



Australian War Memorial

Sound Collection

ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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INTERVIEWEE: Percy Bird

INTERVIEWER: Alistair Thomson

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THOMSON: Perhaps to start you could tell me where and when you were born and what your parents were doing?

BIRD: Well, I was born on the 18th May 1889. My mother, my father ... no, my grandfather arrived in Victoria, from Dunbarton, Scotland in 1858, and my grandmother and my mother, my mother was the age of three, with her brother about two years of age, they arrived from Scotland in 1859. In 1858, the Mayor of Williamstown, a man by the name of Lathan, he had a hardware store in Williamstown, and with shortage of change he would have to give broom handles and things like that, and the police thought there was something funny about that, so they asked him to get tokens made, and he had tokens made.

THOMSON: Did you live in Williamstown?

BIRD: Oh well, I was born in Williamstown. Somewhere about 1840. My father was born in Sydney.

THOMSON: What was your father doing when you were born?

BIRD: My father was working in the railways as a boilermaker. My mother... my grandfather was working down at the dockyard. But he got very, he got ... an accident down there and he died very young. The old lady had a small boarding house down there, and an elderly gentleman with his daughter came from England on a visit to New Zealand. Well of course, in those days the mail boats used to come to Williamstown. And he arrived with his daughter, but he was so very ill that they took him off the boat and he was in a hotel. Doctor said, 'No good you ... it's too rowdy for you here, I'll put you into a small boardinghouse.' And he died three days afterwards. What happened to his daughter, I don't know. They were on a visit to his son, who was the Prime Minister of New Zealand. Dick Seddon

THOMSON: How many did you have in your family?

BIRD: Well my family, well there were ... one, two, three ... six boys and three sons. Daughters, I

should say. Six boys and three daughters. I was the ... well I was the one, two, three, I was the fifth son. The last little boy died about after nine months and the little girl, she was about three weeks when she died, and then I was left to be the youngest one. But my second eldest brother married a well-known lady in Melbourne. You wouldn't know her. You are too young, but all the elderly people knew her. A great theatrical.

THOMSON: Who was it?

BIRD: Jenny Brennan. Have you ever heard of Jenny Brennan?

THOMSON: Only vaguely.

BIRD: No, well all the elderly, because she had the biggest dancing teacher in Melbourne. Not only that, she used to do all pantomimes for J.G. Williamsons. All those things. In fact she ran a few shows herself, at Her Majesties Theatre.

THOMSON: You said your father was a boilermaker.

BIRD: Yes.

THOMSON: How well off would you have said your family was, when you were young?

BIRD: Oh, well, just ... you know as far as the money was concerned. No, well just ... well, we'll say not exactly, near enough we'll say to the middle class. Not a bit wealthy. But his father, his wealth according to what they tell me. I don't know, but I've been told by different family that my father's father was in the navy in England, and his father was the ... owned a boat line called the Watts Watts Line. Whether that's right or not, I'm just telling you what they tell me. He had a runaway marriage. He came out to Sydney. See, and when he got out here he sold the boat. Ha ha ha. He was well known in the Harbour. Anything went wrong in the Harbour they used to come to the old man. So my father came over here, he learnt his trade in Sydney. Learnt his trade in Sydney and he came over here and he might have stopped at my mothers boarding house, I don't know. Or my grandmother's

boarding house. They got married, and of course, we had so many children.

THOMSON: You said you were born in 1889. Do you have and memory of the Depression of the 1890's?

BIRD: No, no. But I know... I know there was a depression then, because my father bought a block of land at St. Albans, then. Why, I don't know, but ... I know very little, just going on what they tell me. It was a very bad depression in those days. So, of course, they would be involved in that. But this block of land, they kept it for years and years and years, so they thought, 'Oh what's the good of it.' So they put in the paper, after the First World War, and First World War Veteran would like to have the block of land, they could have it for nothing. So an air force man came and picked it up and got it. Now I suppose it would be a bit valuable out there, St. Albans now.

THOMSON: Did you go to school in Williamstown?

BIRD: I went, yes, I went to the Williamstown State School. My sister was a pupil teacher there. My eldest sister, a pupil teacher there. You writing shorthand?

THOMSON: No, just the odd note.

BIRD: Oh, and she took me to school in 1894. It was a local state school, introduced me to the teacher, a Miss Paxton, and then my sister left me there, and as soon as she left I ran for my life. Ha ha ha. And the teacher after me. She brought me back and she said, 'I'll sit you beside a nice boy.' So she sat me beside one of the boys, so I stopped there then. Then in 1904, I went to Business College. To learn shorthand, typing.

THOMSON: Where was that?

BIRD: Bradshaw's. Stott and Halls were there at the time. I went to Bradshaw's and learnt there.

THOMSON: Why did you decide to do that?

BIRD: Well, I suppose my mother decided that, I think. So, I went there.

THOMSON: Before you went to Business College, when you were at school, do you have memories of patriotic celebrations?

BIRD: Oh yes. At the school. No doubt about that. Yes. The Boer War. You see. Well, during the Boer War, there were ... the English soldiers were besieged by the Boers at Ladysmith, and at Ladysmith my next door neighbour, her eldest son was in South Africa, and he was besieged in Ladysmith. Lord Roberts was the man in charge of them, and when he came back here, home ... mental. But, then after that there's Kimberley, you see, then after that Mafeking was besieged. Baden-Powell. He was relieved on my birthday, the 18th May, and the old lady next door to my place, she was the daughter of that Duckett, who were big hardware people in Melbourne, and she came out ringing a bell. 'Ladysmith relieved. Saturday morning it was. 'Ladysmith, Ladysmith.' I said, 'No, no Mrs. Linsay, it's not Ladysmith its Mafeking this time.'

THOMSON: What about Empire Day? Can you remember celebration of Empire Day at school?

BIRD: Ah, 24th May, oh ... yes, 24th May, wasn't it. 1902, I think it was, wasn't it? When Queen Victoria died. Yes. Well, they had a flagpole put up at the school. A flag was put up there but that's gone now. But I can remember when Mafeking was relieved. The people went mad in town. I was told this by my father-in-law. People went mad in town and they threw their hats in the air. Where their hats got to I don't know, but they took the cable tram off the track and put it onto the footpath.

THOMSON: Tell me, were you a member of the cadets, or anything like that?

BIRD: Well, now yes. Did you hear the announcers at the Moomba Parade last year? Well, in the Herald that night and in the Sun the next day the announced, it was announced that ... a man in Glasgow saw a number of boys and he got the idea to form a boys brigade. A hundred years ago, in 1883. Well, in 19 ... between 1902 and 3, a Warrant Officer from our Naval Depot here saw a number of us boys standing outside our St. Andrews Presbyterian Sunday School, got the idea. Saw

the superintendent and saw the officer of the church, could they have a boys naval brigade there. So, oh yes, they agreed to it, so of course we started with the boys naval brigade, and we had a drum and fife band, and then eight or nine months afterwards, St. Kilda started the same thing. Then all round the suburbs, all the suburbs and at Ballarat and Seymour, boys' naval brigades. Well in 1904, St. Kilda and our crowd went down to Swan Island to camp. That's the naval depot there, to camp down there. Then in 1905, on one of the naval boats, we were taken, all the naval boys were taken down to Swan Island to camp, and a gentleman, an aristocratic gentleman from England was invited down there to see us. He came down, and he said, 'my word, this is a wonderful idea.' Because we had Petty Officers from the navy teaching us all sorts of things. He said, 'this is a wonderful idea. When I get back to England I must tell them all about it.' So whether he told Baden-Powell or not, or whether Baden-Powell got the idea elsewhere, but in 1907 Baden-Powell, being an army man, he couldn't call his boys the Boys Naval Brigade, he called his boys the Boys Brigade. That's the Boy Scouts now.

THOMSON: You were in the Boys Naval Brigade; after that did you do compulsory military training?

BIRD: Well no, no. Compulsory military training started about 1907, I think it was. It wasn't till our naval boys were right out of it. But I was, I was over the age, I think, at that particular time, so I didn't have to do it. But still, we used ... the Fire Brigade in Melbourne and the Police; every year had a big turn out on the grounds of the Exhibition. Our boys from Williamstown, invited up to these every year, and I was the fugal boy. Now the fugal boy is the boy in front doing the cutlass drill, and the Navy Band used to play for us. We'd do our rifle drill and our marching and everything, then a mock fight we had. We went up to Bendigo to the Easter Fair for the weekend up there. Oh, we had a wonderful time. Some years and years afterwards, somebody writing in the Herald, oh about twenty odd years ago, writing in the Herald, wanted to know anybody know anything about the Boys Brigades. So my family thought, 'Oh, why don't you write in.' so I wrote in to Canberra to whoever it was about the Boys Naval Brigade. I gave them a lot of dope about that. But they asked me if I had any photos. Well I'd given the main photos; I'd given to our Historical Society. But about twelve months ago, hunting around, looking around, I found about a dozen. All sorts of photos about the Boys Naval Brigade. See, of course, it was to long, too long ago, you see.

THOMSON: When you were living in Williamstown, living with your family, were you a church going family?

BIRD: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I went to the Presbyterian Church, and having a boy soprano voice when I was sixteen, at the Sunday School anniversaries I had to sing a certain song and when we went up to Ballarat for the weekend then that time, well my superintendent said to me, 'Did you bring the music with you.' I said, 'I didn't have the music.' He said 'You've got to sing at a couple of the churches up here.' 'Oh well,' I said, 'I haven't got the music, I know the words.' At ten o'clock I had to go to the Presbyterian Church in Sturt Street and sing this song, hymn to the organist and he wrote the music down. So I sang up there and at nighttime I had to sing at the Church of England.

THOMSON: Apart from baseball, which you've talked about a bit ...

BIRD: I played cricket down here.

THOMSON: What about, were you a reader? Did you read much when you were young?

BIRD: Oh, well, yes. Books on the olden days like the Boys Annual and Chums, the monthly magazine that used to come out and other stories.

THOMSON: And films?

BIRD: Oh well, no films in those days.

THOMSON: Not yet.

BIRD: No, no radio. Radio about 1925 or so, and then the films about 1956 or something or other.

THOMSON: Were you a member of any other sorts of clubs in Williamstown?

BIRD: Oh well, I was connected with the A.N.A. Lodge, but I was connected The Presbyterian

Church and Sunday school here. Well of course, I was in the Boys Naval Brigade we had a football team, we used to the other brigades football, and cricket in the summer time. But I, well I played football with them, but my games were cricket ... and I played tennis down for the Church. And a funny thing, I was up at Macedon before the ... about 1915, just before I went into the army, and a girl of fourteen or so there, she was practicing tennis, and her mother, her father was a Member of Parliament. Her mother saw me playing one time there, and she said, 'Will you give my daughter some practice?' Well I didn't think I was good enough to, ha ha, so I said 'I don't know'. But later on she turned out to be the professional, she turned out to be the champion lady player of Australia. Esne Boyd. Ha ha ha. I was sorry I didn't play her.

THOMSON: Was your family or your father at all interested in politics in those early days?

BIRD: Well my father, no, no. But he was interested in cricket and of course, being a New South Welsh man, he barracked for New South Wales. He loved cricket, but he didn't play it. But he used to come down to see me playing.

THOMSON: Was he a member of a union or anything? Can you remember?

BIRD: Er ... oh ... oh, he was a Mason.

THOMSON: He was a Mason?

BIRD: Oh, yes he was a Mason. But I didn't know that until years afterwards.

THOMSON: Tell me, you said you went to Business College?

BIRD: Yes.

THOMSON: How long were you there for?

BIRD: Twelve months. Oh a little over twelve months. Then I went into the Railways and I was a

permanent in the Railways, see. A clerical man.

THOMSON: When was that? When did you *go* into the Railways?

BIRD: 1905. And then ... whilst there, and then I went to the war. When I came back, my boss said to me, 'there's a shortage of pushers'. I learnt as well, I learnt drawing and ... and draftsmanship. When I was working as a clerk in the Railways, at the time, I learnt that, and they both, in fact they were both useful to the army. When I was in the Army. Because when I was on the boat to go to the war, Port Melbourne, the Adjutant, who was a supernumerary in my branch, before that, he had left us while that was on but, he was a supernumerary in our branch and I got friendly with him and on the boat, he was the Adjutant, and he spotted me. 'Hey, hey hey. Come here Percy I want you to be Orderly Room Sergeant.' And I said, 'What about my Company.' So the Doctor ... er, the Colonel came along and said, 'What's up, Mr. McWiggan?' He says, 'Oh, it's all right, sir. But I've got a man here for the Orderly Room Sergeant and he's thinking of his Company.' 'Tell him he's got to obey orders.' So I had to obey orders and I was the Orderly Room Sergeant.

THOMSON: We might come back to that. Can you remember where you were when the war broke out and your response to the war?

BIRD: Oh well, oh yes, I was here. I was in Melbourne on the 4th August 1914, and in the train from Williamstown going to Melbourne. A number of us got in the same carriage and we saw a boat going down the river, the Yarra. Hello. Look at that. It was the Holtz, I think they named it. A German boat trying to get out, and they were, the artillery fired to stop them. He had to fire two or three shots to stop them. So they grabbed them.

THOMSON: What was your initial response to the war?

BIRD: Oh well, nothing particular. But I was going to join up somewhere about February 1915, but my father was put into hospital seriously ill, and my mother said don't do anything until we see how Dad gets on. So I enlisted on the, somewhere early in July 1915, because they had time to operate on my father, but his heart wouldn't take it, so they said 'Well, we'll let him have another twelve

months.' You see, so he died on the 4th of March, no the 4th of April 1916.

THOMSON: Why did you want to enlist?

BIRD: Oh, ha ha. Be like all the others. Ha ha. I wanted to enlist like all the others, you know. Well, like lots of the others, I should say, because I thought I was ... well, I was ... should enlist. Being member of ... being an Australian. So, then, well when I did go on the boat going over, I was ... The Colonel, well of course I've told you that. So, just before we got to Egypt, the Adjutant came to me and he said, the Colonel, he was a solicitor in Albury, the Colonel said to me, 'Two of the men have asked me for references and I don't feel inclined to give them references.' One was the Quarterly Master Sergeant and the other one was the Company Sergeant Major. 'But', he said, 'I'm going to give a man a reference who didn't ask for one.' And I've got the reference here.

THOMSON: What was the reference for?

BIRD: The work I did as the Orderly Room Sergeant.

THOMSON: This when you came back?

BIRD: Yes. No. No. On the boat going over.

THOMSON: So you were Orderly Room Sergeant on the boat going over?

BIRD: Yes, on the boat going over.

THOMSON: What unit were you with?

BIRD: 5th Battalion. But I was a reinforcement of the 5th Battalion then. When I got to Egypt a friend of mine, a Captain in the 14th Battalion, they sent him word that my father had died four days after I had left. So my brother-in-law was in Egypt at the time, he told, my other friend told him, and he told me, about my father. I dreamt he died when I was on the boat.

THOMSON: Where did you go, from Egypt?

BIRD: We went from Egypt

THOMSON: Were you in Egypt long?

BIRD: Oh no. Only a little while. Tel el Kebir. Only for a while. The, luckily, we got over to France somewhere about May 1916.

THOMSON: Had you gone on to Gallipoli?

BIRD: Oh, no, no, no. Oh no, I was only in Egypt. From Egypt I went to Marseilles on the boat, and from Marseilles on the train, three or four days going up north to ... what's the name of the place. They had a big camp there?

THOMSON: Etaples?

BIRD: Etaples. That's right, yes. Had a camp at Etaples.

THOMSON: Had you joined the 5th Battalion by this stage?

BIRD: No. No, well, from the first Pozieres, 25th July 1916, our Battalion lost about half the Battalion. Lots of the other Battalions lost the same. But, we joined up at Bonnaville, just after the first Pozieres, and we were there for the second Pozieres, and from there we went up to Belgium. We were up to Belgium somewhere about August 1916, and we were going to be there for the winter. But we only lasted six weeks up there. Back to the Somme. So while we were up there, they... I had to give the company concert, for the Captain. Then they had a Battalion concert *up* there, and my Captain was sent to a school. While he was at the school another Captain took over, and he didn't know much about Don Company, so he came and he said to one of our old Sergeants, he said, 'Have you got any artists in Don Company.' 'Oh,' the old Sergeant, 'Yes, there's Corporal Bird there.' So 'Oh yes, I'll sing.' Then he got three other chaps from our Battalion, our Company. So that night I went to the concert and one of the Officers said to me, 'Are you singing tonight?' I said, 'Yes sir.' He

said, 'I've got a bet on with one of the other officers you're going to win the prize.' I said, 'What's the prize?' He said, 'We're giving a hundred francs.' So before the concert started, they gave out twenty francs for the best singer, twenty francs for the best recitation, twenty francs for the ragtime singer,

ten francs for the best effort and three ten franc prizes for second prizes. So, I sang that night and I got an encore, and then when it was allover, they had a committee passing the votes and everything. So the next morning, the Captain we had, oh thrilled to bits, we got the three first prizes and the best effort. Seventy out of a hundred. Ha ha ha.

THOMSON: What are your most striking memories of life in the front line?

BIRD: Oh well... well, like everything else, we were on the way up to the trenches and everything, we had to sleep anywhere, but when we got to, up to lots of the places, the Germans had dugouts everywhere, and they knew where they were. Of course, we had to get up to those dugouts to get into them, so we had to get rid of them. But on the way up, one time, about early in April 1917, of course prior to that we came out of the lines just before Christmas in 1916, and we came to a place between Vialt and Derancourt, at a railhead. At the railhead there were a lot of German prisoners and a lot of English permanent basemen. We had to work at the railhead. One day the Captain, the English Captain in charge of the railhead, he said to our boys, 'Now,' he said, 'if you get those two trains emptied before twelve o'clock you can have the afternoon off.' So they finished the job and when twelve o'clock came another train came in. 'Oh,' he said, 'I'm sorry boys but you'll have to get rid of this.' 'No,' they said, 'you gave us the afternoon off, so we're going to have the afternoon off.' So he went to our Captain, and our Captain said, 'What did you promise them?' So he told him. 'Well,' he said, 'take my advice and give them the afternoon off, you'll get the best job out off them all the time afterwards.' So he took my-Captains advice and they did everything he wanted afterwards.

THOMSON: How did you cope with conditions up in the line?

BIRD: Well, I'll mention about, on the way up one time, ever seen the lascars from the boats walking along, in the shopping centre? All behind each other. Well, we had to do that on the way up to the line. You see. Because if Fritz put any shells over, if they lobbed there'd only be one or two killed,

whereas they were all together they'd all be killed. So we used to have to go up, and one time the old Sergeant was in front of me on the way up, and on the way up, we used to have to say, 'Mind the shallow on the right. Mind the barbed wire.' See. And this old Sergeant had had a few drinks and of course he was shuffling along, so I said, 'Beware of the barbed wire' and off course he was shuffling along and he fell over. Ha ha ha. They all started to laugh, then somebody else he took no notice and he fell over again. Eventually we got into the trenches to get up to where we were going. The trenches were so bad that fellows were spraining their ankles, so they walked over the top to get up to this particular spot where there was a German strong point, there was a couple of dugouts. So when we got to these big dugouts up there, a fellow in front of me fell and we were so exhausted that it took six of us to pick him up out of the mud. We got into our dugouts and stopped there, but the 1st Brigade had to hop out in front of us after this German strong point. They were knocked about. But when we came out at Christmas time we were at this place ... at the railhead and the Germans started to sing... Christmas carols. They were wonderful. My sister was a school teacher, she went down to a school near Yea and boarded at an old German lady's place and while she was there the old German lady used to sing a little German love song. So when I was a lad my sister taught me that love song. I didn't know the meaning of it and I thought I'd try it out on these German prisoners. Middle aged men they were. Putting the fires out. So I started to sing quietly. Do do [A German song, see tape]. Oh.....they looked at me in astonishment. One was a young fellow could speak English. He grinned. And I said, 'a little German love song.' He said 'Yes.' He started to sing something. He said 'Do you know this one ... a yip oh a yaddie...' 'Oh yes,' I said, 'I know that one.' So I got all the old fellows singing. I said to one of them, 'What do you do?' He said to the German, 'Oh he wants to know what you do?' He went ... played the piano. Ha ha ha.

THOMSON: How did you feel? I mean these were the people you were fighting against, your enemy.

BIRD: Oh, we didn't mind them. We didn't mind them at all. But unfortunately, later on, my Captain, he came to me in February 1917 and he said that the Orderly Room Sergeant had been made a Second Lieutenant he came to me and said, 'They want you to be Orderly Room Sergeant.' The pay clerk in the Orderly Room must have told the Adjutant that I had been to Business College. So my Captain came to me and said, 'they want you to be Orderly Room Sergeant.' I said, 'I don't want

the job'. He said, 'oh, I don't want to lose you, so we'll say nothing about it'. But two days after he came and said, 'you've got to go. You've got to obey orders. You've got to go'. So I had to go and take over. And my off sider, he copped a wagon line so I had to go off to the line every time with them. So in April 1917, early, we were in a village that had been knocked down. Nothing there

for us to.... well we made our own sleeping quarters in the space there. He even chopped the trees down. Fruit trees. So, while we were there, four o'clock in the morning, up, we'd had to get out of bed. Fritzzy had made a hop out. Before, just before Lagnicourt. Now Lagnicourt was the sunken road.

THOMSON: Do you know who made the sunken roads?

BIRD: Bonaparte. So the enemy couldn't see him marching along. Oh, there were quite a number of these sunken roads up there then, and we were at this sunken road and we had little bits of dugouts, oh, they were as high as this, you see. We had little dugouts and that's where we slept. So, the 1st Brigade had to ... Fritzzy was coming over towards Lagnicourt and the Doctors and the ambulance when we were at Lagnicourt and the 1st Brigade, they were wondering who was going to get there first. Well, the 1st Brigade got there first and pushed the Germans back. Then after that, at Bullecourt. Now at Bullecourt, that...quite a number of our fellows, er, Australians had been killed at Bullecourt, and early in May we had to take over.

THOMSON: 1917?

BIRD: 1917. May, 1917. So in the front of us, about a hundred yards in front of us, the Colonel, the Adjutant and the Doctor, and a hundred yards behind them was the Regimental Sergeant Major, Batman and myself. So Fritzzy was putting the shells over Bullecourt wall for some time so we were told to get down into a trench. They got down, so after a while they gave us the word to get up. See, so on the way, they got into another trench to get along and we were just going to get to this particular trench that Fritzzy had been putting a few shells over there, he put one over there then and of course I would rush through, because another shell wouldn't lob for a few minutes or so. I ducked through. But the Regimental Sergeant Major and the Batman didn't come in. They ducked. I

had to go looking for them. So I said, 'Why didn't you come through before another shell lobbed there?' So, oh well, they didn't, I don't know what they said, so eventually we got up to Bullecourt. Then our Battalion came up afterwards.

THOMSON: By this stage you were Orderly Sergeant, were you?

BIRD: Yes.

THOMSON: So you wouldn't have been going into action anymore?

BIRD: Well, I didn't go into action anymore, no. No, because at Lagnicourt when I was sleeping with the Regimental Sergeant Major up there, Fritz put over some gas shells, see, and I got a touch of the gas, and so did the Regimental Sergeant Major. He heaved his heart up, but it didn't seem to affect me. But a couple of days afterwards ... started to come up. *So*, we had a New South Wales Doctor with us at the time, because our Doctor was in hospital. Broken leg, I think. So, the Army Medical crowd told him about ... to watch me, you see. So when he was leaving our old Doctor, he told our old Doctor about me and he was watching me all the time. In August the Doctor said, no, the Colonel said to the Doctor, 'Send the Sergeant to hospital.' So of course the Doctor said to me, 'We've got a hospital at Outersteim, about eight miles away. I'll see you there at two o'clock this afternoon.' So the Pay Clerk and I walked eight miles to the hospital and he introduced me to the Colonel, he rode a horse, he introduced me to the Colonel, the Colonel said, 'Righto, when you're ready I'll operate on him.' So the following week my Doctor said to me, 'Field ambulance is coming tomorrow, are you ready to go?' I said, 'Aw yes, I'm ready.' So he gave me a letter to the field ambulance to send me to this hospital, a letter to the Receiving Officer there to give to the Colonel and that night the Colonel came to see me and said, 'I'll fix you up at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon.' So the next day I was lying on the operating table put the chloroform on me and I thought 'Well, will I stick it, oh stick it.' That was the last I knew. That night I'm lying in my bed and one of the army Sisters came round, looked at my chart and she says, 'Oh, so you're the one.' I said, 'What do you mean by that, Sister?'. 'You nearly left it to late.' That's what she said to me. So...

THOMSON: Why?

BIRD: Well I don't know why, but it must have been a big operation. See, it's just like a wrinkle now, isn't it. I don't know why.

THOMSON: That was from gas?

BIRD: Well, I was gassed in April, you see, and this was August. I should have been operated on before, I suppose. So then, from there, I went into, I lobbed in an American hospital or a Canadian hospital on the west coast of France at twelve o'clock that night. In the morning a middle aged army Sister came to see me, and she said, 'Where do you come from?' I said, 'Victoria'. 'Oh', she said, 'that's not far from where I live.' I said, 'No, not your Victoria. You're Vancouver.

My Victoria is Australia.' 'Oh, fancy that,' she said. 'Have you got any badges?' Well, I had one, I don't know why but ... oh when I lobbed there at twelve o'clock at night, they took my pajamas away, taking them away, an orderly, I said, 'Wait a minute, bring that coat back to me.' I had in my handkerchief eight sovereigns, a hundred peasta note and a fifty peasta note from Egypt and three twenty franc notes from France, and this hat, rising sun hat badge, so I gave that to the old, middle aged lady. Oh, she was thrilled to bits. But I got my money back, ha ha ha.

THOMSON: Perhaps we could go back to when you were still in France and before you became Orderly Room Sergeant. In the times that you were in action, at Pozieres and other places, how did you cope with going into action and being in situations of combat with other soldiers?

BIRD: Well, firstly I think we were all frightened but we all stuck tog We all stuck together. I think we all had the same feeling. We were going to, at one time we ... of course we had to put badges on the backs of our jumpers, so as to identify each other. At one time, seven or eight of our fellows went on patrol, and others hadn't been notified about, I don't know why, but when they were coming back, our fellows fired on them. They yelled out, 'Hey, wait wait wait, don't.' One got killed, I think it was. I'm not quite sure of that, but all the same, ha ha, oh of course there was an inquiry about that.

THOMSON: What were relations like between officers and men in the army?

BIRD: Well in the Australian Army, wonderful. Now that's why they didn't think we had any discipline. The Australian ... oh they had no time for us as far as discipline was concerned, the English Army. But we had our own discipline. See, an English Tommy, he was frightened of his Sergeant Major. He was frightened of the Sergeants even. You see. And if anything happened in action, if anything happened, they couldn't do what an Australian soldier would. He'd take over. They didn't seem to be able to do that. I don't know why. One time, we were out of the line and our Battalion was changing the guard, and there were three A.S. Army Service soldiers of the English Army standing beside me watching my crowd changing the guard. When it was over one of them said to me 'We hear there's no discipline in the Australian Army. That's the best changing of the guard I've ever seen.' And another time, a fellow and I, we were walking along, when we were out of the line, and there were half a dozen French women talking. You know what one of them said to the other, 'We're safe now, Australia's here.' That's what they thought of the Australian soldiers. But when we were on the way up to Belgium, my Company, we were detailed to go to a certain railhead to put on the trucks all the stuff from the 1st Division to go up to Belgium. We did the job in two days. But there was a ha ha French officer in charge of this railhead business, a little, funny little fellow, and our fellows, he must have been in his office, when he came out our fellows had put one of the things on a truck they shouldn't have put it on that truck, you see. But they didn't know. They put it on the truck, then another couple of trucks after, he came, 'Oh no no no, you take that off. You take that off. You shouldn't put that on that one.' So our old Sergeant, he said, 'Look, we're running this show here. You get back to your office Took no notice of him. He went back to his office, and we got a wonderful letter from Birdwood, thanking us for the wonderful job we did.

THOMSON: Can you tell me, when you were in France, what were some of the aspects of life that you did enjoy?

BIRD: Well, oh well... we had a number of concerts, like; I don't know whether you heard of the Historical Society in Melbourne? Well one of the big noises there was one of our 5th Battalion fellows. Somebody said to him, 'When you got out of the line in Egypt, what did you do?' 'Oh,' he said, 'we used to have concerts and things like that. So-and-so used to sing, who mentioned my name, and things like that.' But we used to get around, finding out through the women, some of the villagers used to fry eggs and things, so as something extra or different to what we were getting as

regarding food was concerned we used to go and get coffee and milk and some bread and half a dozen eggs, you see, and things like that. My Sergeant Major, he used to spot me, every time he'd go, 'Hey, coffee and milk there, Birdy?' 'Yes' I said. 'oh,' he said, 'I thought so.' Ha ha ha. 'When I saw you knocking around I knew there'd be coffee and milk about.'

THOMSON: What about drink and alcohol?

BIRD: Well I didn't, no I didn't drink and I didn't smoke. But, my Captain used to say to me, 'Look, I like chocolates just as much as you do, so when you get a box of chocolates for yourself from the army canteen, buy me a box.' So I had to buy him a box every time. Of course he paid for his. When we were out, we came out of the line from Bullecourt and we got a long expected, or long promised rest from General Birdwood. We were at Henencourt Woods, and at Henencourt Woods we had a Battalion sports meeting, Brigade sports meeting and a Divisional sports meeting, and whilst we were there about twenty or thirty men each day was given leave to Amiens. Amiens was a big city. So to get there, I had to get up at six o'clock in the morning, to write out the leave passes for them and they had to walk eight miles to get the train, and they bought a ticket at the train and an hours journey to Amiens, and then at eight o'clock that night get the train back to this village and walk eight miles back.

THOMSON: So this is the ticket that you had?

BIRD: Yes, well that's the ticket I bought to go to Amiens. I never used it. I didn't need to.

THOMSON: Tell me, how did you and other men cope with the absence of women when you were away?

BIRD: Oh well, personally I never worried about the women folk. I was engaged at the time and I never worried about the women folk. Of course the fellows, certain ones, you know, **they...** they had different ideas to me. See, I didn't drink and I didn't smoke. But my Captain, he said, 'Oh, you must have some other ... some other, what do you call it, a vice or something or other.' So my vice I think was lollies, and they ha ha ha we were up at the line there, they'd come, all cigarettes

gone, 'Got any lollies, Birdy?' So I had to supply them with lollies. But one time...

THOMSON: You were talking about your vices.

BIRD: Yes, well, so, I never worried about the women folk, but

THOMSON: What about the other men?

BIRD: Oh, well, well I don't know. I used to hear about some of the other fellows getting ... they used to go see some of the women there for certain purposes. But, I won't say they were all that way, but ... I don't see, I wasn't used to it and a lot of them probably not used to it, but certain ones, unfortunately, they were caught. Certain diseases.

THOMSON: Tell me, just as a different sort of question, do you have any memory of any other people being involved in any relationships between the men, because they were away from women?

BIRD: No. No. No. Never heard of anything like that. But of course, when we were lying in bed of a night, or not in bed, where we were sleeping and that, somebody would yell out, 'The old squire's been foully murdered.' And of course, they'd all 'What? Again?' This seemed to be one of the little jokes. Poor joke I thought it was. Young and Jackson's has been burnt and things like that they used to callout. Ha ha ha. Why, I don't know.

THOMSON: You said before that you'd been engaged before you went away.

BIRD: Yes.

THOMSON: How did you feel about going away when you were engaged?

BIRD: Oh, well. Of course she was about seven years younger than me at the time, but of course, I'd known the family for a long while, but all the same. Well, I suppose the feeling was that I had to go. See, my pals were going and I had to go too. So while I was with them in France, beside ... I used to

do some of the drawings of the plans for the battle. Course, very few knew that. And another time, when we were in England, I was in a camp in England down at Norwich, arrived there at six o'clock one Sunday night on a stretcher, and a volunteer, middle aged men volunteers, taking us to the ambulances and then to the hospital. And all, it's a Sunday evening about six o'clock and all the little children were standing near the railway station, they cheered us all the time. So when I got to the hospital, I was there for a while and the Matron said to me, 'When are you going back to Australia?' I said, 'Oh, I suppose after the war.' 'Oh well,' she says, 'I don't think so.' She must have known something. I said, 'I don't think so.' Two ladies came to see me there. I'd only arrived the night before and the next day they came to see me, connected with the Red Cross, wanting to know if I wanted cigarettes and things like that. I should have taken the cigarettes and given them to the other fellows. I said, 'No, I don't smoke. '

THOMSON: By this stage, what was your attitude to the war?

BIRD: Ohhh, well, nothing in particular. But, well I went, I got my leave in England and I went fortnights leave and I had to, got to Horseferry Road, and my brother-in-law was an Englishman, he married ... his people lived in London, you see, a certain place. So, of course, I had to visit them. They hadn't never seen me before. Didn't know anything about me, you see, because my... they got married out in Australia. He was the Chief Engineer on one of the boats, you see, and they got married and they hadn't met my sister and hadn't met any of us. But one of the other brothers had been out here and he'd met our family and everything. So when I got there, the two daughters, one was twenty-one and the other one was nineteen. So I managed to get to their place at midday on the Saturday, well just before midday on the Saturday and the old man was there, 'Oh come inside.' One of the daughters came home. Oh just to see me, and then when the other arrived the other one rushed out, 'what's he like? What's he like?' 'Oh, he's very nice.' So I supplied them with all they wanted by way of things, but I think the young one took a fancy to me, but I wasn't playing up, well I didn't I didn't know she took a fancy to me, I heard about that afterwards. But I gave them presents before I left and I was sent out to Weymouth then. To go to hospital at Weymouth. While at Weymouth, I was there for a couple of days and then they opened up, the night before the Australians took over a military camp at a place called Littlemore. And about fifty of us arrived there on the second day and the Officer said 'All out the Sergeants.' So another Sergeant and myself, we fell out and so they said,

'Either of you do clerical work?' I said, 'Yes I can do clerical work.' "Righto. Orderly Room Sergeant.' Orderly Sergeant to the other one. So we were put in an office, a nice office on our own, but it wasn't the real orderly room. The real orderly room was round further, where the Colonel and the Adjutant were. So, what I had to do was take a list of all the fellows there, you see, and where they came from. So one fellow, I said, 'Where do you come from?' He said, 'Tallygaroopna.' 'Ohhh, Shepparton, Tallygaroopna, Numurkah.' 'Oh, you know the place?' Of course, I had to know being in the railways. I had to know where all the places were and in their lines on account of my work sorting out things, see. So, he thought I came from there, a bit of a laugh among the crowd. But I noticed in the orders one night, they wanted a draughtsman. So I happened to go out to the Adjutant who wanted to see me about something, I went round there and I said, 'Did you get a draughtsman?' 'No,' he said. 'Are you a draughtsman?' 'No,' I said, 'but what do you want done.' A thing about the size of that, Headquarters wanted a small one of them. So they wanted one about that size. So I said, he took it done, he gave it to me, I took it back to my office, he said, 'Now see what you can get in the way of drawing material.' Well, I couldn't get the real fair dinkum drawing material, like a draughtsman uses, you see, and the ink and everything. So I did the job. I approached him myself, and on the top I printed, so-and-so represents so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so, see. It took me two days to finish it, so I gave it back to the Adjutant and he said 'Thank you.' Didn't look at it, but two days afterwards he sent for me, just when I was going, 'Oh', he said to the Colonel, 'this is the man that did the job.' The old Colonel said to me, 'Are you a draughtsman?' I said, 'No, I'm not a draughtsman, but all the same I can, I learnt drawing and printing and things.' So he said, 'this is too good to send away to them. You'd better do another one.' So I had to do another one.

THOMSON: What was it of?

BIRD: Of the camp. All the sheds and everything like that. All drawn only about that size. About a sixth of the size, you see. So, I had to do it again.

THOMSON: So when did you finally get sent back to Australia?

BIRD: We'll get to that but in connections with that particular thing, he took me, he sent a runner, the runner came and wanted the Orderly Sergeant. I said, 'He's not here.' So I sent the So the Orderly

Corporal came back, he said, 'He wants the Orderly Sergeant.' Then another runner came back. 'He wants you and he's wild.' So I go back, 'Oh,' he said, 'It's you.' Changed his tune. He said, 'Here's a man here says you've taken his pay book. You can't take.' I said, 'I've heard a rumour going round that the Pay Officers have taken the pay books from the men going back to Australia.' 'Oh', he said, 'Righto. I'll find out.' You see. The, 'What about another ...' I said, 'I've just nearly finished that.' So I couldn't do anything wrong after, with my crowd. Different thing altogether. Well now, go ahead.

THOMSON: When did you get on your way back to Australia?

BIRD: Well, we were leaving there about a week before ... the last week in October we got to Plymouth.

THOMSON: What year was that?

BIRD: 1917. Yeah, to Plymouth in 1917, and we had to wait for a convoy at Plymouth before we left. So we were there for a week, and on the day before, day before Cup Day, we left. But before that, on the boat they started a sweep for the Melbourne Cup. Fifty pound first prize and everything, you see. So of course, we left the day before Cup Day. We didn't know until we got to South Africa. On our way, we went right over, the day before Cup Day, we went right over towards America to dodge the submarines and on the way down the west coast of France, in the middle of the night one night, of course no lights or anything, in the middle of the night, our boat stopped all of a sudden. Another boat was crossing our path. Just stopped in time. Course, we didn't know that until the morning.

THOMSON: How did you feel at this stage, physically?

BIRD: Oh, well, I felt all right. I felt a bit weak, but otherwise I was alright.

THOMSON: What about your nerves? How were they after your time at war? Were you okay in that sort of way? You hadn't been a bit worried by the war, or that sort of thing?

BIRD: Oh, well I don't know. It didn't seem to affect us that much. We were glad to get away. I will admit that.

THOMSON: Did you have any particular plans or aspirations for what you'd do when you came home?

BIRD: Oh no, no. Not at that time. No, but when we got to Cape Town, we had two days leave coming to us, see. That's eleven o'clock in the morning to eleven o'clock at night and on the first day I happened to be going along with some chaps, and there was my old Sergeant Major who'd left long before I'd left the Battalion. He'd lost his leg. And he was on a boat from another convoy. 'Oh BIRD,' he said. I said, 'what's up, Bob?' 'Oh,' he said, 'I haven't got any money. Could you let me have ten bob.' So I gave him the ten bob. 'Thanks, BIRD.' Then, course he went away then, to go back to his boat afterwards. So when we got back here, on the 30th December, '17, you see, I arrived home, and I was ... we were taken down to the Victoria Barracks, and then we were ... standing in a line there waiting to get our pay, and one of the fellows there had all our papers, looked at us to see how we were and everything. But prior to that on the boat, the Doctor and a clerk would be looking at us and everything, so when he came to me, two big glands taken out, you see. So the clerk said to the Doctor, 'Oh, I suppose he's going to have to go into hospital straight away?' The Doctor said, 'Why?' 'Oh, T.B. Glands.' 'Oh,' he said, 'that doesn't " effect him. As far as the T.B. Tuberculosis is concerned.' So, of course, I got away from them. So while we were waiting to get our pay, a fellow came and he said to me, 'Hey, you've never been vaccinated.' I hadn't been vaccinated as a baby and I hadn't been vaccinated to go to the war, but I had any amount of inoculations, you see. 'No,' I said, 'on the boat the vaccine was bad.' So I missed out on being vaccinated. So, I've never been vaccinated. Ha ha ha. But one time when we were inoculated in France, you see, and when I went on duty the next day to the Colonel_ the Colonel said to me, 'Were you inoculated yesterday?' I said, 'Yes, sir.' 'Why aren't you off sick?' I said, 'It doesn't affect me.' Oh all the other fellows were getting sick. Of course they used to drink. Alcohol affected them, you see. Didn't affect me in the least.

THOMSON: How did you feel upon return?

BIRD: Well I felt alright, I felt alright. But this, I had no feeling here for about six months.

THOMSON: In your neck?

BIRD: Yeah. No feeling at all for about six months.

THOMSON: What had they taken out?

BIRD: The T.B. Gland.

THOMSON: The which gland?

BIRD: The T.B., tubercular, tuberculosis gland.

THOSMON: What did you do when you arrived home?

BIRD: Well, when I arrived home I had fortnights leave, and then went down to Caulfield. They were at Caulfield Hospital then, before the Heidelberg Repat. I went to hospital there and I was there for a week, but whilst there, you'd want to know this, I had to go before the Board. The first thing they said to me, 'Got you're job to go to?' I said, 'Yes'. 'How do you feel?' 'Oh,' I said, 'I feel alright.' Course, we didn't know anything about pensions. I said, 'I feel alright.' 'Oh, according to your papers so-and-so and so-and-so.' I think that was a hint they gave me but I didn't take it. I said, 'I've had sixty days on the boat and I'm alright.' So when ... before leaving them, I ... they gave me a form to fill in whether it was the pension paper or not I don't know, but I never got a pension. What I should have told you, while we were down at Weymouth, Sir Charles Ryan, you wouldn't know anything about him, but he was the biggest doctor in the Army, and he was the one to say what the men were to do. And when I went before him the crowd behind me, you see, waiting to be interviewed by him, he called my name out 'Sergeant Bird.' And I stood up, and stood up to him. He looked at my papers and he just looked me up and down, said 'Alright.' So I still stood there, thinking he hadn't finished with me, and he called another name, so I thought he'd finished with me and I went out. All the others behind thought he'd booked me to go to France. 'Oh yes, you're going back to France.' Instead

of that he made me C3. Now C1 is' home service anywhere. C2 is home service Australia. C3 right out. He made me C3, right out altogether. Of course, there used to be a lot of jokes about him. One fellow went before him, 'Oh,' the doctor said, 'you're deaf?' You know, made out so. 'Oh well,' he said. 'so and-so.' Very quietly he said so-and-so. When the fellow was going out he ducked behind him. 'What did the old doctor say?' 'He said "So-and so'. They're one of the jokes, I don't know whether it's true or not. Another one, he was on an ambulance going into the city or something, and four or five of the fellows saw this thing and they ran along, had their walking sticks, ran along and hopped on, and he was on the same bus. Ha ha ha. They had walking sticks. Well, on the boat coming home, they had a parade and everyone with walking sticks had to go on this parade, you see, and out of the fifty or sixty, forty-five were told they didn't require them. Didn't require the walking sticks. Of course, they might've said the same thing about me, but I've got to have it now because ... to help me to walk along.

THOMSON: Were you angry that you hadn't got a pension?

BIRD: No. No, I wasn't angry. No, I thought, oh well. I'm happy to be home. It didn't worry me.

THOMSON: So did you go back to work then?

BIRD: Well, no. I went to Sydney for a fortnight. Over in Sydney, now the wife's family were very strict, very, very strict, and she'd never been to Sydney, so I said, 'well, would your parents let you go to Sydney with me?' Oh, they gave her permission to go to Sydney with me.

THOMSON: Were you married yet?

BIRD: No. No, we were not married. No, but we got to a certain hotel, a big hotel over there, and she had a single room on the ladies side and I had a single room on the gents side. We got there on the Sunday, yes, I think it was the Sunday, and I said ... no it was on the Saturday, and on the Sunday we took a walk over the Spit. Have you heard of the Spit, have you? Now the bridge is there you see. That's where the Spit used to be a... what-do-you-call-it, a thing, you got on the Spit with the cars and everything. The ferry. You got on that and we were standing on the ferry to go across to the Spit

and a motorcar comes over with a chauffeur and three girls in the car. One of the girls says, 'What are you doing here?' That was early in January 1918 just after I'd come home. About 1912 I was stopping with them at their place. They were big butchers and everything and stopping at their place with them. 'What are you doing here?' It was these girls. Ha ha ha. So I told them and introduced them to my finance and of course, they picked us up one day, to take us down to Cronulla. When they took us back to the pub the Assistant Superintendent of the pub, he ... they didn't, well they didn't worry about us, but the girl in the office she used to talk to us and everything like that. Very nice girl. But, we came in here and the Refreshment Room was here, and coming along from there was a pillar there, and the Manager was coming past that and he gave us a bow. He must have thought that we didn't spot him and he gave us another bow. He must have seen our friends. And knew them, you see, because they were big butchers. Oh yes, and he took notice of us. Ha ha ha.

THOMSON: Did you get deferred pay and a gratuity?

BIRD: Oh, well, no. We got a certain amount of deferred pay but, oh, I can't think of it. We all got a certain amount. It wasn't very much, but, you'll be surprised when I tell you this, when I was down at Weymouth, in this Orderly Room waiting to come home, some fellows were coming to me. They said, 'We're entitled to four days leave.' You see. I didn't know anything about it. Of course, when we came over from France, I was on a stretcher going to England, but when they arrived from Australia, arrived in England, you see, they were given four days leave. Well this batch, it appeared this batch ... I asked, I said, 'Well, why haven't you had your four days leave?' They were all inspected off the boat, and all these fellows were rejects. Sending them back home to Australia.

THOMSON: Why?

BIRD: Because there was something wrong with them. I said, I didn't know, I said, 'what's this four days leave you're on. Well what are you doing here?' 'Well, we've had an inspection by the doctors and everything and said we're not capable of being AOK for the war and so we're coming back home.' I don't think many people knew that.

THOMSON: Did you go back to work then after you came back from Sydney?

BIRD: Well, in 19 ... February, 1918, I think it was, my boss said 'What about coming back to work, Percy?' So about the middle of the month I went back to ...

THOMSON: This is with the Railways?

BIRD: Yes. Went back and I was with him at the Railways. Course he was very interested, he had two daughters, but not for me to worry about them, engaged to them or anything. I was like a son to him. You see. Oh yes. And he was a big well-known cricketer, played with Hawthorn.

THOMSON: How was it returning to work after being out of the work force?

BIRD: Well, it didn't affect me. Because I was doing so much of it in the army, you see, it didn't affect me. But he said to me, 'Now look, if you feel you want to go out for a walk, you know, to get away from here.' But, he also said to me at the time, 'There's a shortage of paper. Can you alter the size of the form, the accounting forms used at the stations and in our office and the books and everything to make them smaller.' So to save paper. So I went to the printing works and I asked for the size of the paper and everything, from that, see being able to print and everything like that, I made a lot of these alterations.

THOMSON: Was there any difficulty because other people had taken jobs when the soldiers came back?

BIRD: Well, I won't say that as far as I, you know, as far as I'm concerned. I don't know. Not as far as I was concerned. But I will admit, afterwards, years afterwards, my branch was a small branch, and we were transferred to a bigger branch. The accountancy branch, and my branch was murdered, by the others. By the senior branch. Absolutely murdered.

THOMSON: Did that have anything to do with you being a returned soldier, or anything like that?

BIRD: Well, no, well of course, some of these were not returned soldiers. But, they didn't know anything about our audit work. No idea. But being accountancy men, they didn't think much of us. One of them, well one man, he come to America, he went to America, he was in another branch, he went to America, there for a couple of years over there. When he comes back he starts to write lots of things and Clapp thought the world of him. Thought he was a marvel, you see. He gave him, over one of our men, he gave him a job, auditor of revenue, you see. And, he had to learn the job. I will admit he tried to, but in 1948, he got the job of, our fellows were glad to get rid of him, you'd be surprised. He got the job of controller of accounts and audit in Perth. You see. Then later on he was made an Assistant Commissioner over there. And, later on, do you know what happened? They had a Royal Commission on him. Ha ha ha. He was doing silly things. Ahh, and he didn't know anything, a lot he didn't know. In fact, he got me to help him in the office there one time. He told me he was very busy and wanted the use of an audit inspector, and he picked onto me because he reckoned I was the only one he could trust, and I wasn't the senior man. He put a yarn to our fellows that the head of the branch had recommended that I be the one to help him. He's asked me to help him.

THOMSON: Tell me, I'm very interested about the returned servicemen when they came home from the war. Particularly after the war finished.

BIRD: Well, now, that didn't affect me that way.

THOMSON: What about other soldiers?

BIRD: Well, I don't know, I don't know, because, as I wasn't affected I don't know about other soldiers, you see. Well the ones that came back later on with me, they weren't affected in any way. But of course, we were told at the time, ohh, government was going to do everything for us, but they didn't do anything. They didn't do anything for us.

THOMSON: Did soldiers get angry about that?

BIRD: Oh well, no, no, I don't think so. I think they just took it like I took it.

THOMSON: Can you remember in 1919 when lots of soldiers were coming back, Peace Day, which was in July, there was Peace Day marches and then there were three days of trams being uprailed and small riots and disturbances including a march to Victoria Barracks.

BIRD: No, I don't remember that. No, I don't remember that. I should if you know. But about 1921 there was a police strike. You've heard about that. Yes, well, no need to worry you about that. No, well of course then they made the Returned Soldiers Association. The Town Clerk of Melbourne got that running I think. What was his name? I forget.

THOMSON: Couldn't tell you. Did you join the R.S.L.?

BIRD: Oh yes. I was in the ... first time we started down here about 1919.

THOMSON: Here in Williamstown?

BIRD: In Williamstown, yes. Some elderly men on the corner of Melbourne Road and Ferguson Street, some elderly men had a building there. Made things for the Red Cross. When we started to form our R.S.L. we got the title deeds on this from the elderly men. So that's where the R.S.L. is now. And the squash courts.

THOMSON: What sort of role did the R.S.L. play then in those early days?

BIRD: Well, nothing particular, nothing particular. But, years and years afterwards, well in 1917, one of my Sergeants in Don Company of the 5th Battalion, he was made a Second Lieutenant and transferred to the 12th Battalion and before he left, the Don Company Sergeant and three of us Sergeants from the Headquarters who had been in Don Company, were invited to this celebration, send off to the Sergeant. Their Captain was the main in the chair and, ha ha ha, the A.M.C. Sergeant was one of us from Head Office, and the Pay Sergeant and myself, and the A.M.C. Sergeant had had a few in at the time, and he comes out, 'Good on you, Daphne.' Daphne, that's the nickname they called our Captain. Ha ha ha. He looked at me and gave a bit of a grin. Ha ha ha. So, after lots of speeches during that time, but when it was allover, years afterwards, this Sergeant had a farm up

Beaufort, or out that way, he was the head man of the R.S.L. in Melbourne. He was there for a few years. Sir Charles McKay. Charlie McKay. Yes, he was made Sir Charles McKay.

THOMSON: Do you remember when you were in the R.S.L. in Williamstown; can you remember were any other civilians a bit wary of the R.S.L. in those early days? Were there ever any problems?

BIRD: Well, no, no. Well, I worked, some of the fellows didn't go, one of them said to me one day, 'Oh, yes. You're lucky. You've been and come back.' But he didn't go. But he was jealous of me because I'd gone and come back.

THOMSON: Do you think that was common? Do you remember much of that sort of feeling?

BIRD: Oh well, I wouldn't be surprised if there was a certain amount of feeling that way.

THOMSON: What about the issue of preference for returned soldiers in employment? It probably didn't affect you, but can you remember it being an issue?

BIRD: No, well I don't know where it was affected elsewhere. No idea. But I will admit, but on account of our branch business, nothing to do with the R.S.L., but the senior branch got the benefit of certain of our jobs. Well, when this fellow went to Western Australia, and he got the sack over there, one of their men got the audit of revenue job. Do you know who sat beside him. He didn't know a razoo about it. No idea. No idea. Lots of them knew about it because a fellow stealing at the Spencer Street parcels office, working there. This is while the Second World War was on, later on, you see. He was at the Second World War, he was, well it was over then, he'd come back and an undertaker sent a corpse away to Wagga Wagga. Fifteen-pound cheque he paid for the freight. But there was something wrong with the something or other, Wagga queried it and of course they tried to find the debit. Couldn't find the debit for the fifteen pound. This fellow had used the ordinary cash he'd got, he'd used this cheque to forward of the debits, the cash items.

THOMSON: Tell me, were you an active member in the R.S.L. in Williamstown?

BIRD: No, oh no, no. I wasn't an active member there. I was just been married at the time, so I wasn't an active member. I used to go to their turnouts and that's about all.

THOMSON: When you came back from the war you got married quite soon after?

BIRD: I got married in July 1919.

THOMSON: How did you feel about, when you came back from the war, readjusting to civilian life?

BIRD: Well, it didn't upset me in any way. I didn't feel any effects from it.

THOMSON: Do you remember any of your other soldier friends or soldiers you might have known, who had trouble returning back to domestic life, civilian life?

BIRD: No, no I can't place any of that. But the only thing, when I did come back, I was walking along a street and some young fellows yelled out 'When are you going to the war?' That's the only thing, but no, I didn't feel any effects from it or anything.

THOMSON: What about memorial occasions? Day parades? Did you take part in early Anzac?

BIRD: Yeah, oh yes. I took, because it was during one of those that, well I'd met my Sergeant Major at Caulfield Hospital and he gave me the ten shillings back then, but about eight or nine years afterwards he came to march, because he couldn't march. He said, 'BIRD, did I ever give you that ten bob back?' I said, 'Yes, Bob, you gave it to me at Caulfield Hospital.' 'Well,' he said, 'you're lucky to get it.'

THOMSON: What was the importance of the Parades to you?

BIRD: Oh well, to meet the old pals. To meet my old pals. That's the most important. We thought the world of each other. In fact, shortly after I started work, I had to go into Spencer Street station for something or other, and on the way three of my old cobbors, 'Oh BIRD, oh oh, oh.' Had a talk.

One of them said, 'How about coming over for a drink?' 'Oh,' they said, 'BIRD doesn't drink.' 'Oh,' I said, 'I'll come over we'll have a drink.' At that time in 1918, one of the big pantomimes on at Her Majesty's Theatre. Oh well, they were wonderful. Everybody went. Children and all. Parents. Parents thought as much of the pantomimes in those days as the kids. We were up in the dress circle, up the back and three soldiers came in that had a few in, and they were sitting, went down below. They were a bit rowdy and everything, you see. Well, at half time they started, the fellows started to come out. 'Billy Mansfield,' I said. 'Oh BIRD.' I said, 'What are you doing?' 'Oh,' he said, 'I've only got six months to live. I got T.B. They've given me six months to live so I'm making the most of it.' Oh, we were thrilled to see each other. And at other times when I used to see different ones, we were thrilled to have a talk to each other.

THOMSON: How important to you was your memory of the war in those early days? Did you talk about your war experiences a lot?

BIRD: No, no, no. We didn't talk about it a lot, but I must tell you. You were talking about the food. Course, there's mud in the wintertime the worst winter for thirty years. That's why we were lucky to get over there in the summer time. The 1916-17 winter was the worst for thirty years, and the mud was shocking. Well, we were up the line one time for three days and three nights and you know what we had to eat? Bread and milk. Sodden bread, Tommy cookers, condensed milk. I don't know where we got the, we must have had the sugar or something or other, and they ducked out with a couple of dixies to get some shell hole water and we mixed it with the condensed milk and heat it, you see, and the Captain said to me, there were about twenty of us in this dugout. He said, 'How much?' I said, 'Two mouthfuls each.' Went round, I said, 'Fill a mouthful.' And that's what we did. Ha ha ha. Then we came out of the line, C and D Company came out of the line another time, and A and B Companies had gone back and we came out and I was given a cup. I thought it was rum, you see. Bovril, they said, 'Drink the lot. Hot.' So I drank the lot, and passed it on. Somebody else drank the lot. Then we left there, the Colonel was with us, leaving, we were ... another crowd took us over at eight o'clock at night and we came out and we were marching along, or walking along, I should say. One of them said to the Colonel, 'Where are we, Sir?' He said, 'I'm buggered if I know, we're lost.' Ha ha ha. About four o'clock in the morning we got to some trenches. 'Well,' he said, 'we'll stop here.' And they issued rum, they gave my a cup of rum, and I took a couple of sips. That was all

you were supposed to take, but some of them drank the lot and they were drunk in the morning. But I yelled out, 'Hey Bill, come and sit here.' So we got into a trench, a bit of corrugated iron and we just sat there. Four others sat in the open trench, and one of them was moaning and groaning all night, we thought he was drunk. Trench feet.

THOMSON: Tell me, after the war, would you tell these sorts of stories to your family?

BIRD: Oh no, no. In fact, in 1918 at the Mechanics Institution, the Chief Secretary of the government was down there to talk to the men. They talked to the people, you see, and he was boosting up the soldiers. The soldiers did this, and an old fellow, 'And sailors.' And the soldiers, the soldiers, 'and sailors.' So when it was over the old fellow got up, and he said, 'I've heard a lot about the soldiers but nothing about the poor sailors. What they had to put up with in the icy winds in the North Sea.' And he said. 'The soldiers had the beautiful dugouts to sleep in.' and everything, oh, running us down completely. Ha ha. I never said a word. I didn't say anything to people He was talking about the German trenches, the German dugouts, you see. They knew where the dugouts were, of course. Talking about the German dugouts all the time.

THOMSON: Tell me, when you came back from the war, did you read much about the war?

BIRD: No, no, no, no. I was glad to get out of it. But now and again, now do you see that book there. Have you seen that book?

THOMSON: Yes. Patsy Adam Smith.

BIRD: Yes, yes. Well, I was disappointed.

THOMSON: Were you?

BIRD: The only thing about the 5th Battalion mentioned in that book, is where a number of books were concerned. A.W. Keon forward with the 5th. Well that could have been the 5th Division or the 5th Battalion. People wouldn't know. We were not allowed to write diaries. We were not allowed to

write home anything particular. I'll give you how our fellows were so strict with the censorship, I bought two or three postcards from Egypt and one was a lovely yachting scene, and when I got to France, I wrote on them, this particular postcard, to my girl friend and I was talking to the Officer, the censor, 'Oh,' he said, 'We can't send this.' I said, 'Why?' 'It's got printed in Egypt on it.' 'Well,' I said, 'they know we were in Egypt.' 'Oh no,' he said, 'I can't send it.' 'Well,' I said, 'it belongs to me. You'd better give it back.'

THOMSON: Tell me, did you ever read anything written by the official war historian, C.E.W. Bean?

BIRD: No, no, no. What was ... I forget, no, I didn't read any of those. But I read Forward with the 5th, in fact I bought one and I lent it to a fellow about thirty odd years ago, never got it back. I would like to have had it back so I could read about different things about us. But, well, during the war we got some reinforcements, and when they came I knew one of the fellows in the reinforcements, and he was put into B Company. Well, this particular day we were, I don't know where we were, this particular day, A and B Company were sent on maneuvers elsewhere, and a big officer from the Australian Army came and he said to me, 'I'm so-and-so. You have got some reinforcements the other day. I'd like to see one of them.' 'What's his name.' He said, 'Buchanan.' 'Oh,' I said, 'I'm sorry. He's in B Company, and they're away on maneuvers.' 'Oh well, he said, 'he's a relation of mine.' Little did he know that I knew who he was married, the officer was married to, and knew the family because this girl belongs to our church. And her mother and father belong to our church. I knew her cousin, the fellow was her cousin. He said, 'Oh he's a relation of mine.' I knew what relationship he was. Gordon Bennett.

THOMSON: Oh really.

BIRD: Yeah. He was a solicitor in Sydney. He married, yes he married the girl Buchanan. Went to our church.

THOMSON: You thought you might sing a few songs for us.

BIRD: Yes well. I'll sing the first one. If you like.

I don't want to be a soldier
I don't want to go to war
I'd rather stay at home
The London streets to roam
And live upon the earnings of an old bus driver I don't want a bayonet
Sticking me in the ribs
I don't want me head shot away
I'd rather stay in London
In dear old dirty London
And read it in the papers every day. I love my wife
I love her dearly
It's the rich the whole world over It's the poor what gets the blame It's the rich what has the pleasure
isn't it a blooming shame.

THOMSON: What were those two songs called?

BIRD: Well, oh well I don't know what they were called. But that one 'I love my wife, I love here
dearly' you couldn't, it's shocking after that.

THOMSON: What? The verses?

BIRD: Ohhh, only one verse. Shocking. But.

THOMSON: Do you want to sing it onto the tape?

BIRD: Oh no. No. I don't know - well yes I do know verses, but oh, shocking thing. Oh an awful
thing. One of our old Colonels used to sing it, that's how I learnt it. Oh awful. And the other
'Cockney's Lament'. That was the 'It's the rich the whole world over'. That's a shocking thing after
wards. But there's another one we used to sing.

Oh Landlord have you any good wine, Oh Landlord have you any good wine,

Oh Landlord have you any good wine Fit for an officer of the line Inky pinky parlez vous.

Oh Landlord have you any good wine

Fit for an officer of the line

Inky Pinky parlez vous.

And then the landlord would do his reply.

Oh yes I've got some very good wine, parlez vous

Oh yes I've got some very wine, parlez vous

Oh yes I've got some very good wine

Fit for an officer of the Inky pinky parlez vous.

Oh Landlord have you a daughter fair, parlez vous?

And it would go on like that, you see. Then there'd be a hundred verses afterwards. But one time, at one of the schools, the Colonel in Charge, he said to the officers, 'Look, when you come back from the parade get the men marching at ease along bit further back.' So I'd go and find out what some of the other verses were. Of course they got worse and worse all the way through.

THOMSON: Do you remember any other songs, or lines of poetry or anything?

BIRD: Oh well, no, well there were other ones but I can't place them. While we were at Christmas time, while we were working at this railhead, there was one of the English tommies. Every night, of course we'd have our tea and go to bed straight away because it was so cold. This fellow started to sing a certain thing and when he got towards the last oh, he let it out loudly. Every night. So we got sick of that and so we thought. Righto, so we all got to work and when he got to that particular, we all joined in. He never sang it again. Now talking about that, we used to march on parade, marching along on parade and then we'd get to where we march at ease and you'd think this was rehearsed beforehand, but it wasn't. We're marching along and two of the officers in the front and a French girl started to walk with them and all the fellows, you know what they were saying? 'Hello, Hello, who's your lady friend, who's the little girlie by your side.' They started to sing that. Then we all started to burst out in laughter.

What was this song?

Adieu Marie.

He looked at her across the street

Bon soir, Marie, bon soir Marie She was so timid and so sweet

Bon soir, Marie, bon soir, Marie He saw the blushes come and go

He heard her singing sweet and low He loved her so, he loved her so

Bon soir, Marie, bon soir, Marie

That's the first verse; there were three other, two other verses.

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