ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE:	REGINALD COLMER, 13 BATTALION, FIRST WORLD WAR
INTERVIEWEE:	REGINALD COLMER
INTERVIEWER:	DAVID CHALK
SUMMARY:	ENLISTING FOR WAR; INCIDENTS ON SHIP GOING TO GALLIPOLI; EXPERIENCES ON GALLIPOLI AS MACHINE-GUNNER; FROSTBITE; HOSPITALIZATION IN EGYPT; EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE AT THE FRONT; SHORT STINT AS AN OBSERVER BEHIND ENEMY LINES; HOSPITALIZATION IN LONDON; ARMISTICE DAY; RETURNING HOME; INCIDENTS ON RETURN HOME TO ARMIDALE.
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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

... Brigade did no training at [Mena], they trained at Heliopolis under - well, the general there was General [Godly] - we trained with the New Zealanders right through till Gallipoli went over, and we were New Zealand soldiers.

You were paid by the New Zealanders.

No, we wasn't paid by them - we were still Australian soldiers, but we belonged to New Zealand originally, and served as New Zealanders.

You were the real ANZACs, wern't you?

We served with New Zealanders. You see, when they were making up the army corps New Zealand was short of a brigade; Australia had one over and we were transferred over to them. When we got to Gallipoli they had more than the New Zealanders. See, we were with them right through till it was all over. Then we formed up the 4th Australian Division.

That was at Tel-el-Kebîr?

Yeah.

Are you saying that the 15th and the 13th were always great friends?

xxx they worked together; and the 14th and the 16th, they worked together. They were one behind the other all the time - nearly all the time. Of course, sometimes they all got mixed up anyhow. That was our supports. I don't remember the names of places, I can't remember that far back, but the thing that happened at Gallipoli.

You were a 2nd Reinforcement? Were you a reinforcement at all?

I went over - I belonged to the 13th. I did belong to them here, and when they had to go down to training - the Brigade - to Melbourne. I was crook and they left me behind.

So you didn't go to Melbourne?

No; I didn't go with them, I didn't go overseas with them. I had more experience than any of them blokes did going overseas, over to Egypt. I then left in February of the next year. Instead of going round via all the other places - Melbourne, all them places, to go over to Egypt - we sailed from xxx up north, up as far a Queensland. We didn't pull in to Queensland, we went over that way, a different journey to anyone else who had ever gone.

So you went round the top of Cape York ...

Yes.

... and then past Indonesia.

We didn't go that far before we got into ... we didn't get past, we got caught, and everything else. We were going up there - we didn't pull in at Queensland or anything - in Brisbane - but when we were going along there - I forget now whether it was night-time or not - two boats were straggling up there - there was no more than that, I don't think - and they were both Japanese boats that we were on - two boat loads of Japanese boats.

These are troop ships, aren't they?

Yes. One boat was called the [Xiang Chune], and the one we was on was called the [Xiang Bee]; well, we were on the Xiang Bee. When we were going up they ran us onto the Barrier Reef. We were stuck there for three days and three nights. We had to throw our coal, put it in baskets and throw one after the other like that, and throw it out in the sea to reduce our weight. Well, on our boats - it was different to any other boat or any other troops who went overseas - we had no freezers or anything like that on our boat, and so we had to carry large xxx and kill our animals every day for meat on the boat.

What sort of livestock - cattle or sheep?

Yes, cattle, all cattle - kill them on the boat. Then, when we got up there we had a bit of fun; we were throwing to coal up one to the other, throwing all our coal, we were throwing it nearly all over us, and all of a sudden, one morning, they started up the engine, we had her going. The high tide was on and we xxx with ourselves. I had to go onto Thursday Island then to wait till another boat up there give us some of their coal to carry us onto - I forget the name of the port where we got coal afterwards.

Did you go through to Colombo?

I don't remember the name of the place we went to - we called at another port before we got over there.

That would be Port Suez that you arrived at.

That's where it would be, I suppose. But we had a lot of experience unloading our coal and all that - it was hard work, I can tell you that, xxx baskets of coal, on up to the other, up to get it up from down below.

How many tons do you think you'd have moved?

Oh, I wouldn't like to say that because we were going days and nights - two days and two nights we were going flat out. Of course, you couldn't put that much in a basket at a time to throw up. While we were on the boat in the Canal, on the one that was stranded there, killing the beasts, of course, and throwing the stuff in the sea - which was all they did when they killed them, the stuff we didn't want to eat, and that

sort of stuff. They threw it over there, but every time that happened there were dozens and dozens of sharks arrived a second after it was thrown in the water. That went on for one day.

This is on the way across to Port Suez?

Going over to ...

Through the Indian Ocean?

We were going over to Egypt - that's where it was.

You went up through the Suez Canal, did you?

Yeah, I think so. Anyhow, these sharks were coming there all the time. The next day when they were killing, there was a bloke standing on the side of the boat without a stitch of clothes on. He was standing there, and when they threw all the stuff in, into the water - he had put a rope from the top of the boat down into the water xxx, and when the water, when all the sharks were there, a couple of dozen or more - they are all getting into their xxx - he dived off the top of the boat right into the middle of them.

Why?

We all thought he was committing suicide or something. He no sooner hit the water than all the sharks disappeared, and we never seen one. He swam back and climbed up the thing to the boat. We asked what made him do that; he said, 'I was born up in these islands up here, and I know what sharks are. They can be like that, and they can be doing and be killing people, and all the rest of it, but if anything goes into the middle of them like that they clear for their very lives. They clear flat out,' he said, 'and they all run away.' He said, 'They all disappeared, and I knew that; I knew I could dive into the middle of them and there wouldn't be a shark anywhere. I thought I'd show you how an xxx shark xxx.' He just swam back. He said, 'I was born and bred amongst them sharks so I know what I could do'.

Where was that? Was that in Australian waters, or was that going up through the Suez?

That was when we were stuck on the Barrier Reef, that's where it was.

What was the group that you were with? Were they the 2nd Reinforcements to the 13th?

The one that I belonged to was the 2nd Reinforcements.

And you arrived in Egypt in March?

I wouldn't know - it might have been February - I don't know when I got there - I wouldn't be able to tell you, I can't remember dates. At one stage the 13th Battalion - I belonged to

them - they reckon xxx.

What were you doing before the war? Where were you?

Armidale.

What were you doing here?

At that stage of my life I was a plumber.

Did your family live in Armidale also? Were you living at home then? Were you married?

I was living at home then. None of them was ever born in this part of New South Wales at all except me.

You were born in Armidale?

No, I was born at Black Mountain, twenty miles to the north.

What is the name again?

B-L-A-C-K.

Black Mountain. You are ninety-two or ninety-three, aren't you?

Ninety-two.

That makes you twenty-odd when you enlisted?

Twenty-one when I joined the army.

What prompted you to enlist?

I suppose [the army] wanted assistance. I was in the boy's brigade when I was going to school - not boy's brigade ...

The cadets, you mean?

The cadets, school cadets. I belonged to the infantry afterwards, served with them for a few years. Then I thought, well, I've got all the training and everything like that, that I'd better go, better go and offer my services - so I did. The only thing I refused to do was refuse to accept any promotion or offer to do any work up to the rank of captain. For anything or any time or need, when there was a vacancy or anything like that, you have to fill in, and I refused to accept any rise above the rank of lance corporal.

Why was that?

Well, I had an idea in my life at that time that the fellows that were going overseas, and were going there, joining up to fight in the war, that they all went over and offered their services for the one thing, to go and fight and defend whatever they had to do, the whole lot of them. And I always had it in my opinion that if the people had the qualifications, should be

given the positions, to take the positions, of officers or things like that, but they still had to remain the same equal ranks as the soldiers. I objected to them being put up and put in different places, and made ... and training and that in different beautiful places, living in ...

These are the officers?

Yes. I objected to all that, and they shouldn't be paid any more money than the others, because it was a volunteer army, and those that had the qualifications should be given the positions to take that they were qualified for, and still be there as the same rank soldier, the same soldier as all the others. Have their ranks and all that, but at the same time, doing it at the same rate of pay and everything, and living the same as all the others. I had that in my mind all the time, and always did. I refused promotion at Gallipoli, I wouldn't take it.

You are not the first person I've talked to that has had that view.

I had to be a lance corporal because I was supposedly an expert on machine-guns (laughs) and that sort of thing.

Are these the Lewis guns or the Vickers guns?

Oh cripes, none of them was in existence.

It was only the Vickers on Gallipoli.

They wasn't in existence, we'd never heard of them those days, wasn't even thought of, the Vickers.

The Vickers was on Gallipoli.

xxx action machine-gun.

It was an action, was it?

Yeah. The machine guns, you had to pitch them up on the ground, and all that. The ones that we were using, some of them was ... the one that we had, they had the history of all the machine guns where they served, and things like that, originally; and the machine-gun that we were served with, it's history served in the Sudan Wars, and their barrels was worn out. If you were trying to hit a target over there, the shots would just scatter round anywhere. Of course, when you fired amongst blokes, you might knock half a dozen blokes over whereas it might only knock one over if it was going straight. But I mean to say, they were not suitable for ... considering.

(Break in interview)

You were obviously in the landing at Gallipoli if you were a 2nd Reinforcement.

I xxx in official information, it's officially recorded in

Melbourne that I landed on 25 April.

What do you remember about that time? Were you still on the Xiang Bee at that time?

Oh cripes no, we never seen it any more after it got rid of us at ...

The Xiang Bee, I think, did go up there.

It would have been working because it was working for Australia, doing Australian transport. It would be carting rubbish and things like that, and not people; that's what it would be carting.

You want to know about when all the boats was landing there. Our boat - I forget the name of the one that I was on - I can't remember now, I used to know it - we came from Egypt over there, and we were landed. We were the fist ones in that particular spot of the sea when we was landing in the islands there. The funny thing that happened to us was, the next boat that come up and landed up alongside of us, the first one to come along, do you know what the name of it was?

No.

Armidale - the same name, spelt exactly the same as our town. Mostly Armadale, in a different state, is spelt A-D-A-L-E.

This is A-R-M-I-D-A-L-E, yes.

That was the name of the boat there. I called half a dozen of the blokes up to have a look - the boat that come alongside was there and they all got the shock of their lives - it was called Armidale.

Most of the men that were with you were from Armidale, were they?

No, not a lot of them - might have been half a dozen or so, that's all. The 33rd Battalion was the one that nearly everything would belong to Armidale originally; it was formed her in Armidale.

What company were you in?

Well, I'd been in every company in the Battalion.

You moved around a lot, did you?

I used to go to different ones - one at one time, one at another. Well, we only had one machine-gun to one battalion.

So you were the machine-gunner - on one of the machine-guns?

Yes - the only one we had.

So you were a 13th Battalion machine-gunner.

I wasn't always a machine-gunner all through my army career.

At the landing you were actually responsible for this Maxim gun?

No, we went just as an ordinary xxx, or we went as an ordinary soldier. You couldn't use a Maxim machine-gun at that time - someone else was looking after that, that affair. You couldn't use a machine-gun xxx there because xxx around the side and each side, and if you were shooting up there you'd be shooting your own blokes that were further up than the others. I think it was at Gallipoli the fair dinkum real war, where every man had to fight his own battle. There was no excuse for it because all they had to fight with was a single-shot rifle that had a magazine in it, but you had to reload every time you fired a shot, and a bayonet on the end of it. And that's all they had to fight with, was that bayonet. You could see that it was fair dinkum, and each man ... Generals meant nothing, or officers meant very little once they landed there. Most of them at that time only had a revolver, and a lot of them picked up a rifle and bayonet when someone got killed because they needed it. But each bloke was his own general, he knew he had to get to such and such a company. When you come to think of it, it was a fair dinkum individual war, each one was having his own war.

Yes, not like France.

If you didn't - well, you had conveniences, and you had bombs to chuck at them if there was a heavy xxx - things like that, you could do that - you had to go in there. Supposing you stuck your bayonet into a bloke and got stuck on one of his ribs, well, what would you have to do? Push him over on the ground, stand on top of him to try and get on top of the poor bugger to see if you could pull the bayonet out. If you couldn't pull it out you had to fire a shot to smash whatever was holding the bayonet there. When you come to think of it, it was a real fair dinkum place to have a fight. You never knew whether they were coming from the side, the front of you, the back of you - where they were. xxx first, with that thing under your gun, or shoot them. When you often fired a shot, it would be another bloke that died in the [queue] - you'd have to stick it in to try and stick it into him, or something like that. It was a fair dinkum war, an individual war, that's what it was - right through.

There was one thing about it, as far as I am concerned, I was unable - I've been condemned by a lot of Australians, and told that I was a liar, I didn't know what I was talking about, I was never at Gallipoli, and I was a liar because I'd said I'd never been to Lone Pine. If I'd been to Lone Pine it was an xxx I didn't know xxx in the first day, but we were always on the left of Lone Pine.

That's right, up on Quinn's.

Oh, I forget the name - Quinn's Post and all those sort of places.

It was on the right, wasn't it?

And the thing is, when the second landing was made at ...

Suvla.

The second landing that was made by the English, the year later in the career, we just captured Hill 60.

Hill 971.

We were at Hill 60, and we were there, and we were xxx because everything was going good, these blokes had to land there, they had to go straight around - like, they'd land this way and go straight across over that way to the other side - they had enough troops there to go right to the other side of the little island - and they had to come up there like that and hook on with us. And the line of ours came from down that way, like, right across that way. That all back there was free ground that we had behind us. They were English people. Some of them generals there shouldn't have been (generals). Their general, do you know what he did? He feared a Turkish ambush because they'd gone half way across the thing and they never had any casualties. There was no troops there against them, they just had to keep walking to get where they had to go. We was fighting up there and engaging - the [Turks] just captured this hill and were engaging all the people up there, and he feared a Turkish ambush and ordered them to dig in instead of completing his job. He was sacked and another general was put there next morning, next day, to take over; well, he tried to send [a man], but when he did he found there were thousands of troops there waiting for him - he couldn't budge, he couldn't shift at all, so that made a complete mess of it, whereas they could have come right up with this and that would have made the thing safe. He had all that ground to put stuff on, or to get around the back or anything. That's what it was all about.

What do you remember about the landing itself at Gallipoli?

We all got christened when we were in the boat that took us right to the beach - the little boat - we got christened before we landed. There were two wounded badly, one was killed and another badly wounded before we got ...

By stray bullets?

Not stray bullets, snipers.

The boats coming in?

The boats - we were only - we were in little boats for the landing - the big boats wouldn't go there. We were taken off the big boats and put on little boats, so many on each boat. But we got our christening before we got ... before landing at all we got our blood christening.

What did you do when you landed? Where did you go?

We had to go straight up - you saw these hills up in front of you, you had to go straight away up into those hills. You never knew when a bloke jumped out from behind a bush, or you see someone behind a bush, or something like that - there were thousands and thousands of them. It was a case of slaughter before you got anywhere near the hills, you had to fight your way all the way to get up there to where we built up our positions that remained our positions for the rest of our career there.

The one thing that I seen there, where you talk of the 15th Battalion, we were in the font-line trenches, the 15th was just back down the hill behind us, in reserve.

This would be at Quinn's Post?

One of them places up there. And the Royal Marine Light Infantry was supposed to be a wonderful lot of soldiers, a wonderful lot of people in there. Well, the Royal Marine Light Infantry, we don't know exactly what it was all about, but they had, along from us, just along next to us further along - I don't know whether they were going to have a go at another trench, or whether they were just seeing the other blokes attack them - but they jumped out of their trenches and started running away - xxx - some of them threw their rifles away and everything and started running down to the beach - this is the Royal Marine Light Infantry. Always after that we called them xxx xxx xxx. This bloke - we could see the other enemy was going to take over that trench - we had to send a runner down to the 15th Battalion to run up immediately, not wait for anything; run up immediately and take over our trench that we had to go to, to save the lives of the trench xxx, which was probably cleaned out all our xxx we had. We had to race back up out of our trench and run xxx back over to our trench and hold it for us, otherwise the Royal Marine Light Infantry had given it away.

I've heard that before, that's certainly the case. There are a lot of stories about the English and their, you know ...

They had conscription and that, not long before the war ended over in France - thought that's a different place. We were going up the line - it was the time when they broke through the English lines, English and French lines and that, not long before the thing was over. We had to race up to a certain place, and we were going up there, and we met blokes running back, going back - 'The Germans have taken over everything, they belted us all out' - so we said, 'That'll do'. We went up, I suppose, about another half a mile, walking up there - it was a long way behind the line too at that time. We found out how much they'd been scared: the Germans were marching down, four deep, marching in the column four deep. So we seen what was our advanced colours up - the scouts up in front - we seen that. We put all our machine-guns and everybody laying down the long way - there was no-one about - and put them all down there along

there, and let them march down. No-one was to fire a shot or anything until they got the final authority, and they were all marching down four deep in the columns. When we opened up there was all the machine-guns and bullets, and everything from the full length, and we cleaned them all out, quick and lively. That's what happened over in France.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

Were you wounded on Gallipoli, or not?

No, I wasn't wounded on Gallipoli, I was sent away sick for a few days, and back. I was evacuated two days, I think, from ... I think it was two days I was evacuated before the evacuation took place - I went away. I came back and I was in the machine-gun position where I would be firing between two lines. You climbed about there sometimes - you can't look over the top, you can't look out, you can't see anything - there is snow and frost and everything else coming in there. I was there and I went out to see if I could get some tucker for us. I got away before it got dark to get some tucker to take out for the next step back. I was walking down along the trench, or getting down along past the front line of trench, to get down to headquarters. I'm going down and I seen someone coming up. So i sat down on a little bank of dirt that was there. A bloke came up to me, he said, 'What are you sitting down there for? There's no-one to talk to' - 'Oh, I was just having a little bit of a rest' - 'Get up,' he said, 'you are telling me lies. Go on, get up and get walking.' I got up and got walking; I walked about ten yards - I guess maybe it would have been ten yards - he said, 'Sit down there'. So I sat down and stopped there. He said, 'That's the last walk you are going to do here for a long time' - I had frostbitten feet, and I was having a hell of a job xxx. But the doctor was the bloke up there. I never, ever seen him there before, but he was there and he sent the ambulance stretcher bearers to pick me up and take me down.

It was very cold there for the last month or so on Gallipoli, wasn't it - it snowed?

Snow and frost, and frost nearly all the time. We couldn't walk about or anything, we were only in a little hole in the ground. That's what happened; he sent me away three days before the evacuation - or two or three days.

You went across to Lemnos, I suppose.

I was sent from there, I was put on a boat - not a hospital boat, but a boat that was carrying wounded and sick people. I was put on that and was taken down ... As a matter of fact, the one I was on happened to be a Canadian boat. It did me a good turn to get on a Canadian boat because there was a doctor there and he had a look at me. He said, 'Listen, I'm going to give you some advice', he said, 'Your doctor doesn't know anything about frostbite and things like that, he doesn't know what can be done or what can't be done.' He said, 'I know they are

cutting a lot of feet off, and I wont be surprised they don't cut your right foot off straight away'. 'So,' he said, 'I'm telling you now, you suffer a bit, put up with it.' He said, 'You tell your doctors that you refuse to allow them to take that foot off. Tell them to leave it there. Never mind if the black keeps coming up your leg like that, don't worry.' He said, 'It will go up to a certain thing and then it will start going away altogether.' He said, 'It's got to extend to a certain thing, and it will go away. It might take a long time, but it will do it, and you will still have your foot and be able to get about on it. But if you get if cut off you know what you've done.' And the thing became black right up to about there.

Above your knee?

Right above my knee, and then it started clearing up again - it got alright.

You were lucky then.

I was over six months there.

You were over six months in hospital through frostbite?

Yeah.

Where were you in hospital?

Heliopolis. That's where ...

What do you remember about Heliopolis, in hospital there?

It was a very good hospital - I couldn't get out and about.

You couldn't walk in that six months?

No. I got out there before I ... One day I said to a bloke, 'I know where the toilet is here; I'm going to get out and have a decent feed with the people in the xxx'. So I got out of bed - and it was clearing up, and there was hardly any stains in it then - I got out on the side of the bed, and went straight down on the floor - I said, 'Hold me up'. They had to come and pick me up xxx - 'What are you doing?' - I had to tell them the truth and got into trouble - 'You are not to do that any more'. You wern't able to get up and about - I thought it was alright.

After you did recover, what did you do in Heliopolis? What do you remember about Egypt in general - Cairo, you must have gone into Cairo?

I used to go in there, I didn't like the place much. We used to go in for our drop of beer sometimes - one or two I didn't drink any xxx. There was nothing there to amuse me. There is one thing that I will say, that while I was in the army I kept damn clear of women - girls - I didn't want to have anything to do with them - kept right away from them altogether.

Of course, Egypt has all the brothels, didn't it?

They had all them sort of things, and one thing and another. I seen enough of it the first week I was over there. I got wandering round and round, and I found the place where they used to put the blokes that got that disease from the women and things like that.

Venereal disease.

There was about eight or ten of them being sent home on the next boat that was going to Australia - chucked out of the army.

You didn't want that to happen, of course.

Well, I didn't want to have anything that would drive me mad - I wouldn't have anything to do with them, I wasn't interested in them. Generally, the only fun that I got, or the only pleasure I ever got, was when I'd get in and I'd be a long way in Cairo, or anywhere like that, I wanted to go back to catch my train, or whatever it was I had to get me home on, I used to take a delight in getting on a donkey and riding into the railway station. You had a bloke running alongside of you all the time.

This would be the Egyptian driver running along?

Yes. They used to have donkeys and you could ride them there. xxx when I'd get there I'd get a ride, and sometimes there wouldn't be that many about, but sometimes you could get one there and get a ride back to the camp from when you got off the railway station at Heliopolis.

This was a tram that went into Cairo from Heliopolis, wasn't there?

No, the train - I don't think it was a tram - I called them trains.

Why did you like riding on the donkeys?

Oh, just something different. I always had a horse to ride, and that sort of thing - I thought it was good. I had a race for twenty dollars once, from where we was in Cairo to the railway station. I talked to different blokes, and there was another bloke there, and he said, 'Say we have a race, two or three of us. We'll have a race to see who gets there first.' Well, I was always a pretty regular customer with this bloke, and he said - he knew what we were talking about - 'I'll get one donkey for you, sir; one certain donkey for you to ride today'. He got it there - he had it there, you know - but he got it out - 'This is your donkey to ride,' he said, 'They'll never beat you.' I was there about two or three minutes before them (laughs). He was a beaut, he could go!

Where would you go drinking in Cairo? Do you remember any of the cafes?

I think they were pubs - I don't know what they were. I never went drinking long; I would see a place where I could have a drink and go, and that sort of thing.

Did you go out to the pyramids and the sphinx, and some of the mosques and look round?

I only went out there once, not while I was training, but after I got back, before we went over to France. I went out and had a look at them one day.

Did you go on the march from Tel-el-Kebîr down to Serapeum?

That big long march? No, that was a funny thing. I went to ... I don't know what I did, I suppose it was just to have a change - I went to an English school there over in Heliopolis there, a machine-gun school. I went there to see if they had anything more modern - they did have another machine-gun coming in at that time.

Was that the Lewis gun?

No, before that. I went there, and the boss came to me. One of the blokes said something to me - didn't say anything to me, but the boss said something. I went to see and have a look around - the boss of the school - he said something to the boss. The boss said, 'One of my fellows is cheating. I want you to do something for me; will you please? Will you take over as this particular instructor here for the time being, while he is off sick.' I said, 'Yes', and I did. And he kept me there, he wouldn't let me go.

Is this at Zeitoun or Heliopolis?

Heliopolis - or in that area - could have been another little town for all I know.

There was a machine-gun school at Zeitoun.

I wouldn't know the name of any other place. He kept me there, and he wanted me to stop there - stop there permanently and instruct. He said, 'You're the best instructor I've ever had here - a [cheeky one] perhaps, but you are getting better results than the others, than other people are getting. You've done me a couple of favours, one way and another. Well, there was an officer coming there, and he was always being nasty, and he gave me a lot of cheek.' I said to him, 'What's going on with you?' xxx all quieter. He said, 'I didn't want to come here in the first place; I was sent here against my will.' He said, 'Under no circumstances am I going to do anything right, or if I xxx. I've got the ability to do it, but,' he said, 'I'm not going to. I won't, I'm not taking over as an officer of machine-guns at all, I'm going to stay an infantry officer.' I said, 'I'll get you chucked out if that's all you want'. He said, 'Cripes, you'd be the greatest bloke in the world if you could get me chucked out'. So I did, I put in a report about

him. I said to him, 'Now, I believe the chief is coming down to have a look and ask you a couple of questions down here today, about the machine-guns, see how you are getting on'. I said, 'Just xxx, he doesn't know I'm xxx'. I said, 'I'm going to tell you what to do. We'll have the machine-gun out there, and the fist question he'll ask you is, what do you call that thing sitting there. And you answer him xxx.' He said, 'That's a silly sort of damn thing, it's a silly sort of a thing.' He said, 'If you are silly enough to know how to do it, it spits shots out all over the bloody ground everywhere. You press that button like that.' He said, 'It's a silly damn thing; what do you call it?', he said, 'A silly bloody thing' - that's what he said to the British Army (officer). He turned around and the fellow said to me - I said, 'You want to send him back; you don't want to be ...' He turned around and he chucked him out (laughs), sent him back to his unit - chucked him out as undesirable, not a suitable man for a machine-gun (laughs). That's what he done with him.

I'd be interested to get an account of what machine-guns you were using at that time, and what their performance was. I asked you before about ... you were telling me it wasn't the Vickers gun that you had.

The only machine-gun that we had was the old Maxim. You'll find it in some of the shows where they are showing some things. I saw one ...

A museum?

Some of them museums and places like that. That's the only way. It's the only rapid firing thing you had - if it was rapid firing - but they were all worn out, they were never fit for action.

The one that you had had actually been used in the Sudan War?

Well, that's what the piece of paper was supposed to have said. We were supposed to keep a record of it, but he didn't, we threw the papers away, lost them or something. We know that it was used in the other war there, just a bit of a scrap in Egypt there too. It was second-hand stuff coming from England - rubbish that they had finished replacing. Everything we had like that was just rubbish that had been replaced in England; they send them out there so they xxx.

What sort of range would they have with their barrels worn out? These are .303 calibre, are they?

Yeah, something like that.

What sort of a range would they have - a couple of thousand yards?

I don't know now - couldn't tell you.

How fast did they fire, the old Maxim gun?

That would be hard to say because you couldn't ... They just fire them as soon as they were on a cordon - a big long cordon was coming along, you'd fire another one, and get going about - xxx right for the time each shot was fired off. Unless you've seen one it's not much good trying to describe it. It was alright, it done a lot of good work, it done good work. xxx shots, it's shots weren't reliable, you couldn't say you could hit a pin's head every shot with it. But at the same time, when people are attacking, three or four close together, you could hit the whole bloody lot of them instead of one when you are firing at one of them, in the middle or something like that. So things was all worn out see - there was only one to each battalion anyhow.

How many were there on the gun - half a dozen or less?

Oh, there'd be about three - might be just about all we had.

Were you firing the gun? What was your job?

I fired it a few times - then I gave it up altogether eventually.

The machine-gun school that you went to at Heliopolis, what sort of machine-guns did they have?

At that time they were still on the Maxim. They did have a modern one - I forget the name of it - I don't know whether it had a name or not.

There was the Vickers gun and there was the Lewis gun.

Yeah, well they all were coming up - they were different altogether. The Lewis gun was more like a rifle than a machine gun.

After you had been to this machine-gun school, did you take a position in the 13th Battalion as a machine-gunner?

Just as an infantryman. I only joined them up the day before they sailed, only caught up with them then. I had to chase them to catch up - when I went they had gone.

This is going across to France?

When they was going to France.

So you didn't go down to the Suez Canal and Serapeum?

No, we didn't go that way - I don't know whether we went that way or where we went.

Well, the Battalion, when it was at Tel-el-Kebîr, they marched from Tel-el-Kebîr down to Serapeum on the Suez Canal, and then when they went across to France they all came by train up to Alexandria, and they caught the ship to Marseilles.

That's where I caught up with them.

At Alexandria?

Yes.

You were only a lance corporal?

I wasn't going to take anything over, I wouldn't take anything at higher pay, under no circumstances - I was up against it. I did the job more than once.

At higher rank, is it?

I'd taken the job of a lieutenant, right up to that, but I did it all ...

As a lance corporal.

... as nothing, I just did the job, and that's all there was about it, without any rank or anything else. The time that [Eddy] Murray got his Victoria Cross, that was when the worst things that we were ever in (occurred).

What do you remember about that? That was xxx, wasn't it?

Yes, I think that's where it was. Well, there'd been two or three units that had taken the little position there, and they couldn't hold them. I'd been over in England on seven days leave and I came back the day before - no, that morning. When I got back I joined the unit that morning. Harry said to me, 'Reg, come for a walk with me, I'm going up to have a look at the stuff we've got to do today, and I want to have a look at it in daylight to see what's what. Come up for a walk with me, I'd like to have someone with me for company.' So I went up with him. We had a look around there. When he first came to our battalion I think he came from the 15th.

The 16th.

The 16th? It says the 16th, but I've always thought it was the 15th. Anyhow, he came there and he went to the machine-gun officer in charge. We went up there and had a look around, and I found what I was in charge of, as soon as they captured it. But we never had a chance to dig a trench from there to another spot, never had time. We went in under navy [strikes], the day we came in xxx. It came the next morning, Harry said to me, 'Reg ...' - I don't know, he always used to ask me to do a lot of things - '...Reg, will you give me a list of the casualties please, who they are, or other casualties, and I'll send it down to headquarters?' I went along the line and I come back. I said, 'Listen Harry ...' - I always called him Harry - '... I can't possibly make out or give you a list of the casualties, who they are or anything else'. I said, 'I'll give you a list of the names of the [clergy]'. He said, 'Why?' I said, 'Well, as a matter of fact, there's eight, and I think one will be going away inside half an hour, he's been hurt. So that's only

leaving seven in the flamin' trench.'

What did he say to that?

He said, 'I didn't think they were down that much. I knew the damn thing was gone down'. Well, nearly everybody was in that, all the NCOs and all that. A hell of a lot of them got decorations out of it.

That's another thing that I've always objected to in the army, that is giving decorations.

Did you?

I do, and I still do.

Why?

You take this now. There is a fellow done a good thing, he's done something good, he's done his duty, he's done what he volunteered to do - a good thing, he's done something good. He's somebody, he has some family which does more [caring] than anything else.

(Break in interview)

I've always been opposed to that because how many times have I seen a fellow get a decoration for nearly nothing, because in a stunt like that you could get two or three decorations out of that - 'We'll give them to so and so, what's his name is a good size, we'll give him one' - things like that. That took place. It seems right, but that took place. How many thousands of times have you seen some of them doing a much tougher, and more important job, than what they did when they got their decoration. Now, how does that happen? Fellows that have done a real good job - 'Oh no, he's just done his duty' - and that's all they'll ever xxx - he's just done the duty he had to do, and he's done a triple risk and done the thing that's worthwhile, fifty times more than what the other man who has got one did. I said to one fellow one day, I said, 'What did you get the Military Medal for?', he said, 'Why?'. I said, 'I want to know. I know damn well you are not a soldiers backside.' (laughs) He said, 'Listen, do you know when such and such a stunt took place' - 'Yes' - 'When that was on I jumped over the bank and slithered down the hill a little way and crawled in a little dugout tunnel down there. I was sitting in there, and I seen someone else sitting further in than me, and the bloke that was sitting in further than me, he said I dived in that stunt, and this bloke had dived in too.' He said, 'He got the Military Cross for this stunt that he wasn't even in'. As soon as it was over he got in amongst them and round about them. Because he was so and so and so and so, they gave him a Military Cross.

I'm sure that happened.

This bloke said, 'I was in there and knew he was there, and he knew that, so he turned around and he said he put me in for a

strong recommendation for a Military Medal. And that's what I got the Military Medal for.' He said, 'That is the truth of it'.

I've heard similar things to that - not put so strongly - but I've heard comments about people who have won medals, to the effect that they really didn't show any ...

I know two or three xxx personally that really didn't do it. A bloke said to me one day - he was a captain - he said, 'Reg, you've been here longer than me ...'

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

He was a real good soldier.

He wouldn't be [budging].

He always does everything right, and that was why I recommended him on other things that he'd done in the past.

He had joined up with you, had he?

Yes.

He was a friend of yours from Armidale?

Yes.

What was his name?

I forget that now - I wouldn't like to tell you that - he's dead now.

What other friends did you join up with?

There was seven went down on the train; when they found out I was going none of them was going down. Seven went down, six of them stopped and got through, and one bloke went there and come away because he couldn't get the job that he wanted; he wanted to be a certain thing - I forget what it was.

In the Light Horse?

Something else, and he couldn't get it. Something to do with something.

Where did you have to go to join up?

Liverpool.

Did you have to go to Victoria Barracks first?

Actually, I went to Victoria Barracks where I was xxx bloke that I was enlisting. I'd been accepted. Up here I was told I had to go from here; I didn't enlist up here though; I had to

go down there to Victoria Barracks to be consulted - the colonel down there.

I was standing in the group, I was standing in the group waiting, lined up to go up, and the bloke behind me touched me on the shoulder. He said, 'Listen mate, are you in any trouble with the police, or anything like that?' I said, 'No; Why?' He said, 'If you are just creep around the side of me and out the other side of them blokes there, and get away to buggery.' This bloke had come up here, walked right up alongside of me - he said, 'Do you see that fellow over there?' I said, 'Yes', he said, 'He's a detective. So if you've done anything wrong you'd better get out of the road xxx.' I said, 'No, I haven't done anything wrong, I'm not afraid of detectives or anybody else. He can come and consult me if he wants to. I'll stop here.' He come up about three or four more minutes - we hadn't moved very far up along the line at that time (laughs) - and he came up to me and said, 'Is your name Reg?', I said, 'Yes, that's right', he said, 'Shake hands with me', and I shook hands with him. He said, 'I suppose you don't just exactly remember me. I was up in Armidale when that murder was at the hotel ...' - one of the pubs up here - and he said, 'I was up there, and I was a friend of yours. We were all friends. Very often of an evening we'd go down and have a beer at the pub and have a yarn for an hour, and then go home again. Up there, all the time I was up there, for nearly six months, you were my best friend up there. You're friend inquiring into xxx murderer.' And he said to me, 'Give me that paper, I'll fix everything up for you. You'll be here for thirty hours or more before you'll get up there yet. I'll take possession of you, and I'll take you up to the front of the lot of them. Then you can go away and have your day out, go back in time to catch your ... back to the camp at the right time, when they will be going back.' He looked around, he went up and he filled in the form, and he put in on the form, he wrote, 'Top class horse rider' and things like that, in a trade and everything else. He filled it in himself, I didn't.

When I went up there the colonel said xxx xxx - one of those top colonels at that time - and he said, 'Ha, this fellow is a plumber, plumber by trade. Talk about having the hide to put down that he's a good horseman. You'd never make a Light Horseman, you couldn't ride any bloody horse, you couldn't mate. It would be a damn quiet horse you rode.' 'Yeah,' I said, 'that's your opinion'. I said, 'I'm going to tell you something now colonel - that's your rank I understand - I'm going to tell you something now. This war is not going to be won by Light Horse. The Light Horse is not worth two bob in this war. You could chuck them all out in the depot and it wouldn't make any difference. They are no good for this war at all, you can't use them. You will never be able to use them where the war is really a war. But,' I said, 'I'll tell you one thing. You've got a lot of cheek. You might be colonel and all that, you've got a lot of cheek. I've got £100 in my pocket, and I'll put that £100 on and you put in, say, £80. You will only have to put in £80,' I said, 'and you come along and give me the horse to ride and I'll ride the bugger for you, just to show you that I can ride a horse. I've been breaking in horses all my life,' I said, 'since I was a kid. I can ride them better than you. If

you can't ride them (laughs) I can.' He never said anything. I said, 'The infantry is going to win this war, not the Light Horse, they are past history now.' xxx xxx he says. I said, 'If you want to chuck me out, chuck me out. I'll go to another state and join up.' He never said anything and went away.

Funny, about the Light Horse and that. At Heliopolis the Light Horse was being trained there - I think they had them on the race course there - they were stationed there too. We used to go down and watch them in the evening. Sometimes they were breaking in the horses there, they were riding horses that were wild or something like that. They'd get blokes to ride them to start with, and we came in to see what they were like. There was one horse there, for three days he chucked them all off that got on him. So it got to the third day there; a bloke said to me, having a yarn, 'Reg, xxx offer to ride that horse'.

(Break in interview)

He said, 'You offer to ride that horse' - he chucked two off that evening. I said, 'You Light Horse blokes don't know anything about horses, you buggers can't ride horses at all'. I said, 'You fellows can't ride horses. Us infantrymen can ride them, but we don't bother about it.' I said, 'We've been watching this horse, it's the horse you've had in every evening, isn't it?' - 'Yes, he's chucking them all off, and we're having a job to find someone to ride him.' 'Well,' I said, 'bring him in tomorrow evening, and we'll run him.' I said, 'Do you want to have a bet on it, you can put some money in' - I told the bloke, I knew it was in the Light Horse - 'Don't you put any money in,' I said, 'Whatever you do, don't you put any money in about the infantry blokes can't ride a horse or anything.' I said, 'Right?', he said, 'Who's going to ride it?', I said, 'I am, I offered to ride'. He said, 'I'm a better rider than you and he chucked me off' - of course, we knew one another for years - we knew one another, see.

He was from Armidale?

No, he was from Guyra way, or Black Mountain, or somewhere up there. Anyhow, he said to me ... I said, 'Don't put any money on it, keep quiet about it'. So anyhow, they all went in there and they put in over £100. I walked in and I just started to put the saddle on him, and one thing and another. I said, 'Do you want him ridden bare back or saddle? How do you want him ridden?' This other bloke said, 'Hey, wait a while, just a minute. You are a better rider than me, you are a lot better rider than me, but,' he said, 'it wouldn't be fare. You are a real good rider for an infantryman; you are a real good rider; it wouldn't be fare to let you get on there, it would be robbing them. I'm not as good a rider as you, but I'll have a go at him. When I fall off,' he said, 'you can get on and ride him then, but I'll have a go at him first.'

This is a Light Horseman that said that?

No, this is another infantryman. Maybe he was the bloke that suggested that the infantry should have a go at riding this

horse.

What was his name?

I forget. But anyhow, he goes in, and he got on him, and he's riding him, and riding him - and he never fell off. He called out, 'What do you want me to take off first, the bloody bridle or the saddle, or what? I'll take them all off while I'm on him and chuck them on the ground - whatever you like. I'll take the bridle off and throw it away if you like - anything you like.' He rode the bloody horse, and it walked over in the bloody corner and stood there. He rode him round the ring then.

What sort of a horse was it? What colour was it?

He was a bay one with a bit of white on him.

Was he a stallion or a mare?

He was a real outlaw - they reckon - of a horse to ride, throwing all them blokes down.

Where did it come from?

It would be an Australia horse, all the horses came from here at that time. They were sending them over unbroken, they broke them in themselves over here.

Anyhow, they were really knocked, they done their dough. I said to this bloke, 'Did you put your money on it?', he said, 'Yes, I did. I borrowed fifty quid and put it on'. I said, 'You bloody idiot, I told you not to'. He said, 'I know you did'. The funny part of it was that this bloke - that wasn't his real name, I don't think, that he was in the army with - but he, for two years running - before that - he was Queensland's champion buckjump rider (laughs). That's why he told me to go; he said, 'I can ride him without any trouble at all'.

He was a better rider than you?

He reckoned he was (laughs). I couldn't ride in that - as good as him anyhow. He got through there - they left us alone after that thing, they never accepted any more challenges.

And you can't remember the name of this chap?

I asked this chap about going. He went to join the Light Horse and they wouldn't accept him because of his trade, or something like that - and they wouln't accept him. They asked him when he joined, would he transfer from the infantry over to the Light Horse. 'Oh,' he said, 'alright, yes, I will.' When they got him over there they asked him would he mind going to their depot branch there to handle all the horses that comes over - the unbroken horses. He had the job of riding horses while he was there. A lot of funny things happened.

You didn't get down onto the Suez Canal then I imagine - the Suez Canal?

What's that?

You weren't at Tel-el-Kebîr either?

I wasn't stationed there, but I'd been there.

You caught up with the Battalion just as they were leaving Alexandria to go across to France?

Yes.

And you went across on the Transylvania - that was the name of the ship?

I don't know what it was, couldn't remember. I wouldn't remember what it was.

Can you remember anything about the trip across the Mediterranean, from Alexandra across to France?

Nothing went wrong with that - went alright - going halfway up to where we was going, after we landed, I had a yarn to three or four old women - I forget the name of the place - it was halfway up - a big French place. I had a yarn there with them.

Could you speak French, or did they speak English?

Oh, half [bred], they could understand xxx - wasn't doing very good or anything like that. Then, when I went over ... the first time I went to ... The only notable thing that I went to was over when we had a few days leave, three or four days leave or something, and we went to Paris. We decided we'd have our dinner, and we went in to have our dinner. We looked at the list - they gave us a list to see what we wanted - well, I didn't know what anything was, and they didn't know what anything was, so they picked out a flash name they liked. They had that and I had mine. We went back - we had gone there four times to that place and I ate the same stuff every time - they changed - I ate mine all the time. And in the finish one of them asked a bloke that could speak a bit of (French) - that was working there - he said, 'What is it that that bloke is eating? We didn't like the look of it,' he said, 'but he's eating it and he's getting it again.' Every time I went there, if ever I went anywhere in France; the same thing when I went to another town there one time, I asked for the same thing again. Do you know what I was eating? - frogs. They were lovely, beautiful. I could eat frogs all the time.

What did you talk to these three people about on the way up?

Just asked them how they were getting on, and one thing and another - nothing sensible - just silly things, things that I thought that they'd know, that they could make a bit of a sign about what I was saying. But I did have a couple of xxx when I was in the army over in France - I shouldn't be telling you.

Why is that?

Might be getting myself disgraced for twice committing an offence against the army, what I shouldn't have done.

I don't think you'd be alone in that, I've heard a few stories of that kind.

One place in France - we were xxx, as I told you before, in a little dugout where we couldn't see or do anything. We had to be covered over all the time, we couldn't leave our heads bare or anything like that - so aeroplanes and everything couldn't see us. And every day, there was a bloke climbed out along the trench away out there, and he walked down there - from our trenches you couldn't see him - but that's where we were spotted. We wern't supposed to be looking that way, we were supposed to be looking the other way. This bloke used to come down there every day.

Is this a German?

A German. He used to get down there, and he'd get down and drop his trousers there at the tree ever day, and he'd done that for over a week. I said to my mates, 'I think we can do with just one shot xxx find us or know where it come from xxx'. I said, 'I'm not going to hurt him, I'm not going to kill him or anything like that' - I was supposed to be a pretty good shot, I don't know whether I was or not. But anyhow, I said, 'I'm going to wipe his bum. I'll wait till he gets down, and when I think it's just about dropping out I'm going to have a shot to try and wipe - put the bullet through the cheeks of his bum.' So I did; he jumped up as high as this flamin' ceiling up in the air. He ran a lot better with his trousers up and his arse on his knees, struggling all the way up to where he was getting in and out of the trench that he was getting out of - or passageway going round. He got up there and fell down in it. Never seen him no more. But when I fired at him these two blokes started laughing like blazes. I said, 'What are you laughing at? I only wiped his bum for him.' 'Wiped his bum? Don't you know,' he said, 'you get down, stoop down yourself like that, the way he stooped down there. Them other two things and that other thing hanging down below his bum,' he said, 'You've castrated him, you've shot them off.' (laughs) That's what they told me.

There was another place there where we watched them for two or three days. We were on a private watch place ...

Like an outpost?

Yes; just to keep an eye on everything that was going on; it was a place where both sides had someone looking. These blokes used to, every day, two or three days I noticed them boiling their billy there in this little joint - no-one could see them, only we could just see them alright. They were boiling their billy there - it was only a little xxx you could see through - boiling away their billy. I said, Today I'm going to give this bloke a fright, scare him', he said, 'What are you going to

do?', I said, '[Once done] they'll never find out where it came from. When he stoops down to put his coffee in the pot I'm going to try and fire a shot through the bottom of the pot, low down in the bottom, out through the bottom' - he had the flames coming up xxx xxx. xxx - whoosh! - all the flamin' ashes and everything when the water came down on the ashes (laughs) - xxx - he disappeared, we never seen him after that.

You must have been a good shot.

I should have shot him instead of shooting and spilling the water out of his billy can. It would be terrible if they didn't have another billy can to cook in.

If you were in France at that time you must have gone through Pozieres and Mouquet Farm battles.

Yes.

And in the winter.

Yes.

And then Stormy Trench.

Yes.

And then Bullecourt.

Yes, I know all them places - I forget the names.

What do you remember about going down ... First of all, when the Battalion arrived up, it was Bailleul that they xxx from, when they came up from Marseilles, and they went into Bois Grenier, or what was called the nursery. After that they went down onto the Somme. Can you remember anything about the first place you went to in France - I think it was Bois Grenier?

I can't remember the names.

What about the attacks at Pozieres?

That's a name I know.

Do you remember anything about the actions there, what you were doing?

I was there, nearly all the time there I was xxx infantryman; but after that, I finished up, I was a regimental stretcher bearer. Well, I wasn't actually a stretcher bearer in a way, I was doing the dressing.

How soon after you arrived in France did you transfer across - this would be for your company, I gather?

It was only in the same battalion. There was a chap from xxx called [Jake] - I forget his other name - I knew him before the

war was ever thought of. He joined and went through the same time as I did, the same unit, and he was a stretcher bearer right from the word go. And it was peculiar: nearly every time there'd be four or five of them to a stretcher, for the Battalion, and ever time after the stunt he would be the only bloke left. The rest would all be wounded or knocked over.

It was a particularly dangerous job then.

It was; you had no chance of getting out or getting shot, and yet he went right through like that. He had a bit of leave, they sent him over from France to England for a bit of leave; and he went through, come back, and he went through, and he went through, right through the whole damn war doing that, and he never was wounded or anything. He went right through. Well, he came to me, he said, 'Reg, you are not going for any promotion. What about you coming and putting in the rest of your days now as an offsider with me on the stretchers - on the dressing and that? I'll send you out in the field when they are going out there, you can do the dressings and everything like that, and the stretcher bearers will have to pick them up afterwards. But you can go out and do the forward dressings for them.' Every time it was him and me - only us two on the team that went out - we were the only two that were still alive.

Why was that? Were the others just more careless, or was it just luck?

No, it was just the luck of the game. The other blokes were getting knocked over with bullets, and shells, and things like that; it was just that it was our fortune and his fortune that he wasn't going to get hurt while it was on.

Were you doing that job at the time of Stormy Trench, when you went across with Harry Murray, or not? You would have been with the infantry then at that time.

Well, when I was with Harry Murray I was doing a bit of xxx, I was an infantryman. It was after that that I was a stretcher bearer, and was dressing them.

Did you go across in the attack at Bullecourt when the tanks were used?

I was there, I was in that.

Did you go across, or not, to the German lines? Or were you reserve or what?

I don't know what we done; I know I was there, but I can't remember. Of course, all I done when I come home to Australia, came back to Australia, there was a funny sort of a silly sort of thing, he cautioned everybody but myself. My wish and desire was, when I came back to Australia, was that I would be able to forget all about the war altogether, I wanted to forget all about it as if I had nothing to do with it.

Is that because you had been through so many experiences

that if affected you?

I just didn't want to have anything more to memorise it. That is why, I suppose, I've forgotten the names of lots of places.

You are not alone in that.

When I came back home my sister came and met me at the train when I got there. I had a lot of trouble in Sydney. I came home, one month to the day I think it was, after the armistice was signed, on sixty days leave that was granted to me. I should have had that while the war was still going, but when the Americans first went into action it was hurting Australians was allotted to them to do certain work, to help them, help the ones that were doing that particular thing, to show them what to do, and the right place to be doing it.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

And we had to store them so the stretcher bearers could pick them up quick and lively, and get them through like that. I was with them there at that place, with the Americans. The day I went into action with them - which I learned them a few things early in the peace. I was supposed to be coming home to Australia on leave; my leave was wiped off and I never got it till after the army - it's a long time. I was struck off the list for a long time before they put me back on again.

Being originally a private ...

Because I hadn't taken it, I suppose, they probably still reckoned that I didn't take it or something like that. Anyhow, that was all going like that.

You were talking about when you got home and your sister was coming to pick you up from the train.

Coming home - that's right, I was telling you about what took place, how I came to be there. What I was going to say, while I was going over - when the what's-a-name was going over and they were taking the trench - when I was there. They were going to advance on the trench there. The others had been advancing all around there. And they were going up there, and there was a machine-gun opened up, and they all run together - there was four or five of them knocked over. There would have only been one man knocked over, but they all rushed together. This machine-gun was only as far as from here to that tree away when it opened up. They all ran together trying to get out of the road, I suppose. Like they had the bomb - one bloke - I seen he had one. I said, 'Give us that bloody bomb', and I threw it from where I was in on top of them and skittled the lot of them, knocked them all over. There was no more trouble with them. And that's all they had to do, was throw a bomb at them.

They were pretty hopeless the Americans.

The Yanks were doing that all the time. When their air force was coming over - they'd go over to drop bombs on the enemy lines, they'd come up to where we was and drop them on our lines. We sent word to them that we were going to shoot them down, every bugger that come over our trenches where we were; we had to do it.

That's why I was so late, and then, when I was coming home, I got to the railway station, and I said, 'We are not driving home in a car?', she said, 'No, we are going in the taxi'. I said, 'Well you are not going to bother about the taxi at all, we will walk home, it's not that far to walk'. I said, 'No, I'm tired of being in the train all night'. I said, 'Is that little shop still down the street there?' - 'Yes' - I said, 'I want to go around there by that shop, I want to get xxx. I'll go and get ...' Do you know what I did? I went into the shop and bought two bottles of kerosene.

Why was that?

Well, when I went home I looked around and I found a pair of trousers that I could put on, xxx coat, it wasn't very tidy or anything like that - they issued us with bloody clobber that I wouldn't put on anything - a pair of trousers or jumper - something to put on - when you were being discharged - it was no good anyhow, it wouldn't have fitted me. So I went home and put on these old clothes - had a cup of tea and things like that - put on all these old clothes and took off all of mine.

Your uniform?

Everything I had, all my uniform - hat, boots, socks - everything, everything I was wearing. I took them all off and I went out in the back yard and I put all of them down and poured kerosene over the whole lot of them, my hat and all - put them in a heap and set a match to them. I never wore them down town once - I burnt them all up. I said to my sister, 'There's only one thing I've got to try and do now, is forget all about the war and everything that happened.' There's quite a lot - I've forgotten all the names, and things like that.

You're not alone in that. I'd say that the majority of the men that I've talked with have never really talked about it at all, and some of them have really got excellent memories - your memory is good, you can remember a great deal. It's very interesting to hear you say that.

Well, that's what I did when I came home - burnt everything I had. The only thing that I didn't burn was a little wallet that I had in my pocket.

Do you have a photograph of yourself in uniform?

Oh yes, I think so. Do you want to see one?

Yes, I would. I've actually been copying photographs like that to illustrate the book.

(Break in interview)

In Egypt there, when I was there - I told you, I used to ride the donkeys, and that sort of thing. One time I decided there that I'd give up the infantry altogether. They were forming up in what they called - the first one they formed up was the Camel Corps. So I decided I'd join the Camel Corps.

I once had a good yarn to a bloke that I knew - not one of our blokes, but who had a lot to do with camels, he was always looking after them - and he told me it's not the female camel that you've got to worry about at all, it's the male camel; he's the bloke that you've got to watch because, he said, he comes on season, not the female. He said he goes along the trenches, he'd go mad, they go mad, they'll bite you, they'll bite all the people and everything else.

So me and another bloke decided we'd go and see the Camel Corps formed, where it was and where they were working, where they were stationed. So we went down to see - and they had vacancies - went down to see them. We were walking down through the rows of the thing, and we seen a camel galloping into the flamin' lines. We got out the back, slipped through between the camels into another line. But before he got down to where we were there was a bloke up there, he bit him in the arm - he bit his arm and he went on and bit another bloke on the leg. Here was this bloke with his flamin' leg nearly all bitten. He went down - we went at the right time to see - they told us to watch out for the mad male camel. There was a little xxx fellow down further, little bloke who was working with them - xxx of whatever you call them - he was down there and he had a rope, and he was dragged under another camel - he was looking for a camel. He threw it over his front leg, and his leg went up, and he ran right round the other side as fast as he could - he had a long rope - and he threw him right down onto his bloody side. And in a bloody second he got around his head and pulled his head up there and tied him so he couldn't get up - tied him down with this rope. He reckoned he could do that every time. Tied him up and he couldn't get about, he couldn't get up or anything. They left him there until he got over his ailment. But he bit one bloke's leg - well, the other bloke was up there that went to attend to him, said he'll lose this leg, and the other bloke lost his arm. So we decided we'd clear out.

The Camel Corps wasn't for you?

We wouldn't have it on at all. We'd be inexperienced enough to get caught. So that's what it was.

I know another story. Just before the big march down to Serapeum, they used camels to take a lot of the gear down. One of the 15th men was grabbed on the arm by a camel, and it wouldn't let go. He was badly cut.

He was lucky he got out of it that lightly.

It took him several months to recover.

This other bloke, being in the galloping mood and that, he'd get a more vicious bite on him than if he just bit a bloke. That's what it was.

(Break in interview)

It was formed up in Australia.

That's right.

And the 33rd Battalion, that was almost an Armidale thing at the start. I mean, it was formed in ... What I was going to say was ... What was it?

The 3rd Division in France.

They were the 3rd Division. We went over to France, and we'd been in and out of the line - we'd come out, like, tonight, or last night, for a rest; and some was in the Hut B and some was in the Hut C, where the farmers and that was, to have a rest for a few days before we get put in again, our turn with our company. We were walking down the street there - and the 3rd Divi blokes had just arrived over from England - and they come up the street - 'Oh, look at the bloody war babies coming down here. Look at these war babies coming down here - look at the war babies - look at them, the 4th Division' - chucking off, singing out like that. It ended up with a brawl - some of them had had a few beers - they had a bit of a fight and a brawl. The 3rd Divi was only going up the line for the first time (laughs) xxx, and these blokes have just come back the night before. So you can imagine what was the feeling, xxx. Of course, they were in the 4th Division, you see.

And they reckon they were more raw than the 3rd Division?

Yeah. Well, you see, they were formed up after them (laughs) - they didn't know - they didn't know that this one was one that had been to Gallipoli xxx (laughs), Egypt and everywhere.

(Break in interview)

France, I think.

About right.

What recollections do you have of the winter in France, that first winter when it was really cold?

Well, it was still cold on Gallipoli, you know.

Yes, that's right, you had frosts there.

We were used to that (laughs), the cold weather. Well, you couldn't say it was very pleasant, and yet you didn't feel it as much as what you would walking about the streets here, in a way. I suppose you'd have to get used to it because it when it rained, you had your wet clothes on all the time, day and night, all the same - the same clothes, wet or dry, whatever

they were, you had the same clothes on all the time, and you got used to that. If you got wet, well, you took no notice of it, you just left your clothes on just the same. You couldn't expect anything else.

What about trench feet, did you suffer from that?

No.

How did you look after yourself and keep warm? What sort of precautions did you take?

None.

You just wore your boots ordinarily?

Didn't take any notice of anything, just had to stop there and put up with it. I didn't get specially prepared with extra clothes or anything else; I just wort the army issue.

Do you remember when General [Brand] took over the Brigade early in France? We know there were a few months, or a bit less perhaps, and he called ... there was a parade. I think he made some comment about the fact that he'd been on Gallipoli and all these other fellows hadn't, or something like this. Can you recall that day?

No, I can't, I can't remember that.

What else do you remember about going across at Bullecourt? You were telling me about Harry Murray taking you out to have a reconnoitre.

Just went over the xxx, into the line, the trench, went over and had a look to see where they had to go, and everything like that, and see where I had to dig this other little trench - which I never had a chance of digging. I had nothing to dig it with anyhow, nothing to dig it with. That was because there were seven attacks after we took that trench.

There were seven counterattacks?

Yes.

What were they like? What do you remember about them?

Pretty bloodthirsty, fairly vicious, and things like that. The whole case of victory was silly, stupid things that were done - it's not always right according to teaching - is the fact it was just as the enemy was attacking, things like that, everybody got out of the bloody trenches and sneaked back without being seen; got back in the open behind the trench, a bit further away - not too far away - and then when they come in and jumped in the trench to take it they got their shower of bombs in on top of them.

So you withdrew, and when they came in ...

We got out of the trench and let them get in it.

And then you threw all your Mills bombs in on top of them.

Not all of them - threw bombs in on top of them and cleaned them up that way. They had seven attacks that night.

Were you in A Company at that time - that was Harry Murray's company on that evening?

Well, to tell you the truth, I never knew what company I was in; I don't know whether it was A Company or what it was. He was in more than one company anyhow because every time he was promoted from lieutenant up to a bit higher, a bit higher, a bit higher ... I used to go ... he came to the ... the old Maxim machine-guns charged up before we finished up and that. And after that he was with the infantry most of the time - he was somewhere else first - a few months or something, once, I think. Everywhere he went - we were sort of friends, I used to go with him. They transferred from one place to another, one company to another - when he was transferred, and that sort of thing - we were just friendly.

What special memories do you have of him?

Well, I asked him once, years ago, how it was that he never got scared or upset or anything like that, no matter what was going on. He said, 'I know bloody well, I've got it in my head, that I know very well I'm never going to get killed in the war and I've got nothing to be frightened of'.

He had that view?

So he said - he told me. I don't know whether I should say them sort of things but that's the truth of it. He said he had no fear of ever getting killed, that he was quite confident he would never get killed. He was badly wounded; as a matter of fact, he wasn't really right up to the standard when he went in that night, the time that he won the Victoria Cross.

He had pneumonia, didn't he?

He was suffering from the effects of the war wound at that particular time, on the chest or something, that particular time, when he volunteered to do the job and succeeded - he did, for sure.

What was your view of him? How did you regard him? Did you think he was reckless?

He was just a good, calm, cool fellow - a very good fellow - and he was quite confident that he was never going to get killed or anything like that. He'd been wounded a couple of times.

What about some of the other men of similar calibre like Albert [Jacka] or Percy [Back] - did you ever know them?

Oh, I knew Jacka; he was the first bloke to get a Victoria Cross.

That's right.

Yes, I knew him, but not being with him - he was in the 14th Battalion.

They were looking for me for over twelve months - I don't know how long it took them to find out who I was - they never found out. They were going to find out. A mate of mine, a fellow who I was real great mates with - we was all the time - we were both there all the time together, the same length of time - although he come down from the Victorian border.

What was his name?

I'm just trying to think of it now. But anyhow, he come to me one day, he said, 'I'm going to see the colonel today, I'm going to talk to the colonel. I've got to talk to him. I'm going to tell him ...' He said, 'I know very well who it is they are looking for because I remember I spoke to you when it was happening. I spoke to you when it was happening, and I saw where you took the bloke to and where you put him down. Instead of some of the stretcher bearers coming to take him away, you took him back to the colonel's dugout. I'm going to tell the colonel who it was. They've been making enquiries all over the place.' He said, 'Apparently no-one else knows about it seeing that they didn't know who you had or anything like that'. And I said, 'Well, I'll tell you this ...' - what did they call him? - 'I'm telling you this: you go near the colonel and tell him that, or tell him anything about me, or tell him that I had associated with that turnout or anything else, I'll tell you what's going to happen to you and I don't want to have to do it.' I said, 'I'm going to shoot you in the bloody leg afterwards if you do that. I won't break your bones, but I'll see that you are sent away from the bloody war with a bad wound in the leg. I'll shoot you in the leg with my rifle if you go and tell him anything like that.' 'Cripes,' he said, 'I'm only telling the truth.' 'Truth or not, it doesn't matter, you are not to say a word about it.' I said, 'I know who they are looking for, but I'm not telling them'.

That happened to me, an incident where a certain bloke pulled ... went, and we got there, somehow or other, mixed up - grabbed him out of the line, out of the enemies trench. They had him there as a prisoner - he would have been - he couldn't get away, he couldn't walk, couldn't stand up. They had him there so that they could get him out of the road. I went in there - we had a xxx raid in there because the other people had been fighting with them there, or something. And I picked him up and carried him out, and took him down, and got him away safe and sound. He was a captain out of the 15th Battalion, that bloke. I knew his name and all - I didn't know then.

When was this do you think? Was this early in the peace, in 1916, or was it after that?

Well, to tell you the truth, I'm not quite clear, but I think it was at Gallipoli.

This is not in France?

No, I think it might have been at Gallipoli - might have been France, but I've forgot. But anyhow, I know I went down the hill, I had to take him down the hill with me to get him away. But you had to do that in France too.

Funny thing then afterwards, when I heard about it, and I heard them talking about someone - I knew that bloke before the war. Originally he came from Uralla.

You don't know his name?

I think he went up to Queensland. His sister was a great friend, a real xxx, two friends they were with one of my sisters. If I'd known who he was - I tried to talk to him but he couldn't talk to me, he was too ... but he knew the bloke was from the 13th that carried him out.

And he was recommending you for a decoration, was he?

That's what he was after, but I didn't want it - I was only doing him a favour. I think his name was Cooper, I'm not sure.

There was a Cooper who was later a Sir Walter Cooper.

But anyhow, I did him a good turn, and that's all the xxx.

Where was he wounded?

I couldn't tell you. I think he might have been wounded in a lot of places - it's hard to say. I didn't do him any dressing or anything like that - I just grabbed him up and carried him - plenty of blood all over him.

What about Bullecourt? You were talking about that before. What can you remember about that attack? It was snowing, and it was after [Gudecourt], after Harry Murray won his Victoria Cross.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

START OF TAPE THREE - SIDE A

How many times what happened, or what eventually ... there was a chap there, they called, there was another chap down there and he helped me get up off the ground. Well, I had goodness knows how many wounds I had.

You were wounded at this time, when the Russians came up?

Well, I had to take delivery of them, there were no NCOs, there was no-one all night, you see; I had to take them.

They went back for 180 men.

I had to take them, distribute them. They were sent in, they put them there and stacked and all. They landed a bloody shell right underneath them, blew it all up. I was wounded in both legs and arms, face and head.

This is all shrapnel?

All pieces of shell and everything. There was some there - one, two, three pieces - my bottom lip was thrown down there, and bottom teeth knocked out - all this place around here ...

Around your right eye.

... for years, that mark up there, that used to be out here; and there were scars until a couple of years ago, right from there, right away right around xxx xxx.

Right around your ear.

And another one coming right away down here - there's one there. The doctor has three times taken pieces out of me, out on the table. He wanted to pull that one out there; he looked at it and he said, 'I don't know what I'm going to do with you. I'm frightened I'm going to blind you when I do this operation. We've got to get that piece of stuff out because the skin is starting to heal around it, and if it heals around it it will push it down and blind you - it's that close to it. And I'm frightened that if I go to pull it out, when I xxx ready, if I move it just a sixteenth of an inch, let it slip forward or anything like that, I'm going to blind you. So I don't know what to do.' 'Well,' I said, 'go and have a go at it next time you are putting me on the table - have a go at it - if you blind me, blind me, and I'll thank you very much for trying.' He had a go and three times he started to do it. I got badly knocked about.

I sent up word xxx any money - he wouldn't let me xxx him anything but xxx. I sent word up that I was going to try and walk out, to see if I could, xxx. I didn't go very far. I said, 'I'm going to take a shortcut across there'. It was a silly thing to do because instead I should have gone another lot further round the other way by the trench that you travel around in. I started to go around there and I didn't get very far, and I went out to it. It was three or four days - nearly a week - before someone came along and found me. So that's what happened.

You'd be in a bad state by then.

I didn't finish the thing off or anything else. I think I was about the only NCO there that didn't get a decoration of some kind. They know bloody well I wouldn't have accepted it so I didn't get one.

It was a battle and a half that night - a few days, wasn't it? Are there any other incidents from that attack?

I can tell you a very funny incident that happened. Just exactly what place I can't tell you. I was back out of the front line - support line or somewhere - just walking out there. I don't know what made me go out - I might have gone out to do a job or something like that. Anyhow, I come back in and I walked up near a friend of mine from Armidale who used to be here - was standing up there talking to a bloke. I looked again - it was a German soldier he was talking to in the front line of trenches. They were talking to one another. I walked up - I suppose I got as far as from here to the front gate away from them.

Twenty feet.

He looked around. 'My God,' he said, 'that's not you Reg, is it? That's not you, is it?' I said, 'It's me alright ...' - I forget his name now - 'It's me alright'. So I walked up and shook hands with him, give him a cuddle and everything, and I said - while he was working over here at xxx school for a while, all beautiful, lovely fellow he was, and he was working over at xxx school over there - he was a German guard before he come out to Australia, and he had to go back to ... he got called back to do another six months or twelve months to complete his military career.

This is in Germany?

In Germany - so he went back. That was before the war was thought of. Then, when the war broke out he told them, he said, Under no circumstances whatever put me into fight against any Australians that are here, or the British, or anything else, particularly Australians - don't put me anywhere where they are, to fight against them. Put me in against the Frenchman - put me in against the Frenchman every time - all the time let me fight against the Frenchman, I'll kill every bugger I get eyes on, but don't put me where the Australians or any of the people like that are.' He found out the night before that he was put in to fight against the Australians. He cleared out through the night, he cleared out and come around, and xxx in daylight he surrendered.

I didn't understand it to begin with, but the German soldier that you knew was a person you knew from Armidale?

Yes. He was here, and I knew him for about twenty-two years, give or take a month.

And he was at the school here?

He was working over in ...

He was a teacher, was he?

No, he was a working bloke, working in the yard, [stack the bags] - labourer.

What is the name of the school?

T-A-S.

T-A-S?

Yes.

What does T-A-S stand for?

The Armidale School.

The Armidale School.

The real big one - they are building a new building over there for accommodation. That's where he was.

And he came over and surrendered?

And I saw him, and I said, 'Well, I'm taking charge of you' - I forget his name now - anyhow, I said, 'I'm taking charge of you, I'm going to see about you.' I took him, I said, 'Walk along with me'. I told him where I was going; I went down and I saw the colonel. I told the colonel all about him, and the colonel said, 'I can't do anything about it.' I said, 'I want you to give him a trustworthy job in the prisoner of war camp, and look after him as one of our soldiers'. He said, 'Yes, he should be, but I can't do anything. Take him down to the brigadier.' And I took him down to the brigadier. He said, 'I'll give you permission while you've got to go away to do what you are doing'. I went down to the brigadier, and the brigadier said, 'I can't do anything about it; it's unfortunate, I can't.' He said, 'I'm very pleased to see that there is such a person in the world. I'm in favour of what you are trying to do. You take him down to civilian headquarters and see (what they can do)' - it was a hell of a long way to travel. But I took him down and introduced him and everything. The bloke that I had to consult about that down there, he said, 'Look, you can rest assured that as far as I'm concerned everything will be fixed up right for this chap.' 'He's a thorough gentleman,' I said, 'and you couldn't get a better bloke anywhere.' xxx xxx. 'That's worthwhile,' he said, 'I'll see what I can do about it. I can't say for sure that I can do what I want to, but I'll try and get him fixed up with a real trustworthy job.' Unfortunately I never heard of him or seen him since, so I don't know what became of him.

When the war broke out where was he - in Germany at that time?

He hadn't quite finished his training - he actually thought it was to be to the country.

So he couldn't come back to Australia, he joined up there?

He was still doing his service when the war broke out. And that's why they got him over there, to make sure he got there. They got in touch with him and everything. So that's the way it was.

When you were picked up after Bullecourt, after being out in no-man's-land for four or five days, what happened to you?

They took me down and put me in the advanced post; and the advanced post took me out and chucked me into the xxx that would take me to the hospital, or the further place - going to the hospital.

Were you unconscious for those four or five days?

Well, I must have been, I didn't know anything about it; didn't know anything about it until I got down to the hospital after I ...

(Break in interview)

What have we got to talk about now?

Do you remember anything more about the train ride when you fist got to France?

When I got to France I never done any train riding at all when we first went there. Everywhere we went was done by trucks, everything round about there.

A lot of the marches were on cobblestones, weren't they - the roads?

Yes. We generally got in busses to go from one section of the fight to the next; if we had to go from one part to another we used to get in busses and they used to take us up to a certain distance, and then we'd walk from there onto the ... on the things. When the war ended - would you like to hear that?

What happened then?

We happened to be out, just on a rest period, but there were certain places where the British were not gaining what they should be; they were, in fact, lost in a couple of places. And we were all lined up to leave where we were having our rest, we were all lined up ready to get in the busses - the busses was there - to go up there and hop over the trench, hop over that night, that day, and clear up and start to belt the enemy back from there where there was a place where they wasn't belting them back - they weren't knocking them back just at that particular spot. We were all there in the race and they said, 'Right turn, march onto the busses, get into the busses' - we were ready to go, and before they said 'march' - 'Hold it, hold it, stop still and behave yourselves - the war is all over, it's finished, you haven't got to go no, you haven't got to go up there at all, the war's all over, the war's just finished, the Germans have chucked it in'.

What was the reaction?

Oh well, they were very pleased, and the funny part of it was, I was the only one ... I think there was only a few days that

I'd had over in England or something - seven days we get, I think, to go over there.

Seven days?

It used to be three one time.

Three days?

Three days. I'd been over there for seven days or something, over that way, had just been back. I might have been in action again, but I'd just been coming back - but I had been in action after I came back. But while I was over there I had some money, and I had a bit of surplus money in my pocket - I had xxx.

Is it English money or French money?

I never had French money in my life unless it was an accident that I got it - something like that - it was always English money I had. And I had a few quid in my pocket. Just as xxx come, we were dismissed, up comes one of our officers - a captain I think it was - 'He Reg,' he said, 'you've just come back from England, you are the only one I think that would be xxx'. He said, 'I haven't got any money in my dirty pocket at all, only a couple of bob - a few bob, that's all. Could you lend me twenty dollars (pounds?) out of the money you've got? I want something at the officers' mess out of this.' 'Right-oh,' I said, 'I'll give you the twenty dollars (pounds?).' Then two or three more come along - 'Hey, can you lend us a couple of dollars (pounds)?' - and things like that. Before I had time to shout anyone I'd found I'd given all my money away, I never had a penny left, I was broke, I had no money at all myself - didn't matter to me, but that's what I had - no money. All the money I had - I had about forty-odd quid in my pocket when it occurred. I got nicked for the lot of it.

This is after the war ended?

Yes, just as soon as we got word that it was finished.

What were they all doing with it - spending it on booze?

Whatever - a couple of beers together (laughs), things like that. We had to stop there for a few more days.

You wern't given a talk by the mayor at that time, were you, of the village where you were, or the town that you were in?

No, never heard anything like that. They were all peaceful, they all [thanked us], but I never heard of anything like that - they were bloody pleased. We stopped there - I don't think we shifted from there. That's the time that I got my sixty days leave.

You came home very quickly.

On the boat that took you over to England. I had, I think, two

days over there that I could have, then I had to catch the boat to come home. The funny part of it was, that hurt me most of all, had I been sent when I was going to be sent - that was when I told you about when I went in with the Americans - my leave went right back till after the war was over. Had I been sent at the time when I was fit to go - do you know what happened, the fellows that was in that [boat going over]? They put in one end of America and went right through to the other end of it. They were able to do that and take the boat at the other end.

San Francisco or somewhere?

Yes - had to go across there - they had a trip to America. I had to go back the same damn way as I come over, except for round Australia - we came round the other way of Australia.

Did you go on leave over to England in 1916? You'd have been due for leave for sure, wouldn't you, to England?

I only go there ... first you were given three days over there, then they got seven, I think.

What did you do the first time you went to England?

I'd better not say that on air, it would be disgusting if I did. I had a look at that monument that they used to walk around; I walked around and around it. I was in a bad way, I went round the back of it - I won't tell you what I done when I went around the back - took the risk of xxx (laughs).

Was that Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square?

Yes - it was only liquid (laughs).

Did you go and see any plays?

I went to a play there. But I'll tell you the funniest thing of the lot, when I went to leave. My leave I always put down to go into Scotland.

You had to say where you were going, did you?

Yeah, you were supposed to let them know - well, I was putting in for Scotland, and I had to go to London. I went up to Scotland the first time I went over there - it was New Year - got up there New Year's Eve. When I was in London a bloke said to me, 'Where are you going mate? Are you going up to Scotland?', I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'Well, you leave it to me, don't you get on the train when it comes, you wait for me, I know a bit about this game. I'd like to do you a favour, a good turn. You wait here,' he said, 'and I'll take you along and put you in carriage later on.' So he took me along and put me in a carriage.

Who was this?

A bloke working on the railway line, xxx. And he said, 'This

bloke is Johnnie Walker ...' - or something, one of them liquor factories - he said, 'He's going home now, and everything that he's got there are samples - they always have samples xxx. You get in there with him, he'll open up the samples for you, you'll have a good time going up.' Sure enough, he did. Although I'm a descendent of them in Scotland, on one side - I've always heard how tough and mean they were. It's the only time I went to a lady [who was married to royalty]. I had been given authority, of a chap gave me an address to go to in Glasgow. 'Stay there,' he said, 'you go there and stay there. No-one knows about this, only the permanent soldiers in England and Scotland' - they all go there when they get their weekend off or something like that - he said, 'Stay there, you'll be pleased. You don't get meals there, but you stay there in the nights xxx.' I went there - do you know what it cost me for my bed? - it was beautiful, everything was perfect - sixpence.

Sixpence a night? That's cheap, isn't it? What sort of a place was it - a guest house?

Yes - couldn't get better. They used to give the soldiers who have got so many days leave, and there's nowhere to go - who were permanent - all through the year, they always let them go there for sixpence. They did the same for fellows in the army, but no-one knew about it in the army, these regular blokes. I was given the order then, give me the order to go and see his mother and father. And I took his sister to a place, and I went into the place. She said, 'We'll go and see a play or something' - I forget what it was'. Went to see the thing and she turned around and she said, 'Oh, it's pretty dear in here, but it's a lovely place to go'. I said, 'It will be alright ...' The New Year has just started and xxx.

This is in Glasgow too, is it?

And I went to another place - it was cold.

(Break in interview)

This is all in Glasgow?

I went in to buy these gloves - it was cold so I reckoned that I'd buy a pair. They were the most expensive gloves that were in the shop.

These are leather gloves?

Yes, leather lined and everything. I said, 'How much are these gloves?' - he looked at me - 'This is New Year,' he said, 'We are very kind people in here xxx, you can take them. Off you go.' I went to another refreshment room - and here was another time - 'No, this is our New Year's Day Week this week, you are not going to pay for this meal; you can have this at our expense - no cost'. They were the people that were supposed to be so tight and lousy.

This is all in Glasgow, is it?

Yeah.

That's good of them. Did you know Doug Grant, the Aboriginal who was in the 13th?

There was one, but I couldn't remember names.

What about some of the aerial dogfights and so on that the air force used to put on? Do you remember any incidents about that, the planes you used to see?

Do I remember it. Yes, I remember the Americans dropping quite a few bombs on us once; they dropped them there, they come up the first trench they seen so they dropped the bombs and [cleared]. We had a bloke that was coming around there every ... used to be coming around there shooting at us.

American?

No, an enemy - a German. We had a machine-gun there to try and drive him away - stuck on a post. So I ran down and got this post, and knowing where it was he come following the bullets - he was following me round while I'm going round the post. So I waited until I thought he got in a good spot, as I could see. I let go - I fired a second burst - I thought something was going wrong, so I tore another burst in. He came down about 500 yards away from where we were.

You got him?

It was supposed to be me, but the people all round about were satisfied it was me that brought him down alright, but there was another aeroplane a long way up in the top, and he was having a go at him too, so he got the credit, he got the credit of bringing him down. But they reckon it was me, and them that seen the plane after reckoned there was more bullets went up through the bottom than there was anywhere else. But anyhow, we never had him to worry us any more - he had been at us for nearly over a week.

The same chap?

Yes. No-one was game to run out and try and get to where that gun was, that's why; it was just a machine-gun propped up on a post.

A Lewis gun, was it?

No, it was a Vickers.

Did you have any special capabilities? With the maxim machine-gun on Gallipoli were you in the bombing section, or in the Lewis gun section, or were you always just as an infantryman?

We didn't have them sections in them days.

But in France?

We didn't have them sections there. Some of them might have had them, they had some there and doing them sort of things. When anybody was detailed off, there was a company, or a platoon, or half a platoon, or something, were ordered to go and bomb such and such a place - they had to go and do it, there wasn't specializations or anything like that. They were all supposed to go and do them sort of things.

What about at Pozieres, with the attacks there? Can you remember any of the experiences from there that you might have had? The Battalion was shelled very heavily there at Mouquet Farm. That was the first big stunt in France for the Battalion.

I can't remember places, that's the trouble. We did have bombing once or twice, or shooting once or twice, when we was back in billets a couple of times, but there was never anything much done to hurt our people - he wasn't putting any exhibitions on anyhow.

What was the name of this Russian that you mentioned - Paul?

I think his name was Paul [Zanovitch], I'm not too sure.

And he was a Russian?

Yes, Russian born and bred. He got in touch with me - a couple of letters two years after the war was over - he wanted to come up here and see if he could get a job - that was when the depression was on. I told him that it's no good coming up here, that there was nine out of every ten unemployed at the present time, not to come up here, to try somewhere else. You wouldn't get a job up here. I think his name was Paul Zanovitch.

END OF TAPE THREE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE THREE - SIDE B

There certainly was a Zanovitch - he was an original private, wasn't he?

I don't know whether he was original, the same as me, or what he was. I got to know him there, when he was in ...

What do you remember about Liverpool Camp?

It was alright - we thought it was alright - I didn't get upset about it or anything like that. It wasn't like it was later on, and other places like that. They didn't used to, like they did later on, have huts to camp in.

It was all Bell tents, wasn't it?

It was all in tents. You could get wet or have the water running through your tent while you are laying down sleeping of a night-time. It was alright - got on alright.

Did I tell you about when I was out, when we was in our billets behind the line. We come out the night before - and I'll tell you about it. There was five of us in this little hut, little place. I said, 'Tomorrow I'm going to cook the dinner for the five of us, so don't give blokes xxx come and get your dinner'. Did I tell you about that?

No.

I said, 'I've got a lovely bit of meat to cook', and I cooked it.

What was it - poultry?

Steak. We cooked it up and we ate it, and it was the most beautiful meat that I've ever had - the most beautiful feed they'd ever had in their lives - it was a big lot too - good lunch. I saw the stuff going into the brigadier's when I was coming past - we took a piece and got away with it - and I cooked it and done it up. Oh, it was lovely; they'd never had anything like that in their lives xxx. Then they kept saying to me, 'Where did you get that meat' - 'I'm not telling you I got it' - 'Where did you get that meat' - and they kept it up, and they kept it up for such a long time. At last three of them said, 'You'd better flamin' well tell us or we'll bash you up if you don't tell us where you got that meat from if you don't tell us'. I said, 'You couldn't go and steal some from there. I did it and I was fortunate to get through without getting shot.' And they said, 'Yes, if it's good enough for you to do it, one of us can do it just the same as you, and we'll get more to eat'. I said, 'Well, I can't tell you, I'm not going to tell you'. Of course, they'd have no chance of getting it there, I was only lucky that they thought I was helping taking it in, the stuff that was going in there I suppose.

They kept at me - 'Now look, we're going to bash you up if you don't tell us where you got that meat'. 'Well,' I said, 'I'll tell you now; I'll tell you straight out where I got it - and you can't get it there because there's no more left. You can't get any more because I took all that was worth getting.' They said, 'Well, where did you get it from?' I said, 'I'll tell you - do you want to know?' - 'Yes, we want to know' - I said, 'Alright. Do you remember that big fat German we killed three days ago - before we come out - that real big fat fellow?' I said, 'I cut it off his arse, what we had it for dinner'. Did you know that three out of five started spewing all over the place - they spat it all out, they got rid of it all. I said, 'What are you spitting it out for? There's nothing wrong with that. You liked the meat, it was lovely, it was good and everything else. What are you doing that for?' - 'We can't swallow that, we can't keep that sort of stuff down'. I got the shock of my life. The other two that didn't get upset about it was laughing like blazes at it. Then, when they finished it all and got like that I said, 'You silly looking goats, a bloke says something like that and it makes you do a thing like that'. I said it was fair dinkum cattle meat (laughs). 'You tell a yarn like and,' I said, 'that's silly, after wanting

such a good feed and enjoying it, saying how lovely it was.'

Did you ever steal anything from the French? A few people have been telling me about pinching pigs or poultry.

No, I never done anything like that, I wouldn't take anything off them. The only thing I done over there was eating some things that I didn't know what I was eating, and I ate a lot of them when I was over there.

Frogs legs.

Yes. Well, I don't know any more that I know. If there is any more that I think of when I go to bed tonight, then I wont sleep.

I hope it doesn't keep you awake. I know that with a few of the men that I have been talking to that reviving the memories of it has been a bit upsetting in a way. Some of them reckon that their nerves aren't the same now.

It was just the same two nights ago, I was going through part of the war. I got the shock of my life, and I hadn't done anything like that for years, yet two nights ago it come in.

(Break in interview)

END OF TAPE THREE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE A

Identification: David Chalk interviewing Reg Colmer, Tuesday, 15 December 1987.

What's your birth date?

The middle part of the year, in the middle month of the year.

What's that?

15 June.

189- ...

You'll have to work it out ... 1890 or 1891 I suppose, I don't know.

1892, I think. You are ninety-four now, are you?

Yes.

So you were ninety-four on 15 June this year, '87.

Yes.

So you would have been born in 1893.

Yes, I was. I thought I come down to Armidale in 1892; it was

1896.

Where were you born?

Black Mountain.

Where is that?

Nineteen, twenty miles up north.

Outside Armidale?

Yes.

That's heading out towards Guyra, isn't it?

Yes, going on to Guyra - used to have a pub and everything there in them days.

Your father was farming, was he?

He had a farm there, but he was a engineer by ...

Profession.

I suppose you'd call him a xxx - mechanical.

He was a mechanic, was he?

No, he was a ... he had an engineer's certificate ... they were all engineering works - not one of those office ones - mining engineer perhaps, or something like that.

He was working at Black Mountain, was he?

He had a property up there, and a guide used to - xxx guide at Black Mountain - he was xxx. I think he was there when the butter factory was build under his supervision, I think, and he was managing the butter factory for many years. They used to do the butter up in big kegs - like that.

About three feet high.

xxx and send them away.

How much would they weigh?

I couldn't tell you that, don't ask me that. But they used to send them away. He sent one over to an exhibition in London over in England once; he got the first prize I understand. He sent them over there, and one thing and another. Well, I'll tell you how high they must have been or how deep they were: I climbed in one of them - I got up on top of it and was scooping up stuff - I was about three - and I fell in and I couldn't get out. They were looking for me everywhere and couldn't find me. Eventually they came in and sang out to see if I was there. Anyway, they sung out and come and pulled me out, lifted me out of the barrel - I couldn't get out of it.

Was the barrel full?

No, it was empty, it was a returned one. There was a bit of butter stuck on round there xxx xxx.

How many were there in your family?

Cripes, I'd have to get xxx xxx - a lot - double figures. Not in my family, but in the family I was born with.

There would be twelve or fourteen children?

Yeah - more than that, sixteen or seventeen. I was the baby - I'm the only one alive.

You were the youngest, were you?

Yes - I'm the only one alive. My mother was a hundred, I think, when she died.

Your mother was a hundred?

I think so - a hundred or a hundred and one, I'm not sure. I'll have to ask [Margaret].

Who were some of the other children - your brothers and sisters? Do you remember any of them?

Oh, yes I can. I'll tell you something. xxx production of people - families and that - was ... I'll have to ask Margaret, she's the only one that might be able to tell me. All the boys got married - we were all married, me and all of them - a long time. xxx - the funny part of it was, there was only one boy, that was her son, all the rest had daughters. He had two, one died when he was about seventeen, and the other one is still alive somewhere down in Newcastle. I never see him, he never comes to ... I got a card from him yesterday or the day before - Christmas card - about all I ever get.

You were born on the farm at Black Mountain, were you, or in the town?

We had a house, we lived in a house just there between where the factory used to be and the railway line.

What was the name of the road out there?

I don't know whether it had a name in them days - it would be the road through Black Mountain. They'd get the [stores] and paddocks and all that - went around the farmers. The road you would use if you were going to go to Armidale eventually - the xxx road there, that's what it was.

Where did you go to school?

Armidale.

They sent you down to Armidale?

We shifted down here.

You shifted down here?

1896, I think.

Where were you living in Armidale when you first came here?

Corner of Mosman and [Jersey] Streets, Armidale. It's straight down there three or four blocks.

Your father had a house there, did he?

Well, xxx excuse to be over in the place, where there is a big house over the other side, and the people that were living there then wanted the whole block, and that one house was the only thing that was in their road. They got us shifted across that angle corner, over there. The house wasn't finished when my father went there, and he went there to live - my mother eventually owned it.

Was he working as an engineer here in Armidale, or was he working for the butter factory?

The butter factory was finished before they came to Armidale. The butter factory wasn't finished, but they were finished. His latter years he was working over at [TAS] school; he was in charge of everything that had to be done round the school, xxx, repairs and all that sort of thing. He was in charge of all the mechanical things around the place. When he was there he used to teach the boys - take them down there, some of them that wanted to learn anything like that - teach them [carpentry] so that they'd know how to - he was a good [gardener] - so they'd know how to make gates and that on their properties, or anything like that. He used to go down there and have a lesson with them, and how to do all the things like that.

How long did you go to school for? When did you leave school?

I wasn't leaving school when I left, when my mother got sick, when the Christmas holidays was over - just before they were over. I stopped home to look after her, help her for about six weeks. I was supposed to have been going back to school to become a barrister, or solicitor, or something. But I wouldn't go back, I'd been away that long I wouldn't go back. I was a plumber by trade; I was apprenticed to a plumber.

What was their name?

Dalton Brothers.

They were an Armidale firm, were they?

Well, where they originally come from - I think the old bloke

was an Englishman who started the business up here, but then when he went his son took it over. Two of his sons was here and I joined up there. But one left here and went down to the coast somewhere - started a business up there and left the other bloke here in charge. I was here with him till I finished my time. xxx after I finished my time xxx.

You left school about twelve or thirteen?

Fourteen.

You were fourteen when you finished?

I'd be fourteen before I left school.

Did you get a Leaving Certificate?

We didn't get those sort of things in them days. The schools then that had most of the residents there, they had xxx schools there - the residents in the school, they xxx the day xxx - they had residents there and everything.

What was the name of the school?

I think it was the Armidale Superior Public School, I'm not sure. At that time there was only two high schools in New South Wales that were what the [lower] schools were. Those schools were schools, the teachers were teachers - they had to be - not like they are today. The sixth class, anyone who got up to sixth class - that was the highest class of the school - and anyone who got up to sixth class there, and they passed their exams and everything like that, they became barristers, solicitors and everything. There was a high school in [Fourth] Street in Maitland. It didn't matter, there was something here, xxx people sent them down to these two senior schools because they'd be better educated, as they reckon, there than they were here. Yet the blokes that went through - solicitors got up to barristers, and everything else, from the sixth class in Armidale. The sixth class was the highest class that they had to go to; when they finished there they were right up to ... education was perfect.

While it was afternoon, after school, they didn't go through teacher's colleges or anything like that for teachers in them days; but they had their lessons for an hour every afternoon when school finished up they all assembled in the one place, the different ones in different grades, and got there talks and lectures, and everything else, and put through what the teaching next day would be; they were properly organized.

You started with a plumber, Dalton Brothers, here in Armidale?

Yes.

And you were an apprentice plumber to them?

I learnt the trade.

What were you being paid when you started?

Well, the pay the first time was two bob a week, I think. A top tradesman - there had to be two or three under him - used to be paid twenty-eight bob a week. On twenty-eight bob a week, [save] me the girl and give him love and all the rest of it, get married, rent, or build a house for themselves. When you come to think of it, in those days they could build a house for a hundred quid - see what I mean? The average top tradesman was getting twenty-six or twenty-seven bob a week. Well, he got everything - he could rear his family and everything else - he still had his beer, and he still loved his smokes.

What kind of jobs did they get you doing?

All plumbing work - houses, xxx, putting gutters and roofs on, and everything like that, and all the pipe work and everything - water and everything like that that was being done - down pipes and everything like that.

And you were in Armidale when you enlisted, were you?

Yes.

What made you enlist?

Well, if you want to know, the truth of the matter was, when I went to school I'd been up as a sergeant major in the school cadets.

You'd been in the cadets?

I belonged to the school cadets. And then, late after that, I still belonged to a volunteer army.

What was that called?

I forget the number of it now, but it was an infantry battalion.

Did you like the training?

I forget the name of it - we didn't go away training at all, we did it outside of working hours, the training and drill and that, of a night-time. They didn't ... it was really well conducted all them things was, they were real good. You did everything voluntary on time and that.

You liked it, did you?

I got on alright with it, it suited me, was something that suited me; and when the war broke out I thought I had better join. Well, I joined in 1914. I should have gone down to the 13th Battalion - the brigade was formed down in ...

Liverpool?

No, over in Victoria.

Broadmeadows?

Over there somewhere. But the 13th Battalion was New South Wales. Well, they had to go over there to make up the brigade ...

Yes, down to Melbourne.

... to be trained - to Melbourne. Well, I was sick, I didn't get away with it.

What did you have?

Oh, I don't know, just crook. I had to take my place in the 2nd Reinforcements because the 1st Reinforcements went with the ...

Original brigade.

... with the Battalion. We didn't go round like where all the others went. When we were going over we went from here up to Brisbane to pick a few troops up up there. There were two of us, two Japanese boats, Xiang Bee and Xiang Chun; we was on the Xiang Bee. Well, on our boat - this is news to you - we didn't have preserving places and things like that, but for our food we carried livestock and killed them on the boat. Well, this is something that you wouldn't know - I shouldn't be telling you. When we were going up that way our boat - someone got in charge of it one time, or took it over or something, made a bit of mistake and the stuck it on the Barrier Reef. We were stuck there, the boat with us couldn't pull us off. Another big passenger boat came along - well, it was big in them days - tried to pull us off and couldn't pull us off, and they couldn't get us off. We were there for three days, I think - three nights, three days, three nights and two days. On the third day, one morning, they decided the waves and everything seemed higher than usual, and they had a go themselves to see if they could get off again.

This is the captain of the ship you were on?

Yes. And we got off. There was a naval boat coming up to get us off that day, but we got off before he got there. We went on to Thursday Island from there.

Was the ship damaged?

Oh, we did the journey all the way with it; it was hurt a bit but it couldn't have been that bad.

We used to kill the beasts, and what we didn't eat - xxx skin, things like that that was no good - threw them overboard into the sea. While we was on the reef there - and we were killing them over there one day - there was a bloke come up along near where I was, there was a bloke come up along where I was hanging in there, a bloke come up there and he started taking off his clothes. They were going to throw over all the stuff -

they killed an animal, a bullock, and they were going to throw the stuff overboard as they always did. Well, the day before when they killed one - or a couple of days - while we was there they killed one and threw it over. Well, I suppose there were fifteen to twenty sharks there, all come in diving into this stuff, grabbing it, eating it, and taking it away. Well, all these sharks was there and he stripped off all his clothes. I seen him earlier. He tied a big rope onto the top of the side of the boat, onto the rail, and he threw it down in the water; and I was wondering why he done that. Then he took off all his clothes, the whole lot of them; and when they threw this stuff over and all the sharks was there, down there tearing into this flamin' meat - the stuff they threw over there like that. Do you know what he done? He dives into the middle of the lot of them - he dived right in the middle off the boat. And we never seen a bloody shark for over an hour. I said to him, 'What the bloody hell made you do a thing like that?' He said, 'Listen, I was born and bred up in these islands up here, and I learnt that the sharks was the easiest thing in the world to frighten and xxx way for a while'. He said, 'I knew that we had done it in different ways and people had died - jumped in amongst them ...' - over there, the islanders and that - 'so,' he says,'I knew that I could safely dive into the middle of them and there wouldn't be a bloody shark anywhere'. Well, they cleared. He just swam back and climbed up the bloody rope onto the boat and got dressed. That was something we learned.

When you joined up what did your parents think about you doing that?

I never asked.

You didn't ask them? How old were you then?

Twenty-one - when I turned twenty-one.

When you turned twenty-one you joined up?

I joined up when I was twenty-one.

So you didn't need your parent's consent, did you?

No - oh, they didn't mind, they didn't say anything about it, father never said anything about it, he didn't expect me to do it, no-one ever expected me to do it, nobody thought I'd ever do it.

Why?

Oh, I don't know, they didn't think I was that sort of a bloke, but I'd been in the army all that time. And the funny part of it, our fist colonel - but I don't know his name, I've forgotten it ...

[Burnage]?

I don't know what his name was that was there.

It was Colonel Burnage who was in charge of the 13th.

Yes, but there was that many - there was two or three in charge of it at different times.

There was Marx.

The first one anyhow. He was in charge of the Battalion when I was in as a volunteer. The funny part of it, when I went down ... when I went down to enlist I was in a line waiting to go up to get our names fixed up xxx. I was going up and this bloke said to me, 'Listen, did you ever do anything wrong?', I said, 'No; Why?' He said, 'Well, you see that bloke over there, he's a detective or plain-clothes policeman. He's been over and looked at you two or three times and then walked away.' He said, 'You haven't done anything wrong and they are looking for you for anything? Slip out round the back there and get away to buggery before he gets you.' I said, 'No, I'm not going to do that'. It was only a couple of minutes after when he come up to me and said, 'Hey, is your name Reg?', I said, 'Yes', he said, 'Mine's ...' - I forget, Jim or something - 'You know me. When that murder was on, and enquiries was going on up at Armidale about that woman getting killed in the bedroom in the xxx hotel,' he said, 'I used to see you every evening, we used to have a beer together, we used to go down and have a beer together, you and your brother. When I was working I got to know you real well up there.' 'Yes,' I said, 'that's right. I know you now alright.' 'Come on, get out of the line,' he said, 'I'll take you up to the front', and he took me up to the front, took me in there, said this bloke has to be attended to quick and lively to get away, and it's only fair to give him a go. They said alright. But when you come to think of it they got xxx. Then the bloke in charge there taking it - he filled in the form for me, this police officer - he said, 'I'll fill in the form for you' - he put horseman and all the rest of it - good rider. I went there and they [trade] and that.

When I went up the bloke said, 'Bloody fake on this paper', I said, 'What's fake, what's wrong?', he said, 'Talking about being a bloody good horseman, and you are a bloody plumber,' he said, 'Wouldn't be able to ride a bloody horse or anything else - trying to get into Light Horse - I wouldn't let you get in the Light Horse under any circumstances whatsoever.' Well, I let him know: I said, 'That's right as far as your concerned. You can put up with what I've got to say now. I'll tell you what, I've got £100 in my pocket, and I'll put up that £100 and you go and get a bloody horse,' I said, 'and I'll ride the bastard. I don't care if he's ever been ridden before or not. If you're game to ride him I'll ride him, and if you're not game to ride you might get on and ride.' I said, 'I'm a bloody professional rider, a real good rider. I don't want to belong ...' - as soon as he said that, I said, 'I don't want to belong to the Light Horse. The bloody Light Horse wont win the war for us, it's the bloody infantry that's going to win the war. Buggers like you, Light Horse buggers, you'll never be any bloody good anyhow, you'll never do anything worthwhile. The infantry's got to win this bloody war.'

Where did you learn to ride?

Here - I used to ride here.

Your father had horses, did he?

I had them myself - father might have had some too - he had them when he was at different places, but I always had a horse myself all the time - perhaps a couple of them.

What was the first medical like - this is in Sydney, isn't it? You went down to Victoria Barracks to enlist, did you?

Yeah. We had to go down there from here.

You enlisted here?

No, you put your name down here and they give you a ticket to go on the train; I went up on the train. They couldn't fix you up here, at that stage of the war they couldn't fix you up here; you had to go to Sydney to get fixed up.

END OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE A

START OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE B

And you did your first medical down in Sydney at Victoria Barracks, did you?

I don't know whether they did it there or whether they did it out of camp - I got sent out of camp.

What was the camp like?

It was alright as far as I was concerned, I didn't find any fault with it.

You were all in tents, weren't you?

Yes.

Did you have any friends that came from Armidale with you, anybody else you knew?

When I put my name down, that afternoon I was walking along the street - main street. I said to a bloke, 'I'll be leaving Armidale in a couple of days - xxx talking to you any longer mate' - great friend of mine. He said, 'Why?', I said, 'I'm going down to Sydney to enlist, I'm going in the army'. 'You silly bastard,' he said, 'what are you doing that for?' - anyhow, alright - 'I'm going down on the train tomorrow or the day after tomorrow' - and he turned round and he never said a word, he went away. A couple of other blokes, I told them I was joining up the army.

When I get up to the train four other blokes - I'm not sure whether it was four or five now - other blokes waiting up there on the railway station for me, they were all joining up too -

they all joined up because I was joining up. Since I was going down they decided to go too.

What were their names?

Oh, I don't remember their names now.

What was your best friend's name, the one you met in the street?

... I know him real well ... I forget ... I don't remember their names. [Herb] was his name - I don't know whether his name was Dickson or what it was - I think it was Dickson, it started with a D anyhow.

Who was the officer in charge of you out at Liverpool, do you remember him?

I don't remember who was out there then.

Which company were you in?

There wasn't any company there at all at that time - I don't think there was - there might have been.

Did you get a uniform then, or were you in the dungarees and the white hat and so on?

What we were in was what we had when we went down there - to start with. Then we were issued with our clobber. They didn't issue you with anything to start off with, you had to wear you clobber until you got issued with what you were going to wear.

What kind of training did they get you doing down there?

The usual military training, it was just drilling and things like that, taking you round, took you out a bit. xxx wasn't there that long - didn't train - I wasn't - I had been trained right through the lot, so I didn't take any notice of it.

Did you get any rank at that time, or were you a private?

I was a private - I could have got rank if I'd wanted it - I didn't want it. I did have rank in the volunteers before they went. Out at Gallipoli after a time they recommended me for a promotion - I said, 'I wont accept it. It's no good you offering, I'm not going to accept it.' He said, 'Why?', I said, 'I wont accept it' - as a matter of fact, I would have been made an officer before I was there - I said, 'I absolutely refuse to accept it'. 'Well,' he said, 'we'd better make this xxx.' I was made lance corporal because a lance corporal is a non-commissioned officer - you didn't get paid if you were a lance corporal, you had to be xxx. That went along there. I told him, I said, 'I'm doing the jobs that I consider xxx necessary, I'll fill in any time you like. When someone is appointed I'll get back again'. He said, 'We'd better make you a lance corporal', so I was supposed to be a lance corporal.

Why didn't you want to accept any rank? You didn't want to be in charge?

It wasn't that I didn't want to be in charge - I did - and i did fill in at different times, both on active service and away. Once on active service I took a lieutenant's place. Everything was right, everything did go right - I had the qualifications.

Why didn't you want to accept any rank?

Well, I'll tell you why if you want to know, and you think I'm a ratbag - but that's alright, I don't mind. It was a volunteer army that was going overseas - a volunteer army - they all volunteered of their own free will, they had themselves to please, they weren't asked to go, they did it themselves; and I maintained that a volunteer army, that all men in that army - what they had to be paid to help them along, that sort of thing, they all had to be paid the one fee. The ones that had qualifications to take another position a bit higher up, to control the others, to direct - we knew that you had to have those sort of people, but I maintain that they should be promoted up to the ranks and [bearings] that they had, but they had to live on the same food and everything, and be paid the same money as the others - because it was a volunteer unit, a volunteer army, that they all had to be paid the same, and the ones with the qualifications put their qualifications into action.

There is nothing wrong with that thinking.

Well, I had that in my head all the time, that I wouldn't take any - I wouldn't disagree with it - and I refused to accept more pay because it was a volunteer army.

You went away on the Xiang Bee; can you remember your day of departure?

Not now.

Where did they have you on the ship? Were you in hammocks?

I don't know if we were sleeping on the floor or where we were sleeping. They were two cargo ships - bunks xxx.

They were cargo ships, weren't they?

They all were, wasn't passenger boats.

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

Oh, some of them did, I think, [but I wasn't involved].

Did you suffer from seasickness?

I always did when I was at sea, [to start with].

You went to Egypt, didn't you, and up to Zeitoun and Heliopolis?

After, we went to Egypt, and then when we were formed up there we became the 4th Australian Division.

That's right, that was after Gallipoli.

Yes, after Gallipoli.

What was the camp like in Egypt, at Zeitoun?

Zeitoun, where is Zeitoun.

Or Heliopolis it was, that's where you were camped in Egypt.

Yes. It was alright, there was nothing wrong with it; we were in tents.

Did you go out to the pyramids?

No, never seen them, never was there; seen them at a distance, that's all. We didn't go there; our brigade didn't go there at all.

You were on the other side of Cairo?

The Australian troops in the early days was trained down at the pyramids.

At Mena.

Yes - and we - the 4th Brigade that was handed over to make the full division at that time to build up the New Zealand divisions to a full division, to make the army corps - we had to go and be trained under General [Godly] - he was our general there at Heliopolis - in the Heliopolis area anyhow. We did all our training there.

What did they get you doing - desert marches and so on?

Oh, everything. We had a tremendous march from there once.

This would be from Tel-el-Kebîr down to Serapeum, down to the Canal?

Miles and miles and miles of it. That was the biggest march that was ever done, I think, sending them down to the other place. I don't remember whether that was before or that was after ...

That was after.

... after Gallipoli. We were getting ready to organise with the others, all the other turn-outs.

You went into Cairo on leave I assume.

Oh yes, I used to go there a few times - from Heliopolis we could go there.

What would you do in Cairo?

Walk about, might get something to eat. I didn't drink while I was in the army so ... I wasn't drinking but the others did.

What was the relationship with the Egyptians like?

As far as I was concerned it was alright. There was one place we went to there, they played up a bit; didn't like it being there - only a few people.

Was there much of a problem with drunkenness in the army, or not?

Oh, plenty xxx. It was a place they could be getting it all the time. That wasn't in the war though. There were a lot of drunks in Egypt. Over there they were drunk all the time - in France when they had a chance to get out and one thing and another.

Did you go swimming in the Suez Canal?

Oh yes, I went in for a swim - I had a couple of swims.

I think in Egypt there were a lot of horses, weren't there?

There were horses, donkeys and things like that. Sometimes we used to have to go a good way to catch a train to get in to Cairo, in the camp; well, I generally used to get on a donkey or horse, or mule or something, and ride to the railway xxx. You had to pay sixpence or something to get there, and go xxx round there - save walking all the way. And over in Cairo we used to get one to go to the railway station if it was a long way away and time was running out a bit - go and get on a donkey and go and ride him over there. There used to be someone come along with them to take them back.

The Egyptians would come along?

Well, they owned them.

They would come along too.

They would be with you. We used to use a donkey, they used to use them alright. They had a race from one side of Cairo across to the railway station for money.

It was for money, was it?

Yes. One bloke wanted to have a race, and he put up some money, I had to put it up - just between the two of us was betting. Whoever won bet their xxx won, on the donkeys. I was right.

You got there?

Oh, I got there easy with a bit to spare. The donkey I saw there, that I knew, I'd ridden him before and I knew and found out that he was a pretty quick mover, he could go a bit. I got on him.

Who's idea was it to place the bet, yours or the other fellow's?

Oh, I don't know; we both agreed to it, to have a race, fly through the streets, through the traffic and everywhere - we had to go through traffic and everything.

There used to be open-air cafes and so on in Egypt, weren't there - in Cairo?

Yes. They wasn't worrying me much; I reckon they've got enough xxx interesting place there most of the time. We used to walk a few miles too, when we were off duty sometimes, to have a look at something.

How often would you be off duty - of an evening I suppose?

Only occasionally. When we were going over, before we got ... once when we were travelling over - I think it was the time of pilgrims going over to Cairo - over to Egypt I think it was - we pulled in at the station, one of the places, to pick up a bit of coal because we had coal on our boats - our engines were fed with coal. When we got on the - I forgot to tell you - when we got on the boat, on the reef, we had baskets like that and we were throwing them ... the coal from down the bottom of our boat, we used to have to take it up and throw it up onto the other xxx. We put it up there and we threw all our coal except a few shovel fulls out into the ...

To lighten the load.

To lighten the load - that's how we got off. A few tons was thrown over, night and day. The only way we could get it up was with these little basket - buckets or whatever you like to call them.

You formed a big chain, did you?

We had to throw all that over. We pulled in - we got to Thursday Island. I went ashore there and I enjoyed being there for a couple of hours very much. And then we pulled in at another place - Colombo or somewhere ...

That's right, Colombo.

... over to there, and there was a shark there, and I said to a bloke - there was a big rope there with a hook on the end of it - and I tied the ... I xxx a bit of meat, and I put it on - this is on this bloody xxx xxx, onto this thing, and there was a shark in that bay there - everyone was frightened of it. We were warned before we go there that you never knew when sharks were there. I threw it over the side of the boat, and a shark

come and grabbed it - bit it or something - and the thing was a big shark - the thing was on the rope - the rope was fastened to a machine over there, and he is pulling it off. I had a bloke with me; I said, 'When I get this you do what I ask you. Will you help me?', he said, 'Yes, I'm in it with you' - he was - he wasn't. I threw it over and he got it stuck in his mouth somehow or other.

This is the shark?

Yes, he was grabbing the meat. I said to him, 'Wind ... start the machine to wind ...'

It was a winch, was it?

Yes - 'You wind it up' - and he started to wind it up - it was one of them that wound themselves up.

Electric winch.

Something like that - it was made, anyhow, so that it wound up itself. He was pulling that and pulling that, and it was starting to pull up ready to pull up the side of the boat, and I said to him, 'He's coming up, we're going to get him up now; get him up a bit and we'll have a look at him'. He had a look, he saw it and I said to him, 'You shut it off now, and we'll tell the boat manager about it'. Do you know what the bugger did? He ran away.

He ran away?

He cleared out, he never turned it off. And it kept pulling in right up over onto the xxx air vents and things that were round about. He is bouncing here, there, and all over the bloody deck - it cost me a hundred and twenty-five quid, I think it was, for damages done to the boat - I had to pay that - he charged me for repairs to the boat where he damaged all these things. I had to run and get a ride from xxx.

And you went across to Gallipoli ... You didn't land with them, did you? When did you go to Gallipoli?

I think it was about three or five o'clock the first day.

So you were there the fist day, the 25th?

Yes.

So you went across with the original battalion?

No.

You were a 2nd Reinforcement?

We wasn't on the boat they were on.

Which boat were you on?

Oh, I don't remember the name now. But where we pulled up there in the bay, I said to a bloke, 'Look, there's a boat just pulled in over there' - and do you know what the name of the boat was? - Armidale.

And you went ashore on the 25th?

Yes, 25th.

Did you go ashore in the open boats, the same as the others?

We had xxx blood before we got ashore, the snipers got one bloke, they fired at all the boats if they had a chance to.

You had to row in, did you?

Yes - some of them did and some of them didn't - some had boats that had little engines on them, I think. But you got ashore and that wasn't any better, there was nobody when you got ashore, you were better back on the boat.

You see, we didn't have artillery there in them days, and a lot of people didn't realise, or know, we had the old Maxim machine-guns, but you couldn't put them down and use them because you had to mount them on the ground; you couldn't use them in the early stages till after we got established up on top of the hill or somewhere. When you come to think of it, people never realized that those blokes, there and then, was different - was a war where every man had to, not only rely on his own ability, but he had to be his own general and manager and everything else because all he had, all they had to fight with - no [bombs], nothing like that - all they had was a single shot rifle - you had a magazine, but you had to load it every time you fired a shot. And they blame it on the end of it, and that's all them blokes had to fight with - I know that - that something, you see - a big thing. Well, you come around the corner or around a tree, or around a shrub or something or other, or a stone or rock, or hill, you might have a couple of blokes there right in front of you. Well, you had to reload if you fired a shot at one of them. If you stuck your bayonet in a bloke it was possible - not always - but it was possible - you drove the bayonet in and then pushed him over onto the ground, then you'd have to put your foot on him to try and pull it out because your bayonet might have got pressed or tangled up with a bone. Well, if you couldn't pull it out by putting your feet on him, you had to fire a shot to smash it up so that you could pull your bayonet out. They didn't realise there that every man was his own general and everything else; he knew where he had to go and he had to go there because they couldn't turn round and give orders. You couldn't say, this section, have a go at them there, or anything like that; each man had his own battlefield, he had to fight his own battle. They would all be trying to go to the same place, but they were, nevertheless, had to be their own ...

END OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE B

START OF TAPE FIVE - SIDE A

Identification: Tape 2.

A lot of people was going from there down to the bach - wounded blokes were - there were blokes coming up and that. They had the one-legged [tractor] they were travelling on. He had a bloke sitting up on top of a donkey so the what's-his-name could see where they were travelling. These snipers could see exactly where they were going up and down, all the time, and many and many a bloke was getting killed on his walking up or down there, or wounded, killed.

You reckon he was giving away the rout?

He was, he was showing up there. You were not allowed to have things that would show up or anything like that, but he was sitting them up on top of the donkey and they could see that above the protections they had - it was scandalous, he should never have been allowed to use such a thing.

Did you see him, did you, going up and down?

No, I didn't; if I had've I would have shot his donkey. I heard all about it. You see, I never went to Lone Pine, I was on the left.

You were over at Quinn's, weren't you?

Quinn's - Pope's Hill. The last big battle we had there was at Hill 60 - Quinn's Post and Pope's Hill ...

Courtney's?

I forget the names of them now.

What was the view like from Quinn's?

Alright.

What could you see?

Nothing, nothing to talk about. In one place though - I forget what they called it - we were only about five yards apart from the enemy. In case you don't know what happened there, we decided - our people decided - that they would burrow under the ground and stick in explosives over there and blow their trench right out - they were five yards apart. Well, we were doing it, but they must have known we were doing it or something, and they started to do it. Well, the day of peace they had there - to bury the dead when everything was so stinking and that - the day that they had off to do all that, our idiots - that's what they were - our idiots stopped this from going ahead with the tunnel under there - but it didn't matter, we got here. We got over right through alright and got everything all ready to blow it up. We were going to blow it up at nine o'clock that morning, the day that we were going to blow it up. But the other blokes were about two days behind us - or a day behind

us ...

This was the Turks?

Yes - and that day that we were supposed to have knocked off fighting, our blokes wasn't allowed to go ahead with their digging. Well, the other blokes over in the other - the Turks - they kept digging on that day, right through, and they got ahead of us. And we had our xxx there - whether they had theirs, we didn't know that - we had our xxx there, and we were going to blow them up at nine o'clock. It was all arranged what had to be done and everything, while the blokes had to get away before we blew them up. So eight o'clock or before - early in the morning - they blew our blokes up and they were chucked right over the bank there and blown right down over the top of the hill. Had we worked through that day ... we were finished before them just the same, but if they happened to work through on that day they wouldn't have been ready, they wouldn't have been there, you see.

You weren't up there at that time, of course; where were you?

I was down over the back of the hill, I wasn't in the trench at that particular time. I'd been sent back down there to do something.

Which company were you in on the Peninsula?

I'd been in all the companies, but which one I was in at that particular time I couldn't tell you.

What company were you in in France?

Oh ... D and V and ... I'll tell you, if you want to know: most of the times I wasn't in the same company all the time.

(Break in interview)

What was I talking about?

You were talking about different companies.

Were you keeping that on there what I'm saying?

No, I turned it off then.

xxx. I'll tell you: when he first came over - he came back along to ... he was in charge of Maxim machine-gun - I mean, the number one man.

You were on a Maxim machine-gun, were you?

Not at the start - I was when we got it. I was looking after ... running ... Nice thing to be in charge of, have to use: the bloody thing was used in the Sudan War, and the bloody bullets would fly all over the place - it was worn out and everything else - they were no good - they weren't good ones.

When Harry Murray come over - we got him over from ...

The 16th.

... 15th or 16th Battalion - I thought it was the 15th, but someone said it was the 16th, but I always thought it was the 15th. But anyhow, when he came over to us ...

Harry Murray came across?

He came over - I was friendly with him and that sort of thing - and he came over to see the machine-gun, I think. He got his position and ... Harry Murray, xxx used to ... just seemed to be going with him, not xxx xxx or anything like that, but I always used to get in the company where he was - he was D Company once and different companies next. I was with him the night he got the Victoria Cross.

You were at Gudecourt, were you?

Could have been there.

That would be France.

Yes. I went nearly everywhere they went over there in France. A couple of times I got wounded - I was sent over to England once.

Were you wounded on Gallipoli?

No.

How long were you on Gallipoli for?

Well, I was sent away sick once and I came back again - about three weeks afterwards I was sent back. I had the machine-gun at the time of the evacuation, before it occurred. There was a place up there where there was new troops - I don't know whether they were Maoris - New Zealanders - natural people, not white. I forget what you call them. They were in that line there. Well, we was over here.

On the right?

Over that way, but I was over here somewhere - they were there - no, we were over there, that's right. I was put over here ...

On the right?

In this place, with my machine-gun, but I couldn't see, it was covered up under protection because I could fire straight up between those troops ...

The Maoris.

... and the enemy; right up so that if the enemy attacked them I was firing straight up the line where they had to go. But I was not allowed to fire a shot or anything like that until such

time as I got the message from headquarters to open fire. I was there for a week, I think, or two weeks.

I had to go down to get something, and I got down when I was able to get out and run down. I was walking down along an alleyway ...

A track.

... walking down there in the trench. I seen someone coming up further down. As soon as I did, and I seen a bit of a heap of dirt, a place that you could sit your bum on; I sat down on that. A bloke come along - 'What are you sitting down there for?'

He was an officer, was he?

Yes - captain. I said, 'I'm having a rest', he said, 'You are telling bloody lies' - he was a doctor - you didn't often see a doctor there.

He was the 13th doctor?

Yes - well, he was there, he might have been the brigade doctor, but he was there with the 13th going up into the line. 'Get up off your arse,' he said, 'and start walking'. I only went about five yards and he said, 'Get back there and sit down on that thing again'.

What did he do that for?

He looked at me, he said, 'You stop there' - the next bloody thing he said, 'And don't you leave there, don't you leave there now. You stop there until I tell you you can get up.' I got the shock of my life: the next bloody thing there was a stretcher coming along and put me on the stretcher, took me down to the beach - frostbitten feet.

You had frostbitten feet?

Yes. I had a hell of a job to walk. That was xxx. The snow and rain and everything else - we were in that hole where we had our machine-gun, and we couldn't move, we couldn't get going, we couldn't stand up, we couldn't put our heads up, anything like that. We were waiting there, we had to wait till we got the message from headquarters before we could push a bit aside to do what we had to do.

You got frostbitten feet?

When I was going over - I was put on a boat then, eventually - I know they were bad - I had a job to walk a little bit. I was put on a Canadian boat that was there, was taking blokes on board, injured and that sort of thing. And the doctor said to me there, 'Listen boy, as soon as you get to hospital, they don't understand that bloody thing like we do. We've had years and years of experience with it. It is more than likely that they'll cut your feet off. Refuse to allow them to do it. They

might go black further up and further up, and they might get black right up to here. Don't worry about it.' And they were satisfied that they'd have to take one of my feet right off, and some of the other foot - most of the toes off the other foot - and they were going to do it. They'd made arrangements and everything. I said, 'Your not bloody well going to do it, I'm not going to allow you' - 'But you'll never be able to walk again, you'll end up dying' - I said, 'Well, I'll end up dying'. I said, 'I've got instructions from an experienced man; under no circumstances allow that to be cut off'. Well, it come up a bit further, come up my leg like that. He said, 'Look at where it's going' - the bloke that was in charge of the ... I said, 'Yes, he told me it might even get up above the knee, but it will clear up in a while'.

This is a doctor who told you that?

This is a Canadian. And I told him, and in a few days it started clearing up - it wasn't being used, it was there.

You went back to Egypt, did you?

Yes, I was in the hospital in Egypt; Heliopolis is where I was.

The Palace Hospital?

Somewhere there. Anyhow, from there it cleared up. It was pretty well cleared right up to nothing - and I knew where there was a toilet, just around the [bridge] a little bit from where we was, and I said to the bloke in the bed next to me, 'I'm going to go round here and have a piss today - walk around'. I got out of bed, tried to go and have a piss; when my feet went on the ground they went straight down on my xxx - they wasn't ready then. So I had to wait till they came and picked me up and put me back. It took another fortnight or three weeks before they were right to use. Then I went right - they are still there.

(Break in interview)

I could tell you another thing that happened.

Yes, I think so.

I could tell you more than anybody else could tell you.

You can tell me a lot.

I could tell you a bloody lot of things that I done that I shouldn't have done. It would cause a lot of excitement and fun.

What were they?

Oh, I'd better not tell you.

What were you going to tell me - you were going to tell me something?

Only some of the silly things I used to do, have a bit of fun. I was going to tell you: we'd been in this xxx xxx some other mob that was getting in trouble, and we had a new fellow not long with us - a captain, a very nice chap - I can't remember his name now. When we got back into our trench after chasing the other buggers and one thing and another, next morning he wasn't there. A bloke got wounded out there and he's picking up as many as what we could. Well, I went out - this captain, they didn't find him although they picked up a lot of fellows round xxx. At that time I was looking after wounded people, that's what I ended up doing in the army.

A stretcher bearer?

Well, exactly in charge of [caring that they were doing us] - the advanced part, not the stretcher bearer - up in the advanced dressing room. I had to go in action the first line all the time.

This captain, we didn't find out anything about him, we didn't know whether he got out or anything else. They thought such a lot of him, the people that was there. So the next morning everyone went out all around where we'd been fighting, and going round and round there, looking to see if they could find him anywhere - that was my job - I was unarmed. Admittedly I had a bit of a ...

You had a red ...

... badge on me. When I was coming back home - like the mob - I don't know what happened, but I fell in the bloody xxx. When I went there I thought, my God, there was a machine-gun in front of me facing over our way, and two blokes there with it, and I could see more blokes up there having a cup of tea.

These are Turks?

No, this is in France - this was the Germans. I was there; I said, 'Hello' - no-one could speak xxx something or other. So I walked up to the first xxx put my hands out and shook hands with the other blokes. I stopped there talking for a while and then - I'd been there for about half an hour while they were having a cup or tea - their breakfast I think it was. And what did they do; they brought me a cup of tea and everything - they gave me a bit of cake or something.

You were out in no-man's-land somewhere ...

Yeah.

... looking for this captain?

They got cut off when the others were returning - came up and that to go back, they were left there.

The Germans were?

Yes - the Germans, this machine-gun. They couldn't get up and do it in day time or they'd get killed or something like that, so they had to do something.

They were waiting for dark?

Well, they were waiting till night-time comes so they could get away back. At last I said to them - they are all talking around me while I was drinking and all the rest of it, and see if I wanted another cup - I was talking to them all, you know - I had them all around me, like that. They pointed round themselves and to me - I shook my head, 'no' too.

I don't understand; what's happening?

Well, I couldn't tell them what I wanted to tell them, and I was doing that to see if they would surrender, if they could take them over ...

That they would come with you?

I pointed to each one of them, you see, and then pointed over there to come with me - they knew what I was doing - and they said, 'No, no' - they shook their heads, no, and they pointed to themselves, and then pointed to me and said, 'That way', stop with them. Then I decided after a little while, I said, 'Me ...' - I walked round and shook hands with them all.

Going back home?

They helped me out of the bloody thing.

So they let you go?

Yes. That was one of the first things ... I think it was one thing, and the one and only thing, that I ever did wrong in the army.

What was that exactly?

Well, when I went back over the line I said where that was and told them to stick a bomb there - fire a shot in there, in on top of them.

You didn't do that?

Why could you do it? Could you do it yourself - would you?

It would be difficult.

They were good to me, why should I do anything about that. I never let on a word about it, xxx or anything like that. Yet you could shake hands with them like that. That was the same when we chucked a tin of beef over after the first one - when we first chucked it over to them in Gallipoli, threw the meat over to them over there. What did they do? They threw it back because they thought it was a bomb. Then I get out one day there and I opened a tin up - they were friendly at times, they

wouldn't shoot you - I opened it up and was eating it, then I threw them over a tin afterwards, and they took it. Do you know what happened? Only a few minutes - not long afterwards - they threw us over a tin of fruit. They were getting fruit nearly every day, they were gloriously fed. So we threw over a tin or two of bully beef - we couldn't eat it - we was only getting bully beef and dog biscuits there. I'd throw over that and we'd get a bloody good feed of food chucked back at us. You could do it, you could do it all the time.

(Break in interview)

... taking prisoners and that, but I found out you could talk to them.

Now, another thing: once in France, while we were walking along down in the trench - the front line trench - there was a bloke down there. I could see he was a German soldier, and he was talking to a fellow there. I'm walking down there, and I seemed to know that bloke. When I was walking down there - I was about as far as from here to the fence away from him ...

About twelve to fifteen feet.

Do you know what he said? 'Hey,' he said, 'is that you Reg?'

This is a German?

Yes - 'Is that you Reg?' - I said, 'Yes, that's me pal' - I forget what his name was. Anyhow, I said, 'Yes, that's me'. He ran up there and he xxx kissed me and everything else, and I said to the bloke, 'What did you do? Did you chuck yourself in, or what?' He said, 'Listen Reg ...' - he was working over here at xxx school.

He was working at The Armidale School?

Yes - I knew him. I knew he had to go back to France because originally he belonged to the German guards, and he had to go back and do another six months to complete his service; and the war broke out while he was there. He told me, he said, 'I told them all, under no circumstances ... I'll go and do my fighting and everything else for you, and kill every bloody Frenchman that I can get hold of, but don't put me near an Australian or an Englishman - British troops at all. Always put me where the French are and I'll fight.' He said, 'They put us in there yesterday and I found out it was you, so last night I cleared out and got over here. I'm not going to fight against you boys.' I said, 'Well, I'll look after you'. I went along and seen the captain and told him what I was going to do - take him down to see the colonel about it. He said, 'Take him down to the brigadier then if he's such a nice fellow'. I took him to the brigadier and the brigadier said, 'Look, I'll give you full authority to do it, you know what your talking about, I'm satisfied you do.' I went down to ask them to give him a good reliable trustworthy job where he had to go as a prisoner of war. He sent someone down to escort me down to the divisional headquarters. He said, 'I can't do anything, but I'll try'.

They got in touch with someone somehow or other over there, but I could never find out whether they done it. I said, 'You can trust him, you can give him a trustworthy position and he'll do his duty all the time. You could put him is as a clerk or anything you like.' They said, 'Under the circumstances I'm going to ladle him up to be given a trustworthy job'. I never heard what happened to him afterwards - I never seen or heard of him after that.

(Break in interview)

Identification: David Chalk interviewing Reg Colmer, Wednesday 16 December 1987 in Armidale. Tape 2 continued.

We'll start today with that story you told me yesterday about meeting the Germans and them giving you a cup of tea. What happened at that time? What were you doing?

I was out looking to see if I could find that captain that was missing. We lost a lot of people, and we picked up a lot of wounded. I was on that, an advanced man for doing up wounds or anything like that in the firing line. And I went out looking for this captain to see if I could find him anywhere. I went around there, and I was walking along, and I don't know even now how I didn't see the thing or how I slipped into it or anything else.

It was a German machine-gun post?

Yes.

And they were in a trench, were they?

Yes, well a part of it, just for another whole trench, just a little place for machine-guns.

Did it have a roof over it?

No; it did have some cover over the top of it - artificial covering.

Camouflage?

Well, the whole thing was, you see, they were in that position when they were fighting the day before, but they couldn't go back in broad daylight and they were waiting there till night to go back.

And it was just getting light when you came upon them, was it, just before dawn? Or was it daylight?

It would be light then, nice and light then.

And you fell in on them?

I slipped in the hole on top of them.

What was their reaction?

Well, everything seemed to go without any words or anything being said - I was in a spot. I thought, well, I'm going to get killed now.

END OF TAPE FIVE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE FIVE - SIDE B

I suppose I'd better see what I can do. I went around and I shook hands with every one of them. I was trying to talk to them - I think some of them might have known what I was saying, I think there might have been some who knew a fair bit. But I was unarmed, and I went around and spoke to them all, more or less. Then, when I thought I'd better see about getting away I beckoned with actions, exactly to each one. I pointed to every one of them and then to me - went like that - to come with me over there if they wanted to surrender, to give themselves up. They shook their heads and they said, 'No', and they all pointed to one another and they came and pointed at me to go over there with them. I shook my head and said, 'No'. We stopped there and ... I don't know whether they knew what I was talking about or not. A couple of them said something to me two or three times but I didn't know what it was. And in the finish I thought it was time I better see if I can get back, or what's going to happen, because they could kill me or do what they like with me. So I went around and I shook hands with every one of them, and I went and I pointed to myself like that.

You were going to go back, yes.

And they helped me get out of the ...

They gave you a cup of tea, didn't they?

Yes; when they were having a cup of tea they gave me a cup of tea too.

Where was that? Do you remember the place?

I've forgotten the name of it.

It sounds like Mouquet Farm to me; that was what Mouquet Farm was like.

Well, we were there; I know we were there. The others come over and they more or less had taken a trench, and we went back and took it over again from the other ... But we had some ... there are some things there that I don't know whether I should say them or not.

What about?

At different places that happened. There was one at Gallipoli there - the second landing that was made by the English people. You know all about that, do you?

At Suvla Bay?

Yes. They landed. We were in possession, at the time, of their trenches - the New Zealanders and us. They landed over there - we could see them where we were.

They were over on the left of you, weren't they?

Yes. They could land there with [peace], and they were right out there, and they had to march right around and come up and hook them on with that to go right across the thing. Well, that happened many times with them officers that were sent out there - they were never worth tuppence at any time. The general feared a Turkish ambush - we could see them marching around there - and he feared a Turkish ambush and he ordered them to dig in. Well, he was sacked that hight and another general was put in. But, when they got up in the morning, when the other general decided he'd move round and finish the job, they knew all about what was taking place, they could see it all. Well, they, instead of them taking place ... when they went to move they found they had the enemy all up against them and they couldn't budge an inch - they couldn't budge, they couldn't go anywhere. They could have walked straight around without a casualty and hooked up with us.

While that was going on they allowed the others to get round the top, but they were going round the back of us. They were up there doing that, you see. But it happened that the 2nd Australian Division had landed, and they come up there and they hooked onto the side of us and knocked that all back because they were firing at us from the side of it and everywhere else - up on Hill 60.

Just going back to the story about meeting the Germans; you went back to the Australian front line and you didn't tell anybody about that, did you?

I couldn't possibly do it. I did the wrong thing.

Do you think you should have told them?

I should be punished; I should have been bloody shot for that; I should have told them where that machine-gun position was. But how could you do it. I mean, I should have done it.

You were a machine-gunner yourself, weren't you?

Originally, yes. I was on the fist Maxim machine-gun on Gallipoli.

Where did you first get on to the machine-guns? Was it in Egypt or on Gallipoli, or in Australia?

Oh well, I suppose it would be over in Egypt - but they were no good anyhow.

What was wrong with them?

Worn out. A lot of those machine-guns had been used in the Boer

War; some of them had been used in the war before the Boer War - what was it?

The Sudan War?

Yes. I think ours had books originally - where these machine-guns had fought previously, so they recorded what they'd done.

They recorded the service of the gun, did they?

Yes.

Service books?

Yes. They were no good; the barrels in them was worn out; they were no good at all. They did get better ones later on but they didn't have them then.

(Break in interview)

You were with Harry Murray for quite a while on Gallipoli you were saying.

He was a machine-gunner I understand in the - I thought it was the 15th - I don't know whether it was the 15th or 16th Battalion - I thought it was the 15th Battalion - and he was transferred. I don't know exactly why; xxx he came over there with us, and he went to the machine-guns for just a little while - he wasn't there long. He became an officer.

You used to follow him?

Well, he used to say, 'Go on Reg, I've been transferred to ...' - such and such a company - from one company to another, or something like that. Well, I used to just go with him.

Were you working the same machine-gun as him?

I wasn't working on the machine-gun then - or I wasn't using the machine-gun then, I was off it at that particular time.

Well how were you helping Harry - just carrying them?

No, I wasn't helping him I wouldn't say, but I was one of the men that was in his platoon - an infantryman, ordinary infantryman. I was with him the night when he got his Victoria Cross.

That was at Gudecourt, in France.

It was over there - you know where it was - I forget the name of the place. It's no good me saying I know the names, I don't.

That's okay, I know the names. What was he doing that night?

The thing was this: previously that position had been taken; they had gone to take that position. The enemy had belted them

out of it a couple of times. We went up and took the position. Two companies had been bashed out of it - two or three goes they'd had at it before they got to hold that position. I heard - I don't know, not officially - I don't know officially - that Harry Murray volunteered to take that position - he was in our brigade - to have a go at it. Well, we got there, we was up in that position when they come to belt us out the same as they did all the others. It was a very brilliant thing - I don't know if it would be recorded or not, or whether they'd ever know exactly whether they thought we were belted out of it or not - but we got out of the trench before they got there and stayed behind the trench. They rushed in and jumped into the trenches. Well, as soon as they jumped into the trench we dropped our bombs and things in on top of them and belted them away out of it altogether.

In the morning, after daylight, Harry said to me, 'Reg ...' - he used to call me Reg and I used to call him Harry - 'Reg,' he said, 'would you try and work me out a list ...' - I was only a lance corporal, you know - '...try and work me out a list that I can send in to Battalion Headquarters about our casualties'. I said, 'No, Harry, I can't do that ...' - I never called him officer xxx - '... I can't possibly do that, that would be impossible,' I said, 'I'm going to surprise you now.' He knew that there was very few there. I said, 'I'll tell you the truth; I'll give you the names of the men that are left, left here, then you send them down and they can work out what some of the others [would be like] - [cartridges] xxx. He knew it was bad: you'd see a bloke here and see a bloke there, and another - like that. There was only eight men left. I think there was a hundred and eighty, two hundred and eighty-three went into action; there was only eight there at daylight. One of them got wounded just afterwards. We were stopping there all day.

You didn't get wounded?

I did, before they got relieved.

What happened to you?

15th Battalion was coming up. Well, I'll tell you what happened. I was really everything in it to do the work.

You were doing all sorts of jobs?

Everything - we wasn't doing any fighting at that particular time - it was quiet and that sort of thing. They sent up the refreshments, the tucker, for that company because they thought the company was going to be there within ... that was delivered up there. And I was in a place where there'd been nothing going on all day, and I fixed it all up there, and I was putting it into ...

This is the food?

... the food into sandbags and giving them a full bag each and telling whoever came in to take delivery to take it. It was a

big mistake: I think they sent up rations for the full unit, and it was all up there, stacked there together.

Was it bully beef?

Everything - I put down - I was there, I was just going to tell them to come around and get their bag each - give each one a bag of stuff that he could carry away and eat it himself - and a tremendous big shell landed right in underneath the bloomin' lot - and us. It was the fist shell that had hit there all day, and it landed right in underneath it and blew everything away to pieces. I did wrong there. A chap that was near me, I got him, I said, 'Listen ...' - after a while, a few minutes - '... we can't do nothing about this. You blokes pick up your bag each and ...' - usually if you've got your bag you are alright for feed - '... if you can find anything round here pick it up and shove it in your bag too' - a lot of it was scattered all over the trench, blown away and blown up. I began to get worse and worse and worse.

You'd been hit, had you?

Yes.

You didn't realise it?

I did.

Where were you hit?

I was hit in that many places that I didn't know where I wasn't hit. I'm still suffering from the effects of one place, at times.

This was shrapnel wounds?

Well, the shell.

From pieces of the shell?

Pieces of the shell. I had it in my legs, my arms, the head, the face; I could hardly see.

And you were bleeding very badly, were you?

Oh, well, I was bleeding, of course, but it wasn't that that was worrying me - they couldn't patch me up altogether - so I said to myself, well, I don't suppose there'd be anyone coming along to take me away for a while - I thought I could walk. I sent one of the blokes up ahead to tell them that I was badly wounded, that we'd lost all our rations that I hadn't handed out, and that I was going to try and walk back to the Battalion ...

Headquarters.

... out of the line - see if I could walk back. Well, I don't know how far I walked, but not very far and I went out to it.

Three days later some stretcher bearers found me and picked me up.

Three days?

Yes.

You were lying out there unconscious for three days?

Yes - well, I suppose I was unconscious, I couldn't get up and walk. It was my fault too, I suppose, in a way, because I was going to take a short cut instead of following round the trench. Anyhow, I got down there three days after it was all over.

They would have posted you missing, I guess.

I don't know what they did, I wouldn't know.

You couldn't have been loosing too much blood if you were out there for three days.

I wasn't bleeding that much blood that I bled to death. The majority of the pieces were all in me, they were still holding the positions where they went in.

The pieces of shrapnel?

The pieces of shell. Now, there's a place there.

Right above your nose.

No, not up there, just in there - see the little place.

Just near your eye.

Well, for three times when I was in the hospital I was put on the table, and I was taken away and they done nothing - put on the table for an operation. The doctor come to me and he said to me, 'Reg, listen, I'm in a mess. I've had three looks at that. It's a thirty-second of an inch of your eye' - the piece of metal that's gone through into my eye - and he said, 'Every time I've been going ...' - he's been taking other pieces out each time - he couldn't do them all at once - he said, 'Three times I've had a look at that eye and I've got ready to do it. I haven't got the bloody guts to try and do it. I'm afraid that when catch hold of the end of that - but it's starting to heal around, the flesh has grown up around it, and if I leave it there it's going to push it in on your bloody eye when it starts to grow over the top. So,' he said, 'I'm in a hell of a mess, I don't know whether I'll blind you. I don't think it's possible for me to get it out without poking that into your eye.' I said, 'Look here, old boy. If you've got to have a go to pull that out and it's going to blind me or anything ...' - he said, 'I don't want to blind you, take the responsibility' - I said, 'You have a bloody go at it; next time you've got me on the table you have a bloody go at it.' And I've never seen a more happier bloke in all my life. He got it there and he got

hold of it and got it out without pushing it into the eye, and he was real wrapped up about it.

Well, you can see all the pieces there. Well, you see a little bit of a mark just there. Do you know where that was? That was a piece down there, right out there.

Down on your cheek.

It was there for years.

It's still in there?

Another piece went right away round there.

Up towards your ear.

That was a big scar; and another one come right down here.

Round the side of your jaw.

My bottom lip was hanging down over my chin in three places. Some of it ended up in here in different places.

Up on your scull.

All round there they were pulling out pieces of metal.

How far away was the shell when it exploded do you think?

Underneath me.

It actually exploded underneath you?

I think it got in the ground before it exploded.

And it blew up and it blew you ...

Blew everything up.

Was anybody killed?

There was no-one there but me at that time.

And you were putting all these rations into sandbags?

Yeah.

What about during the night when the Germans were counter-attacking? What was Harry Murray doing then?

You couldn't say what he'd be doing all the time because I wasn't in charge of him or near him.

Where were you?

I was down this side ...

Down the road?

No, I was in the same business, but I was down in one end - down the other, up the other end, and in the middle and all over the place. You couldn't say you were together or anything.

What kind of preparations did you make once you took the German trench?

I don't know whether it was a German ... To tell you the truth, I don't remember whether it was a trench they were taking or one they lost.

They were attacking you all during the night, were they - the Germans?

Well, they didn't get cleaned up that much they couldn't attack again, they went through all right, they got a bit of a hiding because most of them got caught when they got there in the fist place - they got caught properly. They stopped there frightened in the trench. You deserved to get pelted over with bombs and things yourself.

How many bombs would you usually carry as an infantryman?

Oh, I couldn't say that I ever carried any. They'd be there, they'd be taken up and things like that.

What did you see when you went across to the German trenches that night? Did you see the Germans retreating?

Oh yes - they didn't get any retreating hardly any of them - there was more killed than what there was retreated. But they were out fighting [from open ground] out in front, same as we were. But it died off in the morning. It's hard to describe them things because you can't see what other people are doing except just what you're doing.

You were firing your rifle most of the time that night?

Well, I had a rifle - it's about all I had - oh, I used a bomb or two, I suppose, and things like that. But I was on the left flank. It was the bloodthirstiest thing that ever I'd seen, I think - it was the most vicious one of the lot - yet he succeeded in holding the position and never lost it - he won the battle. I don't think they ever had to battle it over again after that.

No, they didn't, he kept it, that's right. Did you lose any friends there, anybody that you knew?

The thing is, I know them nearly all in a way, but you wouldn't know them another way; I wouldn't even know what a lot of their names were. Most of my friends are gone, all the blokes ... there was two other blokes - I can't remember their names now - there was two other blokes at Gallipoli, two of the blokes where I was telling you about the day of the burial, and the other blokes kept digging and they beat us and blew the trench

right up instead of us blowing theirs up. I'm not sure whether two or three of our blokes who joined up when I did got skittled in that.

When the mine blew up?

Yes. One live out here at Armidale, and one lived in Kentucky Road - we didn't know it was a road then - Kentucky - a street or anything like that, it was just a place to us.

You can't remember his name?

I think one of them was a xxx bloke, but I'm not sure.

What was his name?

[Clutterbuck], I think - I'm not sure.

It was very cold at Gudecourt, wasn't it?

Oh, I don't know, it was all the same to me.

Were you unconscious out in no-man's-land for those three days, or most of the time?

Well, I didn't know what it was, but I was sitting in a hole in the ground. How I came to get found: they put a couple of blokes there waiting for the stretcher bearers to pick them up, and they found me there like that.

You would have been in a pretty bad way by then, wouldn't you?

It was a good long while - I was a fair while in England where I went into hospital - xxx - I can't remember the hospital just at the moment.

END OF TAPE FIVE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE SIX - SIDE A

Identification: Tape 3.

I was a while there.

This is in the hospital in London?

Yes. I was in convalescence for quite a while.

Were you at Bullecourt? Did you get back to the Battalion for Bullecourt, or not? Remember when the brigade made an attack with tanks at Bullecourt?

I was there but I don't ...

You'd have been in hospital, I think. How long would you have been in England do you think - two or three months?

Yes.

Easily, I suppose.

Might have been three months there.

I reckon you missed out on Bullecourt.

I was at Bullecourt, I did serve there, I know I was there in the trenches.

The brigade was certainly there but you didn't go across in the first attack, I don't think.

I don't know.

I think you'd remember it if you did.

I don't remember what I did - I can't remember the places there - there were a lot of attacks there - but we had bombs and everything else there to fight with ...

Much better than on Gallipoli.

... and rifles and things like that. It wasn't like Gallipoli where you only had the bullets and a bayonet.

Did you use the bayonet much in France?

I supposed it wasn't used much - it wouldn't be used much in France I don't think - there might have been the odd one or two who used it. Why would they use it, because it would be a damn sight easier to pull the trigger and reload, xxx to use the bayonet because you could always get that attack xxx.

What kind of a shot were you with the .303?

I was supposed to be a very good one. I won't tell you a yarn about that. I was always a terrible bloke in the army. My mission in life when I got there and got to see the way some people were, my mission was trying to make everybody feel as happy as I could - have a joke and do silly things.

I can tell you about one incident there - I shouldn't have done it, knowing xxx - there were only two of us in the hole. We had a machine-gun for protection.

Is this on Gallipoli or in France?

In France. We watched every day a bloke used to come out and climb out over the trench that they went through when they are travelling. And he's walking around and he'd go down to a tree - there was a nice big tree there. He'd sit down there and do a job every day - the same bloke was doing it. He done it for four or five days - we watched him doing it, and get up and wipe himself and go away. I know he couldn't have seen it and no-one else could see it - they couldn't see it from the line, but we could from the position we were in to protect with

enfilading fire up the two lines.

You were out in the front?

Yes - we were out in no-man's-land there - well, there were no trenches in front of us where we was planted. This bloke was there and I said to my mate there one day, 'I'm going to have a bit of fun today', he said, 'What?', I said, 'I'm putting my rifle up here ...' - I was considered a very good shot - and I said, 'While that bloke is doing his business against the tree today I'm going to either cut the turd off for him or wipe his bum - I'm going to try and wipe his bum. I'm not going to try and kill him or hit him in the back, I'm going to try and put it down just about where I'll put it through the cheeks of his bum, just straight through between the cheeks of his bum'. He said, 'Yes?', I said, 'Yes, I'm going to' - and I did it. I said, 'They wont know that we fired a shot' - they couldn't hear from we was anyhow. So he got down there and he was down there like that ...

Crouched over.

... and I fired the shot. He jumped up, I suppose, half as high as this bloody verandah; he jumps up in the air and he went over there with his head down like that, crawling back to get in the trench. I didn't fire at him to kill him and shoot him. I said to the bloke, 'He wont be in the army any bloody longer now, we've put him out of the army without killing him. He'll never be in the army again.' He said, 'You are a mad bugger', I said, 'Why?', he said, 'You didn't wipe his bum only', I said, 'Why?', 'Well,' he said, 'when he stoops down there like that his balls and cock is hanging down there and you've shot his bloody balls and cock off - you've shot through them - if you've shot through his bum you've shot through his balls and his cock, that's why he can't walk. If it was only his bum he could get up and walk, and you've castrated him.' (laughs) I used to be silly enough to do things ... but he would never be in the war again.

How far away would he have been?

Oh, from here to half-way across the road.

He'd only have been less than a hundred yards away.

About that, a hundred yards away from us. We'd been watching him every day.

It's a wonder you didn't shoot him earlier.

I didn't want to - I was watching him. We weren't supposed to shoot, we wern't allowed to use a gun or a rifle or a machine-gun.

You were on observation?

We were up there waiting - we wasn't on observation at all, we were sitting there waiting with the snow and rain and

everything else getting on us, waiting to get the call from headquarters that this other attack was going on up there, then we opened up. We couldn't fire at anything.

Did you have a machine-gun there?

Yes, I had the machine-gun, it was a Vickers gun. It was the best that they had at the time. We were waiting there for instructions, we had our guns set up and everything ready - it was covered over and everything.

You were under a camouflaged net?

Yes, just camouflaged in the hole in the ground.

Who was with you - do you remember his name?

I forget his name - there was only one bloke with me.

He was your No. 2, was he?

Yeah - only the two of us there all the time. That's how I got caught with frostbitten feet.

This was in France?

Yes.

So you were evacuated again? The doctor saw you, didn't he?

No. I was going down there to get something, to get something that we wanted. I suppose it would be a bit of tucker or something. xxx man, wouldn't let me walk, sent me down there. I was a good while. I didn't get with them all drilling, when they were forming up the unit and that - I was in bed all the time - making a new division and all that - I wasn't with them all the time, I was in the hospital a long time.

When I was in the hospital I thought everything had gone right; my legs had cleared up thoroughly, as the Canadian told me it would. And I went to get out of bed, I said, 'I'm going round to the toilet' - the fellow in the bed next to me. I got out and when i got on my feet I just went straight down on my bum.

And that was in France?

Yes.

You got frostbitten feet in France?

Yes.

What was the sniping like at Gallipoli? Was it one of the worst problems?

It was going on all the time, most of the time, except when the troops was here and the troops was there in the trenches - a

lot of the time they wasn't even bothering to fire - there'd be one looking over in each side, here, and one there, and one there, looking over. But they wasn't even firing at one another - shooting one another. When you come to think of it it was a bloody good ... I mean to say, they wouldn't be firing just for the sake of it. Sometimes you'd see a bloke put his rifle up and have a shot at a bloke he could see, but a lot of the others wouldn't do it at all, they'd just let it go.

Did you have to do any patrolling?

Oh yes. As a matter of fact, I was attached to a part of the secret service, or whatever they call it ...

Intelligence?

... to find out everything that you possibly could, and things like that for a while. I resigned, I got out of it anyhow. I resigned and went back into the infantry again after a while. We used to ... I got the wind up, I'll tell you the truth, because the British used to fly them over there, sometimes of a night, and drop them down between the two lines of trenches.

This is by parachute?

No parachute, be buggered, xxx you down.

They would land?

I suppose there would be parachutes in a way, something to help you. They dropped down xxx with a rope or something or other. You'd be there, there'd be, perhaps, two or three of you taking over, and you'd be like a unit, and you'd go round and find out what you could, see what was taking place in the front line of trenches, find out what you could, what affairs is in that line, whatever their names and all are, what they are and one thing and another. Well, I had one of the saddest things that happened to me there. I was aiming to keep myself under control; I don't know how I did it.

I was there - there were two of us there - had been sent out there this night between the trenches. And the enemy had the same as we had too, out there were three or four or five men or something just sneaking around to see what they could find out, to see what they could do and everything - get information they could - patrol as you call it. They were getting along and they were going round there - it was in the night-time - and they were going round there. I was there: well, I just had to lay down there and pretend I was dead.

You saw them, did you?

I saw them before they saw me - and I had to lay there and be dead.

You had to pretend you were dead.

Yes. Well, they are going past and one bloke come along and he

kicked me in the arse - 'Look at this bloody bastard', and he kicked me - he was saying something in his own language. And the other bloke come along and he kicked me up here, high up.

In the ribs?

And another bloke kicked me in the leg - three of them out of the five of them that went past, they all kicked me. Well, it hurt. You imagine the strain it was to stop from letting a yell out or saying something - and they went on - they [had just squabbled] with a bloke that was dead. By geez, it hurt me; it was still hurting me the next day.

You were lucky that they didn't clobber you.

I got away from it and went back to my own unit before I got doing the sailing up in the air business - I got away from it.

Which was this - when they blew the mine up?

No. I applied to transfer back to the other section. I reckon I said I've got a lot of good knowledge now, I can take it back and use it in the unit. Anyhow, somehow or other they let me go, otherwise in another fortnight they would have been flying me over and dropping me down somewhere.

This patrolling, this was in France?

In France.

And it was the Germans that gave you a kick?

Yes.

Not the Turks?

No.

I thought it might have been Gallipoli.

No. They kicked my, but how I could keep myself from making a noise or singing out or something, I don't know - but it wasn't pleasure.

Where were you sleeping on Gallipoli? You had a dugout, did you?

Just lay down there or sit down there anywhere, we had nothing to camp in, unless you were just back behind the line you could sit down there and have a go. All the sleep we was getting would be laying in the trench, I think - most of it.

Did you have any experience with the jam bombs - the jam tin bombs?

Oh, I got some bottles and put them in the things and threw them over.

Used bottles?

It was only bottles or glass laying about - would smash that up - that was our ...

That was your shrapnel?

That was our shrapnel - they put that in. But the trouble was that we had to put ... in some places we even went and once or twice we took the stuff out of the cartridges to [find a better way], make things xxx, and we put a bit of stuff in to light it - light the bloody match and light the wick. Well, the trouble was, to have it the right length that it would go off at the right time. Well, when we first started you could say eight out of ten that would be chucked over at the start, eight out of ten thrown over would be thrown back in our own trench because the wick was too long burning. We didn't know, we wasn't experts, but sometimes we got them alright.

And the Turks used to throw over their own bombs, didn't they?

Yes, they had real bombs - had the real bombs there. Well, they had everything over there that we didn't have, you see.

What was your opinion of the Turk as a soldier?

Good - bloody fair and good.

What happened at the time of the armistice that you were talking about - the burial period?

At Gallipoli?

Yes.

Well, it was two days, I think, before the evacuation; before that no-one was firing shots or anything like that.

You were there for the evacuation, were you?

No - I left - that's how I got caught with the frostbite, two days before the evacuation. I was sent down there and put straight away. Well, they sent me away whether I was bad or whether I wasn't bad - they were sending a lot of casualties and sending them away, and sending them away, and sending them away for a couple of weeks.

And, another thing that was going on there: they were playing music xxx and things like that.

The Australians would?

Yes - not taking any notice of anything, and other blokes would be looking over the top of the trenches and no-one was shooting at them or anything like that - there was no shooting to be done, and they'd be playing music of a night-time or a daytime.

This is gramophone records?

I don't know - but some had instruments there to play - mouth organs and so on. It just depended where you was. See, I wasn't with the Australians - we were on the left from where they were, we wouldn't know exactly what they were doing. Everything was going that quiet you could stick your head up like that and look over the top of the trench with safety. It was safe to stand up and look over. Well, they said, 'Them buggers are just making themselves ...', they are playing music and that, and they were satisfied we was making ourselves, establishing ourselves for the winter, for the real severe winter, that we was going to have a bit of music and things like that and just camp there.

Look as though you were going to stay?

They were satisfied not to be doing any shooting and that sort of thing too. They'd be in their trenches and we'd be in ours, just living that far apart, and that's what it was.

You were evacuated with the frostbite?

Yes, I was taken away on a stretcher. I was put on the Canadian boat, that's how I come to know ... otherwise I would have lost some of my foot - half my foot or all of it.

Was that the fist time you'd been evacuated from Gallipoli, or not?

I went away sick once. I don't know what happened but I got very, very crook, and they took me off and sent me away. I was away for about two weeks - two or three weeks.

Did you go back to Egypt, or only over to Lemnos?

I went there and I was sent straight to Egypt - I was over there in Cairo.

How long had you been on the Peninsula when that happened - a couple of months?

Yes.

Most of the time you spent digging trenches, didn't you - you were always digging?

I don't know.

What was it like down on the beach? Did you go swimming much?

Not there.

Not on the beach?

No ... I don't think I ever had a swim there at all. Never used to get anything to wash yourself with. Getting drinks was hard

to get too. And the tucker was hard to get there - only beef and dog biscuits - and your clobber. Sometimes you'd have to go without it for half a day or a day.

But before the evacuation there there was no shooting going on from one side to the other. They thought we were preparing to stop for the winter, and they were going to have a peaceful time too, you see, and that's what it was.

My machine-gun, I think, was left there; it was the last lot to leave was my machine-gun.

(Break in interview)

We were real good friends. I never seen him after he come back unfortunately. He was supposed to have gone up to Queensland with his xxx.

He did, he lived in Queensland.

He died up there. I was xxx xxx with him there, you know - I got on real well with him. We both met one another when he first come over to our unit, you see; he went to the machine-gun that I was with - he got his commission and that - he was a great bloke.

When you were in England you would have got leave, wouldn't you, down to London and so on?

Oh ... once when I was over there I was in the London Hospital. Something happened once when I was over in England. I just can't think of the name of the suburb where I was in hospital - Brighton, I think - somewhere. Anyhow, there was a woman there - I got into trouble - I got a nurse into serious trouble. Of course, I didn't get her into trouble because she shut them up, she shut them up bloody quick. If she'd have been an ordinary nurse, an ordinary woman, she'd have been in trouble, she would have got punished because ...

This nurse come along to me and she said - it was when I was getting about a bit - and she said, 'Reg, I'm not doing anything this evening. I've got a couple of hours off' - I was just able to walk about and that - 'I'll take you for a walk, we'll go down town, xxx street'.

Soldiers were not allowed to associate or go out with nurses.

Weren't they?

No. Women working with the AAS or anything, they could go with them. Nurses were only allowed to go with officers. We went out and went to another hospital - she said, 'I want to go in here and have a look at someone in here, and you come in with me'. And it was reported that I was getting about with this nurse. xxx xxx and one thing and another, and they started tearing into her - blowing the tripe out of her - they were punishing her - they fined her so much money or something. In the finish she said to them, 'If you buggers don't mind your own business

and shut up about what I'm doing there will be a bloody lot of you and a hell of a lot of you xxx.' She said, 'My husband is so-and-so' - and he was the head of one of the bloody hospitals, a doctor in a big way apparently.

Did you go down to any of the London plays? Did you go and have a look at London itself?

I was round there. [I was pissed] in the morning xxx one night. I was able to do something so I decided one night I'd piss on that.

Where was that?

In London - the big thing that they all go to look at.

Nelson's Column?

Something.

END OF TAPE SIX - SIDE A

START OF TAPE SIX - SIDE B

I thought, the dogs can piss there, so can I. I used to do a lot of silly things - everybody liked it, they were all happy.

Did you get a Christmas billy? Do you remember the Christmas billies that they gave you one year?

I don't ever remember getting one. I was going to say, when I was down in this other place out from London he took me to [Mile End] Military Hospital in London, that's where I was.

What was it called?

Mile End Military Hospital. And from this little place the woman said to me one time - this was when I was there - she took me into London and took me round there - there's going to be trouble over that too. She was a sister but she was one of the big hits - wives too. She took me in her own car and everything, took me to London, showed me around everywhere. I found them very good, I got on very well with most of the people over there.

Did you have any relatives in England?

My old man come from there - xxx. I don't know why it was, I didn't know where he came from. I knew he came from the south of England but I didn't know the name of the place. I might have been told a hundred times but I didn't know. And when I got home I found that I put three days down there, I had three days down there and ...

And didn't know.

And he had two sisters that weren't married, were living there - the last letter he got from them - but they knocked off

writing to one another. I suppose they were doing no good. His brother left there the same time but his brother went to Canada and he come to Australia. And they used to write to one another once [a day], and they knocked off writing to one another. So he was right off xxx - I didn't know. If I had known I would have been making enquiries there to see if them girls were still there - they probably were - they wouldn't have been old enough because they were a lot younger than them, and they'd probably have still been living there, you see.

But the woman at this other little place - that took me to London - she took me around thoroughly everywhere.

Do you remember her hame?

Lady somebody - I forget it. I don't remember now - I did know. You couldn't get a nicer person xxx the way she was looking after me.

Was she working in the hospital?

She was a sister in the hospital. She used to go round the patients so I suppose she was - what they used to call a sister. They got on real well while I was in London, England.

You spent the winter of 1916-17 in France, didn't you?

Yes.

It was the coldest one for forty years.

I don't know, it was cold, that's all I can say. When you come to think of it, how can I expect my leg and everything all still to be perfect now when all the days and the nights you had wet clothes on all the time - snow and frost and things like that getting on you all night because you had nowhere to get out of it, you couldn't dodge it, especially if you was on duty.

How would you keep warm?

You never knew whether you was warm or cold.

They used to use whale oil, didn't they?

I don't know.

They used to put that on their feet, I think.

The things that they used to use, we didn't know anything about what they were using. Some of them got different thing but things didn't go round a lot of places. A bloody lot of Australian things went over there and went to other countries - Canada and some of them - Africa - would be getting it, the stuff that was Australian.

What kind of billets were you in? Where were you sleeping when you were out on reserve or rest?

Where?

In France.

In sheds - sometimes you'd think there were houses you was living in - different houses and things like that - probably sheds and garages. You got around them all - they were not real good, you know. They did have other places, I suppose. I suppose where the 33rd Battalion Reserve Divi was over to England and finished their training over there, you know; I suppose they probably had tents - I don't know what they had, I don't know where they were.

But you'd mostly be in barns and cow sheds and that kind of thing?

Anything, anywhere at all. I was never over there like as a ...

This is in France I mean.

Oh there. Well, when you got out you got in any hut you could see or any place with a bit of a shed - they let them use all them places. Sometimes it would be that bad you'd go and lay out in the grass outside - be more comfortable.

It was very muddy, wasn't it, in 1916?

Oh yes, it wasn't good to fight in or good walking about ground.

When I got my leave I should have had my leave a long time before they got it - sixty days leave, used to be twenty-eight days - the twenty-seven one in Australia - and I didn't know. When the first American unit went into action where we were there were some people that were sent - that belonged - had to go with them from some of our units to advise what to do. Well, I was sent there to advise on the treatment, how to do it, how to set up their place to put their wounded and all that, and how to take delivery of it, where to get it and take it down further to the next base, and from there on to hospital. Well, that's why I was with them.

It was a funny thing that was. I went there - I forget the regiment - I went there when I had to go out and have a look around them. Well, they was all on parade, along a trench like that - they were lined up. When I was walking up there, and the first bloody captain I came to - I come along and there was a captain out in front - and he came up and put his hand out, 'Hello, Reg,' he said, 'don't call me a so-and-so whatever you do. Call me what's-his-name, some other name call me.' So I had to call him that - 'That's my name,' he said, 'you call me that. You know me and I know damn well you do, but don't let on you know me. You know me and we'll be friends and all that.'

When we was at Gallipoli, when we went back, we got three days leave off there one day once, over in one of the islands - I forget the name of it, but I did know it.

Lemnos?

Over there, one of them places - and we were having three days leave, and travelling from there up to Athens. Anyhow, there was a boat always goes travelling backwards and forwards every day and any of us - could get a couple on - we could go up there and come back. This bloke - a bloke that was with us, he was with our unit - he went up there one day but he never come back with us - a couple of us, three of us, four of us would be - and he never come back, disappeared, we never heard of him again, he was a deserter, deserted the Australian Army. The funny part of it was, when we landed on this island there was a mob there, but they got paid while they was there. Why they were paid in a place like that - they had nowhere to spend the money - and he started a two-up school and he got a lot of money. He pulled it off, he started a school and he pulled off the money - he had a bit of money himself, I suppose - but he pulled it off and he got a lot of money, I know that. Anyhow, when they knocked off he disappeared and got away from xxx. When I walked up there, when I went there to this unit, the fist one going in there, he was there.

The American?

He was the captain in the American Army. I said, 'What xxx, how did you come to get here?' 'Well,' he said, 'I had a glorious time over here till I spent my money, and I joined the American Army.'

He went to America?

Yes, that's where he went to, he cleared out from over here, he caught a boat from there, from Athens, which took him to America. He went over and he spent all that money. And then he joined the army and he got away ... volunteered to go overseas and everything, and he got through there with the rank of captain. He was highly qualified in military training. He come over there with them. He said, 'Don't let on you know me'. But the day before I went with them I was supposed to have been sent down to headquarters to get away and come over here on twenty-eight days leave.

Come over to Australia?

Yes - have twenty-eight days leave over here, but it was knocked in the head and they never done anything about it. I wouldn't have known. I went down - there was a young fellow joined us up - and I went down to headquarters like when this fellow joined them up - I went down to see about it, but he shouldn't be there. His father was a sergeant major in the army, and he had a brother there too who was in the army - he got there, and I knew him and knew them well and knew he was bloody young - he was only thirteen years old.

You were going to put him out?

I went down and saw the colonel and all that to see all about

it. He said, 'Right, we'll fix it up tomorrow'. That night they had to go into action and the poor little bugger got killed - I didn't get him away. It was a while that that was on, that when I went down to see about him I found that I should have gone to America or something.

Gone to Australia?

Well, if I'd gone then the mob that went then went through America, travelled from one end of America by train to the other end, and caught a boat across there, the group that I was supposed to go with. When I got there, when I eventually I got my - it was a month to the day after the armistice was signed - when the armistice was signed we were all lined up just going up to give in our votes as to what to do about the battle. We were just ready to march up and the colonel come along and said, 'xxx xxx, you haven't got to march because the bloody war is declared closed now, you wont have to go up'.

Where was that?

I forget where it was, where we was. It was where we were back in the little rest areas. I don't remember the names of them places.

You were preparing for an attack?

We were going up to ... a Pommy lot got belted up there the day before and we had to go up there and take over where they were to straighten things out because they were advancing all over the place. The Pommies, they were buggers of blokes some of them - not all of them, there was really good ones there, but there was a lot of bad ones - they were conscripts some of them, and some were good and some were bad. They was all frightened - most of them - frightened they was going to xxx.

It was funny you know, the way all them things seemed to work out. I used to miss out on everything that was really good, and then I'd get something that was not much good to take its place afterwards.

How did you feel about the armistice? What did the men do - I suppose celebrate?

Well, he said you can take it easy. We stood there for about half an hour and then they dismissed us and told us we could stop in our shelter rooms where we was before for a while. I was still round about there when I got my notice to go. They said, 'You've got to find your own bloody way over to England, we've got nothing to show you how to get a boat or anything. You'll have to go down the beach there and see if you can catch a boat over to England, get a boat that's running over to England that's running troops over, or stopped or something over here and back.' I went down, said, 'Alright', and I got over there and got to England. They said, 'You'll have to see if you can find a boat to get back to Australia', although I got through alright. When we got back there were nearly two sixty days leave we were supposed to have been on. We was

waiting down there - I was in the pub in front of us there - and we were waiting there. We had to have a medical examination and that before we went home, and we wasn't getting them.

You weren't getting your exams?

We wasn't getting our exams - we went up and blew the tripe out of them up at Victoria Barracks - where we had to go at that time - and the bloke said - the fellow who was there - 'Why don't you fix us up and send us there straight away? We are only going for an examination. A lot of our leave is gone already and we haven't got home.' And all you got for service then was a trip home on the train - you could go home on the train but you couldn't come back again. So he said, 'Why didn't you go home and come back?' - 'How could we go home when we was told we had to wait here and have our examination?' And he said, 'Well, so far as that goes ...' - whoever was there come out to take sympathy with them, or something xxx bloke xxx - he said, 'We can fix you up and give you a discharge right here and now, on the spot. Just sign these papers.' Well, they were about that long and about that wide and all small blue print. We couldn't read it, we didn't want to, we were satisfied to get out of the bloody place. We thought we was signing the papers alright, we didn't know they were crook. Do you know what we signed? We signed papers - we signed two - 'We have refused to have medical examinations, examinations of any kind whatsoever' - eyes, mouth and everything - it was all down there that we'd refused to have that, we refused to go and have that examination. So what did we do? - they gave us our discharge - it wasn't a proper discharge. It was a discharge anyhow so we could get home then - but two weeks is gone! We were paying board and drinking round the pub, and having a drink as well as xxx xxx. There were two weeks living there before I could come up xxx. In the finish I didn't know anything about that till World War II broke out - don't ever put this down.

(Break in interview)

What I was going to ask you today was about what you did when you came home. You burnt your uniform, didn't you?

I went straight out ... coming home, my sister - older sister - met me up the railway, and I said, 'Is that little shop, that [Eton] store, still down there?' - it used to be there in Brown Street. She said, 'What about getting a taxi?', I said, 'No, we're going to walk home'. And we are walking home and I go down round that shop I want to go and see. 'Is that shop still there?', she said, 'Yes', I said, 'Well, I want to go round there'. I went round there and I bought two bottles of kerosene. She said, 'What do you want to buy there? You are coming home to live with us, we've got everything you want up there.' 'No,' I said, 'you haven't.' I went in there and I bought two bottles of kerosene. She said, 'What's that bottle?' - xxx fooled you. I took them home and I found I had an old pair of trousers there and an old shirt, so I took off all my clothes - after I'd been around and greeted them all, had a feed and all that - took them off and I put this old pair of

trousers on and old shirt, and things like that. I said, 'I've got to go up town this evening, up town to buy some clothes so I can be a bit more respectable.' I went out in the back yard - they were wondering why I was running in and out a couple of times, they couldn't make out what I was doing, going out and in, in the middle of the back yard with the fowl yard there. I put them all there and I went out.

This is your boots and ...

Boots and hat and everything else.

Uniform, tunic.

Put it inside my boots, kerosene and everything, and put them all together and I burnt - put them all over and lit the bloody lot - hat and everything. I burnt the whole lot up. My idea was that I was going to forget all about the war - I tried xxx to forget all about the war.

I don't blame you for that.

Well, I thought to myself too, different times, different people I've met - and enemies - and spoke to them one way or another. I'd do that sort of thing if I got a chance. I often thought to myself, war is a terrible thing. Well, the same as Gallipoli when we was chucking bully beef over to them and they were chucking me back fruit - instead of eating the bully beef we were eating fruit, getting something lovely and that sort of thing. Well, I mean to say, I thought to myself, the way things ... they are all friends - the lot of them - not all of them would be like that - but you find so many lovely friendly people there that was real good people, and yet five minutes afterwards you'd kill the buggers. I always felt it was a wrong thing to be doing.

And another thing I done there once. I was on a little [speculation] place for keeping a lookout on one particular corner there - there was a couple of us together there. And every day a bloke used to come out and boil a billy of tea - enemy over down there, a good way away. He would boil a billy of tea - we wasn't getting enough stuff for ourselves there to keep us happy. So I said to my mate there, 'I don't think they'll ever find out where we are. I'll sneak over there and when that bloke comes out to boil his billy - I wont do anything'. We could see the whole lot where he come out from behind a big rock. I said, 'When he is putting the tea in I'm going to put a hole through the billy and it will spill over the fire'. 'Oh Christ,' he said, 'you wouldn't do that, would you?', I said, 'Yeah, I'm going to have a bit of fun with him. They wont know where I shot it from.' I was able to sneak back without being seen, back to where we was on duty. He's down there and he's stooping over like this, putting his hand down; when he got his hand down there like that I pulled the bloody trigger and it went through the side and the bottom of the billy, I think, and the bloody xxx flew straight up in his face. Never seen him no more; he never went back any more to boil the billy there.

I was a terrible bloke that had to have a bit of fun. I thought that was fun, see, I was enjoying that. I used to do things to make them all laugh.

END OF TAPE SIX - SIDE B - END OF INTERVIEW

6/94