



# **Australian War Memorial**

## **Sound Collection**

### **ORAL HISTORY RECORDING**

**ACCESSION NUMBER:** S01317

**TITLE:** Australian War Veterans of the Great War – 1914 - 1918

Oral history project

**INTERVIEWEE:** Mr W. LANGHAM

**INTERVIEWER:** Mr ALISTAIR THOMPSON

**RECORDING DATE:** 29 May 1983 AND 30 March 1987

**RECORDING LOCATION:** 27 Regent Street, Yarraville

**SUMMARY:**

**TRANSCRIBER:** Juliet Schyvens (transcribed from original typed copy)

**TRANSCRIPTION DATE:** 14 JUNE 2007

THOMPSON: Could you tell me first of all where and when you were born?

LANGHAM: I was born in a little place called Axedale, just out of, about forty miles out of Bendigo. I did my schooling there.

THOMPSON: Can you remember when you were born?

LANGHAM: Yes, I was born in the, on the 27 April 1897. That's a fair while ago.

THOMPSON: What were your parents doing in - is it Axeville?

LANGHAM: My father was a woodcutter. He was a champion woodcutter too. None could beat him. As I say, I did all my schooling there. I got my merit, when I - in those days we used to have classes, you know, not - they used to call them classes. What they call them now, grades or something. And we had an upper six and a lower six. We had to spend 12 months in each class for your merit certificate. I went through the two classes in six months, and when I got my merit, it was framed. The Education sent it in a frame.

THOMPSON: So you were a pretty good student?

LANGHAM: Well I was then, but the war settled me as a student. That came along and I went to the war and there was no more education. I was sorry, quite often very sorry, when I was on the other side that I hadn't had a better education, 'cause I could have bettered myself over there even. I finished up in the racing stables at Caulfield. I was going to be a jockey.

THOMPSON: When was this?

LANGHAM: This was in - oh, this was about 1912, 1911. It was about 1911 or 1912. I really forget now. I was in the same stable as a famous jockey, Bill Duncan, and I gave him his first ride on a pony when he came out there. I spent about four years there, then the war came along and I enlisted.

THOMPSON: Perhaps we could go back a bit, to when you were living in - what was the name of the town?

LANGHAM: Axedale.

THOMPSON: Axedale, right.

LANGHAM: It's been in the news just recently, up there, with those fellows that escaped from prison.

THOMPSON: Who was your father cutting timber for?

LANGHAM: He used to work for himself. In those days it was all woodcutting and bluestone quarrying up there. They used to work from sunrise to sunset. That was the hours they worked. For a pound a week. That's the equivalent of about two dollars now. He had a big family to keep on that.

THOMPSON: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

LANGHAM: Ah, there were thirteen in our family altogether. I'm the last of the Mohicans. They're all gone bar me.

THOMPSON: How did you fit in the family? What position did you come?

LANGHAM: Oh, I was the second last, yes, second last.

THOMPSON: How well off do you think your family was in those days?

LANGHAM: Well, as a family we were pretty well off. We were a good happy family but we were very poor, and I don't mind admitting how many a time I went to school with a bit of dry bread, in those days. Well, you can imagine yourself with a big family and a pound a week. Wasn't much. Course things were much cheaper in those days, I will admit, but still, it was a struggle.

THOMPSON: How long did you got to school for? Did you finish off at six ...?

LANGHAM: Oh, I finished off when I was, er ... when I got my merit certificate. Yeah, 1911 it was, yeah, I 'm sure it was 1911 I got that.

THOMPSON: You were about 14?

LANGHAM: Ah ... no, I wouldn't be 14 then. Yes, I would be about 14, that's right, yeah. I was too because I got my merit and went through those two classes in the 12 months, I was granted a - three years I think it was, at the Bendigo High School and I'd had school. I didn't want to go to school, so that's when I ran away. I ran away from home. I packed my little bag and away I went. I remember I got a job in a shearing shed in a place called Ravenswood, out of Bendigo, picking up the fleeces there. And I got 15 shillings a week, and the job lasted a month and I had five pound at the end of the time and I reckoned I was a millionaire. Five pounds. Well then that's when I went to the racing stables. I went down, I came down to Caulfield and joined the racing stables. I thought I'd like to be a jockey because I had a brother a jockey. Country jockey. He rode from when he was about eight till he was sixty before he retired. I thought I'd like to follow in his footsteps. Course the war intervened and altered that.

THOMPSON: Had you done a lot of horse riding when you were young?

LANGHAM: Yes, oh yes. We had horses all the time. All my mates all had horses, you know, and we were always riding. We were pretty wild with them too, at times. Ha ha. Look back on those days, they were grand days.

THOMPSON: Tell me, when you were living at Axedale, was your family a church-going family?

LANGHAM: Ah no, not exactly. Although we did - the parents weren't church goers, but the rest of us attended our, we attended our Sunday School every Sunday, and we never missed, Sunday School. We went to church. We were brought up that way.

THOMPSON: Which church was that?

LANGHAM: Church of England it was then, yes. We had a lot of discipline and discipline is a marvellous thing in life, I reckon, discipline. Lot of these young fellows now days and these young girls could do with a bit of discipline.

THOMPSON: You mean your family were disciplined, your parents had a strong discipline?

LANGHAM: Yes, yes. We had to do what was right, if we didn't, were we let know about it!

Few times I had a strap around my backside, ha ha ha, and it didn't do me any harm.

THOMPSON: From your father?

LANGHAM: Yes, didn't hurt very much, you know, but just to let you know who was boss, do the right thing.

THOMPSON: What was that for?

LANGHAM: Oh, well, if you did something wrong.

THOMPSON: Were you a sporting person?

LANGHAM: Yes. I liked, I liked football. That was my game. Football and cricket. I loved football and cricket. And billiards. When I was a tyke I used to sneak into the billiard room up there, and play billiards. Matter of fact, my mate, his father had a hotel at that stage, the Campaspe Hotel, and he had two daughters then. They're both nuns now. And he used to lock us in the Billiards Room and let us all play billiards. That's how we learnt to play billiards.

No-one else was allowed in the Billiards Room.

THOMPSON: Were there any other societies or clubs or groups that you were a member of when you were young?

LANGHAM: Oh, no. I was only ... you know, we all joined the scouts, we were all in the scouts. That's a marvellous thing too. The discipline. They teach you a bit of bush craft too. Now days they get lost when they walk into the bush, young people. But we didn't, we never got lost. I - for years up there we used to do a lot of rabbiting - a terrible lot of rabbits and things around those places - and we travelled through the forests and things at night time. We never got lost because you always had your markings. You were taught. When you were in the scouts you were taught to mark your track when you went in so you could come out again.

THOMPSON: Did you have any military training when you were young?

LANGHAM: Ah ... yes, we had compulsory training. Another marvellous thing. That's only, say, half a day, or half a night a week, or whatever it was. I really forget now whether it was night or day, it's a long time ago. But that's more discipline. It taught you discipline and things that were right. It was very helpful when the real war came, I'll tell you that much.

THOMPSON: Did you enjoy your compulsory training?

LANGHAM: Oh yes. Oh my word, yes. You made a lot of good friends, met a lot of good mates and all that sort of thing. They don't get any of that now days.

THOMPSON: Tell me, was your father politically active at all?

LANGHAM: No, no. He didn't go much, no, not for politics.

THOMPSON: Was he a union man?

LANGHAM: Well, they weren't union men in those days. I tell you, they used to work from sunrise to sunset. The boss'd say, if you were working in this quarry he'd say, "Well, the sun is just about down, I think it's just about time to knock off for the day". That's what it used to be.

THOMPSON: Where did you live when you came to Melbourne, to be a jockey?

LANGHAM: Ah ... right at Caulfield.

THOMPSON: You lived at Caulfield?

LANGHAM: Yeah. That's where the stables were. You had to, we had to live in the stables where we were.

THOMPSON: Oh, right. And how long were you a jockey for?

LANGHAM: Oh, I wasn't a jockey. I was only, like a - I would have probably been if I'd stayed there, if the war hadn't have come along. But I stayed there until the war, about 19 ... 14. End of 1914.

THOMPSON: Can you remember the day when the war broke out?

LANGHAM: Yes. 4 August 1914. I can remember that all right.

THOMPSON: What happened on that day for you?

LANGHAM: Oh, really, nothing much. It didn't strike home, you know. Well, I think everybody thought, oh, this is something that will just happen. It will be over in a few weeks, and all that sort of thing. That's the attitude you took about it. Even when the last war started, the Second World War, we thought the same way. Oh, it'd only last about 12 months. We didn't realise it would go six years.

THOMPSON: When did you start thinking about joining up?

LANGHAM: Oh, I don't know. I think it just came suddenly. I used to pick up the papers and see fellows that I know and mates that had been knocked over.

THOMPSON: This is at Gallipoli?

LANGHAM: Yes, at Gallipoli. One of my very good mates, he was a bit older than I was but he was a lovely fellow and I read in the paper one morning where he'd got knocked. So I thought, well, I'll go and have a go at it.

THOMPSON: Can you remember any pressures to go or not to go?

LANGHAM: No pressures, no pressures. It was just purely voluntary. Lot of people say, oh you went away just because you thought you were going to have a good trip. Well that was furthest from my mind cause I realised - I'd read a lot of history in my day, when I went to school, and I realised that war wasn't a picnic. You know what, if you volunteered to go, you knew what you were going for. You knew you weren't going for a holiday.

THOMPSON: You said you'd done a lot of reading when you were at school?

LANGHAM: Yes, yes. I used to be very fond of, very fond of history. All stories of the old, old history that they don't get now days. We got it terrible lot. Wars of the Roses and the days of the Normans and go back to all those things. I was, I used to love reading those things.

THOMPSON: And Empire, and that sort of stuff?

LANGHAM: Yes, Empire. We had a good Empire those days. But I was a real Royalist in those days, but now days I'm not. I'm not a Royalist now days. I don't mind admitting that I'm

not. The Queen is a lovely person. I met her when she was out here. I's as close to her as I am to you now because I was in a position - I was working with the City Council Lord Mayors Department. And she's a very fine person but they get a lot of money out of the country and they get it from the people and they're always appealing for more. That's what gets under my skin.

THOMPSON: You said you were a real royalist then. Do you remember Empire Day celebrations?

LANGHAM: Yes, we always celebrated that at school. That was a big day at school, Empire Day. We always had sports and races. We'd have a spread, you know. That's what we used to like, the kids, when it came to the food part of it. All the dainties used to be on, and I tell you, in my day anything like that was a treat.

THOMPSON: You were talking about when you joined up. Can you remember the date when you did join up?

LANGHAM: Oh gee.

THOMPSON: Was it still 1914, or was it 1915?

LANGHAM: I think it was 1915.

THOMPSON: After Gallipoli?

LANGHAM: Yes, it was just after Gallipoli. Could have been the end of 1914, or the start of 1915.

THOMPSON: Can you remember the circumstances of your enlistment? What happened?

LANGHAM: Yes. I couldn't get consent because I was under age. I tried a couple of times and brought home the papers and Dad wouldn't sign them.

THOMPSON: Why?

LANGHAM: Well, he reckoned I was too young, see.

THOMPSON: Had any of your brothers gone?



LANGHAM: Not at that time. No. No. I ducked off one day, and I remember I went to the Polling Booth. I went to - not the Polling Booth, the Recruiting Depot. And I remember the officer saying to me, or the doctor saying to me, "How old are you?" And I said, "Twenty-one". He said, "Well you don't look it". I said, "I can't help what I look like". Anyway, he passed me. I didn't want to go into camp up there because I'd be – Bendigo - because I'd be found out. So he said, "What camp would you like to go into?" I said, "I'd like to go to Melbourne". I said, "I haven't seen Melbourne yet and I'd like to have a look at it". So they sent me down here and I spent my first night in Sturt Street Barracks. With a couple of blankets.

THOMPSON: Where is Sturt Street?

LANGHAM: That was Sturt Street, South Melbourne. That used to be the Military Barracks in those days.

THOMPSON: So you didn't have your father's consent?

LANGHAM: No, not at that time but I got it later on. I got it all fixed up later on. I won't go into the way I did it, but later on I got the consent and everything was alright.

THOMPSON: So where did you go from Sturt Street?

LANGHAM: We went to Royal Park. Royal Park. There was a big camp then. They gave us the old giggle suits, like - they call them jeans now. They were old dungaree suits. Dressed up in that. We used to march, we'd have a band and we used to march in from Royal Park to the city. Oh, it used to be lovely. Striding out behind that band, you know. You thought you were king. The old tunes they used to play. It brings little pictures of something like that. I finished up in the artillery camp at Maribyrnong. Got fixed up and transferred to artillery, that's what I went away in, the artillery unit.

THOMPSON: What unit was that?

LANGHAM: The 8th Brigade. They formed the 3rd Division. They sent them away - they all went away in different units from Australia. We went to Salisbury Plains in England. We spent a few months there training. Formed a division, formed a whole division there. When we went to France we went across as a full division.

THOMPSON: This was the first time you'd been overseas. What were your impressions?

LANGHAM: Oh, good. Good. We called in at Durban and Cape Town, and South Africa. I was quite impressed with the place there. Especially Durban. They had a funny incident in Durban. We - they got the rickshaws there with the Zulus, and they prance around. They've got horns on them and they're all painted up in all different colours and they prance around like a horse and make out they're the freshest, you see. So anyway, we thought we'd have a rickshaw ride. And we got in the rickshaw and it was three miles down to the beach. So they raced. Had a race. Three miles. Tell you what fine condition they were in, those fellows. When they were going down a hill, they'd jump in the air like that and ride on the shafts. Course, you're leaning back like this. Well I didn't know there was a wheel on the back. I expected to go on my head out the back every minute, you see. Anyway, they took us down and back. That was six miles they travelled, and we gave them two shillings. And they started to argue, one of them started to argue the point. We didn't know what he was arguing over or anything. A lady and a man came along, and she could speak the language. She spoke to the fellow and she said to me, "Now what is he going crook about?" I said ... She said, "How much did you give him?" I said, "We gave him two shillings". She said, "That's the worst of you Australians when you come over here", she said. "You spoil these fellows. How far did he take you?" I told her and she said, "You should have given him one shilling". I said, "For six miles!" She said, "That's right. Two shillings was too much for them". They turned out to be - he was the fire chief in Durban. They took us home to tea and gave us a good time for the rest of the day

while we were there. We only had one day off there. So, Durban's not a bad place. I'd like to see it again. I don't suppose I'll ever see it again.

THOMPSON: What about when you were in Salisbury Plains? Did you get leave to London very often?

LANGHAM: Yes, we got four days leave in London when we landed there. We all – well, we all couldn't go, but every man got four days leave. They called it Disembarkation Leave. Gee, it's a fine place London. It was a really fine place. Oh, yes. I spent some time there, later on, I had a fair amount of time in London after I was wounded. I came back to London.

THOMPSON: In all the times that you were in London, can you remember many Australian soldiers, how did they respond to the freedom of being able to be free in the city?

LANGHAM: How do you mean?

THOMPSON: Do you think they had any problems, any drink problems perhaps or anything like that?

LANGHAM: Oh, none at all, no. I didn't - they didn't play up. Australians didn't play up in London. Although, a lot of people reckoned they used to, but that's not right. There was only one sort of fellows we didn't like and that was the British Military Police. They were a very arrogant lot of fellows and we didn't like the Red Caps, as we called them, from Horseferry Road, from the War Office and those places. They were fellows that had never seen a bit of fighting and never would see a bit of fighting but they sort of expected you to salute them every time you met them and all that. They'd look for it.

I remember one day I was walking down the Strand - and I won't mention the man's name I was with. He was a V.C. and he's got the V.C. ribbon on there, see. We saw these two fellows covered in all this red braid, you know, coming towards us, and he said, "You watch this". And they got their eyes on us, like that. They stared at you, they waited for the salute from you, and when he got up near them he poked his chest out like that, and they saw the Victoria

Cross ribbon. Well, they've got to salute that, no matter who they are. That's - you get the salute, not them. So they threw a beauty, you know. Ha ha. He just threw a casual one back, ha ha. So we got our own back on them that day. Ha ha ha. Yes, that takes pride of place with anybody. You must salute that V.C. You don't salute the man, you're saluting the honour. And they deserve it, too. Would you like to know how he earned the V.C.? Would you?

THOMPSON: Yes, who was it?

LANGHAM: It was quite simple, he didn't know himself. I said to him, "How did you earn a V.C.?" "Well", he said, "I'll tell you. I don't know much about it. All I know was", he said, "I was at the place later on where it happened", and he said, "we came to this flat stretch of land and there was a German machine pill box on the opposite side. And", he said, "every time we started to advance, the machine gun mowed our boys down. All of a sudden I got up and I ran. I ran zig zag, like that, and the machine gun was rat-tat-tat-tat-tat and I must have had a charmed life because nothing hit me. And I just walked round the side, I dropped a mill bomb into the box and that's how I won my V.C.". So I said, "Would you do it again?" He said, "I don't know. I don't know why I did it then and I don't know whether I'd do it again or not. I got a V.C. for it". There was only the one machine gun there but he put it out of action, you see, and they advanced then.

THOMPSON: When did you go across to France?

LANGHAM: When? I can't tell you now exactly when it was.

THOMPSON: Were you across for the big push in July on the Somme?

LANGHAM: Oh yes. Yes. Our fist big push - our division, our first big push was Messines, when they blew up Messines Ridge. Battle of Messines. That was our first big battle. We had a general killed in that. I don't remember his name. I have an idea it was General Bridges. He was in a place that they thought was safe. It was behind a hill. I didn't think anyone ... but the

Germans used a howitzer, and howitzers fired up like that and then dropped down, see. They got his car.

THOMPSON: What exactly did you do as an artilleryman?

LANGHAM: Well, you had lots of things. You had gun sites, mostly in the ammunition column. We had to supply the ammunition. We had to keep the ammunition up to the guns. We had some hectic times, I tell you, getting through barrages and things like that. I remember one day we were coming our - and Fritz had a very heavy barrage over and there was a Tommy gun going in. We were about fifty or sixty yards apart and as they went in they waved to us, you know, and we waved to them coming back. All of a sudden they disappeared completely. A high explosive shell went under them and they disappeared. It just burst under them and they were gone. That's the sort of thing that happened in war. You're there one minute and you're gone another.

You could nearly always get an idea if a shell was going to be near you, come near you, because the minute that gun fires, you get that sound. Comes to you somehow. I remember one day, one went under our centre team, horses, and it was a dud. It went right under. If it had've exploded, well, I wouldn't have been here. That was the biggest scare we ever got, I think. When we heard - you could hear the terrific sound coming towards you. Woooooosh, you know, as it comes. Flop. No explosion, thank God. But the poor Tommys, they went.

THOMPSON: How did you feel when you first went into action?

LANGHAM: Oh, I don't think ... People say you're not scared but that's all bunkum. I don't give a damn who it is. Whether he's a V.C. winner or what he is. He's scared at times. That's only natural. He gets used to it after a while but you still, you still wonder whether your name's on that one. The day I got mine, I didn't think - everything was fairly quiet. I didn't think I'd finish up that day. Comes when you least expect it. Best way out of it, I suppose.

One of the worst things that I ... things I don't like - I very seldom mention it - but when we made the big push on the 4 August, that's the last big push that we made before we finished the war. We were - our guns had gone ahead and we were taking up ammunition. We had to go through a little cutting and there was only room for - where we had to go through this cutting, there was only room for just your wagon to go through and your team. And you know, that was full of Germans, lying there. We couldn't go round. We had to go through. We had to go over them. That's always been a very ... something that ... oh, it's hard to explain. It hurts very much when you think of it, that you had to ... you had to gallop over and pull your wagon over those dead Germans. It's an awful feeling, you know. Still, it had to be. That's war.

THOMPSON: What was life like amongst your fellow soldiers?

LANGHAM: Oh, they were marvellous. They were marvellous. Your mates. That's when you found real mates. When you go to war you find real mates. They, they'll die for you. They will too. You don't think, you don't think of yourself. You think of the other fellow. Long as he's all right, don't worry about me. He thinks the same about you. You'll strike an odd one or two. I've got a photo here. There's a chap there, he died of bronchial pneumonia. Now, I met him when I first went into camp. We were both civilians. He was about, I suppose he was about fifteen years older than me. But he was like a brother to me. He'd take the sock off his foot and give it to you if he ... he'd give you the last cent he had and go without himself. That's the sort of mate you strike in the army. That was taken on Salisbury Plains, that photo. Chap lying down, that was his twenty-first birthday. Ha ha.

THOMPSON: Perhaps we could have a look at these after, I'd be really interested. What sort of things did you do when you were out of the line, when you were out of action?

LANGHAM: Well, when the artillery's out of the line, you got - your discipline's still there, although discipline was fairly slack. Our officers were pretty good, most of our officers were pretty good. They didn't - they treated you like a human being, you know. Not like some of the

Tommy officers. And you got a pretty good go and mostly exercise and cleaning harness and things like that. Seeing that your horses and - your horse was number one. He came first, your horse. He came before you or anybody else. Because you couldn't get horses, but you could always get men. Your horse was always number one. Anyway, he was the fellow that had to carry you through when you were mounted and you had to look after him real well. Your harness had to be spick and span when you came out. It got a bit dirty and rusty when you were in action but when you came out, you had to burnish it. Polish it up. And all your chain work had to be, had to be cleaned and burnished and all that sort of thing. Pretty strict on that.

THOMPSON: What sort of recreations did you have?

LANGHAM: Oh, we had all sorts, we had recreations like, just like you'd get here now with civilians. Anything went. We had horse racing and mule races and foot races, swimming. All that sort of thing.

THOMPSON: Visits to the estaminet.

LANGHAM: Oh, plenty of visits to the estaminet. See pretty well every house in France was an estaminet. Every farm house and things, you could always get your wine there. Vin Rouge and Vin Blanc. Some of it wasn't very good but it was wet.

THOMPSON: I'd heard that sometimes the army organised brothels for men. Is that true?

LANGHAM: Well, yes. In Rouen and Bologne and Le Harvre and all those places, they had streets of those, what they called the Blue Lights, Red Lights, Green Lights. They reckoned that those girls used to come from far away in towns in France and they'd spend about three years there, in brothels and things, then they used to go back to their own town and none knew anything about it, you know. Then they'd marry and settle down, just like an ordinary person would. Course that's different to now days. You've got your television and all now. You had nothing like that those days, and perhaps ... well it would be hard to get a letter, perhaps, in those days, from far away, to a far away town.

THOMPSON: Did many of the soldiers use ...?

LANGHAM: Oh yes, they used them, oh yes. Our nurses, they were the ones. Oh, they were marvellous, our nurses. They couldn't do enough for you. They were angels, no doubt about that. I remember when I got wounded, all the front of my tunic was blown away. If I'd a been six inches farther forward I would have got the whole charge in the stomach. I only got one piece in the head there. So I got it there. I was lucky it didn't go right through, I suppose. The head must have been a bit too hard. My horse got it. Put a great hole in the side of his face. It just sort of got the jugular vein. The horse blood squirted out all over me. And I must have been down in the clearing station, I was at the clearing station next morning and I was lying there on my stretcher, on my blanket and the sister came up and she said, "My goodness, there's an awful smell here, round here somehow". She came over near me and she said, "It's you". "Well", I said, "I can't help it", So she pulled the blanket back and had a look. I still had the clothes and things on. And "Oh", she said, "it's horrific". It was the horse blood. Smell of the horse blood, stale horse blood. It's a terrible smell. They were marvellous, the sisters.

THOMPSON: It must have been important because you were out of contact with families and other women and so on for so long?

LANGHAM: Oh yes. It was lovely to feel their touch, you know. Ha ha. You've got to be in a position like that to realise what a gift a woman is.

THOMPSON: So this must have been only a few weeks before the war ended, or a few months before the war ended, when you were wounded?

LANGHAM: That was so. I think I got wounded on 1 October, if I can remember rightly now, and it finished on 11 November. What's that, it's about six weeks. About six weeks. I was a bit disappointed in a way because all my mates, they used to write to me and tell me they'd gone to Charleroi in Belgium. They took them all to one place, see. They used to write and tell me



about 'the lovely time we're having up here'. You know. I was missing - course I was having a good time in London, so.

THOMPSON: How sick were you?

LANGHAM: Oh, I wasn't sick. I wasn't sick. But I had this trouble with this eye and things. I can't turn that eye that way. That's paralysed down that side there. That come from the wound there.

THOMPSON: Still is?

LANGHAM: Still. It will always be that way. I can never ... I've got to turn my head like that. But nothing - the sight's all right, just the - it's paralysed down the side, the nerve or whatever it is. I don't know whether they call it an optic nerve, or what they call it but can do nothing about it.

THOMPSON: Did you spend long in London?

LANGHAM: Ah, yeah. I stayed a while, I stayed till ... I stayed till Christmas in London. They said to me, when the war was finished they asked us if we wanted to go back to France to join our unit or whether we'd like to stay in London. So I said, "Oh, I don't want to go back there. I've seen enough of that". So I got a job on the guard in London. Horseferry Road Guard.

THOMPSON: What do you mean 'guard'? Standing outside?

LANGHAM: Guard of the Headquarters. I was bank escort there. Used to be - collect the bankroll, the pay for the A.I.F. We used to go by taxi from Headquarters to the Bank of England, and we'd hand over - we had bundles of notes that - Australian notes - and we'd hand those into the bank there and they'd give us the Bradburys. The English currency, like the ... issued out. Well, I had a revolver, a colt revolver, with six bullets. Sat along side the taxi driver. And I had a short bayonet like that. One of the small ones, about ten inches long or so. I said to the sergeant one day - sergeant major used to sit in the back with the money - and I

said to him, "What happens if I use these six bullets?" He said, "Well, you've got to use your bayonet". It was really funny, that was, you know. Ha ha ha. Anyone could have robbed us. Simplest thing in the world, because people - we'd have the money lying on the footpath in the Strand. People were walking past. They could see the bundles of money there 'cause, you know, the paper was broken round some of them. I wanted to stay there because I wanted to go to Manchester at Christmas time and if I went back to France I wouldn't be able to get to Manchester.

THOMPSON: Why did you want to go to Manchester?

LANGHAM: Well, I had a little girl up in Manchester. They looked after me when I was in hospital up there. And I remember her father had a garage and he used to give her a - Fords were all the go then. The T-Model Ford. They were all the taxis in those days. And he gave her a T-Model Ford and she used to take me and me mate. She had her girlfriend, like. They used to take us around on trips and all that sort of thing there, and have a chat. We used to go to the Belleview Skating Rind they had - big skating rink there. Had some good times.

THOMPSON: Had you met her when you were in hospital in Manchester?

LANGHAM: Yes, they came to visit in the hospital. I remember. So anyway we got to Manchester for Christmas. They wouldn't give us leave so we went A.W.O.L., the two of us. When we came back, I remember I had to go up before the colonel and he said, "You know, we can't keep men like you on the guard here. You're not reliable. I'm afraid I'll have to send you back to camp". Course I, you know, I tried to make out I was disappointed and all that, but I was really happy because getting back to camp would be getting home. See. Anyhow, I arrived at Sutton Veney Camp on Salisbury Plains, was nearly midnight when I arrived there, and a fellow says - I met the sergeant and he said, "You go in that office there and report in there". So I walk in and I saw a fellow, he had a little lamp and he's writing at the desk, see. I gave a cough, you know, and he said, "Yes". I said, "I'm reporting back from London".

"Well", he said, "see the orderly sergeant". I said, "I been A.W.O.L., sir". "Well", he said, "the bloody war's over. Do you want to make anything out of it". And you know who it was. Captain Jacka, the V.C. First V.C. He said, "Go and see the orderly sergeant and get some blankets". Two days after I was on the boat on my way home. That's the sort of fellow Captain Jacka was.

THOMPSON: When was this? 1919?

LANGHAM: Yes, 1919. January 1919. I was put on the boat a couple of days afterwards. Sent home.

THOMPSON: Can you tell me, in those three or four years that you were away, did you have much correspondence with people in Australia?

LANGHAM: Oh yes. Oh, we were never short of mail or anything. I remember one Christmas time there, we were sleeping in an old barn. There were six of us. When you turned, you all had to turn together. We were all in there sleeping together. It was really cold, you know. We were lousy, I tell you. We were crawling alive with lice, body lice. They never used to get in your head. You had a job - if you wanted to scratch, you had a job, you were packed in that tight the six of us, the six of us, in this little place. Come Christmas Day and we only had a bit of bully beef, and damned if the mail didn't arrive. And I had a parcel. It had a great big Christmas cake in it. So when we opened it, it was mildewed. But we ate it. We're still here so the mildew didn't do us any harm. That was sent to me by a grocer from Axedale. His Christmas pudding came in very handy, I tell you.

THOMPSON: Were you very aware of things that were happening in Australia? While you were away?

LANGHAM: Oh yes. Yeah. We were pretty well aware. They had the conscription campaign. That was on, you know. Well, ninety per cent of the soldiers voted against conscription because although our battalion were very - they were only half strength, we didn't want to, we

didn't believe in bringing anybody else into what we were into, compulsory. We didn't want to compel them to come. If they wanted to come on their own, good enough. But we saw enough of the Tommy. They were conscripted. And there's a big difference between a conscripted fighter and a voluntary fighter. They don't fight the same. At least they've got to be very - they've got to be pushed to save their own lives, but you realise yourself, you volunteer for something you do it better than if you're forced into doing it. Those poor devils were all conscripted. And on top of that, the poor devils only used to get a bob a day. They used to reckon we were millionaires. We were getting six bob a day, or I was. In the artillery we got an extra - they got five shillings a day. We got six shillings a day because we had horses and we were supposed to be - whereas a gunner or a private could have his rest time, you had to be with your horse, like, twenty-four hours of the day. You had to look after them, so we got an extra shilling a day for that. Six bob. We reckoned we were millionaires too.

THOMPSON: Were you ever homesick, can you remember, when you were away?

LANGHAM: No, not really, no. You had so many good mates that - made you forget homesickness. When it was all over, well we were anxious to get home then. Very anxious to get home then.

THOMPSON: How did you feel at that stage? Do you think you were in many ways, a different person? I mean, physically you'd been wounded.

LANGHAM: Oh yes, I don't ... I don't know. Ha ha. That's a pretty hard question to answer, that one. I suppose it did make a difference in a way. We were only kids but we grew up quick. You matured pretty quickly. You mature pretty quick when you go to war, I'll tell you that much. You're a kid today and you're a man tomorrow. You had to be.

THOMPSON: What were your attitudes to war after you'd been at war for two or three or four years?

LANGHAM: Oh, I didn't like it. We didn't like it, but I still think now that if you put some of these blokes that's sitting in a lovely chair back in the office somewhere, you put them out to fight, you wouldn't have many wars. They don't do any fighting and they tell you to go and do it.

THOMPSON: Did you feel that about that war?

LANGHAM: Yes. Yes, I did. It should never have been.

THOMPSON: Did you think that at the time?

LANGHAM: Not at the start, I didn't. No, we thought the Germans had done the wrong thing. We used to hear bad stories about them, about carrying babies on their bayonets and all that. But I think that's a lot of hooey. Personally, I don't believe that. I don't think any man could do that. Stick a baby on a bayonet and that's the tales they used to tell us. Stick the bayonets through the babies and carry them along on their bayonet.

THOMPSON: So when did you start to realise, or change your attitudes to the war?

LANGHAM: Oh, I changed my attitudes, I can remember, when we started the big push. I was back in the wagon lines we used to call it, and wet and miserable. This was up at Paschendaele, one of our big battles. An infantry chap came back and he's got about two hundred German prisoners following him. He was only the one man with them. He's got his rifle and bayonet, you see. It was a terrible cold, miserable day. Most of these fellows were only bits of kids, these Germans that came in, and we said to them - they pulled up at our wagon lines and they looked miserable and all that, you know. So we offered them some stew and a hot drink and things. And the fellow that was in charge of them went, he went crook about it. He said, "Why should you give it to them. Look what they've done to me. I've had to walk all the way out here with them through all that mud and slush to bring them out here". That altered my - sort of altered my attitude all together. I realised we shouldn't be fighting. 'Cause, one of them said to me - he could speak English - and he said, "I didn't want to fight

you. I was forced into fighting on the other side. On my side, I was forced into the trenches. Most of these fellows are the same. They're only bits of kids, they were forced in. They were calling them up very young. They're forced into the line and we were happy to be taken prisoner. Soon as we could". I realised then we were fighting fellows that didn't want to fight. I still got that attitude. Why should we go and fight. It should be a free world. Everyone should be allowed a little bit of it and the freedom that's in it.

THOMPSON: When you were about to return home, did you have any particular aspirations or plans for your return?

LANGHAM: Yes, when I came home I made up my mind that I'd be a taxi driver. I'd start my own business. A taxi. And the Repatriation - if it was the Repatriation Department. I think it was. They would grant you a sum - if you wanted to start in business, they would grant you a sum. I put in to get this grant - I think it was about five hundred pounds - to buy a car, you see. Only small models then, not like these big things you've got now. The Overland and things like that. Were small four cylinder cars those days. And so they said that was okay, they'd grant that. So I asked for two. Two cars. They said. "You can't get two you can only get one". "Now", I said, "Look, I'm going into a business, I'm starting into a business. I don't know anything about it. Now if anything happens to that one car, I'm out of business. If I've got another one to carry on with I'm all right and I can keep paying you the money back". Anyway, they wouldn't give it to me. So I scrubbed it.

THOMPSON: So did you continue with the taxi idea?

LANGHAM: Then I decided - I scrubbed that idea, see, because I couldn't get the two cars and one was no good. I say, if you had an accident you still had to pay for it. Still had to pay back the money and I wouldn't have had a job to pay it back. So, I thought I'd go into the upholstery business then. Like upholstering these sort of things and all that. Now they had a

place down in Jolimont. A school there. And I went to that school. I was there about - I think I was there about six weeks and all I did was cut a bit of leather. I learnt nothing.

THOMPSON: Who's school was it?

LANGHAM: It was run by the Repatriation Department, see. The fellows that were instructors and things there, they didn't give a continental. They were getting their money, they were getting their pay and they'd come along, oh, do this and do that. Well that was no good. So I scrubbed that.

And that was the last time I asked 'em - oh, at one particular stage I got a pair of glasses off them. In those days, glasses, they were those steel rimmed ones and they were half a crown, two and six a pair. These glasses, see. So, I put in for the pension. I hadn't got a pension and I got knocked back for the pension and they asked me for the return of the glasses - two and six - because this wasn't due to war injury. This wasn't a war injury.

THOMPSON: Your head?

LANGHAM: That's true, yeah. It wasn't a war injury.

THOMPSON: How did they argue that?

LANGHAM: So anyway, they sent me for an x-ray. I forget where I went for the x-rays now. Ha, it was really funny. When they read the result of the x-rays when they came back he said, "A depression ..." - I can see him now as he's reading it out - "a depression of frontal bone, right side". No, it's on the left side, see. They had the x-ray wrong and I got knocked back for me - got knocked back for me pension. And I returned the glasses with compliments, soldiers compliments. I got them back.

THOMPSON: What did you mean, 'soldiers compliments'?

LANGHAM: Well, use your own judgment there. I told them what they could do with them - that's with the glasses, see. Two and sixpence, you know. So, I never got a pension. I fought them. I tried for 56 years for a pension, but I couldn't get it. One day, I had a bit of trouble

with my eye and I went in - in recent years - I went in and I saw a specialist. And he's reading my file and he says, "You don't get a pension Mr Langham?" I said, "No". He said, "You were granted a pension in nineteen hundred and something, 1926, 1927 or something. You were granted a pension". I said, "Well, I never got it. I've got papers to say that the pension had been refused". "Well", he said, "Look, don't say that I said anything about it. I don't want to come into this, I'm not supposed to tell you this, but it's in your file". See. I've got papers there now to prove it too. He said, "If I was you, now, I'd have another go. But don't bring my name into it". I had a go and I got it. But the same thing that I applied for in the 1920s, I got a pension for 10%. But they were all saying to me, "Oh gee, you're going to get a nice tidy sum. Back pay, you know, for 56 years". I got \$140 for 56 years back pay. That's all I got.

THOMPSON: Perhaps if we could come back again to when you were looking for work after you came home. Perhaps you could tell me, first of all when you returned to Australia. Can you remember the day when you came home?

LANGHAM: Ahhh ... oh ... no.

THOMPSON: Can you remember what happened?

LANGHAM: I can remember what happened on the day, exactly. They brought us from the boat, and there was one of us - each one of us had a car on our own. We sat in the back seat. They drove us to the Sturt Street Barracks and I saw my brother and - my mother and young brother standing at the gate as I went in, you know. I waved to them as I went in. They was as close to me as you are, as I went past them, you know. I was two hours in there before I got around to the doctor. You had to go right around into this room for something and into that room for something, you know. And when I got to the doctor, the doctor said to me, "What's wrong with you?" And I said, "Nothing". He said, "What do you mean nothing wrong? Do you want me to mark you A-1?" I said, "Look, I don't give a continental what you mark me", I said. "as long as I get out of this place. I've been two hours in here already and I saw my



mother and brother at the gate there and I want to get out of this". He said, "Alright. I'll mark you A-1. If you don't like that you can appeal within 14 days". Those are the very words he said to me. "If you don't like the decision you can appeal within 14 days". Well, I came home and I kicked around for three weeks and I thought to myself, oh, I forgot about that appeal. Oh, it's three weeks now. Oh well, that's the end of that.

So I went up to Bendigo and met a lot of other friends and had a holiday and sometime later when I made the application for the pension, I told the doctor this, and he said, "He told you 14 days? Look," he said, "it doesn't matter if it's forty years, you can appeal". Well, I said, "I didn't know that". And that's the reason I hadn't appealed for several years, like, for the pension. That was the day I arrived home. Everyone had to go through that, right around. We had a paper called the *Bayonet*. "Do you want the paper?" he said to you, and all these sorts of silly things, on a day like that when you're coming home from a war. Silly, wasn't it.

THOMPSON: Did you have a welcome home with your family?

LANGHAM: Oh, yeah. We had a good welcome home. I had several welcome homes. Ha ha ha. More family affairs and things, you know. They were all good. I had a couple down here and I had a couple up the bush, up around Bendigo way. We weren't living up there then, like. Mum had shifted down to Melbourne, like, when the war started.

THOMPSON: Why?

LANGHAM: Oh, well, I suppose to be - my brother was down here and my sister was down here.

THOMPSON: What about your father?

LANGHAM: My old ... Dad had disappeared.

THOMPSON: While you were at war?

LANGHAM: Yes. Yes. No, after I came home. No, he was there when I came home. That was right. It was after that. My mother and father parted. But she had been down here in the war

period, like, staying with her daughter. Then when I came home she shifted back up to Axedale.

THOMPSON: Had your brothers gone off to war?

LANGHAM: No. There was only one brother.

THOMPSON: So you had lots of sisters?

LANGHAM: Yes. Well, they're all dead. I got his photo here, the other brother. Well ... we both survived. He came home. Lost a leg when he came home. At work. Years after, that was. But still he lost a leg in, like, civilian life.

THOMPSON: Can you remember, when you came home was there a problem with Spanish flu?

LANGHAM: Yeah, well we had the Spanish flu when I was in London. Before we came home, just before Christmas. I remember a very funny incident happened there. A chap and I, we had a couple of girls to meet, and I said - he wasn't - I was stationed at Horseferry Road as they called that Headquarters. We had our own bedrooms, see. He was in a different place because he got a job in a different part of the city. I said to him, "I'll meet you on the corner at seven o'clock". He said, "Right-oh". So I came out - I remember I came outside and I looked up - it was only a little short street - and I looked up the corner and he was there and he waved like that, you see. And I said, "Won't be a minute". I had to duck inside to get something. When I came out he's gone. I never saw him anymore. He'd dropped with the flu they told me later. While he was standing there. It just hit you like that and down you'd go. The flu. It was bad over there. Terrible lot of people died with it. And he was one of the unfortunate victims that - he was right as pie one minute and the next he dropped. The ambulance just picked him up and took him away. I never saw him any more. That was the flu. Pretty bad over there, I don't know what it was like here.

THOMPSON: You were talking before about the way the army helped you, or didn't help you, because you had trouble getting a pension. Did you get a gratuity when you came home?

LANGHAM: Yeah, we got a great gratuity. A hundred pounds.

THOMPSON: What did you do with that?

LANGHAM: Well, I kept it for a while. But we couldn't get any work, we were out of work. And I remember reading - the Victorian Railways, they started a big project down Hamilton. Putting a railway line through from Hamilton to Cavendish. Yeah, Hamilton to Cavendish, that's right. I had been barbering, cutting hair, things like that. So I took the tools down there with me, and we couldn't start work because it was raining. Railway sent us down there. They paid our fare down, gave us a free trip down, and they said they'd take the fare out of our first pay. Anyway, we never started. We were there for a week. It rained for the full week. We were laying in the water for nearly all the time. Course we were used to that, being ex-soldiers. Anyway, I said to a mate, I said, "Oh damn it, let's go back to Melbourne". So we came back to Melbourne and we cashed the - I cashed my bond of a hundred pound and we spent it. Ha ha.

THOMPSON: Spent it all at once?

LANGHAM: Oh, we never spent it all at once. We kept going till it was gone, you know. A hundred pound would last you a fair while those days. Not like now. Wouldn't last you very long now days.

THOMPSON: You said you were out of work for a while.

LANGHAM: Yeah. I went barbering then.

THOMPSON: When you first came back, when did you first start looking for work and what sort of work?

LANGHAM: Oh, I never ...

THOMPSON: You tried taxi driving and you tried upholstery?

LANGHAM: Yes, well I had a fair bit of money saved up, all my money from the time I was away. My mother - I left it to Mum and she'd put all that in the bank for me, see, and I had a few thousand, like. We were only allowed to take two shillings a day away with us.

THOMPSON: So how much did you have saved?

LANGHAM: Oh, I had a thousand or two. I forgot how much it was now but anyway, it lasted me a couple of years. I really had a good time for a couple of years. Then I went barbering.

THOMPSON: After you tried the upholstery training with the army, you scrubbed that. What did you do after that? Did you immediately start looking for other work?

LANGHAM: No. Then I got a job with a fellow in Elizabeth Street. He was a barber. Went to learn the barbering trade there. I was sort of – well, I was an apprentice with them, a sort of apprenticeship, you know. And from there, I left him and I went out on my own barbering. I stuck with that for a good many years, barbering. That was my trade. Eventually, the indoors didn't suit me. I got very sick about it, you know. I got sick and I went to the doctor and he said you'll have to get out. And I was smoking very heavily at the time. He said you'll have to give the cigarettes up and get outside. So I got outside and I went up near Bendigo and I got a job in a quarry.

THOMPSON: We might have to come back to that. But did many soldiers, many of your friends have trouble finding work when they came back from the war?

LANGHAM: Yes, oh yes. They had a hell of a job trying to get a job. They made all these promises when you went away to war: your job's here - they'd tell us that. Your job's here when you come back. But it was a different story when you came back. Oh, so-and-so's got your job and he's doing a good job there. Can't sack him. All this sort of business.

I can remember they were getting - giving farms to soldiers. Now there was one place up near Bendigo, it was called the Gravel Hills, because it was gravel. You had a job to get scrub to grow there. They cut that up into blocks. Soldier Settlement. And they put these fellows on

this land and expected them to make a living on the land. But they all went broke. You go up there now and drive past there and it's all factories, houses built all over it. It's pure gravel. That's what they gave the - the politicians of the day and the government of the day, that's what they gave a lot of the soldiers. That's the sort of ground they gave them to make a living on. They were treated pretty bad, I tell you, some of them.

THOMPSON: The soldiers looking for work, did they have trouble with employers, getting work because they were returned soldiers?

LANGHAM: Oh, no. I wouldn't say that. I don't think they had it against you in that way. But it was like I said - different places, fellows that I knew, I said, "Did you get your old job back?" They said, "No". I said, "Oh, Jack Smith's got my job. He's been there since you went away". He didn't go away to the war, he stayed there. "But he's done such a good job, well I can't very well sack him now. He's doing well there". See. Although they had to - the government passed an *Act of Preference to Returned Soldiers*, but it didn't always work. There was supposed to be preference for returned soldiers but it didn't work that way.

THOMPSON: Was there much resentment from men who had stayed behind when the soldiers came back looking for work?

LANGHAM: Oh yes. There was. If you had my job, I resented you very much. A lot of bad friends made that way but, over the years, it righted itself. But you know, when you ... I think it was the same when the last war was on. The Second World War they were promised their jobs would be there when they came back, but ... they didn't get their jobs back. Some of them might have, but it's just the same old story. When we want you to go away and fight we'll give you the world, but when you come back we'll take it off you again. If we've got it, still got it.

THOMPSON: Did you every try to use the policy of preference for returned servicemen?

LANGHAM: No, I never did. Not once. No, I never used it. I went on my merits, what I could do.

THOMPSON: Did you believe in the policy of preference? Did you think soldiers deserved?

LANGHAM: Yes, I reckoned they did. They gave up everything. I gave up perhaps, a ... what will I say, well I could have been a better scholar. I gave that up when I went away.

THOMPSON: But were you actually learning when you went away, studying, or was it something you were hoping to do?

LANGHAM: No, well I hoped, see, when I ... even when I was at the stables and I'd be a jockey, I thought to myself, now if I can't make a successful jockey I can always go back to the other, I can always ... perhaps go to University or something like that. I was young, that was always at the back of my mind.

THOMPSON: Did you still want to do that when you came back from the war?

LANGHAM: No, I wanted ... I didn't want to do it when I came back from the war, it was too late then. I just wanted to be ... I wanted to be free, you see. You were tied up with so much discipline, and you had to do what you was told when you were in the war that getting your freedom back was a marvellous thing. When you'd lie in bed in the morning and you've got no-one to say, "Come on. Roll out there. Rally's gone". And all this sort of business. Pull the blankets off you, you know. You just lay there as long as you like, you were your own boss.

When you're in the army, you're not your own boss, although it's a good life. I'll say it's a good life for any young fellow. I would recommend it to any young fellow.

THOMPSON: Talking about this freedom, do you think, the fact that you wanted freedom when you came back, is that why you planned to do work where you'd be independent, like a taxi driver?

LANGHAM: Yes. Yes. I wanted to be my own boss. See, I'd been, I'd been bossed so long for the years I was in the army, I'd been bossed so long, I had to do what I was told there, I thought what a lovely thing it would be to be your own boss.

THOMPSON: Do you think that was a common attitude?

LANGHAM: I think so, yes.

THOMPSON: Talking about returned servicemen coming back to the work force, do you think many of them had trouble readjusting to working again, say working in a factory?

LANGHAM: Yes, quite a lot of them did. Like, when you got into a factory and you were working for a boss, you're still under a certain amount of restraint. There's a bit of discipline and all there, you see. It's nice getting away from that ... forced discipline, forced on you. That's why I wanted to get again on my own. I've always been, I've always felt that way that I'd like to be what I want to be. I don't do things wrong but I like to do the right thing.

THOMPSON: When did you go to work in the quarry?

LANGHAM: Oh, I made a pretty success of that?

THOMPSON: When was that do you think?

LANGHAM: Ahhh ... gosh ... I can't remember, but I was many, many years in the quarry.

THOMPSON: So you went into the quarry before the depression? In the 20s?

LANGHAM: Oh yes, before the depression. I was in the quarry when they the depression came on, and I was making good money. I was a good tradesman in the quarry. But the first three weeks, it was something shocking the first three. I'd b4een hairdressing, as I told you.

And you know what hairdressers hands are like. Well, I got a blister on every joint there, and they cracked. The blisters cracked, see, and I couldn't move my hand like that. We used to urinate on your hands, they used to say that was good for them. You'd do that, and you'd sleep with your hands between your legs like this to try and keep the warmth in them, and you'd grab hold of a hammer handle next morning and your first hit - oooo. Was shocking. But after about three weeks or a month your hands got hard. I finished up powder monkey and boss down in Newport Quarry down here. I was there for years.

THOMPSON: A powder monkey? What was a powder monkey?

LANGHAM: Well that, you do all the firing the ... shooting, the breaking up the rocks. You know, putting the explosives in the rock and firing the big shots.

THOMPSON: And then boss?

LANGHAM: Yes.

THOMPSON: You ran the whole show?

LANGHAM: Yes, the boss of the quarry.

THOMPSON: Really.

LANGHAM: I got hurt down there. Hurt my back and I had to leave that job. I got seven pound a week wet and dry. That was terrible good money in those days. If I stayed home I got my seven pound a week, you know. We had a wet week or anything like that, or I got hurt I was still on my seven pounds. Wet or dry. When the second war came, we all came under control again then. You lost your freedom. As the saying is and ... I got shifted down to the sugar works, down here, by the Manpower. Stacking sugar. Well, there was a hundred and seventy-five pounds in a bag of sugar. A fair weight. The stacks went as high as the, as high as the building its. Right up to the top we stacked. By gee we were fit men though. Slinging those around. It was all night work.



THOMPSON: Perhaps we could come back to your work experience in the second world war. Back to when you returned to Australia, did you have any troubles or did your friends have any troubles readjusting to domestic life, to living with your family, after being away for so many years?

LANGHAM: Oh no, no I don't think so. No, you're feeling alright there. With you own people you fitted in all right.

THOMPSON: Do you think you had any new habits which to them were strange? Being away, did you pick up smoking or gambling or anything like that while you were away?

LANGHAM: No. No. No, I didn't, some of them may have, but I don't think I changed much at all. Got back to the same old things, you'd gradually drop back into the old routine. The only thing as I say you wanted, you liked that freedom.

THOMPSON: Someone once told me that, when the soldiers came back to where this person had lived, that the young children were very frightened of the soldiers?

LANGHAM: Oh no, that isn't true. No, oh no that's not true. Wherever I went, wherever I went and you were in uniform the kids made a ... made a real hero of you. They thought you were marvellous.

THOMPSON: Did you go around in uniform much in Australia when you came back.

LANGHAM: Oh no. Stayed in uniform until you were discharged. You had to stay in uniform until you were discharged. As soon as I was discharged, the day I was discharged I was straight out of mine. I'd had the khaki. But you had to stay in it till then. You seeing the pictures and things sometimes where they're in civvies and all this, but you never struck that in our day. We had to stay in uniform. Till the day you were discharged.

THOMPSON: Did you ever feel that there was a gap between yourselves and the people who'd stayed at home, over the experiences that you'd had that they couldn't understand?

LANGHAM: Yes. A lot of people ... there was a certain amount of jealousy that you were able to ... that you'd been through this sort of thing. You'd be able to talk about these sort of things and they couldn't join in the conversation. But that didn't last for very long. You sort of ... you realised that there was a certain amount of jealousy there, that they were a little bit jealous that you'd ... you'd been through all this, you know, that you could talk about it more than they could. But the old saying, remember the old saying, "What did your father do in the great war", that was a great thing, but I don't think that really worked either. It might have worked for a few months or so after but then it was just forgotten like that. "What did you do in the great war?" That's a poor attitude to take anyway, I don't think people should say that. You've got to realise that everybody can't go. everybody can't go to war. If everyone went to a war, where are you going to get your ammunition from, and your food and all this. You got to have ... you've got to have all those lines, like you've got them in the army. Just the same. There's many a man that went away and never saw, never been near a battlefield, but he was in the army, but he had to be at that place to keep those fellows up there in the army.

THOMPSON: Tell me, when you came back, did you maintain contacts with other returned servicemen?

LANGHAM: Oh yes. Oh yes. For year we had our smoke nights.

THOMPSON: Is that your particular Artillery group?

LANGHAM: Oh yes. Oh well, that's what I say, you had your smoke nights and all that, but you ... there were certain friends that like, pals and things that you made, like I've had a pal in another state and you never lost contact with them. We didn't anyway.

THOMPSON: Did you join a serviceman's organization?

LANGHAM: Yes. I came home, I joined the, it was called the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia. R.S.S.I.I.A. in those days. We had a great big badge. We got that small badge now. We had a great big badge, took up half a lapel.

THOMPSON: Did you join that immediately?

LANGHAM: Soon as I was discharged, yes. Soon as I was discharged I joined that.

THOMPSON: Where did you join it?

LANGHAM: Down in Footscray. It was a little place in the Royal Hotel. A little office alongside the Royal Hotel in Footscray.

THOMPSON: Were you living in Footscray at this stage?

LANGHAM: No, I was living in Yarraville, but ... where was I staying then. Ah ... no I went back to Axedale for a start, that's right. For a few months, then I came down here and I was living with my sister. She was in Yarraville.

THOMPSON: This is when you were looking for work, or ...?

LANGHAM: That's right, yes. Well, I been here ever since.

THOMPSON: So you were in Yarraville and you joined the Footscray Branch, did you? Of the Returned Servicemen's ...?

LANGHAM: Well I don't know if they called it ... I don't think they had a suburban branch then. There was just the R.S.L., R.S.S.I.L.A. Like they had offices all over the place. But now, like you got your Footscray R.S.L., you got the Yarraville R.S.L., Spotswood, they all got their own now. It was all the one thing in those days.

THOMPSON: Why did you joint it in the first place?

LANGHAM: Oh well ... I thought it would be a good way of keeping in touch with your old pals.

THOMPSON: Can you remember there being any other returned serviceman's organizations and any sort of conflict at al. Anything like that?

LANGHAM: No, I don't remember any other one. No I don't. Nor from the First World War, but there has been from the Second World War. They've had different clubs, different

organizations. My son there, he was in the air force in the Second World War. They had the Air force Association. But he's in the R.S.L. now, too. They can join that if they'd rather.

THOMPSON: Can you remember any conflict between the R.S.S.I.L.A. and other groups at the time? For instance, perhaps over the issue of preference for returned servicemen?

LANGHAM: Oh, well there was always a lot of talk about, a lot of people didn't believe in preference for returned soldiers and all this thing. But it didn't come to anything. You'd always find a few that'd complain.

THOMPSON: Can you remember any groups or individuals who were hostile to the returned servicemen organizations?

LANGHAM: Oh no. I never struck anything like that. Not from the First World War.

THOMPSON: How actively involved were you with the R.S.S.I.L.A.? What sort of activities did you take part in?

LANGHAM: I didn't take part in any. I was just a member of it. Well, those days they were supposed to do the same as they do now days, if you're in trouble or anything like that they're supposed to help you and all that. Which they would have done. There was no conflict or anything like that. Although I remember the one we joined down here, a bloke got away with all the money. The secretary got away with all the money. Ha ha. The first one in Footscray there. I remember that quite well. Forget where I joined up the next one was. I forget where the next headquarters started from. That long ago. I can always remember the first one because he got away with the money and we had that great big badge.

THOMPSON: Why did they have such a big badge?

LANGHAM: I don't know why it was, but, I don't know why they designed it but it was terrific big thing.

THOMPSON: Did you wear that badge when you went looking for work?

LANGHAM: Oh yeah, yeah. I remember once it came in very handy, to us, you know.

Remember I told you when we went down to Hamilton for a job. Well, we had no money to come back so we had to stay in the rattler. So when we got to Hamilton we both got in the toilet. We both squeezed into the toilet, and a bloke came along and he just kicked to the door like that, and he didn't see anyone and he just walked on, the conductor on the train. Now we didn't strike any more trouble, we changed trains at Ararat or somewhere, and we were between Sunshine and West Footscray. I heard him coming down the corridor and I said, "Here comes the conductor and we got no ticket". So my mate, he laid on the seat like that, like this, I leaned back so and we were asleep you see, and he came in and said, "Tickets please". Gosh, you now, I had a start like this, "Oh", I said, "Yeah". I'm fumbling around, I said, my mate had his arms closed like this, and he had the badges on, you see, two badges. He was a returned soldier, the conductor. So I said, "Oh blimey. He's got the tickets in here somewhere. I don't want to wake him. We've been awake all night". I'm going like this. He said, "Don't wake your mate. She'll be right, don't wake him". That's one time the badges came in handy for us. Ha ha. Well, there funny little things, you know. Soldiers sticking to one another, returned soldiers sticking.

THOMPSON: Do you remember any other occasions like that?

LANGHAM: Oh no.

THOMPSON: When it helped you to be a returned serviceman.

LANGHAM: Oh no. I don't think it helped us any. Not like it ... I know that ... you know, you're always welcome if you're in a place, and a fellow walks up, say you're in a pub having a drink, and a bloke says, "Hello dig". You remember. You know, you're all right but perhaps if you hadn't had that on he would have just walked past you. You always recognise a returned soldier, all your mates, all returned soldiers recognise on another that way. It's still the same, the R.S.L. it's a marvellous organization.

THOMPSON: You've been a member right through?

LANGHAM: Yes, yes. For years I was a member of the R.S.L. I was with the City Council in there for 13 years. Tow-clerk in the Lord Mayor's Department and I was always a member in there then. Then when I retired I was out of it for a few years. When I retired I missed it for a few years. Then I got in a train one day and a fellow said, I had my badge on, but it was out of date, see, and the bloke said, "Hey, you're unfinancial, mate". So I joined up at the Yarraville one straight away and I've been there ever since.

THOMPSON: Did the R.S.L. ever help you with your pension?

LANGHAM: Yes, oh yes. They helped me get it alright. They have what they call an advocate goes with you, and give you all instructions and all this you see. It was through our Secretary up here, Derek Pooley, the Secretary of the Yarraville branch, I really did get it this time. He pushed it for me. I told him, you know, I gave him the story and he got to work and he got in touch with the Anzac House and got the advocate to go with me and things in there. That's how I got it.

THOMPSON: In that period between the wars, you didn't take part in any social activities with the Footscray R.S.L.? Any dances?

LANGHAM: No I never joined the Footscray R.S.L. I didn't like the way it was run. There's only one thing. With the R.S.L. there's some branches now, like Footscray, they've got two sections of high power. That's what he explained to me when I went up to join it, after I retired. He said they've got .. He said, "Do you want to go inside or outside?" I said, "What do you mean, inside or outside?" He said, "Well, it costs you more or something to go inside, that's to go into the bar. To have the privilege to go inside to the bar. If you just want to be a member and go tot he functions and things like that, it doesn't cost you so much". I said, "Oh, if that's the way you want it I can't join". I've had it explained to me since that that's the usual thing, you pay a little extra for all the facilities, but if you don't want to use the facilities well,

you get it cheaper. But, I still can't fathom that one out, because we pay the same every year, the same ...

THOMPSON: Is that why you didn't like the Footscray branch or where there other reasons?

LANGHAM: Yeah. No, that's the reason I didn't like the Footscray branch.

THOMPSON: That was between the wars or more recently?

LANGHAM: Oh, that was about four or five years ago. I think it's all the one now, you know. It's all been altered. That was like, in my book that was sort of causing a little bit of class distinction.

THOMPSON: In what way?

LANGHAM: Well, I mean, if I went up there and the bar's there and there's other rooms there and bally cards and things in there, I'm not allowed in there. It's not good enough to go in there. That's the way I looked at it. But the other way to look at it later on, I suppose, you got to pay people to run those, you've got to pay wages and all that sort of thing. You've got to pay no one out here. Our club down here, we got everything. We're all the one, one happy crowd. We've got .. we've British, we've got Yanks, we've got everything in our club down here As long as they're returned soldiers that fought on our side they can join the R.S.L.

THOMPSON: So you were a member of the R.S.L. between the wars but you weren't active or involved?

LANGHAM: No, no. He didn't go much, no, not for politics.

THOMPSON: What about memorial ceremonies or Anzac Day parades? Did you take part in them?

LANGHAM: Oh yes. I went to those. The last Anzac Day was about three years ago. The last one I went to. I was the only one there out of my unit, so I didn't go in any more. They're all gone, I suppose. See, I'm 86. That's a fair age. There can't be anyone, there can't be anyone left. There's no smoke night or anything now because there's not enough, no one to go.

THOMPSON: So, did you always take part in the Anzac Day parades between the wars?

LANGHAM: Yes, I did. We used to go. Wet and dry, never missed.

THOMPSON: Why did you go?

LANGHAM: Well, you met your mates. It was lovely to meet them, and have a drink and things with them afterwards. Have a yarn, over the good times, I'll say, not the bad ones. When you'd go to smoke nights you'd never mention things like I told you about going over those Germans and things. You never mentioned things like that. You'd mention all the funny parts.

THOMPSON: The marches that you went to, were they in the city or were they in this area?

LANGHAM: No, they were in the city. In the old days we used to march up the Exhibition. Form up down the hill then there was the march, then it got ... it was up the hill see, and they're starting to get a bit old, it got too much up the hill, then they built the Cenotaph down there and they changed it the other way. No it's getting shorter. Making it shorter for the old blokes. But I haven't been in it for about four years. I say, I was the only one there the last time. I marched right through that time, on my own, you , but you knew nobody. They were all strangers.

THOMPSON: You mentioned the Cenotaph. How important was it to you and to other soldiers, the building of monuments like the Cenotaph and the monument in each suburb?

LANGHAM: Oh, yeah, I think they're a great idea. Shows that somebody remember anyway. Every year, you find out people do remember and they go and they lay their wreaths and things there. I haven't been to a dawn patrol, er .. Dawn Service for years and years. It's terrific that crowds still go to Dawn Services. Each year now, we have a march here. We march from Spotswood down to the ... Spotswood R.S.L.

THOMPSON: The Yarraville?

LANGHAM: We all meet down at Spotswood and Yarraville and Williamstown, they all meet in the one area, and they all have their own little march. They had that on the Sunday, yes.



THOMPSON: I was just wondering, one particular event you might remember, I'm not sure whether you were back from overseas, but in 1919 in July, there were some Peace marches in Melbourne. Were you back by then?

LANGHAM: Yeah, I came back in January 1919.

THOMPSON: On Peace Day there were some riots at the time.

LANGHAM: No, I can't remember. I couldn't have been down here. I must have been up the bush somewhere. I was getting around. I'd say the first couple of years I was getting around a bit, you know. I got a job once up the bush, I was on the railway, and I was playing football, and they gave me a job on the railways up there. I had a trike and all. My own trike. I was doing a ten mile limit on the railways there, but I was playing football in the Heathcote League. Could have been away at the particular, that would be about the time.

THOMPSON: You said you used to talk about some of your war experience, the good ones, with your mates. Could you talk freely with people who didn't go away about your war time experience?

LANGHAM: Oh they didn't want to listen. Most of them didn't want to listen. Unless they had relatives or something there, you know.

THOMPSON: Did you read much afterward, much about the war?

LANGHAM: Oh yes, I still like ... I still learn a lot. There's still a lot that I don't know, and I'm surprised at a lot of the things that I read now about Gallipoli and those places.

THOMPSON: What about C.E.W. Bean, the official historian?

LANGHAM: Yeah, I liked his stories. He was a good war correspondent. He gave you true facts, that fellow. I remember one funny incident when I first went to France and I couldn't speak any French. This was really funny. We went into a restaurant, two of us, and we wanted steak and eggs, see. We didn't know what to ask for, and I said to the fellow, I said, "Look, we might be eating snails for all we know". So one fellow came across and he said, "What's the

matter?" and I said, "Well, we want some steak and eggs, and I don't know what to ask him for". He said, "Come over here". So he took me over in the corner you know, and he said now, told me what to say, you know. He said, "When she comes you just ask her". "O.K.", I said. I got it off pat you see. I remember this young girl, she came across and said, "Oui, messieurs?" I said, "Voulez vous coucher avec moi ce soir mademoiselle?" and she slapped my face. Speak French? Ha ha. I looked at her silly, you know, and I asked again, "Voulez vous coucher avec moi ce soir mademoiselle?" and she slapped my face again. A beauty. Few of the blokes around they all start giggling, see. They all heard it, you know. Another fellow came across and he said, "What's wrong?" I said, "I don't know. I keep asking for steak and eggs and she slapped my face." He said, "You didn't ask for steak and eggs." I said, "What did I do?" He said, "You ask her would she sleep with you tonight." Ha. Well, he explained to her what had happened and they always give you - everything you got in those days was on a little plate, you see. I had a pile of plates about that big in the finish, she looked after me, and the others were all singing out for service. So there's one of the little funny incidents.

THOMPSON: When you came back after the war, I'm interested in the extent to which returned servicemen, and particularly returned servicemen's organizations, got involved in politics? For instance, pressuring local councils into preference for returned servicemen and things like that? Can you remember any incidents like that?

LANGHAM: I don't know. I never became involved. I wanted to strike out on my own. When I did strike out, I went hairdressing on my own. I had no occasion like, to become involved that way. But there were many that did become involved that way, they tried to put pressure on their - and even the R.S.L., they tried to put pressure on councils and things like that, for preference for returned soldiers. Oh yes, that was well known. The R.S.L. were strongly behind that.

THOMPSON: Did that create any tension do you think?

LANGHAM: Oh yes, it created a certain amount of tension. You struck fellows in councils and things like that, bosses that were unpatriotic, they didn't believe in it, and they were up against it. There was always a certain amount of tension, you know, between - I'd say a lot of people didn't believe in it. The fellows that didn't go away had the equal right to a job. But I didn't personally agree to that myself. I reckon a man went away, he gave up a lot, and the risk of his life and all that, he was entitled to a little bit of consideration when he came back. As far as work was concerned, anyway.

THOMPSON: How much of the years between the wars were you living in Footscray and Yarraville, in this area?

LANGHAM: I've lived here ever since 19 ... I've lived here ever since I came home from the war. Except for a few months away playing football and that.

THOMPSON: So you were here during the depression?

LANGHAM: Yes, I was here. I was working in the Albion Quarries, when the depression came on, and I was doing pretty well. Just came in one morning and he said, "Well, I can't keep you on any longer." We all got put off. I was out of work for about, I was out of work for about three years. I had a few bob saved up, you know, and that all went. Then we used to go round picking mushrooms, selling the mushrooms to herbalists and things like that. You might get a few bob. It was pretty tough. I got four and six a week, I got three shillings a week - sustenance, they called it then - I got three shillings for myself and I got one and six for my son, who was only a little fellow then. That's four and six a week I got. While the depression was on. I used to get half a day up in the Footscray Council Quarry, half a day a week working there.

THOMPSON: Did you every join an unemployment organization?

LANGHAM: No. No.

THOMPSON: Were you ever helped by the Returned Servicemen's League?

LANGHAM: I never asked for help. If I had've asked I would have been helped, see. But we had a, they had a, what they called a Self Help Association, in Buckley Street, Footscray. We used to go round.

THOMPSON: You remember that, do you?

LANGHAM: Yes. We go round to the market gardens and we'd collect, and we'd go to butchers and we'd collect meat and things, and we used to distribute them amongst all those people that were there. And there was two other fellows and myself, we were hairdressers, and we'd cut between two and three hundred haircuts a day between us done there for nothing. For the unemployed.

THOMPSON: The Self Help Association, was this returned servicemen?

LANGHAM: No, that was anybody. Anybody at all.

THOMPSON: This was the Footscray and Yarraville Self Help Association?

LANGHAM: Yeah, that's right. In Buckley Street in Footscray. In the old building down there now where the Footscray baths are. Two or three hundred haircuts a day you know, was a lot. It's a lot of work. There were three of us, three or four of us.

THOMPSON: But you say you never actually used the fact that you were a returned serviceman to help you get work?

LANGHAM: No. No. I never. If anybody asked me, I have been asked you know, I'd say, "Oh yes, I'm a returned soldier."

**ACCESSION NUMBER: S01317 (unofficially part 2)**

**TITLE: Australian War Veterans of the Great War – 1914 - 1918**

Oral history project

**INTERVIEWEE:** Mr W. LANGHAM:  
**INTERVIEWER:** Mr Alistair THOMPSON:  
**RECORDING DATE:** 30 March 1987  
**RECORDING LOCATION:** 27 Regent Street, Yarraville  
**SUMMARY:**

**TRANSCRIBER:** Juliet Schyvens (transcribed from original typed copy)

**TRANSCRIPTION DATE:** 14 JUNE 2007

THOMPSON: Perhaps to start with Bill, just thinking of Australia before you went away to the war, what sort of opportunities do you think that there were for someone like you to advance yourself? In the days before you went away?

LANGHAM: Well, in the field that I was going into it was alright because I went into the racing stables at Caulfield, and I thought I might finish up a jockey. Yeah. But of course the war changed all that. I went out there just after I left school. I said in the previous interview that I ducked away from home when I didn't want any more school and I did a shearing shed. Then after the shearing shed I went up to lucerne cutting up in the north of Victoria. I went up there and I stayed a few weeks lucerne cutting and then I found my way back to Caulfield. I stayed there then up till the war period. Of course all the years I was there I never put on a pound in weight although we ate well, but when I came home from the war, I went back out to see the old boss and he said to me, "Well, I suppose we'll see you back here now?" Offered me

my old job back. That was one of the times you got your old job offered back. And I said, "Well, Mr Kerr, thanks for the offer but I'm too heavy." I was 12 stone 4 when I came home from the war. I said, "I wouldn't make much of a jockey now, 12 stone 4." "Oh," he said, "we'll get two or three stone of that off your back," he said, "and you can ride over the jumps." But I'd seen so many of the cross country boys smashed up that I said no. Seen enough of that.

THOMPSON: Just back to before the war. Apart from yourself, just generally, to what extent do you think it was possible for people, apart from yourself but people in your own situation, to make good in Australia, in those pre-war years?

LANGHAM: Oh, I think you always had opportunity to make good provided you were willing to work. And that's right in the old days, you go back to our pioneers. They slaved. They made good. A lot of those fellows I knew up around where I lived there, all those "cockies" we used to call them round there, they started with nothing, and they struggled but they worked and they worked long hours and they made a success of it. They finished up a lot of them rich men. But they didn't get it easy, but they got it because they were willing to work.

THOMPSON: Thinking about the same years, what's your memory of relationships between different social classes in those years before the war?

LANGHAM: Oh, there was always a bit of - well wasn't much in this country, only the Irish and Protestants in the old days, to get back to the old story. But up around where I lived there was a very mixed lot of people up there, like Protestants, Scots people, English, Irish and all them. By jove we got on really well together. There was no, there was no worries there. A lot of my best mates were Irish, and we never, as far as we were concerned, it didn't worry us. We used to read about the - what do you call 'em, the Sinn Feiners in Ireland, and Black and White Police or whatever they used to call them there, but that didn't worry us in Australia. Let them fight their own battles out over there. We're all happy to be together here. And as far as I

know, and I've been up that way quite often since I came home from the war, and I can't see any difference with the people there. With the dominations, [sic] I mean.

Of course now we've got a lot of different - that's what I'm talking about, I was talking about the Irish and other nations those days, but now we've got so many of the others. Now, well, we've got, next to us we've got a Vietnamese. They bought the place next to us. Now he's a nice fellow. I've got nothing against him. He's married and he's got two lovely little girls, and I look at it this way. People say, "Oh, bloody Vietnamese!", you know. I say, "Well, that's alright, we bought 'em out here. Our people brought 'em out here and they've got a right to live the same as we have. And they've got a right to look for a job and get a job the same as we have, because they brought them here." A different thing if they'd have just battled their own way to get out here. But when your politicians, your Parliament brings them here we're entitled to look after them. We're entitled to, I suppose, as much as we are.

THOMPSON: Related to that but thinking back again before the war, how did you see yourself in terms of your national identity in those years before the war? Did you think of yourself as English, or Imperial or Australian or Victorian?

LANGHAM: Oh well, as I said before, before the war I was very Royal, I was a real Royalist, you know. I was very strong that way. Our forefathers were Englishmen, most of them. Well, I say Englishmen, they came from the old dart, as we used to call it, they were all different. We had Welshmen, and I think on my wife's side there was a lot of Welsh. Lot of Welsh on that side. And we had nothing against, I never had anything against Pommies as we call them. It's not an insult it's a sort of endearment I reckon, a Pom. So far as I can go back to when the First World War. We always called them Pom's, see, but we didn't mean, we might say, "Oh shut up you bloody Pom" or something like that, but we didn't mean it to be an insult or anything like that. It's like an endearment, it's like they call us "digs", "digs" or we got called worse than that sometimes but we didn't take any offence at that.

THOMPSON: What sort of things did you get called?

LANGHAM: Well, the first thing I got called when I went into camp, I had a fright – well, I put my stuff down in camp. I was a civilian and I put it down in the corner of a tent and a bloke said, "Don't stick that there you bastard or I'll job you." Course I hopped into him. Course they stopped us and the fellow said to me, "How long have you been here?" I said, "I just came in and just put my stuff down there." He said, "What did you go crook about?" I said, "He called me a bastard. I don't have anyone call me a bastard." He said, "That's an endearment mate. When you're in the army you'll learn to know that's an endearment. Ha ha. So long as they call you that, you're okay." Ha ha. That was my first day in camp.

THOMPSON: Just moving on now, Bill, to when you joined up. How did you feel about joining up. How did you feel about it in yourself when you joined up?

LANGHAM: Oh, that's pretty hard, that's a pretty hard question. I just thought I was doing the right thing anyway. By the things that we'd been told, I suppose, when the war first started, they - the press reports and things, they gave us stories of German soldiers marching along with babies on their bayonets. Well, that sort of got under your skin. You know. You thought to yourself, well you want to try and put a stop to this, if that's true. But I couldn't believe that. I don't think, I don't think that ever a German soldier would do that. They weren't any different to us. The German soldiers for all we fought them, they were, well the big knobs started it. And looked to the poor ordinary citizen to fight it for them. And I don't think they were any different to us. We wouldn't, we wouldn't carry babies along on our bayonets. I'm sure our fellows wouldn't do that, and I don't think a German soldier would do it either. I think that was just a lot of hogwash from the press, just to try and get, perhaps, volunteers, to try and get the world set against the German army. Course, that's war, isn't it?

THOMPSON: What did it feel like to be a soldier?



LANGHAM: Oh, it felt good. As I said before, it's a good life, a soldier's life is a good life. The only part that's not good is the war part. But being a soldier's alright. I mean, it's a good healthy job. You get well clothed. And get well fed. And you come back to the old things as I said once before, you learn some discipline, which is very badly needed in the world at the present time. And it didn't do us any harm. I don't like taking orders from people. I never did, but when I was in the position where I had to take orders, I obeyed those orders whether they were right or wrong. I had to obey them. Quite often I suppose in the course of the time I was a soldier, perhaps there may be times I was ordered by an officer to do things that I didn't want to do but I had to do them. Because they were orders from a superior officer and if I didn't do them, well, I had to pay the consequences.

THOMPSON: Can you remember any times when you didn't?

LANGHAM: Well, it's only a simple little thing. I remember I was on cooks fatigue one day, on a ship, and we had an inspection, and I'm standing on the hatch and a couple of my mates are behind peeling potatoes. I got out of cook's fatigue, that's right. They were put on the cook's fatigue and we were brought to attention. We're standing at attention and a bloke hit me in the back of the ear with a potato, piece of potato. See, of course I moved, I jumped like that because - the sergeant jumped me, see. This happened three or four times and each time - the last time he said to me, he said, "If you move again when you're not told to, I'll book you. I'll put you on the mat." I said - I was pretty sharp. I got another hit and he said, "Right. I'm going to book you." I said, "You can bloody well please yourself sergeant what you do." See. I answered him back. So he took me up to the - he took me up before the colonel and I told the story to the colonel. It finished up it was the sergeant and the officers that got into trouble, not me, 'cause he reckoned they had no control over their men. Now that was one time I tried to obey an order and I didn't, see. And I had to pay the consequences. Is that what you meant? Did I answer it correctly?

THOMPSON: That's fine Bill. Can you think of any other times when ...?

LANGHAM: Oh, there were many times. It'll make you laugh this one, I suppose. When the last big push came on, when they pushed the Fifth Army, when the Germans pushed the Fifth Army back, we were sent from Belgium down to the south of France, down to the Somme, to try and stop him and we pulled into a place called Lahoussie, it's spelt Lahoussie. That's the French name, Lahoussie. And - we were lousy too. We got real lousy while we were there, I can remember that. My [inaudible] itched that bad that I went looking around in the houses. All the people left the houses and we had the houses to ourselves. So I went round and we were looking for, souveniring things. Things like that. I was looking for clothes. I came to a - there was a chest of drawers there and it was full of washing that had been done for soldiers. All nicely ironed and in the drawers and everything. So I'm looking for a shirt. Anyway, we weren't supposed to do this and I heard the sergeant's voice bellowing outside, so I saw something and I grabbed it like that. It looked like a white shirt. So I got it, away we went, and I put it inside my tunic to hide it. So when we were dismissed from parade, I took off my flannel shirt and I got a kerosene tin of water out of the pump and we lit a fire. I was going to have a wash, see. Heated the water up and I had a good wash and I put the flannel underneath to help to warm the water, see. Well, flannel don't burn, it just shrivels up, you know, like that. But anyway, my shirt was gone, I couldn't put it on any more, so I said to my mate, "Well, I'll have to put that thin shirt on." It was only thin stuff. See ours was flannel. I said, "I'll have to put that thin shirt on now." When I opened it like that, what do you think it was? It was a woman's nightdress with lace on here, see. So I put that on. I had nothing else to do, and the next morning, we're out on parade, we're on horse lines and we're grooming them. The old warrant officer, he's still - well, he lived in Melbourne. I think he's still alive. Oh, he may be gone now - and he's striding up and down with his cane under his arm like this, you know, and we're grooming away at the horses and he said - I had my tunic on - and he said, "Take your

tunic off, Langham." I said, "Alright." So I watch him like that and he walks on and comes back. And that happened three times and he said, "That's the last time I'll tell you. You take your tunic off" he said. "That's the last time I'll tell you. Take your tunic off or you'll go up before the colonel." I said, "Oh, alright." So I threw the tunic off and you ought to have heard the laughter from all the rest of the mob. Here I am with this lace nightdress on. Well, if I ever felt like killing a bloke, I felt like killing him then. Now that was one of the other times when I refused to obey an order again. I won't tell you - I could tell you his name - but I wouldn't tell you his name because he's - still has relatives here. Ha, ha, ha.

THOMPSON: Were there any more serious occasions?

LANGHAM: Oh no. No. No. Oh, no. I wouldn't, I mean if you got into the more serious part of the business, I don't think, you wouldn't - even if it was wrong you wouldn't, you wouldn't disobey the order. Because that'd be, that'd be refusing - well, what would you call it. It'd be cowardice under fire or something like that.

THOMPSON: Can you remember any times when you or any of your mates did disobey orders in the line?

LANGHAM: No. No, none of my mob. No, oh no. I couldn't say any of our fellows ever disobeyed orders. Was only when you got back. Trivial little things like that that you disobeyed but anything in the more serious manner, well, you had to obey. The only thing was that in the Australian army there was no death penalty. See, certain things in the English army, in the Pommie army, you'd be shot for things like that. But there was never any death penalty in the Australian army. You could be jailed and all that. I don't know how the regulations are, King's regulations are now. But - they may all be changed - but those days we were immune from the death penalty. As far as I know, even if you, even if you disobeyed an order under fire, you wouldn't have been shot those days. You would've been - probably got a long stretch

or something. That's as far as I can remember what the regulations were. That was one good thing too.

THOMPSON: How would you describe the Australian soldier, Bill, that you fought with?

LANGHAM: Well, that's a pretty different question. He wasn't like a soldier. He's just like an ordinary citizen where your mate was just like an ordinary couple of blokes. Until you got into action. And then when you got into action he proved what a good soldier he was. He forgot everything else with the exception that he was a soldier, and it was either the other bloke or you. That was the - when he wasn't in battle. He loved life. He didn't, he wanted to forget he was a soldier when he was out of the line and things like that. We used to act like we were ordinary civilians when we were out of the line. We'd do the things that ordinary - try to do the things that ordinary civilians do. You come out and you had a bit of, had a little bit of a rest from the line, you got away from the army sort of business. You went back to civilian life. Like you, you could have horse races and you'd have - do all the things that you did in civilian life. Or try to do all the things you did in civilian life till you got back up there again. Then you had to forget all those things then, because that's the survival of the fittest once you get up there.

I remember one night - I'm lucky to be here I reckon, or I'm lucky I wasn't a prisoner of war. I don't know whether I told you before or not, but when he came through at Passchendaele, our fellows were up. They'd captured some of his pill boxes and we had - they'd called on - they were short of ammunition - so they called on the artillery - I was in the artillery - they called on the artillery to help them with ammunition. So we were sent up with our pack mules with the small arms ammunition on to the pill boxes. And I remember I delivered my load to the pill box - and they used to have lines down like the engineers used to - the signals - lay a line down. It was all rooted up, shell holes everywhere, it was - everything looked the same. And you had to follow this line to come out. Well, I was following the line, delivered my load and I

was following the line out and all of a sudden the line disappeared because it had been blown up. So I thought to myself, I had a look around for a while and I thought - it's night time, mind you. I thought, now that's the way I've got to go. So I headed off. And it wasn't very long before I saw a couple of figures looming up, coming towards me and they were talking very quietly and they said, "Hey, where do you think you're going?" So I stopped, and I got my old mule with me, and I said, "I'm going back to the wagon line to get some more ammunition." He said, "Do you know where you're going?" I said, "No. As far as I know, I'm going back to the wagon lines." He said, "Fritz is just over there somewhere in those shell holes. We don't know where he is", he said. He's the same as us, there was no particular line at that time, you know. They hadn't formed another line. He said, "You're going out into Fritz's land. If you go any further you'll be [inaudible], see." So that was one of the incidents that I had. It didn't take me long. They showed me the way back anyway. It didn't take me long to get back the other way. But that was one of my near squeaks. Ha, ha.

THOMPSON: Did the Australian soldiers have a reputation?

LANGHAM: For what?

THOMPSON: Of any sort, amongst the other ...?

LANGHAM: They had a reputation for being the star troops on the Western Front or anywhere they fought. They were always number one troop. If there was to be a big push, put the Australian soldier in there. He's the one that'll take it. If you want a place taken, put the Australians in, they'll take it. They were always classed, they were classed everywhere as number one troops. Especially attacking troops.

THOMPSON: Were there any other features of their reputation, the diggers?

LANGHAM: Well, they had a reputation for women, I thought they had a reputation for women. Ha, ha. It wasn't bad. That's only natural I suppose. Man meets girl and there you are. Ha, ha. There's one thing he always looked for was - especially if he got back out of, back

from the line or anything - it was lovely to strike a woman to talk to. He got sick of talking to blokes.

THOMPSON: Did you think the Australian soldier was any different from soldiers of other armies?

LANGHAM: In what respect?

THOMPSON: In any respects that you can remember?

LANGHAM: Well, I don't think so because I think a soldier - it doesn't matter what country he belongs to, he can only fight the way he's taught to fight. But, I'll tell you that - I think the Australian soldier had a lot of guts. Nothing was beyond him. Even if he - he'd try anyway. He'd try even if he failed, which he didn't do very often. No, they were a marvellous lot of blokes, I didn't, I didn't go to Gallipoli. Gallipoli was a little bit - I was just after Gallipoli. But a lot of good mates were killed on Gallipoli. They told me there that they even, the trenches were that close there that, oh, you'd talk to one another. And they had little truces at times, you know. Little truces to collect their dead and all that sort of thing. Hostilities would stop while they - on both sides. They'd have to get their dead and wounded out.

But I don't think there's any difference in a soldier in any part of the world. Well, I'm only speaking of soldiers up to the time I was a soldier. But present day fighting away in the Middle East and all that, it seems to me to be, well, it's bloody awful, to put it plainly. Half of them are like cannibals nowadays, and I think it must be - drugs must be playing a, playing a big, must be a big thing with them. There's quite a lot of fellows that came, the American soldiers that came back from Vietnam when they were over there that they reckon that half the time they were on drugs. They did things there that they wouldn't normally, wouldn't normally do in - if they weren't on drugs.

THOMPSON: Just thinking of Australian soldiers when you were at war, there's quite a lot of talk now about the character of the Australian being different or special. Do you think there is anything in that?

LANGHAM: The character?

THOMPSON: The qualities of their characteristics and so on being different.

LANGHAM: Oh, I don't know. All I know is the Australian soldier was a bloody good mate. What I said before, your mate would die for you rather than let you down. That was the one good quality he had. They were all the same. I never thought that I'd be the next one to go. I'd be thinking you'd get yours next, not me. You never thought of that at all.

THOMPSON: Do you think that the Australian army was any different to any other armies in that respect, in terms of mateship?

LANGHAM: I don't think it would be. I don't think, I think soldiers in - didn't matter what nationality you belonged to, I think they'd all have the same quality as far as mateship was concerned. I think that's only a natural thing. Just like we - we're Aussies, we think Aussie is a great place. Some people might think it's not. We think it is. The Pommie, as we call him, he thinks England's a good place. But what amazes me, a lot of these people, they reckon their country is such a good place but they want to come to Australia. So that, I reckon, puts Australia on top. Ha, ha.

THOMPSON: Just thinking about mateship, Bill, do you have any memories of men who didn't fit in, say in your platoon or battalion? Who weren't included amongst the other mates?

LANGHAM: Oh, well, you'd find the odd one, but they were very rare indeed. Oh all my mob were all pretty good lot of blokes. Even our officers. You'd find an odd stray in an officer. We had a - my officer was a fellow named Jack Brake. He was a - in the old days there used to be a team playing football called University and Jack was a ruckman with University. He was only a one pip man but by God he was a bonza bloke. You wouldn't think he was an officer at

all. One thing he used to say was, "When I'm on parade I'm on parade, but when I'm off parade I 'm just Jack Brake." See. That was mateship. But most of the Pommie officers from the different Poms and soldiers that I'd spoken to, they didn't have officers like that. When they were off parade, you had to be 'Sir' and spring to it. Whether you were on parade or off parade. But our fellows were different to that. Majority of them anyway.

THOMPSON: Were there any others you remember particularly well apart from Jack Brake?

LANGHAM: Oh, we had a hell of a lot of good officers but he was my pick of the whole bunch, Jack Brake. The others were a bit strict on discipline and all that. Especially in the line. But when we got behind the line for a spell or anything, you still had discipline but even your officers relaxed then. I can remember a padre, he was a Roman Catholic padre, and he came in one night - we were playing cards. Gambling. Back behind the line. And he came in, he sat down and had his go too. Had his little bet on the side and his little drop of grog with us. Real mixer, you know. Didn't have to, you didn't have to get up and say "Sir" and all this sort of business. He was a bonza bloke too. I just can't, I just can't for the minute, I just can't remember his name now, but I can see him. I can visualize him. I can see his face now. But a marvellous bloke if you were, he was a marvellous fellow if you were - anything wrong with you or anything like that. He'd reassure you, I tell you. He was a real man, he was a man and a half that bloke. He didn't want you to be bending the knee to him and things all the time. But as I say, he was always there if you wanted him. Didn't matter what denomination you were.

THOMPSON: Can you remember any officers of yours who you didn't get on with?

LANGHAM: Oh yes, quite few, yeah. Well, not so much the officers, the bloody sergeants. One sergeant, now he was down on me every chance he got. I don't know, he had me in the gun properly. Sergeant Weeks. I don't mind if he's still alive, I don't mind if he knows it, if he heard it. You know that I hated him, I hated his guts. He's a lucky bloke to be alive, I reckon. I wasn't the only one that hated him. He never had a friend. Might've thought he had 'em but he



never had one. But you didn't - we didn't strike many of those sort of fellows, you know. What you did, you couldn't please him, and everything you did was wrong. He was the only one that knew anything. The only one that could do anything, one of those sort of fellows. And he never got any farther than a sergeant because he knew too much. Ha, ha.

THOMPSON: Any other officers or NCOs who stand out in your memory still?

LANGHAM: Oh, I don't think so. Oh yes, I had a mate, a corporal. Les Smith from - where'd he come from? Adelaide. I lost touch with him after I got wounded. Oh gee, he was a lovely fellow. He came from Adelaide. The artillery crowd, our artillery crowd, they weren't all Victorians. They were sent from all states, they sent them all to the one camp here in Victoria. Maribyrong, and we all went away like as a - we all came from all states whereas other battalions and things - you had your Bendigo battalion, you had your Ballarat battalion, like, they were all Victorians in those things. But the artillery, especially the 3rd Division artillery, they were a mixed race.

I had another fellow I tried to contact for years. He was the jockey named Lee Wallace. He came from Hamilton down like and I went down to Hamilton and I couldn't find any trace or anything down there. They were a couple of good mates that I'd like to have got hold of but I could never contact them. They might have died but no-one remembers them.

THOMPSON: Just thinking about your officers again, what do you think was the typical social economic background of our officer?

LANGHAM: I don't quite follow that one?

THOMPSON: Like, do you think they would have come from the same sort of background as men in the ranks?

LANGHAM: Oh, I see what you are getting at now. No, well, the fellow that came up from the ranks, he was a good officer. But we had a lot of those fellows that came from the officer school in Sydney there. What is it? Duntroon? And they were real pigs most of them. As far as

I was concerned, they were real pigs. But, we had fellows that won their pips on the battlefield. They were alright but the bloke that came down, oh, he was a different fellow altogether. He learnt it all out of books. But the other the fellows learnt it the hard way. They knew what you were going through because they'd been through it. But the other fellow came direct from Duntroon and those places, what they read in books they wanted you to do, but it didn't work. I could give you an instance of that with the American army. When the Yanks first came over there in the First World War, they came over and they, they relieved some of our fellows - I'm telling you what the infantry fellows told me now, or part of it. They relieved our fellows and they were going to hop over onto the Germans, see. So anyway, they had the hop over, and after the hop over, we'd been up with the ammunition wagons and we're coming back and we picked up an American soldier who was walking along the road looking worn out and miserable and all that sort of thing. So we pulled up and we asked him would he have a lift. So we put him on the gun limber, the ammunition limber, and we come back and he said - oh, we said, "How did it go, Yank?" He said, "Oh, it was terrible, mate. We hopped over and we took the first line of trenches and we went on, and the Germans came up behind us, out of the dugouts and they just mowed us down from the back and front. Our fellows ..." I'm telling you and honest truth now, what he told me. He said, "Our fellows were piled two and three high on no-mans-land for the simple reason when we went in, when we relieved the Aussies, the Aussies said to us, don't forget to mop up before you go on." And he said, "All we did, we took the first line of trenches and went on to the next. We forgot to have a look down the dugouts where they were." When our fellows hopped over and took a trench, if they had to go farther on, they'd mop up, and if they didn't come up, give 'em a chance perhaps to come up out to be taken prisoner. If he didn't come up, well, you just put a Mills bomb down there. Yanks didn't do that. Now that was an absolute incidence of inexperience of the war,

inexperienced officers had no war experience, come from colleges I suppose like Duntroon. They had to learn it the hard way.

THOMPSON: Of the two sorts of officers we're talking about, the men who came through the ranks and the men who came through colleges, what proportion do you think of the officers you had experience with did come from one or the other?

LANGHAM: Oh well, I tell you - I can't think of the colonel's name now. He was in the Melbourne hospital. I think he came from Duntroon College and he was, he should have been a pacifist instead of a colonel in the army. He was that type of fellow, he was so nice and mild and all that sort of thing. He should never - he was a colonel but he was a lovely fellow. Now that's the only bloke that I know that I served under that came from those places that I'd say was good for the ordinary soldier. But the bloke that came up from the ranks, nine times out of the ten - take Jacka, our first V.C. for instance. He came from the ranks, he was a ganger on the railways up at Wedderburn. He worked his way up from - and the men'd swear by him. You'd follow those bloke anywhere.

We had another fellow there one time, I remember we went up in a barrage, we were taking small arms ammunition up again to the infantry and he put over a hell of a barrage and he stopped us. It was too heavy, see. We couldn't get through. And you know this fellow - he was a church man. But he'd risen up from the time he joined up, he risen up to a couple of stars or ... yes, he had three. He was a captain, that's right, he worked his way up to captain. And when we all baulked, you know, he cried, he came back and he cried. He cried and he said to us, he said, "Think of those boys up in the front line there, in those pill boxes and in those little holes up there. If the Germans attack them and they've got no ammunition, no ammunition to fight back, put yourself in their place. How would you feel? You follow me, I'll lead you through. You follow me and we'll get through." And we followed him and he got through too. And we never lost a man. We never got a casualty. He was a marvellous fellow and a marvellous

officer. He came up from the ranks but I doubt whether the bloke from Duntroon would have done that. He might have, but I'd have my doubts about it. Because he learnt it all out of a book.

THOMPSON: How hard or easy was it to rise through the ranks?

LANGHAM: Oh, it was pretty hard. Oh, it was pretty hard, yes. My word. That's why I think a man that came up through the ranks, he was the best officer.

THOMPSON: Did you ever have aspirations to that?

LANGHAM: No. No. I had a - I had one stripe once, that was enough for me. I had an incidence, I had an incidence once when we were in Boulogne. I was in the convalescent camp there after I got - I'd been - I got a bit of gas and I was a few weeks in hospital. I didn't get much of it. They sent me to Boulogne to - for a rest period, like, before I went back up again, and I palled up with an old Jock sergeant there, see. And I remember one morning we were on parade and he said, "Fall out all Aussies" or something if I remember rightly now. Oh no, he said, "Fall out all the NCOs." Tell you about the time I was once a corporal. He said, "Fall out all the NCOs" So of course those all fallen out. He said, "I said, fall out all the NCOs" And he looked straight at me, you see. Then he looked at me and he said, "Fall out corporal." So he walked up and he said, "Fall out corporal. Didn't you hear what I'm saying?" I said, "I'm not a corporal." He said, "Well don't let me see you wearing those two bloody stripes again when you go down the street." See. So, it had me tricked, you see. I couldn't understand what he meant. Well, when we got up in the morning at that place, we had to make our beds and everything had to be laid out right and your overcoat had to be rolled up nice and neat, see, and put in a certain place like that. So when I went back, I thought - I was puzzling over this. Well, I picked up the overcoat. We were going somewhere, and I picked up the overcoat and let it drop like that and there's two stripes on the arm. Pinned on. Anyway, that's how I came to corporal. So, anyway, I found out afterwards, when I was down the street with him - he was

the sergeant you see, and I was only, I had no stripes of any sort and he pinned the two stripes on me to put it over me on the parade ground. That's the only time I was a corporal. Ha, ha. If I'd've got caught, I'd've been in trouble. Wearing a corporal's stripes and I wasn't a corporal. You do funny things like that when you're in the army though. Especially if you've had a couple, you know.

THOMPSON: Just changing the subject a bit, Bill. You talked in the previous interview about what it felt like to be under fire, and you talked about that experience where you had to take your horses over the German bodies and so on. When you think back over those things, how did it feel at the time and how does it feel now to relate those things?

LANGHAM: Oh, I still feel very sad when I, when I think of that, that incident, that particular incident you mention there. But it was the only way we had to go. We had to go through that little cutting and we had to do it. Otherwise we'd have been trapped lying there with them. If we hadn't hurried through there. See. But I say that's war again. You get to do things that you normally would never think of doing. That was one time that you felt like disobeying an order, but where were you going to go. Ha. We'd nowhere else to go. It was only a little, little cutting through this particular spot. You just think about it being our own fellows and the Germans running over the top of them. When you think of the wheels of the wagons and things crushing them up. Still. I suppose that's only one of the minor things in war. There's worse things than that happen.

THOMPSON: Did worse things than that happen to you?

LANGHAM: Oh, no. I don't think worse things than that happened to me. I been in – oh, I've been in tight spots but that's one of the nasty things to remember, you know. I was lucky in a way because I wasn't in bayonet charges or anything like that, but I often think it must be, for the infantry man, it must be - a soldier's life in the trenches musta been terrible. It was bad enough for us blokes in the artillery, and we didn't have to sleep in trenches and things like

that. We had to sleep on wet ground and all things like that at times, you'd sleep anywhere you could if you could get a sleep, but those poor devils in trenches, they, they had the rough end of the stick, I tell you. I always take my hat off to an infantryman. And he's lying perhaps in the slush and mud all night and first thing at dawn next morning he's got to go up over with that bayonet on there - no. Terrible life an infantryman's life.

THOMPSON: At the time, how did you cope with experiences like that one of going over the bodies? I mean, how do you cope with those? Do you laugh about them, do you shrug them off?

LANGHAM: Oh well. I go to my music. Music's the greatest thing in the world. I pick up one of these instruments. If I get a bit melancholy and think of those things, I'll come inside and pick up on of the instruments and try to forget it that way. And it works. It works. That's what I say, music's a marvellous thing. I felt sad when I lost my - when my horse got wounded. He got wounded at the same time I did. He got a great big piece in the side of his jugular vein there, it got the jugular somehow. But I think I told you before that they told me they saved him and I was very - they saved him and I think he was given or sold to a - when the war finished - he was given to a French farmer. I felt very sad about him because, by gosh, he carried me through some, some tough spots, you know. The poor old horse. The most - the horse and the mule - the most abused things in the war, but they were number one. Number one. I wasn't number one. My horse was. They had, after the war they had - a blue cross, they called it, a blue cross - they had for horses and things. Lots of councils and things they put up, they put up troughs, troughs and things, you know, for the horses, in memory of the horses and things. You might've in the old days if you'd've gone round you'd've seen troughs here in Melbourne City Council and they had horse troughs and things there for a horse to have a drink in.

THOMPSON: Just thinking back again to your experiences during the war. Do you have memories of times when you or others amongst you were discontented or grumbling or things like that?

LANGHAM: Oh, well, yes. I think we, I think we had that with us all the time, we'd grumble about something. Nothing'd go right for us. I went - when I played that thing this morning - I went back all over those particular spots we were at there. The funny part of it was, when we were up in Belgium there when the, when he broke through the British Fifth Army down below, well they sent us way down below there to stop him. And when they did, he came back. He knew we were gone from up there and he attacked the Poms again up there. Broke through them again up there and he left. We went down to Villers Bret and those places, and he changed his course and went round the other way. And we had to whip one of our divisions back up there again then, to the top. To let him know there was Australians or New Zealanders there.

One of the funniest things - did I tell you about the chap, the Portuguese soldier, in the last story? Well, the Portuguese sent a contingent over there. And I remember they relieved one part of the front there, and when the visiting rounds went round at night time they were all asleep in the front line and no-one on guard or anything. So when they asked - this is quite true. When they asked them - they took them out of the line after this I believe - when they asked them, they said, oh, they finished at five o'clock and they fired all their bullets over the - right up, fired all their bullets and they put their bullets down and they went to, had a siesta, went to sleep. They were going to sleep till next morning. So that was the end of the Portuguese troops. They took them out of the line and used them for repairing the roads and things like that, you know. Labour, labour battalions. So, not a very good soldier, the Portuguese soldier.

THOMPSON: Just thinking back to the Australian soldiers, were there times during the war, or as the war progressed when you or your mates started to get a bit pissed off with it?

LANGHAM: You mean dissatisfied. Yes. After the last great push there, the time of the conscription, when Billy Hughes was in power here and they had conscription, and they - we couldn't get reinforcements. The battalions were so, so low, you know. They'd been chopped about that much, there were no reinforcements coming. They tried to bring in conscription. Well, there was, I remember there was a time there when it was almost as if the whole bloody A.I.F. was going to go on strike, if you put it. They were dissatisfied and all that with no reinforcements and getting pushed in. If you had a battalion that was only half strength or something like that, they'd push you into the line against perhaps a full German regiment. Things like that. And that made them very discontented. That went on for a good while, but eventually it righted themselves because they thought they were going to - Bill Hughes thought he was going to get an overwhelming vote from the troops, you know. And they all voted, the troops voted "no" for compulsory, for compulsion. We were all volunteers and we said, how could you expect - we looked at it in this light. How could you expect a volunteer to fight with a bloke that was forced into it. We'd put all we had into it, but would the bloke that was forced in, what would he do. He wouldn't - he'd feel like giving himself up straight away. Where was that going to leave you? That was one time there was - they were very annoyed, the troops. Was right near the end of the war, thank goodness.

THOMPSON: Do you have memories of people either inflicting wounds upon themselves or deserting?

LANGHAM: Oh no. You heard tales, you know. I heard a tale of one fellow one time, he shot himself in the foot, and took off his boot to do it, then put his boot back on again. That's how they found him out. Ha, ha, ha. He had no hole in his boot. Ha, ha, ha. But we used to hear



stories of blokes that had self inflicted wounds, you know, but I never came in contact with anyone like that.

THOMPSON: What about deserters, Bill?

LANGHAM: No, I never heard of anyone deserting. Oh well, I mean. Desertion, now do you mean desertion in the face of the enemy or desertion just - you mean desertion in the face of an enemy? Oh no. I wouldn't say there was any of that but we've heard of deserters now, fellows that went to England on leave from France, and then they went to Ireland. That's the time Ireland was still having a bit of trouble with, with England, you know. The story that used to come back to us was, if you go to Ireland, if you go to Dublin or any of those places, you go into a pub, a bloke'll come up to you and say, "Hey, do you want to get out of the army?" And next thing you knew, you had a suit and you could get rid of your, you could get rid of your khakis and no worries in the world, no-one'd find you. There was supposed to be quite few did that, deserted like, in Ireland. Course whether there was any truth in that or not, I'm damned if I know.

THOMPSON: What did you think of blokes that did that?

LANGHAM: Oh, not much. No. No. Well, you're leaving your mates in the - you're leaving your mates aren't you? To bear the brunt of it. Oh no, can't have that. That'd be alright perhaps if the war was finished but not while there's a battle on. As far as - that's tantamount to deserting your mate in action, I reckon.

THOMPSON: You talked in the last interview about - gradually during the war, especially after you met some German prisoners and talked to them - you began to think that maybe you shouldn't have been fighting each other.

LANGHAM: Oh yes. I was going back to that little incident when I gave the fellow - asked the young bloke, he was only a young bloke, same as I was, only a teenager, next door to a teenager I suppose. He looked cold and miserable and he came back, he was a prisoner of war.

I asked him would he - when he was passing our - we had some stew on. I asked him would he like a little bit of stew, and he said yes. He was only about my age and the bloke said to me, "I ought to stick the bloody bayonet through you." I said, "Why?" He said, "I'm fighting that bloke. I've had to bring him back here, now I got to go back up to the trenches again." I didn't look at it - I looked at it this way. I didn't want to fight him, he didn't want to fight me, we didn't know one another, we didn't have a grudge against one another. Why should we try and kill one another. But, you've got to do it. If you don't kill him, he'll kill you, you got to - one of you got to go, if you're in battle. One of you, only one of you survives, if you're in battle. And we're fighting one another and we got nothing against one another. It's like you and I having a fight now. I got nothing against you, you got nothing against me. Well, why should we fight one another.

THOMPSON: Once you had that sort of feeling, how did you feel about the war?

LANGHAM: Oh, I thought war was wrong. I always think war was wrong.

THOMPSON: But you kept going?

LANGHAM: Yeah, I kept going because we took an oath when we, we took an oath when we joined the army. I stuck to that oath till I got my discharge.

THOMPSON: Just shifting then to the post war years. How do you feel when you recall the years when you came back from the war? What's your strongest feeling about those years?

LANGHAM: Oh, I felt pretty bitter at some of the things that happened just after the war, to me. Well, I told you about them, few of these things before, but we didn't get much of a go at all. Very bad go. Promised you everything when you went away and when you came back, if you still had it, they took it off you. That still goes. I still stick to that.

They gave us a gratuity as they called it. A hundred pound. All we went through over there, and while we're away there was blokes here, firms making millions, supplying us with stuff perhaps to kill some other poor unfortunate on the other side. They're laughing at us blokes

over there. They're piling up their bank accounts. You know, as long as - now we got this business up here, what do you call it. These missiles. I don't think there'll be another war. For the simple reason, in the old days when you declared a - when war was declared, the bloke in the war office, or back behind parliament house or those places, they were quite safe, there was nothing could reach them. They'd send you and I out, we could be reached where they sent us. But now they got these missiles and things, they can reach them anytime they want to, they can reach them. And I think that's the only thing saving the world. That's my idea. They're all scared, all scared to send one out. Let's hope they remain scared. Because if they send one, they'll send the lot and that'll be the end of civilisation. But I reckon there would have been another war - we'd a had a third war on our hands long ago only for the, only for the missile hold up. No-one will be immune from that one.

THOMPSON: Just thinking back to the end of the first war. How did it feel to be a returned serviceman? Were you proud to be a returned serviceman?

LANGHAM: Yes, I was. Yes, I was proud of what I - I wasn't proud of the things that we were forced to do. But I was proud that I did it and carried out to the best of my ability what I had to do. But I mean no-one could be proud of killing a man you've never seen anything like that. I don't know whether I, I don't know whether I ever killed any one, but see, when - in the artillery, you're a long way away from the blokes that you're after. You send that shell over there you never know who it will get or where it will go. Oh, you got an idea where it's going, but you don't know who's going to be there to be collected with it or anything like that. But it's different for the infantryman who's got to get up. He's face to face with you. That's a different proposition altogether. You know, the infantryman knows he's killed. We've got an idea we've killed but we don't know for certain, see. But I could - I think the infantryman must have - especially a man that's been in bayonet charges - he must have some awful memories.

THOMPSON: When you came back, were there things you couldn't talk about? Or didn't want to talk about?

LANGHAM: Yes. For instance, if we went to a smoke night, we never mentioned war. All we spoke about - people used to say to me, "What do you talk about when you go to - do you talk about this battle you was in and that battle you was in?" I said, "Oh, don't be funny mate, we talk about all the funny incidents that happened. You're taboo if you start talking about war, if you go to a smoke night. You pick out all your funny incidents." It's like, you want to forget it, see. You want to forget the bad parts, which we all do. Forget the bad parts. Sometimes if you sit on your own and ... like if you sit down on your own and you start to think, then that's the time they all come back to you. Then you wish there was somebody there, with you to speak to, so's you could forget those things. I often lay awake at night, I lay awake for hours at night time where I go back over old trails there. Right back. I suppose it's a funny thing, you never forget them. They're always there. Although, as the years go on they get, they get milder and milder. They're not as bad as they were when you were, like in the early years and things like that. Like everything is, you get used to them. But you always try to remember the - as I said, we try to remember all those funny incidents and things that had happened. Then occasionally, as you're remembering a few of them one of the other ones slips in between somewhere. Yeah. Then you got to bring yourself, you got to bring yourself back to reality then and I say one of the greatest things in the world to bring you back to reality is that music.

THOMPSON: What about dreams Bill? Did you dream about the war when you came back?

LANGHAM: No. I can't say that I - no. No, the dreams never worried me much. No, I can't - no I don't think so. No.

THOMPSON: Do you think you ever dreamed about it, like, more recently?

LANGHAM: No. No. That's the remarkable thing that, you dream about other things that happen in civilian life. I can't say that I can ever recall anything happening, like in dreams. No. Thank goodness it didn't. Ha, ha.

THOMPSON: What about ANZAC Day? What was the significance of ANZAC Day for you?

LANGHAM: Oh, ANZAC Day used to be good because you'd go back, even if you didn't meet your mates - a lot of them didn't come to reunions - but you'd probably meet all them again on ANZAC Day, and oh, you'd have a great - you could have a talk about old times and that. They were good, ANZAC Day marches and things like that, in the early days. But the last time I went I was the only one there. My unit. So I haven't bothered to go for several years now because I think they are all gone. No, the last - there was two of us, that's right. Yes, one bloke carried the flag, poor old Curl, he carried the flag and I marched alongside him. Or behind him.

THOMPSON: What did it feel like to be marching on ANZAC Day, on the marches?

LANGHAM: Oh yes, it felt very good, it felt very good indeed. We always got a good reception, all along, right along the way.

THOMPSON: What about the speeches? Can you remember the sorts of speeches, the type of speech that people would be making on ANZAC Day?

LANGHAM: Well, it's practically the same thing every ANZAC Day. Even when you go to the Shrine, you only hear the same things every year. I don't think there's any variation at all in those, every year it's the same.

THOMPSON: So what would you say was a typical ANZAC Day speech?

LANGHAM: Well, I don't think ... Well, I just can't remember what they do talk about now. It's usually some general or somebody gets up there or a minister of religion or something like that, and he has the same old things to say. It's like the - they're sort of traditional speeches whatever they are, see. There's nothing new comes up.

THOMPSON: Do you think the speeches would be about the sort of war you experienced?

LANGHAM: About the ...?

THOMPSON: Do you think the sorts of things they'd be talking about would be similar to what happened to you during the war?

LANGHAM: Oh no, oh no they wouldn't, they wouldn't be anything like that. They would hardly mention, I don't think they would - you'd hardly hear them mention the, the Battle of Passchendale or the Battle of the Somme or anything like that. You know, they'd never mention those things at the - they might mention about the boys in France or the boys on Gallipoli and things like that but ... Sometimes there have been - I think if I remember rightly they have mentioned in speeches things about Lone Pine and things like that on Gallipoli, you know, when our boys were first into it. But after that I don't think you ever hear much about - in speeches - what happened in France or any of those places. The Middle East or anything. No, you wouldn't hear them in speeches. You'd only hear about that when they showed that picture, so many *Thousand Horsemen. Thirty Thousand Horsemen* or whatever it was. I can't remember how many was in it now. They might mention the battles that the Light Horsemen played, like, when they made their charges and that sort of thing.

THOMPSON: What sort of message do you think they were trying to get across, the people who'd speak on ANZAC Day? What sort of message is ANZAC Day meant to make?

LANGHAM: Well, I think the - it should be a message for people, trying to tell people they didn't want war. But war is something that if it is forced on you that you've got to fight, and that's the reason we went away and fought, because the war was forced on us. We didn't want a war, but the war was forced on us in the first place. The First World War was forced on us by the Germans. Well, we had to try and stop them. They forced us to go to war, we didn't want to. They wanted [to], we didn't. It's the same thing with the second war, when the

Japanese started it. I suppose the Yanks didn't want to go to war but they had to go. We should never have war. This world is large enough, big enough for us all to live in peace.

THOMPSON: Do you think ANZAC Day does or doesn't put across the message that we shouldn't have war?

LANGHAM: No, I don't think it puts across the message that we shouldn't have war. I think what you're trying to get me to say is whether it's trying to glorify war or not. Ahh. Well, some people might look at it in that light, that it is glorifying war, but to the man that fought and lost his mates, it doesn't glorify war to him. It just makes him remember that there shouldn't be any bloody war. It's hard to drive that message home to people, I suppose, that's never been in a war area or anything like that. They don't realise what those people - it's not only the, it's not only the soldiers that suffer in war. The civilian suffers more than the soldier, I think. The soldier's got things to fight back with but a civilian's got nothing. Now, you take all those towns and things that were blown to pieces. Women and kids blown to pieces and all that. Who wants to glorify that, that sort of thing. But I mean the whole, the whole flaming business is forced on you by the people that started that, and it rebounded back on them again. Germany, it rebounded back on Germany and it killed, well, millions I suppose of their own women and kids. Because they happened to be unfortunate enough to be in the area where they were shelling.

THOMPSON: So what you are saying is that to men like yourself who fought in wars, ANZAC Day doesn't glorify it?

LANGHAM: Oh no.

THOMPSON: Do you think, generally, for other people, ANZAC Day could or doesn't glorify war?

LANGHAM: No, I don't think it glorifies war. No, no. ANZAC Day, in my opinion, is just, it's a good day or remembrance for your mates, that fought with you. And to prove that you,

prove that you haven't forgotten them, and you hope to God other people wouldn't, haven't forgotten that, That they were there. Because you or none of the others would have been here if we hadn't a been there. You wouldn't a been under the - living under the conditions you're under now. We bore the brunt of it. We didn't want to but we bore the brunt of it. And sometimes we don't get much thanks for it, we get a lot of abuse for it. By people that don't realise what war is.

And I hate to think, if we got another world war, I hate to think where they're gonna get the soldiers from with some of the young blokes that's around now. Tell you that much. I've got nothing against young people, fine lot of people, but it's the sort of life that they're being brought up to at the present time. We were brought up to be tough. They think they're tough now, but they're gonna be - if they get into something like what we've been in, to prove they're tough. They'll find that just jogging around the street here of a night to stick in your back or something like that, it's different when you're facing that other bloke over there. The other bloke has got a knife too. That's just the difference. I can remember when my son - he was joining the air force in the last war - and he came home one day and we're out on the back lawn there and he said, "Let's have a bayonet fight, Dad." Got a couple of brooms out there, see. Up like that, and we did two or three parries you see, and he parried my broom off like that and I hit him under the jaw with my broom. He said, "Hey, you can't do that." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Oh, you're not supposed to do that." I said, "What do you think the bloke on the other side is going to do. You parried his bayonet off, you parried my bayonet off like that didn't you?" He said, "That's right. Beat you." I said, "That's the butt end of my rifle, and I hit you under the jaw with the butt end of my rifle, I broke your neck." He didn't look at it in that light. Well, that's the sort of thing they teach you in the army.



THOMPSON: Just one more thing about ANZAC Day. I don't know if you heard, the last few years there have been groups that protested against ANZAC Day, groups of women for example.

LANGHAM: Oh, yes.

THOMPSON: What do you think of that?

LANGHAM: Oh well, I feel sorry for the, I feel sorry for the protesters. As I said before, only for those ANZACs, I wouldn't be here, you wouldn't be here perhaps. We wouldn't be living under the conditions we're living under now. We've got to thank them for it, those poor fellows that went out there and jumped into that, jumped into that water and jumped into barbed wire entanglements under the water and all that. They're the people you got to thank, so why should they, why should they get up there and criticize them for holding a march in memory of them. That's all that march is as far as I'm concerned. It's in memory of our comrades, our fallen comrades and the ones that are come back here crippled, maimed and ruined for life. And that's the thanks you get from a lot of people for it when you get demonstrations like that. If they looked back, if a lot of them people looked back, they'd find probably their own darn relations were some of those that were mutilated in war, to try and give them what they've got now. Under the same conditions, as at the two previous wars, if I had to go again and I was a young bloke I'd do the same thing again. You often say to yourself you wouldn't do it, I suppose, but I would. Under the same- if I had to live my life over again, I wouldn't change. I would do the same as I did. Because I thought it was right. I had to do it. We only went, we went away, we tried to save the world from a worse fate than we've got now, I think. But I don't think we succeeded somehow. That's the trouble.

THOMPSON: In what way?

LANGHAM: Well, I think the world seems worse off now with these missiles and all this stuff they got now. Scientists have done a marvellous job in the world, but I think the worst

thing that happened to the world is when they smashed the - what do you call it? - the atom.

Yeah, when they introduced the atom. That, that's the worst thing that happened in the world.

THOMPSON: Something a bit different, Bill. What do you think of Bruce Ruxton?

LANGHAM: Well, I think he's pretty right. I'm with him. I'm with him. These people who come into this country and try to tell us all about - well, look, we've got enough troubles of our own in this country without bringing the troubles of other countries into this place here. As far as the black and white business is concerned, I'm not one way or the other. I think the black man's got as much right to live on this earth as I've got, being a white man. But let him stop in his own, let him stop - I stop in my backyard and let him stop in his backyard. He's got plenty of room where he is. Why do they all want to come here. I've, I've got a lot of black friends. Nice people. Very nice people. In fact one lady from America came out here - school teacher - she was a marvellous lady, a black, black lady. We had her here, entertained her and she lived with my daughter. We had nothing against them. But ... there's plenty of room in their own country, they should stay there. That's the idea I've got. I'll stay in mine and you stay in yours.

THOMPSON: How well do you think Bruce Ruxton represents you as an ex-serviceman?

LANGHAM: I think that you'll find that the ex-servicemen, most of the ex-servicemen, will think the same way I do. My view of Ruxton is he's right. He may not be a hundred percent right, but he's on the right track, I think. That's my view.

THOMPSON: Related to that fact, Bill, how would you, if you were to summarize your political beliefs, how would you do that? How would you summarize your politics?

LANGHAM: Well, I said we've got nothing against the black man, but I said let him stay in his country and I'll stay in mine.

THOMPSON: But apart from that issue, the black white issue, what about, generally, your politics, how would you describe them?

LANGHAM: I don't quite follow that.

THOMPSON: Umm.

LANGHAM: I've been a hard worker all my life, or the biggest part of my life I was. I worked in quarries and things like that. I don't like people who come out here, like this bloke we saw in the paper, the case in the paper just recently. He refused to join a union. Now he came from overseas, see. Well, he'll take the union wages. If he went to a - he went onto his job, I employ him and I don't pay him the union wages, he kicks up a stink because he's not getting the wages, that's the wages. But it's unions fought to get him those wages. Only for the union, I wouldn't have this roof over my head, if they hadn't made it that I got a decent, didn't get enough, but I got a decent sort of a wage to live on. But he wants to come out here and break up all those things that we fought for for a hundred years. Now why should that happen. Therefore, I've got to stick on the, on the Labor side. I still got to be, I still got to be a Labor man. I still think the Labor Party is the right party. That's my political view. Although I'm retired now, I could perhaps say, "Oh, to hell with the Labor Party" and all that, but I remember the years that they stuck to me. As I say, I slugged my heart out in the quarries. Forty-eight hours a week breaking up bluestone with a twenty-two pound hammer. Eighteen to twenty-two pound hammer. All weathers. Up to 108 degrees in the shade. For four pound a week. Equivalent to eight dollars. Well, I wouldn't have been getting that if I didn't have a union. Would have had the Labor Party behind me. I'd a been working for about ten bob a week. See. So therefore I - that is, that's my political side of the business. The other party did me a bad turn when I got my war pension. I put - when I put in for my war pension I was 56 years fighting before I got it, the war pension, and when I got it I got - oh I think I told you before - I got \$140.00 or \$240.00, I'm not sure which it was now - back pay because the party that was in power then, Fraser's party, altered the rule. Originally it said, it was paid back retrospective back to the first time you made an application. And that was 56 years ahead. And when I got it, they paid me back from the last time I put in. So instead of getting fifty-six - I

was entitled to that pension for 56 years because I got it for the same thing as I applied for 56 years before - but I only got it back about 18 months. That's what - another gripe I had against the other party, because Fraser altered the act. He altered the Repatriation Act, back to the first time retrospect for the last time.

THOMPSON: Thinking a bit more about politics, there's been, ever since the war, at different stages some tension between the R.S.L. on one hand and Labor politicians and trade unions on the other hand. Do you have any memory of that?

LANGHAM: Oh, well that's a pretty difficult one because - you take your members of parliament now. There's a lot of returned soldiers in parliament and there's a lot of returned soldier Labor men, there's a lot of returned soldiers in the Country Party. In every party you have returned soldiers. Now, they've got their own particular views. Their views may not be the same as mine. What I'm trying to say is, it's not a, it's not a - because you're a returned soldier you don't have to have the same political view. You can't have. Wouldn't work. You wish, you wish it could. Other than the R.S.L. but it can't. See, you've got to have those different parties. But when it comes to an R.S.L. meeting or anything like that, the different parties don't work in the R.S.L., like at any of their functions or anything like that, you're still the R.S.L. But then when you go away from the R.S.L. meeting, well, you've got your own views on other matters then. But I think we all agree the same on anything that, that's in the R.S.L.

THOMPSON: Moving in a different direction, you talked a bit last time about reading about the war afterwards. Can you think of any examples of books about the war that you've read that have maybe influenced you?

LANGHAM: Oh no. No. I've read a lot of things but - there was Bean's, I suppose there were things in Bean's war records of things that I don't agree with perhaps. I couldn't pick out anything from memory but, I mean, Bean wasn't everywhere in the war. You got to look at it

that way. He writes about things that happened everywhere but where does he get his information from. He must get it from somebody that's been there, he's never been there. He doesn't actually, he can't actually vouch for what he says. That's reasonable isn't it? See. I'm only telling you things now, you're learning, I'm telling you things, that's just my view how it looks. You might interview somebody else, they'll tell you something different. But you're only getting my personal, personal view.

But, I like reading, I like reading war stories, but I suppose that's only natural too, because you been to war. War, war's now so different, war nowadays is so different from when I went to the war.

THOMPSON: What do you like about reading war stories, Bill?

LANGHAM: Oh, I dunno. They, they give you a bit of a kick, I think. What you used to do when you were young. That's a hard one to explain too, but it's ... it's like, I like reading deeds of sailors on battle ships and things like that because I reckon they're bloody brave men. They're braver than we were I reckon, on the land. We only had the land to contend with but they had, they had all the things that we had to contend with as far as ammunition is concerned on top and then if they went down below they had the sharks down there to compete with. I read in an article once, an American paper somewhere that, they reckon that there was more American sailors lost in the battle by sharks, taken by sharks than there were otherwise. Now that's dreadful, you know, when you come to think of it, isn't it? When the ship goes down the sharks are all there and the poor old sailors are in the water and they're just taken. And that was said by some general in America.

THOMPSON: You were talking about how you enjoyed reading war stories. Do you think that those stories show war like you experienced it?

LANGHAM: Oh, yes. Yes, I do. Oh yes, I'll give them, I'll grant them that. But just wait a minute, I didn't think - although the way they put it, I don't think they can give it to you

exactly as it happened. There's not the real thing. You get an idea but, I say reading about high explosive shells and bayonets going into fellows and all that, and being there and seeing the actual thing, you know, I think it's a different thing altogether. I could tell you about somebody getting a bayonet shoved through them, it don't affect you much does it? But if you were there and saw it happen, you can just imagine what you'd feel yourself, if you think it was going into you. Well, well they were, they were dreadful. The Germans used those bayonets on - and they had a, they were serrated, and when they pushed them in, when they pulled them out, they pulled everything with them. They were terrible things, those serrated bayonets. And then they had an explosive shell. I laid in hospital with a fellow, he'd been shot through the penis, and it exploded here, blew all that away. That sort of thing, explosive bullets. Went inside you and exploded once they got inside you. Well, those are the sort of things they use on whales and things now. They were using them - they used them on, they used them on men. They didn't last for long when they were found out, but still they happened.

THOMPSON: Were there any other stories or books about the war that have been - that you can remember well?

LANGHAM: Oh no. If I get 'em now - I got 'em, I got books there somewhere now that if I get them I just glance over and have a look at the pictures. Tired of reading the stories.

THOMPSON: What about films? There have been quite a few films recently about the First World War?

LANGHAM: Aww, Jeez, what's the one - they took us in to Channel 9?

THOMPSON: ANZACs?

LANGHAM: ANZACs. That was bloody terrible that was. God, they might as well - it's like the shells bursting out - they gone out into a paddock here somewhere and shell. They should have been at Passchendaele or Messines or some of them places and seen the whole area was churned up. Just churned, not a little hole here and there. I told the bloke in there at Channel 9

too. I said, "That's nothing like the real thing. You got Passchendaele there, our boys, before the stretcher bearers could get them at Passchendaele, they were sucked under in the mud and suffocated. Wounded soldiers, they were sucked under and they died of suffocation, with the mud, before they could get to them. Look you were showing Passchendaele there in that picture of us, it's all dry. Where's the rain, where's the water." He said, "Oh, that's got to come later." So later on they showed us, they showed us a couple of scenes with, you know, there was a bit of rain, and things around. Oh nothing like - it was just a bog. Oh. They made a poor show of that. They reckoned they booned it up. That was alright for the people that never seen it. But anyone that had seen it, it was laughable. I told him in there.

THOMPSON: Is there anything else about that T.V. series that you liked or didn't like?

LANGHAM: Oh, taken as a picture right through I think the whole, it was pretty good. It was - I liked it, it was pretty good. Only that Passchendaele scenes, that's the ones that I reckon they were awful, the Passchendaele scenes. They were nothing like Passchendaele was. I was at Passchendaele. No, they were nothing like it.

THOMPSON: What does it feel like to watch a film now of something you've been through?

LANGHAM: Oh, it doesn't make any affect on me now. No, I'm immune to it. Just comes a matter of fact.

THOMPSON: Did you ever go to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, Bill?

LANGHAM: Yeah, I was there once.

THOMPSON: What did you make of that?

LANGHAM: Oh, well, it was in its early stages, many many years ago since I was there. It's all been done up or something, hasn't it? I haven't seen it since they've - when I went there it was just a matter of - your name and everything was all on the wall there, you know, all the soldiers' names and things were there. But I'd like to see it now, but. It's facing Canberra, facing the Parliament House or something isn't it now, or something. I saw a picture just

recently. I'd like to see it again. If I go up that way again I might call in Canberra and have a look next time. I forget whether I saw my own name there or not.

THOMPSON: Just thinking back through your life, Bill, what do you think would have been the key moments or times or events in your lifetime for you? Quite a big question, but ...

LANGHAM: Oh, well, I'll tell you one of the loveliest moments in my life. I think it was when I landed off the boat here. I drove in the gate at Sturt Street and I saw my brother, mother and brother standing at the gate. That was one of my lovely memories. After being away and through that. There she was standing at the gate and my little brother standing alongside her. Always that scene, I always remember that. Yeah.

THOMPSON: Because we've been talking about the war, there's a chance that we may exaggerate its importance in your life. But I wonder, how important do you think the war, that First World War, was in your life in the context of the rest of your life?

LANGHAM: Well, as I said before that, the war changed my life completely because my intentions were probably to have been a jockey. Well, that settled that idea altogether because when I came back I was twelve stone four as I said before. That - see my life, I reckon it was changed altogether when I came back. I was, I was a real rouse-about, anything that went I did. Didn't matter what it was, I put my hand out and I'm not skiting when I say whatever I tried to do I made a success of. I did nothing in a big way or anything like that, but I was - I was a barber. I made a success of that. I got on. Everywhere I worked I could always go back and get a job, didn't matter where it was. I went to the quarries. I didn't know anything about quarry work and I finished up the boss of the quarry down here. See. I made - I went right through the quarry business, I knew the whole business right through. I finished up my career when I went to - I went to the Melbourne City Council and the last twenty years of my, my working life - I went there as a cleaner, to the Town Hall and I finished up sitting on my backside in the Town Clerk's private office. See. Through the Lord Mayor's department and all



that for all those years and I reckon I did all right there. I went as - I got what I wanted, that's what I wanted and I got it, see. What would have really happened if there hadn't been a war, well, only the fellow up top knows that.

THOMPSON: Now that you're an older man and you look back over your life, in the memories that you recall, how important are memories of the First World War? Are they important still in your memory?

LANGHAM: Oh yes, they're very important because I met so, I had so many fine mates. I made so many great friends and mates in that, in that First World War. People that I would never have met, never if there hadn't a been a war. I always remember them. I often sit down and think of them. I can, I can see them. I could close my eyes and they could be in this room with me here, some of them. They're all gone now but I think I'm about the only one as far as I know, the only one left. Don't suppose I got much more but, still I've - you've got no qualms over what's happened to me through - I've had a good life, led a good life.

THOMPSON: Do you get nostalgic? Do you know what I mean by that?

LANGHAM: No.

THOMPSON: Nostalgia. Do you sort of think about the good old days a lot?

LANGHAM: Oh, yes. Oh yes, oh yes, I do. I still say that we don't have the times now that we had in those good old days. They were good old days. I mean you could - young people don't have the fun that we had. Good heavens above, we could go away to a country dance anywhere, we could chuck our bike on the side of the road and leave it there. You could come back in a week and pick it up, it would still be there for you. You could go to a dance and you could pinch the other bloke's girl and have a couple dances with her and you wouldn't get a knife shoved into your back, or anything like that. No, now you - a lot of young fellows and they go to a dance now, they're frightened to - young blokes have told me - they're frightened

to speak to somebody else's girl, in case they're going to get into trouble. I don't know whether that's true or not but that's what the young ones tell me.

THOMPSON: Do you think there are ways that they were the bad old days?

LANGHAM: Oh, they were bad old days, there were bad days, the gold days, the gold digging days and all those. You had your bad fellow there. You know, always waiting for the opportunity to pick up an easy quid as the old saying was those days. Knock you over for your little bit of gold or anything like that. They had bad men those days just as we have them now. Perhaps more those days than we got now, but we didn't hear so much about them because we didn't have the, we didn't have television or wireless and all those things in those days. All you could hear about was through your local police or something like that. Only bit of news you could get. Nowadays if a thing happens you get it on your television in a few minutes.

THOMPSON: Just as a way of rounding off, maybe I'll just play devil's advocate for a moment, Bill. If I was to say it might be better just to forget the whole of thing about the First World War, forget it all and not remember it and so on, what would you - how do you respond to that?

LANGHAM: Well, I couldn't forget it. No, I could never forget it. No man that's ever been there would ever forget it. What I'm trying to say was, we hoped it'd never happen, that we never had to do what we did, but as we did it, well we still like to remember it. And I only hope to God that the young generation coming up haven't got to go through the same things that we went through. I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy. I hope they have a very peaceful time for the rest of their life and I hope to God they can live in peace with the rest of the world. I don't believe in war, but I say if war's forced upon you, well you've got no alternative but to fight it.

THOMPSON: Just thinking about your memory, Bill, how do you think that this sort of interview process affects your memory and the way you remember things?

LANGHAM: It's good. Good. Keeps me remembering, doesn't let me forget. I don't want to forget those things. I don't want to forget the mates I made, I don't want to forget the things I did. An interview like this, lots of the things we've talked about today, I haven't thought of those for years, but that's jogged my memory again now. It takes me right back down memory lane. Memory lane's a nice place, I reckon. Yeah. Remember your bad times and your good times, but I always - as I said before, I always try to forget the bad ones and I always pick out the, pick out the lovely ones, the good ones. That's the best way, that's the best thing to do.

THOMPSON: Do you do that consciously, Bill?

LANGHAM: Yes, my word I do. Yeah. Consciously. I think to myself, I'm gonna - if I sit down here now - I sit down some days here and I say - I'll go back, I go back over a lot of this ground sometimes when I'm sitting here on my own. But I don't - if I happen to skip onto just a little incident where we were in a tight spot, I just skip over it quick and lively and get onto something else. Yeah.

[end of interview]