimming there one day and General Birdwood was there. I didn't know who he was. He was talking to me and I was talking to him.

He was in swimming?

He was in swimming and he lost his cygnet ring in the water, as he thought. It turned out that the ring was given to him by his daughter in India, years and years before. Anyway, he was swimming around and - as a kid I was fairly good at diving. I used to dive for pennies and threepenny-bits and so forth.

Where was that?

This is up in Geraldton. I could stay under water for the normal lengthy time. It would be about a minute I suppose, at the outside. And I was feeling around - everyone was looking out from where he, in fact, thought he dived in. And I thought, oh that's funny, there must be a little bit of a current. So I came back and lay down alongside one of the poles on the jetty. Watson's Pier they used to call it. And I found his ring.

He would have been grateful to you.

He asked me to report to his headquarters after his swim, which I duly did. I didn't see him, but I saw his aide, I suppose you'd call it. He took me back and he just gave me two golden sovereigns! And when I came back from there, a little later on, I had a poisoned right toe. We were unloading ammunition. Gun shells, one day, down at Watson's Pier. The shells were brought over on a barge. Luckily they were in baskets. Each shell had a basket to carry it, so you could carry two at a time. 5.9s they were.

They were big shells.

Yes. And then they'd have - I was walking along the barge on a plank on the bottom, and I slipped and I dropped one of the shells on my foot, and I got a poisoned right toe out of it. It was all pussy. In a few days it became all pussy. So they sent me off to hospital and went into the hospital on Lemnos. I was there for a few days. Eventually the pus got so bad that they took my toenail off. That was the only really exciting experience as far as I was concerned.

You would have been up on Pope's Hill, I suppose, would you?

I was for a start, yes. I was one of Colonel Margolin's - he wasn't a colonel then, he was only a captain - I was one of his signallers. Afterwards we went down, by the way, further down to the left of there... or facing Gallipoli from the sea. Gabe Tepe was on the right hand side. Further down there, we were out on two outposts. There was Beck's Bluff and another place by the name of Warwick Castle. Where they got their names from I don't know. It was on Beck's Bluff that I got hit.

That's where you were hit, was it?

Yes - doing nothing except going down ... No, I'm a bit ahead of myself. Where we were then, there was a tunnel dug right through a hill - straight through the hill - so we didn't have to climb over the hill to get up to the Bluff. You would walk through there, then there was a communication trench up the top of Beck's Bluff. Anyhow, one day I wanted to write a letter. I went to my haversack where I used to keep my writing pad and found it wasn't there. So I thought, oh well, my mate must have got it. Anyway, he was up on the Bluff. And I went through the hill - you didn't have to give a reason, you just walked - and I got there. And when I got there they were picking up some rum that they'd been issued with. My cobbler asked me if I'd like a drink, and I said, "Oh yes, I'll have a drop." I didn't drink much. While I was standing there talking to him - Bang! The next thing I knew I was ...

It was a machine-gun, was it?

No, it must have been a gun. It could have been shrapnel. I don't know. You don't know these things.

You don't know what happens apparently.

You get a good whack, I know that much. Then I had to walk down from there, right down to Anzac Cove to the jetty. Off the jetty they had a casualty clearing station - a big marque tent. I think this was at night-time. I had to walk right down from Beck's Bluff. I think somebody came with me, but I'm not sure of that. I don't think I would have made it on my own so I think somebody would have had to come with me to make sure that I was okay. I didn't mind this so much. Well, it hurt like hell, my head was ...

Bleeding?

Yes, bleeding and bits spinning round. If I tried to open my eye - I would sort of half open it - and all I could see was green. I don't know why but it was this bright green colour. I think that's normal when you get something like that. I don't know. Now from there, I remember getting down there, and I remember laying down on the ground, and I remember some chappie next-door to me hitting me on the head with his mess tin. He didn't know what he was doing. He just whacked me on the head. The next thing I know, I'm in hospital in Egypt, in Heliopolis.

No. 2 Hospital?

Oh sorry, No. 2 at Gazzira, over the Kasr-el-Nil Bridge. They were camped near the bridge in Cairo.

It's near the barracks; the barracks were one side and ...

I don't remember seeing any barracks.

Over near the Kasr-el-Nil Bridge.

Anyway, we had to go over the bridge in any case, and the No. 2 Hospital was ... when you got to the end of it you'd take a sharp turn to your left and that was No. 2 Hospital. A big place it was. That's where I put in a few weeks - I don't know how many.

How long did you spend in Egypt? When did the 2nd Reinforcements leave? Did they leave with the rest of the Battalion?

No, we left - from memory - I think, early in 1915.

About February or January.

The Battalion left before, I think.

About November they left - end of November.

We left - it was after Christmas anyhow, and I think it was sometime early in January. It took us about a month to get to Egypt from Fremantle - a boat called the *Itonus*. I remember that. And I remember then landing at - when we got to Aden we were challenged by a sentry up top somewhere - by a great big searchlight shining on us - asking us what our name was and number. The boat had a number - A50 I think it was. The next thing we know we are up through the Red Sea and up to Suez. Then we went overland from Suez to Cairo.

Yes, on the train.

On the train. We were quartered then in the barracks - not barracks, an open air camp - at Abbassia. Abbassia Barracks is where ...

It used to be a prison.

A military prison, I think it was. That's where we put in our two or three weeks until they sent us over to the Battalion.

What did it look like at Abbassia. Can you describe it? It was a suburb, wasn't it?

Part of Cairo I think it was really, so it must have been a suburb. Anyhow, it was a big place - British military prison. From there we went out to Heliopolis. The Battalion was camped on the desert there, and that's where we put in time until we were ...

Till April?

Till early April - it must have been. Then we got on this boat, the *Clan MacGillivray*. From then on you know the rest, more or less.

What memories do you have of Cairo?

Oh, nothing startling, except that we had to go down there. We used to go to the Ezbekiah Gardens. Have you been there?

No I haven't been to Cairo, but I have seen maps and I know where you are talking about.

The Ezbekiah Gardens are almost in the centre of Cairo. An Egyptian military band used to play there practically every day, and we used to go there and mostly listen to the music when we were in Cairo. When you were free of your military duties you used to please yourself from that respect. Of course, if you were out where the 11th Battalion were, out at Mena camp - at the Pyramids.

That was about nine miles out, wasn't it?

Twelve miles out. You'd get out there and then you'd have to get permission to get into Cairo, but from where we were we didn't.

Heliopolis was close.

Oh yes.

You went in on a tram, didn't you?

An electric tram. It only took about ten minutes to get into Cairo - that's all, if I remember rightly.

What else did Ezbekiah Gardens have?

Just the band music.

It was like a park, was it?

Sort of, yes - sort of a small park fenced in with - I think it was iron fencing with iron spikes on the top, I think. Then we used to go down to what was called the Mouski - the bazaar - where they used to sell all sorts of things - silks and lord knows what. Anything like that.

How do you spell Mouski?

I think it was M-O-U-S-K-I. I don't know, I'm only guessing. That's how it was pronounced anyhow.

Did you ever buy anything there?

Oh yes, I bought a few things and sent them home. Silks and things for my sisters and that. Not too many.

You were a private I assume.

Oh yes. I seemed to suffer for it.

Well, you didn't last long. Well, you were on the Peninsula for a while. Promotion was pretty scarce on Gallipoli, wasn't it?

Promotion - oh yes. You'd have to get killed first or something similar, if you were an NCO or anything else. No, I was just a private.

What did you think of the Egyptians?

Oh, I didn't take any notice of them. I got one souvenir off the Egyptians. One bloke sketched the Australian flag on my arm. That was the Australian flag, and it had ANZAC 1915 across it, but that's worn off.

It was a tattoo?

Tattoo, yes. Had that done on the footpath out on the street. We were only young then. I was eighteen years old. Another thing that I used to like was - when I was in Cairo I used to go to Groppies.

G-R-O-P-P-I-E-S?

Something like that - P-P something. It was a restaurant sort of thing - a serve-yourself restaurant. Go in, take what you wanted, and you just paid for it and came out.

Like a smorgasbord type of thing?

Something like that. I first got there by one of the nurses in the hospital. She took me in there one day. She was going into town. That's from where I was in hospital in Heliopolis. There were two nurses who used to look after me. One used to do my forehead and the other one used to do my arms. My arm was stiff – I couldn't move it for some weeks.

Well, it's hit right in the joint, wasn't it?

Oh yes. As I say, I was pretty damn lucky. I'm lucky this way too.

Oh yes. You could have lost your eye quite easily there.

Could have lost me life too. Oh yes, I was lucky. I didn't stay with the Battalion afterwards. After I came – oh, we were sent down to – onto there - a convalescent place. It wasn't a canvas camp, it was a building. A big column and arch sort of thing with another big building attached to it.

That wasn't the Palace Hospital, was it?

I don't know.

It wasn't in Heliopolis, was it?

No, it was eleven miles from Cairo. Eleven miles to the west, I think.

Mena was out to the west, wasn't it?

I don't know.

The pyramids were west of Cairo, weren't they?

I don't even know that. I know that if you were coming at it - say I was standing up and I point to the left, well, that's where I was. And this side, to me, you would be going towards the Suez Canal. That's the way I see it.

And you went to a convalescent camp?

Yes. I was there for several weeks, and we were treated there, and we had nothing to do except get well. And we used to go off for a walk, and hire a donkey and go across to the river - the Nile - across the Nile. There were boats available there, and they had some older types of pyramids there. Two of them that I can recollect. We used to search around for scarabs. Scarab stones. I had one made into a ring, a beautiful scarab ring. I don't know what became of it. Perhaps it disappeared somewhere. Well, I don't know. I can't tell you much else about that part of the thing.

Did you have any friends at that time in Egypt?

Civilian friends?

Army friends.

I had one or two army friends - two in particular.

Who were they?

The chappie I enlisted with, a chap named Gibson.

What was his Christian name?

Tom. And the other one's name was Healey.

H-E-A-L-E-Y?

I suppose so. He's alive still I believe.

Is he. What was his Christian name?

His initials were M. J. We used to call him Jock. That's all I knew about him.

He was Scottish was he?

Oh yes, he could hardly speak. He used to stutter so much.

They both came from WA?

Yes. Tom Gibson and I, we were school friends.

At Geraldton?

In Geraldton. That's where I went to school. I was born in Victoria in 1896, and I came over here as a baby in my mother's arms. And I was christened up in Geraldton. I was born on 22 August, in Victoria, a place called Bunyip. And then when we came over - of course, I didn't know anything about this part of it, except the dates. I remember that I was christened in Geraldton on 11 July 1897, eleven months later after coming over from Victoria as a baby. Christened in Geraldton, and then I was confirmed in the Church of England a bit later on in Geraldton. And I enlisted in Geraldton.

What were your family doing?

My father was a carpenter and joiner. He was an Englishman, and my mother was Australian. My father came out from England, I believe, as a boy eleven years old in 1867, I think.

Where did Tom Gibson and ...

His family, the whole of his family - there were quite a few of them - he had three sisters, two brothers, might have been three brothers - two brothers I know of - and three sisters. They all came from England, the whole family.

Tom Gibson was from Geraldton too?

Oh yes. We enlisted the same day at the same place.

What was the name of the other man?

Healey.

M J (Jock) Healey.

I can tell you something if your interested: I'll show you a photograph.

(Break in interview)

I don't know if there's anybody else I've sent one to.

That's okay, it's easy to photograph it.

(Break in interview)

These other chaps are light horseman. We had to go into quarantine because these chaps had come from Egypt, and we were up in Port Said. I was coming through on a boat. These chappies joined us, but owing to the fact that these fellows had been in an area which was subject to smallpox and all that sort of thing. They bunged us in camp at Whitworth Point down here.

What happened after you left the Battalion? You were in hospital in Cairo ...

Yes.

... and this would be - well, you would have spent Christmas in hospital, I assume.

Must have done because it was close on the end of December when I got hit, as far as I can recollect.

Did you get a Christmas billy? Do you remember them?

No, I didn't see one at any time. Not that I know of anyhow. No, I'm sure I didn't.

How long were you in hospital in Cairo?

Oh ...

Well, you went to a convalescent camp then, didn't you?

I went to No. 2 AGH, and I was there for at least three weeks to a month, perhaps longer. It all depends on how ...

Yes, I'd say that you'd been there that long.

They couldn't straighten my arm. It wouldn't come straight. It was continually massaged. That's what they had one particular nurse for. And the other nurse was looking after this when this one sort of healed up reasonably quickly. It never troubled me, and it's never troubled me since.

You were lucky there.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

And I don't get any pension for it, or anything like that. All I get from the 'Repat' is the aged pension, that's all.

Then you went to a convalescent camp, didn't you?

Yes.

That would be, let's say, at the end of January - for the sake of it. So early February you were in a convalescent camp eleven miles west of Cairo.

I think it was west - yes, it would be west. It was west because I remember looking up an atlas one time to see where it was exactly. It was eleven miles. I measured it by the scale - eleven miles.

How long were you in that convalescent camp?

At least ... I suppose three weeks, at least.

What happened after that?

Then I went back to Cairo to join the Battalion, and when I got there they were forming the 48th Battalion.

So that would be late February-March.

Yes, something like that. Then they told me they didn't want me on account of my wounds, or something like that. So then I immediately applied to join the Flying Corps.

Did you? What happened? Did you join them, or not?

I joined them.

Really. I imagined that you were repatriated home.

No, no. I was marked C. They had three definitions. There was C1, C2, and C3. Well, C1 was totally unfit - no.

C3 must have been totally unfit.

C3 was totally unfit to get back to Australia. C2 was, I think, temporarily unfit, or whatever it was. Anyhow, my discharge shows that I was discharged as medically unfit, not due to misconduct.

(Break in interview)

This would be the RAFC, wouldn't it?

It was just called the Australian Flying Corps.

That's right, the AFC.

AFC.

You joined them from Egypt, or did you have to go England?

I went to London. I had to go to a place called Farnborough, which was the aircraft depot apparently, or Royal Flying Corps depot. And that's where I had to go and enroll. I went from there to join them in France.

So you were flying in France?

I wasn't flying.

You were an aircraftsman?

I was a rigger. I had to go through training, of course. I went to the Sopwith Aircraft Company. I did my training there and I was there when the war finished. I don't know where we went from when the war finished - a place called Claire Marie, I think it was - a little places.

This was fairly close to the front line?

I was in No. 4 Squadron, that was a fighter squadron.

And these were Sopwith Camels?

Camels, and later on we had Snipes. Sopwith Snipes followed on from the Camels. They were the same thing to look at except bigger.

By April 1917 what planes were flying?

Well, there was the Bristol Fighters. There's one still around as a matter of fact, somewhere flying round Australia.

(Break in interview)

We were talking about you as a rigger in France. You were in the 16th Battalion to start with, and then you joined the Australian Flying Corps in France. I am interested to know something about conditions in France with the fighter planes, and what you can tell me about the operation of them. Because I've already taped some accounts of watching dogfights.

I don't know anything about that.

No, you weren't flying, but you were back at the aerodrome, obviously.

At the aerodrome, yes I was there alright.

(Incidental conversation)

Oh, we never had any long trousers - oh, we did, but we didn't wear them. As a matter of fact. We wore next to nothing after a while.

I think you were telling me that it was the Bristol fighters that were ...

There were Bristol fighters, and there were what they used to call the DH9 - the De Havilland 9.

Were they any good those planes? The Germans outclassed the British machines for a long time, didn't they?

They were flying these - I've forgotten their names now.

The Fokkers?

It was another name.

The Albatross?

No, Albatross was an observation thing, I think. No, I can't remember the name. I don't know much about the Flying Corps, that's all. As far as that goes any aerial work that was done was done right away – right away from us.

(Break in interview)

This is on Lemnos, and that's when you dropped that shell on your foot?

Oh yes, that's when I came out of hospital.

Just after you'd been out of hospital.

That's before we got sent back to Gallipoli.

And this man on the left is ...

He's now deceased - T G Gibson.

That's Tom Gibson - T G Gibson.

That's right.

And that one is M J Healey.

That's M J Healey.

And what happened to both of them?

Tom had yellow jaundice, but I don't know what was wrong with him (Healey). I think he might have had it too, but I don't know, I can't tell you that. He wasn't wounded I don't think.

That's a mosquito net that you've got round your hat?

That's a mosquito net around their head.

(Break in interview)

It says, 'Not looking too bad after five months hard fighting and five weeks hospital. Three of the "Australian Cannibals" who invaded Turkey on 25 April, 1915.' Australian Cannibals has commas round it. You were a signaller apparently.

Yes.

Those three men were signallers ...

Yes.

... attached to headquarters?

No, they were attached to the various companies.

Were attached to the ...

B Company. That was Margolin.

This was sent to your Auntie Belle, "with love from Eugene, 14/10/1915". Did your brother Ernest join at the same time as you?

Oh no, no.

That's right, you told me he'd come in just at the end.

That was a couple of years later.

So you never saw him, I suppose, until after the war.

I never saw him at all until he came home after the war. And I think he was home when I got home. When the war finished our squadron was sent up to Germany, up to Cologne - I don't know what for.

Part of the occupation.

Part of the occupation, I suppose. We were stationed just outside Cologne, more or less in the town. There was a big barn arrangement upstairs. I had a lift in a Bristol fighter, that's how I know a little bit about them. I had a lift on Christmas Day. A flight sergeant in the Royal Flying Corps, he gave me a lift and we flew around the two big steeples on the Cologne cathedral - flew between them I thought he was going to crash into them.

Do you remember any of the men who were flying from No. 4 Squadron?

I remember the CO was Colonel McCleary. And I remember Captain Malley, he was the OC of A Flight. Roy King, another captain, B Flight - I was in B Flight - I was in B Company in the 16th.

And you were a rigger for B Flight?

I was a rigger for anything that came along, any plane that wanted things done.

What were you doing when you were a...?

Mainly for B Flight, but if anything else wanted doing and they wanted it, well, I'd just do it.

What would be a normal day at one of those front-line aerodromes? What time would it start? Would they have a pattern of always going out on an early morning?

They used to go out on an early morning flight, and sometimes come home in the late afternoon ...

Would they have flown ...

... but not very often.

Did they fly at all hours?

They used to go out usually round about dawn time in the morning. There's not too much I can tell you about that. I knew their names. There was a Ramsay - Lieutenant Ramsay. Lieutenant Sheaffer. Oh, Lieutenant Sheaffer, he was either killed or taken prisoner of war in the last day of the war. Went out and never came back. When we were going up to Germany we passed what could have been his plane.

And you never did find out what happened to him?

No, not to my knowledge anyway.

Did you see any of the 16th Battalion men in France?

I used to in the early part of it. And a few on Gallipoli of course. But they are all dead.

(Incidental conversation)

What engagements did you take part in at Gallipoli, because there was an attack by the Brigade at Hill 971, wasn't there?

I don't know anything about their numbers - their hill numbers. I know there was a Hill 60.

It might have been Hill 60 that you had to attack. It might have been the 15th Battalion.

I know I joined - when we eventually got to Gallipoli, the Battalion was already there, and I joined up when they were at Pope's Hill.

What was it like up there?

Oh, quiet at the time. That's where we were able to go swimming from when we used to come down. Of course, Gallipoli is not a level patch. The hills are up like that, you know. The only more or less level ground was where the British ...

At Suvla Bay.

At Suvla Bay. Well, from there right across the land towards the trenches, that was fairly level, but otherwise it was just mountains and hills. I was there in the November blizzards which were pretty damn awful. Of course, I didn't leave there till December. There was one place where there was an enormous big hole dug, a big square hole - a big thing, and deep - fairly deep. I never found out what it was for. But if you wanted to use your imagination you could probably say that it was to be used in case of another severe attack, and a hell of a lot of chaps killed, or whatever. And that's looking on the morbid side of it.

Yes, as a cemetery.

That would be one reason why it might have been filled.

Dug you mean?

Dug, rather. But I never found out what it was for.

Did you ever know Percy Black? Can you tell me anything about him?

I only knew him by sight, that was all. He was killed fairly early.

He was killed at Bullecourt.

Wait a minute. He must have been wounded, because I never actually saw him on Gallipoli, as far as I can recollect.

He was in the machine-gunners, wasn't he?

I think so. But he belonged to the 16th Battalion though, I think.

Yes, he certainly did.

Or it might have been in Egypt that I used to see him ...

Could have been.

Before Gallipoli - but I can't say.

What about some of the other officers that you knew? Did you know ... well, I don't know ...

Well, there was Captain Margolin, who later on became colonel, who also commanded the Battalion. He was the officer commanding B Company, and that was where I was, you see. But I can't remember all their names. Oh, also Captain McDonald - R T A McDonald - as adjutant; he was taken prisoner.

By the Turks?

On Gallipoli, yes. He was caught with a Colonel Pope, and Colonel Pope rolled down the hill ...

I think I remember that.

... and McDonald was taken prisoner. But I didn't know much about him, actually. I saw him once or twice, but not often. You didn't see a lot of people too often, unless they were on parade. As I say, I wasn't in Egypt long enough with the Battalion to know much about anybody. I mean, there were chaps that I was with, and I've forgotten half their names.

What sort of a man was Margolin?

Oh, he was ... You see these stern-faced Russian blokes; he was something like that. He was dark-skinned, sort of, but he was a very nice man. Fairly stern, but at the same time equally fair and was popular with everybody. He was a good bloke.

What were the duties of a signaller?

It mainly turned out to be all buzzer - using the buzzer.

Is this with the Morse code?

The Morse code on a buzzer; instead of a wireless set or a telegraph set you'd have a buzzer. The flags were useless there. We used them a bit in Egypt, or somewhere like that. You went up a hill and just tested them.

And the buzzer, of course, would have a wire going all the way up to the post.

Wherever an operator was sending his message from, there was a line all the way along to you. You might have been half a mile behind, or whatever. All those messages would have come from brigade headquarters. I did know a chap named Pinnell, he was a signaller in the 4th Brigade. Pinnell, or something like that. I didn't know too many though. Never had a chance. Where did the Battalion – they all sailed from Adelaide, didn't they?

Which Battalion?

The 16th.

Three companies from Adelaide, five companies from Perth - from Western Australia - and sailed from Fremantle, I think.

I think they were then shipped out from Adelaide.

Yes, you're right.

The 11th, they all sailed from here. They shipped on a boat called the *Ascania*.

Yes, that's right.

He's my older brother. I saw him twice during the war. One time I got to hear where the 11th Battalion was on Gallipoli, and it was right away on the other side of - almost opposite Lone Pine, way past - what was the name of that place I told you about? - a big rock sticking up out of the water.

Warwick Castle?

No, no.

Beck's Bluff?

Beck's Bluff. So that's where we were at the end of the war - or that's where we were for some little time. No, what's the name of that - Gaba Tepe - it was on the other side of Gardafee, back towards Lone Pine. I got the news that the 11th was there so I got permission to 'take a walk', and I walked for, must have been five or six miles, around to see him, and he was there. And I also saw him once in France, when the 11th was resting at a place near Messines. He was over there somewhere and I got permission, again, to 'take a walk', and I walked over and saw him. He said, "What the bloody hell are you doing here?" He didn't know whether I was alive or dead at that particular time. He knew that earlier, of course, because I saw him on Gallipoli, but he didn't know what had happened to me in the meantime, and I didn't know what happened to him.

Did he survive the war?

Yes. All he got was one of his arms was dented, a big bone in his forearm. He had that and he could never get it straightened. That's what might have happened with me, you know, if I hadn't been lucky enough to get almost immediate attention. When you get cracked you go stiff. In the arms in any case. It doesn't hurt you for a while. You go numb, and then after the numbness is gone, that's when the pain starts.

Do you remember any of the Turkish attacks on Gallipoli? Because there were big attacks in early May, weren't there?

No, that was ... early May, yes. I was near to quite a few blokes who were there. It was 7 May, I think.

It was around that time, yes.

And there was another time when we - not we, but the Australians - I think it was mainly Light Horse blokes, at a place called The Nek. They tried to get across there a dozen times but couldn't. Finally they did, but they lost a lot of men. I never saw anything like that. I only know what I was told about it

later on. We had a chap here in the Legion of Anzac actually. He was the secretary for quite a number of years. He died about two years ago. He knew all about those things. He'd been to Gallipoli several times since the war and he became friendly with Colonel Paton. And Colonel Paton told him that an army that retired of its own accord was never a defeated army. Don't question me on that though, for God sake. I only know what he said after he came back. His wife was with him and all that sort of thing.

They've named Anzac Cove officially now. You knew that I suppose.

There was never an Anzac Cove - never.

I forget what it was called now.

I don't think it had a name - might have done.

It had a name of some description I remember reading, but last year they formally called it Anzac Cove. I've spoken with one of the men who was there at that ceremony, a 15th Battalion man. He went back for that.

The only time you knew it was Anzac Cove was on account of the Watson's Pier. They built a pier. The engineers built a wooden pier there. That's where we used to go swimming from.

This would be in the nude, I suppose?

Oh, we had nothing else. Unless you had a pair of those, as if you wouldn't wear them. Oh yes, if anybody went for a swim there they didn't bother about clothes.

Birdwood was 'skinny dipping' too, I suppose?

He was. He was standing alongside me. I was standing alongside him and didn't know who he was. Hadn't a clue who I was talking to. He was just talking in the normal way.

What was he talking about?

I don't know. It's a long time ago to remember that. All I know is that I was talking to him and he was talking to me. I had a sort of clue and I dived down alongside the piles of the jetty and found his ring up against - well, not up against, but near enough to up against one of the piles.

Had he been diving?

Yes, his ring came off when he dived into the water. Apparently. He did tell me that it was his..

His daughter.

When I handed him the ring I'm pretty sure he told me that it was a present from his daughter when they lived in India, or somewhere similar. One of those places where he was stationed.

What about Monash. Did you ever see him?

I saw him several times, but mainly on parade.

What about the Prince of Wales? I suppose you saw him in Egypt, did you?

No, I never, although it was a funny act I believe. He was counted out ...

Yes, that's right.

... and when he got back on his nag it went off again – and they counted him back in. I never saw that.

That did happen. That was at Tel-el-Kebîr.

Tel-el-Kebîr was where they started to form the 48th Battalion out of the remnants of the 16th.

And that's when you went back to join them?

That's right. I was told I wasn't required ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

What is your birth date?

What do you want that for?

Just to give a background to you I'd like to know how old you are and where you were born?

I was born in Victoria.

Where in Victoria?

In Bunyip. In August 1896.

What was your father doing over there?

Well, I don't know what he was doing over there because we came over here when I was a baby in arms. I suppose he was ... he was only a boy when he came here. This is not being recorded, is it? Because I might be entirely wrong in what I tell you.

You'll be right. You'd know what the background of your family is.

Anyway, he came from England; he came here from Somerset, I know that. He was young. He came out with his father. I don't know about mother. I suppose my mother too. I don't know about that.

What kind of job was your father doing?

He was a carpenter and joiner. That was when I started to know him, of course.

Where were they living in Perth when they came over here?

When they first came here, I don't know, but we always lived in Geraldton. He died in 1935 at the age of seventy-two, so he must have been quite young when he came here.

What brought him over to the west, did he ever tell you?

No. Our family records were lost somehow or other. Lost through marriages and so forth. I don't know of any records that I've got down here now that would be in existence.

How many were there in your family?

Eight children. Mother and father, two sisters and five brothers I had.

Six boys altogether.

Six boys and two girls.

And they were all living in Geraldton, were they?

We were all living in Geraldton. Three of us were born in Victoria. That's me, my elder brother and elder sister. They were born in Victoria. They spent their whole lives there, of course. And the rest were all born in Geraldton.

Were you at Geraldton when you enlisted?

Yes ... I must have been, I was eighteen-odd. Eighteen years and three months, I think.

What Reinforcement were you?

2nd.

2nd were you?

We caught up with a battalion in Cairo.

What kind of work were you doing when you were in Geraldton?

Oh ... I can't tell you much about it because ... well, I don't know ... I'll tell you something, I was working in a wool store.

Were you, as a classer?

No, well I was learning classing. And wool, and sheepskins and so forth - and I also worked in the office over there.

What was the name of the company?

It was called Charles [Horman].

H-O-R-M-A-N?

H-O-R-M-A-N-N - I think - and Company. They were a New South Wales, Sydney company. They had a small branch amongst other things.

You would have spent your boyhood in Geraldton.

I did. Well, I must have done because I was nursed, in the first place, when I was a baby in arms. That's what my mother used to tell me that I was nursed by black women while she baked bread for them. She told me that later on, of course, when I was able to understand what she was talking about. I don't know how old I would have been then, perhaps five or six years of age. I don't know, but I've always remembered it, that I was nursed by aboriginal women while my mum bakes bread. When I enlisted I was working then as a clerk in the office of this particular wool store.

How much were they paying you a week?

I don't know - somewhere round about thirty shillings. Round about.

You were living at home, I suppose.

Of course. We were all there. The whole family lived in Geraldton. As a matter of fact, we brought Geraldton up (laughs). That's what my father used to say. There were not very many people there till we went there. I suppose a couple of thousand at the outside. I have no idea.

Do you like it out there at Geraldton?

Did I?

Did you, yes.

Oh yes - had to like it.

Where did you go to school?

In Geraldton. I left school the year King Edward VII died.

1910.

1910, that's right.

What was the day of your birth - it was August '96?

Yes - 22nd.

And you went straight into the wool store, did you?

Well no. I was pottering around working in Geraldton. Anything anybody wanted me to do, such as carrying parcels from the draper's stores to wherever. Oh anything, just little odd jobs. Oh, 2/6 a week was my first pay. That's 25 cents, or 30 cents. In present-day money.

Did you have any ambitions? What did you want to do?

I started to learn accountancy. The war stopped it.

You were going to night school?

No, correspondence. I've forgotten who with now.

What made you join up? How did you join up?

You tell me!

Most people say it was because their friends were.

I suppose so, yeah. My friends were.

What friends did you have at that time? Can you remember any of them?

Oh, young fellows, yes. Quite a lot of them young English boys. Of course, immigration was going then, you know. Assisted passage immigration. Quite a lot of English families were coming out, you see.

Did you have any particular friend at that time that you can remember?

Yes, oh yes. I've got a photograph of him here. Here you are - and another one.

What were their names?

Gibson and Healey.

What were their Christian names?

Oh ... Tom Gibson - you are writing this all down, I suppose?

Yes.

You shouldn't be because ...

It's the only way I can remember it. I can check it in the Battalion history anyway.

There was a book on the 16th Battalion printed.

Yes, I've got that.

I had a copy but I've lost it - it disappeared.

I've got a reprint.

I can even tell you Gibson's number - 1471. Mine was 1469.

He'd be a good pal of yours.

We were, we were friends. We stuck together through thick and thin, sort of.

What was he doing? What line was he in?

I don't know whether he was doing anything or not. His father was a painter, I know that much. His father, brother and uncle, they were all painters - house painters. I don't know what Tom did. I think he was something in the clerical line, but where I don't know. If I did know then I've forgotten.

What about Healey?

Healey was from this place somewhere.

Around Perth?

I think so. I don't know whether he was Irish or Scottish, but I couldn't understand him.

You met him when you joined at Blackboy, did you?

Yes.

What did your parents think about you joining up? Were they worried?

My mother was, but dad wasn't, as far as I know. I wanted to join the navy. Mum said no, and dad said yes ... No, not the navy - I'm sorry. I wanted to go away on one of the big three- or four-masted sailing ships that used to call in to take away the wheat and all that sort of stuff. I wanted to go away on one of those as a deckhand, or whatever. Mum was strongly against it. Dad said I could but – then I wanted to join the navy. I had to get a copy of my birth certificate, which we did get. That was in the same year as the Navy was first formed. I remember that - 1911.

That's right.

The year after I left school. Mum was - I forget now whether she was for it or against it - one of the two was for it and the other was against it. Anyhow, we had to get a birth certificate, which we did and which I've still got. But there was a snag. I had to have a university education. Now, how the hell could I get a university education. I'd just left school, more or less. Well, I'd only left school the year before. I wanted to be an officer in the navy. I would have had to be a midshipman first. When they discovered that, and when they discovered that according to the law I would have had to - according to them - have a university education, which was stupid because I'd only left school.

You were about sixteen then, weren't you?

Oh ... fifteen. I was only eighteen when the war broke out.

You would have had to get your parents consent, wouldn't you? Or did you put your age up?

No, I put my exact age - eighteen years and three months. That's right, I enlisted in November of 1914. I got my army discharge from there.

Did you have any experience with the cadets, the army cadets?

Oh yes, at school. We used to have, where the Sheffield Shield they have now at the present time for cricket, well, we had a Sheffield Shield for schools. Mainly rifle shooting and that sort of thing.

And that was in association with military training?

Well yes. There is a name for it ...

It was the militia, wasn't it?

No, it wasn't the militia. Anyhow, we had uniforms in any case - proper uniforms. But we had them at school. It wasn't called the militia, it was called ... I've forgotten now.

You came down from Geraldton on a ship, did you?

On a train. The train was running straight out to Blackboy.

What was Blackboy Camp like at that time? Was it all tents?

All tents. As far as I know there were no buildings. The only buildings that were there were buildings that had no connection with the army, but were organised by people who were selling stuff, such as tea rooms. Small tea rooms and things like that. They would put up a counter in them and all that kind of thing.

What had Blackboy Camp been before it became a camp? Was it all bush?

All bush - as far as I know it was all bush. It was off the road from Perth to Kalgoorlie

Was it?

No, wait a minute. Yes, on the road from Perth to Kalgoorlie, which in those days, was probably just a gravel track like the roads that used to be from Perth to ... anybody going to the zoo - from Perth by tram to Angelo Street, and then from Angelo Street round through. You had to walk if you wanted to go to Applecross. You had to walk on a white dirt road - but not from Perth, of course. I remember that because I did that when I was married. I had a party before I was married and we had to walk out. Of course, if anybody had a horse and cart, or whatever ...

It was pretty rough in those days.

Oh yes.

What did they get you doing at Blackboy Camp - what kind of training?

Just the usual army training. Forming fours and all this sort of junk. Going for a bit of a route march, and learning rifle drill and things like that.

Where would you go for route marches?

Up around the hills. It wasn't too far because it was pretty hard walking up ...

Yes, it would be. What kind of a rifle shot were you?

(Laughs) I don't know, you'd laugh. I don't remember. We never used to have any competitions. We used to do rifle shooting as we had to walk out to the rifle butts which was out from Geraldton out towards what used to be ... out to Grey Bay. The rifle butts were out near the turn off to Grey Bay.

This is up in Geraldton?

Geraldton, yes. I had nothing down here, only the forming fours and all that sort of thing.

You had some training up in Geraldton before you came down here, did you?

Just ordinary military business. Discipline, as they used to call it. There was a name for ... school cadets it was. Oh, we had proper army officers – or we saw one at least. There was only one real army officer, Captain Carlton, but he was a school teacher as well. He was also in the army.

Did you get leave into Perth much from Blackboy camp?

No.

Did you know anybody in Perth?

I had an aunt living in East Fremantle, but I didn't know anybody in Perth. I can't remember now whether I ever went into Perth, or not, from Blackboy. I wasn't there long enough.

You left November 5, 1914.

I didn't enlist until 11 November. I can't remember how long we were in Geraldton before we came down. We came down by train in any case, and went to Blackboy, but I can't remember how long I was in Blackboy. It wasn't long before I was in Egypt. We weren't there very long. One thing I do remember though, I was one of the guard of honour for the opening of parliament in, I think, 1914.

This is the State parliament?

The State parliament. Most of our early training was for that. I used to have a photograph of that, but that's disappeared too. We had training down at Helena Vale, down on the Helena Vale Racecourse. That's where we had most of our army training. Although we didn't need it actually because we were only just doing what we'd been doing as kids up in Geraldton.

What was the duty that you had to do in the opening of parliament here?

Just going up ... Well, not going up - we had to march up. We went out by train and then marched up. I think there was about fifty of us. I'm not sure. It's a long while ago to remember that – 1914. But all we had to do is form up and give the royal salute when the flag was raised, or they played something of it. Must have been God Save the Queen. George V would have been the king, wouldn't he?

Yes, God Save the King it would have been in 1911.

Yes. He succeeded Edward VII.

(Break in interview)

Which one is you in this photograph?

In the middle.

You are the one sitting down in the middle ...

Yes.

... and on your right ...

On my right is Tommy Gibson. That's Jock.

Jock Healey?

I think his name might have been James, but we called him Jock because he was Scottish. He used to splutter in your face when he spoke.

On the back it says, 'Not looking too bad after five months hard fighting and five weeks hospital. Three of the Australian "Cannibals", who invaded Turkey on 25 April, 1915.' You were signallers - 'J G Gibson, and E A Fathers, and N J Healey, Headquarters 16th Battalion. Love from Eugene, 14 October 1915.' That is to your Aunt Belle.

I don't know how you can read that, I can't. Hard fighting, that's what it was. That's the only picture that I've got. The only souvenir picture that I have. That's my great grandfather.

(Break in interview)

Do you remember what ship you went away on?

2nd Reinforcement ... yeah, we went on a ship called the *Itonus* - I-T-O-N-U-S.

Who was in charge of your Reinforcement.

Lieutenant Brashaw.

Where did he come from, do you remember?

No idea. Down this way somewhere I suppose - might have been the goldfields, I don't know. There's nothing like that I can remember.

Did you go back up to Geraldton before you left? Did you have final leave up at Geraldton?

I'm dashed if I know - can't remember.

Nobody came down to see you off?

They could have. We just marched down to the train, and from Blackboy to the railway siding. I forget now where that was - pretty close to the hills there. There was no transport, not like the Second World War. Had to march everywhere, then go by train down to Fremantle. I don't even remember that to tell you the truth. Don't even remember going on board the *Itonus* - that was the name of the ship.

You would have gone via Colombo and Suez?

Yes, that's right. We had to take on coal at Colombo. Of course, we didn't do it. That was done by the coolies.

Where were you sleeping on the ship? Were you in hammocks?

In hammocks.

What were they like to sleep in?

Alright. They were quite good as long as you didn't fall out.

You didn't get seasick?

No, I never got seasick. Never even felt seasick, not as far as I know. I shouldn't have been seasick because I was always swimming, or as a young fellow I was always going out in somebody's boat sailing and all that. I especially used to get a trip on big fishing boats that used to take a trip round. Anybody who wanted to go they took them for threepence a time.

It would take them out off Geraldton?

Of a Sunday, yes. They used to take us quite a long way around. I think, from memory, they used to go down about from Geraldton itself - from the jetty, or near the bay where we went from - we used to go down seven miles down to a place called Drummond's Cove, and then they'd beat back. And that's when you got a bit seasick. It used to take all the afternoon. I don't know what time, of course.

That would be a good way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

Quite a lot of people used to do it. All the fishing boats used to do it, and there was a big fleet of fishing boats. One fleet was owned by one person, as far as I know. They were all big boats, like big pearling luggers you might have seen on the TV. They were boats after that style - big boats.

All sailing boats of course.

Oh yes, but only one mast. They used to go from Geraldton across to the Albroton Islands, and some used to go as far as Shark Bay and back. From there the closest island is Rapp Island, and that was forty miles out from shore.

Did they get you doing any guard duty on the ship going over? That used to be one of the ... four on and four off, or something - two on and four off.

I don't think so.

What about boxing matches and so on?

Oh yes, they used to have them.

Where did they hold them?

On the deck.

You weren't game for it yourself?

No. I'm too scared of that. We used to see the blokes going round with black eyes. No fear! I was no fighter. All the chappies that used to do the boxing, they'd been doing it for some time, you know.

It was a sport for them, I suppose.

Yes, but for kids like us ...

They used to have concerts too, didn't they, of a night-time or an evening on the ships?

I don't remember that. I don't remember that at all. I don't know if we even had an instrument, such as a band instrument.

You may not have done either.

No, I think we just used to, more or less, get down in your hammock at night and stop there till you had to get up in the morning.

Did you play cards much?

No, I was never a card player - might have, I don't know.

END OF AWM TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF AWM TAPE TWO - SIDE B

How long did it take you to get to Egypt - about four weeks?

I suppose so ... No, not four weeks. I think it used to take four weeks to go to England. Mind you, the *Itonus* wasn't a big ship, and she wasn't a passenger ship.

She was a cargo ship, was she?

I suppose she was. She had bunks for the officers up on the deck. There was a swimming pool. I remember - oh no, I'd better not say that.

Oh, I'd like to hear that.

There was one particular officer who wouldn't go in for a swim. Eventually they told him that if he didn't go they'd throw him in. And they did, he got thrown in.

You'd think a swimming pool would be very popular.

Well, I think it was one of the holds of the ship built up some way and made waterproof. There was only the one. That was the day of crossing the line I remember. Yes, that was the day of crossing the line. Everybody that hadn't been ...

Hadn't crossed the equator.

Crossing the line it was. Anybody that hadn't been there.

Old King Neptune, wasn't it?

That's right. You all had to go in yourself, or get thrown in. But this particular old - he was a captain too - he wouldn't go in, but he got chucked in in the end. I don't know who threw him. I can't tell you that.

That's the spirit of things, isn't it?

Yes. When we got to Suez we had to go overland to Cairo on the train.

You went up to Heliopolis, didn't you?

Then we went to Heliopolis. Heliopolis was just out from Cairo. They used to have electric trams; electric trams used to run out there. We were camped just on the edge of the desert. That's where No. 1 General Hospital was, at Heliopolis.

That was the Palace Hospital, wasn't it?

Oh, I don't know about the Palace, but it was No. 1. And No. 2 was in Gezireh, on the opposite side of the Nile to Heliopolis.

You were a signaller, were you?

Pardon?.

Were you a signaller before you went away?

No.

They made you a signaller in Egypt, did they?

I learned that in Blackboy.

What did that involve?

Well actually, it was using flags.

Like semaphore?

Yeah. They didn't have the buzzers. They finished up on Gallipoli with buzzers.

That's with Morse code, is it?

Morse code. We had those in Blackboy. We got them when I first started ... it must have been on the ship, I think. I can't remember.

They were training you as you went over, I suppose. What kind of messages would you have to send? I suppose anything.

Anything the signal officer would want to put down on paper.

And you'd send it with the flags?

Yes.

Were they any good on the Peninsula, or was it too dangerous?

No, no. We had to - on the Peninsula there, really as far as I'm concerned, as far as I know - we just had to use the buzzer if we could, where we could. That's right, they couldn't use flags. They'd be bumped off quick and lively.

That's what I would have thought, yes.

In any case, it was too hilly for a start.

Couldn't see far enough?

Oh, we used to use to heliograph too, with the sun. We used that when we were cadets at school. We weren't too expert at it. At least I wasn't anyhow. We struggled through, but we never had them on Gallipoli as far as I know.

With the buzzers they had to have a transmitter and a wire which would go back to headquarters?

Yes.

Did they have the wireless telephones at all?

No.

Not while you were there, no.

Never had wireless at all, as far as I know.

Oh, I mean the cable telephones.

Well, the cable buzzer.

You couldn't speak into a handpiece like a telephone, you had to use the Morse code?

Use the Morse code. They might have somewhere or other, but I don't know. As far as I was concerned it was just the buzzer. That's when you had to stay awake. If you wanted to go to sleep you were too scared to.

Yes, you'd have to watch for a message all the time. Did you go out to the Pyramids and the Sphinx when you were in Cairo?

Oh yes, that was the only place I went. Went out by tram - went right out to Giza. Was it Giza?

Yes, I think it is - Pyramids of Giza.

That's right. Went into the biggest one - you could go inside.

Did you get up on top?

No. There is a picture in existence somewhere of the 11th Battalion on top of one of the Pyramids.

The whole battalion?

The whole battalion. A brother of mine in Adelaide - the other brother I was telling you about - he was in the 11th, and he was in that picture. They've still got it in Adelaide. I suppose they still have. But he's been dead now for some time.

Did you go for a ride on the camels?

No.

Or the donkeys?

Nor the donkeys.

The trams or walking?

You could only go by tram. To walk from the Kasr-el-Nîl Bridge - which is the bridge over the Nile, very close to No. 2 General Hospital - well, the road to the Pyramids, you'd have to walk across the Kasr-el-Nîl Bridge to get from the city of Cairo onto the road to go to the Pyramids. Kasr el Nîl. K-A-S-R-E-L-N-I-L.

Yes, there were barracks there, weren't there?

That was in Abbassia, wasn't it?

There were barracks at Abbassia too, yes.

Abbassia we never stayed at.

That was the prison, wasn't it?

Yes, military police.

That was the military police barracks at Abbassia, wasn't it?

That's where we went to when we got off the *Itonus*. We went overland to Cairo. We were there, in Abbassia, just before we went out to Heliopolis. That was about four or five miles from Abbassia to Heliopolis, where the Battalion was. The Battalion was camped on one side, and on the other side, almost in the same position - at Zeitoun. Zeitoun was the opposite side to Heliopolis. That's where the New Zealanders were camped.

Were you all in tents at Heliopolis, or in straw huts?

In tents. There were no huts as far as I know.

In bell tents?

I was in one of these great big things, you know.

Fifty or more in a tent?

Well, it would hold fifty, but there wasn't fifty. I don't know how many were there, but we were all in there in any case while they got the reinforcements. What the number of the reinforcements was, I don't know.

You got all the 2nd Reinforcements in the one tent?

I think so, yes.

It would be pretty crowded.

Oh no. In the bell tents at Blackboy, we used to have twelve in there, one to each partition of the bell tent.

They had twelve sections, did they?

Twelve sections where they were sewn together to make the tent. We used to have twelve in them. There was in the one I was in, I remember that.

Where were they cooking at Blackboy camp?

Open air.

Open air cooking over fires.

Yes, it was all open air. If you had to get out of your tent of a night-time you could always go and get a drink of hot coffee or hot tea. Coffee there was, I think. Yes, they used to have the fires going all night. They were on the road up from ... you know, you go through Midland, and when you get to Midland Junction, turn to your right sort of thing and keep going. Well, Blackboy was, more or less, up the hill. I've forgotten the name of the place, but Blackboy was off to the left, off the road - the camp.

Did you get leave into Cairo much? You would have been in Egypt a fair while, wouldn't you?

Not very long.

What month did you arrive? Early 1915 I suppose?

1915, yes, after the opening of parliament. That was either late in '14 or very early in 1915 - the opening of parliament was. Well, it was very shortly after that when we went away, and we'd be about three weeks ...

On the ship.

Three weeks at least on board ship.

So it would be about February '15.

February, yeah.

What was Cairo like on leave?

Well, I don't remember going in to Cairo. Oh yes I do, I was in Cairo. Oh yes, we used to go round to what we called the Mouski. That's where they used to have the bazaars where they used to have all these fine silks and things like that.

What was it called?

The Mouski.

How do you spell that?

I don't know - probably M-O-U-S-K-I, I don't know. That's what they used to call it, but it was a bazaar.

That was popular with the troops, was it?

Oh yes. There was a lot of money spent there. People kept buying stuff for their sisters, and mothers and all that sort of thing. Mostly feminine stuff - silk. Oh yes, I remember that. I think I was only down there once, but you couldn't go alone. It was dangerous to go down there alone.

Why was that? Because you'd be robbed?

(Laughs) Probably knocked on the head too. You didn't know. There used to be a lot of stories going on about it. Anyhow, I was only there once, and that was in the daytime, and I wasn't by myself. I think I was with Tom. It's too long ago to remember.

You weren't in Cairo when the Wazzir got burnt?

Yes, yes, we were in Cairo. That was General Hamilton - was that his name?

He was the general in charge overall.

Yes, he was the British bloke. Was his name Hamilton? Anyhow, whatever his name was I saw him there, and I saw the results of the Wazzir business.

What had happened?

Oh, pianos in the street and all this sort of thing coming out the widows. But I didn't stay there very long. I remember it quite clearly now. Tom Gibson and I, we were together. We were always together. We ducked through a Kodak shop. One end was opened - the shop with the entrance - and you could walk right through it to the next street. We dashed through there and got out of it. There was a hell of a mess going on there.

That was to escape the military police?

Escape everything, anything that was going. Didn't know anything about military police - never saw any. We had no part in that at all in any case.

What was happening there? There were all sorts of fights, were there?

Oh yeah, there was a hell of a row and all that sort of business. That was about the only time - I think - that I was in Cairo.

Did you ever go down to the Ezbekieh Gardens?

Oh yes, that was right in the centre. Do you know Cairo?

I've seen a plan of old Cairo.

Do you know where Shepherds Hotel was?

Yes.

Well, Shepherds Hotel, say, is here - that's Shepherds Hotel - but in a direct line, like that, I suppose half a mile, and here is Ezbekieh Gardens. That's where the Egyptian bands used to play every day.

Was there dancing?

No, just music - Havana.

And they had outside cafes, did they?

Not there. There were cafes but further round.

Shepherds Hotel was officers-only, wasn't it?

Yes, that was out of bounds to troops. It was for officers only.

Was there much of a problem with drunkenness amongst the Australian troops?

I wouldn't say so. From my own knowledge, I don't know. Might have been in the camp, but I never came across any of it anyhow.

What were relations like generally with the Egyptians?

We didn't take any notice of them.

They always used to be selling oranges and tomatoes and so on, didn't they?

Oranges came from Jaffa, which is only across the Canal. Jaffa oranges, they were very nice. Well, I don't know much about it now. I've forgotten practically everything I knew about it, which wasn't very much in any case.

What kind of training did they get you to do in Egypt?

Only just drill. As far as I was concerned it was just marching down the desert and back. You know, getting you used to marching in rough country where it was stinking hot during the day and stinking cold at night.

It was strange, wasn't it?

Yes. Walking in sand, say, over your ankles. It was a dirty sand, not clean white sand. Dirty. A grey colour.

Did you ever experience any of the desert storms - the khamsin?

Oh, yes and no. They had some but not severe, just everything covered in sand. You put something down, and the next minute it's all covered over in sand - fine, very fine sand. But I never experienced a real sandstorm or khamsin as they call it. Never experienced any of that at all.

The 2nd Reinforcement went over with the original Battalion, didn't they?

No. We went over on the *Itonus*.

I mean, from Egypt going to Lemnos, and then Gallipoli.

No, no, no. The original battalion went first, and the Reinforcements went on a boat called the *Clan Macgillivray*. And that was turned from being the Reinforcements into what was supposed to be a labour party unloading ammunition and water from the *Clan Macgillivray*.

That was the job of the 2nd Reinforcement?

Yes. We were the only reinforcements. There might have been a 1st, I don't know, but they would have been mixed up with the Battalion. The 2nd Reinforcement was, as I say - we didn't join the Battalion actually until Gallipoli.

So you were in a training battalion in Egypt, and the Battalion left to go to Lemnos and then Gallipoli?

Yes.

And you subsequently followed up as a reinforcement and joined with the Battalion on Gallipoli?

That's right.

When did you land on Gallipoli?

Oh, late in the afternoon.

This would be the 25th?

Yes, it was the 25th - when the Battalion landed.

You landed the same day?

No, we landed a bit after that. The Battalion was on different ships, or a different ship. We were on a different ship. We were on the *Clan Macgillivray*. We had to catch up. We had to get this water and stuff unloaded into barges.

What did they get you doing once you landed on the Peninsula?

Keeping low.

Fair enough.

Couldn't stand up.

Were you on the beach for long?

We were on the beach for a little while, not very long. Then we had to find our way to the Battalion. My first sight of the Battalion was at Pope's Hill where Captain - later Colonel - Margolin started with B Company, and I was allotted to B Company up there.

What was the view like from Pope's Hill?

You couldn't see anything, only looking back down towards the sea.

Down Monash Valley?

We used to call it Rest Gully. There was Rest Gully and there was Shrapnel Gully. That's where our clothes got blown up.

What happened then?

We had - it was that picture you saw - that was all we had to stand up in. We went down for a swim and when we came back our clothes had been blown up.

Where had you left them?

In the dugout.

This is right up on Pope's?

No, no.

Rest Gully?

Yes, down towards the beach, when we went for a swim.

You were nude I suppose. You went in swimming and you came back and ...

Nobody wore bathers. You could wear a pair of shorts if you had them, and just walk down, drop them on the jetty. Watson's Pier it was, I think - drop them on there and hop in the water. And our clothes were left in the dugout, and the dugout had got a shell in it.

You were lucky you weren't there.

As I say, that's what we had. That thing that you see down my head - that white thing - that's not a wound, that's a mosquito net. A bit of mosquito netting I stuck round my cap so I know where to find it when I wanted it.

How long were you up on Pope's Hill?

I couldn't tell you.

A few days, or were you there a long time?

No, not very long. Then we shifted from there right around past Suvla Bay. That's where I got wounded down there, at a place called - it wasn't a place, it was a hill ... I've forgotten it.

Is this still up at the end of Rest Gully where the 4th Brigade were - around Courtney's and Pope's Hill?

No, it was past Courtney's Post.

This is round towards Gaba Tepe?

No, the other way. If you are going down past Gaba Tepe you are going down to Lone Pine. That's leaving the sea on your right hand side, and you go right. Say this is Gallipoli there – well, Gaba Tepe is here, of course.

Yes, on the right.

Well, we were there, and to get to Gaba Tepe you'd have to go down that way. Lone Pine was further down still and inland.

What happened when you were wounded?

Well, from there on you've got me.

Do you know what happened? How were you wounded? What wounded you, a bullet or a shell?

I don't know.

You don't know what happened?

No.

What were you doing at the time?

I know what I was doing. I can remember that, but it's afterwards I don't remember. That was when it was getting cold, in November, when they started to issue out rum. I sat down. I was down ... We'd had a blizzard and I was on duty, sitting down somewhere. I was only covered over with a ground sheet, and it was snowing slightly - or had been snowing. And I reached in - I thought that while things were quiet - oh no, no, I'm getting ahead of myself. No, later on, after ... I can't remember too well. I remember. How I came to get wounded was - I wanted to write a letter home, and I reached in my haversack for my writing pad - I had a writing pad - and a pencil - indelible pencil - and it wasn't there. Oh, I remember now. They had a tunnel through a hill. There were two outposts. That's what I can't remember, the names of them.

This is near Pope's Hill, is it?

No, no, no.

A long way along to the left?

A long way, right past the New Zealanders, past where the British troops landed and all that sort of thing.

(Break in interview)

When I got wounded I got two.

What happened?

There's one.

That's the shrapnel, is it? Shrapnel went through your arm at your elbow?

I don't know. I got one through here.

Just above your right eye, down the side of your right eye.

Yes. It's all on my army discharge. What it was I don't know.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

START OF TAPE THREE - SIDE A

You could walk, could you?

I could walk, yes. I wasn't crippled.

We might just go back a little bit for the sake of the tape. You had been issued with the rum ...

I wasn't issued with rum, no.

They were issued with rum.

Chaps up on the outpost had been.

And they were warming it over the fire?

Yes. They were told to pass the pannikin to have a sip, which he did. And as I was drinking it I got hit.

It was a shell that went off above you?

I don't know.

You don't know what it was?

I don't know. It could have been shrapnel. My army discharge says 'gunshot wound'.

They tend to say that for all fragments, don't they?

Would you like to see my discharge?

Yes.

Nothing to it much. You'll have to take a photograph of it.

(Break in interview)

You are Eugene Alfred Fathers, 1469, 'Medically discharged, unfit - not due to misconduct'.

That means I was a good boy.

'Attested at Geraldton, 17 November 1914', and you were eighteen and three months, born at Bunyip, Victoria.

Where's the ...

On the back it would be: 'Gunshot wound, left arm and forehead'.

(Break in interview)

You were taken back to the dressing station, were you?

Yes.

You can remember that?

And from there ... I remember getting to the dressing station, and that's the last I remember until I woke up in hospital.

In Egypt?

Yes, that's right.

It must have been a bad wound over your eye.

It must have been. I don't know anything about it. I remember getting to the dressing station, but that's the last I remember until I woke up in bed in the hospital in No. 2 AGH at Gezireh.

They eventually sent you home, did they?

No, no. I was going to be sent home, but there were no ships, there was no transport.

Do you remember the day you were wounded, what the date was?

No, that's what I can't remember. I can't remember that at all.

But it was after that photograph was taken, so it must have been in November some time.

That wasn't taken on Gallipoli, that photograph. That was taken another time we were in hospital on Lemnos Island. That's where that was taken, I think.

You told me last time about that photo. Why were you on Lemnos then?

I was in hospital, not with a broken toe, but I dropped a 5.9 inch gun shell on my foot, on the barge. The barge was going up and down, and I dropped one on my foot. It wasn't..

Primed.

Live, No, no, just as well. They sent me to hospital. I even remember the doctor's name. Doctor McGregor I think it was.

You were up in the front line on Pope's Hill during the Turkish attacks, were you, during May?

I was never in any attack – an actual attack.

What about when the Turks were attacking the Australian lines? Did you help in repelling - there were big attacks in early May.

The 8th May?

Yes.

I don't know ... That must have been when I was in hospital.

You helped unload ammunition from the ships.

From the barges.

From the barges, yes, early on, like in the first few weeks.

I don't know when that was really. All I know is that I was doing it and I dropped one on my foot.

Sniper fire used to be very bad on the Peninsula, didn't it?

Oh yeah.

One of the worst things, I think.

That was pretty bad at times I believe. Although I don't think anybody ever shot at me. Bit of a nuisance when you can't remember things like that. It's such a hell of a long time ago.

You used to go swimming off the beach?

Oh yes. Not off the beach, we used to go off Watson's Pier.

You'd dive off the pier?

Yes.

You'd be under shell fire there, wouldn't you?

You could be. I saw the *HMS Triumph* go down. It wasn't only me, but..

She was torpedoed, wasn't she?

Yeah - I think it was the *Triumph*.

Yes, it was.

I went down swimming that day.

Where were you sleeping and eating on the Peninsula?

On the ground.

You made a dugout I suppose.

Oh yeah. Where our clothes got blown up it was a pretty big dugout. We didn't dig it, it was already dug.

How many were there in that dugout? Just the three or four?

Only three that I can remember. That's me, Tom Gibson and Jock Healey. we were always together. If we got separated we always found each other again.

Did they survive the war?

Yes - old Tommy Gibson, yes. Later on I was best man at his wedding, but he's dead now. And Jock Healey: last time I went to the Legion of Anzacs I saw Jock, but I haven't been with him for a while, haven't been able to get away.

How long were you in Egypt? You were in hospital in Egypt, and you didn't go back to the Battalion, did you?

No. That's what I told you before. I did go back, but we were told we weren't wanted. That was down at Tel-el-Kebîr. They were forming the 48th Battalion, and they took a mob from the 16th.

Did you go across to the 48th?

No, I went back to headquarters then in Cairo. When I came back and they sent me to the Postal Unit, I think. Yes, that's right, I was classed as ... When you come out of hospital you are either classed - you were, I think - C1, C2 or C3. And C1 meant that you were temporarily unfit; C2, which I think I was, medically unfit; C3 was totally unfit, I think. I'm not sure about ... I must have been C2. They sent me to the Postal Unit.

This is in Cairo, is it?

In Cairo. Then the next thing I know, I can remember - oh, I can remember it alright - I wasn't long there, then they sent us over to England. Not to England, to France. From Marseilles we went right up - we had one day - not a day, a few hours, in Paris. Then from Paris we went right out to Calais, and that's where I stayed for some time.

And you were still with the Postal Unit?

Yes. What we had to do there was, in Calais, was to get the bags of mail. They were all numbered. I can't tell you the numbers now. If I take, for instance, RW - might have been RW1, or RW2 or whatever - that meant that that particular unit was in a certain area and we had to get them on board a train that was going to that area.

You stayed in the Postal Unit in France?

No, no, no. I wasn't there very long. I went into the Flying Corps as a rigger, splicing wires and things like that.

This is in France?

In France. That's where I finished up.

I notice it said on your discharge that you were a second air mechanic.

That's right, yes.

Did you do any flying?

Once or twice, but not on my own. A couple of chaps from one of the Royal Flying Corps units, we got friendly with them. When the armistice came on we were all shifted up to Germany. At least I was in any case - our unit was, No. 4 Squadron. We were sent up and got as far as Cologne.

(Incidental conversation)

So they sent my squadron up to Cologne. We got friendly with some chaps in the Royal Flying Corps, and they used to play rugby with some of our blokes, but a lot of our flying corps chaps were from New South Wales. Of course, that's the rugby state here. They didn't play Australian Rules football, they just played rugby. Somebody talked me into standing in for one of the players one day. (laughs) I'll never play a rugby match again, it half-killed me. As a matter of fact, we were playing in mud, and it was wet and raining. I was wishing that I was sitting at home. I had great big patches of mud all around my shoulder. I could have brought it home as a souvenir, but I got sick of the sight of it and I tossed it away somewhere. Well, that's where I was when the war finished. Well, the war had finished, that's why we were sent up there.

Where were you on Armistice Day when the war was ended?

Oh now ... I was in the Flying Corps, but where I was ... When I joined the Flying Corps in the first place, when I first got there, I was in a place called Bruay - B-R-U-A-Y. And from there we went to -

we were in huts there – and we started to get shelled out. Luckily the German artillery had the wrong direction. They were firing their shells into the town instead of into us. Anyhow, apparently they must have got the wind up and they shifted us - what was the place called? - this was open air - Clair Marie. I think it was. I don't know whether it was two names or one name. Clair Marie I think was one name. That's where I was when the armistice came.

What was that day like?

Just another day - just another day as far as I was concerned.

I thought there might have been celebrations of some kind.

Wait a minute now, I'm talking about World War I, not this...

I'm talking about November 11, 1918.

That's right, that's the First World War. That's what I was talking about too, but then I thought, well, perhaps you were thinking I was talking about all this business to go on the tape, say, for the 16th Battalion.

I was just wondering where you were, and what you remember about Armistice Day.

Well, that's where I was.

Did they have a party?

Yeah, we did, we had a wake. There were some Portuguese officers there. They'd gone. We got one of their big square tents, and the chaps went scrounging for chickens, buying chickens or borrowing chickens. Another souvenired some wine from somewhere, and we had a wake in this ... No, it was a hut, Portuguese officers' hut. That's where it was.

Did you get drunk?

No, I don't think so. You wouldn't get drunk on the wine in any case because the French people used to feed their children on the wine. This was a bad blend of red wine and whatever - it wasn't champagne. No, you wouldn't get drunk on that stuff.

Did you get a Christmas billy in 1915? You'd be in hospital in Egypt.

No.

You didn't get one?

No, not that I know of - Christmas billy?

Yes, Christmas, December 25, 1915. They issued all the troops with a Christmas billy.

That must have been during the period when I didn't know where I was.

Yes, you'd be in Egypt.

Yeah. I don't even know the date that I was wounded. It was December.

That's when you were wounded?

Yes.

Just before they were evacuated?

Yes ... That thing has always got me tricked. I can never remember. I remember being in hospital, and I remember getting this tattoo stuck on my arm. I was in hospital then.

What does that say?

Anzac 1915.

And that's the Rising Sun on it, is it?

That's the Australian flag. A lot of the chaps got that stuck on them. Had it stuck on on the footpath when I was allowed out of hospital one day. But it's not that, that I don't remember, it's being wounded and getting to hospital.

You must have been unconscious.

I must have been. I don't even know whether I got there by boat. Well, I had to because there was no aircraft. But whether I got there by hospital ship, or one of the tugs that used to carry people to-and-fro. But it was a good way away from Gallipoli to Alexandria. And I don't remember going on a train

straight from hospital to Cairo from Alexandria - if it was. It wouldn't have been Port Said because that was in the opposite direction.

It would have been Alexandria.

I don't remember getting to Alexandria. I don't remember being on the train. And I don't remember being taken from the train to hospital. But I remember waking up in hospital, but how long I'd been there I don't know.

How were you feeling at that time?

Pretty sore.

Did you have any operations?

No, not that I know of. I remember when I came to – or when I got conscious, if I was out to it - there were two nurses. One used to do my arm and the other used to do my head. I remember that. That was when I was getting well. But it's up to that point that I can't recollect getting there, being wounded.

That's not unusual. I've struck other people who are the same. They just lost consciousness. Even a shell that landed right next to them, they didn't know anything until they woke up in hospital.

(Break in interview)

Side A and Side B of this tape: David Chalk interviewing Eugene Fathers, 16th Battalion; Perth, Wednesday 30 March 1988.

END OF TAPE THREE - SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW