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WILFRED J ROBINSON
Interviewed by Stuart Menzies

Cassette 1/Side A

Stuart Menzies: Interview with Mr W J Robinson, Private 61464 of the 11th General Service Reinforcement * of the 1st AIF, also served with the 45th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers North Russian Relief Force, enlistment no. 133038. Interview held in Castle Hill, Sydney, on 23 June 1984. Interviewed by Stuart Menzies.

Mr Robinson, could you start by telling me how you happened to get to London at the time, or out in the training camps, and how it was that you got there after the war?

Wilfred Robinson: I belonged to a general service reinforcement unit and I was landed at Sierra Leone with pneumonic influenza. There at Sierra Leone I became very friendly with Johnny Redman * and Jimmy Peaden * and the three of us were very close. A few of us were considered well enough to be sent on to England. We were put on board the *Zealandic*, which I fancy was either the last or very close to the last troop ship to reach England. It arrived after the war, to be promptly called by whatever troops we struck - I better not swear, I suppose ...

Stuart Menzies: T V L. *

Wilfred Robinson: (inaudible), because we arrived after the storm. So we were engaged in Sierra Leone, sorry, in Sutton Veni No 1 Command Depot * on camp duties. We spent quite a fair time there on camp duties.

Stuart Menzies: Do you remember about what month you arrived in ...

Wilfred Robinson: We arrived in England in December.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Jimmy Peaden, I'm sorry to say, was rather fond of the booze. He got very drunk one night and he came back to the hut that we lived in and he said, 'I've just joined the Russian Relief Force. I've just put my name down at Orderly Rooms * to go to North Russia'. So Johnny Redman and I, we discussed the move and we thought, 'Well, we can't let poor old Jimmy go by himself', so we went down to the Orderly Rooms and put our names down to go. In the morning we said to Jim, 'I wonder when we'll go to Russia'. Jim said, 'What the devil are you talking about?'. So we said, 'You came down to the hut last night full of the fact that you've just put your name down at the Orderly Room to go to North Russia with the Russian Relief Force'. He said, 'I never did anything of the kind'. Well, we said, 'We can't take our names off now we've put them down'. 'Oh', he said, 'Well, I suppose I'll have to go and put my name down'. So that's the way the three of us got into the 45th Royal Fusiliers.

Stuart Menzies: How would have Jimmy Peaden heard of the relief force at this time? Had you seen it advertised?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, we saw it at the picture show.

Stuart Menzies: Was that a runner to the pictures, they had an advertisement?

Wilfred Robinson: Yes, picture show at the camp. They were calling on the screen, you know, for volunteers to the North Russian Relief Force.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: So Jim must've seen that, you see. He was with us at the pictures.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: It must've stuck in his mind and when he had a few drinks aboard, well, he decided, well, it'd give us a fright, probably to give us a fright. He decided that he'd put his name down. So we were then sent up to London. We were given our discharges at Horsery * Road, the AIF headquarters, and then we were sent to Whitehall to be sworn in the Russian Relief Force. Well, they formed us in a ring and there was an elderly colonel in the ring, in the middle. Some wag says, 'Two bob in the guts', being a ...

Stuart Menzies: A two-up term.

Wilfred Robinson: Two-up ring, you see. He said, 'How dare you say that, how dare you. I've been in this army for 50 years'. A voice came from one of the fellows around, 'You ought to be dead', which he wasn't at all pleased about. So we were then sent off to Saddling * Camp down in Kent.

Stuart Menzies: Can I just, one question of that. When you put your names down in the Orderly Room, was it a couple of days wait before you went up to London, or did you go straight up?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, we went up within a few days.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: To get our discharges. I suppose they had to advise Horsery Road or something. We went up there and got our discharges.

Stuart Menzies: Were they very helpful? Were Horsery Road, were the AIF officials very helpful?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, they were quite helpful, yes. As a matter of fact, I've got the discharge here now, tattered and torn. It got part of the bullet when I was wounded, in fact.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: I had it in the wallet that I was wounded through, and the bible and so on. So we were set up there without any money. We had our own payrolls overdrawn. We couldn't get any money from the AIF. So there we were, I think we had fourpence between us, stuck in London. So we decided we'd go along to the YMCA to see if we could get something to eat. No, they wouldn't give us anything to eat for only fourpence. We went to the Salvos and they gave us a decent feed each. So after that I said, 'Now, boys, I sent home for some money. It might be at Australia House'. So I said, 'It's worthwhile'. So we set off and walked up The Strand until we got to Australia House and went to the Victorian Agent General's part of the show. I said, 'Did any money come over for me?'. 'They've sent across 30 pounds'. Well, 30 pounds was a lot of money in those days. So, sure enough, the 30 pounds was there. Well, we had a high old time for a couple of days in London.

Stuart Menzies: Was this before you went down to the Saddling Camp in Kent or afterwards?

Wilfred Robinson: After which?

Stuart Menzies: Before you went down to the Saddling Camp in Kent?

Wilfred Robinson: Before.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: That's before we went to the Saddling Camp in Kent.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Then when we got down to Saddling Camp in Kent Jimmy says, 'Oh' he says, 'I'd like to go home to Glasgow'. He was a Glasgow man, you see. We said, 'Oh, we'd like to come too'. So we went along and saw the Orderly Rooms down at the Saddling Camp, 'What's the chance of getting a pass and a railway ticket up to Glasgow?'. So, 'Yes, all right'. So they gave us a pass and a ticket each, or a pass each on the railway. Off we went, caught the night train to Glasgow. Travelled all night. Only had, I think, a two-day pass, something like that. So the next day we went back to Saddling Camp. We travelled two nights running. When we got there we thought we might like to go to Glasgow again and off we went to Glasgow. They gave us another pass and so on. They didn't seem to mind what they gave us chaps. So we stayed mucking around there for a week or so and then they trained us across to Southampton. [coughing] That's no good, is it?

Stuart Menzies: That's okay.

Wilfred Robinson: They trained us across to Southampton and we caught a ship called the *Czar*, * which went up to North Russia. They landed us there at North Russia. We went into Murmansk first. That's where they had that big explosion the other day.

Stuart Menzies: That's right.

Wilfred Robinson: We went into Murmansk and then went on round to Archangel, * into the White Sea, and landed there. Then we were put into a sort of a barracks effect with the big stoves that the fellows used to sleep on in the winter, you know.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: So we were put there and we were put on guard duties. A couple of blokes came down, 'Hey, there's a barge full of port wine and champagne there'. What are you saying, dear? [talking to wife?] I told Stuart that.

Stuart Menzies: No, this is a wonderful story.

Wilfred Robinson: So with that the troops into the barge. They were getting ashore with cases of champagne and cases of port wine. Well, they took them all back to this barracks and they thought they better burn the straw and the wood of the cases. So they set the damn place on fire. The next thing that happens, there's a fire brigade turns up and Sergeant Pearce, * who later got to the VC, he was a man who could use his fists a bit. As the firemen came rushing in he probably was knocking them out. At any rate, honestly, for a couple of days we were finding blokes all over the place, in Russian prisons and guards rooms, all over the place. They finally got them all sorted out.

Stuart Menzies: These were all from under Major May? * These were all your 45th guys?

Wilfred Robinson: Yes, all the Australian mob.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: We finally got them out, all except one bloke. Who do you think it was? Jimmy. Because he'd got on the booze particularly with this champagne and port wine and he'd gone and clobbered a Russian officer, one of the White Russian officers. So he was arrested, put into the clink with instructions he was to be given a field general court martial. So the next day, I think it was, or two days after, they decided these Australians were better up at the front to do some fighting, rather than hanging about doing guard duties on the wharf, on the front, wharf affair. So poor old Jim was to be left behind. I said to Captain Newbold, * our 2IC, * a very decent bloke, he was a New Zealander ... Major May was our CO and he got an Australian hat because we were all in Australian

uniforms, the whole lot of us. They called us the Australian Company of the 45th Royal Fusiliers.

Stuart Menzies: You weren't a full company though, were you? It was a fairly mixed company you were in?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, it was a mixed show.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: They called us that but just to differentiate.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: There were some of the genuine 45th Royal Fusiliers with us.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: So I said to Captain Newbold, 'What about poor Jim? Are we going to leave poor Jimmy behind?'. He said, 'I'll see what I can do'. There was a pony about and he jumped up on this pony and off he went and he came back with Jimmy perched behind him. It's all true, pet. [talking to wife?] Yes. You're looking disgusted. You better cross that bit out.

Stuart Menzies: That's okay.

Wilfred Robinson: Captain Newbold said, 'Well, I've brought Jimmy back, but he's to be given every onerous duty there is. If they want volunteers for any special job, he is to be detailed'. Then they called for volunteers. So they loaded us aboard cattle trucks and took us up the line. When we got there there was quite a bombardment going on. They were having an artillery duel with guns that we had mounted at ... I forget what the name of the

place was. Might have been Nova Seskia * or Backaritzza, * I'm not sure which. We were landed there and the minute they landed us Jimmy Peaden was pulled out. 'Now, we want you to go through that forest over there and scout to see what you can see. See if there's any enemy there and so on. So now I want two more volunteers'. So poor old Johnny and I fall in for that. Well, that was the same right through all the time we were there. Jimmy was detailed and then we used to volunteer to be with him.

At any rate, we went through this and we were so dog tired that night after travelling all day and a lot of them, of course, still had heavy heads and so on. We just fell where we were, even though there were shells falling all around. We just lay on the ground and went to sleep. At any rate ... what's the next step?

Stuart Menzies: What was the patrol? What sort of countryside were you patrolling through? Was that sort of through the pine forest?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, through the pine forests, yes.

Stuart Menzies: Did you encounter ...

Wilfred Robinson: Wonder we didn't lose ourselves.

Stuart Menzies: Yes.

Wilfred Robinson: No, we didn't encounter anything but, I'll tell you what, the artillery was going on overhead. Well, you haven't been, but to hear a shell going over your heads is like an express train going through the sky. At any rate, they had the wind up us properly. They had dugouts of a sort there. The troops, they had a crowd of sort of headquarters troops there, you know. They'd hear the guns go over, you know, the howitzers or something over in the Russian, around about Ampster * or somewhere like that.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: The minute they'd hear the sound they're down into the dugouts. Because the shell would arrive, oh, seconds after they heard the noise.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Because sight, of course, travels far quicker than sound and the sound was a little bit faster than the shells.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Then down we'd go down the thing. At any rate, we got sent from there up to another spot. I think it might be Backaritzza, I'm not sure. We were there and we did a little bit of messing around and they formed Johnny, Jimmy, myself and another bloke that I can't remember his name ...

Stuart Menzies: Gaffy? *

Wilfred Robinson: No, not Gaffy. No, that's a different story, Gaffy.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Into a Lewis gun team. They used to send rations and various things, ammo and stuff, up to the front line with a train. They put a cattle truck that had things built out, you know, and filled with soil.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: We were stuck into this with a Lewis gun, a couple of Lewis gun teams, with our Lewis gun resting on ... she was sort of a slit effect.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: We went off up the line in front of the engine. Well, old Bolo, * as we used to call him, he had an outpost or a lookout post up on a tree somewhere and the minute they saw the train coming up they used to start shelling. Well, honestly, they never hit us but by golly there were some close misses. When we got up to the line, you know, the mob used to pitch out the stuff as quick as they could and then go backwards down the line again, you see. I seen, honestly, a shell land on the rail line behind us and blow the line up.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: But fortunately it never hit us. We were on that business for quite a while and we did a number of patrols around, you know. We used to go out on patrols, seeing if Bolo was trying to establish himself in any particular area, and also inspected some block houses that some of the earlier troops had taken and hadn't bothered to keep them going. You see, didn't bother to man them, to see that Bolo hadn't got in there. One particular ... we struck quite a number. They'd entrenched themselves up a slashing and they had machine guns and they had a lot of Mongolian troops there. They were the very devil. The Russian troops at the time they were good to fight.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Because the minute you started they used to run. Not the Mongolians - they stuck to their guns and we killed quite a number of them. One bloke, a corporal, I've forgotten his name, captured a Russian machine gun and I think that's in the War Museum now.

Stuart Menzies: That's right, I think it is.

Wilfred Robinson: As a matter of fact. Oh, some days after we went back to that particular place. They never bothered to bury their dead. They were just lying there. Of course, summer time with the flies and that about, they were a shocking sight. They had leaflets scattered all around, in English, printed in English. They called themselves the English Speaking Communists in Russia. They were telling us we had no right to be there, that we were fighting working men and all this sort of business. So we took no notice of that, of course. We went out on a number of patrols and that sort of things. One particular patrol we had a corporal names Stewart. * This Corporal Stewart, he was a Scotsman and he'd been cashiered. I think it was something to do with embezzling funds from the mess or something. He'd been a captain in one of the Scottish regiments and he'd been reduced to the rank of a corporal. The poor fellow, the mosquitoes there were about that long. Oh, dreadful things, great mosquitoes. They attacked him very, very badly. His face was all swollen. This particular bloke, he was in charge of this particular patrol. There was Gaffy and myself and Jim, of course, and Johnny and Corporal Stewart and two or three of his ...

Stuart Menzies: Privates?

Wilfred Robinson: Privates belonging to the other crowd, you know, the 45th Royal Fusiliers. So we were away there in the bush and Gaffy, he'd been a drover in Australia. I never saw a man like him for finding his way. Stewart says, 'Oh, well', he said, 'We'll go this way boys. I've got my compass'. Gaffy said, 'Well, if you don't mind, corporal' he said, 'I know how to get back'. Stewart says, 'Oh, well' he said, 'All right'. So our particular crowd, Gaffy and Jimmy and Johnny and I, off we went back with Gaffy. He just strolled along. He had a look at the sun and had a look at this and led us right back to the camp. Stewart arrived back a couple of hours after. They'd lost themselves. But he was a great chap, Gaffy. Gaffy, I think he paid us one of the greatest compliments we could have been paid. [tape goes off]

Addressed to us in our general service reinforcements, you see.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Gaffy looked at us. He had letters given him to give to us or something. He looked at us and he said, 'I didn't know you blokes were B rainbows'. So he was an old sweat that had been in France.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: We thought that was a great compliment. He didn't pick us for newcomers because with poor old Jim and Johnny and I, we were in the thick of everything because Jim used to be detailed and we had to follow on, you see. So that was all right and we filled in a fair bit of time that way. Finally, let me see, we got word that we were going up to attack a big Russian artillery post.

Stuart Menzies: Emster? *

Wilfred Robinson: That's right, Emster. So we set off, all of we Australians, some of the tommies attached to us, Johnny and Jimmy and myself and the other bloke with the Lewis gun. Apparently, we didn't know the reason at the time but we were supposed to attack that afternoon or late that evening, or that evening. We couldn't; didn't get there in time. I believe that the guides either lost their way or didn't show the right way for some reason or other, because they hated us, you know.

Stuart Menzies: The local peasants?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, yes.

Stuart Menzies: Really?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, my word. We were under orders never to go alone into any of the villages around in the forest because if you do that you'll be attacked.

Stuart Menzies: How did that make you feel?

Wilfred Robinson: Mm?

Stuart Menzies: How did it make you feel with the local peasants being so ...

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, well, we used to go alone.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, they were a shocking lot. Child prostitution was rife. One of these ... I did as a matter of fact. There was a woman used to come and clean out our tents and so on. We were in tents at the time, the round * tents.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Just to test her - we'd heard that this was going on - I said, 'Skulka rupli kerish barishna?'. That means, How many roubles to get a girl, you see. So many roubles, she quoted so many roubles. I've forgotten how much now. I said, 'Barishna'. She pointed to a child about 11 or 12 years old. That was her own child. But for the roubles she was quite prepared to pass her over to an Australian soldier, which I thought was a very shocking affair.

So we slept that night. Put one ground sheet down, lay on the ground sheet with our rifles between us and the old machine gun, of course. Jimmy and I shared one and Johnny and the other bloke shared one. And a ground sheet over us to keep us from the dew, because you used to get a lot of dew at night there. So off we went next morning and we attacked Emster, or attacked this artillery post outside Emster, at about six o'clock or six-thirty in the morning. Johnny and Jimmy and I, Johnny rested his Lewis gun ... oh, the artillery post was surrounded with trenches and barbed wire entanglements. We rested the machine gun on the wire and we inflated * along the trench to keep the heads down a bit. Pearce,

Sergeant Pearce, cut the wire, only about, oh, a metre across the path there from where we were. Cut through the wire and dashed in and, of course, the troops went in after him. They started to fire from a block house which was covering the trenches too, covering where they were getting in. He stood there taking the pins out of Mills * bombs and pitching them inside. He got skittled, poor fellow. He got shot to pieces. He got the VC for that because it saved a lot of lives.

In the meantime Johnny ran out of panniers of ammunition. You see, he used to carry the gun. No 2, * who was Jimmy, carried all the spare parts and so on. No 3 and 4 carried the ammo. I had two panniers of ammunition as well as my rifle ammunition and I passed those over to Johnny. He, of course, got rid of those pretty quickly. The other bloke, the fourth bloke - I couldn't tell you his name and I don't think he was an Australian, I think he was one of the Pommy chaps - he'd thrown the ammo down and gone off. Why, I don't know. So Johnny said, 'Any more ammo, any more ammo?'. I said, 'I'll see what I can find'. So I went back to see, back to where we'd come from to see if I could see any ammo. There was Major May badly wounded lying on the ground. I said, 'Can I do anything for you?'. He said, 'No, you can't do anything for me'. With that, as I turned, I got myself.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Knocked me head over tit, of course, when you get shot like that, especially as it was a lead bullet and, of course, it mushroomed. I had a little bible and a wallet and a diary and my discharge all in this top pocket and they saved my life because it deflected the bullet a bit. But, oh, it knocked a hole about that big through the bundle.

Stuart Menzies: Right, that's extraordinary.

Wilfred Robinson: Yes. It knocked a piece out of the diary about that big.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: You can see where it just caught the edge of the ... the thing was folded, the ...

Stuart Menzies: Discharge.

Wilfred Robinson: The discharge was folded and it just caught the end and you see the ragged bits.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: At any rate, that knocked me kite and that's the last I saw of the fighting there. Of course, by that time our troops had got in and captured the place. One of our fellows captured an armoured train on his own. I don't know whether he ever got anything for it. I couldn't remember his name. But I don't think he did, that he got anything for that.

Stuart Menzies: I haven't read anything.

Wilfred Robinson: No. He did, he captured that armoured train on his own and slew the crew and some other fellows got aboard. Whether they pitched him off or not, I don't know, but he wasn't wounded or anything. They moved the armoured train off out of our reach, you know, off to safety. In the meantime, they picked up Major May on a stretcher and they turned up with a stretcher for me, with one of our fellows in charge and about, oh, half a dozen Russian prisoners. They carried us down, oh, a long, long way, right back to where we'd started from, where we had been bivouacked there, you see. I was shoved into the casualty clearing station there. They poured a drop of ... what do you call that stuff?

Stuart Menzies: Morphine?

Wilfred Robinson: No, no.

Stuart Menzies: Iodine?

Wilfred Robinson: No, it's a salt.

Stuart Menzies: Epsom?

Wilfred Robinson: Saline.

Stuart Menzies: Oh, right, yes.

Wilfred Robinson: They poured it into the wound. I spent the night there. The next day they loaded me onto a cattle truck - I was still on the stretcher - and they took me right down to a point close to Archangel. Took me off out of the pier and stuck me on board a tug which was lying in the river. Took me from there down to the landing stage nearest to the hospital and an ambulance was waiting there. They popped me into that and took me over to the hospital. Well, I'd been wounded early in the morning. I travelled all that night, all the following day. In the tug for an hour or so and then in the ambulance and finally I got there at some time. Of course, the wound had gone, you know. It was really no good at all at that time. So they didn't do anything with it except pour some more saline in. Of course, all bits of bible and bits of my uniform and all this sort of thing had all been driven in by the soft-nosed bullet. By the time then the wound was septic. Before they sent me out to the hospital ship they got one of the military parsons to come and take a letter to my mother and all this sort of business. They thought I was a goner. Little did they know.

So I got out there and I had two operations in two days. They got a whole lot of stuff out and so on and stuck a great big tube in. To get the tube in they had to saw out a bit of rib. They said, 'I'm sorry, old boy, we can't give you an anaesthetic, you're lung's full of pus and your heart's been shifted an inch with the force of the ...', you know, when I was hit. So they gave me a feeding bottle, a little feeding bottle full of scotch whisky. So they said,

'That'll fix you up'. So I sucked on that and they sawed a piece out of my rib. You know how the butcher saws the bone. I'm listening to it. They nearly got it through and then snapped it like that. I thought they'd taken me inside out. At any rate, from that moment I didn't look back.

We were pretty well one of the last ships to leave Archangel Harbour. We got to Leath, * the Port of Edinburgh. When we got to Leath the surgeon commander came along to me. Aussie, they used to call me, of course. He said, 'Well, Aussie, how you feeling?'. I said, 'Not too bad'. There was a fellow opposite me, about as far away as what my wife is, and he said, 'That chap's gonna die. We've got to land him at Leath to die'. I said, 'Oh, that's bad luck'. He says, 'His wound's not as bad as yours'. 'Oh' I said, 'Don't put the wind up me'. He said, 'Oh, that's all right. You never thought you were going to die'. But he said, 'He dropped his bundle and thought he was going to die and he is going to die'.

So from there we went round to Portsmouth. We were loaded into a hospital train and taken right into the environs of the hospital and put in there. The fellow in the bed next to me was Joe ...

Stuart Menzies: Purdew? *

Wilfred Robinson: Purdew.

Stuart Menzies: That's right.

Wilfred Robinson: Joe had two wounds. The sister came round wanting to see where we had the wounds, you see. Asked me where my wound and I said, 'Here in the chest'. Asked Dew, * 'Where's your wound?'. He said, 'In the sciatic nerve'. He had the sciatic nerve severed which gave him a dropped foot, a dropped foot like that. Ever after he had to have - you couldn't join the sciatic nerve, apparently - he had to have a ...

Stuart Menzies: A brace?

Wilfred Robinson: Well, no, a spring.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: On his foot up here somewhere to keep his foot level.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: She said, 'You've got two wounds'. 'Oh' he said, 'No, only one, sister'. 'You've got two wounds, now show me. I want to see'. He'd had a piece knocked out of the end of his tool. He was dead scared to show the sister, you see. At any rate, he showed the sister and, of course, they don't care, they're sisters, but he was too embarrassed. At any rate, Joe and I became great friends there. Gaffy was in hospital, as you see there.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: But he didn't last very long. He had a wound in his leg or something and they sent him up to Horsery Road and I remained. I had another operation there. Then, oh, the wound was very slow in healing and they had this big tube in me. They used to pull that out every day and stick it in again. The naval blokes were marvellous because they knew what to do. Whether they had a lot of experience of wounds or not, I don't know, but you'd think the sisters would have. But they used to go, pick, * like that and pull it out quickly and you wouldn't feel it so much. But Sister Rogers, * this was my sister, she'd pull it out a little bit, pull it out a little bit. I'd say, 'For God's sake, pull it out quickly'. So she got into that habit then because they had to put it in again. That always hurt a bit. I went up and Jimmy's people, Jimmy had gone back to Australia by then and Jimmy's sister wrote down to me and asked me would I like to come up and spend leave with them, you see. So I saw the doctor and he said, 'Oh, yes, that's all right. You'll have to go to the hospital there for dressings'. So off I went up to Glasgow.

The conductor on the train, he was a marvel. He saw I was pretty crook, you know, and so on. He put me in a first class carriage and looked after me all the time I was on the way up there. Isobel, * that was Jimmy's sister, met me and took me home to her place. I spent a very nice leave there. She took me across - snowing, it was winter then, snowing - took me off to the Stub Hill * Military Hospital where they dressed my wound and so on. I had a couple of trips to go across to get my wound dressed. I went back to Nettley * Hospital and my future brother-in-law turned up to see me. He was a great mate of mine, a school friend of mine. He'd gone home, met my sister, after he came back from war. He wasn't my brother-in-law then. He met my sister and married her. He came to see me at Southampton and I went down to see him off back to Australia.

He had a very interesting experience too. When he got to Cape Town he was given leave and he went ashore and a chap came up to them. There were three or four of them there. He said, 'Any of you chaps come from Melbourne?'. Ray says, 'Yes, I do'. He says, 'What part of Melbourne?'. He says, 'Ivanhoe'. 'Ivanhoe' he said, 'Would you know Jack Robinson?'. He says, 'Yes, he's one of my greatest mates'. That was my uncle. You wouldn't believe it, would you?

Stuart Menzies: That's extraordinary, isn't it?

Wilfred Robinson: It was my uncle and when I went out I went to see him. Finally I was put onto the *Bohea Castillo*, * which was a family ship. How I got on the family ship, I thought, 'Well, dash it, I want to get home'. I wouldn't go for dressings and I spent four or five or six days and I didn't go for dressings. The wound closed over. So I went to see the doctor and I said, 'Oh, doc' I said, 'I'd like to go home'. 'Oh' he said, 'A lot of us would like to go home'. I said, 'Yes, but not everybody's got a home 30,000 miles away'. So he said, 'Oh, well, we'll see what we can do'.

In the meantime, about every week a letter used to come up from Horsery Road asking how I was progressing. My dad was the manager of one of the biggest boot factories in

Australia. They used to make a tremendous number of military boots. Well, the old man was very incensed at me being allowed to leave while I was still a minor. I was only 19, you see. He said, 'You should never have let him leave like that and go to Australia'. Of course, being wounded and all that sort of thing, that only made him worse. He had such a big pull with the Defence Department that they sent over an order that I was to be sent to Horsery Road for reinstatement in the AIF as if I'd never left it. So they gave me a civilian suit, which I didn't want. I'd got hold of an Australian uniform. I think I got them to get it for me. I forgot how I got that. I was dressed again in Australian uniform. I gave this away to some other bloke. I said, 'Would you like a civilian suit?'. He said, 'Too right I would'. He was being discharged the same day as I was from the hospital. I knew him by sight, you see.

So I went up to Horsery Road and reported and they had their instructions to re-enlist me in the 1st AIF. They said, 'We can't enlist this bloke in the 1st AIF'. He said, 'What's your category?'. I said, 'Permanently unfit'. 'Oh' they said, 'We can't enlist you as permanently unfit. We'll have to join you up as A1'. * So they swore me in as A1. Next morning I was boarded and marked permanently unfit. So I came back to Australia. Oh, I was discharged with an English pension. When I got back to Australia I was promptly put into Caulfield Hospital, had another couple of operations there and finally was discharged from Caulfield. I think it was the following October I was discharged from Caulfield. I was given a pension from the Australian people. So for a while I was enjoying a British pension and an Australian pension.

Stuart Menzies: That's okay, isn't it?

Wilfred Robinson: All for the one thing. So finally they handed over - what shall we say? - the paying of the English pension to the Australian authorities.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: At Repat. They woke up to the fact I was getting two pensions for the one wound so they wrote and said they were stopping the Australian pension. I said to my dad, I said, 'What do you think?'. He said, 'Well' he said, 'You're not really entitled to it, are you?'. I said, 'No, I'm not entitled to it. Legally I might be but morally I'm not'. So I didn't do any more, but I kept my English pension. Now, the result of that is that my English pension is worth to me about \$51 a fortnight, whereas the Australian pension ...

Cassette 1/Side B

Stuart Menzies: You were just about to say that you got no service medals or anything like that for the ...

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, that's right. I've kept my British pension and I've been jolly glad I have. I was discharged in October and, well, after that of course I've been in the RSL. I joined the RSL straightaway and I belong to the RSL here and the RSL Club. I'm a bit past ... I used to march with the, you know, Anzac Day but I got past that now. I can't walk too far. Well, I'm 84 and getting on for 85. Well, now I think that's about all.

Stuart Menzies: Okay. Well, there's a couple of things I'd like to, if I could take you back, a couple of things that I'd like, if you could expand on them.

Wilfred Robinson: Yes, right.

Stuart Menzies: If you can't remember any of the details it doesn't matter at all.

Wilfred Robinson: Go on, you go ahead.

Stuart Menzies: When you saw the advertisement for the Relief Force, the call at the picture theatre that night, when you first heard about it, was there much talk about the Relief Force?

Wilfred Robinson: No, no talk at all. Nobody ever took any notice of it.

Stuart Menzies: So no-one was interested. So where do you think all of the guys that served with you under Major May, where did they come from? They were from?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, at various depots around the place, No 1 Command Depot. There were other depots. There were depots at Hertkit * and Fovent * and these places.

Stuart Menzies: Do you know why anybody else enlisted, apart from you three?

Wilfred Robinson: Well, half of them were dodging police or something or other.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: There were the two, three or four two-up kings with us. Some chaps that left girls in trouble in Australia and all this sort of business.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: One particular bloke I knew was a deserter from the navy and he just joined the army and he didn't want to go back to Australia yet.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: For fear they'd get him and so on. They were a pretty tough mob that went up, I tell you.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: We were innocent really, we three, except old Jimmy, he was a hard nut, of course. He was a seaman.

Stuart Menzies: Right. He was a Scott too, wasn't he?

Wilfred Robinson: A Scottish seaman. *

Stuart Menzies: That's right. Is that how he'd got to Australia?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, yes.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Yes, he married a girl and poor old Jim, my heart felt sorry for him. He came to my welcome home and his wife, he couldn't find his wife when he got back. She'd been drawing his allotment all the time. He'd said to me, he said, 'You know, I might have a son by now, Jack'. He was dead keen on having a son. When he got there she'd deserted, finished. He went to the pack again. One day I was working with Howard Smiths, * the shipping people, and I went back to my job. I was the senior clerk, chief clerk in the provedoring department down at their Sidley * Street wharf really. The stores and the provedoring department was down near the wharf. An apparition turned up at the door. It was poor old Jim. Oh, he was down and out. He'd been on the booze.

So his people had been very good to me and I thought, you know, well, he was a mate of mine and so on. So I rang up home and rang up my dad and rang up my mother and said, 'Could Jimmy come out?'. So they said, 'All right, what's he like?'. I said, 'He's been on the booze'. The old man said, dad I mean, said, 'Well, he can only stop with us as long as he give up the drink and doesn't drink'. So I said to Jim, 'All right'. I gave him some money and told him how to get out there. I said, 'Now, Jim, provided you don't drink you can stay'. So I fitted him up with clothes. Oh, he was absolutely down and out. We had him there for some two or three months, I suppose. Finally, he turned up blotto one day and dad said, 'That's the end of it. You know he's got to go now, Jack'. I said, 'He knows it too', because the minute I came home and he'd been on the booze I said, 'Look, Jim, you've got to go'. I had three sisters and all nice girls. You know, dad and mother didn't want a boozy chap around the place.

So he said, 'It's all right, I've got a ship'. He'd got a ship and off he went the next day to join this ship. He got as far as Western Australia, Fremantle, and he jumped ship again. He wrote to me, said he'd jumped ship and he was going up scrub cutting into the bush. I never heard another word from him. I had a letter from his sister some time after asking

me could I give her any news of Jim, when I'd last seen him. So I wrote and told her the story how we'd taken him in, looked after him for some months. I said, 'The last time we heard of him was he said he was going up scrub cutting in the bush in Western Australia'. Goodness knows what happened to him then but I've never seen him since, never heard of him. But whether he's dead or not, one would presuppose he's dead because if another bloke and I are the only survivors ...

Stuart Menzies: Well, the only ones that I know of anyway.

Wilfred Robinson: Yes, must be dead.

Stuart Menzies: There could still be others. Because it's never been established how many Australians actually went, it could never be ruled out that there aren't more survivors still.

Wilfred Robinson: No, that's true.

Stuart Menzies: It's hard to tell.

Wilfred Robinson: Hard to tell. Now, what else did you want to know?

Stuart Menzies: All right. Back to the Relief Force business. When you were sort of all being formed, what were you told about the nature of the fighting? What were you told the reason why you were going?

Wilfred Robinson: We were told it was the North Russian Relief Force. We were told it was to relieve the crowd that had gone up some 12 months before.

Stuart Menzies: Right, right.

Wilfred Robinson: They were the fellows who objected to we blokes.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: They called us mercenaries and so on.

Stuart Menzies: Yes.

Wilfred Robinson: That's how I first got in tow with the War Memorial crowd because they wrote and said only so many Australian soldiers had served up there and that was too much for me. I wrote and said that a number of Australians soldiers had served up there. They'd said we were mercenaries and we were this, that and the other and we'd gone for tommy pay. I said, 'That's a lot of nonsense because we were paid Arctic rates, Arctic Circle rates, and it was five bob a day, the same, except that it was deferred pay. We were only losing a bob a day, that's all. Of course, the other Pommies that were with us they were only getting a bob a day, of course, but we were getting five bob a day. No, well, I think they paid them the Arctic wage too so they wouldn't feel out with it, you know.

Stuart Menzies: So did you see it as an extension of the war, going ...

Wilfred Robinson: Well, I told you how we got into it. We didn't think about that side of it at all.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: It was a case of mateship really.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Poor old Jim went, or said he'd gone, and we decided we'd go with him. I'm glad I wasn't married then to my wife or she'd have given me something for that, wouldn't you, dear?

Mrs Robinson: You wouldn't have gone, dear.

Wilfred Robinson: No, I suppose not.

Stuart Menzies: It's become well known that you were able to continue to wear your AIF uniforms.

Wilfred Robinson: Yes.

Stuart Menzies: Do you know how that came about, how you were allowed to wear your AIF uniforms?

Wilfred Robinson: Well, I always had the reason. In the War Memorial, in the business, they told us we could wear our Australian uniform.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: I've got an idea, and I think I'm right, that they told us to put these other uniforms on and we said, 'No, we'll wear our Australian uniform'.

Stuart Menzies: And that was an end to the matter.

Wilfred Robinson: They didn't do anything about it then.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Old Major May went and got an Australian hat.

Stuart Menzies: Right. Were the New Zealanders wearing the ... do you remember whether ...

Wilfred Robinson: No, I don't know of any New Zealanders with us, but I do know that we had a New Zealand captain, Captain Newbold.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: He was a New Zealander but he might have been serving in the British forces.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: That's probably ...

Stuart Menzies: But can you remember what sort of uniform he was wearing? Would he have been wearing a British uniform?

Wilfred Robinson: He was wearing a British uniform.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: And an ordinary officer's cap.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: He didn't get to the stage of getting an Australian hat.

Stuart Menzies: So there were no New Zealanders that you remember in the force under Major May?

Wilfred Robinson: Not that I know of. No, not that I know of.

Stuart Menzies: So it was all Australians and Royal Fusiliers people, all Pommies and Australians?

Wilfred Robinson: Yes, that's right.

Stuart Menzies: Okay.

Wilfred Robinson: As far as I know.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Because I can't answer what was up in the riverfront.

Stuart Menzies: Right, yes.

Wilfred Robinson: Mine was the Australian front, as you know.

Stuart Menzies: During the time you were there, not precisely in your area but on the riverfront there was a lot of mutinies happening. Did you hear about those?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, yes, we knew of them. There was nearly one too as far as we were concerned.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: A couple of the Pommy blokes belonging to the 45th Royal Fusiliers pinched some whisky from the officers' mess. We'd been out on a patrol or something and we came back and we found these blokes handcuffed to a gun carriage, you know, the wheels of a bloody gun.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Excuse my French.

Stuart Menzies: That's okay.

Wilfred Robinson: So that was no good to us. We all got out rifles and off we went to Major May's tent and said, 'Let those blokes go or there's going to be trouble'. He let them go.

Stuart Menzies: And there was no repercussion?

Wilfred Robinson: No repercussion whatsoever.

Stuart Menzies: You got away cold.

Wilfred Robinson: Except he said, he was addressing us one time after when we were going into action sometime, I think before the Emster stunt, he says, 'I'm gonna get a VC or you B's are gonna get to RIP', says Major May.

Stuart Menzies: What was the general feeling about the mutinies, or the White Russian troops that you were serving with?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, the White Russian troops, we used to admire the Russian troops. The White Russian troops, they were fantastic. They had a slow march and they used to sing and their voices, it was really fantastic, the sound of those voices as they marched slowly along. The only troops really that I knew of to mutiny in our time there were the ... what did they call them?

Stuart Menzies: Dyer's * Battalion.

Wilfred Robinson: Who?

Stuart Menzies: Dyer's Battalion.

Wilfred Robinson: No, no. It was the fellow that was a colonel, a lieutenant colonel.

Stuart Menzies: Sherwood Kelly? *

Wilfred Robinson: That's right, Sherwood Kelly mob.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: What they were I don't know but they mutinied.

Stuart Menzies: He was a British lieutenant colonel.

Wilfred Robinson: He was the one that wouldn't let them go into (inaudible).

Stuart Menzies: That's right.

Wilfred Robinson: He got court martialled over it. I don't know what they did to him, but I remember he got court martialled.

Stuart Menzies: What was the feeling with all these things happening at the time? What was your reaction or your troops' reaction to it?

Wilfred Robinson: What, to mutiny?

Stuart Menzies: To people like Sherwood Kelly refusing to fight?

Wilfred Robinson: Didn't worry us a bit. We didn't care. We had some Polish troops with us. By golly, were they any good! Oh, my word. They were fighters, those Polish.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Polish, a Polish contingent. Yes. Oh, you forget about lots of things, you know.

Stuart Menzies: Yes, that's right. Last time we spoke you mentioned that just before you were leaving, or at some time when you were in Russia, it was mooted that they wanted some of you guys to go down and advise Denigan. *

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, we were told, we were told when we first went to Russia.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: That after we finished there that we were to go to South Russia.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: We were to be put in as training troops really. Say, a couple of us to a company of these White Russians and so on. We'd have been slaughtered, no doubt, if we had got there. At any rate, I was out of it.

Stuart Menzies: Right. What was your reaction at the time to being told that?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, we didn't care much.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: No. We thought it would be interesting to go down there.

Stuart Menzies: Yes.

Wilfred Robinson: Of course, they were carrying all before them in those days.

Stuart Menzies: That's right.

Wilfred Robinson: They had some of Kolcheck's * mob. We had a few big six inch naval guns of Kolcheck's mounted on trucks they brought across.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, my God. We were out on a patrol one night. They got the news that Bolo had hopped in somewhere and we were off up the line. We had to walk up the railway line to sort of meet the Bolo and they fired these goddamn guns. Well, we were right in, you know, with the force of the demons just firing over our heads. I know I turned right around. It knocked me right round. I turned round facing towards the guns. Everybody was in the same sort of mess. At any rate, we got up and they lined us across in open order about, well, each one between the wife and I. Here we are in the darkness, you know, with their rifles all ready and never saw a sign of anything, which we were very pleased about, I might add.

Stuart Menzies: Yes.

Wilfred Robinson: Yes.

Stuart Menzies: When you got back to Australia, did you have any reaction when you told people you'd been in Russia for a year?

Wilfred Robinson: Oh, no, they didn't seem to care about that.

Stuart Menzies: Because there was ...

Wilfred Robinson: Lots of them didn't know where we were, you know.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: They didn't know who they were fighting or where they were fighting. But, no, there was no reaction to that, not that I know of.

Stuart Menzies: Right. It's just that at the time there were some newspaper reports going on about the Australians there and things like that.

Wilfred Robinson: Yes, only the troops. We had a white star.

Stuart Menzies: Right.

Wilfred Robinson: On our shoulders. You see, white star, a blue with a white star. The first things she says, 'Good Gawd, silver star starch'. There's nothing like the Australian troops, you know, they're funny. A good lot though, my word they were.

Stuart Menzies: I'm just trying to think whether there's anything further. I think you've covered everything that I could possibly. That's fabulous. Well, look, that's about all I can think of at the moment. That's wonderful.

Wilfred Robinson: Well, what about would you like a cup of tea or something?

Stuart Menzies: I'd love a cup of tea.

[End of interview with Wilfred Robinson.]