ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: KEITH TAMBLYN - 10TH BATTALION, WORLD WAR I

INTERVIEWEE: KEITH TAMBLYN

INTERVIEWER: DAVID CHALK

SUMMARY: EARLY FAMILY LIFE; ENLISTMENT FOR ARMY DURING FIRST WORLD WAR; EXPERIENCES OF GALLIPOLI, EGYPT, FRANCE, LEAVE IN LONDON, AND AS PRISONER OF WAR IN FRANCE AND GERMANY DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: This is David Chalk interviewing Keith Tamblyn, Renmark, Saturday 30 September 1989. Tape 1.

(Background conversation)

Okay. Well, what I usually do is start with your birth date; I start with the beginning.

Right; my birthday is 9 December 1892.

Whereabouts were you born?

Woodside, in the Adelaide Hills.

How do you spell Woodside - is it S-Y-D-E or S-I-D-E?

S-I-D-E. I put in nineteen years there, and I came here in March 1912; so I've been here a couple of years.

What were your father and mother doing?

My father was in business as a - he had a general business in Woodside, but he got out of that. You see, not just out of Woodside there was three or four gold mines, or shafts anyway. There was one mine working - they closed it down, water got into it eventually - and it was owned by an English company, and they wouldn't do anything about keeping the water down, you see. So they closed it down. Well, it was no good people stopping in Woodside - it was only just a dairying district in those days - and he started a business up here then - he came up here - that was in the early days of this place.

What was your father's name?

William Gill.

William Gill?

Yes.

G-I-L-L?

G-I-L-L.

Tamblyn?

And he came from a place called Perronzabulo in Cornwall.

How do you spell that?

P-E-R-R-O-N and then, I think, they dropped the zabulo - Z-A-B-U-L-O.

Oh, I've never heard of that.

Our daughter's been there and seen the place where my father lived.

(Background conversation)

And he came out to Australia?

He came out to Australia when he was a boy of about twelve, fourteen - fourteen, I think, wasn't he mum?

Do you know what year he came out?

Oh, no, I couldn't remember. Our daughter knows, she's got a record of it, but I couldn't tell you.

(Background conversation)

And what was your mother's name?

Er ... Adeline Amelia Gubbin.

How do you spell that?

G-U-B-B-I-N.

G-U-B-B-I-N?

Yes.

Gubbin?

Yes. Her father came out from England - I don't know where he mother came from - and I've never, ever seen any grandparents - never. See, my father's parents, they died in England, that's why the family all came out here then, you see. And my mother's father came from Devonshire in England, and he - I don't know what he did out here, I couldn't tell you - but she was born at Glenelg.

Glenelg, yes.

His wife died, and he [got a boat] back to England, and put his children out to foster parents.

Did he?

Yes.

That's a bit rough.

I'll say - rough! It's the most peculiar thing, I got a letter - or I didn't get it, that's the point; I don't know what happened to it - but my mother wrote and gave me the address of his family in

England, in Devonshire, or I'd have gone down and dug them out. I never, ever got the letter so ...

You didn't know about them?

... I didn't know about them.

When were your parents married - do you know the date?

Oh, no, I couldn't tell you that, no.

How many are there in your family, or were there in your family then? Whereabouts are you? Are you the eldest?

I'm the eldest living - I had a brother, but he died when he was only a baby.

(Background conversation)

When he was nine months, right.

He was only a baby when he died - I don't know what happened to him, I couldn't tell you. But he was born in about 18 ... If I can remember rightly, he'd have been about two and a half ... he was born in 1889, I think, if I remember correctly - somewhere about that year.

Were there any others in your family? Just the two boys?

Oh, no, no, no - there was three - I had another brother, but he died through wounds in New Guinea, up here in the Second World War.

Oh, did he?

Mm - and I had two sisters - both of them are gone. I'm the only xxx member of the family.

The difficulty is ...

(Break in interview)

How many were there in your family altogether?

Five.

There were five children?

Five children, yes.

That's three boys and two girls?

That's right.

And one of the boys died very young?

Yes - almost a baby you might say.

And what about the two girls? What were their names?

Phyllis and Hazel.

They were younger than you, were they?

Yes, I was the eldest - yes, I was the eldest - and I'm the only one left.

Whereabouts were you living in Woodside?

Oh, we lived in a couple of houses in Woodside - the north side of Woodside - there was a big double villa house there that my dad bought - sold it when he came up here, of course - and he built one up here - bungalow up here - big bungalow.

So he was a merchant, was he? He had a business?

Oh, yes, he had a drapery business.

A drapery business?

Up here, yes.

Is that what he had at Woodside?

Yes - both - grocery and drapery.

I suppose when you left school you started helping him there, did you?

No. When I left I did two years in a college in Adelaide - College is gone now, it's amalgamated with [Scotts] College - it used to be Kyre College.

How do you spell that?

K-Y-R-E. I was two years there, and then I went on to Roseworthy Agricultural College. I had three years there. And just when I finished there - the last year I was there, 19 ... I went there in 1909, I finished in 1912, you see - well, my dad came up here in January while we were right in the middle of harvest down there in those days, and, of course, I was busy down there, you see. Well, I didn't come up here until after harvest was over in xxx - because we used to have our own winery down there.

This is at the college?

At the college, yes - our own winery, and brew our own grapes, you see. And once that was all over then I came up here, which happened to be at the end of March 1912.

What did your dad come up here for?

Well, I didn't know - see, my family were here - I didn't know just what I'd do exactly because there was nothing offering, I'd just left - I was only nineteen, and I'd just left school, you see, you might say. Then I came up here and I got a job on a fruit property - and experience.

Whereabouts was that?

Here, in Renmark.

Which property was it, do you remember?

Yes, Harry Showell.

S-C-H ...

As a matter of fact, his son was running the Jane Eliza - have you heard of the Jane Eliza business?

No - it's obviously a paddle steamer, is it?

It's a building business.

(Break in interview)

You were with Mr Showell, were you?

Yes.

How do you spell that?

S-H-O-W-E-L-L - and he came from Wales.

Were you living with him?

No, I was living at home.

Whereabouts was home in those days?

Here, in Renmark, in the town - and Renmark xxx.

(Background conversation)

The big wages were seven shillings a day - six days a week.

Sunday was free, I suppose?

We used to work till one o'clock on Saturday, and then go out and play football Saturday afternoon. That's why I'm running round with a walking stick.

You reckon that's what caused it?

Busted me knee. I put in ... just over two years - he had 120 acres of sultanas. So there was only two of us - there was another chap and myself used to do all the xxx work, and that was sixty acres a piece we used to have to do.

That's ploughing, is it?

Ploughing and cultivating, and making furrows for irrigation, all that sort of business. I'll tell you, you didn't have time to sit down. We had to be ready to go to work at twenty past seven, horses and all. Well, they had to be fed early, and I used to go out in the mornings and feed them, and the other chap used to feed them at night.

These are Clydesdales or something, are they?

Yes, yes - oh, yes. Well, a couple of them were a bit on the light side, but still, we had three or four horses a piece.

When you were at Woodside, whereabouts did you go to school?

Woodside Primary.

That's the primary school, is it?

That's the primary school - went to the primary school - there was no high school in those days, you see, and I had to go somewhere else. I was sent down to the Kyre College.

How old were you when you went down there?

Er ... about ... how old would I be? - about fourteen - fourteen, that's right - I'd be about fourteen when I went down there.

What was it that made you go down to Kyre College? Why did you want to go?

There was no further advancement as far as the public schools were concerned, you see - there was no high schools.

And you wanted to go farming, did you?

No - well, I didn't - being stuck in the shop wasn't any interest to me at all.

You wanted to be outside?

I liked to be out in the open - oh yes - oh, no, that was never any good to me. Dad said, Well, you'd better go to Roseworthy, so I went to Roseworthy. Those days education at Roseworthy was not like it is today, it's only purely and simply a theoretical school now, it's not a xxx - we used to have xxx. I worked every instrument on a farm, with the exception of a tractor, because there was no tractors in those days, it was all big horses.

You'd get a great range of experience, wouldn't you?

Well, that's right. One day you'd get your theory lectures, the next day you'd be out doing farm work, see.

What were they doing down there? What kind of crops?

Oh, they'd grow anything - barley, wheat, oats - what have you - and they were always - they had an experimental section in which there was a chap, he was experimenting with wheat - he had ninety different varieties of wheat. Now, it would be hard to credit that. Eventually he would cross-fertilize them, you see, and then he'd get further different varieties. Oh, no, it was quite interesting, my word. Mind you, they didn't teach us horse riding like they do now - xxx schools doing that - oh, yeah.

Well, it must have been a fairly advanced college for its time, I suppose.

Oh, yes, yes. It was a good school in those days. But I don't see how they can - you can get your theory, but theory is no good to you without your practice.

That's right.

As you know. Well, after I came back up here, as I say, I put in just over two years, and then I - there was some property opened up at Murray Bridge - oh, not Murray Bridge, this side of Murray Bridge, place called [Mypolonga], on the river.

How do you spell that?

Swamps.

How do you spell that, Mypolonga?

M-Y-P-O-L-O-N-G-A, I think. It was swamp, and then back of the swamp the country rose up into a sandy ridge, and that was adaptable for trees - irrigation.

So this is fruit trees you are talking about?

It was a government project, you see, it was all good for irrigation. As a matter of fact, there was a block - above that irrigation block there was another one they called a dry block. It wasn't worth two bob because the bloomin' limestone was right up at the surface.

I'll never forget it. There was an English chap, he got the block alongside of mine, and he thought he'd fence his top block. So he goes up there and he found he'd want a bit of dynamite or something to blow the holes in, because there was that much limestone, you see. So what he did, he thought he'd cut the posts off, you see - shorten his posts to put them in the ground, but the fences wouldn't stand up - a typical wind and they'd blow them over.

That's pretty silly, isn't it?

(Laughs) That's English style - oh, yes.

How extensive was the irrigation system out here at that time?

Here?

Yes.

Well, it wasn't very, very big, I should say, in those days because there's quite an area - xxx - to the north of the settlement - it was surveyed by the xxx people, but it was never put under irrigation - they'd never put it under irrigation. After I came down on those swamps, the government - the surveyor - he'd made such a howling mess that we couldn't irrigate our swamps. Why, I don't know, but they tried - the channels were altered and everything - but instead of the water coming in from the north side of the swamp, he had it coming in from the south side of the swamp - this is in 1914, and the lowest river on record - salt water from the sea was up at Murray Bridge, so you can imagine how low it was.

Well, they opened it up one time - if you got a good south-westerly wind it would back the water up and you could get it in a bit, and open it up - and they flooded the first couple of

fellows out down where they opened it up, and we up the other end never got any water at all. When they realised, they woke up to the fact that they'd put the intake at the wrong end of the swamp. Oh, well!

They had a new pumping station on the river for the top blocks, you see, and a wooden pipeline - wooden one!

What size pipeline?

Oh, it would be - I suppose it would be about a fifteen inch, I suppose.

Well, they set this pump going, and the pipeline got more irrigation than the blocks because the water spurted out from everywhere.

Well, they settled that up and then they pumped. One or two of them thought, well, they'd put a bit of crop in on that top block, you see, sort of sweeten the soil up a bit. I didn't worry, I was only living in a tent - I was only getting things in order sort of business.

Well, they melted the main bearing in the pump.

They overworked it, did they?

That stopped - finished. This happened, oh, it would be October - that's next month, October - beginning of November. Anyhow, they had to send to Melbourne to get a new bearing for it - [find] a new bearing, put it in. Went for about three days and that melted.

What was the problem?

Couldn't tell you - nobody knows - I don't know to this day - I don't think anybody knew what was wrong with it. But anyhow, the government turned around and said, well, there will be no more irrigation there for this year. So what was the good, I couldn't stop there, I couldn't live on fresh air because I had no means of making any ...

How much land did you have?

What, there?

Yes.

Oh, I don't know, I can't exactly remember - there was about eight or nine acres on the high land that I could irrigate, and the swamps was round about fifteen, sixteen, acres, I think; and then there was this dry block up the top.

Were you buying that, or leasing it?

No - leasing - you payed rent for it. Well, I said this is no good so I came back here to Renmark and got a job in the fruit canning industry.

On the fruit ...?

Soon as I came back into Renmark, Showell knew I was back, they sent for me, so I must have been alright while I was there before. But anyhow, I went there and I went right through to the end of the harvest.

This is the sultana harvest?

Yes, sultana harvest. That year we had the worst drought they've had for years, and years, on the river.

This is 1914?

1914 drought - there was '12, '13, '14, they were all dry.

Were they?

Yes, all dry. Only time we got fresh water dams was when the snow melted, up in New South

Wales - came down. It was the only time the boats could run.

Well, I put in then - of course, the boys had all gone to the - all my mates had gone to the war - xxx all my mates. But you had to be five foot six or you couldn't get in the army, they wouldn't take you - that's why they wouldn't take me.

How tall are you?

Five feet four. Then, in March ...

This is 1915?

1915 - they lowered the height to five feet four, and as soon as harvest finished - and this was just before the end of March 1915 - as soon as harvest finished I went into camp.

Who were your friends when you were first working with Showell? Who were the fellows that you knew?

Most of them were English - three of them were English fellows.

What were their names?

Come out here from England - Guscott.

How do you spell that?

G-U-S-C-O-T-T.

What was his Christian name?

Oh, there was Jack, Ted - and what was the other one? - there was three of them - Jack Guscott, Ted Guscott ... I've forgotten.

Doesn't matter - they were brothers?

Yes, all brothers. Then there was a chap called ... an English chap - now, what was his ... Oh, I'm terrible at remembering names.

You're not doing too bad, I don't think.

He was an English chap too, he used to be with me on the horses.

That was your job, looking after the horses, doing the tilling, and the ploughing, and so on?

Yes, cultivation and ploughing, and one thing and another. We used to plough [them all] those days - can you imagine ploughing, walking up and down sixty acres, in between the vines?

And you were actually ploughing the ...

Soil.

... the soil up against the vines, were you?

Yes - [away].

Away?

Yes. You don't back up. The only time you back up is after the first irrigation - you water right down underneath the vines.

And this ploughing is mainly for irrigation, or is it just to ...?

No, you've got to keep your block clean, you've got to keep weeds and everything else xxx.

What was it like picking sultanas? How were they harvested?

Oh ...

How do you pick it?

You know what little pruning snips are, do you?

Yes.

Well, your little fellow is about this long. Well, now they use knives now - you can't ... Yes, I know, it's not bad. It's like the bloke the other day, he's growling, he said the growers are not paying enough wages. He said the growers down fix the wages at all, it's fixed with the arbitration commission, you see. But he's one of these dole bludgers, they don't like work. He reckoned they worked hard - he wouldn't know what it was to work hard.

Well, anyhow, I went into camp in March 1915.

So whereabouts did you enlist?

In Adelaide.

You went to Adelaide to enlist, did you?

Oh, yeah.

You didn't enlist in ...

I enlisted ... when I say ... I had to go down to Adelaide to be registered, you see. They sent me name down from here.

So you went in somewhere here to a recruiting office?

There was, one might say, a recruiting - they'd send a list of names of different ones that wanted

to go in and send them down, whatever they wanted to know about, these fellows, or anything, you see, they'd know - get their information from there. As a matter of fact, we have the record of Australia, this town.

What record it that?

Percentage of population.

Who enlisted?

Enlisted. We had a population of about two and a half thousand in those days, and there was six hundred of us went away.

That's practically all the young men, isn't it?

Well - yes, yes.

What made you go?

Well, all me mates had gone, what was I going to do, see. And it was no good going down on that other bloomin' place because there was nothing doing down there. So I told them on the government, I said, well, I'm going to the war, and they said, oh, alright.

So you came into town somewhere here and you told a recruiting officer that you'd like to join up?

I just told them, I said I'm going to join.

How old were you then?

I was just twenty-two.

What did your mother and father think about it? What was their reaction?

Well, they quite expected it in a way. Not that anybody wanted the family to go, but still, there you are. You don't like these things, do you? And once you've been you think the best thing that can happen is to keep quiet - these countries keep quiet and stop this scrapping - it's sense - what we've seen, by crikey! - bodies that you couldn't hardly walk between.No, it's wicked.

Who did you enlist with? Did you have friends who went with you at the same time, that you remember?

No, no, I just went in on my own. There was one or two that I knew, certainly, but couldn't say they were actually, you know, friends or anything like that, they were people that I knew. The one was an Indian, as a matter of fact, he used to poke around here doing odd jobs around the place. I knew him; he went in, but he went into the cookhouse.

What was his name?

Khan.

How do you spell that?

K-H-A-N - Charlie Khan. He got the Meritorious Service Medal for cooking. No, you'd think that ... people would laugh and say, well ...

It sounds a joke, but I suppose ...

Now, look, if any one of his company was out - it didn't matter whether it was the middle of the night and they'd come back about three or four o'clock in the morning - there was a hot cup of tea or something there for him.

This was up to the front line?

No, out on fatigues somewhere, you see. Oh, no, front line, of course, he was back out. That would come up at regular times.

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You'd get your breakfast in the morning and then your dinners would come up in dixies, you see. So that was for extra that he used to do that he didn't have to do.

So you went down to Adelaide in March 1915?

Yes.

Whereabouts did you go into camp in Adelaide?

It was known as the Mitcham Camp in those days.

M-I-T-C-H-A-M?

That's right - Mitcham Camp - it's now called xxx Gardens - it's a suburb now, built on and everything, you see. As a matter of fact, I suppose we were the first into that camp because the original camp was down at a place called Ascot Park.

(Break in interview)

You were talking about Ascot Park.

Yes. As a matter of fact, the day I enlisted they sent us down to Ascot Park, but we didn't stop, they told us to get out and go home and report back to Mitcham. That was on a weekend if I remember correctly. They said report at Mitcham on Monday morning.

Look, I'm not exaggerating, if you put your foot down you'd go down in powder that would run up over the tops of your boots - the powder from walking, and walking, and walking.

I suppose South Australia is so dry.

It was, that was the trouble.

At Broadmeadows it was so wet that it became a muddy bog for everybody walking over it.

Yes.

You came back to Renmark, of you just stayed in Adelaide somewhere?

No, I stayed with a cousin of mine - yes, stayed with a cousin of mine for a couple of nights. Went into Mitcham, and were in there doing our exercises, and learning how to act in the army, and all sort of business, you know.

Did you have anything to do with the military before? Had you been in the cadets?

Not ...

Were you a rifle shooter?

No.

A horseman?

When I say, wait a minute now. When I was at Kyre College we had an ex-sergeant major used to come out and give us drill, you see. That's the only sort of military business that I'd ever had. There was no cadets where I happened to be, that was the only time.

And you were living in a tent down on this block, did you say?

Down at Mypolonga?

Yes.

Yeah.

That's on your own?

Yes.

How long did you live down there?

Oh, only about six weeks, I suppose - seven weeks - six or seven weeks. Well, it was no good stopping there, I mean, you couldn't live there on fresh air (laughs).

What were you going to do? What was your intention?

I was going in for growing vegetables, if you like - potatoes - in the swamp country - potatoes and onions, and that sort of business.

It was fairly good soil, was it?

Oh, rich peat, yes, beautiful - grow anything - yeah, beautiful - black as tar - oh, black, very black - all decayed reeds and rubbish, and that sort of thing.

Very rich?

Oh, very rich, yeah - grow anything - lucerne - I had a ...

That sounds good.

xxx xxx. And then I was going to plant the top, next block, just above it, with oranges. And I had them all ordered from the Two Bays in Victoria - Two Bays Nursery.

Two Bays Nursery?

Yes - are they still going?

I've not heard of them, no - that's T-W-O B-A-Y-S is it?

That's right - Two Bays - but I cancelled it. I said it's no good, I can't plant them, so I cancelled them. Well, we all had to, there was a lot of us done exactly the same - had to cancel them, you couldn't bring them up there and just stick them in and no water.

This was all virgin country, was it?

All virgin country.

First time that it had ... Did you have to clear it at all?

No, no.

It was just scrub, was it?

Yes - fence it - I fenced mine - oh, yes. I say I went into Mitcham Camp - it would be, I suppose, about the 1st April, probably, round about that time. Well, then we were doing those exercises, and then we were living in tents.

You were in tents at Mitcham, were you?

Yes.

This is the bell tents, I suppose?

Yes, the bell tents.

How many were there in a bell tent?

Oh, there was about eight of us.

You used to have to sleep feet to the pole, didn't you?

Feet to the pole, that's right - make a little hole in the ground for your hip (laughs) - oh, yes, yes.

There were no mattresses?

Eh?

No mattresses?

No fear! - no. They started, after we'd been in there a while, they started building iron huts - only weatherboard floors, you see.

On 24th May that year the drought broke. Oh, you've never seen anything ... By god! it rained - on 24th May, Empire Day (laughs). And it poured with rain, it poured. And, of course, all the tents got full of water, the water ran down through the little hip holes, they all had water in them - well, you couldn't sleep in them. We were fortunate in that there were a couple of huts that they hadn't quite finished, but they had the floors in them, and they said you can camp in those. Well, they'd hold about forty people, you see. So we got in there.

Had a roof over them, I suppose?

Oh, yes, they had a roof and sides on them, and the doors weren't there, fixed up, and that sort of thing. But they said we could camp in them. Oh, dear, I'll never forget that.

It would become very muddy, I suppose.

Oh, muddy! you can say that again - oh, yes.

What were the cooking arrangements like down there?

Just the - have you ever seen army cooking?

No, I haven't.

Well, all they had was open fireplaces - cook in the dixies.

This is like out in the open?

Out in the open, oh, yes.

A fireplace, just a fire?

Yeah, yeah.

And it had the dixies over that on tripods?

Wooden fires - you know, wood fires, and dixies on the little iron stands where they could stand them on, you see. (Laughs) Oh, no, real army style.

What did they serve you? What was the food? What were the meals?

Oh, mostly stew - they'd cook them all up in the dixies - vegetables xxx, altogether, one after the other.

Did you have to have a turn on the cookhouse?

No, no, they were regulars.

What was your regimental number?

2455.

And which battalion are we talking about - the 10th?

The 10th Battalion.

What reinforcement - the 7th Reinforcement? When you went into camp ...

The 5th had just gone when I went into camp - the 5th Reinforcements. The 6th was still in camp. And they formed us into the 7th - and then I don't know, the 8th, I couldn't tell you when the 8th was formed - they were after we left Australia, i think.

But they formed the 7th in Australia here?

7th?

Yes.

The 7th they formed in Australia - all 8th, 9th and 10th, they came ... See, we were the last on Gallipoli, the last reinforcement.

Well, that was the case with the 4th Brigade also, the 7th Reinforcements ...

That's right.

... got onto the 10th.

All the 7th Reinforcements got onto Gallipoli - 9th, 10th.

They all missed.

Well, they got as far as Lemnos Island.

Did they?

Yes. And we picked them up at Lemnos Island.

This would be about Christmas time?

Oh, just before - in December, yes.

How many were there in the 7th Reinforcements?

150.

That's a company, isn't it, or thereabouts?

Mm?

That's a company strength, isn't it, or a bit more?

Oh, no, not quite.

200's a company.

240 is round about the company strength.

Yes, that's right. Who was in charge of the 7th?

Er ... a Captain Creswell - what happened to him I couldn't tell you because he never, ever went to Gallipoli. He stopped in Egypt, I don't know what he did, but there was a ... Oh, my memory.

Don't worry about it.

He was a lieutenant, and they were short of officers, and, of course, he got shot over there early before us.

This is a lieutenant in the 7th Reinforcement?

7th, yes, he got shot - he went to Gallipoli before us. See, they were short of officers. We landed there on 2nd December.

This is in Egypt or on Gallipoli?

No, we landed in Egypt at the end of July.

How long were you at Mitcham Camp?

Mitcham? Well, from say, there was April, May - eight - we had ten weeks.

About ten weeks?

Mm. Because then we left to go to Egypt, you see. We went on a boat called the Kanowna, she had a sister ship called the Kyara, and they were coastal passenger boats.

How do you spell the Kanowna?

K-A-N-O-W-N-A.

And they were running along the South Australian coast, were they?

Oh, no, right around Australia - right around, yes. And we were in there and it took us seven days to go to Fremantle - it went like this, all the way across.

Very rough, was it?

Oh, rough! My god, it was rough. You'd go up, and then down you'd go. And you'd think, hello, she's going to dive to the bottom. It was dreadful.

Was it the first time you'd been on a ship?

Oh, no, I'd been on ...

(Break in interview)

Took us a week to go to Fremantle, and they usually do it in about three days.

I've heard of other people who have gone across to Fremantle, had the same difficulty in the Bight.

Yes. Well, we pulled into Fremantle and we had to coal there - coal - and we all got leave to go up the Perth, to get rid of us off the boat while they coaled, you see. So we went up to Perth, and you'd go up there, went into a cafe, or a shop, you'd be going like this.

Swaying about?

She rolled around (laughs). Oh, well.

Did you get seasick?

No.

What had you been on a ship before?

Oh, two or three times I'd been across the Gulf.

This is across to Perth?

No.

The 'South Australian Gulf'?

'South Australian Gulf', and that sort of thing, yes. Anyhow, we got to Perth, and Perth rocked too! We had to report back by 9 o'clock, I think, that night, or something. Went back, and of course, in the meantime they'd taken on fresh water and fresh supplies, and the ship was coaled.

Next day - that's right, next morning - we set out next morning. We only got out of Fremantle Harbour and we passed another boat coming in; they said, you'll hit her again, for about four days, about midnight.

I'm not quite understanding that. What's happening?

We hit the storm again.

I see, so when that ship was coming in, they told you about the storm?

The storm that was coming - we hit it, and we had four days more of it. Then it was calmed down and it was just like sailing down the Murray - just like sailing down the Murray, it was as flat as ... there was hardly a ripple. And it was terribly hot, going across that Indian Ocean - oh, gees, it was hot. Then you got up in the Red Sea, it was hotter still.

When did you leave Australia? Do you know the day you embarked?

Oh, I couldn't tell you the exact day.

I could find that out actually.

Yes, you could find that out - no, I couldn't tell you the exact date.

Do you know how large a ship the Kanowna was?

7,000 tons - so it was only a small tub.

It was a passenger ship, was it?

Oh, yes, it was a coastal boat, you see.

So were you in cabins, or in hammocks?

Look, I slept on the open deck all the way through. You got down below, in the deck down below - no thankyou!

What was wrong with it?

Well, you've got fellows seasick all over the bloomin' place, everywhere - oh, no thankyou - no - and more than once. We ha what we used to call a mock funeral, we'd take the meat up and toss it overboard - dinner time - oh, you know, they never had the proper cooling facilities, it went off, and it went off - too strong for us. Had the vegetables, but as far as the meat was concerned, that went overboard (laughs) - oh, dear. And then we landed at ...

Port Suez, isn't it?

Port Tewfik.

Port Tewfik, yes.

Well, that's Suez.

That's right, yes. Did you go via Ceylon?

No.

You didn't go to Ceylon?

No, no, went straight across the Indian Ocean to Port Tewfik - never stopped.

(Break in interview)

Do you know that - five weeks to go from Port Adelaide to Port Tewfik.

From Port Adelaide to Fremantle, and then across to Port Tewfik.

Five weeks.

It's a fair while on the boat, isn't it?

It is a lot, my word.

Can we go back to your first few days after you enlisted? You did a medical, I assume; can you remember much about the medical that you had?

When?

When you first went into the army, they gave you a medical.

Yes, they gave you a medical, they tested you the same as a doctor would test you. As a matter of fact, it was a doctor that tested you - your lungs, your heart, whatever - urine - and they'd stick you up against a wall and measure you (laughs). And you had to xxx. There was a chap, he just touched five feet - just - and he'd been sitting on the doorstep trying to get in there for goodness knows how long - he'd go every day. And eventually they got that sick of it - 'For God's sake, get in and get out of it'.

Did you do any special training when you were Mitcham Camp? What was the kind of training that they got you doing there?

Oh, just ordinary drill exercises, if you know what the army exercises are - drill - army drill.

What is it exactly?

Well ... I don't know a way to explain it ...

Physical exercises?

Oh, yes, you got physical jerks in the morning, always got that in the morning.

What was the routine?

Physical jerks in the morning.

What time would you start - about six?

Six.

Six o'clock?

Yes - physical jerks - and then go and have breakfast.

What was breakfast?

Oh, well, whatever was available, if I can remember rightly.

Did you go out on any route marches?

Oh, miles of them - miles of them - three a width.

Three a width?

Mm - or in fours, all doing various exercises, like you'd swing a company round, or some other xxx - all this sort of business. I don't know what they do now. I've got a grandson that's just gone into the army.

Oh, have you?

He's at Holsworthy in New South Wales - he's gone into what we call the drop-shorts - artillery.

What were you like with a rifle? Did they give you rifle training?

Yes, oh, my word - oh, yes. You had to be able to do all your rifle exercises.

What kind of exercises did they get you doing with the rifle?

Well, they'd teach you to [trail] arms, if you know what trail arms means.

No, I don't know much about that.

Just pick it up and you carry it with a [ballot] - rifle - right away down here.

Alongside your ...

Body - alongside your legs. Slope arms - bring it up and onto your shoulder. Then there's present arms, from there down in front of the body. And there's secure arms.

What's that mean?

Cover your breach up, stick him under your [arm].

Really?

Mm.

Oh, I've never heard of that.

And the [slope] - pin your rifle down, have the breach under your arm, in case it's wet - if it's wet.

Really? I've never heard of that.

They don't do that now though. They cut that out too, after quite a while, and they gave us a sort of - I don't know what material you would call it, but it was weatherproof material that would fit right over the breach.

A breach cover?

Breach cover.

What kind of a shot were you?

Me? Oh, reasonable, I could usually hold my own.

What about the issuing of uniforms and so on? How long was it before you were issued with all of your equipment?

Oh, must have been a month.

What were you in to start with? What were you wearing to start with?

Ordinary civilian clothes.

In some places they used to give you fatigue overalls.

No, they didn't give us any of that, no.

Did you make any friends at that time?

Oh, yes, you got to know people, the chaps that your mixing with.

Did you team up with anybody particularly?

No, no, they all seemed to be decent sort of chaps, you know. I had no particular friend or anything like that - not when I first went in. I say, you got to know them. I know after a while there was about four of us, we got chummy and that sort of business, you know. Unfortunately we lost one chap in the Red Sea, developed meningitis; we buried him in the Red Sea.

What were their names, those four?

Oh, now whatever was he ... oh, Howe, a chap called Howe.

H-O-W?

W-E.

Do you know his first name?

No - we used to call him Howie.

What were the names of the other three?

Oh, now your asking me something. We got into Cairo - we landed - Friday night we pulled into Suez - that's right. Saturday we got up to Cairo, put into our camp, and then told we could have leave.

What about the leave you had before you went away from Australia? Did you get a chance to come back to Renmark?

Yes, oh, yes, I got leave and I had a bundle of bloomin' equipment, and goodness knows what. The only thing I didn't have was my rifle.

How long does it take to go down? You would have gone down on the train, I suppose.

Those days, yes. Leave here about half past five in the morning, get down to Adelaide about nine o'clock at night.

It was a fairly long trip; I suppose it had a lot of stops, did it?

You are going through the mallee. It was the first time the railway line was being put down, you see. The railway line had only been finished in 1913 - it wasn't graded and ballasted like it is

today.

It was a pretty rough trip, was it?

Oh, it wasn't a rough trip, altogether, it was a long trip.

Fairly slow, I suppose.

Yeah - then you'd have to xxx and you had to change trains.

Whereabouts did they put you on the boat? Were you in hammocks, or did you have a cabin?

Yes, hammocks.

You were allotted hammocks?

Yeah - you can have them! I never got into one.

Whereabouts did you sleep up on top?

Anywhere up on the deck.

Anywhere up on the deck?

Yeah - always surprised at the number that used to sleep on deck - dozens of them used to sleep on deck.

Who else was on the ship beside the 7th Reinforcements?

Oh, there was another - people through from New South Wales - oh, I forget now. There was several officers on board - I couldn't tell you - the several officers, I wouldn't remember them now.

See, there must have been a good three hundred aboard - [not many more].

I suppose that's a fair ...

There would be about 450 people on board. You get them on a boat that size, you've got a crowd (laughs). Oh, no, there was people through from New South Wales, and South Australia - I can't just remember all of them now.

We landed and went into Cairo on the Saturday afternoon, and went into Shepherd's Hotel, ordered dinner - four of us. We went in there and had dinner in there. While we were having dinner there was a big shemozzle outside, oh ... things were a bit xxx.

What was happening?

Well, they burned down the prostitutes.

This would be the ... the first Wazzar battle was before they ...

That was it, the Battle of the Wazzar - heard of it?

We're in about June 1915, aren't we?

1915.

When did you arrive in Egypt?

We landed in ... oh, Friday.

At the end of June, was it?

Now, wait a minute - no, July.

End of July?

Somewhere towards the end of July - towards the end of July, I couldn't exactly (say).

That's okay, I can find out those kinds of things.

And then we ... xxx the boys set alight to the place - pity they didn't burn it right down.

What was Shepherd's Hotel like?

Oh, it was a posh hotel - oh, my word, a post hotel. We were in there - of course, some of them were chaps ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

Identification: Tape 2.

What did you have in Shepherd's Hotel? Do you remember the meal you got?

Oh, I couldn't tell you what the meal was - quite nice.

It would be better than ship food, wouldn't it?

Waited on hand and foot.

You can't remember the names of the other four fellows you were with?

No, I couldn't remember them now. I doubt whether there's any of them still alive.

That's probable.

As a matter of fact, the point is that we split up when we went on to Gallipoli, you see; all got split up and you went into another company, and you [lost] xxx. I've got photos here from Dr Freeman, taken in France. Well, I can't - I can remember one or two of them, but ...

We were given English officers in Egypt, and one bloke was that good that he had to have a sergeant major alongside of him to tell him what to say - that's a fact.

We had these - by gee, it was tough work. You were out on that white sand all the time, and in the heat of the day - it was tough.

Whereabouts were you camped? Were you at Mena?

No, a place called Zeitoun.

That's where the 4th Brigade went, to Zeitoun.

Yeah, that's right.

And Heliopolis.

It was a big camp, Zeitoun. And Heliopolis was alongside.

What did you see of this Battle of the Wazzar that happened? Did you go out and have a look?

Well, we couldn't do anything else, we had to finish that dinner and we went outside. There was British red caps on horseback, running around everywhere, and fire brigades, people roaring all over xxx, police everywhere, and that sort of thing - terrible to-do. And these Light Horsemen, they were the only ones that had them, and they had what they called a jack knife. It's a big pocket knife, would be about that long.

About six inches long?

Oh, yes, a good six inches long.

That's the blade, or ...

The whole thing. And then they had a big spike on one side so that if any horses got anything in their foot they could dig it out, see. They went along and cut the fire brigade hoses up into lengths, and then got stuck into the British Mounted Police. Oh, she was a ... terrible place.

Did you go and have a look in the Wazzar?

No, no, no thank you. No, the place didn't appeal to me.

Whereabouts did you go in Cairo?

Oh, I went all over the place, went out to the zoo, and the museum, down to the pyramids.

Did you go up on top?

I went right up on top - the big one. By gees, you should see some of those Gyppos go up there, you've got no idea. They run up! And those blocks, you know what it's constructed of?

Stone blocks.

It's granite blocks, four feet square, twenty feet long.

And they ran up there?

Yes, just ran up there - oh, cripes, go up like a rabbit or squirrel.

And they used to have drinks and so on at the top, didn't they?

And they'd get a cool drink up the top.

That's right.

Yes, oh, yes. And then inside was a most peculiar thing. Perfect on the outside - perfect.

Perfect triangle, yes.

You go down a sort of a - well, it was a stairway, you see. Being granite, and the number of people that had been through, it was polished and worn. You had to sit down - slide down - well, you couldn't stand up - take your boots off, you had to go in with your boots off, get down to the bottom, and just on one side of it there's a well. I don't know how deep it is - oh, they didn't in those days. You went up two or three steps into a great big chamber, forty feet square - height, everything - that was the king's chamber. Of course, the sarcophagus is gone, you see, but there was a [formation] where it had been.

You could see where it had been placed?

Placed, you see. That's on there - on this side of it, over here sort of business, there was - there had, as I said, been that many people through it that you daren't walk without any boots on - there was a few steps, it was about that wide, I suppose.

A couple of feet wide?

A couple of feet wide - and that led up into the queen's chamber, which was half the size of the king's chamber. And yet outside that was perfect, that pyramid. It was a wonderful piece of engineering, there is no doubt about that. Whoever he was, he knew his job.

It's a wonder of the world, isn't it?

It is, it is a wonder of the world, yes, I think it is.

The chamber was lit by lamps, was it? It would have been dark in there, of course.

Yes - no - you had a guide, you couldn't get in without a guide, and he had a light, you see.

He had a lamp, or something?

A light - torch or something - oh, yes, it was terrific.

What was the view like from up on top of the pyramid?

Oh, it was terrific.

What could you see - how far?

Oh, you could see for miles - you could see Cairo - miles and miles around. A lot of it was only white sand.

Could you see Zeitoun from there?

Oh, I don't know if you could pick out any particular spot, you know - I don't think you could pick out any particular spot.

Did you go for a ride on a camel?

Oh, yes - camels and donkeys. Go into Cairo [of an evening], you'd get a donkey for five piastres to take you home.

How often would they let you go into Cairo?

Well, you'd always go in once a week - sometimes - it all depends. You see, most days, because it's only a hop, step, and a jump. Most days you could go in after parade at night, you see, if you wanted to. Oh, you didn't feel like it after you'd been soaking around in that bloomin' white sand all day.

What would they get you doing as training? What was the training like there?

Oh, it was just the same as it was here in Australia, exactly the same, only intensified, you see.

Was the training any good generally?

Oh, yes - you had to be fit. If you weren't fit, well, you had no hope.

What about in terms of its actual usefulness in the front line, or in action?

Well, actually, in the front line in those days, of course, it was totally different to what it is today. In those days it was static - you'd just stand there and keep your eyes open, sort of business. Nowadays its movement all the time, you see, it's quite different.

What rank did you have? Were you a private?

I was a private then, yes.

You wouldn't have been in a company at that stage, would you? With the Reinforcements you'd have just been with the Reinforcements xxx Company, yes.

Put into a company. See, you were divided - it was the most peculiar thing. I suppose you might go through I don't know how many wars, and you wouldn't have the same thing happen, but when I landed on Gallipoli, the first chap I met was to show us where we had to - because everything was done at night, there was no daylight business over there, unloading and that sort of business - the first chap I ran into was a Renmark boy, a chap I knew.

What was his name?

Ernie Huselius.

How do you spell that?

Now how do you spell Ernie?

Well, Ernie's okay, what's his Christian name?

Ernest.

His surname?

H-U-S-E-L-I-U-S, I think it was.

Was he Italian?

No, he wasn't, he was ... I think he was a Norwegian or Swede, or something - his father.

He was born here?

He was born here, yes. Well, anyhow, he showed us where we had to camp that night. It was just off the beach. The next morning he came along and took us up to the Battalion. So I was allotted to A Company - Number 1 Section, A Company. And the bloke that took over was a cobber of mine - corporal - in charge of Number 1 Section.

What was his name?

Archie Smith. His father had a sheep station up here - [Warakoo] Sheep Station. They used to own - they had a butchery and bakery business here, and he used to manage it here.

He was a corporal in charge of he section?

He was in charge of the section. The medical orderly came around and he was a cobber of mine.

So you knew everybody?

Charlie Dunhill. You wouldn't read about it, would you?

No.

He came around, he went away with about the 3rd Reinforcements, I think. Archie went away about the same time. There you are.

Whereabouts did you go on Gallipoli? Where was the Battalion at that time?

Down at a place called Silt Spur, Gaba Tepe.

I know Gaba Tepe.

Yeah, well, they were just up from ... Gaba Tepe - down - Silt Spur is just up here.

How do you spell that?

S-I-L-T - Silt Spur. And they tunnelled it - they tunnelled that - you wouldn't read about it, they tunnelled it.

How far away were the Turks from there?

Oh, from here to the house across the road.

Only about fifty yards or so?

That's right, yeah. Only we were just a bit above them.

That would be an advantage.

And you could see their [loopholes] from the trench. Of course, they used to put sleepers over the tops of the trenches and put dirt on the top, so you couldn't snipe them.

Good idea.

Although one day, a chap that was with me - there were two of us - we xxx out of this tunnel,

we had a couple of steps up, and then there was a sort of a 'T' that would hold three men, that 'T'.

It was a sort of communications trench, was it, going up to...

No, no communications trench. You had your tunnel, and then just straight out of the side of the tunnel was the firing position, you see, and that was the shape of a 'T' - a couple of steps up, and you'd be up, standing there all day long. When I say all day, you get two hours in there during the day, and one at night.

A chap that was with me one day, he had a shot at a Turkish loophole, or something, and a bloke waved a shovel - a Turk waved a shovel. I said to him, 'Look, Ashie ...' - his name was Ashington.

What was his Christian name?

Oh, now, that's got me, there's that many Ashingtons I just couldn't remember what it was - no, I couldn't remember what his Christian name was - Ashie was used to know him as. Oh, the brigadier, he knew everything - brigadier.

He was a brigadier? That's what he thought he was?

Yes (laughs). Anyhow, I said to him, when I saw this Turk waving xxx, I said, 'I'll fire a shot and deliberately miss, see what happens', which I did. 'Now,' I said, 'are you ready?' - he said, 'Yes' - and I fired the shot. Up came the shovel again, and he let go, and hit that shovel fair and square. Oh, you could hear it ring. No more come up.

It was a bad spot. See, flies were terrific, nobodies got any idea, unless they were there then at that - you couldn't eat. They'd give you no bread - army biscuit - I don't know if you know the army biscuits.

Yeah, I know the army biscuits.

Then they'd give you Golden Syrup to put on it - tangle foot we used to call it.

Tangle foot?

Yeah (laughs) - catch the flies.

I see, that was its nickname?

That was its nickname (laughs).

As soon as you put that on the flies would be all over it?

Oh, flies, coo!

Did you get sick?

See, all the tins - everything was tinned - milk - condensed milk - tins of meat, tins of what have you. They used to burn them down on the beach, keep the flies down as much as they possibly could, you see. After a while they got that many bloomin' tins down there they put them in a chaff bag, send them up the font line and tell them to toss them over into no-man's-land (laughs). Well, they'd toss them over into no-man's-land and then had all the Turks going stone mad; he'd be firing and blazing away, and that was the reception we got the night we landed on Gallipoli. See, they had one of these, what we called, a jam-tin stunt, you see (laughs). They'd toss these, and there were bullets flying around way out to sea. And there was one poor New Zealand officer - CO - he never got off the boat, a bullet hit him in the shoulder, so he stopped on the boat and went back to Lemnos Island. But we managed to get away without any accidents - without any casualties.

And these tins that they were throwing, they were the jam-tin bombs, were they? Is that what you are talking about?

No.

Just the tins?

Just the damn empty tins that had been burnt, you see, and then they'd throw them over. Of course, they'd rattle, and nobody could walk out into no-man's-land - the tins, you see.

It was a safety measure, or something?

Yeah (laughs).

I haven't heard of that before.

Oh, yes. Then they used to make these xxx jam-tin bombs - of course, we had others - these jam-tin bombs. And that tunnel that I was telling you about, at the front line, they used to make what they called a slush slug - have you ever heard of a slush slug?

No.

Well, apparently you get a condensed milk tin, then go down to the beach and half fill him with sand - bring a bucket of sand and half fill these tins with sand - and then get a stick about the size of a meat skewer, you know - wouldn't be as long as that, only about just half the length of that.

Two or three inches.

Stick it in the sand in the tin, you see. Well, then they'd get the bacon fat in the morning - we used to get fried bacon in the morning for breakfast - get the bacon fat, pour it over the sand, and get the wick with a bit of flannel on it - wound around the top of the stick, you see - and get a bit of bacon fat on that, and they they'd light it and it would give you a dull light. And that was the Australian flashlight.

How long would they last?

They'd have enough to last you all night - oh, yeah.

Whereabouts were you living? You were in a dugout somewhere, I gather?

No dugouts - dugout in the trench.

You were in the trench?

All the time.

A lot of them used to dig possies into the side of the hill.

Oh, yeah, once a month.

Once a month you used to get that? That was a rest stop, was it?

That's a rest - rest a month - forty-eight hours, once a month.

Could you see the beach from where you were, or not?

Beach?

You couldn't see it?

Oh, yes.

You could see it?

Oh, yes, you could see down to the beach. We were up above it, you see. Oh, yes, you could see it.

How often did you get down to the beach?

Once a month.

That's not much.

(Laughs) - well, you couldn't get down there. I mean, there was ... I mean, in the daytime you'd do two hours on and four off. You didn't feel like running and tearing down to the beach on your four hours off.

What would you do during your hours off?

Well, you'd have your rifles to clean, and lucky you'd have a wash - you only used to get a quart of water a day, and half that went into the cookhouse to cook your meal - they had tea - right? - then you got a pint. That would have to do you ...

What would you do with that pint? Would you put it in your water bottle?

Yes, into your water bottle, oh, yes, into your water bottle, and then you'd just wet a flannel and wipe your face.

Any shaving?

Oh, don't make me laugh (laughs) - there was no water to have a shave - no, no fear. Old Birdwood used to come along and he'd look up at the xxx all over his face, whiskery looking faces.

Well, you were lucky you got onto Gallipoli when you did because it was a reasonably quiet time, wasn't it?

Yes, yes, oh, yes.

You landed early September, did you?

2nd September, and I was there till the end of November - twelve weeks exactly.

Well, that's a fair while.

It's long enough.

Yes, that's right.

I wasn't a hundred per cent when I came off, either.

Did you get dysentery?

No, I didn't get dysentery, but I got diarrhoea badly.

I think everybody did, didn't they?

Oh ... oh, it was a cow. When we went off, we went off. I'll never forget, we were going off one night, and we were waiting for a boat to come in - going off on barges, you see, out to the boat. And waiting for the boat to come in, and over it came; well we had a thunderstorm. Phew, did it rain! cats and dogs! my gosh it rained, it poured and poured - and we didn't go - had to wait till next night.

The next day there was another chap and myself, he said, 'I'm going to have a shave' - I said, 'Oh, yeah' - I said, 'If you have one, I'll have one'. So he got his razor out - blade razor - no bloomin' fancy razors there. I took mine out too - I kept stropping mine, and he'd be using his, and then when his got a bit on the dull side, he'd take mine and I'd strop his. Between us we got a xxx moustache - oh, yes. We got off the next night, over to Lemnos.

Did you go down swimming at the beach?

Only once.

What was that like?

Too damn risky.

You'd be under fire, I suppose.

Oh, yeah - you never knew when he was going to burst - when he put over, goodness knows how many bloomin' what's a names.

Shrapnel?

Shells - shrapnel shells - and they'd go right along the bloomin' beach. There was a boat that had been beached there - oh, it was part protected.

That was Beachie Bill, wasn't it?

Beachie Bill, that's right, out in the olive grove - oh, yes, poor old Beachie Bill.

What was the main routine? Were you bringing supplies up and down, or were you digging trenches?

We were in trenches all the time.

But were you doing much trench work, digging the trenches?

Oh, gosh, we were digging what we thought was to be winter quarters, and they were - oh, what would they be? - like that - that way.

Like a tent?

Just a little passageway in there, to a certain distance, you see. There would be a ledge there, a ledge there, and a ledge along the back - take three men. And you did it with a small, one-pointed pick - not a double-pointed - one-pointed pick, and a little army shovel - I don't know if you know them at all.

Trenching tool?

No, not a trenching tool - that was yours, you carried that, that's a little army shovel, oh, it would be about that wide.

About a foot wide?

No wheelbarrows or anything, you carted it all out in sandbags. And that's what they did with that tunnel.

Right, that's how they made that.

They put it between the ... with this Silt Spur, and the ridge, there was another ridge at the back of it - which I'll tell you about directly - they put all that dirt in there, and they filled up the gap in between - the gully in between. Well, they came across to this ridge, then they dug a tunnel right through that ridge - it was higher than Silt Spur - tunnelled right through that ridge. And it was easy the width of the table - easy that width.

That's about five feet.

Yes, it would be quite that. And six foot high.

It's fair work, isn't it?

Yes.

Shored up, or not?

And that was all done with these little picks and sandbags.

And was it shored up?

No - just natural - yeah, oh, yeah. And it was named after the governor's wife of South Australia at that time - Lady [Galway] Road. And when you got through Lady Galway Road, there was an old Turkish trench at the back of it - oh, I don't know whether it had been a trench - but anyhow,

they ran into two bodies, the head of one and the feet of another - they'd been buried, you see. And that head was just a skull, see, and there was a bloke this side with his two boots on. The boys would go by and they would smack him on the head as they went by. So you could imagine - well, you ought to know, you're an Australian (laughs). And the bloke on the other side would take his boots and they'd say, 'Come on, your king and country needs you'. So you can imagine - well, you've got to have humour - look, man, you'd go batty if you didn't - you'd bo batty.

And did you do any patrolling?

Not there, you couldn't, no, you couldn't.

Did you get out into no-man's-land at all?

You couldn't, not in front of us - you'd kick a tin - you couldn't. Well, on the end of that Silt Spur they dug out a place, I suppose ... oh, it would be the length of the table - a person could stand up in it - you could stand up in it.

Six feet, say.

And they had a gap - I suppose the gap would be about that wide.

About eight inches.

And about, oh, pretty well the same length, and about five foot long, I suppose. And they had a machine-gun in there.

This is a Vickers gun?

Vickers gun - Vickers machine-gun, that's right. And they used to cover up a track, or a road, or whatever you like, where the Turks used to bring their supplies in, and they'd belt with this thing, you know. You can imagine that going off at night, and that bloomin' great big tunnel - the noise - terrific!

Well, the Turks were down below, and they would be digging away, and digging away - 'What's going on down here?' - and then they got a fair cavity, and they put sleepers on the top of it, prevent it shooting in on top of them.

This is the Turks?

Yes, this is the Turks - and they had to put a machine-gun in there, and they were going to have a go at our machine-gun, you see.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

The artillery we had there was what we used to call the [Burgou] Battery - the Scotch eighteen-pounders - and we had four or five naval guns at the back of us.

A four-point-five?

Yeah. He used to belt over Beachie Bill occasionally. Well, on top of that they had what they called Indian Mountain Batteries - the Sikhs - and there would be five of them on a gun - five of them, you see. A bloke would carry a wheel, and another bloke would carry a what's a name, and someone else would carry so many rounds of ammunition, or something like that.

They'd transport these guns around in pieces?

Yes, that's right - came along - they said, 'You'd better bring that Mountain Battery up here and give this Turk something before they do any damage'.

On your machine-gun?

Yeah - so they brought them up behind the back of them - more or less in the open - and they let go at this place the Turks were building with a machine-gun down below - blew it to

smithereens. Then they'd both xxx.

Well, a funny thing. We had a sergeant, and he was an Englishman.

What was his name?

Vallis - Arthur Vallis.

How do you spell that?

V-A-L-L-I-S. He'd been in the army in India.

He was an Englishman?

In India, before he came out to Australia, you see.

He was an Englishman?

An Englishman, yes. And a peculiar thing, those chaps came down, hopped in and came down through this tunnel. They saw him there and they nearly went mad - these Indians - they knew him in India. They said they couldn't stop because they had all the guns and everything with them, you see - 'We'll come back'. They were back too.

It's surprising who you meet, isn't it?

Yes - surprising. We went off - after that business - we went off and a general evacuation took place just shortly after. I think we were about the first lot to go off.

Did you know the Peninsula was being evacuated at that time, or not?

We didn't know anything. We knew Kitchener had been there, that's all we knew - he came there in October. He said the best thing you can do is make arrangements to get out, he said, because it is a dead end. That's what happened.

Did you see him?

No, he didn't come near us - xxx xxx. No, he didn't come near us. So then they had to organise the whole business.

Well, just before we left they gave orders, came along the line, nobody was to fire a shot - no-one was to fire a shot. Well, we went off - we were there when the order came through, but we went off, we didn't stay to see it out. But what happened, the Turks felt it was that quiet - had been quiet for several days, nobody had fired a shot or anything, they thought we'd gone - everybody had gone. So they came across to have a look-see, and they met with something pretty hot, see. Well, it worked. Well, that's alright.

The next time, when there was another fight, of course, they wouldn't bite, and yet they were burning rubbish on the beach, you know - anywhere - that sort of thing.

Did you have any idea?

Nobody knew any idea at all.

You didn't know?

No - we didn't - others might have, because they all came to Lemnos Island, we saw a lot of them after.

Before they left - you've heard about the way they fiddled their rifles up, did you?

Yes.

Have you? - with water? - and a drip, drip, drip? - that was done at xxx intervals along the line, you see. And, of course, when they got the weight on pulling the trigger, bang she went. They got that rigged up in the War Memorial in Canberra. Have you been there?

Yes.

You saw it then, I suppose.

I think I remember it, yes - I do know about it. Did you see them when you were there?

No, they weren't doing it, no, no, they weren't doing it when we were there. But those flash lights, I'll tell you a funny one about that.

Now, see, it was a bit of a problem because anything that had to be done, had to be done at night, and it meant pulling troops out of the front line, you see. Well, it's not a fair go because, I mean, they've got enough to do, and then you've got your hour on duty each night just the same, and you've got down there unloading barges and one thing and another, with supplies and ammunition, and what have you. So they brought a party of about thirty or so Egyptians over, and they had them on the beach, you see. Well, they used to put them in these bell tents. Of course, they were back off the beach, and one of them found a jam-tin bomb. 'Oh,' he says, 'very good, very good - Australian flashlight, very good'.

It had a wick on it, did it?

Had a fuse on it, you see - fuse and a detonator. There was twelve of them, I think, in this particular bell tent. Comes in and he put it down alongside the tent pole, and lit it - wounded eight. Oh, you get some funny thing.

I hadn't heard of that.

You hadn't heard of that, you say?

No.

Oh, no, it's these little things, they bring back memories, you know - oh, yes.

You would have been there when it started to get cold, wouldn't you?

Yes, by Jove, yes. Well, you know, the British troops at Cape Helles, they were frost bitten - British troops at Cape Helles. They brought them up into hospital in Lemnos Island there, poor devils, hands all frostbitten - poor beggars they are - there was a blizzard, you see.

Do you remember that blizzard coming through?

Oh, do I what! Those quarter guards on Lemnos Island.

You'd gone across to Lemnos at that time? You were on Lemnos at that time?

Lemnos, yes. I was there [at a quarter guard].

What's a quarter guard?

Oh, the quartermaster's stores, and that sort of thing. There were eighteen of us in one of those bell tents - eighteen of us to keep warm. We would get down there and huddle up. By Jove, it was cold - oh, bitterly cold. And then they'd only give you an hour on and then they'd relieve you. Oh, you couldn't stick it. I'll never forget that.

It snowed I gather?

Funny thing. You know, the latrines were right at the top of the hill.

This is on Lemnos?

Yes - and their camp was down below. And you'd see them roaring and tearing up the top of the hill with their trousers down.

This is from the diarrhoea?

Oh, yes. By Jove, I'll never forget that one.

Were you suffering from it at the same time?

Well, no, I'd got rid of it then - I'd got rid of it just before we got off the Peninsula, the diarrhoea.

What did they do to get rid of it?

There was some medicine there they used to give us, and on a special diet - get on a special diet, you see.

What was the special diet?

Oh, sort of - what would you call them? - custards and blancmanges, and all that sort of stuff - you know, that type of stuff, soft foods.

Then, when we got to Lemnos, we were all on - nothing to do, no parades for a month - no parades whatsoever for a month. This will do us! That was just before the what's-a-name - this blizzard came. We got a quart bottle of beer, or a quart bottle of stout, per man. You couldn't drink anything of it hardly.

Why?

You'd drink a little glass full like that - nothing.

You hadn't had anything for a long time?

Only rum.

Only the rum?

Yes, had a rum issue - we had our rum issue every day, they did give us that.

What time of the day would they give you that?

Oh, usually some time after breakfast. What we used to do, we'd open one bottle, and that would do about eight or nine of us - for a start, you couldn't drink it. And it was not given to you just because to make a boozer of you, it was given to you to build you up again; that's what it was done for. Eventually - I mean, you ... you'd probably open a bottle perhaps about between three of us in the finish. It was a good tonic, it was really a good tonic.

Was it Egyptian beer?

It would give you a good appetite. I don't know where they got it from, I'm sure.

It took us five days to get to Lemnos - to Gallipoli - five days.

This is from Alexandria?

From Alexandria - five days.

That's a fair while, isn't it?

Of course, there was that - now, what was the name of that British troop ship that got sunk on the way to Gallipoli?

I don't know.

On the way to Lemnos, as a matter of fact - to Cape Helles - there was a British troop ship got torpedoed. And that's what they were dodging, all over the bloomin' [shop].

They were zigzagging all over the place?

Yes. And then we came along one night - I'll never forget one night, we were coming past a bit of an island - wasn't much of a one, I mean, you could just about jump over it, it was that small - but there was a bloomin' light - bang!

A searchlight?

Searchlight - bang!

From the island?

Yeah - and xxx destroyer hanging about, so we were right now.

The searchlight lit up the ship?

Yes. I happened to be on guard duty up on the what's-a-name deck - top deck.

Well, we got into Lemnos, I suppose some time during the night, and you couldn't get into Lemnos. See, it was a terrific harbour, you know - I don't know if you know it.

I know about it. I know that before the landing there were hundreds of ships in there.

Oh, I suppose there ...

This is Mudros, isn't it, they called it?

The opening was only about three quarters of a mile wide, but it would take the whole of the British fleet in the harbour - it was a beautiful harbour. There was Russian boats and goodness knows what in there. We had to wait out the night because there were nets across so that submarines couldn't get in.

So you had to wait outside?

Had to wait outside till the next morning, then we went in.

(Break in interview)

I thought this afternoon that we might start with the prisoner of war period; that's

principally why I've come out to talk with you, in fact.

You transferred from the 10th Battalion to the 50th Battalion?

50th Battalion, that's right. When we came back from Gallipoli, we got back to Egypt and there were tens of thousands of bloomin' reinforcements.

That's right, yes.

And they formed two new divisions, you see.

Yes, I know that.

And I went into the 4th Division. They split the 1st Division and the 4th Brigade, they split them in halves, and so formed the nucleus ...

Of two new divisions.

Two new divisions.

That was the ... right, that's the 5th Division - the 4th and the 5th Divisions.

The 5th ...

And the 4th.

5th Division - see, the 4th Brigade and the 3rd Brigade, they formed the 4th Division.

Yes, that's right.

See, there was the 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd.

Yes, well, my grandfather's lieutenant was a Len Wadsley, and he was in charge of the

13th Reinforcements to the 15th Battalion, but then, in Egypt, he transferred to the 52nd.

Oh, yeah, the 52nd?

You were in the 13th Brigade, weren't you?

I knew the colonel in the 52nd, when it was formed - the blighter was in the 10th Battalion - he was in charge of the 10th Battalion, chap by the name of [Beball] - Mud Guts we used to call him. He was hated.

We'll skip Egypt and France for the moment.

I'll tell you a funny one that happened. We were out before we were split up, we were out in the Sinai Desert doing outpost. And one day he had us - the whole battalion - lined up in what they called a 'hollow square'. Do you know what a 'hollow square' is?

Not really.

Two companies that way, two companies that way, and the colonel was up here on his horse.

I see, in front, so on two sides there was a company ...

Yeah.

... and opposite the horseman there were two companies?

Two companies. And he was there and he got a letter from - I don't know whether it was from the Comfort Fund, or the Red Cross - something from here in Australia - he sat up there on his horse and he was bellowing this out, 'Dear Colonel Beball' - he brought that out, and you know, there was somebody in the battalion going 'wha! wha!' - just like that. Well, it broke everybody up - [overawed] - officers and all, you couldn't help it.

And what did he say?

I don't know, I can't remember what the letter was now, but he started off ...

'Dear Colonel Beball'. Who was the letter from?

Oh, I think it was the Red Cross or the Comfort Fund, or some of those people there. xxx - broke the crowd up.

Well, you went across the France, of course.

Yeah.

And you'd have been in Mouquet Farm - Pozieres, Mouquet Farm?

I was in the first battalion to attack Mouquet Farm.

Were you?

Yeah, oh, yes, we did that - that was on a Saturday night - dug in [hopping off] trench - Jerry didn't know where we were, he had no idea. We didn't exactly know the position of Mouquet Farm. We knew it was strongly fortified. We attacked it on the Monday, and we lost half the battalion or more - killed or wounded.

Yes, it was a shocking place.

Oh, a dreadful thing.

Then you went ...

Then we came back out of that and then the 40 ... that was at the end of July 1916 - we went in again in September - went out - we were out for about five weeks - went in in September again.

That's right.

And at the same spot, Mouquet Farm, 49th Battalion, Queenslanders had a go at it. Mind you, we'd been belting it and belting it - we weren't the only ones, they all had a go - and eventually that broke the defences, they broke it but they couldn't get through to it. But the Canadians came in and went straight through into it.

That's right.

Took it.

I think the number of casualties was dreadful, wasn't it?

Oh, shocking.

Were you at any time wounded at that? Were you wounded at Mouquet Farm?

No, never wounded.

Were you in France through the winter of '16/'17?

Sure did, yeah. See that photo over there?

Yes, that's the one that was taken of you there, the portrait?

That was taken after the war, in London. Only that's to go down to Roger Freeman, I promised him, he wants one. I've got another one I had taken out of civilian clothes in Canberra.

That winter I was in charge of a barbed wire party - seven weeks through that winter I put in barbed wire. And we had thirty men under me.

Did you? What rank were you at that time?

Corporal.

When were you promoted?

Oh, god! Now, wait a minute, it was ... we came out xxx, would be in September '16.

You were a private at Mouquet Farm, were you?

First time. xxx xxx. Yes, I think, and then we came out and I was promoted after that.

The Germans pulled out, didn't they, and they pulled back to the Hindenburg Line?

Who?

The Germans.

That's right.

They pulled back in about March.

Well, no, they didn't go back to the Hindenburg Line. They didn't go back to the Hindenburg Line until April. We attacked the hopping off position at a place called Noreiul.

That's right, yes. That's past the Bapaume, isn't it?

Yeah. And why we were taken prisoner of war, I can tell you that as easy as anything. Some of the organisers made a hell of a big blue, see.

What happened?

Sent a sergeant and six men to mop up the village of Noreiul, and it was full of Germans. We were pinned down on the font line with machine-gun fire, couldn't do anything. I don't know how many there were, but there was well over a hundred Germans came out, (while we were) relying on six men and a sergeant to just ... We had no option.

What company were you in at that time?

A Company.

This is in the 50th Battalion?

50th Battalion, yes.

You were in A Company in the 10th Battalion, and also in the 50th?

50th Battalion.

Which section were you in in the 50th?

Well, Number 2 Platoon.

So that's 1st Section again?

Pretty close, yes.

And your lieutenant was Lieutenant Gore, is that correct?

Well, he was a - when I say my lieutenant, no, he wasn't my lieutenant - he was one of these fellows that was here, there and everywhere, he had no set platoon or anything like that.

He was attached to headquarters?

He was attached to headquarters, and he was a hell of a good officer though. He did all the patrols - he was a lucky man, I could have shot him dead.

By mistake?

Not by mistake - it was a mistake by headquarters. I was sent out with a section of six men as an outpost - listening post - and my instructions were, if Jerry came, empty your magazine and go for your life, and that would warn everybody else at the back, see, that there was something doing, wake them up.

Well, he and another chap, they were sent - went out on a patrol - and never sent word out to us, anything at all. They came around - never told him that we were out there - and go sneaking around. I had two sentries on that night - always had two on those sort of jobs at night - and I had two sentries on - and one of them said, 'Hey, there's somebody coming'. So alright, I said, 'You're the sentry, go on and challenge him', and they dropped there flat on the ground, the pair of them. It was the worst thing they could have done. He didn't know we were there, I didn't know he was there.

Well, sentry said, 'Shall I shoot?', I said, 'No, hold it'. I said, 'No, it might be a patrol' - because there was only a couple of them - so I challenged them again, and I said, 'Advance one and give the password'. Up comes xxx xxx. I said, 'You are a damn lucky man' - 'By hell!' he said, 'they never told me you were here', and I said, 'They didn't tell me you were coming out'. Oh, there was a bit of a blue over that; I mean, we could have ... we were quite within our rights to shoot them.

It happened quite often, didn't it?

These things happened. So that's how old Max and I were together when we were taken prisoner. But [Ollie], he did all those patrols, you know, he was a good officer.

So what happened at Noreiul when you were captured?

Well, I was telling you. We'd gone past the village. When they advanced we were coming off this way, and instead of going through the village, my platoon - or half of A Company - had to make a - to mark time while the rest went through the village and made a right-hand turn, broad-wheel turn. Then we marched on until they got through the village and came out.

When you say mark time, what are you actually doing?

Just mark time and turn round - just stop and then turn for the direction you have to go. Well, that was alright, and then they sent this sergeant and six men. Well, there was over a hundred Germans in the bloomin' village. There was another company way back sitting on their backsides - could have sent a platoon of them up and they would have mopped - the Germans would have tossed it when they found it was a platoon, see. We were pinned down with a machine-gun here and a machine-gun over here.

Where were the machine-guns firing from?

Oh, they were firing from just above us - in front of us - but they had us pinned, we couldn't advance. And, of course, they took - while we were being pinned down, these six men went in there and, of course, they were captured, the Germans and all came out and, of course, we were also ... We had no option, we couldn't do anything about it.

(Break in interview)

Well, then we went ... we went up through the Hindenburg Line, see.

This is after you were captured?

This is just after, the same day, just after we were captured.

You were captured at night, weren't you?

No, we were captured in broad daylight - we weren't captured at night-time.

What time of the day was it?

Oh, it would be about just before dinner.

So you were advancing, in the open?

Yeah - no artillery support.

Towards Noreiul, and there was just a company of the Battalion?

No, three companies.

And one of the companies stayed back?

B Company was in reserve. No, we just ... As I said, if they'd sent a platoon of B Company up to attack the village, it would have been a different proposition altogether because there would have been few men there and the Jerries would have tossed it in. Because there was a chap out of my battalion - whatever was his name? - oh, I forget now - he got the Victoria Cross there. He walked up - he could speak German - and he told them, he said it's no use - there was about three hundred of them. He got on his own, he told them you are surrounded, he said, and if you don't give in you'll all be shot. And he just walked out again. And he got the Victoria Cross.

Well, xxx xxx, but xxx from memory names.

The Germans at Noreiul, they were holding up?

Holding up party, [just about]. xxx xxx. The line was well occupied and they were well - machine-guns dotted all along it - oh, yes.

And what happened to the six and the sergeant who went in to Noreiul? They were killed, were they?

Well, there was another chap - only three of them, all from the same town, come from Naracoorte, a south-eastern ...

I know Naracoorte.

Well, there was a chap called Tom [Loxton], and his brother Angus. Tom Loxton was a junior corporal - I was a senior corporal in the platoon.

What's a junior corporal and a senior corporal?

Well, he'd only take second position, you see. Now, if anything that had happened on different occasions, we hadn't got an officer - sergeant's away or something - the senior corporal takes charge of the platoon, you see, which I had to do on several occasions.

You mean a senior corporal is the one who's been corporal the longest, or something?

That's right, yeah - and a Sergeant [Mahaphie].

How do you spell that?

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

START OF TAPE THREE - SIDE A

Identification: Tape 3.

Just after you were captured you were taken through the Hindenburg Line, weren't you?

That's right, yes.

What were the fortifications like?

Well, the fortifications - it wasn't - it was depth and width.

It was wide?

Yes. It was made so wide that a tank couldn't get across it.

This is the trench?

It was a trap for tanks. A tank could go in, but it couldn't get across it - no hope. I told you, the barbed wire was from here out to that motor vehicle, and about that high. There was a pathway through it.

It was about, say, a metre high?

About a metre high, yes.

And it would be about, what, fifty yards wide, fifty metres wide?

Thirty or forty metres.

How wide were the alleyways through it, the little paths through it?

Oh, only just wide enough for you to walk through.

So they were only about eighteen inches?

A couple of feet, wouldn't be any more.

And they zigzagged, did they?

Oh, yes, they didn't go straight through, oh, no, they zigzagged - we were led through them. After we got into Bullecourt - we went through Bullecourt - we were met by a party of German Uhlans, if you know what Uhlans are.

The cavalry.

Cavalry - they took charge, and we were marched to a place called - now, wait a minute - [Auchies] - heard of Auchies?

Yes.

Do you know what it was?

No.

It was a town where they manufacture pottery and all that sort of thing, and Jerry picked the eyes out of it - Jerry officers picked the eyes out of it and sent it back to Germany.

All of the china and so on?

The china and stuff, oh, yes. Well, we were there for a while, and all of us - that was ... Now, wait a minute, I'm getting a bit ahead of myself. We went to a village - now, I can't think of the name of it - there are that many bloomin' villages around.

I wouldn't worry too much about that.

For a little while, and then the chaps that got into the Hindenburg Line - 48th 12th Brigade ...

The 4th Brigade.

There was over thousands of them.

Yes, that's right.

And they were brought in to xxx. We were taken from there to - what was it? - Reims - now, wait a minute, was it Reims? Anyhow, we were taken to a place called - oh ...

You went up to Lille, didn't you?

Lille, that's it.

You went to Fort MacDonald, didn't you?

That's right - we all went in together. And when we got in - we were put on the train from

[Auchie] and sent up to Lille, to go into this Fort MacDonald. When we got off the train at - I'll never forget him, I can see him now, a little German general who was about my size, I suppose, he wouldn't be any bigger - he stood on a box and he said (in perfect English), 'The guns of the soldiers are loaded; anyone trying to escape will be shot' (laughs). Well, we were put into these ...

How old would he have been, that officer?

Me?

No, how old would the German officer have been?

Oh, I suppose he might be about the forties.

Was he fat?

Oh, no, no.

Just short?

Short and just average size, you know.

What rank do you think he had?

He had a general's rank.

Did he?

Oh, yes, he was a little general. Well, we were put into this place. Of course, this Fort MacDonald was a cavalry barracks - not cavalry, artillery barracks - for the French Army.

I didn't know that.

Oh, yes, it was an artillery barracks for the French Army. And the great big concrete rooms, you know, where they'd keep their guns and that sort of business - wasn't a place where you could have your sleep and that sort of bloomin' business.

There wasn't people living in it?

Oh, no, no, it was just a great big concrete room - there was about fifty - must have been fifty of us in this particular room. And we were put in there, the doors were locked. The lavatory was an empty wine barrel in the corner; the food we got was the vegetable water that the Jerries cooked their vegetables in; and one slice of black bread, per day, see.

That isn't much, is it?

No.

Were you wounded?

No, I was never wounded, no. Anyhow, ten days of that. Then we went out of that, and, of course, you wouldn't - you know, you were too bloomin' weak - I mean, you never had the strength left to do anything any good, then we were put back in the German lines, digging gun pits they were. Oh, yes. We were there for a while. And then we were sent back - after a while when we'd dug all the gun pits, I suppose, that they wanted to be dug, we were sent back to a place called Bruchain.

B-R-U-C-H-A-I-N.

That's right, Bruchain. Well, we were there for a little while - it was on one of the canals - I couldn't tell you the name of it, I wouldn't know - we were there for a while, and then I went from there to a place called Denain.

D-E-N-A-I-N.

And that - yes, well that - they were working in a - oh, I don't know whether you'd call it a

foundry, if you like, you call it, or a - a big factory anyhow, colossal thing, it was about a kilometre long and half a kilometre wide, and they could make anything in there from ploughshares to railway engines.

Could they?

Yeah, oh, yes - electric trams, anything you like, that sort of business - it was a colossal place.

And the Germans were running it obviously?

They were using it as a repair depot, you see; and not only repair, but a depot for - storage depot, things like materiel depot, if you like to call it - materiel depot. I never worked, I didn't work.

What did you do?

Used to go out with the boys for xxx, look after the boys when I was ever out, you see. The Germans would come up - I wanted someone who could speak a bit of English, or something, make me understand [they'd only want it], and I'd tell the boys what they wanted.

So you tried to be an interpreter?

I was never, I could never understand them well enough for that, but I could tell the boys what to do, you see - just give them a [wink], see.

Well, we were there and they put them on filling machine-gun belts - you know what a machine-gun belt is? - with the bullets on. So the boys started - they were there - I used to be poking around and, you know, used to look around, xxx.

You didn't have to work?

No, I didn't work, no, no, I didn't work.

Did you want to work?

No, I didn't want to work, to go out and milk the cows, no (laughs).

That's understandable.

They'd take a bullet - take a bullet out - and empty the powder out of the case, put the bullet back in and stick it in. They'd do about four or five like that. See, put the powder in somewhere in something and put it in their pocket and take it away. I wouldn't like to say how many machine-gun belts they did like that. I used to watch them - and he'd pull any out - 'Anyone coming, or not?' - and you'd give a 'hu, hu' - cough - or something like that, and, of course, they'd know there was someone about.

Well, that went on for, oh, I suppose two or three weeks. And I was poking around - I was nosing around one day and I came across a lot of Lewis machine-guns. And I said to xxx, god! he's got a few Lewis guns in there. And the bloke says, 'Eh?' - 'Lot of Lewis machine-guns' - 'Oh,' he said, 'we'll fix that'. And there's a little spring in the Lewis machine-gun called a pall spring.

Called a ...?

Pall - P-A-L-L - pall spring. Once that's out the gun is useless. So one or two of them had had a bit of experience - this one particular chap was a machine-gunner, and others had had a bit of experience - not general machine-gunners. Anyhow, I kept xxx on him; he took all the pall springs out - there was about thirty or forty Lewis guns in there, all ready to go into the line - took all those pall springs out, come up and put them down the toilet. Those guns were made useless then. They (the prisoners) were doing a bit of good even there.

That's interesting. Were the men there mainly Australians, or were they English as well?

Oh, there was Tommies, Australians, Newfoundlanders ... was there any Canadians? - no there were no Canadians.

I suppose the Newfoundlanders are Canadians.

Yes, well, he's practically a Canadian, isn't he?

That's right.

Newfoundlanders, Tommies, Australians - that was all, I think.

Any French?

Oh, just a minute, I'll come to them. But that was in our particular camp.

This is at Denain?

At Denain, yes.

Whereabouts were you living in Denain?

Oh, see, this big factory, they had a hospital of their own, and there was one - two - three - three big wards - separate wards - and a great big administration block, with surgery in it.

How many beds would there have been in each ward?

Oh ...

Fifty?

Oh, no - I don't know how many, but we had these bunks, you know.

Were you living in the hospital, were you?

We were all in this hospital - it had a big barbed wire fence all round it.

It wasn't being used as a hospital?

No, no, just as a prisoner of war camp. In there I used to be poking around, walking around - of course, there were Jerries all over the place as a rule. Occasionally sometimes you might get away on your own, and I did one day, and I found a little cask, about this long.

About two and a half feet long.

So high.

About a foot high.

Wonder what's in that! So anyhow, I looked around and I got straw; I said, What's this? Got a hole and cork bung in the top.

It's like a wine cask your talking about?

Yes, like a wine cask. And I got a hole in it - got a nail and I bored a hole in it, and I put the straw in - schnapps! - so I got free schnapps.

Did you take it away with you?

No, I just left the darn ... I put the straw away, don't worry. I told the boys where it was, you see, and occasionally odd ones would go in and have a bit of a go at it. Until one day one of the German soldiers came along and he is smelling over the bung, you see - he looked around and he got a straw, but an officer came in and caught him and he got sent up the line. He got the blame.

The trouble was, you couldn't get baths and that sort of thing, like you should do; you couldn't get a change of clothes much.

Were you still in your uniform?

I was then. There were plenty of Red Cross parcels about, but I hadn't got any. I got what they

call scabies - do you know what scabies are?

It's a skin disease.

Skin disease, through ...

Malnutrition.

Malnutrition and not being able to keep clean sort of business, like you should do. And I got sent up to Mons, a prisoner of war hospital in Mons, and I was very fortunate in as much as there was one of my battalion chaps in there, and he was in another camp to what I was, and he was getting his Red Cross parcels. And then there was a chap from out of - what was it? - 15th Battalion, was it? - anyhow, I think he came from Victoria.

Perhaps the 14th.

Yeah - anyhow, I'm not sure on that exactly, but I'm pretty sure he came from ... and he was getting Red Cross parcels alright.

Do you remember his name?

No, I couldn't remember his name, no. But anyhow, on top of the German ration that we used to get, these boys used to make oat porridge in the morning - flaked oats, you know - they'd always make a big pan.

That was your nickname, was it, [Pan]?

Pan, yes - xxx xxx. Of course, I picked up, you see, and then I could - there they put you into a hot bath and washed you with soft soap, then they'd tar you all over, a mixture of some ointment or something or other, with Stockholm tar in it.

Stockholm tar?

You'd change colour - I'd be right from here, down, black.

From the neck down?

Yes - and that cleared things up, you see.

This is for the scabies?

Yes.

So you had the scabies all over your arms?

Crikey, all down here and down my leg.

What's the effect of it? What does it do?

Well, it's just like if ... if you had it really bad, like I had it, it's just like a running sore. Both me arms here was all just like - what will I say? - water running out of them.

That's awful.

Oh, yeah, dreadful. Of course, this stockholm tar and this other ointment dries it up - cleans it up. And then when they finish giving you that, you can put that on for a week, and then they'll take it out and give you a good warm bath, you see - clean it off and have a look.

Are these German orderlies doing this?

Oh, yes, they were Germans. Well, then I was up there for about three weeks, I suppose - yes, a good three weeks - and I was sent back to Denain. When I got back there I got thirty Red Cross parcels a month - thirty!

Thirty?

Yeah, all mine.

Do you remember the month?

Yes, that was in November.

November 1917?

1917 - no - yes, 1917 - yeah, that was in November 1917.

They must have all been building up somehow.

Oh, yes.

What did you do with them all?

With those? Oh, they kept me going for a long time - never touched German food after - no, never touched German food after.

How weak were you at that time?

Oh ...

Did you lose much weight?

Oh, yes, I was down - one particular time I was down to six stone.

What was your usual weight at that time?

Oh, round about nine stone - nine-seven - oh, yes. And then when I came back, after the war, I was just over ten stone; that's from the Red Cross parcels (laughs).

They were marvellous, weren't they?

Oh, they did a - you'd get a box about ...

About a foot long.

That wide.

About six inches wide.

And about that high - and about ten or eleven pounds worth of xxx.

About six inches high.

Smokes, whatever have you - I smoked a little bit, but not that much. Oh, no, you got plenty.

When you were captured - we'll go through some of this again - you were captured by the Germans in Noreiul?

Yeah - not in - we were nearly in his front line.

So between Noreiul and Bullecourt?

Yeah.

Going up towards the hill?

Going up towards Bullecourt.

Who actually captured you? Was it the Germans from Noreiul?

The Germans themselves.

From Noreiul?

Yeah - ho, he came out of the front line.

As well as from the Hindenburg Line?

Yeah - no, he came out of the front line, just the front of Noreiul - no, not the HIndenburg Line.

They weren't that far back at that time?

This was only the ... we were to take this particular line, that was to be the hop-off line for the Hindenburg Line, see. It would be from here to - where? - oh, nearly up to the corner up there. You know where you turn the corner to come down here.

That's about two hundred metres away.

Yeah, that's right - be about that distance - it was a sunken road, and we fortified it. Well, the 51st Battalion was supposed to have taken that particular - on our right - after we'd gone up, got rid of Noreiul, they were to come up and take the rest of the road on our right. Well, they never got there because the machine-guns drove them back - they never got there. Well, it left us in the air.

How many men were there with you at that time?

Oh, about thirty or forty, I suppose.

That's about a platoon.

Yes, a good platoon.

Who was in charge of the platoon - was it Max [Gore]?

Max Gore was in charge of that particular section at this stage, yes. And he said to me - xxx - look, that was way over in the distance we could see a little low bank about that high.

About a metre high.

Because there might be a trench there. He said, 'What about it?' - I said, 'You reckon you can get there?' - he said, 'I don't know' - I said, 'Will we give it a go?' - he said, 'Come on [Tam], we'll go'. So he and I shot over - we got behind it, but you couldn't get ... It was only - and then there was a machine-gun playing over your back all the time. You had no hope in the wide world - no hope, none whatsoever. Two or three others came over then, but they were just the same - you couldn't shift, if you shifted you were gone.

So there was something like thirty or forty of you, all captured at the one time?

That's ... yeah, including the company commander.

That was Max Gore?

No - Todd.

Captain Todd?

Leslie Todd - Captain Leslie Todd.

He was captured there too?

He was captured there too, yes. And then they went around and blamed him after, some of the heads that made the mistake. It wasn't his xxx, it was their mistake - as I'm telling you, they didn't send a big enough party to mop up the village.

What was your reaction to being captured?

Oh, I didn't know what reaction to have (laughs) really.

Just didn't expect it, I suppose?

Oh, no, you wouldn't, no. Didn't know what reaction to have altogether - it was just a peculiar sort of a feeling.

What did the Germans make you do when they first captured you?

Oh, they didn't make us do anything, they just marched us for God knows - we never stopped all day - with these blinkin' Uhlans - never stopped all day.

Did you have a speciality at that time?

Oh, yes, I was in charge of all gas in the Battalion - oh, yes, I was in charge of all gas in the Battalion.

What did those duties involve?

Well, if we had to put over gas, I was responsible for smoke bombs. We used to have a canister, oh, I suppose about that long ...

About a foot long.

... and about as big round as that.

About three inches round.

Full of smoke, you see.

How would you fire them?

Oh, just ... if I remember rightly, we used to pull a [cork] out or something, and then throw them, you see.

Pull a pin out and throw them?

Pin out and throw them, see.

Like a hand grenade, only made smoke?

Yes, only there was no explosion, you see, the smoke would all ooze out - leave a hole and out would come all the smoke.

And that would act as a screen?

And then that would act as a screen, and then the gas would be allowed through, see - let the gas through - only the wind had to be in the right direction, of course.

So there would be gas in them as well?

Oh, no, no, no - there were cylinders for gas. But then they were from way back, behind the lines, responsible for that sort of business, making the gas cylinders up. And then if there was a gas attack, I was responsible for everything in the Battalion - which I did have on one occasion.

What did you do?

Well, see, I was one of these sort that if I had responsibility like that, I always slept [with my] sentry, at his feet - always. If there was anything going wrong, he would just give me a nudge - '[Dan], there's something doing'. And this particular morning - we'd been - it was after we came - came back, we'd been - we came out of the Somme at the end of September, and then we were out - went into a town in Belgium - I can never think of the name of it.

One Sunday, on church parade, 50th Battalion would move off immediately the service was over, and go an pack up all your dunnage, and go down such and such a place - road, or something - and wait. Went down there. Along come a stream of busses - the first time we had a bus ride anywhere - and we were taken down to a place called St [Ohmar] - you know of it?

Yes.

Well, just out of St Ohmar was an officers' school called [Whisks] Army School.

What was it called?

Whisks.

It's an abbreviation, is it, or an acronym?

Mm?

How do you spell that?

Oh, I couldn't tell you, it's French (laughs) - I wouldn't know - Whisk Army School - and there were junior officers and sergeants that are going for promotion, you see.

Well, we were down there for, oh, nearly five weeks, I suppose. I had nothing to do down there, but occasional guard, perhaps - couple of guards and that sort of thing - and then I'd take up the boys, I'd take them up to the school, and then I'd sit down and wait till they'd finished with them and take them back home again. They were there just for the - we were there for the benefit of school, you see, they used the boys for instruction work and all that sort of business. They had a sergeant-majors' mess, and sergeants' mess there - go and get an [oven] if you wanted it, or anything like that. I used to take the boys up.

When the return came - not always, you know - when return came - but I wasn't the only NCO (laughs), wait until they were ready, finished with them, then the days' parade was over and then I'd take them back to the Battalion again. We came back - went from there - went back to Flers - xxx [Fler].

Well, we went to Flers and always slept - had a sentry on. We used to have a pole sticking up with an eighteen-pounder case shell - casement - you know what it is? - xxx.

The brass casing.

A lump of iron down below. And the sentry come to me, he said - give me a nudge - he said, 'Gee, there's some funny shells coming over' - I said, 'Funny shells?' - he said, 'Yeah, funny, they make a funny noise'. I popped up; 'Oh,' I said, 'yes, I know what they are'. He said, 'What are they?' - I said, 'They are gas shells, get your gas mask on, mate'. So I went along and I stirred my company up - it was A Company - and I went through - there was the 13th Battalion alongside. I went through them and I said, 'Where's your officer?' - he said, 'He's in his dugout here' - I said, 'Well, tell him there's a gas attack on, will you?' - they said, 'Thanks a lot', and I buzzed off, I had to go over to another company. I got halfway to the other company and a runner comes tearing up to me - 'Corporal, you've got report to Battalion Headquarters immediately' - xxx 'What's going wrong now?' - and I was going round warning everybody, you see, and getting things moving.

I goes down there and they are there - a [flopping] colonel and his staff, down a flopping great big forty-foot hole - dugout - and a great big blanket hanging down the front door. My two officers were gassed that morning, which shouldn't have been.

So it was a gas attack?

Yes - oh, it was a gas attack alright, started at three o'clock in the morning, and went till seven. You can imagine - three thousand [scouts].

END OF TAPE THREE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE THREE - SIDE B

What kind of a gas was it, do you know?

Phosgene.

What happened to the officers?

No, that's the only one I was in - ever had charge of - ever had anything to do with.

What happened to the officers down the dugout?

They were sleeping, you see, it was in B Company; they were asleep.

I see, this was in the 50th Battalion?

50th Battalion, yes.

And they were gassed, were they?

Yes, they were gassed - both dead then - oh, it gets them in the finish.

What was it like wearing those gas masks?

Oh, cow of a thing.

It was awful - dreadful.

By Jove, they were life savers.

Dreadful to have such a weapon.

They were life savers, oh, yes. That was after Denain, a party of us went up to a place called Conde.

How do you spell that?

Did you hear of Conde? Well, I'll tell you where it is, it's on the Belgian-French border. It used to be an old fortified town years, and years, and years ago. We were there and the boys were working in a factory there. Well, there was - oh, I wouldn't like to say how many - there was one - two - three - four - well there must have been about nine or ten sergeants and corporals with us.

These are all Australians?

No, English - all mixtured. They said to us one day, 'Going to send you into Germany'. Alright, send us into Germany, we don't care. We weren't doing anything, we weren't even allowed to go out to work - one was, an English - I'll tell you what happened to him too presently - he was a corporal, he went out one day, I'll tell you what happened to him.

They said on such and such a day you get on a [train] to a place called Friedrichsfeld - did you ever hear of Friedrichsfeld?

Yes.

There was nothing there, only a railway station, and this big prisoner of war camp, you see. It would hold about - oh, I don't know how many thousand troops, somewhere about forty or fifty thousand troops - it was only a base camp, you see - and they sent us there, about thirty of us. We picked up another crowd of NCOs from another camp.

So it was all NCOs that went?

All went to Friedrichsfeld - I don't know where the others came from, I couldn't tell you - but we went to Friedrichsfeld.

This is on the train?

Went on this train to Friedrichsfeld.

Whereabouts were you - Conde or whatever you call it?

Conde.

How do you spell that?

C-O-N-D-E.

Oh, yes, I've heard of it.

C-O-N-D-E, as far as I can remember.

I can check that kind of thing. And this would be about December 1917, would it?

Yes.

Before Christmas?

Oh, yes - no, 1918.

It was 1918?

1918, oh, yes - oh, this was 1918.

When would it have been in 1918?

Well, it would be about September 1918 - oh, yes, quite late in September, beginning of October - end of September - that's right, because he was getting a thrashing then.

So you were working in France. How long were you in Germany?

In Germany? Oh, only a few weeks.

A couple of months, before the end of the war?

Yes, that's all.

So you spent most of your captivity in France?

Captivity in France, that's right.

Well, that's unusual because most of the men went to Germany.

Most of them, yes, I know. A lot of the chaps I was with in Denain, they went in to Germany too - oh, different ones.

I can tell you another one xxx. A chap that was with me, taken prisoner the same day. I'll tell you what happened to him. That's a good one - really is a good one (laughs).

Anyhow, we were in there - I got another thirty parcels when we got to Friedrichsfeld - another thirty.

So you got your parcels more or less all at once?

All at once (laughs). Well, you see, they shifted from Denain, or they'd have been sent out to there, see. Of course, he was getting a thrashing then, and our people were getting nearer, and nearer, and nearer. Well, he wouldn't transport anything by train, you see, not there. But it was a different thing when we got into Germany. All that stuff came through Holland; all the Red Cross parcels came through Holland, and they were put in Holland trucks, Holland Government seal on the trucks, and they had one man at Friedrichsfeld that could open them - a sergeant major - he was the only man that could open them, he had the ...

Authority to open the waggons?

Yes.

He was an Englishman, was he?

An Englishman, yes - he was an Englishman, and he was the only one who could open them. If Jerry had opened it - of course, what would it have caused? - it would have been bad for him, wouldn't it. So anyhow, I got another thirty when I got there - I had xxx of tucker.

Do you know - you'd be surprised - do you know, when that war finished, there was enough Red Cross parcels there to feed 40,000 troops for a month.

This was at Friedrichsfeld?

Red Cross parcels. When the war finished there was enough food in there - Red Cross parcels - to feed 40,000 troops for a month. And the Red Cross sent word, give them to the Russians - there was a few Belgians there - not Belgians, Serbians - and they said give it to them if they want it. What they didn't get rid of that way they put in a big heap and burnt.

Did they?

Yes, they wouldn't let the Germans have it, they said burn it, destroy it. (Laughs) So now you know, you've got something that a lot of people didn't know.

No, I didn't know about that.

Anyhow, on the day of Armistice, of course, everything was thrown open - gates were thrown open, guards were taken off, and everything was thrown open. We had two barbed wire fences around the camp.

In between the two barbed wire fences was an electric fence - 2,000 Volts - going right around the camp, and it was about that far off the ground.

It was an electric wire, was it?

A fence! an electric fence! about that high.

It was about a metre high.

About a metre high.

So there were actually three fences?

There was a live cable on the bottom, and a live one on the top, and all this was interlaced with sort of - well, I suppose you'd call it pig netting - if you know what pig netting is.

I've got an idea.

You know what wire netting is?

Yes.

Only pig netting has got a bigger hole, something like this, see. That sort of thing. Of course, the whole thing was electrified.

I didn't know that they electrified any of the camp fences.

Oh, yes. And then this other fence - two barbed wire fences - wire about that far apart.

About three or four inches.

Ten foot high.

Couldn't get over that. And they had the sentry posts?

Then they had the guards on the gates and patrolling around outside. Oh, yes, no worry!

You went into Germany about September 1918?

Yes.

From Denain, and you were in Friedrichsfeld when the war ended?

That's right, on 11 November, yes.

What was the reaction?

Oh, jump for joy. Of course, they knew it was coming to them, everything was rearranged prior to the Armistice - everything.

You were expecting it, were you?

Oh, well, we knew things weren't - because of the way the Germans were acting, you see. Now, when I went into Germany - and we knew because when we left Denain in September, our people were jumping at him, and we knew we could - we've seen his trench mortars and all that sort of thing nicking back - see, going back - instead of going out, coming back. There was something happening somewhere, you see. At a night-time you could hear rumble, rumble - it was artillery coming back. We knew that things was moving, of course, naturally. Well, then we went to Conde and they wanted something done there in the factory. Well, this is what happened in that particular factory.

There was a little English chap - I couldn't tell you what regiment he was in - but he was smoking a cigarette in this factory. And the English corporal was only just standing three feet away from him. A German officer came up and smacked him across the face, knocked the cigarette and everything flying. And this corporal - he wore a ring - and he hit, and he hit the German and split his nose - oh, yeah. Well, of course, he was arrested.

Well, prior - just shortly after that, there were two American airmen brought in - they wouldn't give their [parole] so they shut them in the cell alongside this English bloke.

They wouldn't get their ...?

Parole.

What's that?

Well, state that they wouldn't attempt to escape.

So they were shut up with ...

They were shut up with this little Tommy bloke. Well, they were up in a two storey building - it was joined to our camp. And the slate roofs - I don't know if you've ever seen them, they are slate roofs, and, of course, the slots are tied down to about this - about an inch, or perhaps and inch by three-quarters, and then they're sort of laced down and tied onto that. They used to use the same conveniences as we used, you see.

This is the Germans?

No, the prisoners - Germans, oh, no way! - prisoners. And this little Tommy bloke said - just left a note in the latrine - get me a bit of a band saw if you can. So the boys fossicked around and they got a bit about that long.

About a foot long.

Broken band saw. Well, do you know what they did? They sawed through the slate roof, got a hole in a corner, and down below in that corner is a dog's kennel with a dog in it, and a downpipe. They shot down that downpipe, onto the dog's kennel - and there was a little bit of a canal at the back, oh, I suppose it would be about eight or ten feet wide - and the two Yankee officers - pilots - and this Tommy corporal, they got away, and away they went.

Well, I don't know what happened to the Yankee officers, I suppose they got caught eventually, but the Belgian people - this is at Conde - and the Belgian people would go out of their way to help you, not like the froggies who'd darn near give you away.

Would they?

Oh, don't talk to me about Frenchmen, I've had a bar of them. These Belgian people would go out of their way to help you, and they helped him, and he got up, and he got caught on the Dutch border, just as xxx Germany. If the patrol hadn't come along he'd have been in Holland, and it's just unfortunate they caught him. And they brought him back and shot him into Friedrichsfeld because it was only twenty kilometres away from Holland - right? Came in there - of course, he

was getting dickey then - this was in, oh, well into October.

You mean things were going badly for the Germans?

Oh, they were going really badly - this is in October. And he came in and they shot him in amongst us. So we told him, 'Go [sick]' - right. And the chap in charge of the sick bay was a Frenchman, and we told him what had happened. He said, 'Leave it to me - leave it to me'. He never, ever saw a doctor. Armistice came and we shot him away with the fist batch, so the German got his nose clipped all for nothing.

So they didn't get back at him?

No, he didn't get back at him, no.

It was the Tommy corporal who was smoking the cigarette, was it?

He wasn't, he was just an ordinary private - he was a private xxx smoking a cigarette.

And why was it that the German officer hit the corporal?

The German officer hit the private. The corporal, he let xxx.

He went up and hit the German? It was a German officer, was it?

Yes, German officer, yes.

Did that happen much?

No, no.

Were you ever assaulted?

No, no, never. But I'll tell you. I had a chap over there that I knew, chap by the name of Murphy.

What was his Christian name?

Jack.

Jack Murphy.

Yes.

Whereabouts did he come from?

Oh, he came from Adelaide.

What did he do?

Oh, he used to work in one of the factories down in Adelaide - oh, I can't think - as a matter of fact - no, I just can't think of it - one of the factories, I'm not sure what it was, I wouldn't like to - I might make a mistake.

That doesn't matter.

Anyhow, Murphy was sent into Germany, and they gave him a job in an officers' mess, as a waiter, and general [fractotem] sort of business, you know.

General ...?

Fractotem - you'd do anything round about - wait on the tables.

I see, that's Latin, is it?

(Laughs) Eh?

It's a new one on me, that one.

Is it? ... Odd job man. Well, anyhow, he got sick and tired of it. He didn't know how he could work it, and he was about as thick as that. He was as thin as a rake, one of those thin - build - just one of those sort. He looked as though any time he might - I don't know, he was one of those blokes, you couldn't tell his age sort of business, although he couldn't have been there unless he was within the age limit, you see - he'd be a bloke in his forties anyway - early ...

Would he, he'd be in his forties?

Early forty.

And he was very thin?

Oh, he was as thin as a rake.

Was that because he'd not been eating properly?

Oh, no, no, it was just his build. And he got sick of this. Well, in that officers' mess there were two sets of utensils; there was an old set that was a bit rusty, and a new set, you see. Well, of course, he had to set the tables and that sort of thing, and one day he set them all with the rusty ones. So the sergeant came in and, oh, he went off the top - xxx very sorry sergeant, can't see too good - 'I can't see too good' - and then he picked them all up and laid the good ones out again.

And then two or three days after he was coming in with plates of soup, and banged up against an officer and spilled soup all down his back, full of apologies - 'I can't see too good - I can't see too good'.

Well, they thought they'd try him out, they thought, well, it's about time, we'll have to do something, and try him out. So he had to walk past - there was an officer, say, standing over there, and you had to stand over here and walk past and salute him. Instead of Murphy walking past, Murphy walked away over here, and didn't salute at all, you see - didn't see him, he said. So they sent him up to a place called [Archen] - have you heard of Archen?

Yes.

Well, that was the clearing depot. If you got past through Archen you got into Holland, you see. So they sent 'Murph' up, and he was to go through his final exam to go into Holland. He said, as they put that flamin' stethoscope on me, I'm back in camp again. So he stood up, the doctor came along with the stethoscope to put on him, and Murphy fell on him - he didn't worry - 'Finish - finish - good'. He was in England before the war was over. Oh, he was a bird.

He was telling us - he came home on the same boat - and look, he had us in fits of laughter.

What did you come home on? Was it the [Mobassa]?

No - yes, that's right.

My grandfather came back on that.

Did he?

All the prisoners, I think - or most of them - came back on the Mobassa.

Oh, yes, there was a lot of prisoners. My brother went from Bombay - he went away from here on the Queen Mary, and then they transferred from there on smaller boats at Bombay, and he went across to Egypt on the Mobassa.

(Break in interview)

And what happened to you, the first night after you were captured? You went back to a village somewhere, didn't you?

Yes - oh, we just camped, that's all - couldn't tell you exactly now what it was - a barn or something. We were in a village, I can't think of the name of it, it's gone out of my mind - it wasn't much xxx, I suppose. It's hard to remember the names of all these places. We were there for about three or four days, I suppose, in this one particular spot.

Did they interrogate you?

Some of them they did, they didn't do me - but some they did. They did the sergeant - he never told them anything - they never got any satisfaction from him. He was asking what our colonel's name was, he said, 'I don't know, he's only just come' - he'd been with us for months. We were awake up to them. They tried to find out all these sort of business. He came from Queensland - Salisbury.

That was his name, was it?

Salisbury. I always called him the Dugout King.

That was a pretty common term, wasn't it?

Dugout King. And yet, there's a photograph of him in the War Memorial as an intrepid soldier. Now, you tell me where man, when we first went into the Somme - it was in November - this was in November 19 ... That's right, it was after we came back from xxx.

It was 1916.

Yes, '16 - we went into the Somme and it was slush, mud, what have you, anywhere and everywhere. And the brigadier came along one day to Battalion Headquarters, he said, 'I'm going up the line to have a look at your battalion'. Salisbury was in a bloomin' hole about thirty or forty feet deep - that was Battalion Headquarters. So they came up the line. 'Oh,' he says, 'I'd no idea that you was in such a mess - no idea' - he'd never been up to see them, (couldn't) care two flippin' hoops. He wouldn't have come up, only the brigadier told him he was going up and he had to come, you see.

There was a little bit of that, I know.

Yes, well, then again, here was this gas attack that was on, see. He wasn't worried. Why did he send for me and tell me to come immediately when I was just about finished the job - see what I

mean? - and he was down a great hole about forty feet deep.

(Break in interview)

... [poem] - D-A-U-X.

Yes, that's Salisbury xxx - when you attacked it.

Yes, he was back there with Battalion Headquarters in a hole, and he had a company of troops around him.

I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll start with Fort MacDonald again. You went into Fort MacDonald and you were there for about ten days?

That's right.

What did you do?

Nothing, just sat in this room xxx - nothing at all.

What do you remember about that time? Is there anything that you particularly recall?

Well, nothing in particular. I mean, it was a dreary bloomin' time - xxx time - because there was just a party of you, about forty or so, stuck in this bloomin' - what would you call it? - barracks, whatever it was.

It was like a dungeon, wasn't it?

Yes. Just sit - stayed there. You couldn't do anything, you couldn't get out, you couldn't get out, the place was locked, and the guards were walking up and down in the ...

In the corridor?

Outside - well, it was sort of rooms off, sort of a - I don't know what you'd call it - be about easy half the width of this room, I suppose.

That's about six metres or so?

Yes.

That's the width of the corridor?

Somewhere about that, yeah. Of course, they had to bring guns in and get them into these rooms, you see. Oh, no, just did nothing, till they came along and took you out to go way out - and somebody telling them xxx xxx something or other. Then they'd come along and take a party out.

Did the Germans say anything to you about why you were put in Fort MacDonald?

No. The only thing is, why we was put in there - do you want to know why? 'Cause he was that damn frightened of his xxx, that's why he put them there. Well, that's a fact - my word, there's no kidding about that - no.

I thought the reason you were put in there was because the English were working German prisoners behind the lines.

Ah, that's the biggest lie out. I never saw a German prisoner working behind the lines - they were working on roads, but not behind the line. No, that was in cooee of the line - no fear.

I'll tell you an incident that did happen. There was one of our chaps coming back on leave, and he got off the train at a place called Albert - you've heard of Albert?

Yes.

And he was walking over to a village called [Bewla] - have you heard of Bewla?

Yes.

Well, it used to be one of the towns that we used to billet in, and that sort of business. And this chappie had his pack up and his rifle, and he was walking, and there was a German prisoner working on the roads. And he stood up on his shovel - whatever he was doing - and laughed at him. The bloke dropped his pack and gave him a floppin' hiding. Now that's ... and then he got into trouble for interfering with a prisoner of war. And I'd have given him a hiding - done the same thing.

What did the German do? He made fun of the Australian?

Yeah - laughing at him - he laughed at him.

Was he actually carrying his pack and his rifle?

Yes - he resented it, wouldn't you? I think so, oh, yes.

What was the story you were going to tell me about the person who got captured with you? Somebody who was captured with you ...

Max Gore?

No, I don't think it was Max, I think it was someone else who was captured with you.

Somebody else - now, who? - oh, I say, there was ...

END OF TAPE THREE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE A

Identification: Tape 4.

When we got into Holland we discarded our prison uniforms, you see, and we were all issued

with British uniforms - British, not Australian - British uniforms, and we had to go back to England in these things - long bloomin' trousers and ... You saw the jacket of an English (soldier)?

Yes.

Well, we didn't like them.

I know that was the case.

Anyhow, we got fitted out with them, and then there was doctors and nurses, and goodness knows what. We went to Rotterdam, you see. We were put on a - oh, some sort of fishing boat or something or other - only a small thing - and shot across the North Sea to Hull. Anyway, if you had a cold or coughed, or anything like that, they were down on you, these nurses and doctors, down on you like a ton of bricks.

They looked after you?

Oh, looked after (you) alright. But by this time old Kaiser Bill was in xxx in Holland, you see - he'd cleared out. Just as well he did because they'd ... I know a German sergeant - their food was - what would you call it? - [urzat].

Urzat?

Yeah, food. And you couldn't get coffee anywhere, and all they used to do was burn barley - burnt barley, that was their coffee. And then there was other things they couldn't get too - food.

This German sergeant came along after the Armistice, he was - just before he went away - and he said, 'Look what I've been fighting for! - burnt barley' - he could speak English - he said, 'Burnt barley - that's all - burnt barley - that's what I've been fighting for'.

That was at Friedrichsfeld, was it?

Yeah, that was at Friedrichsfeld.

One of the guards?

He was a sergeant of the guards.

And he came along and he said to you, 'This is what I've been fighting for'?

'That's what I've been fighting for'.

What, did he hold out some barley or something?

Yeah, he had a cup of coffee - 'That's what I've been fighting for'. And yet we had one sergeant in Denain, he was Saxon.

He was one of the guards?

He was in charge of the camp xxx - the sergeant - in charge of the camp, you see - he was an officer - he was a Saxon too. They have quite a leniency towards British troops - xxx Saxon - British troops come from Saxon - British people come from Saxony in Germany.

Yeah, Anglo Saxon.

Anglo Saxons, you see. He was very, very good. So they made up a parcel - he was going home on leave - they made up a parcel for him from their Red Cross.

Did they?

The poor old chap looked - you never saw anything so pathetic in your life, he cried and cried.

Did he?

Yes - he cried and cried. 'Oh,' he said, 'my family, it will be terrific when I go home and take all

that food'. He said they hadn't seen anything like it for years.

Did the Germans steal anything from the parcels, that you knew of?

No.

Any Red Cross food?

No, there was nothing they could xxx. The only thing they did was, towards the end ... See, I don't know if you know it, but in Europe they harvest the xxx - see farmers got harvesting, and then they'd dig a cavity in the ground, cover it with straw on the bottom, put all their potatoes and that sort of thing in there, cover them with straw, and then pile dirt over them. They keep them that way, you see. Well, the Germans knew that, and they had one in camp in Friedrichsfeld. Anybody caught cooking potatoes was up for it, you see, he was liable. But British troops used to get a parcel with potatoes in it.

Fresh potatoes?

Yes, fresh potatoes, yeah. And when you got that parcel you showed it to your German officer, and he wrote you out a permit to cook potatoes; but you couldn't cook potatoes otherwise.

I didn't know that.

Oh, yes. But going into Friedrichsfeld from France, we had to change trains at Cologne. We had to wait about, oh, a couple of hours, I suppose, to catch a train to go to xxx - round trip and go east as far as the Dutch border, you see - we passed Friedrichsfeld.

This is when you went into France - into Germany after France?

Yes, when we went into Germany - xxx NCOs, that's all. And when we got into Cologne, they took us into the canteen - German canteen - there was beer - and they drink a lot of lager beer, you know - light beer they drink - tremendous amount of it. They gave us xxx - xxx - xxx hiding (laughs).

And what was the food in the canteen like? Was it good food?

We never troubled about the food, as far as we were concerned - we didn't want it, we had our own.

You just didn't bother? After you got Red Cross parcels, you didn't bother with the German food?

No, xxx touched it. And do you know, on top of that, we used to get three loves of white bread from Switzerland - these round loaves, about as big round as that, and they'd be about that long.

About eighteen inches long and - the round loaves?

Yes - two one week and one the next.

That was each?

That's each person. So you can imagine how we were living, and here they were, on what we called [schwarzes brot] - black bread.

Were they envious of you?

I don't know, they probably were, but there you are (laughs) - they never showed it anyway.

What else would the Germans give you to eat? When you were working behind the lines, what were you eating there?

Eating? German food.

What was it?

Black bread, sauerkraut, ground-up acorns - that's it - grind them all up into a sort of a - almost a

powder, and then stick them - they were never mixed with water - they wouldn't mix with water - and you'd have to feed yourself.

You'd have to grind up the acorns yourself?

No, they'd grind them.

They ground them up, did they?

Oh, yeah, they'd grind them.

That was your coffee, was it?

No! mid-day meal - and the sauerkraut was a bowl full.

What was that like to eat?

Oh, well, I couldn't come at the stuff - it's only pickled cabbage.

Did the French people give you anything to eat?

French people? Well, occasionally you'd get one of those loaves of bread - you know, one of those big, round loaves like this, and about that thick.

About two inches thick and about six inches across, or so?

Oh, six inches! cripes, as wide as that maybe.

About a foot or more?

Oh, yeah. Occasionally the Red Cross would come to xxx xxx - all came through the Red Cross - they'd come to xxx with these loaves of bread.

What did the French people give you though? Did they give you anything from what they had?

No. Sometimes they would - all depends - some villages, some of them weren't too bad - but all they thought of was what they could put in their pockets - yes. No, go into a village - all the Australians - up would go the price a bit. Well, that's it. Poor British Tommy was getting two bob a day - see, that was his pay, two bob a day. We were getting six bob, you see. I was drawing ten bob as a matter of fact.

Yes, you were a corporal.

Yes - sergeant, twelve and six, and a sergeant major about - what did he get? - about eighteen bob or so - a first lieutenant got about a guinea. Oh, no, as soon as the Australians come in, up went the prices of everything. Oh, they were wonderful. We had to fight for their bloomin' country.

Where were you working on these gun pits? When you left Fort MacDonald, whereabouts did you go?

Well ... now, that's just ... Oh, I'll tell you where, a place called Douai - just out of Douai - what was the name of it?

There's a place called [Market].

...

These are certainly places you went because you list them in your statement.

xxx.

Market - that's my handwriting - Solesmes - S-O-L-E-S-M-E-S - and [Lequesnoi].

Lequesnoi, yes, I was in there, yes - yes, I've been to Lequesnoi. There was a place just out of

Douai - I just can't think of the name, so many of the bloomin' things.

That's where you went when you were digging gun pits, was it?

Er ... yes, out there, that's right. We used to march about two or three miles to get to the job.

Whereabouts were you quartered - where were you living at that time?

Oh, they had some place or another, I don't know, I suppose it was part of a French property, or something or other, you see. It was a brick place, I can remember it quite well - it was a brick place, and there were no windows in it, only one door. I can see it now. That's where we were camped.

Did it have barbed wire around it?

No.

They locked you in?

Locked you in and had the sentry outside, yeah.

How many would there have been in there?

Oh, it was quite a big room - as big as this - a lot bigger - yes, as big as this.

Would there have been twenty or thirty?

Oh, yes, yes, quite.

And how were you sleeping - on the floor?

On the floor.

No beds?

No (laughs).

Any blankets?

Blankets? You'd get a straw mattress when you got into some places, or you'd get what they call bunk beds - you know, a bed here and a bed over there. You'd get a straw mattress probably - if you are lucky.

Did you have any friends at that time? Who was with you?

Oh, there were all sorts - no particular - well, as I say, chaps that I knew, some out of my company, and that sort of thing. They were all friends as far as that goes - I mean, they are all mates.

Can you remember the names of any of them?

Oh ... hard to remember. I've got some here from Dr Freeman, but I can't remember the names of them.

That's okay, don't worry about that.

There are some that I know very well.

What was the job digging gun pits? How were they done?

Well, like this. In France they dig - you'd be driving along a country road somewhere, and you'll find a great big patch like that, dug out of the side of the road.

A big square?

Bit square cut out of the side of the road. Well, they put - in this front part of it here, facing the

font line - they'd put a bigger piece out like that, see - put a gun in there.

Separate squared areas?

Yeah - perhaps three or four guns in there.

This is out of the side of a sunken road?

Dig those things out, you see.

There were wells either side, were there, of the ...?

Yeah, well, they'd be, oh, wider than this - double the width of this room.

So they'd be about, what, ten, fifteen metres wide?

Getting on that way - they were quite wide.

How long would they take to dig?

Oh, by the time you've got them dug out and take the guns in, it would take a day or two - oh, yes, they'd take a day or two.

So you were working on a shovel, were you?

Me?

Yes.

I didn't do too much - no. One time we had to dig some pits alongside a railway station at Denain, and I went up with the boys. We dug these pits - we wondered what they were for - there was just a hole in the ground, and then they'd dig a bit of a trench right up the middle of it, they were like two shelves, one on either side. And they'd put straw in them, on these shelves,

inside, and the Germans covered them over with - we didn't, they did.

Covered them over with dirt?

To make them weatherproof, you see - rain proof.

They put a roof over it, did they?

Put a roof over it, yes.

This is with the straw?

No, oh, no; this is some sort of material they had. Anyhow, they'd just got them finished, and we came up the next day - didn't know what to do or anything else, we were told to go up there, went up there. Train pulled in, full of ammunition. A German officer came along and he said, 'Unload them and put them down there' - I said, 'Not on your life' - I said, 'No'. And he looked at me and said, 'Why?'. I said, 'Look, mate, we're not going to kill our own men just to suit you' - see. And he looked at me. I said, 'Your men are not allowed to touch anything like that over that side'. He shot us back to the camp - 'Get out - get out'. But the Russian did it - the Russian prisoners of war, they did it all - an extra loaf of bread a day.

They didn't get any Red Cross parcels, did they?

No, no - extra loaf of bread a day, they did it - and they unloaded it and loaded it up, all the ammunition carriers - [all] up the line - shells. Wasn't going to do that, not on your life. I wasn't too popular. Still, there you are, what are you going to do?

Some of the men were so hungry that they used to go and eat grass.

Oh, yes.

Did you ever do that?

No.

How long was it before you mother and father knew what had happened to you?

Sent them a card.

Whereabouts was that from, can you recall?

Germany - well, it was from France - I said I was a prisoner of war. I couldn't give them an address because I didn't have one.

Did you get letters from them while you were in France?

Oh, yes.

But, I mean, when you were working behind the lines, or at Denain, did you still get mail from them?

From home?

Yes.

Oh, yes - behind our own lines, yeah.

No, I mean behind the German lines.

Oh, no, no. I never got any letters at all - when I got back to England I got a pile about that high.

About a foot high. So all the time that you were working in France, you didn't have any contact with your parents?

None whatsoever.

They knew you were a prisoner of war?

Yeah.

But they didn't know where you were?

No.

Well, the Red Cross would have forwarded their parcels.

As a matter of fact, there was a chap I knew very, very well. He went over to Norieul battlefield, and I was in the missing list, you see. And he searched, and searched, and searched everywhere, he couldn't find me, and he said I'm a prisoner of war, I'll bet on that, he said. So he notified my parents and pretty well said that I was a prisoner of war.

As soon as I could get hold ... The Germans used to issue cards for prisoners of war, you see - some do. I got one of these and I sent it. As a matter of fact, they sent it back - my parents got it.

That was great to get out of it. I took a party of about thirty - twenty-five or thirty - something like that, about that number - of Australians back to England - through Germany xxx xxx. We went into Leighton in Yorkshire - it was a big concentration - well, I suppose you'd call it a concentration camp. They used to use it for different things at different times, and perhaps a couple of Italians or something in there, some of them concentrated there, that sort of business.

Had to make a report. There was an officer there and he was - I was the only NCO there - Australian NCO - and he wanted to know all about it. He said, 'Were there any officers with you?' - I said, 'Yes, a couple of them' - he said, 'Who?' - and I told him - 'Oh,' he said, 'yes, that's right'. But I don't think they even ever published because I told them, it wasn't their fault.

That you were captured?

That we were captured - of course it wasn't. If they sent enough men to mop up Norieul then it wouldn't have been necessary.

Were you bitter about that when you were captured? Were you bitter about that, or not?

Oh, I didn't know exactly what happened. Well, we didn't know exactly what happened until we caught up with this sergeant and his six men, you see, then we knew what had happened - there was something over a hundred Germans there.

They were captured, were they?

They were captured first in the village.

You met them again afterwards in France?

The sergeant, oh, yes, the sergeant and I were together for quite a long time.

What was his name?

Sergeant ... Bob ... oh, whatever - gosh, I can see him now too - funny thing. Just wont come to me - I can see him.

You might think of him. And he was with you, was he, at some of these places that you went?

Yes, he was with us at one or two places - we got split up eventually - but he didn't get into Germany with us. I don't know what happened to him, I couldn't tell you. I don't even remember running into him after the war. There was a boat load of us came home ... all bar one chap, he wasn't game to come on our boat.

Why was that?

We'd have tossed him overboard - his name was Lochel - L-O-C-H-E-L. He could speak German, he used to act as an interpreter, but he also used to crawl, and that's one thing those boys couldn't stand.

Did you know him?

Oh, only in the Battalion, you know. Oh, yes, I knew him. He came on a boat on his own. Well, I mean - he was the only prisoner of war on the boat because the others - they wouldn't know anything about him.

He was with you in Friedrichsfeld, was he?

Er ... no, no, he didn't get to Friedrichsfeld - no, he stayed in France. It was only our NCOs that went to Friedrichsfeld - lot of sergeants and corporals - they were doing nothing, they were only a nuisance to xxx - they had room in Friedrichsfeld so they bundled us all in there.

The sergeants and the NCOs were generally treated differently than the privates?

Oh, yes - we didn't work.

You didn't have to work?

No.

(Break in interview)

Identification: Interview continued, Sunday 1 October 1989.

What I'd like to do to start with is to get some clearer idea of just what your movements were after you were captured. Now, you went from [Auchy] to Lille on the train?

Yes - [Auchies].

Auchies is it?

Yes.

And then you went to ...?

Into Fort MacDonald, right.

And you were there for ten days, or so?

Yes.

And then you went working behind the line?

That's right.

That was near Douai?

Near Douai, yes - just out - I don't remember the names of the towns, you know - it was just out in that area.

How long were you there?

Oh, about a month or five weeks, I suppose.

And from there you moved to Bruchain?

Bruchain.

And how long were you at Bruchain?

Oh, not very long - what would we be there? - about a month, six weeks.

And from Bruchain you went to Denain?

To Denain, yes.

And how long were you at Denain?

Oh, quite a long time - now, let me see - Denain - oh, we were there for several months - I wouldn't like to say.

You were there until you - from Denain you went to Conde, didn't you?

Conde, yes.

And how long were you at Conde?

Oh, about three weeks - it was just NCOs - I don't know how long the others were there - they were there till the end of the war.

At Conde?

Yes.

But the NCOs were taken ...?

They were all taken into Germany - we were a bloomin' nuisance - weren't working (laughs).

So you were in three or four different places, but mainly at Denain?

That was the headquarters, Denain, yes. Not only the headquarters, you see - well, it was, I suppose you could call it the headquarters because all Red Cross parcels and stuff like that came to Denain, that was the headquarters for that sort of thing. So I suppose you'd call it a headquarters camp.

It was a prison camp as such at Denain?

It was a prisoner of war camp.

How big was it, do you think? How many prisoners would there have been there, at a guess?

Oh, I suppose there were three or four hundred - all allied troops, bar French - we didn't have any French there - no Russians - they were all, like British - there was Canadians, and New Zealanders, Australians, British, Newfoundlanders.

Did you have any particular friends there?

Oh, no, we were all just a lot - you know - no particular friends. No, we were all friendly, all of us.

Can you remember any of the names of the men you were with?

Oh, crikey, it's hard - it's terribly hard to remember the names of all.

END OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE A

START OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE B

One or two. There was a chap from Western Australia - now what did I do with his address - about my size - oh ... Johnny - that's right, Johnny - oh, I don't know the names; I can see the fellow, but I can't put a name to him at the moment. And then there was another English chap - very nice fellow, he was out of a British regiment - chap called - I can remember his name - chap called Lewis - very nice chap. But, I mean, there's no particular friends.

Every weekend we used to have sports; it was a competition, and sometimes the Australians would win it, sometimes somebody else - it would all depend on what the sport was - see, that sort of thing. And it used to attract quite a congregation of Germans - quite a congregation.

There was one German captain. As a matter of fact he was in charge of the camp, anything that had to be done had to go to this German captain. And he said to his own people, he said, 'Look,

that's winning the war'.

This is the sports?

The sports - he said that's winning the war.

Why did he say that?

Well, he was a Saxon, see - he was a Saxon.

And he thought that xxx.

Well, there is no such thing in the German army - in Germany - they wouldn't have their sports day or anything on their day off, or anything like that.

Wouldn't they?

No, oh, no, nothing like that. He said, 'That's the spirit that's winning the war'.

Oh, I see.

See what I mean?

Yes, I understand. Whereabouts would you play the sports?

In and around the camp. You see, there was a building here, and a building there, and a building there, and another one there.

On a square.

All round, and there was open ground around - quite a big area. See, it was a hospital for ...

This is at Bruchain or xxx?

Factory, or whatever you like to call it.

This is at Bruchain?

Denain.

And what kind of games would they be playing?

Oh, high jump, races, what have you.

Football?

No, we couldn't get a football.

You couldn't get a football?

No, couldn't get on - all sort of sports, like that sort of thing.

Did you play too?

No, I never played. There were better men than me there.

But you went and watched, I suppose?

Hop, step and jump, you know - all those sort of things - long jump - all those sort of sports. Oh, no ...

And that was of a Sunday, was it?

It was always on a Sunday, yes.

Sunday afternoon?

Sundays - Sunday afternoon. Oh, yes. And this captain would bring his cobbers around and they would stand outside the fence and watch it all. And he told them, he said, 'That's the spirit that's winning the war'. I suppose he could see it, I mean, he wasn't blind, you see. They weren't making any progress, and, of course, this was about the time - I think he made that big offensive in May - well, this would be, oh, I suppose, after they knocked him back.

This would be mid 1918?

Yes, 1918, after they knocked him back, stopped him, you see. Who did it? Who stopped him?

Monash did, didn't he?

Eh?

The Australians did?

The Australians did - they did - wherever they went in they stopped them - yes, it's a fact.

And you were living in a former hospital in Denain?

Yes, it was a hospital, yeah.

What were the conditions like?

Quite good.

You had your own bed?

Well, you know ...

They were bunk beds?

Yeah. Each one had one - they had a straw mattress - oh, yes - conditions were quite good.

Were they lousy those bunks?

No fear, oh, no. And we could get a shower. They had shower places there where we could get a shower.

This would be cold showers, I suppose?

No, hot showers.

So you were getting soap through the Red Cross?

Yes.

So you could keep clean?

Keep clean.

What about shaving?

Shaving? Yeah - they'd get a razor.

You had a razor?

Oh, yes, we had a razor.

What were the hours of work there?

Oh, all depends on what sort of a job you were on, what you had to do - up usually around about eight, half past eight, in the morning, and you'd go till about half past four in the afternoon.

What type of work did you do? It was a foundry, wasn't it?

All sorts of work - unloading materiel trucks at this factory, they'd come in with all sorts of materiel and stuff - no ammunition or nothing like that.

But steel and timber?

I was telling you, in the same place they were loading ammunition belts, machine-gun belts. It was a repair depot, you see.

What kind of things were they repairing there?

Mm?

What type of machinery were they repairing there?

Well, artillery, and any motor vehicles that had gone off the road, or something - that were out of action and that sort of thing - all that sort of business - general repair. And they had all sorts of material there that was used as - it was a depot and a repair shop, all combined - everywhere - electric lifts and everything there - oh.

How big was the workshop?

Workshop! Big! Well, I'll tell you, the factory was about a kilometre long, and nearly half a kilometre wide, so you can imagine how big it was, and it used to employ - there was a population, I think, or somewhere round about twenty, twenty-five thousand people at Denain - it was a big town. Well, you know, those people were working in the factory, it was their job.

So you were working with French civilians as well?

No, no fear, no civilians, no fear - wouldn't have anything to do with them.

Well, the people who were working in the factory from Denain?

It was only under the control of Germans, there were no French people working in it at all. The factory closed down as far as the French were concerned.

So it had been a big French workshop?

Oh, yes, it was big. I suppose they'd make anything there from ploughshares to railway engines. And you can imagine the size of it.

How high would it have been up to the roof?

Oh, well, you imagine electric lifts running around up top, so I suppose it would be round about fifteen or twenty feet high - oh, yes, quite.

And there were a number of workshops like this, were there, in this complex?

I didn't get all over it, I couldn't tell you exactly what the whole place - we used to go to certain sections of it, but you wouldn't get all over the whole factory. See there were certain sections for building certain implements or what have you, and that sort of business. You'd be working in one particular section, you wouldn't get out of that all day. Perhaps you might go there for two or three days, or perhaps a week.

What type of sections did you mainly work in?

Oh, I was telling you, they used to repair machine-guns - I told you about those Lewis guns.

They had Lewis guns there?

Yeah.

I'd be surprised that they weren't locked away, or something.

They were in a group, in a room - they weren't locked away. And then, of course, there was - well, they'd be sitting down at a bench to fill up the belts - the machine-gun belts - and they had

all the ammunition in front of them. And they'd pick it up and put it in the belt. Well, then they'd take the bullet out, tip the powder into something or other, and put it in their pocket, and put the bullet back in again and jam him in tight, and stick him back in the belt. Well, they'd do about, perhaps four of five like that, straight one after the other, you see. Well, of course, when he comes bang, one would go it, bang, the next one wouldn't go, and so it would be a jam. See what I mean? (laughs). We were still fighting him.

It's a wonder they trusted you doing that kind of a job.

Well, there you are. I dare say they found out after, but it was a bit late.

Did you ever do that? What was your role?

xxx walking around.

So you were an NCO?

NCO.

And the rest of the staff were mainly privates, were they?

That's right, yeah.

How many were you looking after?

Oh, well, it all depends on how many was in the party - might have been about ten, fifteen, twenty perhaps.

And they'd be sent off to work in a particular section?

That's right.

And you'd be the supervisor?

I'd go around - Jerry would come up to me - he'd get someone who could speak English - I knew a smattering of German, but not very much. He'd tell me what he wanted doing and I'd explain it to the boys, what they wanted doing, and that's that.

So you were responsible for seeing the work was done and so on?

I didn't care a continental whether they did it or not, as long as I told them what had to be done - whether they did it, that was up to them. Oh, no, I didn't tell them they had to do it, no fear, oh, no, nothing like that.

Did you get outside the camp at all, the factory and so on, into the town?

No, no. I remember a bombing raid one day - one morning - was it in the morning? - no, it was at night. Remember I told you - I think I told you - we dug a lot of pits near the railway station?

Yes.

Well, those pits, of course, was an ammunition dump at the railway station. Well, our people came over in one of their little bombers - and mind you, they were only Tiger Moths in those days - not big like they have today - and they dropped some bombs.

Well, not far from the railway station there was a big two-storey French place, and in this French place there were German officers in charge of the area around Denain (who) used to live there. Well, one bomb dropped right in there and blew a bloomin' tree over and blew it on top of this house. He was out - and, of course, there was no such thing for him as motor cars - it was horses and xxx - buggies or something like that, you see. He was driving around the town to see what damage was done in his pyjamas.

Who was this?

The German officer. They certainly did some damage at the railway station, but the trouble is they didn't get the dump.

So the tree fell over on the house; did it do much damage?

Oh, it knocked the roof - tiled roof, you see, and, of course, it knocked that in a bit - damaged that a bit.

And so the German officer couldn't get to his uniform, and so on?

He couldn't, no - it gave him a bit of a scare, I suppose.

So he was going around the town in a buggy looking at all the damage?

Yeah (laughs).

Did you hear that? I suppose you would have heard the bombs coming?

Oh, well - of course, they were only little things that you could pick up in your hand, not these big fellows like we have - they'd probably be only a few pounds. Oh, no, they couldn't carry a big load like that; they'd only carry about four or five bombs, you see. They'd be hanging down, on a rack, and they'd let them all go.

So there was only one plane that came over, was it?

Oh, no, two or three - xxx never had the planes - they had scouts, scout planes.

How far from the centre of Denain was the factory and the camp?

Oh, it was in - quite in - when I say centre, it was in the town - it was in the town, yes - oh, yes, it was in the town.

And they didn't let you out for walks or anything?

Don't you worry! (laughs) - nothing like that, no.

Was the hospital still used as a hospital?

I couldn't tell you now, I wouldn't know. The factory was closed down completely, and the Germans used it as a depot and, as I say, a repair shot for artillery and anything that wanted mending.

Were there many accidents in there that you recall?

No that I know of, no.

How many Germans would there have been supervising the work?

Oh, it's hard to say.

At a guess - fifty of them?

Oh, there'd be the odd one - and they were always poking around - Germans poking around - somewhere or other. Had to keep your eyes open and ears skinned.

How old were they? Were they mainly elderly?

Oh, people well up in their thirties and up - the odd one - officer here and there in his forties, you know. We never struck young fellows much, you know.

What kind of wire fence did they have around the barracks - the old hospital?

Round that?

Yes.

Barbed wire, about ten foot high.

About a ten-foot high barbed wire fence?

Yeah - and barbed wire about that far apart.

About three inches apart?

Three or four inches apart, yeah.

Did anybody try to escape from there?

Oh, you wouldn't have any hope - you wouldn't have any hope, not from there.

Why was that?

Oh, well, sentries on four sides.

Did they have watch towers?

Going up and down all the time.

There were only three or four hundred men in this hospital?

Yes, that's all - that's all there was of us anyhow.

And there'd be twenty-odd guards, or something, would there?

Oh, they'd be changing all the time, you see - they were changing all the time.

Did they have watch towers, like machine-gun towers, and so on?

No, not there they didn't. They had them at the gates - had a machine-gun at the gates - oh, yes.

And you'd be marched out of the gates to the factory, is that right?

Marched out the gates down to the factory, yes - checked, you see.

You were checked as you went through the gate?

Checked when we came back.

How would they check you?

Count you - they'd know how many went out, and they'd know how many came back - oh, yeah, don't worry.

You didn't hear of anybody trying to escape from there?

No, not from there, no.

Is that the first place you got Red Cross parcels?

Yes.

At Denain?

At Denain, yes - that's the first place.

You said you got thirty parcels.

Thirty, yeah.

All at once, one time.

In one hit, yes.

What did you do with them? How did you store them?

Oh, you'd open up one or two - and they are all really similar, you know - you'd open up one or two and - 'Oh, we'll use these first' - then you get rid of them. We'd work in - you know, perhaps there'd be two or three or us working - I'd open up and see what was in a particular parcel - 'Righto, we'll have mine today and we'll cook up the feed out of mine' - you see? Well, the next day someone else would cook up the feed out of his. And there was one, two - there was a chap from New South Wales, chap called Brown - that's right, Brown - I've forgotten his Christian name - oh, that's another thing. He was a chap about my size too. He used to go out working, and he was unloading coal, and sometimes they'd let him bring home a bag of coal - sandbag of coal - you know what a sandbag is?

Yes.

A sandbag of coal, he'd bring that home and we'd have a coal fire, see, and we could cook our food on it.

You had a little brazier, did you?

No, a little cook - sort of a fireplace, then they'd have an iron plate over the top of it.

And you'd put the coals in underneath?

Put the coal in underneath and light a fire - chimney going up the back. Oh, no, it was quite alright. Then we used to cook up a feed.

Did you have any cooking utensils?

No, only what we got from round about.

Used tins and so on, I suppose.

Yes - borrow them from the French - saucepan or something - or frying pan or something - that sort of business, you know.

And this is in the ward that you were cooking food?

Yeah, in the ward, oh, yeah. Quite a crowd would be able to cook like that. See there would be more or less private - you know what a private ward is, in a hospital?

Yes.

That's just a single room. Well, there'd be a fireplace in it. Over there their winters - we don't know what a cold winter is - they are severe. They used to have fireplaces in them, you see, in the wards - oh, yeah.

How many would there be in these?

Well, there was three, four - four of us in this particular ward. We used to put muck in our parcels.

Were they all Australians?

Yeah.

They were all Australians?

No, there was one English chap - there was one English chap with us - Brownie - I can see them all, but oh, I can't remember their names, you know. It's a long time ago.

It is a long time ago - I'm not surprised, I just asked, that's all.

Yeah, I know. No, it's hard to remember them all.

So there were four bunks in this private ward, and a fireplace?

Yeah - there was a bunk that side and a bunk over that side, two deep - you know the two-tier

bunks.

You'd cook in there?

Yes.

Where would you store all your parcels - your extra parcels?

They were stored in the main building at the hospital. There was what are called an administrative building, you see, and I think there was an operating theatre in this particular - it was the biggest building of the lot - the administrative building, and I think there was an operating theatre, and that sort of thing in it - sort of recovery ward. Well, they used to use that then for storing the parcels. They'd come in and ... we had our own chaps - NCOs - there was a sergeant - two sergeants - no, there was a sergeant major, that's right. Yes, there was, there was a sergeant major, he was in charge of the parcels there, but he was only a company sergeant major, second class. He was in charge of all the parcel stuff. Well, then they'd be sorted out and each one, they'd be going along to so-and-so, couple of parcels for you, and a couple of parcels for somebody else.

How would you collect your parcels? Would they come round and see you?

No, you'd go over to that building.

You'd go over and ask?

And collect your parcels. They'd let you know when there was a truck load of parcels come in, because they had to help unload them, you see.

The quartermaster ...

The sergeant major, he'd unlock the truck, and the boys would put the parcels on ...

This is a truck that came in from Holland?

Yes.

The one that was sealed?

Yes - come in from Holland.

And there'd be a party of Australians, or whatever, go down to there?

Yeah, whoever was available, you see, and they'd unload.

They'd come into the railway station, the parcels?

Yes, and then they went off in a [horse] waggon or something, they'd cart them down to the camp - oh, yes.

How far away from the station was the camp?

Oh, it would be about half a mile.

This is through the streets, I suppose, obviously?

Oh, yes.

The parcels, they had your names on them, did they?

Yes, had your name on it, yes - yes, had your name on it. Then, of course ...

And when you got a parcel, did you have to sign for them?

Oh, now, did we have to sign? - no, no, it was yours and that was that.

See, I came into Mons in October 1917, and I came back to Denain in November - I hadn't had

any parcels. If I remember rightly, a couple of them had died - chaps had died - and there was - I don't know what happened, but there was about half a dozen or so sent into Germany for some reason or other, I don't know what - and this was getting close on towards the end of December. Well, they'd get into a main camp in Germany - wherever they were - they'd gather another lot of parcels in there - see what I mean? Well, anything that was left in Denain wasn't to be sent back - you couldn't send it back into Germany - so it was allotted to me if it wasn't getting xxx - I'd get one, you see. That was a big help.

You'd go and collect your parcels from the depot; how often would you do that? A couple of times a week?

Well, it all depends on when they came in, you see - it would just depend, you couldn't state any particular time. See, a truck load might come in one day, and then you wouldn't see another one perhaps for about three weeks or a month - all depends - when they could get them through, that's just the point - when they could get them through. It wasn't like when we were in Germany, it was only a matter of twenty kilometres, that's all, from Holland, into where this Friedrichsfeld camp was.

But down in Denain you were a long way away from Holland?

We were right out in the middle of France.

I understand.

It's a big difference.

Did the Germans search the parcels?

Search them? No.

They didn't go through them and check the tins?

No.

They did in other places.

They trusted that - no, there was nothing like that, they couldn't do that. If they started interfering with that, there'd be trouble somewhere else, they'd have more enemies still. It was like the trucks, that was sealed, and there was only one person that could handle - break those seals - had permission to break those seals. If the Germans broke them, they were in trouble. You see, they could let British troops, or enemy troops come down through Holland - see what I mean? - you are breaking the neutrality and all that sort of business. Oh, no, you couldn't do that, you are interfering with a government seal, you see.

I understand. Did you ever work on delivering parcels, getting them from the railway?

Not from the railway, but I've helped deliver them from the depots in the camps, you see.

What was the kind of meal you mainly made from those parcels?

Well, it was all tinned stuff, you see. We used to get - we were fortunate, the Australians. Sometimes we'd get boiled mutton in tins, roast beef.

Roast beef in tins?

[Stuffed] in tins.

Like bully beef?

Better than bully beef, it was fresh beef. Bully beef, we had enough of that in the army. They sent us a very good variety of foods.

How was that paid for? Were you paying for that yourself out of your pay?

No, it was done all by the public of Australia - my word - yes, the public of Australia did that.

They were contributing to the Red Cross?

Yes, the public supplied all that, they did exceedingly well.

Did you have much contact with Nurse Chomley and with the Red Cross in London? Do you remember Nurse Chomley?

No.

She was in charge of the Red Cross, prisoners of war section.

No - wait a minute! - I did after the war, when I came back.

This is to London?

I went around - their head place was in Grosvenor Square.

END OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE B

START OF TAPE FIVE - SIDE A

Identification: Tape 5

You were trying to help them find missing ...

They were trying to find out who these people were - they were missing, you see. One was a chap I was with - two of them were the chaps I was with on Gallipoli, they were down to get mid-day lunch - we never got our dinner. We didn't know what had happened, you see, they never turned up, never turned up - neither did they, poor fellows; no, they disappeared, just disappeared. Oh, I think they probably put over a salvo of shells, see, from a battery of guns, and they caught the lot. That's what happened, I think, and they got blown to pieces, you'd never find them - never find them - you wouldn't find a trace. There was a lot like that unfortunately.

Did you meet Nurse Chomley, or not? Do you remember Nurse Chomley - she was in charge?

Oh, yeah, probably did too - there was several of them there, you know, people that were there, all Australians.

What was the building like that they were in?

Oh, I can't remember exactly now - hard to remember. I was only there the one day, I went around to collect my mail, and they gave me this list to look through - they had a list that long I suppose.

About two feet long.

Names on it - missing.

No-one knew where they were?

Nobody knew what happened to them, and they were just trying to find out. As a matter of fact, since I've been home in Australia here, many years ago, there was some party or other wrote - asked me - if I knew about the same crowd. What can you do? What can you tell them? I don't know more than you know. I said I know they went on a job, and I said, what happened to them, we don't know.

And the mail that you got from home, from the Red Cross, that was the first mail you'd had since capture, was it, or not?

Most of it.

Most of it was the first you'd had since capture?

Oh, not the first I'd had. I sent my address home on a - they used to print a card for prisoners of war, you see, but I put my address of a particular camp I was in.

That was at Denain, I suppose, was it?

Yeah, that was at Denain. Well, I did get one letter from home there.

Just one?

It did arrive - one - all the rest went to London, you see, and they went to the Red Cross. As I say, I had a pile of letter up this high.

Six inches or more.

Oh, yes - and I read them all, then there was one missing. What happened to it, I don't know.

One of the letters went astray, did it?

Yeah - one that I would have liked to have too because it concerned my grandfather - he came from Devonshire - my mother's father he was. She gave me his address, and I never, ever got it.

So you didn't go and see him?

I didn't go down to see them. Oh, well, things happen.

We were talking about Fort MacDonald yesterday. What did you do in those ten days that you were in there?

Just laying on your back and [reading the report].

Did you have anything to read?

Yes, I did, I had a bible.

Where did you get that from?

My mother - pocket bible - my mother gave it to me before I went away.

That was very common to have that, wasn't it?

Yes.

Most of the men had that.

Yes.

The Germans wouldn't take that off you?

No.

When the Germans searched you, what did they take from you?

Well, I never had anything for them to take.

They took all of your equipment, I suppose, obviously?

Oh, that was left on the battlefield - yes, that was left on the battlefield.

Did you have a chance to destroy any of your weapons and so on?

No, I never got a ghost of a chance, no.

So you were reading your bible in Fort MacDonald?

Yeah - well, I had to do something to fill in the time, didn't I.

I suppose most of the men were doing that?

Oh, they were doing that, most of them that had them - those that had them were reading them.

What was the mood like amongst the men?

They were pretty miserable, oh, yeah. What could you do? Nobody could say anything, couldn't get up a conversation with anyone or anything; they were all miserable, miserable as bandicoots (laughs).

And was that being depressed about being captured, or because they were not getting enough to eat?

Oh, the main thing was - the whole thing, I suppose, boiled down to the treatment we were getting. You only got ... Fritz boiled his vegetables at dinner time, and you'd get the water. There might be a bit of ground-up acorn put in it, or something like that - sauerkraut - and then you'd get one slice of this black bread which was about that square.

About what, four inches square?

Yeah.

What was that like to eat?

Oh, boy! It is made out of rice now, you know - oh, yeah, you can buy it here - of course, you can buy it here in Renmark - schwarzes brot.

Black bread.

Black bread.

It was also called [kriegsbrot], I think - war bread.

Yeah. Well, you know, see, they'd cook it, and then they've got to let it stand for about a week before you can eat it.

Why is that?

The German bread - oh, it would just about kill you.

Would it?

Oh, god, yes - [boiled stuff].

What would be the benefit of leaving it to stand for a week?

Well, I don't know, but they used to do that - we never got it until it was quite cold and firm.

Very hard.

Firm - not hard, firm, you know. But it was like - when it was freshly cooked it was like dough. I believe - I don't know anything about it - but rye flour is different to the wheaten flour.

Some of the men said that they used to put sawdust in the bread; do you think that was the case?

Oh (laughs) I don't know, I wouldn't be surprised what you'd get in it - I wouldn't be surprised. I wouldn't be surprised what he did.

Did you continue eating that black bread after you were getting Red Cross parcels, or not?

No, no. See, we used to get that bread from Switzerland. You'd get two loaves one week, about that long.

Yes, eighteen inches.

And another - three loaves a fortnight we used to get.

Three loaves a fortnight?

Not only that, it was warm when we got it so it hadn't been long out of the oven - beautiful bread.

This was at Denain?

No, this was in Germany.

This was at Friedrichsfeld?

Yes.

Did you get bread from the Swiss Red Cross?

Oh, we used to occasionally get a ring of bread - they made their loaf round.

It was actually a ring, was it, like a ring shaped?

Yeah - but the Red Cross, there was no hollow in the middle.

Right, it was an oval shape?

Yes - and about that thick.

About two inches thick.

It would be about as round as that.

About eighteen inches across, yes - a foot across. And where did that come from?

I don't know, it came through - the Froggies would come along with them and dish it out to us

now and again - I don't know where it came from. It used to come from, more than likely, through Switzerland or that sort of thing.

How often did you get that? Was that irregular?

Oh, you might get one a month - not very often.

Were you getting more than enough food at Denain, or were you sort of xxx?

Oh, we were getting enough - getting enough - I wouldn't say we were getting more than enough - we were getting enough. And once I got all those parcels, I had more than enough.

Where did you put them?

Store them under your bunk (laughs).

Was there any ever thieving between the ...?

No.

That was xxx.

Nobody - see, it was this way, even if you weren't getting any parcels, the others would share - share and share - everybody was treated the same - share and share alike. Oh, no, there was nothing like that.

You went up to Monns, didn't you? -

Yes.

- the hospital, and that was with the scabies.

Yes.

You'd been working - had you been working in the factory before?

No.

When did you catch scabies?

That developed at the end of September - sometime about the end of September.

Whereabouts were you at that time? Were you at Denain then?

Yeah.

You were at Denain then, yes. You were getting parcels then, or not?

No, I never got parcels until after Christmas.

You didn't get parcels until after Christmas 1917?

Yes - '18 - Christmas '17, that's right. If I remember rightly, it was in February - somewhere about that time, in February 1918.

So in February 1918 you got thirty parcels at once?

Yes.

And they all came to you at Denain?

Yeah.

So they finally caught up with you?

They eventually caught up with me.

They didn't know where you were, and they'd been sending you parcels because they knew you were a prisoner?

Oh, yes, they knew I was a prisoner of war, yes.

That follows. So all that time, for something like six months or more, you were living on German food?

Well, then of course, some of the boys were getting Red Cross parcels and they'd all share.

So they'd look after you?

Yeah, they'd all share. When I was in Monns hospital, you see, there were two - I told you, didn't I, there were two Aussies in there?

Yes.

One chap at home I knew, a chap named Bowen.

B-O-W-E-N?

B-O-W-E-N.

What was his Christian name, do you recall?

Hadden Bowen - H-A-D-D-E-N - Hadden Bowen.

What was the other fellow's name?

Oh, now, that's - he was a Victorian, I think - he was a Victorian chap - I just couldn't remember his name. But they were getting their parcels, you see, they had plenty, and they always used to make a bit of porridge for me in the morning.

How long had they been in Monns hospital?

I was in there for about three weeks, I suppose.

How long were they in there? Had they been in there quite a while?

Yes, they were there when I went there, and they were still there when I went away.

What was wrong with them?

I couldn't - well, they were in the same ward, but they had some illness, I couldn't tell you exactly what it was.

The Red Cross parcels were coming to the hospital for them?

Evidently - I don't know - well, the camp would know where they were, and they'd forward them on, they'd send them on.

So when you went to Monns hospital you still weren't getting parcels at Denain?

Yes.

But when you finally went back to Denain, after the hospital, you found them waiting for you; it that right?

No, no, no. See, I went into Monns in October '17, and I came back towards the end of October '17, I think, if I remember it, and I went back to Denain in November, two or three weeks before Christmas. I didn't get parcels till about next February.

That's a long time without them, isn't it?

Mm - yet they were accumulating, you see, somewhere - probably in camp in Germany

somewhere, you see. And then they found out where I was, and they forwarded them on. And then when I got back - I told you, I think, we went in, the NCOs went into Germany, I got another thirty parcels.

At Friedrichsfeld?

At Friedrichsfeld - they'd accumulated there, you see.

So when you got to Friedrichsfeld you find all of these parcels?

All these parcels there.

Was that the sum total of all the parcels you got - sixty?

Oh, no.

You got more?

The others were still coming.

Were there?

Yeah, oh, yes.

Three a fortnight you were getting, wasn't it?

Yeah.

Three parcels a fortnight?

Three parcels.

Where did you get your uniform? When did you get that?

That came with my parcels.

In Denain?

In Denain, yeah.

That must have been a big day for you.

Yes, the old army uniform had had it. I had this ...

What did they give you? What was the uniform they gave you?

It was sort of a black material, and you had a wide band - oh, be about three inches wide.

On your sleeve?

A brown band around your left arm, and the Germans would put your number on it.

Would pencil it on that. What was your number, do you remember?

Oh, gosh, I couldn't tell you.

Don't worry. How much clothing was there? Did they give you just one suit?

That's all, one suit - trousers and a coat - and there was a pair of light shoes - more sort of sandals, I suppose they'd be.

Actually like sandals - open?

No, they'd lace up.

Lace-up shoes?

Little lace-up shoe, yes.

Did they give you a jumper or a greatcoat?

No, no.

You got a cap, didn't you?

A cap, yes, a cap went with the uniform - black cap with a brown band around it.

Did you have any of your badges and so on at that time - like your rising sun badges? Some of them used to put their rising sun badges on their cap.

No, I never put mine on - no.

What about boots, did they send you boots?

No - no, I can't remember whether they sent us boots or not - I can't remember.

I think they did.

Probably did too, yeah.

And socks, and underwear?

Oh, yes, socks and underwear.

And shirts?

Flannel shirt - all flannel. I had to get rid of them when I came home, they were affecting my skin, you see. I can't wear wool, I wear cotton.

Were the uniforms warm?

Oh, yes.

They were good quality?

Oh, yes, oh, yes, they were quite warm.

What was your feeling when you found all of those things waiting for you at Denain, when you found all of those parcels?

(Laughs) Well, I thought all my meals had come at once.

All your Christmases at once.

(Laughs) Well, I thought, this is good. Of course, most of the other boys had been getting their parcels, see - 'Oh, Tamms got a few!' (laughs).

That's what they said, did they?

Oh, yes - 'Oh, Tamms got a few' - oh, they were always there to help.

Did you make enquiries about where the parcels were?

You couldn't, it's no good making enquiries, you couldn't get any sense anyway, you see, because you had no communication.

You couldn't write to anybody?

No, you couldn't write to anybody, and the Germans wouldn't tell you anything - oh, no, you couldn't communicate.

You could write to the Red Cross, couldn't you?

Oh, yes, you could write to the Red Cross - 'We've sent your parcels; aren't you getting any?' - see, well then they'd query, that's all, but then they'd eventually find out that they were accumulating at a certain depot.

Takes a long time to get through.

Takes a while to get through.

Did the Germans search your bags? Did they come in and search the wards?

Oh, there was a sergeant poking around all the time - yes, yes - he was walking through the barracks. Of course, we had to keep them clean, oh, yes. He'd be poking round all the time to see that everything was in order, you see.

What was his name, do you know?

Oh, I couldn't tell you his name.

What kinds of things would he do?

Oh, well, he's just like a supervisor, sort of people - he could speak a bit of English, and a jolly fine old fellow, he was really. He might have been a German, but he was a jolly fine old fellow. You could tell that he was a Bavarian, and you could tell by the attitude that they'd take - he had sympathy to a certain extent for we chaps, you see. He was never bossy. You get a lot of these Germans, well, they'd bounce you around like nobody's business - oh, you'd get any amount of them too. But no, he wasn't that type of fellow at all, he was a very quietly spoken man, and they all respected him for it.

How old would he have been?

How old would he be? I'd should say he was getting well up in his thirties - he was married and had a family.

(Incidental conversation)

He had a wife and family in Germany. I told you, didn't I, that he was the bloke we gave the parcel to - the chap the boys gave the parcel to.

What was that story again?

Oh, yes. He treated us as human beings, you might say, and the boys respected him. And they each dubbed in a bit and made up a parcel - he was going home on leave, you see, going home to his family on leave. And the poor old chap, I'll never forget him, the tears streamed down his face - he was so overcome to think that, well, they are prisoners of war, but by Jove, they think of others as well. They weren't getting anywhere near the food that we were getting in the Red Cross parcels, and when he took that home to his family, oh, they'd have a glorious feast, I'll bet.

Did you ever trade with the Germans for anything, for any tools or clothing?

No.

You didn't try and barter some of the food you had?

No, no fear, no.

Did you get any fresh food - eggs or vegetables?

Oh, gosh, didn't know what they were - oh, no, no, nothing like that - no, nothing like that - fresh food!

What about fruit?

No, never saw it.

What were you mainly drinking - tea I suppose, were you?

Only wanted our own tea that we made. They used to drink xxx coffee - burnt barley.

They didn't use the acorns for coffee?

No.

That was for soups?

And then it wouldn't mix with the water - no, dreadful stuff.

Before you went to Denain you were at Bruchain for a while.

Bruchain, yes.

What were you doing there, at Bruchain?

Well, I was doing nothing, I was just in camp.

What was the camp like at Bruchain?

Oh, just a camp, just a camp.

I mean, whereabouts were you living at that time? What kind of quarters did you have?

Oh .. stone building, you know, that sort of thing - they weren't the best, the conveniences weren't much, very poor sort of place. I was glad to get out of it, to tell you the truth.

What kind of work were you doing at Bruchain?

I don't know, I never used to go out with any.

You didn't go out from the camp?

No, they wouldn't let us, for some unknown reason.

They wouldn't let the NCOs go?

No - I don't know why, but they wouldn't.

What were the men doing? Was it farm work?

I don't know what they were doing around about, I couldn't exactly tell you really. I don't think they would be doing any farming - oh, no, they wouldn't be doing any farm work, the Froggies did their own.

It would be all industrial work in France, I suppose.

Pure industrial stuff.

They were working behind the lines there?

No, the Froggies always used to do their own - they could grow wheat.

Could they - the Frenchmen?

Seventy and eighty bushel xxx. The Froggies - unless you've been there you wouldn't know, but down one side - the house and living quarters was here, on this side.

On the left side.

And on this side ...

On the opposite side.

... are the stables, and cow biers, and the pigsties, and what have you. And down here, in the

middle, down here, just outside of that, in there there was a great big concrete place where they'd tip all the manure - stable manure, cow manure, pig manure, fowl manure - tip it all in there, till they wanted to plant a wheat crop, then they'd take that out and put it out. No wonder they grew wheat when they'd got stuff like that - it didn't cost them anything for manure.

I knew they were doing that.

My word, crops up here like this, you know - beautiful.

About a metre high or more.

With heads on them like that.

Three or four inches long. You were at Bruchain about a month or so, did you say?

About that, yes.

And you weren't doing any work at all?

No.

You just stayed in the camp?

I just stayed in the camp, yeah.

What would you do to pass the time? Did you play cards?

(Laughs) No cards, we never had any. Oh, no, there was a couple of us there, sit and talk or something like that. And you couldn't do much, there was nothing much you could do, it was an idle time, really idle time.

Could you hear the front line from there?

No - oh, no.

What kind of relationship did you have with the Russians? You didn't see much of the Russians, I suppose?

No, although there was Russians in [my ward] - you never had much to do with them, they used to keep - see now, there'd be all Englishmen in the particular ward, or there might be one or two Frenchmen, but the Russians, they'd keep them out on their own. No, you never had much to do with them.

(Break in interview)

When we stopped before we were talking about the Russians.

Oh, yes, yes. No, I never had anything to do with the Russians at all [except that] I'd seen them. They were in the same camp in Germany, but not in the NCO's section of it, they were over in the working party section, they used to go out and do work. They'd do jobs for - I told you, I think, that they dug the Hindenburg Line for xxx loaf of bread a day. Well, that's the sort of thing they'd be - of course, there was no Russian Army, and the army in those days was gone - it had finished in 1917, didn't they?

Yes, '17, '18, after the Revolution, yes.

They finished up, you see. Well, they were a defeated nation. And then that's when communism came in, you see.

Did you make any friends with Russians at all?

No.

You didn't get to know them?

No, didn't get to know them at all.

What about the Belgians?

The Belgian people?

Yes, or the Belgian soldiers that had been prisoners?

There were none, there weren't any. No, there were no Belgian soldiers, not that ever I came in contact with anyway, in any way. I don't think there was any Belgian soldiers at all - no, I don't think so - but as for the Belgian people, well, they were one of the finest races in Europe in those days - they were.

END OF TAPE FIVE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE FIVE - SIDE B

Look, if there was a prisoner escape they'd do any mortal thing to help him - any mortal thing - whereas the French would just as likely sell you - that's a fact too, oh, yes, oh, my word - they'd sell you.

Why is it that you have that view of the French people? - because I know that some of the other men were helped by the French.

You'd strike them, but I mean, I'm just talking on the majority of Frenchmen. I mean, the experience I had with French - I'm telling you, the French people. We were billeted in French villages, you see, and as soon as the Australian troops came into the village, up would go the price of everything - see. The Tommy troops was getting a bob a day, we were getting five or six bob, see, and they knew.

And they knew that you had it?

Yeah. They forgot that we were there fighting for them though - they forgot that, oh, yeah.

What about when you were captured and were working in France all those months, did the French people help you at that time? Did they give you food?

At odd times, sometimes you'd get out and ask them for something or other - a bit of sugar, or a bit of something - and if you were lucky you'd get it. It all depends who you struck, see, that was just if you were fortunate - it was something like that - or a bit of rice, sometimes you'd ask for a bit of rice, something that you could boil up and make a bit of feed out of, sort of business - we were hungry (laughs). Sometimes you'd ask, Have you got any rice? - sometimes you'd never see them - at odd times, I mean, they were not all bad, but taking it on the whole - I mean, I take it on the whole, not just a few odd individuals that were quite alright. Oh, no, when you were lucky you'd get a bit. I was never lucky enough, no.

Why was it that you were so long in France and didn't go into Germany?

That I couldn't tell you - Jerry wanted us there, I suppose - the Germans wanted us there, that's the only way I can account for it, I mean, I wouldn't know otherwise.

Well, that party that was working ...

He wanted so many out in France, the balance extending to Germany, see. Well, he kept so many out there until, as I said, the big push, and ever since 8 August 1918, when the British troops - the what's-a-name army - our army ...

Stopped the Germans?

[Struck]. See, the Germans had got that far that their support lines were too long, and they couldn't go any further, you see. So they had to stop. Well, then they didn't get a chance to really consolidate themselves - anyhow, they'd had it, they'd been too big, they tried to be too big - in my book, I don't know, I'm no general or anything like that - just, you know, the reason that ... people put ... our chaps put to it that they'd had it. And, of course, when the boys struck, they gave them such a hiding when they stopped them, you see. Their last flutter was at a place called Villers-Bretonneux, which you've heard of - well, if they'd have got Villers-Bretonneux, they'd have got into Amiens, and they'd have cut the French and British armies in half - see, they

would have broken through. But 13th Brigade stopped them - there were a lot of casualties in that - they stopped them. And there was an officer there, and anther chap, they got captured there, at Villers-Bretonneux, but they stopped them there. That was the village, he couldn't go any further.

They over extended themselves.

They'd over extended themselves, that's correct. After that, well, I think they were too blinkin' tired to settle down and consolidate themselves. Well, then when the boys struck, I tell you, all the Australians together - five divisions, one after the other - didn't give them a chance to stop and they went ten miles, over ground that they'd fought over before.

Yes, that's correct. Well, while you were working in France, did you want to go into Germany?

No.

You were quite happy?

We were quite happy there, yeah, as far as that goes.

Did you realise what your situation was, that all of the other men were going into Germany and into camps?

No, no - they only wanted, I tell you, so many prisoners of war out there to do so much. Of course, things were pretty well consolidated by this time.

Do you know when you became registered with the Red Cross? Did you give them your name? How was it that you became registered with the Red Cross?

Oh, well, they found out, they sent out - the Germans sent out notices that they'd captured so many - I couldn't be found anywhere, so they assumed I was taken prisoner. As a matter of fact, there was one young fellow that I knew very, very well when school was here, as a matter of

fact - at primary school. He was one of a few - several - when I say a few, I don't know how many there were, there might have been a dozen or more men that went over the field around Noreil, got all the people that had been killed or wounded, and I was one of those they couldn't find. And he wrote home to my parents and he said to them, 'Well,' he said, 'we've searched the field everywhere, we can't find him; there's only one thing, that he's taken prisoner'.

What was his name?

Jack Hutchings - or John Hutchings we used to call him - John Hutchings.

H-U-T-S-H-I-N-S?

H-U-T-C-H-I-N-G - Hutchings.

With an 's' on the end of it, or not?

Yes - Hutchings.

He was a 10th Battalion man, was he?

No - no, no, I couldn't tell you what he was attached to really, he might have been attached to medical, or anything, you see, because he wasn't with us in the Battalion, I'm certain of that, because if he'd have been there he'd have been digging me out, that's for sure - no, he wasn't there. But how he went up there - I could say it was something to do with medical business, Red Cross and that sort of thing, because they always carried - the medical people always carried a red cross - a white flag with a big red cross in the middle. They always carried that when they were out on the field, picking up wounded and that sort of thing.

When you were marched through Lille, just before you went to Fort MacDonald, do you remember much about what happened then?

Well, we'd just got off the train at the railway station, you see.

They marched you through Lille?

They marched us straight out to Fort MacDonald, we didn't see much of Lille at all. The only thing we saw was this silly looking little German general standing on a box. When you've got armed troops around you, you're not going to make a silly mistake and try to run away. They were scared - no, that's honest, they were scared of Australians - they were - and New Zealanders probably the same - of course, they had a pretty good name too, the New Zealanders - and any of the colonial troops - British troops too as far as that goes. I mean, crikey, I've seen things that the British troops have done - terrific job.

What kind of things?

Oh, attacks and taking positions and that sort of thing - oh, yes, the same as we did. Oh, no, they were ... You get the old regulars, crikey, they were terrific those fellows, and they were all, you know ... the British regulars are all round about the same height, and they'd take them at a certain height - they wont take them any height, or anything like that - then you are a soldier after, oh, yeah, a soldier. I've seen them doing their jobs, I saw them changing the guard at Buckingham Palace - oh, St James's in London, oh, my word. See, those fellows do their drill and it's an eye-opener. I don't care where the next one comes from, there's no country in the world that can put on a military show like they can in England - no, oh, no. Did you ever see the Edinburgh Tattoo?

I know of it, yes.

Don't you see it on TV?

Yes, I've seen it. I know what you are talking about, yes, the military parade.

What I mean, you take those turn-outs that they put on over there - terrific - changing of the guard, that's only minor compared to what some of the things that they do over there. Now, what's that one the Queen inspects? What do they call it? Oh, some blimmin' big parade or other, and all the blimmin' regiments are out.

The trooping of the colours, or something?

Oh, the colouring and everything, it's really terrific.

What about the German Uhlans that you met? What were they like?

Well, they were just men on horseback, with a uniform on, that's all, as far as we were concerned (laughs).

Were they good soldiers?

They were supposed to be. The only time I know of them being used in the First World War was at the Battle of [Vimmy Ridge] which the Canadians took. And he sent in everything - it overlooked quite a bit of country it did - that's Vimmy Ridge - he sent everything in bar the back door, I think - everything. Amongst them was the Uhlans, but the Canadians chopped them to pieces.

Did they treat you well, or where they a bit rough with you?

Oh, no. As far as treatment went they expected you to do things that you shouldn't do - like handling ammunition and all that sort of business. You see, that wasn't allowable at all under the Geneva Convention, you see - all that sort of thing - or repairing - as a matter of fact, they shouldn't have been filling up those machine-gun belts, that was wrong, I'm telling you, and that's where the boys had a win, you see. They'd empty about four or five bloomin' bullets - cartridges - and empty them of their charge, and, of course, when they bang, the first one would go in, perhaps, the second one, and then they would block the gun, and then they'd wonder what was wrong - all sorts of things. If ever we could do anything that would hurt him, we'd do it.

Can you think of any other examples that you did, of that kind of thing?

No, that's about all I can think of. I don't know what the boys used to do in Germany.

They used to do the same kind of thing.

Oh, they'd all have a go at whatever they could, you see. You just had to bide your time and opportunity.

How long were you doing this machine-gun work?

Oh, they were doing that for about three or four weeks, I suppose - three weeks anyway - yes, three weeks, I suppose.

Can you recall some of the other jobs you did there at Denain - some of the repair jobs you did?

Repair jobs?

Yes.

No - no, there was nothing much that we could do. See, they wouldn't let you in amongst artillery - couldn't get in amongst the artillery - all sorts of things - unloading trucks. Like they used to get truck loads of sort of a soap powder, it was just like coarse salt to look at, and they'd all come in paper bags. When a truck load come in you'd have to unload that sort of stuff, do those sort of jobs. That's where we used to get a lot of our soap from. Of course, you'd get a bag - someone would bust a bag on purpose, spill it all over the floor of the truck, and then you'd go along and pick it up. Otherwise they'd want to know what you've got, anything - checking you up before you knocked off at night. I said, 'Yes, the soap powder is on the floor of the truck' - 'Oh, that's no good - don't worry about that'.

It was a soap powder, was it?

Yes, oh, yes.

What did they use it for - for washing?

Oh, yes, washes, wash your clothes and all that sort of thing. We used to use it to wash our

clothes, that sort of thing, if you could get the chance - oh, yes.

Sometimes we'd get a bit of soap come in a Red Cross parcel - it was not too often because it would scent the food - except the tinned stuff, of course.

What was Monns hospital like?

Well, just like any other hospital - two stories - just like any other place.

Was that staffed by Germans or by French?

Belgians - remember the Battle of Monns?

I know of it, yes.

Well, that was the same town. It was a two-storey place. Oh, no, it was just like any other - it was all prisoners of war, you see.

It was a special prisoners of war hospital?

It was a prisoner of war hospital, Monns hospital.

The nurses and doctors, were they Belgians?

The bells of Monns - was it the bells of Monns? - I think it was the bells of Monns. When those bells rang, the angels of Monns would reappear and the war would be over - you knew that one?

I've heard about that, yes.

Something like that, yes.

And was it staffed by Belgian doctors?

No, it was staffed by Germans - oh, well, there was some French, one or two French orderlies. I think there was one or two prisoners of war, if I remember correctly - English prisoners of war - were given jobs in there.

Were there any women there?

I never saw any, no, I never saw any at all.

When you met up with all of the other men that were captured at Bullecourt, can you recall that time? You know when all of the men were captured at Bullecourt?

Well, we met up at [Auchys]. Well, I didn't know any of them - at that time I didn't know anyone. But I found out since the war that there was a chap in there that came from [Roxton] that I knew. I didn't know he was there at that particular time, you see.

What was your reaction to seeing them all?

Well, we wondered what had happened, and, of course, they told us then - see, we got mixed up - they told us what had happened. They said they'd have held it, but they'd run out of ammunition.

That's right.

That was the only drawback to that.

Whereabouts were you in Auchy? Whereabouts were you living?

Oh, we were living in sheds, and one thing and another there. There is a china factory there, it was full up with china stuff, you see. We were living in sheds there, that's all, nothing very much - no, nothing at all very, very much.

When you started working, it was the case that the NCOs didn't have to do the same work, isn't that correct?

That's right.

What exactly was the circumstances?

Well, I don't know, we were just looked upon as ... see, a German NCO never worked, he didn't work, he gave all the orders and supervised the job. Well, they gave us that, we were acting as supervisors - when I say supervisors, passing on what instructions had to be done. They'd come along and explain it to us what had to be done, and then we'd go and tell the boys what had to be done.

How many NCOs were there in your party?

Oh, goodness.

A dozen, or more than that?

Oh, there was one ... three ... three sergeants that I know, and ... let's see ... one, two, three ... four corporals.

Including yourself, I suppose?

Including myself.

So there was seven NCOs?

Seven NCOs.

Can you recall any of their names now?

Oh ... I couldn't remember the names of them.

Were they mainly Australians?

There was one Australian sergeant, two English sergeants, and three English corporals, and a Newfoundlander - besides myself. But oh, it's hard to remember their names now.

How long were you together, that group?

Well, we were together in ...

At Denain?

... Denain, see, then we got split up after.

You were together for months?

Oh, yes.

And you were all living in the same war in Denain, in the hospital?

In these various - we were split up, of course, we weren't all in the same building. There was like four buildings in the hospital, you see; we were in three of them, and we were split up amongst three of them, you see.

Then there were three or four hundred privates?

Yeah, they were all in there with us - you'd have so many - could be about, I suppose, all together - there'd be getting on towards four hundred, xxx were all there. It was hard to remember how many - I didn't count them anyway.

And were you being paid?

(Laughs) What did we get? - yeah, so much a day. Now, what the devil! - five pennies a day - do you know what a penny is?

Yes.

A penny - five pennies a day, that's what we used to get (laughs). But mind you, he printed the prisoner of war money, he printed that so it would be spent in any camp canteens that were there. Of course, he provided whatever went into it, you see, that's where he got his money back (laughs).

What would you get at the canteen?

Oh, nothing very much - for quite a long time I didn't get very much.

What about escaping, did you ever think of escaping from the camp?

You didn't have much chance. I mean, you were too well guarded. I'll tell you one way now. In Germany, in Friedrichsfeld particularly - I don't know what they did in the other camps - but in Friedrichsfeld the boys that were working, they would go out on a job and two or three of them would get together, and off they'd go, see, straight for the Dutch border.

They'd get away on a working party?

Get away from the working party. Now, wait a minute. Two of them would stick together, one bloke would go off right on his own, and these two would expose themselves. And of course, then Uhlans who rode around on horseback would grab them, you see, and take them off; the other bloke would get across the border and into Holland.

He'd get right down to the border?

They'd get close to the border, you see - it was only a matter of a hop, step and a jump, you might say, and they'd be across into Holland. Well, the other two, they'd draw lots as to who was to go next, they'd work it because they'd go, just the two together, or they'd pull another bloke in, you see, and so they worked it that way. It was always one escaped, always, you see - Jerry never woke up to it.

Didn't he?

No, he never woke up to it, no - remarkable, you know, he never woke up to it; there was always that one bloke escape. Most of them were British troops - Tommies - they were shrewd enough, don't worry, my word. I don't know what the other nations did, but I know the British troops were doing that. Oh, no, they were quite shrewd.

Did you have any punishment cells or solitary confinement cells at Denain?

Oh, yes, they had those sort of things. Very rarely they had to do it. As I told you, there was only that one that I actually recall where that corporal punched the German officer on the nose. Well, he was put in a punishment cell, you might call it a lock-up.

Whereabouts was that?

That was at Conde - remember I told you, when there were two American flying officers brought in that wouldn't give a word - parole, that means that they wouldn't attempt to escape, you see.

The private who was hit by the German officer was smoking? Was smoking prohibited, was it?

Well, smoking wasn't prohibited, no - no - they were English cigarettes - he got it in his Red Cross parcels, you see. I suppose whether he was not supposed - there was no notice, and nobody told the lad that he wasn't allowed to smoke there, he was just smoking. They used to make a cigarette, the Germans, but it was only about half the size, all the rest was the same length as an ordinary cigarette, but all the rest of it was holder sort of business, you know.

Filter, or paper?

Paper stuff - whiz-bangs they used to call them - two puffs and it was gone. They didn't know, and of course, this German officer, I suppose he was thinking he was smoking a good cigarette like that when he was smoking this other rubbish - it was only rubbish anyway.

And he hit him?

So he hit him, and he come off second best in the finish because he never got the corporal that hit him.

Did you see that? You just heard of it?

No, I wasn't there then - no, I was back in - as a matter of fact, I was in camp, I hadn't gone out that day.

Whereabouts were you at Conde? What was the quarters there?

Oh, well, it's hard - you don't get a chance to see a town, you're just dumped into a place and that's that, you don't get out of it to see a town. And there was a sort of a factory business there, I don't know just what they used to do in it, I'm sure. I told you, it was an old fortified border town between France and Belgium, many, many years ago. Of course, that business has all gone by the board.

You weren't at Conde very long, were you?

No, no, not long.

A couple of weeks?

Oh, about three or four weeks, I suppose.

What did they have you doing there? Were you working there?

The boys were working there, but we weren't.

So the whole party from Denain went up to Conde, did it?

Yeah, the whole lot.

Everybody that was at Denain moved?

How did we go?

Well, I mean, why did you go? What was the purpose?

Well, I'll tell you why, because he was getting a hiding on the front, and they were getting too close to Denain, see.

So you were pulled out?

We were pulled out of it and sent up to Conde, you see - that's the reason - that's the reason.

Did you hear the fighting, or the artillery?

Oh, we knew it was on, oh, yes, we knew it was on, but we didn't exactly know the position, you see.

What news of the war would you get? Did you generally have a reasonable idea of how the fighting was going?

Well, we knew, in 1918 - after August 1918 - how it was going because ...

END OF TAPE FIVE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE SIX - SIDE A

Identification: Tape 6

Occasionally, if there was an airman brought down, they might dump him in our camp overnight, or for a few hours, or something, keep him out of the road while they were doing

something else. But outside of that, that's about the only - he'd never stop with it because they are all an officer's rank, you see, those air pilots.

The officers were split up, weren't they?

Oh, yes.

Did you ever see any Australian officers while you were in Germany?

No, none at all - they had their own camp, and they were kept isolated. Oh, yes, they had their own camps in Germany.

What kind of things would you be doing at night, after work?

Nothing.

Did you get books from the Red Cross to read?

No, no, nothing. No, I never saw any books from the Red Cross. The only thing you had to read was, if you had it, was the pocket bible, and you had to have good eyesight to see that because the print was that small. You know, well, you get a bible that just fits in your pocket, you can imagine all that's in it, everything's in it, the print's mighty small.

That's right. Did you have concerts?

Well, we did in Germany, when we got to Friedrichsfeld, we used to have concerts there. We had a special - of course, I say, it was a big camp, it would hold about 40,000 troops, you see - well, they had a concert hall there - theatre if you like to call it - it was a concert hall, and different nations would put on their own - like French, or Russian, what have you, put them on and then the British, they'd put one on too, occasionally - concerts. They were all quite good ones too. Oh, yes, they had good talent in amongst some of them - oh, no, it was quite ...

I remember one night there was a party of us, and we got some tickets to go to an English

concert - and we were in our own particular area, separated, and you had to go out through special gates to get into the xxx place - xxx where the other people were, you see.

Well, the guards let us go through the gate and around through another one, you see, and we went over it. Well, that's alright. When we came out, after the concert was over - and it was quite a good show too, variety show, you know, quite good.

There was a German there, and we lined up at the gate to go back with the rest of the mob, you see, and he wouldn't let us go through - he put us in the clink all night. We sat in there, and the guards never got any sleep because we sang and kicked up [Hank's delight].

You kicked up Hank's delight?

(Laughs) You know, we sang and made all the noise we could, we did it all night.

How many of there would there be?

Oh, there'd be about eight or nine of us, I'd say.

All Australians?

No, mixed lot. The next morning we were brought up before the officer in the camp, and he told him, he said, 'How did you get there?' - he could speak English this bloke - he said, 'How did you get there?' - I said, 'The guards let us through the gate' - 'Guards let you through the gate!' - I said, 'Yeah, and they took us in through the other gate, the other side'. 'Oh,' he said, 'is that it?' - he said, 'I can't punish you because you haven't done anything wrong' - he said, 'You didn't know' - I said, 'That's right, we didn't know' - I said, 'This bloomin' other German that was kicking up all the [shindy], locked us up for the night ...' - he was there and he took them through a special gate, he took everybody though, and he checked on the numbers who went through. When he came to check us to go back there was eight or nine more, you see, and he wanted to know where we came from, how we got in. But he wouldn't listen to us - he couldn't speak much English. Oh, I don't know xxx.

What was the variety show like?

It was quite good.

What kind of things did they do?

Oh, all sorts - you know what a variety show is like - you know - there'd be a little act of some sort. I can't remember just exactly what it was now, but little acts or something, someone would sing a song, or give a recitation, or something like that, you know. Quite an interesting little ... you know, it was quite a good show for that sort of thing.

At Friedrichsfeld you were in a separate section?

Oh, yes, all NCOs - all NCOs.

There were eight or nine NCOs that went across in this group?

Yes, yes. We had to go through two gates, you see; you had the main gate, and then in through another one, and the guards took us around, see. The guards got into trouble for doing it, not us, they got roared out for doing it, they shouldn't have done it. They said, 'No, you can't go, you've got gates over there, you go there'. That's what they should have told us, you see, but they didn't tell us.

You should have only gone through one gate?

We should have only gone through one gate, you see, instead of that we went through two.

And when you were coming back you appeared at a gate that you hadn't been through?

That's right.

They couldn't understand where you came from?

There were several others that went over to the same concert, you see, and, of course, they all went through the one gate. Here was our crowd, they are all extra (laughs) - he wouldn't make that out, how we got there, xxx xxx trick. When we went before the officer and told him all about it, he could see our side of the business.

Whereabouts were you staying in Friedrichsfeld? You were in barracks there?

Yeah, barracks, oh, yeah. Everybody had a little bunk or their own - yes, everyone.

Were they double-decker bunks?

No, no, single beds. No, they were ... we just had a single bed, you know, only they were made with boards, went up the side, then there was a mattress - straw mattress - on them. Oh, no, they were reasonably comfortable.

How many were there in a barrack?

Oh, there'd be about thirty or forty of us, I suppose.

Did they have cooking facilities and so on in that?

Oh, yeah, oh, [crumby], cooking facilities was right, yes, my word - oh, yes, we had our own cooking facilities. They had a kitchen, and they had what they called a hot plate - if you know what a hot plate it - it was built up at the front, and then there was a great big sheet of steel on the top, and there was a fire box - there'd be a fire box underneath. And that was always hot, you could go and cook a meal on that - your Red Cross parcels - you'd cook all your meals and make what you wanted - boil the billy and make a cup of tea, that sort of thing, you see. Oh, no, fair dinkum hot plate - by gee, it was hot too, my word. There was a fire in it all the time, the fire was never out. You'd get up in the morning and there was some coal there, and they'd shovel some coal into it and warm her up for cooking the breakfast - porridge in the morning, and that sort of thing.

It would be mainly coal that they were using?

Oh, yes, coal, yes.

Did you have to take turns on looking after that?

Oh, well, if you were out there cooking something and you saw the fire was a bit low, you'd toss some on, that sort of business, you'd look after it just the same.

Did they have latrines and so on in the huts?

Sure, yes, oh, yes, they had latrines, but they were out, not in the huts, they were out of the huts. Oh, yes, they had all those sorts of things. And they had what they called lightning conductors. You know, they get some very fierce thunderstorms evidently, in parts of Europe, at times, and they'd have a pole up about, oh, a good thirty feet high with a thick steel rod, right down into the ground, and any lightning about it sort of attracts it - you see what I mean? - [gravity] will run it into the ground, otherwise you might get a house or a hut, or something, struck, see. Oh, yes, they were dotted round about the place.

Was Friedrichsfeld a camp build specially for prisoners, was it?

That's right, yes - there was only a railway station there.

There was only a railway station?

That's all there was when I went there.

What was the view from Friedrichsfeld? What could you see from the camp?

Nothing.

What was it around the camp?

Really only - I suppose when you got out away from it a bit it was farming country, that sort of

business - there were very few houses round about, very ... odd one. You might see an odd one here and there - it was farming country round about, not heavily timbered, although you had to go through what they call the Black Forest, then way into Germany. We had to go through it.

Funny thing, we were told about this Black Forest - didn't know anything about it - and when we were going ... xxx [use it at] night-time - we didn't know anything about it. And it appears that there was a couple of Australian pilots had been brought down, and they were brought into our camp at Conde. We were talking to them, and they said, 'Do you know anything about the Black Forest?', and I said, 'No'. 'Oh,' he said, 'we were just wondering'.

Anyhow, I don't know what happened, but they said we are going to give it a go when we go through the Black Forest, you see. I said, 'What about your guard?' - 'Well,' he said, 'we'll fix him'. But what happened I couldn't tell you because I never heard any more (laughs). They reckoned they'd get out of the Black Forest and then make for Holland.

This is from the train taking you to Friedrichsfeld?

Yes, train taking us. But oh, it was a terrific ... we went through Essen - you go through Essen - it was terrific - you know what Essen is?

That's in the north, isn't it?

You know what Essen is?

Wheat - German for wheat, isn't it? Well, it's a town.

It's one of the biggest armament foundries in Germany, I suppose; they make anything they want in the way of material for ammunition and that sort of thing - war stuff. Well, we went through there at night. See, when we went in we had to change trains at Cologne, and when we went away at night - we got into Cologne about, oh, half past three, or four, in the afternoon, and we had to wait until about seven o'clock at night to get the train to go around to Friedrichsfeld, you see. Well, we - they took us into the canteen, gave us beer - yes, because there was only us NCOs, you see.

There were only seven or eight of you?

Oh, no, no fear, there was all the NCOs, about thirty or forty of us. And they took us all in and gave us lager beer - they drink a terrible lot of lager beer in Germany - it's a light beer, you see - terrible lot of it. And we - oh, they treated us like kings, and I saw one of the most beautiful cathedrals that I've ever seen in Cologne, it was a beautiful place. When they were bombing Cologne they dodged it - no bombs on Cologne - in this last war - oh, it was a beautiful bit of work.

Why would the Germans in the canteen so generous to you?

Well, they were losing the war - they were losing the war.

This is in October 1918?

Yeah. Well, we went in and we went through Essen. Well, now, I'm not exaggerating, but if you had a newspaper you could see to read from the reflections of the furnaces; going through at night you could read a newspaper. So you can imagine what it would be like. Why that was never bombed - do you know why? - Great Britain had her finger in the pie - yeah! - Great Britain had her finger in the pie, wouldn't bomb Essen, oh, no. Of course, now, this last war, they bombed the daylights out of it.

Yes, that's right. What was the general morale like while you were at Denain?

General morale?

Yes.

Pretty good.

No-one got depressed?

No, no, oh, no, the morale was pretty good - oh, yes. Well, you had to make the best of a bad job, that was the full strength of it, yes. You were in a position, well, you just couldn't be gloomy, it would be a miserable life for yourself and everyone around you. As I told you, they had sports every Sunday, so you can imagine the general position of the troops there.

Did you have any particular interests or hobbies, or exercise?

Well, you couldn't get any, no, you couldn't get any - no hobbies. There was no hobbies that you could get over there.

I think in some of the bigger camps they used to organise little schools to teach various subjects. It sounds like where you were there was very little facilities.

Never had anything like that, not where I was, no. Of course, as I say, in that particular section and particular crowd at Denain.

Your experience, I think, was not quite the same as most of the men.

No.

It was slightly different.

No, I'll tell you what, some of them were rather clever, particularly Russians because they used to make all sorts of knick-knacks - they'd do it with a penknife, you know, that sort of thing. They'd get hold of bits of timber and they'd do all sorts - they'd make ... I didn't see it, but I was being told, that one Russian chap, he made an absolute model of the Eiffel Tower - you know the Eiffel Tower in Paris? - well, he made a complete model of the Eiffel Tower in little bits of wood, about the size of matchsticks - terrific, you know - all sorts of things like that.

Very good craft.

But there you are. There was none of our fellows like that (laughs).

Did you play any music? Did anybody have an instrument?

No - no - music, no! - oh, gosh, no - we never had any instruments - we couldn't get any music. The only music we heard was the German music whenever a band went though the streets or something, that's about the only time we ever heard music.

You were telling me about Jack Murphy yesterday and how he got out of Germany and into Holland.

Into Holland, yes. Oh, yes, poor old Jack.

He was a 10th Battalion man, wasn't he?

No he wasn't - now, wait a minute - he could have been, he could have been a 10th Battalion man.

Was he captured with you?

He was in my company - I'll tell you what now. He worked the first original - now, wait a minute - no, he wasn't - he was a second colonel - was he? - now, wait a minute, am I getting him muddled up? - no - he was in the 10th Battalion anyhow, this colonel, he was a senior major, he was known as Hercombe - Major Hercombe. Well, he got promoted to - after the landing on Gallipoli and that sort of business there, he got promoted to lieutenant colonel, and he took over the 50th Battalion when we formed up in Egypt, after Gallipoli. And this chap was his batman.

Jack Murphy was his batman?

Batman. They'd worked together in civilian life, Hercombe and ...

Whereabouts?

In Adelaide - oh, I couldn't tell you - in some manufacturing firm. Poor old xxx, first hit at

Mouquet Farm. The battalion got such a chopping up, it broke the old boy altogether. He was too old really, he should never have been there - because he was sixty, and he was too old and he couldn't stand it. And the men were first, officers were second, see, he was that sort of man.

How do you spell his name?

H-U-R-C-O-M-B-E.

Murphy made out that he was short of sight - he couldn't see?

He was too old for it, you see - sixties no good - he was sixty, he was too old, he couldn't take it, and it broke his heart, the casualties the battalion had, you see. They had about six hundred casualties, and that broke his heart, he couldn't stand it, it was too much for him. And he was in amongst it all, not only sitting back in a dugout, away back, he was in. He was certainly in a hole somewhere, but it was only a bit of a shallow one, wasn't anything thirty or forty feet deep like some of the cows. Anyhow, it broke his heart and they took him out, and he came back to Australia. Then we got this other chap from Queensland - Salisbury - the dugout king I always called him - I told you about him.

Yes, you did - quite a common term that one. You were telling me that Jack Murphy was telling you these stories on the boat coming back, wasn't he?

Yeah.

Can you recall anything else he told you?

Oh, I don't know if there's anything else, just that they took him and gave him a job in - he was one of them that was in Bruchain, and there was a few of them from there were sent in to Germany, and he was one of them.

Was he a private?

Yes, yes, oh, yes, he was a private.

Do you know whereabouts in Germany he went?

Well, I couldn't tell you - he went to an officers' mess, that's all I know.

He was a waiter there?

He was a waiter in there - [fact totem], you know. Oh, he was a bird, xxx were pretty good, but oh, gee, you'd have heard him tell that story, it was really a scream, they were just roaring with laughter (laughs), the chaps.

You were telling me about him having to salute; I didn't understand that yesterday, that's what I was trying to elaborate on. They tried to test him out, didn't they, to see what his sight was like, and he had to go past a German officer, didn't he?

He had to make a salute, you see, he walked past, see.

Why did he have to salute?

Well, testing his eyesight, that's one way of testing his eyesight, you see. Instead of him walking straight past him, he shot off at a tangent and went away in a blaze of glory and didn't even see him, and didn't even salute (laughs).

As a prisoner of war, he had to salute the German officer, did he?

Oh, yes, yes, just the same as he'd have to salute one of his own officers.

How did they test him out?

They tested him out on that, and then they - what else did they do to test him out? - was there something else? - no, I don't think so - then they sent him to Archen, you see. And you know what happened at Archen, he fell on top of the doctor, you see (laughs). Then the doctor didn't worry to put the stethoscope, because he said, 'If he puts that stethoscope on me' - he said, 'I'm as

fit as I'll ever be'.

He was very thin, wasn't he, and he was making out that he was ...

He was naturally a thin man, you know, and to look at him you'd think that he was one of these - he was one of these chaps that - what would I say? - matured in - aged early in life, see. He had a wrinkled up face, and all that sort of thing, and yet he was only a youngster, you might say.

In his forties, wasn't he?

Well, in his thirties. Of course, if you'd have been in your forties you probably wouldn't have got in - well, he wouldn't have either.

He went past this German officer and didn't see the German?

He didn't see him, no.

He was pretending he didn't?

Pretending he didn't see him, you see (laughs) - oh, yes - yes, that's right - poor old Murph. Of course, they are passed on now.

What about the Armistice? You were in Friedrichsfeld when the end of the war came?

Yes, well ... the sergeant in charge of our section of the camp came along and said it was mooted that the war was about to end any time, you see - this particular - oh, about two or three days before - it was mooted around - and, of course, the boys were getting a bit excited. But outside of that we didn't know anything, they never told us anything.

And then on the morning of the 11th, the sergeant called up a parade, lined us all up and he told us.

This is the German sergeant?

Yeah, German sergeant - he said the war was finished, he said, and you are free to go. The guards were taken off, you see, the gates were thrown open, and the only mistake - the only thing they didn't do was turn off the electric current in between the two barbed wires (laughs). Somebody found that out - I don't know who it was.

Sergeant had one of these little toy dogs, you know - little fellows - he picked him up and threw him in to see what would happen - swish!

A big flash?

A big flash - the little dog.

Was it a real dog?

Oh, it was a real dog, oh, yes, yes, my word.

It was the German's dog?

Yes.

Sergeant's dog?

Yes, this little dog, and they tossed him onto the electric fence.

To see what would happen?

See what would happen - up it went, you see - oh! - and then they realised and woke up, and switched it all off. Well, then we went out, and we went into xxx that afternoon, and went to a place called Wessel - do you know?

W-E-S-S-E-L?

That's right, Wessel on the Rhine. Well, we walked over there to have a look and see what that was like (laughs).

How many of you went across there?

Oh, about half a dozen of us, I suppose.

Were the people who threw the dog on the wire, were they English?

Yes - I don't know who it was, but there was a dog thrown on the wire - I didn't see it (laughs).

They didn't care much about the dog obviously?

No, they didn't care much for the dog. Not long after that the sergeant came out with his cup of coffee and he said, 'This is what I've been fighting for - barley (coffee)'.

That's right, you told me that.

Well, then, of course, things were so well organised that within two days - yes, I think it was only two days - and our first batch went into Holland, you see - there was about four hundred - so many NCOs and so many British troops, went into Holland. Of course, there was a train pulled up at Friedrichsfeld station.

This is a Dutch train?

Oh, I suppose it was - I don't know, it could have been a German train, I wouldn't know exactly, I wouldn't say. Anyhow, we went to a place called [Sevenare] in Holland.

How do you spell that, do you know?

END OF TAPE SIX - SIDE A

START OF TAPE SIX - SIDE B

Oh, well (laughs) now you've got me.

I can probably find out that.

Sevenare. And they spent the night there and then went on. Well, we took enough of our parcels - food - just to last us a couple of days, you see; we didn't know what was going to happen.

Well, then the next batch, the following day, I had - there was about twenty-odd third division troops that had been taken prisoner, they were in there, only they were on the other side of the wire to what I was, you see - I was in the NCOs camp, they were in - well, they picked those crowd out, those twenty-odd, I think - probably twenty-odd or so - and they picked them out. They called me over and said, 'You've got charge of these blokes to go back tomorrow' - I said, 'Right'.

Who told you to do that, the German?

No, sergeant major of the camp - sergeant major of the camp, he told us that. So I said, 'Righto, I'll be ready, don't worry, I'll be glad to get out of it' (laughs).

So you were in the second batch to go?

I was in the second batch to go, you see. We left there after dinner the next day, and we got into Holland, oh, somewhere round about five or six o'clock at night. Well, we stayed at a - oh, some place over there - it was a nunnery sort of business. We brought food, well, we left it there - what food we brought we left - we had our tea, and when we left - what was over, we left there, you see, because it helped them - they were damn good to us, they had hot coffee - of course, they are coffee drinkers over there - they had hot coffee and all that sort of business for us - a place to lie down and rest for the night, and then we got on the train and went up to Rotterdam the next day. It was quite an interesting thing to do, right through from the south of Holland, right up to Rotterdam, it was quite interesting to drive through and see it all - canals and I don't know what not, all over the place. Oh, no, it was quite interesting. Saw the house that old kaiser built, hanging out - a place called [Dawn].

How did you know it was where he was?

Oh, the Germans knew because he cleared out - if he hadn't have done they would have shot him (laughs).

That's right. And they destroyed Red Cross parcels at Friedrichsfeld, you were saying yesterday?

Yes, they did. When we left Friedrichsfeld - when I say we left, orders came through that the Germans weren't to get any of it, you see. They said give it to any of our allied troops that wanted it - give it to them - and the rest destroy, burn, which they did.

You'd think they were bound to get rid of it all, particularly for the Russians.

Oh, yes, well, the Russians did take a bit, yes - they took a bit - some of the French did, but not much. Of course, the French weren't that far from home, it was only a matter of a few ... They might take a parcel, you see - they'd get enough out of it to eat and a little bit over.

When we got to Rotterdam, there was a change of clothes - now get out of that prisoner of war uniform and leave it there - the Dutch had got them, I don't know what they did with them - they could do what they liked (laughs). Then we were there, oh, I suppose about forty-eight hours, and then we went on a fishing boat - xxx on a fishing boat.

What kind of a fishing boat was it? Was it a fairly large one?

No, no, not very big.

How may would have been on the boat?

Oh, might have been about thirty or forty altogether.

Not many?

No. There was about three cabins on it - well, perhaps four cabins - that's all, and they were handed over to the likes of me - I mean, I wasn't the only one, there was two or three other sergeants and NCOs - there was about four or five of us NCOs. We were given these cabins, we could camp in them if we liked.

We went across to Hull, and we got at Hull just at dusk. Of course, there are submarine nets right across Hull Harbour and you couldn't get in, so we had to sit and wait all night, camp on the boat all night, and wait till next morning. Then they opened it up and took the nets away altogether, you see - then the war was over, you see, took the nets away. We landed at Hull, and then we went into Rippon - do you know Rippon in Yorkshire?

Yes.

From there I handed these blokes - no, I didn't hand them over, I was still in charge of them, these Australians. Being the only Australian NCO, I had to go in - I was interviewed by an Australian officer, you see, we sat down and had quite a yarn. He said, 'Are there any officers with you?' - I said, 'Yes, a company commander and a lieutenant'.

This is when you were captured?

Yeah - company commander and Lieutenant [Gore]. 'Oh,' he said, 'yes, we'll get all the information we want from them'. We had a talk, you know.

What about Christmas time in Germany or in France? You spent one Christmas in France, didn't you?

Yes, 1917.

What did you do on Christmas Day?

(Laughs) No more than we did any other day.

Didn't you?

No.

Did they make you work?

I can't remember - I don't think so, no, I think we had Christmas Day off or something. No, I don't think we worked on Christmas Day - no, there was nothing special on, you see. I can't remember anything special, I'm pretty well sure there was nothing.

What about at Bruchain, what were the men doing at Bruchain? What kind of work were they doing?

I don't know - I never went out in Bruchain - I couldn't tell you what they were doing there.

You stayed in the camp all the time?

Yes, I was in the camp all the time.

What did you do during the day?

Oh, just pottered around in there - go down and sat on the canal. There was a canal running right alongside the camp, go down there and sit on the bank of the canal - of course, there was a guard there all the time - sit on the bank of the canal and watch what was happening, and that sort of business, while the time away.

Did they ever try to force you to work?

No, never - no, they never forced us - that's the NCOs, never forced them at all.

You had a choice, I suppose, if you wanted to work you could have done.

Well, if you went out with the party and you worked, well, that was up to you, wasn't it? - not

that any of us did too much, I'll tell you, we weren't going to help him (laughs).

While you were working behind the lines, doing these gun pits and so on, was there ever a time when you were under fire?

No.

When you could see?

xxx - never been under it, but I've seen the actual fire. And I'll tell you, as I told you, how the British heavy artillery blew out four German guns - I told you that, I think, the other day. Then there was a bit of - oh, I don't know whether you'd call it bush country - I suppose the bushes would be about as high as that cupboard there.

About two metres high - a metre and a half.

Had that full of guns, and they could never locate where these guns were, but they were a source or annoyance - this was out more in the front of [Vimmy Ridge].

One particular day - I'll never forget it - an observation plane of ours was flying over, and these guns opened up for some reason or other - observation plane. The observation plane told them exactly where they were - they didn't last long.

They wouldn't.

So they soon fixed that lot. Oh, no, that was British artillery.

When you were working behind the lines in France for the Germans, you weren't really exposed to any risk, were you?

Not in that respect, no.

Could you see any of the front line - the British front line - from where you were?

No, we were never that close, no.

Do you know of any of the men who were?

No, I don't know of anybody - not the men that I was with anyhow. I mean, I can't speak for others, no, but any that I were with, they were never within that range - oh, no.

Did the Red Cross send you anything other than food? Did they send medicine?

No.

What about blankets and that kind of thing?

No.

Did the Germans provide them?

No. You only had your clothes. We were fortunate in many respects. See, we were captured in April, and right through until, oh, I suppose January, before it really got cold. December would get fresh, but really cold in January and February, and then it would start to warm up again. Well, we were reasonably comfortably quartered.

You'd be able to keep fairly warm?

Oh, yes. You see, we were in the hospital in Denain, you see.

Was that a stone building?

Oh, yes, all stone - oh, yes.

Was it two-storey or just one-storey?

One-storey for three wards, if you'd like to call them if you like - you'd have separate buildings, but they were only one-storey, but the administrative section of the hospital, and the operating theatre, was a two-storey place.

How far away from the factory was that?

Oh, about - what would it be? - half to three-quarters of a kilometre I suppose.

It was in a residential district, was it?

Oh, there was houses all around it, yes.

Was it a hospital on its own, or was it a hospital actually for the factory?

No, it was supposed to be there for the factory - at least, that's what we were given to understand.

For the factory workers you mean?

Factory workers. I think more than likely it was a general hospital, that's my opinion of it - I'm only one, you see. You are not going to have injuries or people sick working in a factory like that, with three different wards. I mean, they are not going to keep them filled because, I mean, I suppose it would hold about - three wards would hold somewhere around about forty-fifty people - that's sick people I mean.

That's each ward?

No, no, no, that's all the lot.

That's altogether?

That's altogether. Of course, where ours was, we'd have that many people in one ward.

So there were three hundred-odd people in the one building?

Yeah.

And you are all sleeping on the floor?

Oh, no, we had double-deckers.

Oh, you had the bunks?

Yeah, double-deckers.

Electric light?

Yeah, oh, yes.

Were any of the guards actually sleeping in the building, or near the building?

No, they were outside.

Where did they sleep?

Oh, I don't know, they used to camp out - they had a camp outside somewhere, in the town somewhere. Oh, no, they camped outside the camp, outside the boundaries.

Did they lock the wards up of a night?

No, oh, no, they didn't lock them up of a night.

Was there a curfew, like at ten o'clock?

Oh, yes, there was lights out, oh, yes, that sort of thing, yes - oh, yes, lights out, then they'd have xxx in the morning.

You'd have a morning parade, I suppose, would you?

Workman's parade.

Work parade, yes. They'd count you, I suppose, would they?

Yes. They'd come along - so many men for such and such a job, and so many men for such and such, another job somewhere else, and that sort of business, you see.

Were you the only prisoners working at that factory, or were there other prisoners in other barracks elsewhere?

No, we were the only ones that I knew of working there. Of course, the Germans had such a big area of it for repair work, you see, and they used to do all their own repair work, always, repairing guns and repairing machine-guns, or what have you. They had their own section working on that, no-one else was in there - allowed in there. We were only allowed, as I say, in one or two particular spots.

And they'd get you doing fairly menial tasks, would they?

Oh, yes, anything.

And how was it that you found these Lewis guns there?

Well, I didn't find them, another chap found them, and he came along and told us. And he said, 'Gee, whiz, if we get the springs out of there we'll make them useless'. So I said, 'Well, do you know anything about it?' - he said, 'Oh, yes, I know a little bit, but,' he said, 'so and so ...' - can't thin of the fellow's name - he said, 'He's a machine-gunner, he'll know'. So he told him and they worked it out between them, and I used to just keep watch. Any Germans coming I'd cough like mad and they'd nick off, you see, but they still had a few springs in their pockets.

Did they get all the springs out?

They got them all, yeah - yes, they got them all, oh, yes.

They'd been collected on the battlefield, I suppose?

Oh, yes, captured, you see.

Captured Lewis guns, yes.

And they had plenty of ammunition with them, you see.

Did they?

Oh, well.

You found this Schnapps, didn't you?

Mm?

You found some Schnapps at Denain, wasn't it?

Schnapps, yeah, oh, yeah, that was in a barrel, would be about - what would it be? - about four or five gallon barrel, I suppose. I had one of these little five gallon kegs.

Whereabouts did you find that?

It was in what they called the material section of the joint - there was all sorts in there - writing material and goodness knows what - soap powder and all sorts of stuff in there. I got nosing around and looking in there one day and I saw this keg, and I found a nail and dug a hole in - it was only cork - had it been a wooden bottle I would have been stumped, you see. It was only cork and I bored a hole through the cork with a nail. Then I had a hunt around the place to find a straw, which I did.

This is a hay straw, is it?

Yeah - well, straw would by lying around different places, they'd have something there - probably horse feed or something or other they'd have stored there. I got a straw about that long.

About a foot long or so.

And I put it in a tried the schnapps.

So what happened after that? You drank some of it, did you?

I handed it over - I told the other blokes about it, I said, 'Do you want to find a straw and get a drink of schnapps?' - and they kept xxx somebody keep xxx, if there was a German coming they'd cough like mad and they'd nick off, you see. Then this poor German bloke, he found it too, and he sniffed over the top, and he went away and found a straw, and he's having a go at it, and the German officer caught him and sent him up to the front line. So he was the one that got punished. But I was never keen on then, I didn't like them at all. The Dutch people, they use them a lot.

The schnapps?

The Dutch people did, but I wasn't over-keen on them, never.

(Break in interview)

Identification: Interview continued, Monday, 2 October 1989.

I thought we might start again today, just with a little bit on the prisoner of war period again. Can you go through the few moments before and after you were captured?

Just before?

Yes.

Well, just before, we couldn't do anything because we were held down because of machine-gun fire, you see. If we moved we were shot. Well, there's no point in jumping up and throwing yourself away. So that's what happened. Well, see, a crowd came out from the village ...

The Germans?

Yeah - the Germans came out of the village with a mopping up party, as we called it, and it was only a matter of a sergeant and a half a dozen men.

Half a dozen Germans?

Oh, the village was full of them, you see.

This is Bullecourt?

Yes - what chance did those fellows have, there was none.

How many were there in your little party?

Oh, I suppose there would be about - anything up to thirty, thirty-odd.

And you were all together?

When I say altogether, you know, some were out in the open, the company commander, he was with us, but he wasn't just exactly with us at the particular spot, you know, there was sort of one of these little dugout affairs on the side of the road, and he made his headquarters in there. I don't know how many he had in there, I couldn't tell you - there might have been a dozen or something like that. We didn't see those fellows, they were taken after we were gone - we were the first to go - well, then they grabbed them afterwards.

What happened when the Germans actually captured you? When did you first see them?

Oh, we saw them coming out of the village - yes - and we had this machine-gun banging away at us. Actually, our gunner blew the one out on the right.

That's the Lewis gunner, was it?

Yes, Lewis gunner, he blew the German one out.

Did he?

Oh, yes, he happened to have his field glasses - he had field glasses - and he was screwing around, and he spotted them. 'Oh,' he said, 'here we are, here's a shot', and he let go and put it out of action. Well, if the other battalion had have come up ...

The other company?

Then, you see, well, the point was that that machine-gun xxx.

And so with it out of action they could come up?

If he'd have found it out before, before they came up, you see, and put it out of action, well, they'd have just walked straight up into the line, you see, because the few Germans that were in holding that particular section of the line weren't many. They'd have given in when they saw a whole battalion coming up on top of them.

And the Germans came out from Bullecourt?

No, not from Bullecourt, Noreiul.

From Noreiul?

Yeah - oh, yes, Bullecourt was away in front. We were making the hop-off - taking the hop-off position for the Bullecourt-Hindenburg Line.

This is the sunken road that you were trying to capture?

Yes, that's right - and this machine-gun was up on the top bank of it, you see, and they could shoot right away round, anywhere and everywhere. He caused a lot of casualties there.

Did he?

Yes, oh, yes. As a matter of fact, there was a battalion machine-gun sergeant in charge of Lewis gunners in the battalion, he was shot - yes, they shot him. Oh, no, it was a bad show. If we'd have had an artillery bombardment it might have been different, it was just about half a dozen shells fired over it, anywhere and everywhere, no particular spot, you see. It was badly organised, very badly organised.

The Germans came out from Noreiul?

They came out from the rear of us, you see. We were right on the edge of his front line. We were just pinned down, we couldn't go any further.

And the Germans came out from Noreiul, up behind you?

Yeah.

Did you see them coming?

Oh, you couldn't miss them (laughs) - you couldn't miss them.

And they were shooting at you, I suppose?

No, no, there were no shots fired.

So you couldn't get away from where you were?

No, we couldn't get away, either way. As a matter of fact, there was Lieutenant Gore and myself,

and two or three others - away on our right there was a low bank about, oh, I suppose it would be about that high ...

About half a metre high.

Oh, yes. And we thought, well, there might be a trench there, you see - we ducked across to it. The machine-gun opened fire but he didn't get any of us, he missed. You could hear the bullets - almost see them - whistling around you. We got behind it, but there was nothing. What it was caused from I wouldn't know. No, we didn't xxx. Of course, the machine-gun could pin us down there like nobody's business, couldn't do anything about it.

So you were really trapped?

We were all taken prisoners.

The Germans came up - what actually happened? Did Lieutenant Gore tell you to surrender?

What could you do? You couldn't do anything else, you just give in.

When you were taken back through the Bullecourt trenches, what kind of fortifications did you see, going through the Hindenburg Line?

The only fortification you saw was the extensive barbed wire in front of the Hindenburg Line.

How many lines of that were there?

There was only one line.

There was one line of barbed wire?

The Hindenburg Line was the width of the [room], easy.

This was the trench itself?

Trench itself, yes - all dug by the Russians for two loaves of bread a day.

That would be about five or six metres, wouldn't it?

Oh, yes, somewhere about that, yes - wide enough to stop a tank. A tank would come across and he would get his crawlers in about half way, and then he'd topple over.

How deep was it?

Oh, about six or seven feet.

How was the barbed wire laid out?

Oh, you know, it had posts and wire attached to it. Oh, I suppose it would be about that far apart - wire, barbed wire - had rows, and rows, one on top of the other, like that, and about that high, I suppose - it would be about two foot six, three feet, and as thick as xxx stick. I had a party laying barbed wire all through the '16-'17 winter, about six or seven weeks of it. We used to lay it - what would it be? - about thirty, thirty-six feet wide - half a mile a night.

Half a mile a night? That's a lot of it. How many of there were you doing that?

Thirty-odd. And then you had to pick through about a good foot depth of frozen ground.

To drive the sticks?

The sharp point pick, you know, then we had the sort of screw posts - no driving them in with hammers and that sort of thing, you screwed them in like a corkscrew.

Not to make a noise.

They had sort of rings in them so that you could run the wires through.

They were steel, were they?

Oh, yes, iron, yes.

How was your barbed wire work compared with what the Germans had done?

Oh, I don't know, I suppose they were all much of a muchness, as far as that goes. The barb was only a check, after all is said and done.

Would you be able to get over the top of this barbed wire at the Hindenburg Line?

Oh, no - well, it was too wide. And if you happened to be lucky and strike one of ...

END OF TAPE SIX - SIDE B

START OF TAPE SEVEN - SIDE A

Identification: Tape 7

I thought we might just go over some of the stories you were telling me yesterday about Denain.

Oh, yeah.

I might get a bit more description from you of the quarters at Denain.

Well, you know what hospital wards are like; well, there was so many in those wards - double bunks - this was our quarters. And then there was the fireplaces in them, you see, and, of course, we used to get boys to go out working, unloading coal, and one thing and another, and they'd bring home bags of coal, and we'd do our own cooking.

How large would the ward have been?

Oh, some of them would be as big as this room - bigger - oh, yes, some of them were quite.

Three or four metres by five metres.

You know what a big ward would be in a big hospital, probably round about ten or twelve beds, something like that. Well, you get these bunks, two tiers, see, well you'd perhaps double that number in the same room.

So you would get twenty or so in a room, I suppose?

Yeah, oh, yeah - most of them - then you'd get a ward with about four - see, you'd get about eight or ten in there - and then you'd get your single wards with - I suppose they'd be sort of recovery wards or private wards where there was only a single room, well, you'd probably only get about four in there - that sort of business.

How big was the room you were in?

Oh, that was about, I suppose, anything up to about twenty, I suppose - oh, yeah. Up on the top bunk I was - you had steps to get up.

The workplace at Denain, that was a foundry as well, was it, the factory?

Well, I don't know what it was - it was a manufacturing factory - I don't know whether you'd call it a foundry.

Was it very noisy?

Oh, well, of course, it wasn't very noisy while we were working, not like it would be in peace-time. See, there wasn't a lot of the machinery working and that sort of business. The only noise you'd hear were Germans way up their end of the business doing repair work. It wasn't that noisy.

There were German engineers working there, were there?

Military engineers, yeah.

Was there smoke and that kind of thing there - fumes?

Smoke?

Yes.

Well, I don't know, I can't remember anybody smoking - no, I couldn't remember anyone smoking there.

No, I mean the ...

No, I don't think so, no, I'm pretty well sure they weren't allowed to smoke, not in there anyway.

The story about the officer who hit the private who was smoking; he was smoking?

That was Conde.

That was at Conde, not in the factory?

No, it was at Conde.

What about church parades?

No, no, no such thing - no such thing.

Did you try and organise services amongst yourselves?

Oh, there was nobody to take it - there was no-one to take it - there was no-one there that could take a service. Anyhow, we never had any books, except those that had their own little pocket

bible. That's the only religion you got was your pocket bible - it saved one or two lives, mind you.

Where the bullets hit them?

The bullets didn't penetrate.

I've seen that.

But I'll tell you something now you would hardly credit - I'm not sure whether it was the battle of the Marne or the battle of the [Aisne], but there was a British soldier shot through the heart and he lived. It was an absolute miracle. The doctors explained it; when the bullet passed through his heart the valve opened, you see. If the valve had been shut he would have been killed dead straight away - the valve opened and the bullet went through. It's remarkable, isn't it? It's the only time it ever happened.

It is remarkable. What about parades generally? Did you have a parade every day?

No.

You didn't have parades?

Only working party parades.

You'd have to fall out after breakfast, I suppose?

Yes.

And march off to the factory?

March off, so many for this job here, and so many for that job over there, sort of business, and the parties would go off. You might have four or five, sometimes up to four, perhaps five, parties to go out on different jobs, you see, different places.

They weren't all going to the same workshop?

Oh, no, no, they were going different places, different jobs and that sort of thing.

What were some of the other work places?

Oh, it was all xxx xxx different jobs - it's hard to remember all the bloomin' things, you know. I'll tell you now, there was those ammunition dumps that were built - railway station at Denain. Well, that was one job. They didn't go into the factory, they went out there, you see. And then there was other jobs around about, different things they'd want done.

You refused to unload the ammunition at Denain, didn't you?

That's right, yes.

You were a corporal in charge of a small section?

I happened to be out on that job that day, and they came and brought this train in - I'd been out at odd times, you know, I didn't go out on the same job every day; we used to change around so we'd get a variety. I'd been on it two or three times - things were there - the Germans had put covers over it, roofs sort of business. They brought this train in through - you know these closed [hands] - opened them up. The officer said, 'Unload it' - I said, 'Not on your life' - I said, 'Nicht' - I shook me head and he looked at me, 'What?' - I said, 'Nicht - no'. You know why? I said, 'Look, you people, prisoners over our side, wouldn't be allowed anywhere within cooee of this, and we're not going to do it'. I said, 'You are asking us to help you kill our own men' - I said, 'No'. So he said, 'Right, back to camp' (laughs).

So the whole lot of you went back to camp?

We all went back to camp, and then he went and got the Russians and they come along and did it. They unloaded it and loaded it up into ammunition waggons - ah! They'd be getting this extra bread a day, you see.

I suppose they were so hungry they'd do it.

Yeah, well, that's right.

What about other trouble with guards? Did you ever have any fights?

No, no, oh, no. Usually they were reasonable, you know. No, we never had any trouble with them.

Did you ever see them ill-treating the Belgian or French civilians?

No, never - never, no. No, never saw anything like that.

What about fights amongst yourselves?

Oh, there was nothing to fight about (laughs) - no, we never. You know, they were pretty reasonable type of chaps, you could reason with them. Oh, no, never had any trouble. Sometimes the English sergeants, especially when they were issuing out German rations, they'd sneak a bit extra for themselves.

Would they?

We soon woke up to them. Oh, well, it was part of yours that was going, you see, and we wouldn't let them have anything to do with it, we'd handle all those sort of things so that everybody got their share. Oh, no, you can't do that sort of thing.

See, the NCOs in the English Army are totally different to the NCOs in the Australian Army. The NCO in the Australian Army is one of the boys - you see what I mean? - to the extent that there was no discretion (discrimination) between anyone; but the NCO in the British Army, he was an NCO and if he told you to do a thing, you did it - see what I mean?

Yes. It was pretty much the same in the German Army too, wasn't it?

That's right, yes.

The NCOs were more or less apart from the men.

Oh, yes, that was it, you see, there were hard and fast rules in the British Army. But not so, there was nothing like that in our army, and if you'd get in a position like that, everybody was the same. Like when you were in the army - I mean, an NCO, he was an NCO, but he had a different manner with him. You knew your chaps, and you knew what type of people you were dealing with for a start, and you treat them accordingly. That's right. I mean, I never come along - I never had any occasion to ever assert my authority. I'd come along, every morning before - occasionally I had charge of the whole platoon - well, quite often we had no officer, but still had the sergeant, and sometimes the sergeant would be away on leave or had to go away for some other job, and I was the senior corporal left in charge. Well, take the boys out on parade, I'd have to inspect their rifles before they go; I'd just go through the usual routine, inspect their rifles. And there was another junior corporal, I said, 'You do the rear rank, I'll do the front rank', sort of business - 'Do you think we'll do that' - 'Right, off we go'. I mean, that was only following our duties, and they knew I wasn't asserting any authority, or anything like that - it was natural duty.

Was there any resentment amongst the men, between the privates and the NCOs, on the basis that the NCOs weren't being forced to work?

No - what, in Germany?

Yes.

No, none whatsoever - no, no - we were all on the same level - no, there was nothing like that.

Did you get homesick? Was that a big problem?

God, yes, sick and tired of it.

Were you thinking about home a lot?

Well, I don't know about a lot, but you used to think about it, but you couldn't help it, it would be natural with most people. They'd talk about those sort of things and what they would be doing, or something like that, if they were home. Well, I mean, you must realise that that sort of thing is going through their minds all the time, you see, and when they get three or four of them together, they'll be talking about, oh, this part of the world where they lived, and that sort of thing, and what they would have been doing if they'd have been home.

Did you get bored?

Bored?

Yes.

Oh, always bored, yeah - except on the weekends when they used to have their bit of sport. Then they'd line them up. Well, it was the only way you could - I mean, it gave you - you got sort of - you forgot about all the sort of things during the week and you just enjoyed Sunday.

Did the Germans issue you with any beer?

No fear (laughs) - no fear - oh, no.

So it was a fairly Spartan existence really; you didn't have many clothes.

No.

Just your uniform, you had to work in that?

Yeah, that's right.

You had your Red Cross parcels, and that was all the food you had.

Yeah.

The German food wasn't wanted.

No, well one we got a Red Cross parcel, that was the end of the German food, they never touched it.

How did you open tins and so on? Did they provide you with tin openers, or did the Germans open the tins?

What happened? I think somebody had a tin opener, there was a tin opener, probably, in the camp, round about - might have been four or five tin openers, I just can't remember now. Of course, you'd get these meat tins - bully beef tin - opens something similar to a sardine tin, had sort of a key with it. But we used to get roast meat in tins; by gees, that was a godsend.

Was it?

(Laughs) Well, you know, it was just soft meat - oh, you'd get thick and tough, you got nothing else but that in the army (laughs) - in our own army it was all bully beef - bully beef and biscuits (laughs). Mind you, the biscuits were very nourishing, it was a very nourishing food - oh, it was a very nourishing food. Oh, yes, there is no rubbish about that, very nourishing food - quite a feed xxx - oh, yes, they were very nourishing.

Did you try and cook up different recipes with the Red Cross food?

Oh, mainly we would get rice in a packet and cook rice - condensed milk - biscuits - now, what else was there? - they couldn't put butter in because it would go rancid.

Did they put tinned butter in?

Tinned butter, yes - yes, there was tinned butter, that's right, a bit of tinned butter, and a pot of jam or something like that - a tin of tobacco, and a couple of packets of cigarettes or something like that.

Were you smoking?

Yeah - I wasn't a heavy smoker - I'd smoke a pipe - but mostly you'd give your cigarettes away to some other poor man. I never went in the line without a tin of fifty - no, I took them in. Got a cigarette xxx - [paper cup] - I'd have me pipe - always that tin of fifty in there, they always knew where to come - [Tam Scott] Cigarettes.

Well, we might change from that and start talking about Egypt. When you came off Gallipoli you were on Lemnos.

Yes.

And you then went back to Egypt.

Back to Egypt in a boat called the [Siang Bee].

Yes, I know the boat.

Do you know it?

Yes.

Well, went back. Now, look, I told you, I think, we took about five days to go to Gallipoli, over to Lemnos from Alexandria, because we were dodging islands all over the bloomin' place. We went back in the Siang Bee in forty-eight hours.

She just went in a straight line, did it?

Straight line (laughs). And then my wife's brother went - the Siang Bee came out here to Australia after, and my wife's brother went over to - I think it was to England (laughs).

It was a pretty well-known troop carrier, the Siang Bee.

Yeah.

Were you on Lemnos for Christmas?

Yes.

Did you get a Christmas Billy?

Billy - Christmas Billy - oh, yes, we got a Christmas Billy - oh, yes, we got a Christmas Billy.

Do you remember what yours had in it?

Oh, goodness, I couldn't remember now. I know that it was usual to have cigarettes or tobacco, or something, and sweets of some sort, you know. But I couldn't remember now just exactly what was in it. Oh, yes, they all had their Christmas Billy.

You were on Lemnos for about a month?

Oh, yes, a good month.

And you came back to ...

We left Lemnos about 20 - about the end of December - came back to Zeitoun.

You went back to Zeitoun, did you?

Zeitoun in Egypt - have you heard of Zeitoun?

Oh, yes.

I'll never forget that. We got back there and they didn't have enough tents for us, you see, so we dug a hole in the sand and then covered it over with a ground sheet, see, to keep the dew off.

I would have thought that by that time Zeitoun would be a fairly big camp with quite a lot of wooden barracks.

No fear - never had enough tents there to go around - no fear, oh, no, no. That night it rained, first for sixteen years (laughs). You'd hardly read about it, would you? - first for sixteen years (laughs).

Well, then, of course, the tents arrived and we fiddled them up. Well, then we were there for, oh, I suppose, a week or so, ten days, and then we had to go on outpost, right down on the banks of the Canal - Suez Canal.

Whereabouts on the Canal?

Serapeum.

At Serapeum, yes.

We went down there and there was a South Australian major building a pontoon bridge across the Canal - Major Howard Tolley.

How do you spell that, T-O-L-L-E-Y?

That's right.

He was actually building the pontoon?

He was building the pontoon bridge. We had to wait until he'd put the last float in, or something like that, and we were sitting on, like I say, on this side of the Canal waiting - we'd gone down there by train, you see, in open trucks - no carriages, open trucks (laughs). Anyhow, we sat there for about - oh, must have been about an hour, I suppose, hour and a half, and then we went across - and I [was in the first section forwards], the first troops to cross on the pontoon bridge because I was in Number 1 Section, Number 1 Platoon, A Company, 10th Battalion (laughs) - see, I was in the 10th Battalion those days.

Then we went down there and we had our post - they were expecting the Turks to come down through the Sinai, you see. We did outpost, dug ourselves in over on the what's-a-name there, and then, oh, we had sort of - I suppose they were quite a distance apart, a couple of hundred yards or so apart, each platoon, you see; then you'd have a [sentry] group way out in front, he'd give you the alarm, you see.

You dug trenches there, did you?

We dug trenches - when I say trenches, they were more or less just a position in the sand where you could lie down behind, that's all; it wouldn't be much of a trench, just a heap of sand up in front of you. Well, you were lying down behind it and firing over the top.

You'd fill sandbags, I suppose?

No, just the sand. And we were there and (laughs) I'll never forget it, there was the 29th Battalion were on the opposite bank, and they had to do their guard duty at night, sort of business, you see. And bang went a bloomin' rifle. Of course, everybody was jumping around, they thought, what's happening. This bloke had fired - halted a post - a post - this is true - he halted a post. Of course, the post didn't answer him and he let go.

Well, do you know, it's a funny thing - people might laugh at it, but it's a funny thing - but if you've got an object at night, in the dark, and you see that object, you'll swear to God it moves - yes, you'd swear that it moves. But, of course, it doesn't. It's just you and it's the attitude you are in, you see.

I can understand that. And they were on the other side of the Canal, were they?

They were on the other side of the Canal. Of course, he was just doing his nightly guard duty, you see.

You weren't very far out from the Canal on this?

We were right on the bank - right on the bank - from here out to the street.

Only fifty, a hundred yards?

A hundred yards away or more. And then we'd have to patrol between each platoon, you see. My platoon would patrol up to the next one and come back, and they'd make a report to them that everything was okay. Then the next time they would come back to us, and then they'd go on to the next one, you see, and so on, connect in touch all the time. Until they built a miniature railway, and they built this straight out into the Sinai Desert. Of course, they realised the Turks weren't coming into the Canal, and they hadn't shown any signs out in the desert, so they built this miniature railway line. But they [didn't] give us a ride on it (laughs).

They used it for carrying supplies?

Supplies, yes - just a little motor engine, you know. We [putted] it fourteen miles out into the Sinai.

You moved from Serapeum out into the desert?

From Serapeum out into the desert, fourteen miles out - oh, my God.

What was it like out there?

Gees, it was woeful - it was hot, hot as Hades - really hot - and sandy - oh, crikey. Get a bit of a wind and everything was - sand blowing everywhere in all directions, you might say. Oh, dreadful it was out there. And we had these outposts there too - well, then they had trenches out there. We had to do that sort of job all the time out there.

You'd have been in the 50th Battalion by that time?

No, no, still in the 10th Battalion, yes.

When did you transfer to the 50th?

Well, we'd been out there, oh, I suppose about three or four weeks, and word came along that half the battalion was to come in. So there was a platoon from each - two platoons from each company - marched off - and we walked back.

You walked back to the Canal?

Walked back - yes, we walked right back to the Canal. Then there was the open truck train and they took us up to Tel-el-Kebir.

Do you remember what month it was that you were out in the Sinai? It must have been March.

Oh, now wait minute. We went back January - no, in February, March.

Yes, fairly early.

February, March.

I know the 4th Brigade didn't go down to the Canal until later March.

That's right, that's when we went back again, after the 50th was formed we went back.

Yes, that follows, yes.

That's right.

So you went up to Tel-el-Kebir ...

Yes.

... on the train?

Yes, and then we were sort of ...

There was two platoons from each company?

So many - see, we still kept our own company, but, of course, we were more or less split up sort of business, you see. We were divided into - instead of being two platoons, we were [shot] into four platoons, you see. I went into Number 2 Platoon, you see. That was ... well, I was only an ordinary private in those days, I didn't get me stripes until later on.

END OF TAPE SEVEN - SIDE A

START OF TAPE SEVEN - SIDE B

We went from there to - went across to France.

So you weren't promoted until you went to France?

Mm?

You were promoted in France?

France, yes.

Did you go straight up to Corporal?

No. As a matter of fact we got on the train at Marseilles and we went right up to Calais, and then came back to a place called - oh, what was it called?

Bailleul?

No - put in about ten days or so in that post, and then that was the last of the train rides - we footed it - we marched - and then we marched, gradually marched our way down onto the Somme. Oh, we'd go so far each day - about twenty kilometres a day.

So you were doing outpost duty down on the Canal, and you came back up to Tel-el-Kebir. What was Tel-el-Kebir like?

Oh, it was quite a camp - oh, my word - twenty-odd thousand troops in there - oh, yes, all divisional troops. And the biggest gambling camp in the world - it was a mile long - well, you imagine it - and it was a gamble ...

Right away, just outside the camping area there was a lot of canteens, you know, that the Gyppos had - cool drinks and one thing and another - cigarettes or some other bloomin' thing, that sort of thing - there was canteens dotted along. And in between them was anything from two-up, crown and anchor, what have you, anything that would make money (laughs) - and it was a mile long, so you can imagine all the trouble they used to go to.

Well, when we came off Gallipoli the boys got paid, you see, and there was no money to spend it on on Lemnos, no place to spend your money there. I was in the 3rd Brigade, it wasn't long and they had a tarpaulin out and the pennies were shooting up in the air.

There was one chap out of the 9th Battalion - Queenslander - walked out with a £1,000 - pounds in those days - £1,000, put that in his pay book - eh? (laughs). You couldn't beat them when it came to - they'd get away a group of them and they'd get away like into a camp like that, strange place, and ... there was always the pennies going up, oh, my word.

Did you ever play?

No, I never played, no, didn't appeal to me - no, I didn't play - I watched it many a time, to see how ... Oh, they used to do the same on - they'd have - down on the boats, anywhere, going over or coming home, it was just the same, only they'd use a - for two-up they'd have a - you know what a little dice-shaker is? - well, they'd have a dice-shaker and two or three thruppenny bits in it, you see - shake that, these were their two-up (laughs). And then they'd have the crown and anchor - you know the crown and anchor?

I don't know that game, no.

Well, it's like - they've got a board, and it's got crown and anchors on it, you see.

Like a draughts board?

Like a draught board, yes. And then they had the dice, and if you throw so many crowns, or so many anchors, whatever it might be, with this dice - you see, it was all marked with crowns and anchors.

Oh, the dice were?

Yes. They'd have about - I'm not sure whether it was two or three dice they'd have in the shaker. If you got three anchors or something, by gee, you grabbed a few bob, sort of business, you see.

And you had to move pieces around on the board, did you, or not?

No, it was just ... you'd throw it and each crown was worth so much.

This is the crown on the board?

On the board, you see - crown was on the board.

Did the dice have crowns?

The dice had crowns and anchors on them, you see.

As well?

As well, yes. And then you had crowns and anchors scattered all over this board, and each - if you got three crowns, or three anchors, or whatever - or two crowns and two anchors - you'd win so much, but you had to ...

You had to get a die that had a crown on it over a crown on the board.

That's right, yes - correspond on the board, you see. Oh, yes, they'd sit down and they'd play it.

I remember, there was a chap coming home on the boat - I'll never forget him, he was a Russian, he'd been working up at Port Pirie, goodness knows how long, and he enlisted in the Australian Army - he was coming home on the boat and he used to go along with this crown and anchor, and he'd watch, see how the dice was falling, you see, then he'd have a bet when he thought things were xxx. Well, he came home with quite a little cheque, around about £20 he won off those - see.

I've heard of it. The pontoon bridge interests me; can you describe what that was like?

Well, you know what a pontoon is, do you?

Like a raft.

A rowing boat - you know a rowing boat only it's enclosed all over, right over, you see - same thing - and they'd be about - oh, they'd be the width of this room.

About five metres or so.

Well, you see, they used to take transports across them, you see, besides the troops - oh, yes. They'd be, I suppose, in a space like this room here, there'd be one, two - there'd be three, three pontoons, you see.

Very close together?

Yeah, they were all laced together.

They would be very close together?

Oh, yes, close together. And then you had your roadway across like, you know.

Timber decking?

Timber decking across.

How wide was the Canal at that point?

Oh, I wouldn't like to say how wide it was - it used to take the steamers down it, you see.

It would be about a hundred metres wide?

Oh, yes. It wasn't there permanently, they had to have it so that they could swing it into the bank, to let the steamers and that sort of thing go through.

I'll tell you what happened down there when I was on patrol one night. I was with a corporal - this is when we first went down there, and we were doing a patrol to the next platoon - you'd pick up a star. See, you've got an arrow pointing straight at the next outpost, or the next platoon, and then you pick up a star and make for it, and it leads you up to it. Well, he picked up a star, but do you know what he did? - picked up the mast-head of a boat that was going down the Canal (laughs) - and there we were walking away out into the desert.

You were with that group?

I was with them, yes, too right I was (laughs).

How long was it before you realised?

We realised when somebody said, 'Hey, that bloomin' star of yours in moving', and we stopped and looked, and sure enough, here was this thing going down the Canal (laughs). The most peculiar thing, we were out and then we returned, and we went straight back and we walked straight into the platoon.

Did you?

Yes (laughs).

The one that you were looking for?

One we were looking for (laughs). Oh, no, you get some experiences - you'd have some funny experiences sometimes.

And you used to go swimming in the Canal?

Oh, sure, every day, oh, my word.

What was that like?

Good - salt water, you see - sea water.

It was easy to float in it, I suppose?

Yeah - oh, it was terrific.

Did you go in when the ships were going through?

Yes, I've been in. The most peculiar thing - it's the most peculiar feeling - when you get around the propellers, swirling the water around you, you can feel it going right around you - you had to get well away or it would suck you in. You could feel the water going around and swinging around your body, you know - oh, gee, yes. Of course, there were no bathing costumes in those days (laughs).

That's right.

Oh, no, it was terrific to go swimming in the Canal.

Do you remember Anzac Day 1916?

Yes, we had that on the Suez Canal - was it '16?

Yes.

Yes, that's right, we had Anzac Day on the Suez Canal, that's right. Oh, we had quite a sports day, swimming and one thing and anther - oh, yes. Oh, yes, that's right, we had quite a sports day, swimming and one thing and anther there, oh, yes. Oh, no, it was quite a day, Anzac Day.

Did you see the Prince of Wales?

Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, he was attached to the Australian division, or army headquarters, particular time - this is at Tel-el-Kebir. He, amongst several others - I don't know how many there would be, there might have been four or five of them - riding horseback, came riding through the camp, through the main road. And the boys all down around the canteens and that sort of thing, they spotted him. Of course, he didn't take any notice, so they counted him out (laughs) - yes, they counted him out.

That means they counted up to ten, didn't they?

Counted up to ten (laughs). Wait a minute. He turned around and he said, 'What's all that about?', and they said, 'Oh, they counted you out, Sir' - he said, 'Oh, did they?'. So he turned around and he come back, and they counted him in (laughs).

That was because he hadn't saluted, was it?

Yes, he hadn't seen them and taken any notice, you see. The boys cheered him on (laughs). Oh, no ... you got all sorts of funny things, you know. If it wasn't for those sort of things that happened, life in the army would be terribly dull. Oh, no, you had to have the funny parts. You always got those sort of jokers, you know, chaps that were humorous and that sort of thing, full of fun. And if it wasn't for those sort of fellows, well, life in the army would be terribly dull, you wouldn't have any ambition whatsoever; it's that kept you alive, was the humour, the funny things that happened.

What was he like, the Prince of Wales? Did you see him?

Oh, yes, I saw him. Oh, no, he was only a little fellow, not very big, quite a nice young chap, you know. Oh, yes, I saw him, he was alright.

When you transferred to the 50th Battalion, what was your reaction to that? Were you upset about that?

Oh, we didn't know what was ... See, there were that many reinforcements in Egypt that they had to do something with them, they couldn't handle them, there were too many to put into just the ordinary two divisions that were there. See, the 3rd Division wasn't there.

Yes, that's right.

The 3rd Division wasn't there, it hadn't left Australia.

That's right, yes.

The Swan Division we used to call them.

Why was that?

Took such a long time to swan over (laughs). You see, you get all those sorts xxx - quite a lot of humour.

Yes, I remember them being denigrated like that to some degree.

They went straight to England, you see.

That's right, yes.

They didn't go to any of those places, they went straight to England.

What about drunkenness, was that something that you came across much?

What?

Drunkenness?

Oh, not a great deal, no - occasionally - more so in France than Egypt or any of those places. You'd get a bit of - the canteens down there, the Egyptians used to run them - I'll tell you one about them too.

Out at the rail head in Sinai there was a canteen there - liquor canteen - beer and stout - and you could go in there and buy a bottle of beer or a bottle of stout, whatever you liked. We'd go there early, perhaps about six o'clock, get a bottle of beer, or a bottle of stout, whatever you felt like, take it, bury it in the sand, see. Well, before you went to sleep at night, you'd have a cold drink. See, the sand gets cold, bitterly cold too. It was used as a sort of an ice chest.

Well, there was the 11th - I can remember it very well - the 11th Light Horse had been out on a forward patrol, and they came in - of course, this canteen had to close at nine o'clock every night, anything after nine you'd be in serious trouble. Well, they came in - they were over a bit from us - but they came over and wanted some beer - this is after nine o'clock - he wouldn't open up. If they'd gone the right way about it and gone in and got permission for it, it would have been alright, but they didn't. And he wouldn't open up so they cut the guy ropes on his bloomin' tent, went in and helped themselves to beer, and then went back to camp (laughs). So that's the Aussie Light Horse (laughs).

Oh, no, coming in off the desert like that, you could understand it - I could - because it was beastly hot in the daytime and that sort of thing, beastly hot. You couldn't blame them, and I suppose they hadn't seen a glass of beer, and one thing and another like that, for goodness knows how long.

You were telling me yesterday that there was a party of Turks reported - there was a party of Turks that had been reported.

Yes, that's right.

What was that story again?

Oh, yes, that was when I was in the 10th Battalion. When we first went out into the Sinai, and we were sent out with a corporal and half a dozen of us as an outpost, you see. As I said, our instructions were, they did come - empty your magazines and get for your life, and that would warn everybody back behind, they'd hear all this fuss and hello, there's something coming, and wake them up, you see.

Well, the sergeant major came out and he said, 'There is a party of Turks - about three hundred Turks - advancing on your front, keep your eyes open' - which we did. Oh, some two or three hours or so afterwards - I think it was something like that, might have been a bit more, I couldn't exactly tell you the exact time - but he came out again and he said, 'Oh, it's an Indian camel patrol' (laughs). Is that the one I told you about?

That's the one.

(Laughs) - you never know.

They didn't see any Turks, did they?

No, they never saw any there, no - no, the Turks never came through. Well, you could understand it too, to come through they would have a long drag through waterless country. They'd have been fagged out by the time they got there, that's about the strength of it. Oh, those deserts ran for miles.

What were the relationships like with the Egyptians?

Oh, well, the average Egyptian, we had nothing at all, but the real Egyptian - that's the Arab Egyptian - see, well, they were only the working-class Egyptian, they used to do all the work.

This is the Arab Egyptian?

Arab Egyptian - and the real Egyptians had sort of an olive complexion, not brownish like the Arabs, they were all an olive complexion, but they'd have nothing to do with us, nothing whatsoever.

Wouldn't they?

No, nothing to do with us whatsoever. See, I did a guard duty - there was a place called - what was it called? - Madeira? - it was a suburb anyway of Cairo. We used to have to go out there and do special guard duty out on the suburb. We used to have to patrol the suburb too, a pair of us at a time. There were no troops of any description, it was all these olive complexion Egyptians lived there. We had to patrol this, there was no troops whatsoever.

Troops weren't allowed in?

Weren't in there, no, it was out of bounds - oh, yes, out of bounds completely. Our headquarters was the railway station, we worked from the railway station and would go out right around the suburbs, you see.

That would be a group of you, would it, or just two of you together?

Two of us together, oh, yes, always in pairs.

Were you armed on those patrols, or not?

Yes, oh, yes.

In what way? Did you just have a bayonet or did you have side arms?

Just a rifle - we had the bayonets there, but we never fixed them, you see. Oh, no, we always did it - different parts. Oh, but mind you, you go into Cairo, it's most interesting. There's a lot of these places, you wouldn't say it was a hundred per cent clean, but you've got good hotels which are very good, and there's quite a lot of interest in Cairo. You go out - Cairo zoo it very, very

interesting, which we all used to go and see, then there's the pyramids out at Mena. Not only that, then there was the museum, which was most interesting.

What do you remember about the museum?

Go in there and see it.

But what do you remember about it?

Oh, well, it was mainly ancient Egyptian things, you know, like mummies and other things besides - all sorts of things, you know, any ancient stuff like that.

They had these mosques?

And then the mosques. Of course, you take your boots off when you go into those, but they were beautifully done up, you know, oh, my word - I went into a mosque - oh, no, I had a look around. Then you went out to Heliopolis - you've heard of Heliopolis, have you?

Yes.

Well, that was built by a Belgian syndicate, so I believe.

That' correct, yes.

And there were beautiful buildings and that sort of thing out there, it's quite a modern suburb, you know - quite a modern suburb. There was an army hospital there.

That was the Palace Hospital, wasn't it?

Palace Hospital, that's right, yes. Oh, no, that was a big building, that was a nice place.

What about the desert storms that used to come?

[Kamseen]? Oh, you can have them (laughs). I've seen ... we were out in the desert one particular time, and away over - it would be on our right - there was sand hills - and when that storm finished that sand hill's shape was completely altered - because it's only just loose sand - white sand - it had blown it away. And the camels lie down, and the sand would build up, nearly right up alongside of them - tuck their heads down.

What would you do during the Kamseen?

Oh, gosh, what could you do? You had nothing you could do much.

How did you protect yourself?

We used to have a wet handkerchief over your face to keep the sand away, you couldn't do anything else, nothing else you could do, there was nothing even you could do, unless you were away somewhere. Oh, dreadful things they are.

How long would they last for?

Oh, might last for the best part of the day.

They would go on and on?

Oh, yes, oh, crikey, yes - best part of the day - [houses] xxx.

Some of the men used to find things in the sand.

Oh, probably, yes - I never found - was lucky (laughs). You always used to never sleep in the tent - sleep out in the open - two blankets and an overcoat. Put your overcoat on over the top, and that would be wet in the morning - dew - you got a heavy dew every night - cold as charity. Mind you, I say you wrap yourself up in blankets of a night, and yet in the day you are sweltering.

Extremes.

Extraordinary, isn't it? One time while we were there we had to - when we first went over to - before we went to Gallipoli this was - we had to do - what did they call it? - duty in Cairo, see, and we was sent to a barrack called [Kaseranil].

Right on the Nile?

That's right, on the Nile. Well, there was two Turks and a German officer prisoner - had been kept prisoners - and we had to guard those, and then we had to do patrols in Cairo at night-time. Well, we took over from the 27th Battalion, they went on to Gallipoli, you see, just before we were - we followed them over to Gallipoli - we went over just after them, to Gallipoli. Well, they went off and we took over, and there was, out on the street, before you get into Kaseranil, there was a sort of a guard post there, and then there was another one right inside, and then there was this cell where they had these prisoners. They were locked up in them, of course, and they had to be taken out to the conveniences - toilets and that sort of business - although they had washbasins and that sort of thing - and shower - in their cells, but they always had to be taken out to the toilet.

Anyhow, one of our chaps - a chap called - now, what was his name? - a real bit of a hard case, but, you know, a good fellow, nice chap and all that sort of business - he was on guard duty out at the main gate. And there was a British colonel and a British sergeant major that lived in the barracks. Well, the colonel was home, he didn't go out this particular night, and the sergeant major and his wife went off, went down into Cairo ...

END OF TAPE SEVEN - SIDE B

START OF TAPE EIGHT - SIDE A

I suppose you'd just take it, you don't take any notice of it, that's about the whole strength of it. Oh, no, I didn't know xxx xxx the new fellows came - not any one of them, no.

Did you lose friends or acquaintances when that change happened? You must have done, I suppose.

No, they all came with me. There was a whole platoon, it wasn't as though there was just part of it or anything like that; the whole platoon went.

You went from there down to Serapeum, but you didn't go on the march, did you?

No, I didn't, thanks very much.

You were lucky.

That was - oh, yes - stupid, never would have done it - officer with brains would have never sent troops on a three day march like that - plain stupid - because some of them nearly went mad, you know. My battalion was lucky, they all scrambled in, but they'd had it by the time they got there, you see.

Did you see them coming in?

Oh, yes, I saw them coming in, yes. Oh, no, it was plain silly. I was very, very fortunate. I was picked out to go on the advance party.

How many of there were you in the advance party?

Oh, about a dozen or so.

You had to put up tents?

Tents and one thing and another, yes. I acted as cook for the xxx (laughs). They came in one day - they said they'd be there on such and such a day. Well, they brought in nearly half a bullock, put it in a tent, and then there was potatoes, and one thing and another, with all this - God, what are they going to do with it? Well, it took them longer than they thought. Here was I cooking roast. There was an old stove in the cookhouse, and I cut lumps of this bloomin' beast (laughs), cooked them roast dinner. By gees, they enjoyed it (laughs) - roast potatoes and roast beef. Of course, there was no such thing as green vegetables unless you had a tin of dried vegetables or

something like that, you'd soak them and boil them up. But on, no, they enjoyed that, roast beef.

I can imagine.

Oh, yes. Oh, it was quite an interesting place. Anybody goes round as a tourist and put up at a good hotel, you'd see what goes on - their quarters are poor. See, I mean, you go around out into the villages where the natives - the Arabs, the Arab natives I mean - all they've got is four mud walls and rush mats over the roof - goats in one corner, donkeys in another, family's camped in the other, all together in the one room - chooks in another. Well, that's just how they lived, you see, in those days. I don't know what it's like now, of course, but that's how they lived in those days - oh, dreadful.

They used to come selling oranges, didn't they?

Oh, yeah, oranges - oh, yes, oranges. The boys used to - you'd play pranks on them. See, they used to make them out of sticks, you know, these big baskets. They'd be about that long ...

About two feet wide.

... about that wide, and about so high - come along full of oranges.

About a foot wide and a foot high - full of oranges.

Full of oranges. You'd buy them - oh, we used to buy them, you'd get two of them for half a piastre - two for the half, they'd say - two for a half.

What kind of pranks would they play on them?

Well, they'd go along, he'd be standing up there and somebody would sneak up behind him and just kneel down - all of a sudden, someone would bump him and force him to fall backwards, and away would go his oranges. He'd finish up with nothing.

He'd fall over and his oranges would go everywhere?

Yeah, oranges would go everywhere, the boys would be picking up oranges. Oh, yeah, all sorts of games they'd get up to. They used to come round, then the boys - the paper boys would come round in the mornings, you see - 'Egyptian Times' - 'Egyptian Timers, Egyptian Timers, gooda news - Egyptian Timers' - the boys would get hold of them, they'd get them and say, 'You go around the officer's lines and say, "Good Egyptian Times - Kaiser's Dead, Kaiser's Dead"'. They'd go around and sing out all these sort of - whatever the kids xxx. Ah, gees, there were all sorts of dodgy ... oh, yes. Still, there you are, that was army life, you had to make the best of it, and they sure did (laughs) in those days.

I could tell you things, but I'd never ask you to record them, that these boys would sing out. Now, you shut that down.

(Break in interview)

You went across to France in June, I suppose it must have been, with the 4th Division?

4th Division, yes, we went altogether.

And the 4th Brigade went about the first week in June?

Yeah. The whole division went the same time. I went on a boat called the Arcadian, and we were escorted by the British Navy - yes, my word, right through the Mediterranean - we were escorted all the way by the British Navy, there were destroyers round us day and night.

How many were there on the Acadia?

About seven hundred.

The whole 13th Brigade? No, that wouldn't have been the Brigade.

No, no.

Just a couple of battalions?

Yes.

Only one battalion.

Oh, one battalion and I think - yes, there would be a battalion on it, I suppose - oh, yes, there would be a battalion on it, might have been - I know the whole battalion was on it anyway. She was quite a fair sized boat, oh, yes, she was a boat round about - must have been about 20,000 tons, I suppose.

It was a passenger ship?

Passenger ship, oh, yes, she was a passenger ship. Poor blighter got torpedoed after.

There was a lot of torpedoing.

Just pulled into Marseilles. We were the - there was another boat with the 49th on it - Queenslanders - they pulled in about - we both pulled in about the same time. The 51st and 52nd had pulled in in the morning, and we pulled in at night - in the afternoon - and there was two trains waiting when they got there. They were shot straight onto those two trains and went off. They didn't have the two trains for us so we had to spend a night in Marseilles.

Did you stay on the ship?

No fear, they had a big camp place there. We went there and we drank the place dry of beer (laughs) - the boys did. This was a particular beer, it was what they called [bock] beer, and it's made in - you know these screw-top lemonade bottles? - well, it was made in bottles similar to that. You couldn't buy a bock beer bottle in Marseilles after the boys had been there a while. It was like a very light lager, you see, it was quite a nice drink. But oh, you'd have to drink gallons of it to get intoxicated.

The French beer was like that.

The French beer was vile stuff, penny and tuppence a glass - dreadful stuff, vile stuff.

You were about a week on the Mediterranean; do you remember much about the trip across?

No - it was the guard duty, of course, each night - every night there was a guard duty on - and they had to keep the decks clean, and that sort of thing - usual duties - [three to the] mess decks, and all that sort of thing, where you got your food and all that sort of business. Oh, no, it was just the usual sea voyage. Daytime you could look around - might be probably you'd have a lecture or something like that, you see, xxx, nothing that they could do very, very much. All these islands that you pass by going along.

You went up to Cologne on the train?

On the train? Yes, right through, three days.

Three days on the train?

Yes, three days on the train. I can never think of the name of the village - town - we stopped at. We went up to Calais and back to this town by train. And there was stayed for, oh, I suppose about - I wouldn't like to say now definitely how long - ten days or a fortnight - then we had to move off, down towards the Somme, you see.

The train trip up was quite an experience, wasn't it?

Oh, yes, oh, my word. Always pull up at a station in the middle of the day and there was Froggies there with a hot meal - oh, my word - oh, yes, I will say they did do us grand going up xxx xxx - oh, yes. Once you got up near the xxx xxx it was a different tale.

Well, I suppose many of the French civilians had left.

Oh, yes, yes. And yet a most peculiar thing; you know, when the Germans made their push in

1918, the French people - a lot of them - got back out of - of course, they got back into the villages, the Germans, you see - the boys came along - I mean the boys, the Australian boys - 'Oh, come on, we'll go back home now' - see - that was the confidence those people had - a lot of them - had in the Australian boys, you see, oh, yes - 'We'll go back home now'.

No, there was a book I read not so very long ago - my daughter's got it - her son won it at some school business or other, and it's the history of the Australians at war - complete history. It's a book about that thick, you know. It was the Australians that broke the German Army in the finish, oh, yes, xxx, according to that book anyway. I mean, you are not going to write it if it wasn't true.

When you arrived in France you - I think it had been in the north of France somewhere.

Yes.

All of the men went up to the area round Bailleul and ...

Yes, that's right, north of France we were.

Did you go into the place called The Nursery for a time?

No, no.

You were there about a fortnight and then you went down onto the Somme?

We walked down.

You marched all the way?

We marched all the way down, yes. And on the way down we met the 10th Battalion - they'd been in the Somme - xxx - and they'd given these crack Russian guards the father of a hiding - yeah - and the blokes coming down, they had all these German helmets on.

Did they?

Yes (laughs) - we thought, hello, here's the German Army coming (laughs). No, it was the boys from the 10th Battalion. We were marching along, we passed them on the road, they marched past them. Of course, they got a cheer as they went buy (laughs).

Did you sing any songs when you were marching?

Oh, sometimes, yeah. We had a chap - what the devil was his name? - he was a Norwegian, he could play an accordion or he could play a mouth organ. Well, the boys subscribed and bought him both - and he used to play the mouth organ - they'd carry his rifle for him - yes, they'd carry his rifle and he played march tunes. Oh, he was a champion. The, if he didn't have that he'd have his squeeze-box - accordion. We always had somebody with a bit of music.

Do you remember the names of any of the songs that you sang?

Oh, it's hard to remember now. Of course, they were real old army songs - you know the old army songs, don't you?

I've got a vague idea.

They were the main ones they used to sing.

You were issued with steel helmets, weren't you, when you got to France?

Yes, that's right - we never had them in Gallipoli, of course - we used to wear a peaked cap - hats were a bloomin' nuisance.

The slouch hats?

That's the big - you know the Australian ...

Slouch hats, yes.

Yeah.

They were a nuisance, were they?

They were a bloomin' nuisance to us, and we used to use the ordinary little peaked cap.

Why were the slouch hats a nuisance to you?

Oh, they were in the way. Well, where we were particularly, there was only room for three in the firing line, you see, and then there'd be another one a bit further on, another three, and so on. Well, they'd be in the way, whereas the peaked cap would sit on your head, was alright.

(Break in interview)

Well, I thought we might start again with leave in England. Did you get leave to England ...?

Yes, I got leave for England. I left France on 26th December 1916.

Just after Christmas?

Just after Christmas, yes. I had ten days' leave in England - well, you might say in London, you didn't have time to go out of England. Everything was a novelty really, you'd never seen anything like it, you see, a city as large as that.

You stayed in London all the time?

We stayed in London all the time, yes.

How would they arrange leave? You got a leave pass I suppose?

Got a leave pass, yes, and pay - you'd have so many pounds before you left - I can't think - it was

only a small amount, only enough to take you over there, you see.

You had to have that much?

Oh, you had to have money, you couldn't go without it. But then there was a pay office at a place called Horseferry Road - heard of Horseferry Road?

I know Horseferry Road.

Well, that was a pay office in Horseferry Road, as long as you had your pay book, if you go down and had the money in your pay book, well, you could draw more pay. Oh, no, there was quite enough there to entertain you in London for ten days - oh, any amount. You could go around - by the time you'd been around and done half a dozen theatres, or something like that, you'd had a really good ten days' holiday. Oh, no, there was quite a lot, any amount to go and see.

Did you go away with anybody that you knew, a friend?

No, I was the only one that went away from my battalion at that particular time, I didn't know any others. We went up to - was it Calais? - yes, Calais, that's right, and went across to Southampton, then we went up to London by train from there, of course. Then coming back we came back to Dover and went across to Havre - we had to spend the night in Havre to come back.

How did you get across the Channel - on a ferry of some kind?

Yeah, there was always a boat to take us, [to relieve, to ferry people across]. The army had - I suppose in conjunction with the navy, you see - they always had a leave boat that took us across.

It was a special leave boat, was it?

Special, yes. And the same when you came back, special leave boat would leave whatever port you went to. If you went to Southampton, or you went to ...

Dover?

Dover, yes, whichever one that you went to. That boat might be going across to Havre or to Calais, whichever way it went, you went where he took you. But usually it was going back to Havre because there was a big depot - when I say a depot, you had to stay overnight usually at Havre because we usually, going back, you'd leave late at night somewhere, see, and you'd have to spend the night at Havre; you'd get the train next morning. They'd line them all up and xxx them off to go into different carriages or whatever - they'd go back - land at [Bewer].

What was that?

Bewer - land at Bewer.

Oh, land at Bewer, that's where you'd go back?

Yes - my battalion was in the line, you see.

You went back to the Somme?

So I went back to [Bewer] on the Somme.

Where did you stay in London?

A place called Devon Street - yeah, Devon Street. It was a general place - now, what did they call them? - there was one or two of them about - nothing but soldiers, all soldiers. Was a place, wherever you were, hop on a tube and go to Devon Street, hop off the steps and you are right at the door. It was handy that way.

Whereabouts in London was it? Do you know the suburb?

Oh, I couldn't tell you now, no, I couldn't tell you exactly where. I knew it was Devon Street, that's all I know.

It was close in, was it?

Oh, yeah.

In the West End?

Oh, no, I don't think so - no, no, more in the centre of London it would be, I should imagine, yes.

What were the arrangements there? You had a room or your own, did you?

No - oh, crickey - no, there would be anything from up to twenty or thirty in a room - still single beds, of course.

It was a sort of soldiers club?

Oh, yes, all returned soldiers. That's for you to sleep at night, well, you had a fish for your breakfast the next morning somewhere - there was always plenty of places to get a feed.

What did that cost you a night, do you remember?

Oh, it was only a matter of about three or four bob - that's all, just a night, somewhere to sleep. And then there was another one, there was a place around in Horseferry Road - what did they call that place? - that was another place there, that didn't cost you, it only cost you two or three shillings anyhow. But I didn't like that place, she was a bit on the rough side. Oh, you had to put your boots and your legs out the bed, when you went to bed at night.

I hear that.

I reckon they might be gone in the morning - that's your heavy sleeper, you know - oh, no.

Did you go to the Anzac Buffet, it was called, wasn't it?

Oh, yes - no, I didn't go to that. Australia House, I used to go two or three dances in Australia House. Oh, no, that was alright, round about. I went out to - what did they call it? - that big thing, main theatre in London.

Covent Garden?

Covent Garden, yes, I went to there one night for a show.

What did you see?

Oh, it was a Shakespeare play - now, what was it called? - my memory is slipping - Henry VIII - no ...

Henry V?

Henry V, that's right, yes. Oh, no, it was something away from what you'd been used to.

Yes, that's right.

Something different. Oh, yes, it was quite good.

Did you team up with anybody in London?

Oh, well, we used to chat sometimes - 'What are you doing today, mate? What are you going to do today?' - 'Oh, I don't know, what are you?' - 'I don't know' - 'Well, we'll chum up and go around about' - you know, have a look around about.

We were told that if we want to see London, get on top of a bus, which we did on different busses - two or three different busses - got on the top and you had to drive around. It was half a days' trip - oh, yes - it didn't cost much, only a bob or two.

Were they special tourist trips, were they?

No.

Just get on any bus?

Yes, any bus, just like running around now, in Melbourne, or Sydney, or anywhere, you see. Only they were all double-deckers, you see.

Were they open at the top?

Yeah, they were then, yes. I'll tell you a thing that happened on that. In the early part of the war - when I say, in the early part of the war, it probably wasn't very late anyway - there was an English lad - soldier - he was back. Of course, in those early days of the war, if they were home on leave, or anything like that, they could change back into civilian clothes - and he was up on a bus, top of a bus. And a woman got up, and he was sitting there, and she said to him, 'Good day' - she said, 'Have you got one of these?' - she handed him an envelope. He said, 'No, I've never had one of these'. So he opened it and in it was the white feather. 'Well,' he said, 'that's a strange thing. A few hours ago I was presented with another thing, perhaps you'd like to see it', and he handed her the Victoria Cross. Made her feel about as big as this, you know (laughs). I'll bet she didn't hand them out any more to them. That's a true fact, that's true, there's no xxx about that.

They used to hand out the feathers, I know about that.

You know about that?

I've heard of them doing that, yes; not a very sensible thing to do. Do you recall any of the other plays you went to see?

Oh, no, there was that many of them about you couldn't remember. A lot of them were vaudeville, you know, in London - quite a lot of vaudevilles there. I went to the Victorian Theatre and there was a Russian crowd there with Russian dancing and goodness - that's down in Victoria Street, it goes down toward the Victoria Station - you've heard of it?

Yes.

Well, we went there one night, another chap and I. They had all these Russian dancers and goodness knows what-not. It was interesting, you know - you didn't understand their language, which still didn't make any difference. Then if you got tired there was a little cinema theatre, just a narrow little place, it was about - oh, there'd be about two chairs on this side and about three on that side, and you'd go right down in. The boys got tired - you could go in there for a bob - you could go in for a shilling, yes - go in there and they'd have a snooze.

There would be films on?

Films on all the time, yes.

And they'd just go in there for a sleep?

Go in there for a sleep if they got tired of running around (laughs). Oh, yes, there was always something there that you could go to.

Did you go and see 'Chu Chin Chow'?

No, I didn't go and see it - I don't think that was on while I was there, I can't recall it.

... about the Tower of London?

Of course, I went all over that - and what's-a-name?

END OF TAPE EIGHT - SIDE A

START OF TAPE EIGHT - SIDE B

Madame Tussaud's?

Yes - Tower of London, all over that. And then there was that other palace.

Kensington Palace?

No.

Buckingham Palace?

No - it was outside, outside the fence.

Right.

Well, we saw Buckingham Palace. But no, there was another place, in the early days the royal family used to live in - oh, never mind - in that particular place - and I've never seen tapestries like it in my life; they were nearly as big as that wall, I'm not exaggerating, but not as deep, but, you know, they'd go down, oh, three parts of the way - all hand made.

About two or three metres.

Beautiful stuff - my gosh, it was beautiful stuff, no doubt about it. And in the grounds of that particular palace was a mace - do you know what a mace is? - have you ever been in one.

I thought you were talking about M-A-C-E - that's something that they hold, isn't it, a mace?

Yes - a maze.

M-A-Z-E?

Yeah, a maze. See, well, this particular one, there was all pathways and all sorts of ways, and there's high hedges that's grown, and you go in there and you get lost for sixpence (laughs). You can too, and it's no trouble. You can find your way into the middle, and when you are in the middle there's just a little garden seat, you can sit down on, you see. Another chap and I went in, we got into the middle, but we damn well couldn't get out of it (laughs).

That's probably the trick.

It was a trick, you see. Well, there's a chap, he's way up above, he can see and tell you which turn to take, that sort of thing.

Whereabouts was he sitting?

He was up on a chair, or a seat - a little tower alongside, and he could see all over it, you see.

And he could see where you were going?

Yeah. Whatever was the name? - was it James' Palace?

St James' Palace?

Yes, that's right, yes.

That's near the park.

Oh, gee, we laughed over that one - we had some fun, you know.

Who were you with that day?

Oh, I couldn't tell you - remember them now - it's long ago - such a long time - crickey, it is seventy years ago, my memory's not that good (laughs).

Did you have any family in London?

No.

Nobody you knew?

Nobody I knew at all, no - no, I never had anyone. No family in England that I knew.

Of knew where to contact?

Yeah - I knew my mother's people came - I knew my father's people came - it was a problem to get to these places, you know.

What was the atmosphere of London like in 1916?

Alright, yes, it was quite good, oh, yes. Of course, London was just like Melbourne in those days, there was no bombs being dropped on it or anything like that.

What was the attitude of the English to the Australians?

Alright, yes - oh, yes, it was alright. As a matter of fact, when I was on leave there was a chap - afterwards we found out afterwards that - there was another chap and myself. We were staying around at this place in Devon Street, and he said, 'What are you doing today?' - I said, 'Oh, I don't know, I don't know what I'm doing, haven't thought of it'. So he said, 'We'll have a bit of a walk around', and we were walking down the Strand and a chap stopped us and he said, 'What are you two chaps doing today?' - we said, 'We are not doing anything in particular, we're just walking about'. And he said, 'Have you been down Petticoat Lane?' - 'Where do you find it?' - and he said, 'Well, you come with me and I'll show you, take you around and show you, but,' he said, 'don't buy anything'. He said, 'I'll warn you before you go, don't buy anything'.

So we went around there and he was telling us after - and there's all little stalls, you know, around, and they sell things, but they are the biggest rouges in the world (laughs). Now, he was telling us - I'm only going to tell you what he told us - that a friend of his had bought a suit of clothes off. You could shop at a stall like that that would have suits of clothes, you'd get them there perhaps for - a suit of clothes - for about thirty bob, two pounds. Well, this chap bought a suit of clothes - 'Will we wrap it up?' - and he said, 'Oh, yes, wrap it up'. When he got home he had a bran bag; he didn't have a suit of clothes, he had a bran bag, they'd wrapped up a bran bag, not a suit of clothes. And yet he goes back to find them and they are gone - they are not there when you come back - somebody else.

Was this the person you were with who bought the suit?

No, no, I don't know who it was, this chap was someone over in England, it wasn't us at all. Oh, no, it wasn't us.

And the person who stopped you in the Strand, was he English?

Yes, he was an English chap, yes, he used to work for an insurance company.

He was just being helpful to you?

Yes, being helpful, yes, wondered what we were doing to fill in the time, you see, so he took us around ... It was interesting to go and see it, really it was. Oh, yeah, you could buy anything in there, anything up to a ship's anchor they reckon - and you could buy your discharge if you wanted it (laughs). So there you are. Oh, no, she was a rouges shop - rouge street, Petticoat Lane, yes, oh, my word. Mind you, if you were shrewd enough and knew the business, and all that sort of thing, if you go there, never have anything wrapped, you see; if you buy it, well, then you carry it away as it is. Oh, no, they used to do quite a fair business; the shrewd ones were alright, they'd just say, 'Oh, no, I'll wrap it' - 'Never mind, I'll take it' - and then go away. But they'd wrap it up, and you sure wouldn't get it when you got home (laughs).

What was Horseferry Road like, the headquarters there?

Oh, it was just an ordinary street.

I mean the Australian headquarters there.

Yes.

What was that like inside?

Oh, not bad, alright - it was really quartermasters stores and the pay office. There was a sort of a

rest place where you could camp for the night, but oh, she was rough there - no fear, didn't like it. I had to stay there, as a matter of fact, the night I came back from Germany. When I got back to Horseferry Road, we were all booked in - whatever was the name of that bloomin' joint?

The Horseferry Club or something?

No - my memory is slipping - I can see the place, plain as a pike staff - it was only a matter of about, be fifty or sixty of us all in the one room - oh, yes, great big room. But I only stayed the one night. They couldn't pinch anything I had (laughs).

You didn't have anything?

Because I didn't have anything.

Were you issued out with Australian uniforms again there?

Oh, my word, next day. I was unfortunate, see, all the other blokes, they were fitted out and I was trailing these fellows along, take them along to the quartermaster's store to get fitted out, and I was the last blighter to be done (laughs). Of course, they had to turn around then and get a tunic to fit me, and they had to go along and get a couple of stripes to sew on the sleeve, and that sort of business - someone to do that for you - oh, she was a work of art alright. And then I couldn't get any money at the pay office.

You'd have had quite a lot of back-pay accruing, wouldn't you?

Oh, yeah, and I was getting ten bob a day - I had a few hundred quid, but they'd put it all in the Commonwealth Bank, you see, and that was down at Australia House. I had to go down to Australia House to get it. See, from the day I landed in London, then my pay continued in my pay book, you see; well, then, after that I got it through army pay. It was handy. Yeah, things were reasonable, I could get from London to Edinburgh return for five pounds - that's cheap travel - and yet I got a free pass. I thought, well, I've got to go to Edinburgh and have a look. I knew one or two - I had met one or two chaps - Scotch chaps - when they were prisoners. You never know, you might run into them or something like that. We did run into, as a matter of fact,

one chap; he didn't come from Edinburgh, he came from a place called [Portabello] - I don't know if you know it, it's almost on the border with England and Scotland - and he happened to be up in Edinburgh and I collided with him. We had a couple of drinks and a lunch - lunch together - and a talk. I had a look around Edinburgh, went all over Edinburgh Castle, [Holyrood].

We'll go over to France again. You were about a fortnight or so up in the north of France when you first came up from Marseilles, and then you went down to the Somme?

That's right.

Whereabouts did you go on the Somme?

We went to - now, we went into Albert - you know Albert? - well, there was - we were camped on the open paddocks in old Albert there for a couple of days, couple of nights, and when it was our turn to go in we relieved the 16th Battalion over in the line, a place called Windmill Hill. The 10th Battalion took Pozieres, the town.

That's right, yes.

Well, gradually they crept on, and on, and we relieved the 16th Battalion at Windmill Hill. And then we went on - oh, I suppose, on the Saturday night we went in the line, and we went on about fifty or sixty yards probably and dug in. This was in front of Mouquet Farm - you've heard of Mouquet Farm, haven't you?

Yes.

Well, we thought that was going to be xxx - oh, that's an easy stunt - we'd had a couple of light casualties from shell fire - just odd shells here and there - and then Monday night, bang! You've got to go over and take Mouquet Farm.

Well, we went over, but by hell, we got a thrashing - we got a thrashing alright. Well, you know, we only came out of that - over a thousand men we went in with, we came out with only four

hundred odd - about four hundred. Of course, they weren't all killed, there were a lot of wounded and that sort of thing.

(Laughs) As a matter of fact, that's where we lost a sergeant and a couple of other fellows that went on to get our mid-day dinner. We went in there first on the Saturday - oh, on the Sunday they went to get our dinner.

This is from your platoon?

No, no, the sergeant wasn't in my platoon, they were in my company. The sergeant was the chap I was with on Gallipoli, so I knew him pretty well because we were living together, you might say.

What was his name?

Barkley, came from [Narrowport] - Charlie Barkley - and they haven't found him from that day to this, so we never got our dinner that day. Oh, no, that was the day he got xxx, poor old Charlie - nice chap, terribly nice chap too.

How intensive was the shelling while you were at Mouquet Farm?

Oh, it was bad all the time, all the bloomin' time. Well, then, we came out of that on the Tuesday - no, wait a minute, I'm getting a bit ahead there - no, it was the Wednesday morning we came out of there. We went back to xxx.

What happened when you were at Mouquet Farm? Did you go across in the attack?

Go across? - Gosh! - went across, as far as we could go, then we got knocked back, you see. Well, we couldn't go any further, we had to get back. We got back to our old trench.

Was this a night attack?

Yeah - oh, yes, ten o'clock at night - yes, you could hardly see a hand in front of you except

from the light flashes from the shells and that sort of business. Oh, no, it was a night show. That broke our old colonel up, poor old fellow - he was too old, he was sixty - too old altogether.

Well, what actually was your task? You were in the front line in front of Mouquet Farm?

Yeah.

And your objective was to go across about how many - how far was Mouquet Farm?

Fifty, sixty yards, I suppose, or more.

Not very far.

Well, it's hard to judge - it could have been seventy or eighty yards, I wouldn't know.

What happened?

Well, we just got blocked, we got so far and we got blocked by the machine-gun fire and that sort of business, just had to lie down, quieten down and then sneak back to your own line, you couldn't go any further.

Well, then - who relieved us? - oh, gosh, I think it was 22nd Division - 27th - they had a go at it, that's right - they had a go at it and they got the same treatment. Well, then they kept plugging away at that, and then I think the 16th Battalion were relieved. They'd had a good few number of casualties too. Then we took over from the 16th, and then the 27th took over from us, and I don't know who took over from the 27th.

Were you wounded at all?

No, no.

Did you have any friends who were, or who were killed?

No. I don't know who took over from the 27th, I couldn't say. Oh, there were so many different battalions. When you got back out into a village, you never heard of what battalion went in or anything, that business, you wouldn't hear about it.

Well, then, we had to go in - that was the end of July - well, we went back and we were back in August - way back - we were back for a month, and we had to come up again, and they went in in the beginning of September, and the 49th had a go - you know who they were? - Queenlanders.

They were Queenslanders, yes.

49th, they were Queenslanders, and they had a go, and they were getting a pretty good hiding. They were blocked and they called for reinforcements - we were support troops, my battalion was support troops - and we had to go up and reinforce the 49th, right up in the front line. We didn't have any communication trench, we had to dodge up from shell hole to shell hole. Oh, it was a cow.

Were you buried by the shells at any time?

No, I was never, no, although there were people that were, oh, yes. Anyhow, we got there - we went up on a late Saturday afternoon - and we were up there, and we had to dig ourselves in then. We'd been digging all bloomin' Saturday, and we had to dig ourselves in again all day Sunday. Jerry was jumpy I should imagine, the way he was acting, and that sort of thing. Well, then, on Monday the Canadian crowd came in and I think he'd had it because they took the place - oh, yes, they took it eventually - not us - xxx xxx defences were pretty well broken down.

There was a lot of attacks at Mouquet Farm, weren't there?

Oh, yes - it was very strongly fortified, very strongly fortified.

You were in France during the winter 1916-17, weren't you?

Mm?

You were in France during the winter '16-'17? You came back from leave to the Battalion at [Bewer], and that's when the winter was really ...

After leave? Yeah, well, I came back, that's right, I got back, oh, some time in early January - I don't know much about it - we had eleven or twelve days, I think, I spent on leave, and I got back - the Battalion, they'd been in the line and they were just coming out. And I shook hands with myself, I thought, that's good (laughs).

Did your ten days' leave start when you got to London?

Yes.

It started when you got to London?

Yes - they'd give you a day ...

A day either side for travelling, was there?

A day travelling and a day coming back - but then I had two days coming back because I had to spend the night in Havre, see. That was alright, you couldn't avoid that sort of business.

Whereabouts was the Battalion billeted at [Bewer]?

They were at a place called Flers - have you heard of Flers?

Yes.

They were in the line at Flers.

What were the billets like?

Oh, just straw - blue straw or something, probably - sometimes it wasn't even that, it was just on the hard boards, or whatever have you.

Bunks, yes.

You had your blanket and your ground sheet, and that sort of thing. And then some places - there was a place called [Monteban] - hear of it?

Yes.

Well, there they had huts - army huts - at Monteban - that's where I had a working party, used to go out from Monteban. We had huts with wooden floors - and in those days we used to get Australian papers, and we used to open them up and put them on the floor to lie on - had ground sheets on them - more or less warm ones - see, the cold wouldn't penetrate through them, see, and you always got a warm one - that's what we used to do, and then fold them up and shut them up with our blankets in the daytime, neat and tidy.

You'd use the newspapers to keep warm?

Yes - oh, yes, paper would do that, and no air could get up through it - cold air.

Through the floor?

Through the floor.

I understand, yes.

I used to take a party out laying barbed wire from there, from Monteban, and that was out towards Flers. But that was - we had to pick a hole through the snow and ice, you know, through the hard surface.

The ground froze, didn't it?

Froze, oh, yes, hard as a bloomin' metal road - bitumen road - just as hard, and you had to pick down through that, get this corkscrew peg in - screw that in.

The brigadier came along one day and he was - 'Where's the corporal?' - I was away down helping some boys away down one end of it, and he was up the other end. So I came up and he said, 'You are slow' - I said, 'Slow, Sir; and how slow?' - he said, 'You ought to be getting them up quicker than that' - and I said, 'You come and pick the holes in this ground for us, and,' I said, 'we'll screw them up and get them up quick enough' - he said, 'Is it as bad as that?' - I said, 'Yes'. So I got a pick and said, 'You just see what you can do with that', and he was amazed. He said, 'Well, by Jove, I had no idea it was like that'.

That was a very bad winter, wasn't it?

Oh, bad, one of the worst winters they'd known for many years, yes - it was, it was a dreadful winter. Well, you get twenty, twenty-five degrees of frost, it would freeze anything.

The water would freeze.

Shell holes - ice on them that thick.

Five or six inches thick.

Yes.

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

Whale oil? - no, that was to stop trench feet. You wouldn't know what that was, would you?

Well, I have an idea; what is it? - you tell me.

Well, I'll tell you, your feet go rotten. That's true, I'm not exaggerating, that's absolutely correct. Now, if you are in wet for any length of time, your feet will go black. Well, that's what they used the whale oil for, rub it into your feet, then the water wouldn't soak into them at all, you see.

That's what whale oil was for, to prevent you from getting wet feet - your socks and boots and all would be wet, but your feet, the oil would keep the moisture out, you see. Because I know, I had a friend of mine, he was another corporal, but he was in another platoon, and he got trench feet - we had to cut his boots off - cut them off - his feet were swollen and they were black. Poor devil, I don't know how he got on, whether he lost his feet or what happened to him, I don't know.

Did you suffer from it?

Me?

Yes.

No. I'd rub them with whale oil, but then I was one of these fortunate blokes. A lot of them, they used to have sock clubs here at Renmark, see, and these people used to knit socks for the boys overseas, and there was always one for Tam. The quartermaster would sing out, 'Corporal Tam, here's a parcel for you', and there would be three or four pairs of socks, and I changed my socks every day, and I always had dry socks. I was lucky. The socks I took off, if it was sunshiny day, I'd put them up on the back of the trench, you see, and in a sunshiny day they would dry. Oh, yes - oh, no, you had to be wise - oh, that trench feet was a dreadful thing.

It was a kind of frostbite though, wasn't it? It would get wet and it would get really cold too, wouldn't it, they'd freeze?

Oh, yes. Of course, those that got bitten on the fingers and that sort of business, it was their own fault because we were given sheepskin gloves in the winter, put your hands in, keep them warm. And if you had to take them out, well, you were exercising them and they might get a bit cold, but you'd put them back in again and warm (them) - it was their own fault if they got them frostbitten.

They used to have a sheepskin jacket too?

There was a sheepskin jacket, yes, or, if you didn't, you got a leather one with some woollen

material lining inside, it was exactly the same way - oh, yes. Oh, no, we were well looked after as far as that goes - then you had your balaclavas to put on over your ...

Head.

Yes. I used to wear two balaclavas out on these frosty nights, working (laughs), but most of the boys would wear a couple of balaclavas, it would keep your ears and face warm, keeps the blood circulating, you were pretty warm.

You could wear your greatcoat all the time, I suppose.

Oh, my god, yes.

Did you have fires?

Fires? No, you daren't have a fire.

This is in the front line, yes.

No, anywhere, even behind, anywhere within - forward area, you never light a fire, oh, no.

END OF TAPE EIGHT - SIDE B

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