



# **Australian War Memorial**

## **Sound Collection**

### **ORAL HISTORY RECORDING**

**ACCESSION NUMBER: S01323**

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

Oral history project

**INTERVIEWEE:** Mr Sid Norris

**INTERVIEWER:** Mr Alistair Thompson

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**SUMMARY:**

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NORRIS: Well, I come from a place outside Gulgong in New South Wales and we were brought up there. We had about - we had over four miles to walk to school and we had - there was very little education in amongst our lot. In fact, I've had very little because I had to try and stop home while mother and ... went to work and got - we had a few cows and sheep, fowls and geese and that sort of thing. Used to grow a bit of fruit and they made jam and the best out of everything. But in the house - it was all made of slabs, split the slabs themselves - and a bark roof, mud floor and the door. It had no locks on it, it had a peg. You used to put in the peg. And we lived in that until later on. We caught rabbits and so forth to put a bit of iron on part of the house. We had a bit of tank water then. Got a couple of little tanks and had a drop of water. Though then we - rabbits was our main source of living at them times. And catch a few foxes and possums and things like that. And we sold these hides and that, give us a bit of money to work on.

But I had to do all this to keep the house because ... father used to drink a lot and he never left any money. So we, we had to box on that way until I went up to work. I went out to work on a place - I think it was about 1912. And I worked up there until sometime - just on 1914.

Thirteen or '14. Then I went out to another place. I was offered five shillings a week more and I went there but it was only a catch. He used me up for about a month and ... I got a job then. Oh, it was only a few days, taking a mob of sheep to Wellington and that's where the war broke out in 1914.

Well, then I came back and was digging out rabbit burrows and that on the farms, and in the meantime I bought a mare, a grey mare. I gave eight quid for her and I saddled her up and away I went on the track. Well, I went on the track and I finished up out a Binnaway in New South Wales, and I went to work there for 15 shillings a week. I worked for a while, then I got put off there and I went with this other chap. And he eventually went to the war too. But there

wasn't any money. So he paid me fare down and gave me six quid. That's all I got out of that. And I enlisted and I went to the war.

THOMPSON: Perhaps we could just go back a bit, back to your earlier life. When you were brought up at Gulgong, was that a farm that your parents owned?

NORRIS: Yes. Only a small one though. Only a small farm. Only a small farm, there was only 40 acres in it.

THOMPSON: How big was your family?

NORRIS: Oh, we had eight. I'll get you the sheets later. They're in here. Fact the – our history comes from Ireland, in the first place. We'll show them to you directly. Ah, then ...

THOMPSON: Just a few questions about your family. Was it a church going family?

NORRIS: No. I never, we never went to a church. Only that the parson used to come out to a private place and have a bit of a speech. That's the only time I was at church 'till I went to work. Where I went to work, they used to go to church every Sunday so they used to take me along and I just – of course it was just an outing, that's as far as I looked at it. Well, anyhow, I never went to church again until I was in the army. I thought to myself, now what church will I put down. Because my father was Catholic and my mother was a Church of England. So I accepted the Church of England. Well, then when it came to the church parades in the army, I used to try and wait, if one went before the other. If the English went before the Catholics, I was a Catholic. Then if it was the Catholics, I'd be a Church of England. That's the way I worked it out. I never took any interest in church. I went round the lot. I used to go to them all. Because I couldn't see anything in any of them, them days.

THOMPSON: Has there been any political interest in your family?

NORRIS: Not a bit in them days. Nothing. There was nothing. No, they never had any politics in them days. None.

THOMPSON: To what degree, if any, did you try to educate yourself in those years before the war? Had you done any reading?

NORRIS: Oh well, there was nothing to read. We was out in the bush and I never seen a paper very often. I had no chance. I never really had any chance until I got in the army and that's where I got my education. Because I read what was to be read and heard what was to be heard and I tried to work it out myself. Even in France, I never knew, I never knew that Russia revolted, you know, till the last. Till – up in 1918. But of course, we've got away from the story, haven't we.

THOMPSON: Perhaps you can tell me, why did you decide to enlist?

NORRIS: Well, there was no work. I had no money. I never enlisted for any reason for King and country. That wasn't in it. So I ... where was I up to?

THOMPSON: You went off to enlist.

NORRIS: I went down and we enlisted. He went one way and I went the other. They sent me up to Bathurst. Give us a rough edge off us. Then they brought us down to Liverpool camp and I – they shipped us off from there in a boat called the ... [HMAT] *Wiltshire*. We got - there was – the Gallipoli turnout had finished and we went through to England. Then they shipped us across the Channel to France and I got up to Etaples. That was where the Bull Ring was. They marched us round this Bull Ring and lined us up and he said, "Well", he said, "You're the fittest lot of men I've seen in a long while. You're absolutely good. You'll go up the line". Away we went. Next day we went up.

THOMPSON: What battalion were you with?

NORRIS: The 19<sup>th</sup> I joined. The 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Did you see these? 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion. I joined up with the battalion just the other side of Albert somewhere. Course there was nothing there, only ...

Then we got in and out the line and, you know, bits of skirmishes and one thing and another until come along to Bullecourt there. There was a few places in between but I couldn't think of those now. We're there this time and ... course he came over and had a look at us too. Shot a few bombs at us and so forth. But in that particular turnout we was there not really to take over the line. We were detonating bombs. Putting the detonators in them, capping the detonator, you know. Unscrew the base plug and put them in the Mills bomb. Well, we done a terrific lot of them and then we had to carry them all up the line at night of course. I remember this night there, we worked right through, never stopped. Backwards and forwards. I done over seven trips or something there that night. Well, there was quite a team of us, all stretched out. Take 'em up the line. I didn't know then that we were going to attack that place. But anyhow, we did and that's it there. We attacked Bullecourt and we said to them when they lined us - took us out and lined us up and told us what we were going to do and our mission and every other thing. And also they made us extra special this turnout. All had different ribbons on the shoulders. Well ... of course and I remember I had a purple one this particular occasion. Only happened once of course. Away we went up and of course this night we took - went up to the front line. "Put out the tape". What they put out along the front line, about a four inch tape. They put it out and you all lay on the tape. Then the barrage goes. They pushed up the barrage and it went on for so long, then they dropped the barrage back and it lifts so often and you've got to keep following the barrage up.

But when we got up to this - I jumped over myself a bit there. We were asked the question of course. How we were going to get through the wire. This officer said, "Oh", he said, "That's easy. We've got the British behind us. They'll open up the big guns and just blow it away and we'll just go over". But when we got there, it was not a strand of it cut and we couldn't get no further. Of course he just sailed into us. We could do nothing. Anyhow, what's left we got back into the front line again and he lined us up there and he said, "Well, we'll have to flank

him". So we did. We flanked him. We came up the flank side. There was the Victorians, they were on the left. Of course they had no wire, they had no wire in the particular area. Well, they were able to get through but we couldn't get through, couldn't get through the wire. So we used to jump over every now and then and have a go at him with a few bombs in the trench and back and out and oh, we were getting nowhere fast. So then eventually we got relieved. Either the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 5<sup>th</sup> Division come in. I jut forget which one it was. Either the 5<sup>th</sup> or the 1<sup>st</sup>, 'cause I know by the colours. But anyhow, they relived us and we came out. They took us back, we landed back near some big guns that they were firing there. Had the balloons up of course and they were firing these big shells over. So then we had a church parade, they didn't forget that. They said, "Everybody's got to get cleaned up". We'd been marching half the night, after coming out. No matter about that. You had to go to church, see. Right-oh. So we get down to church but everybody's got to be clean. We were all mud, you know. No chance of getting it off. Anyhow, we got through and they shifted us from there into several parts of the line and then they – we got out of that lot and they took us up the next time into Plugge Street. We got into Plugge Street, and we were there through all that cold, wet and snow, rain and we put in there for a certain time. Oh, a good while we were in there, but there was a long way between us there. The river was running between him and us, and we used to go out every night, you know, on patrols. Patrolled every night. I remember I used to be dragging my shoes, getting along. Ha ha.

Anyhow, we used to go out in these things here and he used to get across. He had a place to get across but I don't know where it was. They reckon it was a bridge underneath the water somehow. I dunno but anyhow, he used to get there somehow. I don't know. We went up and down there but we didn't see anything. But of course, I was only on it once or twice. Then they put a permanent one that used to go out every night. They done nothing else only, only this ... patrol work of a night.

So anyhow, we got out of that in the finish up, then they took us up into Flanders. We got up to Flanders and I don't know, we were in several different places there but it's just big open field and they just had a – it was Polygon Wood. It's Polygon Wood, yes, it's all Polygon Wood. Miles of it. Anyhow, we shifted about there in different places. So I got a bullet cut under there. You might see. I wasn't going to go away. We gained – this time we gained our objective after it and – lost a lot of men but we – wounded and perhaps killed. I don't know but they were all knocked out anyhow so I wasn't going to go away. A little officer came up to me, he said, "Go back to the dressing station. I wished I had it", he said. Oh, I thought, that's good enough. I go up and have a look. So I went to the dressing station and that was that bust there that they sent me to the next one and they sent me to the next one, and the next one and so forth until I finished up down in Rouen. And when I get to Rouen, they put me on the boat and I finished up in England. I went to Natsbury Hospital and I was only there about a week. They sent me to Airfeel Hospital. That's the Australian hospital and I – course it's bed and breakfast, as they used to call it. Then they shot me out of there up to Headquarters in London. Horseferry Road. So therefore, I – they give me a bit of leave. I got 14 days leave and then I roamed around London and so forth. Round different suburbs.

THOMPSON: What sort of life was that?

NORRIS: Oh, it was quite good, quite good. Quite a change from where I'd been. So anyhow, I got back to camp again and I just landed in their number one command depot and come up before the doctor and he says, "You've only just come in". I said, "Yes". He said, "Oh well, I don't want to send you away. I'll leave you for a while. I'll take some of these men that have been here for a good while". But anyhow, I was on the next draft anyhow. Went back to France. So, I gets there and I still goes up, up to Flanders. They sent me up to Flanders again. Then we went in and out of places, I don't know, several different places. We were in quite a

while there and then he busted through on the Somme and they told us that he'd got right down to Albert.

That's the first time there that I learnt that Russia pulled out of the war. I learnt then. That's in 1918. The officer said to me at that time, he said, "We're going to strike it pretty hard. There's all the Russian troops that was engaging him, they're all ... all the troops from there. The Germans is coming back to our front. Will come back". Well, of course you could do nothing about it. But anyhow, we got a bit of a doing in there too, just quietly. The next thing, they pulled us out of there and marched back to a big sunken road and trucks came along and picked us up from there and we went in to – caught the train. It was all trucks. Twenty men or 40 horses was on the trucks. So we got in these and away we went down to the Somme again. Well, then we went into different places there. I remember going through an orchard one time and another time I landed up in a, in a wheat paddock. Wheat about three foot high it was. Just previous to that we got a lot of - a lot of our men got gas. He put over the gas and it put out a lot of our people. Well, when I took over that part of the line, there was a long – there was no men in it to man the line, and these Germans are all out in this wheat. Just close to me too. I could see the flash of their guns. So I used to put up the gun and I'd fire a few shots through there where that was coming, pick up the gun and run up the trench further and fire a few there. Make them think we got a few people because we couldn't, we wouldn't hold it if he came over. We had no chance of holding him 'cause we'd lost all our men.

But anyhow, we got relieved out of there. We got relieved out of there. Now where did we go? Oh yes, we battled on, battled on to ... till we came to ... another place there somewhere, then we got to – we ended up in Villers Bretonneaux. I remember we got up to Villers Bretonneaux and we were all night trying to get in there. Things was in a hell of a mess. There was carts upside down, guns busted. All sorts of things there. Horses dead everywhere and a few men of course. When we – ah, we eventually got into the line. It was just coming daylight when we



got there. Coming along and it raining all the time and I had a waterproof sheet over the, over the machine-gun. Taking more care of that than of myself. And anyhow, it was just breaking daylight when we got in there and there was a - the Birks, the English Regiment, the Birks. And we ... had a look round and the old captain says, "Well", he says, 'we've got to - we'll have to move out of this. We're too far away from him". Right-oh. So as soon as it came dusk again, of course we put out a patrol to find out where he was. We found him and then we went the next night, soon as it got dark and dug trenches, you see, to - semi, just like semi outposts. Only like enough for each platoon. Then of course it rained like the devil and ... this, in the morning after this, after we'd got there, British planes came over, with the plane and they strafed hell out of us because the fresh dirt was thrown up and ... I was nearly going to have a go at them with my machine-gun but I thought, that's no good. You don't gain anything by that.

So then we used to - finished up - see, there was only - there was nowhere for water to run. It was only just straight out. It was only about three feet deep. You only had one shovel to about ten men. You'd go for your life for a few minutes and then hand it to the next bloke and he'd go. You only got down about three feet. It was too hard. But it give a little bit of cover.

Anyhow, when the British there in - when they came over that time, they wounded two men, right along side of me. One bloke in particular, he said, "I think I'll go. I'll get back out of this". I said, "Don't be silly. You want to wait till it gets dark". "Oh", he said, "I'm going".

And off he went. Of course the sniper got him. I seen him fall. A bloke named Allsop. But the other chap, the other chap - I forget his name now - but anyhow, he waited for nightfall before he went. Anyhow, we gets relieved and we go out and then we come in again, come in to another place. We had a hell of a time in there. I noticed the SOS up on night, that night, and on our right, and they strafed the hell out of us. Our own guns too was firing very short on our

– just missing our trench. You know, no-man’s-land, the SOS Line’s anywhere between ours and his. There’s no particular place for the SOS bombardment, see.

So anyhow, we finished up, we got out of that. Got relieved again, got out and then we came back the next time into a TM trench. It was a TM trench and that’s where they put the nine Americans up with me. There was seven men, a sergeant and an officer and I only seen them once. The officer came out once and he asked me a couple of questions and said, “That his drain over there?” I said, “That’s his drain alright”. So anyhow, the sergeant, he come along, he never said anything at all and he went away. They stopped in their dugout all the time. They never come near us at all. The idea, I was told, was to give them a go on, you know, the duties. What you had to do Anyhow, we got talking and one bloke says to me, one of the Yanks, he said, “Why don’t you go over and get at them?” he said. I said, “You’ll get at them”. He said, “You know, I’m a game man”. I said, “Yes”. He said, “I was in Sing Sing gaol for killing a bloke”. Tried to tell me how brave he was and I learnt from there that the majority of those seven that was there, been in gaol. They were let out to – for the war. So anyhow, when we went out, they went out too but they were to take over when we, when the big offensive comes on 8 August. I only learnt that date after. You wouldn’t, you wouldn’t learn it while you were ... because you never see no papers. But anyhow, 8 August, we learnt then that Foch had took charge of all the forces then. He was Field Marshall. And anyhow, this is where we started moving. So my objective was there. They brought us out and they showed us the photos of the outposts between ours and theirs so ... so I took them into – they said on account of us having a long way to go on open ground, they would fire four smoke shells - a gun, you see. The guns behind would fire four smoke shells and give us a screen to go under. So anyhow, away we goes. The tape went out and away we goes. Well, anyhow, I didn’t know where. You couldn’t see nothing. Anyhow, I run right onto the outpost before I seen it, and the bloke, the bloke said, “Mercy, kamerad”. So anyhow, we got these three Germans and they

sent one bloke back with them. They took 'em back somewhere behind the line. I don't know where they were taken but - 'cause the military police, I've seen them afterwards. They take charge of all the prisoners, take them back. So anyhow, we went on ...

THOMPSON: Where there ever any situations where prisoners like that wouldn't have been taken? They would have just been killed? Do you remember?

NORRIS: Oh, we can't talk German. See, that's my fault. I was going to tell you about something else but I didn't think it worth it. But anyhow, we went right on. Oh, we collected a lot of troops and I nearly got, nearly got mistaken there that time. I went right down onto his front line and I see a mate of mine there and I, I just shied off it. I'd put my foot on it, like a bar, you see. So anyhow, I had a mate, an old mate. He was killed there and somebody told me Bobby Lord was dead there. Well, I thought, well, I wonder could I bury him, you see. I'd known him so long. They said, "Don't be long. We're going to move". I said, "I won't be long". So I went back and apparently it was a mine because a tank ran over it and the cable that was on the track, it was bent and the tank only ran out as long as the chain was ... in a cable, and this stopped it.

And I see Bobby Lord. The shell must have hit him on the top of the head. All his head was - brains and that were all laying out on the ground. So I thought, I can't do anything with him because - I thought afterwards if you start to bury him ... I would have liked to have done it, you know. Knowing him so long. But anyhow, I thought, well, he's got an identification disc, if I took it off what would I do with it. So anyhow, I left him. Away we went back.

So then we moved along somewhere and - but at that time, the - another 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade, that's the Victorians, they came over the top of us. We stopped at the edge of Avencourt and then they went through. They went right over the top of us and they took ground and then of course we had a day or two and then we came into the fray again. We were going over one another until we wound right up - oh, there's a lot of places we'd been but I couldn't tell you just

actually the names of them because there's no cities, there's nothing there. There's just open country. And till I got to this place that'd – there was a town there and I don't know what name it was, but anyhow we got in there and tape was out again of course. Ready for us. So we lined the tape and away we went. We bashed through there until – oh, I finished up in the front line but just got this slip of shrapnel through there. You can see it on that gun shot wound left cheek on that ...

THOMPSON: In your discharge papers?

NORRIS: Discharge, yes. Well, then, that was where I finished the war, there. Course I've jumped a lot of ground because I can't think of all the names. I think a man's getting a bit old to remember a lot of those ... I remember the place but I can't put it into right order.

THOMPSON: Perhaps I could. I presume you went off to hospital, but perhaps I could ask some general questions about life in those few years. How did you feel personally in positions where you'd be going into action?

NORRIS: Oh, you were always happy to go in it. Oh, you was. You wanted to get it over. As far as I seen, most of them blokes, they were quite anxious to get it over. All the people I was with.

THOMPSON: What about fear? Was fear a common ...?

NORRIS: Oh no, no. Oh, no. You didn't care much. You developed that way that you didn't care. Everybody was looking for blighty. They thought if they got hit they'd get away out of it and I see people there that needn't have been in it but they wanted to be in it. One bloke said to me, "Well", he said, "I've had enough of this. I want to get hit and get out of it". And that was the position.

THOMPSON: Were there many self inflicted wounds?

NORRIS: I've seen one. I seen one. I seen one and I knew he was going to. He told me he was going to do it. And when we took this place, on the Somme, he put his hand – well, we

took it off the Germans. And they had a lot of these aluminium water bottles and they were full of some – I dunno – liquid. I don't know what it would be. Anyhow, placed it on top of a gun and see, the bullet gone through that'd go through his hand. It done nothing. It never made no marks. So anyhow, the officer said to him, he said to me, "I think he's done it himself". I never spoke because he reckoned he had a very bad go and I thought it was a bad thing to mix up with anything like this. Stay out of everything. So anyhow, I did. So anyhow, when I got to Sydney one time, I run into him and he put up the hand, ha ha ha. He was a tram driver in Sydney, he told me, this fellow. Oh, a fine stamp of a man too. A man about six foot tall, well built, nice fellow. But he said they put it over him. He said he got charged for something he didn't do and he reckoned he couldn't right it. He said he was finished. But of course whether that's the reason why he did it, I don't know. But he really did do it.

THOMPSON: Did many men have trouble coping with the conditions, do you think?

NORRIS: Well, there's some cunning people that wouldn't be in anything, you know. They'd try and get out of everything. Oh, yes. You find people that don't take to it good.

THOMPSON: What were relations like between the officers and the men in your battalion?

NORRIS: Oh, they wasn't bad. But there still was a little bit between some of them. A little bit between some. It wouldn't have taken much to – we did have a bit of a strike one time, you know. Oh, that was in Plugge Street because we were getting nothing to eat. There was no tucker. We wanted to know and they put over the tale once that the ration party got killed and that was the reason why we never got it. Blown up. Another time came when we was – put up a case about it, they said, "Well, you're out now. We're giving it to the men in the line". When we was in the line, it was just the same. So it caused a bit of trouble but we got out of that anyhow.

THOMPSON: What sort of trouble, when you talk about a strike?

NORRIS: Oh they wouldn't go out, wouldn't go out for parade. Oh no, we were out of the line. They wouldn't revolt in the line but as soon as they got out.

THOMPSON: Was that very common, do you think?

NORRIS: Well, I don't know because you can only go for your own – you don't mix up with other people, see. You only can go for your own battalion. That's our battalion but of course that could have happened in other battalions, I don't know. But I'm speaking from ours. That did happen there.

THOMPSON: In your battalion, did you have many people who would have stood up against those sort of conditions and been leaders in a strike situation like that?

NORRIS: Oh ... I wouldn't trust to any of them but there was some prominent men as far as unions was concerned. But they really thought they had to – the majority thought they had to win the war. They got to finish, you see. They had that at the back.

THOMPSON: So you think there were quite a lot of strong union men?

NORRIS: Oh, yes. Oh, there's a few of them about, yes. There was a few about. Yes. My word there was. Well, I know even going over, I've heard people talking about unions. They wanted us on the boat – some of them that they reckoned they were short of firemen. And I remember one bloke saying, "No", he said, "that's against union principle". And they were only going over. I remember that. But I - in my life, I never seen any unionism in my young days, before the war. There was nothing. I hear a lot of talk about different people but, look, on the farms and that, look, they were doing everything. The hours from when you could see till you couldn't see.

THOMPSON: So did this influence you and your politics at all? Meeting these people in your battalion?

NORRIS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I improved a lot on that then. But really speaking, they never had the bit that they've really got to these days. They never had the bit then, because there's a lot of things I think we could have took action against, we didn't.

THOMPSON: In the army?

NORRIS: Yes. But really, I think it would be different today. But of course, you see, they've changed all that now with this atom bomb, you see. That they can do things without the individual man. It's quite a different situation in war time to what it was then.

THOMPSON: Tell me, did you ever hear any stories or know of any situations where men actually did away with their officers in the line?

NORRIS: Ohh, I think that happened once because – I didn't see this like, but I have heard it in one particular place. I never actually seen it, but I heard that's where he finished him off. But of course he – I knew he was a bit of a go-getter. He'd be with you and against you at the same time. A bit like the DLP and so forth, like them people nowadays.

THOMPSON: What was the feeling like amongst the soldiers in France?

NORRIS: Well, really it wasn't bad in them days. It was really good, ah, as far as sticking to the – but they all was getting bloody sick of what was going on. All sick of getting what's going on. They were ... But Foch, when Foch came to power, it changed things a lot. Because we always knew they'd only taken one or two lines of trenches that we got slaughtered. But once you got out into the open, well, you could be quite different. Well, that's what Foch did. That's why he gained a lot of prestige there amongst the troops. They all thought that he was good. We done – from the Villers Breteaux business we really gained ground then. That war could have been over a lot sooner had it have been worked out the other way. If he'd have been in charge. But with our bloke ... he wasn't worth two bob.

THOMPSON: Who's this? Haig?

NORRIS: Haig. Wasn't worth two bob. No. He'd only take a couple of lines of trenches, They didn't have to worry about the artillery behind. They'd just shorten their range and give it to you, you see. They never eased up on you. But on – when – after 8 August, or from 8 August on, they never give them a chance because they went through, took artillery, everything. We took everything that could come. But – all the men, goods, everything else. Oh, we got up, oh – Mont St Quentin, when we went to Mont St Quentin, we ... we kicked off there to – we had an over the top before we got to Mont St Quentin and we crossed the bridge to Mont St Quentin. Crossed the ... Somme River and attacked there. Well, we got – that's one place, there's a place just come to my mind that I should have had in earlier. Well, anyhow, we cleaned that up and then we ... got it, they marched us round, a bit further round and we got into the German dugouts. Ohh, they was down underground. They had a great place. There was H spring mattresses down there in that place. The heads must have had a fair go in there. But anyhow, that was away back earlier in the piece. You see, these names come to me more now and then, but I can't get them in rotation.

THOMPSON: You said before that the soldiers were pretty sick of it. What was your attitude to the war and to war, and was that changing?

NORRIS: Well, it was. I think it was changing a bit up till, up till 8 August. But after then it seemed to be that we were on the move and doing something. That people could see that there was a chance of something coming out of it. That we were likely to get a win. But the other way, we had no hope of getting a win, because we were just going over one and over the other and ... This is Bullecourt. Oh, well, you see that later.

THOMPSON: What about – what was your attitude to the enemy, to the German soldiers?

NORRIS: Oh, it was quite good. Oh, but not with all. I did see a sergeant major out there on 8 August, give them a belt with the gun, some of the soldiers. But that didn't happen amongst most of them.



But there was one time on the Somme there – now we went out to ... he attacked us. He attacked us and it was on a Sunday morning and we went ... shot us out. I was on that. We went out and got to the front lines, support lines somewhere, and there was one or two Germans there. One bloke was alive and he was shot through the belly. I could see the ... stuff coming out of him, from this close that - was hit in the belly. And he produced a letter. All he could say was 'mother'. But I had a look at it and it's German. I couldn't read a word of it. Couldn't read a word of it. I give it back to him and all he could say was 'mother'. That seemed to be all he could say in English. Mother. But anyhow, I put him on a blanket, there was an old blanket lying there. Put him on that, he yelled with pain of course. Then we took him back and took him down to the doctor. Well, he went away. Of course we don't know any more about him but anyhow, he was in good hands he was, through the doctor. He would get treated. But generally, I think the majority of people was all right to them. 'Cause anywhere that I run into prisoners, they were always well treated, amongst my mob, particular mob. But that's the only occasion ever I seen, was that sergeant major bashed one of the prisoners with a gun.

THOMPSON: Did you, when you met these prisoners in these sort of situations, did you ever begin to wonder why you were fighting them?

NORRIS: Oh, no. No. No. I did later, when the whole war was over and I started to realise and see why Russia pulled out of the war. That's when I started to gain ground. But you've got to realise, in that time and the war there, we never had a paper to read. We had no news. No news of anything. Never told us anything. Everything was kept from us. When I got to know, I learnt pretty quick. Although I never had any education. But that's what made me more anxious in life when I came back. But I would have been in politics, I reckon, more only that I got away into the back country. The bush country, you see.

THOMPSON: You were saying that you got to know about politics and so on. Was that before you came back to Australia, while you were still overseas? [Tape changed to side 2] You were just saying that there was nothing you could learn while you were at the war.

NORRIS: No, nothing. No, nothing.

THOMPSON: Perhaps we could come back to that in a moment, and your political education. Just a few more questions when you were at war. When you were out of the line in France, what sort of a life was that?

NORRIS: Well, the main thing was to try and get somewhere to get a feed. Get something to eat. Perhaps a bit of – you might have had a glass of beer. But the beer over there was as weak as water. You know, it was different than what it is here. We used to go out and our main concern was to get something to eat because we – at anytime they never had much to eat. Well, the best I ever got was four men to a loaf of bread, and that's a spoonful of butter and a spoonful of jam. That's about what you all – only what you got.

Now, in some parts of the line, all we got was stew. And I remember when we came down from ... from Flanders down, that we'd been eating this sour stew and everybody had the diarrhoea. When we'd pull up to a station, coming down to the Somme, there was a – you'd see the pants down and bums sticking up in the air everywhere with the diarrhoea. All along the lines. Round the station, everywhere, nowhere to go. So anyhow, we got down there and we eventually came a bit good. The stew up there was as sour as vinegar. Must have been made days before with the onions or whatever was in it. It was sour. Real sour. Of course, you couldn't stand it. I used to look there and see nothing but bums sticking up along the trench, along the line everywhere, where they had to race out of these trucks and let go.

THOMPSON: Did many men, when you were out of the line, enjoy a few drinks? Was that possible?

NORRIS: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, my word they did. Oh, yes, they all enjoyed a few drinks when they were out of the line. But, of course, it's a lot different to what it is now. The drink over in France, we used to – it was - didn't count for very much. It's really only like some of that beer here that you get. It's non toxicating stuff. It's very very light. You'd drink a mile of it, you know. But I tell you what you did get. They concentrated on the wine mostly. Mulligare. That was port wine and there was Vin Rouge and champagne. Apart from the champagne, most of the other wasn't much good. Champagne was alright. I only had a slight bit of that.

I remember I searched a place one time in Villers Bretonneux looking for something to eat, and in there there was – well, I couldn't understand the names. I used to open – there was tin openers, there was everything there. Oh, shells had come through and bashed it. There was a lot of casks down below full of wine. But I took some of it up to drink up the line but the more you drank of it, made you dry in the mouth. That's no good. None of it was any good.

THOMPSON: Some of the other people I interviewed talked about how the army set up brothels for the soldiers out of the line. Is that true?

NORRIS: Ah, well, in all those places there is brothels, yes. But I think they're for everybody, I don't know. There's – now I looked in Rouen, there's only two places I struck them. Rouen and ... oh, what's the name of the place? It's near [?] anyhow. I can't think, just think of the name. Anyhow, they're the only two places that I struck where there was brothels. But I know that they're in Le Havre and all those places too. They're in all those cities. They're everywhere.

THOMPSON: How do you think the men that had been away from home so long coped with the absence of women?

NORRIS: Oh, well, I think they were all trying to get away somewhere to women. That was their main thing, to get over to get leave. That's why a lot of them liked to get a blighty to get away, have women company. I know some of them left Australia that had girlfriends here that

thought - as I met them here in Australia before I left, you'd think they'd never leave their wives, their girlfriends, but they finished up getting married in England. See, they couldn't resist it. You'll find all that. Then of course, you'll find out the married men they're all chasing round just the same. They're in one place or the other. Either in the brothel or a lady friend somewhere. Oh, yes, that's on. You don't keep men away from that. They're in it somewhere.

THOMPSON: That must have created lots of problems with things like venereal diseases?

NORRIS: Oh, yes. Ohh, well, you see, there's a lot outside – a lot of women outside, you know, that's not in a brothel at all. Don't see it much in France. In England, you do. England is full of it. England's full of bloody women running around everywhere looking for men. Young girls and some of them very young too. But, taking the troops round in general, they want to get into women's company. You get very tired, you know, of all people in amongst men company all the time. Apart from the war, you see. It's not natural for them to be like that.

THOMPSON: Did you have much communication and contact back in Australia, through letters and so on?

NORRIS: Oh, I never got many letters because – I'll tell you what, when I went away, my mother couldn't either read nor write. In fact she died while I was over there. She died when I was somewhere over on the Somme there. But anyhow ...

THOMPSON: Had you heard of the conscription debates and referendums in Australia?

NORRIS: No, we never heard of any of those because they never told us anything. We never seen any papers or anything. I knew more about that when I came back to Australia than I knew there. The troops had a vote on it over there but ... you never knew that till later years where you see it was published, that conscription got beat.

I remember the time when they brought over the sergeants and corporals that was training the troops here in Australia. I got a sergeant major, came with me, they put him in with me on the machine-gun. I took the machine-gun. We got into a place one night and he said to me, he said, "I dunno why they sent me with you because I don't know anything about a machine-gun. You're in charge". That's the very words he said. I said, "Okay. That's alright". So anyhow – oh, no. He was killed that night. He got killed that night. So there was a sergeant came over and he went into another mob there. Oh, he was giving orders and orders and orders that first night there. Ha ha ha, first day there. Oh, he thought he was there all his life. But this sergeant major, he was a real gentleman actually. He said to me, "I don't know anything of machine-guns. I couldn't handle it. I never was ... had anything to do with it". So anyhow – but anyhow, he only lasted that night. Got killed sometime that night.

THOMPSON: Perhaps we could go back to when you were wounded, when you had the shrapnel in the cheek. What were your movements then?

NORRIS: My movements? Well, I went down – course they have a ticket they put on you. The button on the buttonhole there and you – they pull it out every dressing station you go to. I come down to ... Rouen and I ... he took me up and he said, "You'll have to go up to the theatre today". I thought, well, alright, away we go. Course my teeth ... and I couldn't get them to open. That went, the shrapnel in there and he took me up and he took a photo. He said to me, "Don't stretch your legs too far, you'll hit those wires". I was looking down on the bed they had me on, taking the photos of it, and these wires, I could see them spark. And he was rolling, like, a picture frame over me, over here. Taking a photo of me. So anyhow, he found out the shrapnel was in there so he'd have to take me back. He made an arrangement for me to come back and get operated on. So I'm coming in the door to get operated on and I looked at this chap over on this table over here. He must have been hit badly on the belly here. I could see all his belly rolled around and out like a little book standing in front of him. You could

look round the book, this little thing and see what's going on. But anyhow, that didn't affect me. So I went in and I remember she calmly put a thing over your nose. Kept shaking his head to me, he said, "Asleep Aussie?" Course he was an Englishman. "Asleep Aussie?" I said, "No". Anyhow I finished up I was asleep and I woke up and the shrapnel is tied – well, when I did wake up back in the bed, it's tied round my wrist. So, they used to poke a bit of cloth in there and pull it out, keep it clean. I said, "What's all this for?" He said, he said to me, nurse said to me, "That's got to be healed from inside. It can't heal from outside, it's got to heal from the inside out".

So anyhow, I got over to England and I finished up in Bristol. Bristol Hospital and they turned me out of there and I went up to Scotland on leave and I was only there a few days when the Armistice was signed. So I overstayed a day and came back. I thought, now that's a bit of trouble. But anyhow, he didn't say anything. I was only one day over and of course the war had finished. He never asked me any questions, just give me a pass for the day and my train ticket back to the camp. So that's where I went and I finished up – we got home from there.

THOMPSON: How long were you in camp there before you came back to Australia?

NORRIS: Oh, not long. They took all them first. I was one of the first that left. I got away early where others was there months and months before me. I knew Ned Hayes, he come ... Joe Lewis and perhaps a few more of them, but they're two I can pick out now. They'd been there months before I got there, but they were still there when I left.

THOMPSON: Can you remember any stories about soldiers getting restless in camp waiting to go home?

NORRIS: Oh, no, they didn't – couldn't care less. They couldn't care less. They were all running around there just waiting. Oh, no, they didn't care. It was all over and some of them, they knew they were going to get away.

THOMPSON: When the war ended, how did you feel physically?

NORRIS: Oh, I was fit. Very fit. Oh, yes. I went to the bush and took on cane cutting, spiking rails. And I landed up in Bundaberg first and I got a job on the railway lines, putting in a railway line from ... to the Goodnight Scrub and through Gin Gin. And anyhow I left there to go to – cane cutting.

THOMPSON: Perhaps we could come back to that in a moment. Just going back to before you got back to Australia. When you were about to come home from England, did you have any particular plans or aspirations for what you'd do when you came home to Australia?

NORRIS: I never had any because the simple reason is there was no work when I left and I didn't – I was sorta thinking it would be similar to what it was when I left. There was nothing as far as I was concerned. There was a depression from the time I was born till the Second World War. That was my opinion of the whole situation. During the Second World War of course, there was a lot of people getting jobs that never had them before. But that's all gone now.

THOMPSON: Tell me, can you describe the day when you arrived back in Australia?

NORRIS: Yes. I did - I went – I arrived back in Australia and they give us some – we got a bit of a pay on the boat and they took us up to the gardens and ...

THOMPSON: Where was this?

NORRIS: In Sydney. In Sydney. And some people were getting injections and all that sort of thing. I said, "No, I've had all my injections over there and I'm not having any more". That's the time the flu was on. But before we got to that we landed in Western Australia. The flu was on and they wouldn't let us – the doctor came and tested us and he wouldn't let us ashore. He quarantined us for three days in Western Australia. Then they – we had to be fumigated every day. Then we got on to Sydney as I – we first came to Melbourne. Come to Melbourne here. Never landed of course. Just took the troops off there and ... the Victorians and then we went on to Sydney. Well, then we got up to the gardens and people that wanted to get inoculations

and one thing and another. I also was given this thing to put over your nose. Of course we never – I never troubled with that. I just dangled it round my neck. You know. I thought to myself, it's only flu. They were dying over in England, miles of them and we'd taken no notice of it, see. I didn't seem to realise.

So anyhow, I got out to my sister's place and I stopped there. And I did get a job there, on the Water and Sewerage Board. It was ten shillings a day. Had to pay a train fare every day. Ten shillings a day and you had to work Saturday morning. Five and a half days we worked a week, and ten bob a day it was. I left that and I went to the malt works in Thornleigh. I worked there up till I went – my brother came back from the war too and he wrote and told me, he said, "Come to Queensland. The only thing I can see is cane cutting". Course he'd been cane cutting away back many years before he went. So that's where I started off with him. We went to Bundaberg.

THOMPSON: Tell me, when you were first looking for work, when you got back to Sydney, was there much work?

NORRIS: No, there wasn't. I only got in – I think they only gave me a job because I was a returned soldier. They were only back end jobs, you know. Any of them.

THOMPSON: Did many soldiers coming back have trouble finding work?

NORRIS: Oh, yes. Oh, there was no work. First they offered me – I went to Repat first to get a job. They said, "We have a job here ...". Some family somewhere, some place, they wanted some shoe cleaners and things like that. I thought I couldn't take that job on. I didn't want that sort of job.

THOMPSON: Did Repat help you in any other way?

NORRIS: No. No, they didn't.

THOMPSON: Had you got a pension?

NORRIS: No.



THOMPSON: Or a gratuity?

NORRIS: Oh, I got the gratuity. Oh, yes, I got the gratuity. Oh, I got the gratuity, yes. We got – oh, yes, I forget what it was now. It was so much – was it one and six a day or something?

Forget now. While we were away. Course we got it and couldn't cash it for three years and we got interest on it. But anyhow, that went like anything else. Because there was time there was no work and it was a very tough time up round Cairns I'm going to tell you, after the war too. There was a lot of people there looking for work.

THOMPSON: You said when you got the job with the Water and Sewerage Board, you got that job because you were a returned soldier?

NORRIS: I don't know whether I did or not. My sister's husband got that job for me. I didn't get it. He got it. He knew the boss and I don't know how he got it. But anyhow, he told me if I went up there, I'd get a job on the Water and Sewerage Board. So I went and put in and I got it, but it was a pretty – well, you know, they don't last long in those jobs. They're only – you're putting in a new sewer for a short distance. There was no real work in it because there's too many there for a place and not enough jobs. That's why I went to the malt works. But when I got in there and found out that could be so – there was nothing in it. But it was better than the lot. So I got three pounds a week there. Three quid a week and that looked a lot of money in them days, three quid.

THOMPSON: How did employers treat returned servicemen, do you think?

NORRIS: Well, I don't know. Some of them, some of them were all right but I don't – but I never went much, you see. I went for the – well, in that position they asked me when I put in – finished with the Water and Sewerage Board. I had to go to Sydney to get paid off and I went in there and they asked me did they put me off or ... I said, "No". I said I left. So that was all was said in that.

THOMPSON: Was - when the soldiers came back and started going back into the work force, was there any tension with men who hadn't gone away?

NORRIS: Oh, yes, of course yes. They were very crooked on us. Oh very, oh, yes. There was hostility everywhere. I remember in Bundaberg when I got that job there on the railway line, they wanted to know that I was a single man and how I come to get it and all that sort of thing. Oh, yes. Course there was a lot out of work there too.

THOMPSON: Did you believe that soldiers deserved a privileged place in the work force?

NORRIS: No, I don't think so. I think you should take it as it comes. I think you should take it as it comes. I think, myself, I put that down the same as I do with the coloured bar or religious or ... nationality or any of them. I think you're all equal.

Now in Queensland, you know, they put up that - you might remember seeing you're a Queenslander, that they had a bar on foreign labour. Now in the cane paddocks we had a preference. First was, we had ... no, 50 percent. Fifty percent had to be Australian labour and I think 50 percent - I just forget the right figures. Then it come down to 25 [percent]. I know the last of it was 25. Twenty-five percent foreign labour. Well, then all the Italians that came in, they never had any - terrible stupid thing. Fred Pattison had a go at that too. He condemned that and he went there to fight it in - had something to say about it in Ingham. But I just forget about how it all wound up. It wasn't, it wasn't right because I remember in Ayr there, there was a lot of good Italians. Really good unionists. So we all put in to get them back into work, which I believe was quite good. Because if you fetch a person from any other country, he should have the same right as here. If you allow him into the country, he should have the same right as anybody else. I'm a believer in equality, myself, with everybody. Everybody equal. That's the only way that, I think, that people have got to go in one force to get anywhere. Once you split up, you've got nothing.

THOMPSON: Can you remember any tensions over the issue of preference for returned servicemen?

NORRIS: Oh, I do. I do. I remember in the Tully there that the Italians and Greeks and all them different people was on one side of the hall and we were on the other. Oh, there was a lot of different things there that ...

THOMPSON: What about tensions over the issue of preference for returned soldiers?

NORRIS: Oh, well, I, I never seen very much of that. I know it did exist in some places but ...

THOMPSON: Tell me, when you came back and started work after the war, did you ever had any trouble readjusting to work after you'd been away for so long?

NORRIS: No, I didn't. I just – because I was used to hard work before I went to the war. I done everything. I done everything.

THOMPSON: Do you think any other soldiers had trouble fitting back into the work force?

NORRIS: Oh, I think some of them might have too. Yes. Oh, I think some of them would. Oh, yes. But I know when I went to Proserpine, they were all up against you because you were a returned soldier there. In fact, one stage of the game, they come round with a list to see that we – I forget what the list said now, what the document was, now. Anyhow, the returned soldiers would be on the side of peace between the two sides. It was pretty tense there, you know.

THOMPSON: What was the issue in Proserpine?

NORRIS: Oh, well there was a – oh, well, look there was everything on it there. They had everything. The women and all went out on the – they had strikes. There was two women there they called – one called Canite Kate and Dynamite Grace was another one. Oh, well, it was conditions in the hotel. Everything seemed to be upside ... and the mill – there was so many different things. Course I never had a job there at the first. Till I got the job of cane

cutting. I got on the railway line. I done 13 days on that. That's the line between Proserpine and McKay. I done 13 days on that. That's back in 1919. Then I got – the brother was cutting up there and he had no trouble because he'd been cutting there before, you see, before the war. I got in there and I got the idea of cane cutting and so forth. Well, that put me out, you see, because I wasn't – see, a lot of people wouldn't have cane cutting on. They'll have all other jobs but cane cutting was a – you know, work. Lots of people never had it on but all the other jobs was pretty hard. Fact a union I remember - I got a job but I didn't know what it was till one of the union blokes said to me, they said, "You can't take a job off them, it's got to go through the union first before it could, before you could work there". So that was all right. I understood that then and that was that. So there was nothing left, only cane cutting.

Well, I got the 13 days on the railway line. I don't know how I come to get that but anyhow, it was only just starting so first in, first served, I think that's how it was. Anyhow, there was only a bit of map. We done it with a wheelbarrow. That's all it was in them days. Digging up each side and getting the wheelbarrow and carting it up and tipping it. A very slow process. But anyhow, a strike came on. They sacked the one bloke there and that caused a strike, so we left the job and came in and, oh, they were getting nowhere. So anyhow, in the finish they went back to work somewhere or other. I don't know. But anyhow, I finished up. I went cane cutting. I wanted to have a go at this cane cutting, I had to have a go. Everybody was talking cane cutting, I thought I better have a look at it and see what it's like. To get in before the season finishes. So I only had about a months cutting, something like that, before the season finished. So the brother said, "Well", he said, "there's no men available much on the cane cutting that really wants cane cutting so you better come with me". I said, "Alright". Away I went. Went up to this cane cutting.

I got through that and came back to Bundaberg again and I could see that things were tough. There was people out everywhere in Bundaberg. People looking for work everywhere. Then I

get a job, I got a job later on on the railway line, outside Bundaberg that was. Oh, it was only for a short while. In fact, I broke a couple of fingers there too. Plate layers. We used to do – we sort of had to do – 21 sets of rails a day. There was only 14 men, we done everything, you see. We were on a sort of a – you had to do so much work. Of course it don't apply today but that did in those days. But anyhow, you had to learn all these things before you could get further. Then when I got settled down and got into it and attended union meetings and all this sort of thing ...

THOMPSON: When did you first start to get interested in politics?

NORRIS: Ahh, well, that's – well, you had to be interested in Proserpine because I got into a few strikes, into that strike there, that was the first. Then I – that was in 1919 but of course we left the place and I never got into anything then until, until ... I was in Ayr. That would be – ohh, well, I reckon it would be ... '25, '26 really, when you start to get really into it.

Somewhere like that. We went on – course I'd been on committees and things like that.

THOMPSON: This is union committees?

NORRIS: Yes.

THOMPSON: Which union would that have been?

NORRIS: AWU. It was much good but I tell you what, it was only the people that used to force things along. The meetings them times, this is where I learnt the job. In the meetings. You see, you'd have a meeting beforehand and so-and-so was going to move something, so-and-so speak to it, somebody'll second it, someone would speak to it, you see. And this is how we worked it. This used to force the union into things. But of course, they were tough. I've seen the union blokes run out of the hall and wouldn't run it too. They wouldn't carry it, somebody else carried it over. But I could see that that wasn't much good because when the union organiser walked out of the hall, he had all this, what was moved and passed and so forth, he dumped it into the waste paper basket. It wouldn't get any further. But that's what

was done in them days. I could see it was no good because, even though when we voted for people – everybody, you see, would vote for a certain man but he never got there, but you could see why. You could see why. Because they've got the last say and we don't know who's who.

THOMPSON: So did your politics start to change?

NORRIS: Oh, yes. They changed. I finished up in the Communist party.

THOMPSON: When did you join the Communist party?

NORRIS: Oh, now I just can't tell you that but it was ...

THOMPSON: In the '20s or the '30s?

NORRIS: Oh, I think it was in the '30s when I joined the Communist party. Yes, it was in the '30s.

THOMPSON: In Queensland?

NORRIS: Yes.

THOMPSON: Had you done much reading, political reading?

NORRIS: Ohhh, we used to do a good bit at one time but then came the ... "ban the party".

They couldn't print a paper then. So they used to print a little booklet. They called it *The Spark*. Well, you see, everyone had them down their sock. The only place you'd carry them in case you were searched in them days, you see. We used to do everything there in them days by leaflets. We had a gadget down there.

THOMPSON: Where was this?

NORRIS: In Ayr this was. Print these pamphlets, you see, and distribute them to different places. That's how we got all the different things through. But there was a miner – the miners printed a paper. I just forget the name of it now. It was printed. It really, really put the communist stuff out. Really good. It was a good paper. Forget the name of it now. It was sold very well in Queensland. Oh, all the political bodies used to buy this paper. The name's gone

right out of my mind now, what it was. Everybody had that. But I got a book here one time, was lent to me. And Conner Clerken and Doug Holland and all these people were in it. It brought back a lot of memories to me of the party in them days. See, the Communist party has changed altogether now. But the Socialist party is still going good. The only party that I recognise these days.

THOMPSON: Perhaps we could come back to your politics, but could I ask a few more questions about when you came back from the war. Did you ever have any trouble readjusting to domestic civilian life after you'd been a soldier in the army for so many years?

NORRIS: No, I don't think I did. I just took to everything just the same as everybody else.

THOMPSON: Did you ever find that there was a gap between the soldiers and the people who hadn't gone away?

NORRIS: Oh, there is a gap. Yes. Oh, I always found the gap. Oh, the gap was there. I never recognised myself as a soldier afterwards. You know. I never wore badges, I never ... never – the only time that – I was talking to a bloke at Home Hill and he said to me, he said, “Why not join it. Keep the thing going”. “Oh”, I said, “Alright”. Ten bob. So I put it at the twenty-five, 1925. But that was the end of it. I never went to any meetings.

Oh, there was a lot of us there. Oh, yes. We did at one time. I remember all the militants and all that was in the AWU. In the soldiers, they all went along to this turn out. I remember Nugget Holland. He finished up in the Ironworkers somewhere in Darwin. He died there. He was a union organiser up there. I knew him well. We used to cut cane with him, see. And then his other brother, Doug, he run the Communist party in Ayr. Ohhh, for a long time.

THOMPSON: You said that a whole lot of militants went along to a League meeting?

NORRIS: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes and this League bloke that was running the show and doing all the talking was a Church of England minister. I remember he waved that axe at – I remember Doug Holland chipping him about this and I forget just what transpired at this place but there

was a big laugh about it, I remember. But that's the only one ever I went to. I went along this time. But I went along with Nugget Holland and quite a good team of people.

THOMPSON: How was the League regarded?

NORRIS: Oh, the League, oh, it was nothing. Oh, the Returned Soldiers League's nothing. Oh, no. I think the majority of people that's got any brains today won't listen to the League. They're near enough to fascism.

THOMPSON: What about then? In those early days?

NORRIS: Oh, well, none of them really belonged to the – a lot of the militants wouldn't have their – wouldn't have the League on. A lot of people that's really ... of course there is a few. There's always a few everywhere that does. Now, I strike different ... now, you've only got to look here. I read the paper, I see where there's this galah now has - is speaking out against this - for the ban on Russia. What a galah he is.

THOMPSON: Ruxton?

NORRIS: Ruxton, but this other bloke. Oh, I know him well enough too. I know his name well enough. I see it.

THOMPSON: Tell me, you said before that after the war, you never recognised yourself as a soldier. Didn't wear badges and so on. Why was that?

NORRIS: Well, I didn't, I don't – I'm just going along as if I don't belong to anything. But I don't deny that I've been a soldier. But I don't put it out that I'm trying to trade on it. That was my idea. I don't trade on being a soldier. In any way, shape or form.

THOMPSON: Do you think that some people did?

NORRIS: Oh, I really think that some people do. I see them advertising themselves. I've only got to get in this bus, tram here and I see them there dangling the medals and one thing and another. Letting you know that they've been to the war. Well, I – but I don't deny it. I've been to the war and that's it. I don't deny that I've been to the war and while I was there I really



was a soldier, really. If you put it that way. But absolutely now, I seen afterwards that I should never have been there. According to my principles now, I would never be there. Because I think that's altogether wrong. That working people should be fighting working people. But still, I know that there's some of them things that they're just something a bit different to others. They've fought for their country and – but when you talk of fighting ... what we have in the county. There's nothing here to fight for. It would be under socialism but under this system, we've got nothing.

THOMPSON: You said that you joined the RSL just for a short while. Was there much hostility in those early days, after the war, in the '20s, between members of the RSL and say, other diggers who didn't join it?

NORRIS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There is. There is. There is some of the them because – I remember in Ayr there, that a lot of them said that there's only a few people getting anything out of it and they were a bit hostile on some of them. There's a lot of people too that marched that don't belong to the League at all. I don't know. But I only joined it for that time. And that's the only meeting ever I went to that time when – a few militants went to that turn out. I don't know what that was. I can't make out what it was. Whether it was really a meeting of ... whatever it was. We were all there but – apart from that I never attended ... I've got a badge there that I got in 1925. I only bought it because I knew this bloke but I never attended any of their ...

THOMPSON: In those early days after the war, did you ever go along to ANZAC Day parades?

NORRIS: No, I don't go to ANZAC parades.

THOMPSON: Did you ever, after the war when you first came back?

NORRIS: No. No. I never. I've never been in an ANZAC parade.

THOMPSON: Why was that?

NORRIS: Well ... oh, I tell you, once I did, in Brisbane. That's right. In Brisbane I went along to one. But apart from that, I haven't been to any. Never been in it.

THOMPSON: Can you think of any reason you didn't want to go?

NORRIS: Well, I don't want to ... no, I don't want to advertise myself as a soldier, really. No, I always think now that people think we're looking for sympathy and that's why I don't go. I think that we should be all the same. I don't believe it was any different because one went to a war and one didn't go. As far as I'm concerned, you see, you've got to look at it this way. That all people have to live. If you're gonna make a division between the people, you're not going to get the results.

THOMPSON: When you came back from the war, did you talk much about your war experience?

NORRIS: No. Only when others asked questions, that's all. No, I never talked about the war at all. Only where I was asked something or if I met a man that was in something, like with me, I might have discussed some things. Like, I know a bloke out here, he's just come out of the hospital. A friend of – a mate of Fred Farrell's. Also a friend of mine.

THOMPSON: Fred Smith?

NORRIS: Fred Smith, yes. I talk to him. But of course, him and I, we were talking about different things. He brought things up the other day when I went to see him in hospital, and we quoted on a few things. But apart from that we don't talk outside because it's not interesting. I don't think it's interesting much to people.

THOMPSON: Did you ever, after the war, read much about the war?

NORRIS: No, I didn't. I've never read much about the war at all.

THOMPSON: What about CEW Bean, the official historian? Did you ever read him?

NORRIS: No, I never read that. No, I never read that. I tell you what, I looked at the picture of Churchill when he put it on there. But that was a good program because it showed up that the

Russians - how they slaughtered the – this is the Second World War, I mean. How they slaughtered the Germans. Well, of course anybody that knows that Russia had a peace pact with Germany before they attacked. See, they broke that so I got the inside of that and I seen there what they did do. They done a good job. In fact we were one time - I was in the Communist party at the time there in Queensland when they ... the militants were trying to get them to open the second front. When Russian was fighting the whole war on their own. You see, this is where I follow along the line of that - see, because Russia lost 20 million people in that war and here you'll hear them saying here, only for the Yanks, we would be ... saved Australia. You see, it don't work out.

THOMPSON: When you look back at your war experience now, do you look back on it as a positive or a negative?

NORRIS: Well, actually I don't – I look back on it as a blunder really. The First World War. It was really – as I see it now – it was a capitalist war.