

FREDERICK FEBEY
FIRST WORLD WAR

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH FREDERICK FEBEY, 15TH BATTALION, 4TH
BRIGADE, FIRST AIF; Recorded by David Chalk

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Then I'm going to write about the experiences of the POWs in Germany.

I don't know nothing about that.

That's my grandfather. That's him as a POW. The other three men are English.

In the middle?

In the middle at the back.

Oh yes.

You see the two together.

Yes, yes.

He was captured at Bullecourt with about 1,000 other men.

Oh yes, yes, yes. I missed out on that.

You were lucky. Not many of them got ...

Bullecourt, Albert. We went in on at Albert and we had to go to – there were all balloons all up along and we was marching up in platoons. I said, "This is no good. They're Fritz's balloons. They'll be getting the hell knocked out of them." But we hadn't marched up far before bang, bang and the first platoon was knocked clean out.

Was it?

And I said, "Extended order boys. I'm out of this." So we went up the line next, scattered about all over the place.

Yes, that's interesting. You were commissioned, were you?

We'd been in the line for about a fortnight or three weeks, and they took us out. And we was ordered back into the line again. I said I wouldn't – I refused to go. I said, "I'll go, but I'll take those malingers from headquarters. I'll take them in and let them have a go."

I can understand that.

I never bothered after that. If a fellow gets knocked back like that, I never bothered.

I've met a few fellows who were offered commissions and wouldn't take them because they would rather stay with the men.

The infantry, yes.

What do you remember about my grandfather? You were going to tell me something about Broadmeadows, I believe.

We were target shooting at Broadmeadows, and there was a chap in my company, a chap named Mulrennan from Queenstown, and he had no roof in his mouth.

He was born like that, was he?

He was born like that, yes. And he used to talk funny. We was at target practice and I was with Mul, and I couldn't hit the target. So the sergeant major said, "Here, take this." He gave him a live cartridge, and he said, "Go and shoot your 'b' self." So Mul went over behind a log and we was there - and Bang! He said, "That silly so-and-so has gone and shot himself!" So we went over, and looked over the log, and here he is. He said, "Missed again, sergeant major!" But he never went away with us. I don't know what happened to him.

When did you join up? Can you remember the month?

No.

I suppose it would have been about July or June 1915. There's no worry about that.

I think it's in there somewhere.

You'd have gone down to Claremont camp first of all, wouldn't you.

Yes.

What was it like down there?

(Laughs) It was all right, but have you been there since? It's all trees and everything. It's a golf course there now.

Is it? You were attested on 14th September 1915 and you were twenty-one and nine months.

Yes.

You'd have joined, say, August 1915.

Somewhere around about that.

My grandfather, he was 4363.

I was 4372.

Yes, you'd have been in the same -

In the same crowd, yes. How did you get to know me?

What happened was that, doing this book was something which happened rather by accident. I just became interested in the story. My grandfather died in 1963.

Oh yes.

I didn't know anything about the story at all and while I was at the Australian War Memorial last year, I thought that my grandfather had been in this Battle of Bullecourt. They had a model there you see, and it sounded as though it was quite an event. I decided to look into it and I discovered this really interesting story. And since then I've been researching it and I looked at the embarkation roll for the 15th Battalion, for the 13th Reinforcement and I noted the names of various men from the Coast who'd enlisted, and I simply wrote a lot of letters

earlier this year to the various places. In looking in the phone book I noted that the Febeys were still living at Claude Road, Sheffield, and I thought they were probably relatives. You're the only person I've turned up alive.

Oh!

But I have found a set of letters by Lieutenant Wadsley. He was in charge of the 13th Reinforcement. He was killed.

Yes. He was killed. He was a nice fellow. That's the first time I've heard his name since I came back from the war.

I've located a set of letters which he wrote at Claremont and Broadmeadows, and on the ship across. And in Egypt, and in fact right up until he was killed. He was killed at Mouquet Farm.

That's right. When we went to Egypt, we went down on the Suez Canal, guarding against the Turks.

Did you go down to Dervesoire, down below Serapeum?

No, no. We stayed at Serapeum there until we boarded the train for France. I can see it now. They were cattle trucks and they were full of cattle muck about that deep and we were sitting in this.

Really.

Oh gee, yes.

So there was actually cattle dung in the carriage.

Yes, they never cleaned it out or anything. I remember sitting there in that stuff and thinking, "Oh gee." I wondered what was coming next. Anyhow, we used to guard the Canal and when the boats came through there was a charge down to get a bit of buckshee. That was anything that they would throw out to you. It had to be something that was waterproof. So we were sitting there having our lunch, having a feed, and here comes this big boat, and no-one's was game to go in, so I flew in, clothes and all, and got out there, and I got as many as I could hold of tobacco, cigarettes and tins and that. I got out there and I had an armful and I was kicking myself ashore and I got on to the shore and I suppose I had five tins. How many cigarettes do you think I got out of the five tins?

I suppose there'd be about a hundred in each tin, would there?

Yes.

So you should theoretically have had 500. And there was only one. What happened?

The others grabbed them! We were dying for smokes, you know.

Didn't the Army provide you with tobacco?

Sometimes you got it and sometimes you didn't get it. It was very seldom you got it and we had to go without. And they had no canteens there to buy it.

No, that's right. They didn't down on the Canal, did they?

No. I'll tell you a bit of a story. When they came off the Peninsula, I had an uncle there who put his age back. He was too old to go in the first place. They gave him a job of driving the mess carts. That was all the officers gear.

Was he a Febey, your daughter said?

Yes.

He was a Febey, yes. He was in the 15th Battalion too?

Yes.

What was his name?

Harry. He had bad legs and there was a sick parade, you see, when they all came off. The other fellow said, "You old boys, you can go and see the doctor. Colonel McSharry was there. The bloke let the horse go. And away she went, the whole cart and crockery and clothes. He turned around and said, "Run a bit." "Well you are a bastard," he said. The Colonel didn't know what to say, and he laughed and he looked round and he said, 'What did I hear you say?' I said, "He was a bastard sir and so he is."

That's okay, that's a good story.

I'll never forget that.

The horse went through the mess.

Yes, it went galloping off.

It had a cart behind it, did it?

Yes, the cart carried all the officer's plates and crockery and everything.

That's what fell off as it went.

Yes.

And he was going down on sick parade.

He was going on sick parade.

Like your ...?

The way he said it, you know. He had no education and he said, "Who are you? You hold my horse." No horse. This colonel. I'll never forget the colonel. He turned round and turned his back and it was funny. That was at Serapeum.

I've been talking with a lot of people now and many of them of course haven't been talking about the war for years, but I've been really surprised by the quality of the stories that I've been recording.

Well, you would be.

Did you ever know somebody called Ernest Etchell? He used to have a nickname Shiny Etchell. He was a Lewis gunner.

No. I wasn't mixed up with them. The Lewis gunners would be on their own.

Yes. You may not remember any of them. There are not many of the 15th Battalion men left in Queensland.

In the first place, the original 15th Battalion from Tasmania. They got too greedy and they had the 52nd and the 12th, and they couldn't reinforce them.

No, that's right.

See, well, I went into the Queensland. The Queensland was all 15th mostly.

Yes, there were three companies that were Queenslanders, or Northern Rivers, New South Wales, weren't they. And D Company had mainly Tasmanians, but there some were Victorians.

Some Victorians, yes.

There's still a Bill Brown who's alive. He's the president, but his memory is going fairly badly now.

Mine's not too good now.

Everybody's a bit the same, they tend to forget what they are doing.

I'm trying to think of the places we were in.

I know the history and I've got the history here so I can help you there.

We went and guarded the Canal. We were in Egypt for a while and they kicked us off down on the Suez Canal. After that they boarded us on this cattle truck and we went to France. But I can't think of all the places we were in battle. I know we were in Albert first – Al-ber.

Everybody calls it Albert.

After that we went into Pozieres, Villers-Bretonneux.

I've actually got some sort of a listing here of what the dates actually were, where the Battalion was week by week. So I'll be able to help you a fair bit there.

You've got it week by week.

Yes, more or less week by week anyway.

What do you want to know any more for then?

I want to get your stories, your side of it and what you can remember about it. The names of some of the men that I know in Queensland. There is a Charles Devers, he was a fourth reinforcement. You probably wouldn't have known him because he spent a lot of time in

England. He got gangrene on the Peninsula. There's a Bill Bradnock. He was first of all in B Company and then in C Company, so you probably wouldn't know them. He was an original, landed on the 25th. There's an Albert Marshall, you may know Albert. He was a signaller.

A signaller?

Yes, he's still alive and he's living in Ulverstone.

He lives in Ulverstone.

Yes. He was taken prisoner at Bullecourt.

Yes.

I've met a James Wheeler. He was an A Company man. He's ninety-five, the same age as you. And there's a Herbert Holden. I've done an article on Anzac Day 1916 which was commemorated at Serapeum. There were water sports in the afternoon and so on. What's the name of the person you know in Queensland?

I don't know.

There's a George Soden, who was secretary of the 2/15th Battalion. He's been taking care of the affairs of the Angels Remembrance Club.

Yes.

Albert Marshall did go on that. He's passed away. Joe MacDonald, he's died now. Do you know Joe McDonald? He was the secretary of the Angel's Remembrance Club for some time. He passed away.

He passed away.

Yes.

That's a long time ago, you know. Makes you wonder if there's any alive.

I've done an article, and there'll be some portraits of the men that I found in Queensland, or most of them. There will be some photographs of them.

They all finished up in Queensland.

Couldn't reinforce the 15th – the D Company.

13th Reinforcements.

(Incidental background conversation with the daughter)

He was still alive at that time. That's his address.

It was his address.

Was his address yes, he's passed away now. Do you know of any other 15th men in Tasmania?

No, I don't now. Young Dave, see he was in - he's gone hasn't he.

He was your brother.

No, he was an uncle.

He was a half uncle.

Yes, he was younger than me.

I think I've been told wrongly by the person over at Claude Road. I think she might have told me that he was your brother, but anyway, it doesn't matter. I think I've been told wrongly by the person over at Claude Road, I think she might have told me that he was your brother but anyway, it doesn't matter.

DAUGHTER: I got in touch with his daughter to find out if she had any relics of the past. Evidently, her son came in the other day and they'd shifted house. But he had sketches and photos of the war. I asked for anything of the war years. They had some big framed pictures of the battles. They sold them when he was leaving Brooklyn. I can't remember who to but it was someone who was somebody in Australia.

Yes.

Does he have a photograph of himself in his service uniform or not?

DAUGHTER: Yes.

That's the most important thing.

DAUGHTER: My brother in Hobart has a photo of Pop in a frame and his sister would have been the one that took it but she died. But she had some photos.

They are down in Hobart, are they?

Yes.

And the photos are down there, are they? I'm going to Hobart.

Do you know practically all the places where we were?

I've got to help you a bit with that, yes. I know whereabouts you went progressively, week by week or month by month in fact. I am really more interested in anything that you can remember from that time.

I can't remember much, it's too long ago.

Yes, it's a long time ago, I know. What was Claremont camp like when you first went down there? What did you do?

The camp. It was a great place for a camp. See, it only had a narrow neck at the bottom, and three could guard all that island. If they wanted to get off, they could swim. I swam late. I went AWOL and went into Hobart and instead of being home at ten o'clock, I walked all the way from Hobart, right to Claremont.

Really.

And when we got there the guards wouldn't let us through. So I stripped off and put my tunic and belt on my shoulders and swam across the neck. I didn't want to be put in clink. I was out on the Domain, I know that, with some girls.

Were you? And what sort of training did they get you doing at Claremont? How long were you down there for?

Not long.

A couple of weeks or a month?

About a month we were there.

About a month.

Yes. Then they bundled us over to Victoria, Broadmeadows.

How did you go across to Victoria? On the *Loongana*, was it?

I think it was the *Loongana*, I think it was. It was a pretty fast old boat. When we went, when we left there to go to Egypt, they bundled us into the boat and packed us in that tight you could hardly breathe.

Really.

I was right up in the point in the front and I thought I was going to die. I couldn't get me breath. I was dead when I got out of the thing.

That was the *Demosthenes*.

Ah, yes, the *Demosthenes*, that's the one.

What was it like?

All right. Only you never had much chance because you were hardly in there and you were out again, weren't you. I don't know how many hours it took to get it, it wasn't long.

You are talking about the *Loongana*.

The *Loongana*, yes.

No, the *Demosthenes* was the one -

Yes, how do you know that?

I found out because my grandfather went on that one.

They bundled you in too.

You were really cramped on the *Loongana*.

Oh yes, yes.

What was the reason for your moving from Claremont to Broadmeadows?

I don't know, perhaps a better place to train, I don't know why it was. Anyhow, it's a good place for training.

Broadmeadows?

Yes. Another one who stuck in my gizzard was that Mulrennan.

Going on target practice.

"Missed again sergeant major."

That's a great story. And what can you remember about Broadmeadows? It was pretty basic, wasn't it there?

Yes, it was all training there, and they were forcing you all the time until you got away. You were drilling all the time.

(END OF AWM TAPE ONE - SIDE A)

(START OF AWM TAPE ONE - SIDE B)

What sort of drill?

Marching full pack, and galloping, and rifles - targets, and into bags. Bayonet drills.

Did you get into Melbourne?

Yes.

They let you out into Melbourne.

Yes. I had a couple of leaves in Melbourne. It was only a night, a trip in.

You had to be back at ten o'clock.

Oh by Gees. You'd be crimed, and I didn't like to be in this crime business.

What were you doing before you enlisted? Whereabouts were you?

Queenstown, not Queenstown, Zeehan, in the mine there.

You were in the mine.

Yes.

What were you doing there?

Drill work, like a drill and pick and shovel and that sort of thing.

DAUGHTER: He was a good 'geli' man.

Your daughter says you were a 'geli' man.

Yes, I've had a lot of experience with gelignite.

What prompted you to join up?

I thought it was my duty. And I wasn't going to be left behind to be a malingerer or something like that.

No.

They bundled you off pretty quick once you did join up.

Did they?

I wasn't long down here.

At Claremont.

They got that beautiful now. There wasn't a tree or a shrub or anything on that when we were there.

Wasn't there.

Now it's beautiful. My son looks after the golf course. You wouldn't know it was the same place.

When you went across to Broadmeadows, were you called the 13th Reinforcements at that time, or not?

Yes.

You were.

Yes. I enlisted at Sheffield. Do you know where Sheffield is?

Yes, you enlisted at Sheffield, did you. You came home to enlist, did you?

Yes.

You came home from Zeehan.

I tried to get in there but they wouldn't have me.

Why not?

Bad teeth. So I got them out.

Then you came home to Sheffield.

I came to Sheffield and enlisted then and got through. Broadmeadows was a good spot to be there. It was alright for training and everything.

What were the living conditions like at Broadmeadows?

Not bad.

How were you housed there?

In tents.

(Incidental conversation)

What friends did you have from the 13th Reinforcements, or from that time from Claremont and Broadmeadows? Did you make any friends at Claremont and Broadmeadows whom you can remember?

No, I was just a soldier. They're gone, what I remember, that I used to knock about with.

What were their names? Can you tell me something about them?

Dave Febey, as I told you, him and I went away together. When we went to France, he went over to England, and he married a girl over there, and he brought her back home. He's gone.

Yes, I heard he had died. What was David Febey doing when he enlisted? Was he farming, or not?

He would have been in telegraph lines. He died in Wynyard didn't he?

DAUGHTER: Yes. He was younger than you, I think.

Oh yes.

DAUGHTER: And he was a half uncle.

That's strange, how can he be a half uncle?

My grandfather married a second time.

I see, yes.

(Background conversation from the daughter)

DAUGHTER: But there were other people in Claude Road enlisted wasn't there.

Oh Crickey, yes, there were all the Georges - Ernest George, and Richard George, and Teddy George. They enlisted.

DAUGHTER: There's none of them alive.

They enlisted. Gillies, I don't know how many enlisted.

DAUGHTER: Elliotts, were there any of the Elliotts?

Elliott, yes. Tom Elliott. He was a young 'un, that fellow.

Was he in the 15th Battalion?

No. I think he was in the 40th.

Was he? Yes, he may have been, yes.

In the 40th. I could tell you a bit of a tale about him.

What was that?

Him and I were down in Burnie drinking and he had his trousers up his leg like that. And the barmaid said, "Do you want some treacle put on your trousers to coax your trousers down?" He put two bob on the what's-its-name, and said, "I bet that'll coax yours down any time." You have some good times and bad times, don't you.

Yes. What can you remember about going over on the *Demosthenes* from Melbourne, to Suez?

I can remember it, that's all. I know who went on it.

DAUGHTER: What was the food like?

It wasn't bad. No, the food wasn't bad. Mostly stew.

Whereabouts were you sleeping? I suppose you were in hammocks, were you?

Yes, hanging around or on the floor or anywhere.

Did you get seasick?

No. We went from Egypt to Marseilles. They was all sick there. I got up and they battened us down, it was that rough and I sat up all the way across, up the stairs, getting up into it. It was an old German pleasure boat and you had to walk down and it was all open in underneath. I got up in there and I stopped there or I'd have been sick too. You couldn't walk down below without treading in it. It was an awful mess.

Whereabouts was this?

Going from France to England. Oh, she was rough.

Yes, across the Channel.

Oh my crikey. I'd have been sick if I hadn't stopped up there getting a bit of a breeze from up above. I've never been sick on a boat. But all the poor wretches.

The *Demosthenes* went to Colombo in Ceylon. Can you remember anything about going there?

No, I can't. We went to Colombo.

Yes. I actually have a diary written by a 14th Battalion man who went on that ship. I'll have to go and get it and bring it in and show you. When you were at Broadmeadows, did they allow you home for Christmas before you went, or not?

No.

You were in Melbourne for Christmas, were you.

Yes, no, we never come home. Mulrennan, I often wondered what ever happened to him. I'll never forget it. The old sergeant major said, "That silly cow has gone and shot himself. " He gave him a

live cartridge and he goes over this log and he said, `Missed again, sergeant major." That always stuck in my memory.

Did you go on the desert march from Tel-el-Kebîr?

Yes, that was awful.

What do you remember about that?

We just marched and that's all. I'll tell you what, when we got to the Canal, I threw my equipment off, all my gear, and dived in the Canal and got seven days field punishment carrying a pack of proper sand.

Did everybody you went into the Canal get that?

I don't know. There was only one or two of us who did, I think. The tents were all up and had we crossed over, as soon as we got over the other side I stripped, and jumped into the Canal and had a good old swim. A got seven day of field punishment. A pack of sand. My god, it was heavy too, she was heavy, a dead weight. Every day if we got a chance we'd swim across the Canal, backwards and forwards. If we saw a boat coming along we'd get all these cigarettes. It would be dinner time and we'd all be sitting there. I dived in, clothes and all.

Why didn't you take your clothes off?

No time. The boat was going past and the people on the boat, when they see me diving in they were throwing me tins of cigarettes, Capstan cigarettes. I got one out of a heap of them. I did some silly things.

What was the general performance of the men on the march down from Tel-el-Kebîr to Serapeum? Do you remember the New Zealanders coming out and so on?

No, I remember them falling out on the march you know. I remember that. That was only a bet. That was the officer's bet.

Was it?

Yes. I think some of them died on the march.

There were rumours of that, yes.

But it was an officer's bet, and the officer's bet that they march us through there and they did it. This is bringing all the memories of everything back to me.

When you arrived at Port Suez, you caught the train from there, didn't you?

Yes, we caught the train, yes.

And you went up to Zeitoun.

Yes. How the hell did you know all this?

I know the story fairly well. I'm going to write a book about it so I have to know. What do you remember about Zeitoun, being in training there?

Not much, I can't remember much. Just a memory and that's all.

Did you go into Cairo?

Too right! We saw all the brothels, like that. Oh yes. They were good me. The place is all right, you know, but it wasn't fit for a soldier to be there.

No.

I'd tell you what I'd like. I'd like to see Zeitoun now.

Yes, a number of men have said that to me.

Oh, I'd like to see France and Belgium.

You've never been back again.

I'd like to see the places we were in. It would be very interesting.

Yes. Apparently Pozieres has been turned into farmland again and they've built a new village there.

I wonder what they did with Albert. It was a cathedral, you know, it was hanging – Have you see the picture?

Yes, the statue that was leaning over.

Yes, they hit it and knocked it. But they never knocked it off. It was there when I left, hanging there. Oh yes. It would be interesting and very nice to go back and see all those places. You wouldn't know them, would you?

I think you probably would, to some degree. I don't think that it's changed that much, no. Some places have but other places are still very much the same.

Yes. There was some good farmland there. This uncle of my who went there, he was a little bit before me, and when I got to Cairo, he was on Lemnos, and he came off Lemnos and he had this old mare and cart and all the officers gear. I said to one of the chaps, "Do you know Harry Febey, have you seen him?" I said, "He's in the 15th." They said, "No, stand here and you'll soon hear him!"

What was his cart? What sort of job did he have?

A spring cart, and he had all these boxes and trunks and things of the officers.

Was he in the transport section?

Yes. They said, "Stand here for a minute and you'll soon hear him." He used to play a lot of nap.

I've never heard of it.

Cards. This was a game they played. He was a terrible gambler and he never done any good. So they said, "Stand here for a while and you'll hear him." I wasn't there for long before I could hear him roaring. They said, "Here he is." I went over to him and as soon as I got over there he stuck his mitts into me for money. He was broke.

He cleaned me out and still he was losing.

DAUGHTER: Harry lost a leg, didn't he? Did Harry lose his leg?

No, that was young Harry. Old Harry, he put his age back, and he wasn't fit to go when he went. He put his age back, but young Harry lost his - Harry Febey – he was at Sheffield. He got his leg shot off up here.

Oh, did he.

And his brother got shot through the kidneys. That was the two of them they killed.

They were all in the 15th Battalion were they?

No, in the 40th.

He was in the 40th, right. There's three Febey's in the 15th Battalion. Here you are if you want to use this.

Dave Febey. That's Hetty's father. Frederick Febey, that's me! Who's the other one? Bill Febey.

DAUGHTER: Henry Walter, Henry. Bill was away, wasn't he?

Yes. He's dead now too.

Henry Walter (Febey), that was Harry, was it?

Yes. I don't know whether he's dead or not, Bet. I know he got his leg shot off.

DAUGHTER: We presumed that was it.

Henry Walter.

DAUGHTER: Yes.

That's Harry.

DAUGHTER: What battalion was Bill in then?

He must have been in the 40th.

There was a Bill Phoebe.

Yes.

He was away. Isn't he in there?

No, he's not in there. There's a David, yourself and Henry Walter.

Bill must have been something else, then.

There's only three of you and Henry Febey, he went earlier. His regimental number was 1180.

Yes, that was the Henry Febey, he was the old fellow.

Yes, that's what I thought.

Yes, that was old fellow. He was the one who put his age back..

How old would he have been - fifty?

I reckon he would have been. He put his age back when – he was a very short of a bloke. They couldn't tell his age.

What did he do before he enlisted?

I don't know, just jack of all trades I think, and master of none.

What about Anzac Day itself, on the Canal? Do you remember that day when you had the water sports and so on?

No, I can't remember.

Not many people remember that.

No, I don't think we had Anzac Day.

You did on the Canal.

I don't know. I can't remember.

Anyway, when I send this article to you, you will be able to read about it. When I send this article that I've done at Serapeum, you will be able to read a letter written by a 14th Battalion man who was there that day. That will bring it back to you.

I can't remember one day from the other.

What sort of training were you doing at Serapeum?

Just ordinary bayonet practice and galloping about with packs on our backs.

You didn't go down to Dervesoir. You never left the camp at Serapeum.

No.

Not till you went to Alexandria. Some members of D Company went down to Dervesoir. I know my grandfather went down there.

What was on there then?

I think there was a ... it was on the Bitter Lakes and there was just a bit of a fort down there that they stayed at. They were guarding against the Turks still.

Yes, like we were on the Canal.

Yes.

But we never saw any Turks there. They had a poor go on the Peninsula. They had a rough go there. They run straight into it. Shot up. Right into the shore and shot to pieces before they knew where they were.

What was the attitude of the men in the Battalion who had been on the Peninsula when you arrived there?

They never talked about it.

They didn't talk about it?

No, never talked about it. I tried to find out and they wouldn't talk about it. They reckoned it was hell on earth. That was all they described it as. It was just the same when we went into France, into battle there. They marched us up in platoons, and here's the Fritz's balloons all along the horizon.

And I said, "By God, if they are Fritz's balloons, we are going to get hell." And by crikey, they wiped two platoons out.

Was this in D Company or in the Battalion as a whole?

Just the Battalion. There was no hope for it. I said, "By Gees, they're not getting me. I'm getting out before I'm unlucky. Two or three of us went, and you know, we scattered out and got up into the trenches and never got hurt. Fancy that for officers. Some of them weren't fit to be officers

No, I don't think they were either. When you come across that sort of thing.

They should have known better, when a damn private can tell them what to do to get out of it.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

You are writing a book on it?

Yes.

I'd be pleased to see that.

(Incidental conversation)

What happened at Pozieres when you went in there? The Battalion made some attacks at Pozieres, didn't it?

Yes. Two or three places I can remember. There was a Villers-Bretonneux. There was Polygon Wood. Do you know that?

Yes.

I can't remember. All I know is there were a lot of places. Sometimes I lie in bed and think and I can think of a lot of them.

Yes.

Then they go away.

You were a private, I suppose, for a certain time.

Yes. I never kept mine long.

Your rank?

Yes. I never kept it long. I told them to take the malingerers up and that was the end of me. I didn't refuse duty, I said, I would take all the bloody malingerers up that they had around the headquarters, but I wouldn't take the men that had been in there for weeks and weeks and weeks.

That's understandable.

I didn't have them long. I can't think of the places now.

Anyway, you went across from Alexandria to Marseilles, in these cattle trucks.

Yes.

You went on the *Transylvania*.

Yes. I'll never forget that, the cattle truck.

What did you do? Did you actually have to sit down in this dung.

Sit down there.

Put your pack down and sit on your pack.

Yes, sit down there. I've been trying to think how long it took us to get there,

You did it in a day, I think. You left in the evening, didn't you?

Yes.

It was a night trip and you arrived the next morning.

All night travelling, I think it was.

Yes.

(Incidental conversation from daughter)

What does it say? I can't read it.

It says: 'To Bert, from Fred, wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy new year'. I'd say that would be sent from Melbourne just before you left.

Yes, that's about what it is.

DAUGHTER: He had a younger brother, Bert. He only had one brother. How much younger was Uncle Bert than you?

Two years and two months.

DAUGHTER: He was blown up during the First World War. He had a funny leg and one arm.

I wish I was as fit a man as I was then.

Do you remember the train journey which you had from Marseilles? You went up north from Marseilles on the train.

That was in that cattle truck and all the dung that we were sitting in.

That was to Alexandria, I think. But when you went from Alexandria you went across to Marseilles in France.

This was on the boat when they jammed us in. I don't know whether it was when they jammed us in there so tight we could hardly breathe or when it was when we went to Williamstown, I thought. I don't know.

Yes, it's a long time ago, I know.

It's really too long ago to remember.

Yes, it's a long time ago.

DAUGHTER: Did you ever do any day marches, Pop, whole day marching?

Whole day marching? Yes, marching from Cairo to the Suez Canal.

DAUGHTER: That was desert, was it?

Yes, that was all an officers bet, that was, an officer's bet. A lot died on it.

I think that they may well have done. I don't know whether from the 4th Brigade, but from some of the other brigades they may have done.

Yes, and the 4th Brigade too.

DAUGHTER: There were a lot of mistakes made, weren't there?

I have got memories that are forgotten.

I know it's a long time ago. I've still been helped a fair bit by a lot of the men I've been talking to. I don't know how you're going to go with this. It's only a period of about a year that I will be writing about, in Egypt and France, because I'm also going to be telling the story of the prisoners, you see.

Yes.

DAUGHTER: Have you been in touch with other prisoners?

I've found three of them, yes.

You've found other prisoners of war?

Yes, I've got three of them.

Have you?

Yes. Two 15th Battalion men and a 13th Battalion man, all three of them captured at Bullecourt.

At Bullecourt.

Yes.

DAUGHTER: Is that the place you ran away from?

I got away from the Germans anyhow.

Whereabouts were you when Bullecourt was being fought? Were you in reserve or not?
When the Battalion went into Bullecourt, whereabouts were you at that time?

In that front line.

You were in reserve, were you?

Yes, in the front line.

DAUGHTER: How come you got missed out then, Pop?

I don't know. I was ugly, I suppose, and they didn't want anything to do with me.

DAUGHTER: Probably one of those times you missed again.

I had a sharp bayonet, and they don't like that.

DAUGHTER: He's got a pair of binoculars he took off a German.

Has he. You've got some binoculars, apparently.

I don't know what happened to them.

DAUGHTER: They're here. He took them off a German

A German, yes. I thought I'd left them at Claude Road. I didn't know I had them.

DAUGHTER: They're in safe keeping. What about your experience of being a prisoner of war?

One is living at Ulverstone.

DAUGHTER: That's the Marshall?

Yes. One is in Bourke in New South Wales and the other one is in Brisbane. I probably will find more. I'm still looking for 14th and 16th Battalion men.

There were some in Brisbane, some of the old hands. There was a Bill Crisp and those fellows. They went back home, I know, to Queensland or up in Brisbane somewhere.

I've come from Brisbane. That's where I've been living.

Cairns is one, Bill Crisp, he was in the 15th Battalion. He lives at Cairns. He wrote to me after he came back, but he only wanted to borrow money and I forgot about him. Another little fellow, I forget his name, Keith somebody, he was a little short fellow. He's in Cairns too.

There most probably are other 15th Battalion men. It's just difficult to find where they are.

Yes. Lieutenant Wadsley. He was in the 15th.

Yes, that's right.

Corrigan was in the 15th.

Yes, that's right, and Goss.

Yes, I remember those.

And Brettingham-Moore.

Oh yes, he's a fine fellow, that fellow. He was a good officer that, my word he was. He wouldn't let anybody go where he wouldn't go himself.

No.

He was a good officer.

DAUGHTER: He never lost his stripe though, did he.

What were some of the other officers like Corrigan and Goss like?

Just officers.

Were they?

Some of them. Some were better than others. Another fellow from Brisbane, Craig.

I don't know that one.

He was a quartermaster's sergeant. He was an officer at the finish.

DAUGHTER: Was he any good?

He was alright in his job, I suppose. He was only rationing the food out, that's all he had to do. He had a good job and he had the blokes working for him. He did nothing, only used his brains.

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

Yes.

It was very cold, wasn't it?

By jove it was. You might not believe this. A shell burst, and I reckon it was a four foot hole. And it was it was frozen right down in there.

Was it.

Yes, four foot down, so that would tell you how cold it was.

How did you keep warm?

The best way we could. We didn't have much in our trenches. In the first place the trenches they build straight down. I said, "This is no good, we'll be smothered here." A lot of our fellows died and were smothered.

Being covered with dirt from shells.

Yes, sitting about in the trenches in a dugout like that. They were straight down and if a shell burst it would smother you. Anyhow, we dug it ourselves and to make ourselves secure. We used to, of a night, we had one blanket and that was full of lice, and sometimes, a few weeks, they would take you out and give you a bath and everything clean and fresh and you'd be in the trenches and five minutes after you'd been crawling again. Did you know that?

Yes, I can believe that for sure.

By geez, yeah. We'd back in - the blanket, we'd drag it into the back of the trench or over the ground, we'd back in there and stop in there. It was hard at times, I'd tell you. I don't know what warfare is like now, it's different all together. We were stuffed in like that there and shells bursting all the time. You didn't know when you was going to get your ticket.

What was the men's morale like that, at that time?

Not bad. They stood up to it well. As well as they could be expected to under the circumstances.

Can you remember the first time that you went into Pozieres? That was really the first time you came under serious fire.

Yes. I watched the balloons all up, and they were watching us moving in platoons, with the officers there. I said, "This is no good, we'll be skittled. Get out into extended order boys."

What happened in the next few days after that?

Once we'd got in there we were right.

DAUGHTER: That's when he lost his stripe.

That was when I was in there for a while.

DAUGHTER: You told them to get back out of it, didn't you, then.

Yes. I told them not to take the malingerers up. I didn't use that expression.

What did you do with the lice? Were you all of the time trying to keep them out?

We had to use spittle where they had been biting you. You couldn't do nothing. There was a bloke from Queensland. He had a monkey.

A real monkey?

Yes. Monkeys would go through his clothes and through our clothes if he came near us. He was nipping, nipping, nipping into them. By crikey, he was good.

What sort of a monkey was it, was it a mascot or something?

Yes, he was a mascot and the monkey would ride on his shoulder. He was a batman to a medical officer.

This was the Battalion medical officer.

Yes, and by gee this monkey was good.

I could imagine the monkey would be able to pick them out.

Yes, he used to go in the seams. It was flannel you know. It was all flannel that we wore those days. He'd go up those seams and that.

Did he use his teeth?

His teeth, yes. He was good. He'd be parting and pushing it about.

However did you get animals like that over there?

I don't know how he came to get him. We never ever asked him.

In the 13th Battalion I've been told that they had a rooster that went over with one of the reinforcements to Australia. That was their mascot.

This guy had the monkey for years. Wherever he went the monkey went, wherever the doctor went.

And he's a 15th Battalion man.

Yes.

Goodness me.

He was a great louser, or whatever you call him.

I could imagine it would be, yes.

My word, he was good.

Did they give you anything like power or something to try and to try and treat the lice.

We just changed, and have a bath. When you went out. You had to put up with it until you went out. The Germans had been in trenches for years.

And it was already lousy.

Yes, then we'd taken those over and they were just lousy.

The cold weather didn't affect them?

No, it affected us more than them.

What sort of duties did you have at that time? Were you just a straight infantryman with a rifle or were you a bomber?

Rifle.

What sort of a weapon were they, do you think?

Just the same as they've got now, just the same. Maybe a little bit heavier that they have now than they did then, but about the same. I remember Cairo more than anything, because I lost a beautiful watch.

In Cairo.

I was playing 'Housie Housie' in the sand and it came off my hand.

And you didn't know.

No. Then I went back to look I could never find it. It was a beautiful watch. A chap named, I worked for R.C. Commode from Mona Vale. And he had a place up in West Kentish. I worked for him there. And when I went away he gave me this watch.

I suppose it was inscribed and so on, was it?

Yes, with my name.

I think there'd be still quite a lot of things out there in the desert.

I reckon there is.

I know on Anzac Day they pinched whisky from the officer's mess and hid that under the sand. There'd still be a bit of that there apparently.

The officers had plenty of whisky and rum and all that. But, of gee, that rum was overproof and it would soon knock you.

How often would they give you rum, because there was a rum issue, wasn't there?

A rum issue. I don't know.

Did they give it to you every time you went over, or not?

Oh, only in the trenches, but she'd keep. I suppose a few of those blokes would be alive, a few of them.

I reckon there'd be a few of them, yes. I've found some of them.

Not too many, though, I don't reckon.

No, only a small number now. I've only been able to find three 14th Battalion men so far and that's not many. But there are about a dozen 13th men, I've found.

Not many 15th.

About half a dozen or more. That's just who served in Egypt or France in 1916-1917. There are a few more who served right through 1917-18, but I'm not writing about that now.

When do you reckon you'll get your book printed?

I hope that I'll have it published within the next three or four years, but unfortunately it takes time to do it and I have to work during the day.

I might not see it then.

I hope so. I hope you'll see it anyway. Everyone says that to me, but I can't guarantee anything. The stories will be used in the book, the ones that I use. I will see what I can do in that way. They will all be recorded. I am going to be transcribing everything and writing it out on paper.

Are you catching anything there?

Yes, I'm catching what you say. I've got some good stories.

You've got that one about Mulrennan.

Yes, I've got that one. I've got a few funny stories.

Have you.

Yes, it's good to have the humour. Did you ever see the Prince of Wales in Egypt?

Yes.

What was he doing?

He just drove around that's all.

What did the troops think of him?

They never said much about him. I remember when he came along - oh yeah. I remember the time.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

What was he doing then?

Not much - drilling I think. He was on horseback and rode passed us.

Did you have much to do with the camels they had in Egypt or not?

No.

You weren't working with them at all?

No, not even on one back.

You didn't get up on one.

No, all foot slogging.

When you arrived at Tel-el-Kebîr, that was when you joined the Battalion. They formed the 47th at that time. What happened then?

I don't know. They formed the 47th. Wasn't the 47th formed here?

No, the 47th was formed over there, but it was the second unit of the 15th. They split the 15th Battalion in half.

That's right, yes. There was a 15th Tasmanian, the 40th, 47th, 52nd. That's all, I think.

The 4th Brigade was the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th. At Tel-el-Kebîr they split the battalions in half to form two new divisions actually, the fourth and the fifth and they formed the 45th, 46th, 47th and 48th from the 4th Brigade. But a lot of the reinforcements, like yourself, went into the 47th.

Some went to the 47th, didn't they. I don't know whether they could please themselves or not, I don't know. Anyway, I stuck to the old 15th. It's a long to remember back.

It is, it's a long time ago. What do you remember about the train journey north from Marseilles? You were all put in carriages and you went up through France. That's the first time you saw France.

Yes, that was in the cattle trucks. That was when we went from the Canal.

Can you remember anything about the train ride when you got to France?

That was when we went from that canal. We went from canal and we got in those cattle trucks and I don't know whether we were two nights or a day and night in these cattle trucks and we went into France.

Where did the train stop? Did you travel through France or Egypt?

We went into France but I can't remember where we stopped, where we got off.

DAUGHTER: You reckoned the French girls were all right. You must have got off somewhere.

When you arrived in France you arrived at Marseilles on the ship.

Yes.

And you caught a train from Marseilles.

In the cattle dung truck. We sat on our packs. It wouldn't have been too good if it was all wet.

No. When you arrived in France you went up north to a place called Bailleul.

I can't remember that.

That's okay. You were billeted in a place called La Maison Blanche, the White House it was called. It was up in Flanders. You went into a place called the nursery for a time, around Bois Grenier.

Yes.

What was it like there?

All right. Just ordinary, the same as if you were camped out here in Broadmeadows or something.

Monash was the brigadier of the 4th Brigade for some time.

Oh yes.

What did you think of him? Did you see him much?

No.

I suppose, not in Egypt.

No. You got all their names down there, haven't you?

Some of them, yes. Not long after you were in France, General Bland took over, didn't he?

Yes.

Do you remember Bland?

Yes.

There was a parade that he had to introduce himself to you. Can you remember that?

No, I can't remember that.

DAUGHTER: Pop was probably AWL or something.

What can you remember about the attacks at Pozieres? There were two or three of them that the Battalion went over in - this is at Pozieres. You'd have gone across, I imagined, with D Company. Can you remember any of the fighting at that time?

No. I remember going over. It was each man for himself those times. You had to use your own judgment, I always said. If you took any notice of some of the officers you'd have left your bones there. I think they bought their commissions, some of them.

They may well have done.

I know they did, most of them, because they weren't fit to be officers. Not like old McSharry. He started as a private and went through.

Yes, that's right.

Corrigan, he was another good man. I often wondered about Fenton.

Yes, I've heard about him.

He's in Queensland, isn't he?

I don't know, I think that's a Tasmanian name. There's a Lieutenant Fenton, Arthur Fenton.

Arthur, that's him. He was a fine officer, yes. You've got him there.

Yes. When did he join the Battalion?

I don't know. He was when I got to Egypt.

Was he?

Yes.

It's just down here, there it is.

Two Fentons there, then.

Yes, two Arthurs.

Arthur Benjamin and Arthur Walters.

Only one of them was an officer.

Arthur was an officer, he was a good fellow.

What platoon were you in?

D, I think.

If you were in D Company, it would have been 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th platoons, wouldn't there?

Yes, I was in D Company. (Incidental conversation) The George boys, are they in there?

Yes, here we are - Edwin, Ernest and Richard. Are they any names you remember?

Edwin, yes. He got to an officer.

DAUGHTER: That was Ted. He was my mother's brother. He's fourth generation and they all came home for his birthday.

(Incidental conversation)

My birthday's on 2 January.

You are the day before me, then.

What was this game of Housie-Housie that you were talking about, what's that? That's a card game, I assume

Oh yes, they call it bingo here.

It's bingo.

Have you got it now?

I've heard of both of them. You used to play this, did you?

Yes.

What about two-up and so on?

I played that too. If you got caught at that they had you up.

Yes, the officers?

Yes.

I heard about that. But they'd allow these other games, would they, like Housie-Housie, or not?

No, the officers weren't about of a night, you know, and you'd get in your camp and play. You could lose money and win money with it.

I was talking to a fellow the other day who won seventy pound on the boat going over from Alexandria to Marseilles playing two up. Seventy pound isn't bad, is it?

He didn't tell you what he lost, though, did he?

No, but he made that.

There was a lot of bingo played, it's played here now. I go up to Crosswell Park a couple of times a week, and in the afternoon we start this bingo. They only play for lollies. They called it Housie-Housie when I was in the army.

What was the name called nap? How did you play that.

I don't know. That was cards. I don't know much about that nap business, I never went into it. They played it with cards, anyhow.

You'd have been on a shilling a day, I suppose.

Yes. That was all I used to keep.

That's about what most people kept.

Yes, a shilling a day. We left the other to our parents at home and we had something when we went back home. Then when you came back home they gave you a thirty-bob suit. They were going to put me in clink over that. I told them to stick it. I wouldn't wear a thirty-bob suit. The army in Hobart, that's what they did to me there. I told them to stick their thirty-bob suit.

It must have been a pretty good suit for thirty bob.

It was but you could sieve seeds through it. You could sieve seeds through it. That's back in 1919.

So the suit obviously wasn't any good.

I reckoned it wasn't any good.

Right. I couldn't quite understand what a thirty-bob suit would be like, whether it would be a good one or a bad one.

You'd know by the price.

That's one pound ten shillings. Yes.

That's not much, I suppose.

Not much for a suit. I didn't care what happened then. I told them what I thought.

DAUGHTER: They put you on a farm when you came back. They gave you a farm.

Yes, on the first year I walked off it. The price of everything was up sky high. Potatoes were about fifteen pound a ton to put in the ground and the next year they weren't worth thirty bob for a ton. I put in twenty-five acres of peas.

That's a lot of acres in those days, isn't it?

Yes, I put twenty-five acres in and had them all cut ready to cart in the next day and the wind came and blew them and blew them for miles and I lost them and never saved a pea out of twenty-five acres. That ended me with the farming.

It's a difficult business.

I walked off. Young David Febey did the same thing. They have a pine plantation on his property now. It went by rail up to Sheffield.

You were born up at Mount Roland, were you?

No. At Barrington. Then they shipped us up to Roland and bought fifty acres of government land and built on that, right under Mt Roland.

It's a beautiful spot up there.

Yes, it's a nice spot. It's not long ago since I was back there, just for a trip. We just drove up around.

Lake Barrington.

Yes, we went to Lake Barrington. They've got a nice lot of water there now.

Yes, they've got big dams up there now.

Gone passed my time, I'd have liked to have done a bit of fishing there.

(Considerable incidental conversation with the daughter)

Apparently you became ill at some stage when you were in Egypt.

Who told you?

I was reading it here in this, I think. You were in hospital somewhere.

Yes. It was ship rheumatism. It got you in all the joints, you couldn't move.

How did that happen?

Just I suppose being cramped up in the ship or something.

Yes.

They fixed it there in Egypt. They give you electric treatment. I don't know which is worse.

What did they do.

They gave you electric shocks. It fixed me, anyway. I didn't know they had anything about it in there.

Yes, somewhere there I was reading it, either that one or the others.

I have an early one where there is quite a few. These electric shocks and electric treatments.

And you'd get that from just being cooped up in the ship, would you?

Yes, I reckon that's what it was.

Yes, I've seen some things like that (cards).

I've got cards from overseas.

They probably are worth quite a few dollars now.

They would be now.

(Incidental conversation with the daughter)

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

START OF TAPE THREE - SIDE A

That's in Queenstown. That's where he originally came from.

He was a miner, was he?

Yes, he was in the mines.

And they sent him back home. I've got a few questions here for you. I was going to ask you firstly if you can remember when you first received your regimental number. When did they give you that?

When I first joined up. I had it right through.

You got it down at Claremont, did you?

I went to Claremont, yes.

Did they give you regimental number in Claremont or Broadmeadows?

In Claremont. I had that all through.

What do you remember about the first days in camp at Claremont?

Nothing much, only just drilling, that's all.

When did you get your uniform down there?

I know it wasn't long before we got it. We were in private clothes for a while I think. I can't remember whether I went down to Hobart to get it. I think I must have done because we got fitted out. I couldn't get out in that bloody stuff. It was a good spot though, there because you only got a little neck.

How wide would have that neck have been?

I suppose a couple of chains. It might be three. It was a beautiful spot where they get old troops you know.

Yes, it sounded really good.

Yes.

How long had the camp been there when you went down, do you think?

Not long

I think it used to be in Brighton. That's what I found out.

It was in Brighton when they started.

Did you go up to Brighton?

No, I never went to Brighton. I went straight into Claremont. It was a good spot. There were no trees about it then.

No, it was completely bare. It was farmland, was it?

Yes, it was as bare as bare. But now it's all fir trees and all that.

I suppose it was a bit cold because you were there in the winter, weren't you.

Yes, but it wasn't as cold as France. That was a cold place. When it was frozen down in the ground and fourteen feet down in the ground, it was cold there. Especially when you only had one blanket.

Surely they would have given you more than that though.

No, that's all we had during the war, and an overcoat.

They gave you sheepskin jerkins too, didn't they?

Yes.

When did you first meet Lieutenant Wadsley? In Hobart?

No, I met him in Egypt.

Lieutenant Wadsley, he went overseas with you. He was in charge of the reinforcements.

I can't remember back that far now. This is all coming back to me now, where I thought I'd forgotten all about it.

I found men can remember back to that time, it's just that it's a big effort to throw yourself back that far.

It's seventy years since 1919, you know, I've got to remember back.

It's seventy years to 1916, anyway. When you went over to Broadmeadows, I think yesterday we were saying you might have gone over on the *Loongana*. Did you do that or not? You must have gone over on a ship of some description.

I can't remember the ship's name.

You went from Launceston, I suppose.

Yes.

Were you all known as the 13th Reinforcements at that time?

Yes.

When were you first called the 13th Reinforcements? At Claremont, I suppose.

Yes, that's where we went from there, the 13th Reinforcements.

Did you ever have a group photograph taken?

No, I can't remember.

I might be able to find one. It was reasonably common for reinforcements to have a photograph taken.

We had photos taken but I never bought any of them.

What happened when you arrived at Broadmeadows.

I think I only just went in and started training there. I don't know how long we were there, but I know I went into Melbourne a couple of times with the boys and played up a bit.

What did you do?

Running about, here, there and everywhere, and after the girls.

Did you have a girlfriend at that time? Someone special?

Yes, I did, but she was a girlfriend in Zeehan. She was a nurse and a doctor married her and I didn't know. I was away in the war and I wrote to her and told her that I had a dream that somebody was pinching her and taking her out and she wrote back and said it was true. She wasn't going to tell me. I don't suppose he'd be dead yet. He was a cripple, the doctor was.

Was he?

When you first enlisted you were knocked back for bad teeth, weren't you?

That was in Zeehan. You then went to Sheffield and they accepted you there. But you got all your teeth out, didn't you, you had false teeth?

Yes, that's when I went to Sheffield. It's going back a lot of years to remember.

Yes, it is. Broadmeadows was always well named for the mud there.

Yes, it was.

DAUGHTER: Were they in tents there?

Yes, they were in tents.

There were 2,000 troops getting around about and they did make mud.

How many were there?

I would say a few thousand, but there were troops everywhere there.

They churned it all up, I suppose.

Yes, drilling and running about.

Was the training ever very useful to you? When you actually started seeing active service, did you find that the training that you had was of use?

It didn't seem to make any difference to me. I was pretty active. I'd been mining and down mines and on the surface doing jobs.

You were fit.

I was fit, yes. I was really fit.

Can you remember the day you left Broadmeadows? When you boarded the ship.

No.

There was quite a scene at the wharf, I think.

Yes, there were a lot of them seeing us off. I never used to worry about that, the crowd of people.

I suppose you didn't have anybody there that you knew.

No.

But you had your half uncle with you, didn't you?

Yes, he was there. We had no-one there to see us off. We didn't seem to worry about it at those times.

It must have been quite a scene though, with all the streamers and so on.

Yes, it was a sight. A lot of blokes with their lovers there. That was the scene.

How apprehensive were you at that time about going overseas, because you'd obviously heard about the casualties on Gallipoli and you knew it was a seriously business.

I don't know. I tried to get through and I couldn't get through. I was anxious to get away. I didn't want anybody sending me cards as a malingerer or anything like that. I never did get any but I didn't want any. I knew that some of them got them. I can remember the old people cutting up about it.

What were they doing? What do you mean, cutting up?

Mother crying about me going away to war.

She was, was she?

And the sisters. I only had one brother, but he didn't get away. He got blown up in a quarry, Melrose Quarry at Devonport or Latrobe there. Apparently he lost an arm off there.

Yes, off from his elbow.

And a leg off there.

Right up there at the top of his hip.

And three fingers off there.

Three fingers off his right hand. You were the only one from your immediate family who went then.

Yes.

Your half uncle - I did get it yesterday - where was he in the family? Harry and David. David was what? Your grandfather married again, didn't he?

Yes, he was married twice, yes.

And he was the son of the second marriage.

Yes.

And he also came from up Barrington way, Mt Roland.

Yes.

DAUGHTER: Harry was a cousin, wasn't he?

Young Harry, yes. He was a cousin.

But Harry who was in the transport section.

That was old Harry.

That was old Harry, yes.

DAUGHTER: He was an uncle was he?

He was an uncle to young Harry and an uncle to me.

He was an uncle to you. Harry was your brother.

No, he was an uncle to me.

DAUGHTER: Young Harry was a cousin. Old Harry put his name down to go. He was Grandfather Febey's brother.

I get it, yes.

DAUGHTER: It's very complicated.

It's not complicated when you're there; when you find out.

What was the ship like that you went away on? Can you remember the colour of it?

No, I can't remember the colour. I can't remember whether it was black, blue, white or brindle.

Whereabouts were you bunked? Whereabouts were you put in the ship?

Right up in the corner nose they crammed us in that tight. I felt like I was fainting all the time, I couldn't get enough air. Once, that was when I was leaving France, when we went over from France over to England.

That was on the ship across the channel.

Yes. I got up the stairs and they had it battened down because it was rough. They battened it down and we couldn't get out. So if we'd gone down we'd have been underneath, just the same. But I got up there and there was sick all over the floor. You'd just fall and slip and slide about all over the place. It was a German pleasure boat that they'd captured and all of the bottom was open. Just like a great big room, with stairs up and that's where I stopped all the way across.

But you can't remember about being on the *Demosthenes*. When you left Melbourne you went out into Port Phillip Bay and you anchored that night off Williamstown. You were there that night and then the next day you went out through the heads. That was the *Demosthenes*. That was the one that you went from Melbourne to Port Suez on.

That's right.

Whereabouts were you on her?

Somewhere about midship, I think.

And you were in hammocks at that time.

Yes.

What were they like to sleep in?

All right. You could sleep anywhere, it didn't make any difference, you could sleep, I could anyhow. Hammocks were good.

Some of the men have told me that you couldn't sleep in the hammocks except on your back and then you were like that.

Yes, that's right.

They used to sleep on the floor or actually take them down. Yes. The *Demosthenes* used to have a lot of sporting matches and so on, on board. Do you remember the boxing?

Yes. I saw it but I never used to worry much about the boxing.

You weren't a boxer.

No, I never used to worry much about the boxing.

Were you a card player then?

I've been playing cards for sixty or seventy years, I reckon.

The *Demosthenes* had a pipe band on it and they used to practice at half past six every evening. Can you remember the band?

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

You had your birthday on the ship, didn't you? If it was 3 January, your birthday, you must have had a birthday on the ship.

I could have done.

You were on it from 29 December to the end of January so you must have done.

That's right. You never thought of birthdays then.

Didn't you?

No.

So you weren't seasick, you reckon?

No.

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

I'd been over to Melbourne and back but I was never seasick. I would have been if I'd got out a bit. You couldn't help it.

The boat did go to Colombo in Ceylon and you were allowed ashore I think.

Oh yes. We were marched ashore to see that you didn't get away.

Whereabouts did you go on this march? Where did you march to?

Just into the town and around and back into the ship.

Yes.

Just for people to look at, I suppose.

To look at you, or you to look at them?

Either way.

There used to be a lot of natives who used to come round the ship in their boats, didn't they?

Yes. The same as Cairo. There were a lot of natives there. There was lots of buckshee.

'Gibbet buckshee', yes. When it started to get warm, can you remember when it started to get warm? You came over the equator and it started getting hot?

I don't remember that, no. I got seasoned to it, I suppose. No, I don't remember that.

You got something called ship rheumatism.

That was in Egypt.

You got it from the ship journey, though, didn't you?

Yes. I had it before I got there.

Did you.

Yes. They gave me electric treatment.

How actually did you get it? Was it because you'd been so fit?

I reckon in the ship, from not being able to move about. I reckon that's what it was. It got me in the knees and legs and ankles. It pained a bit.

Do you think it was caused by the fact that you'd been working as a miner.

I don't know.

You'd just been active.

I couldn't tell you. I wasn't the only one who got it.

How many others would have been?

I don't really know.

One hundred of them or fifty of them?

Could have been, I don't know. I know it was very inconvenient. It was painful, by heck it was.

I suppose it would put you on your back.

Yes. They had ways of curing it.

When you got to Zeitoun, I suppose they did something about it, did they? When did you get treatment for it? Was it on the ship?

No, mostly after I got off the ship. I think it was my being cramped up or something because I wasn't the only one.

They treated you at Zeitoun and they gave you some sort of electrical treatment, did they?

Electrical, yes, electrical treatment. That fixed it up and I never had it since.

Did you see any aeroplanes in Egypt?

Yes, a few. In France there were plenty of dog fights. There were some good goes.

What were they like?

Diving up and then down they'd come and you'd see the fire flying out of their guns. I used to watch those. They were real good dog fights. One fellow they called the Mad Major, by gee he was good.

Was he an Englishman or a German?

I think he was an Australian. But there were some fights.

Did you see any of the planes come down?

Yes. They were up in the air, you could just see them. Some of them were down pretty low fighting too. You'd see them flying down and the fire coming out of them. Then they'd dive down again. Then you'd see the old German taking off and this fellow after him and all of a sudden he'd go into flame. It was well worth it. I used to watch them.

When you went into Cairo, what can you remember about Cairo?

I don't remember much about it. I know it wasn't worth looking at.

One of the fellows I was talking to recently reckoned I'd make a good policeman, asking all these questions. I'm getting the material that I want and when I put it all together it will be a good story. You didn't go to the Cairo museum, do you remember that?

No.

Did you climb the pyramids?

Yes.

What was that like?

Steep.

It certainly would have been too.

The only thing I regret is that I never got on a camel.

They were a bit dangerous, the camels, weren't they.

Oh yes.

Did you meet any of the Egyptians – the Gyppos - personally?

No, I never bothered, no. I never met any of them. I seen them, you know, and passed them and all that but I never had any conversations.

DAUGHTER: They were rogues, weren't they Pop?

Some of them were, they were like the Australians. Some of them were bad and some worse than others.

Do you remember going out camping at Tel-el-Kebîr? That was the old battlefield.

I can just remember it.

What was it like there? Can you describe what the camp looked like?

No, it's only just tents and just more tents. You had a job to find your tent. Once you got used to it you were right. The same as when we went on the Canal, just a sheet of tents. That's when I met up with the chap from Queensland, from Cairns, a chap named Bill Crisp. He was a Queensland fellow. Him and I used to swim the Canal. When I first started I got half way across and I said to him, "I can't do it." I turned around and swam back. He came back and said, "Well, you swam the distance. You might as well go across." So the next day he said, "Come on, we'll go across." So he got me across and then every day we'd be swimming that canal, especially when there was a boat coming in. We'd be down there after buckshee.

END OF AWM TAPE THREE - SIDE A

START OF AWM TAPE THREE - SIDE B

Yes. They used to give you free time during the day, didn't they, at Serapeum.

Yes.

What was the routine of the day?

Just a bit of drill, ordinary drill.

What would they get you doing with that drill? It would be full packs, I suppose.

Yes.

Your rifle and ammunition.

Yes. If you misbehaved yourself you'd get a pack of sand to carry.

Yes, you told me that yesterday.

That was my first experience there, with a full pack of sand. When we went from Cairo to Serapeum.

You got to the Canal and went swimming, didn't you.

Yes.

So for that you had to carry a pack. How many of there were you who had to do that? There must have been lots of you.

Half a dozen of us went into it. We had a good swim in it. We got caught when we came out.

Can you remember anything in particular about my grandfather at all, or not?

No. He joined up here in Tassie, didn't he, at Claremont?

Yes, at Claremont.

No, there was such a crowd of us. If there weren't so many it would be different altogether. We were all clobbered up as one big family.

Yes. But Bill Crisp was your friend then, was he?

Oh, yes.

What was his background? Did he come from Cairns?

Yes.

What was he?

He was a butcher. He used to cut the meat up and all that.

In the army?

In the army.

Was he actually on the cookhouse staff, was he?

Yes, because he was a quartermaster's sergeant. Then he had an officer over him.

Was he in D Company? He wouldn't have been, would he? He wasn't a Tasmanian.

No, he was like headquarters.

Yes.

He wrote to me when I came back home. He was after money.

Yes, I think you told me that.

I wasn't biting. I never heard no more of him.

You were visited by the Prince of Wales at Tel-el-Kebîr.

Yes, but it was like the parade ground here. He just came through on his horse and saluted. That was all I saw of him.

When you went on the desert march, did you have Tommy uniforms on and the pith helmet and so on?

Oh yes.

You had the summer tunics.

We had the uniforms, yes.

But did you have - I think that they changed the uniform from a winter issue to a summer issue. It was a Tommy tunic and I think you had big sun helmets.

We had a helmet, yet. We had a helmet on.

I mean the sort of sun helmet.

Sun?

Yes. Do you know the sort of thing that they used to wear during the Boer War, those big thick things?

Yes.

They changed a lot of the uniforms over to those sorts of things to protect against the sun. You don't remember that.

And I never wore them, either.

I think you might be right, too. The 13th Battalion certainly did change uniforms. The 15th may have done.

No.

You're not the only one who says no, that is not the case with the 15th. It got hot there, didn't it.

Yes.

It could get up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit there some days, couldn't it.

Yes, it was very hot.

Then of a night-time it would get really cold.

The same here you know, the same in Queensland, it gets cold of a night and hot in the daytime.

But it used to get really cold in Egypt, didn't it.

Yes. You'd really want somebody to cuddle up to.

Yes.

When do you reckon you're going to write this book?

In the next three or four years.

I won't be here to see it then.

I reckon you might be actually. I'll send you a few of the articles that I do, anyway. That will be something. Can you remember anybody that you were with on the desert march, down to Serapeum? Can you remember anybody else?

No, I can't. Young Dave, I can remember him because he was a relation, I remember him.

How was he going?

He walked, he marched, I can remember him. I can't remember.

There used to be the sandstorms that would come in. They used to be called the khamsin or something like that. They were sandstorms that used to come. What did you do when they came?

Cover me head over. I never saw many of them, no.

What about the scorpions? There used to be these scorpions.

No, I never saw a scorpion there.

Didn't you.

No, somebody put one over you there.

Did they?

There could have been, I suppose. There might have been in some places where they are. I never saw a scorpion. I might have seen a spider or two.

What sort of ability did you have with a rifle? Were you ever a sniper?

No, I was just ordinary. But I could hit anything. I was a pretty good shot.

Did you get training with some of the other things like bombs and Lewis guns?

We had bombs, oh yes. They were hand grenades.

What about the Lewis gun?

I never trained with them. They had them in our battalion. They were good. I often wished I had had a go with them, a bit of excitement.

Why's that?

They would blast. By heck, you'd see a stream of dirt flying up. My word, chopping it anything.

You lost a watch while you were playing cards, you told me. Who gave you that?

The people that I was working for at the time.

This was at Zeehan.

No.

At Sheffield.

At Sheffield.

You were working in a store, or something, were you?

No, I was on a farm. It was a beautiful watch. R C Commode from ...

R C Commode. How do you spell that - Commode?

Yes.

Where were they from? I think you said West Kentish yesterday.

No, he had a place at West Kentish. Down the midlands.

Campbelltown or Ross.

No, I can't think of it - Mona Vale.

Mona Vale.

That's on the way to Hobart.

Yes. That's right.

Mona Vale, that's where he came from.

That's down near the Fingal isn't it?

No, it's on the way to Hobart. Fingal is the way to the east coast.

I don't really know it very well, actually, but I know more or less where it would be. It is on the Hobart road, isn't it?

Yes.

Did you ever go fishing in the Canal?

No.

You never saw anything in the Canal? Sharks?

No.

Someone was telling me they saw porpoises there once.

There could have been but I never saw a shark. The water was always beautiful and warm. You could go in there and it would feel good.

It was salty, wasn't it?

Yes. It would hold you up. I never did a stroke of swimming until I went there.

Didn't you?

No.

You couldn't swim.

I couldn't swim. Bill Crisp used to take me and get me out there and I'd get so far across and I'd turn round and go back. Then he'd get me the next day to go again. I finished up going across. Then each time the boat came up I was there, I was in.

Were the boats dangerous to go around swimming?

Yes. Those twin screws could suck you under. The water seems to go down and it was hollow and by gee, you had to struggle to get away from that if you got in too close. The water was dangerous.

Apparently my grandfather got caught and went down in and apparently they had to stop the ship.

It was dangerous.

He reckoned he was lucky, this was what my father told me anyway, that he did get caught.

I got pretty close, but I got out. I never got too close after the first one. I kept a good distance. We used to go after cigarettes. I remember once getting a coil of Double Navy, I think they called it, and there was a big coil of it.

Is it a coil of tobacco?

Yes. I don't know what happened to that. Mind you, I was a cigarette smoker and that was pipe tobacco.

Was it mainly the English boats or all the boats?

Different boats went through there. Egyptian boats and French boats and all those.

What do you remember about some of the officers like Snowden? Do you remember anything about him?

I can remember him, I can remember his face and that's about all.

He was transferred to the 47th, so you wouldn't have known him very well.

No.

What about Corrigan?

He was a good fellow, he was in 15th. And McSharry. Did you know him?

Terry McSharry, yes. They used to call him Jockey Jack.

He was short.

Yes.

He was the one who saw my half uncle. He called him Harry and sent a driver in and like he'd got that used to him. He used to do the officer's mess. He'd have his cart with all the officer's gear all in it. He knew him pretty well. I can see him now today.

He was killed, McSharry.

Yes.

I've got a letter that he wrote. That he wrote to Brettingham-Moore. I've got a letter that Brettingham-Moore wrote also, describing what happened at Pozieres when he attacked. And he was wounded very badly there. In fact he won a DSO but that was it, he didn't see any more service, he was badly wounded.

I forget a lot of the officers, you forget their names.

What about Bradley? He was a D Company officer.

Yes. I can't remember much about him.

He was a 22nd Reinforcement, I think. He was fairly late, early 1917.

No, I can't remember him. The old ones, I can remember them, the ones who were with us, you know. Yes, when we were in Egypt. That's when they made their bets, these officers, that they could march us through.

Do you remember anything about the measles or the mumps in Egypt? A lot of men did catch measles and so on, didn't they?

Yes, but I never got them or mumps.

What about some of the men from the 1st and 2nd Division, particularly at Serapeum, who were rejected by the 1st and 2nd Division and they ended up in the 4th Division, the lot of them. They weren't very good soldiers.

I don't remember them. And they were rejected?

Yes, they were rejected by the 1st and 2nd Divisions. They went across to France and the reject stayed behind. When you marched town to Serapeum, they were at Serapeum, these men.

Oh yes.

Do you remember David Waterfield?

Was he a 15th man?

Yes, he was a 15th man, yes, he was quite an elderly man. D Company he was in.

And D Company?

Yes, he wasn't a Tasmanian though. I don't know if it was New South Wales or Victoria he came from.

He came from Queensland.

He might have come from Queensland, but I'm not sure. I'd like to find out a bit about Lieutenant Wadsley if I can, so far as you can remember him.

He was a good officer.

Why was he good?

You could follow him anywhere. He wouldn't send you in. He'd go himself. You'd follow him. But he wouldn't shrink anything like that. Wadsley was a real gentleman as an officer. What happened to him?

He was killed by a machine gun at Mouquet Farm, in early September. He transferred to the 52nd Battalion.

It will be an interesting book when you've finished it, won't it.

Yes. And the men had been on the Peninsula, you were saying yesterday, wouldn't talk about what had happened on Gallipoli.

I wasn't at Gallipoli.

No, I mean the men that had been in Egypt. They wouldn't talk about it.

No. Only that it was hell on earth. Only that it was the heat that caused so many casualties. They went into it blind and there were the Turks sitting there waiting for them and they were sitting ducks. They must have been pretty close to the trenches of the Turks and our fellows, on the Peninsula. They could talk to one another.

Could they.

Oh yes. They must have been very close.

Yes, they were, they were only a few yards apart in a lot of places.

I'd have liked to go there to see what it was like.

You went across from Alexandria to Marseilles on the *Transylvania*. You probably can't remember that.

I can't no.

Then you went by train up to France.

I remember that.

What was that like?

You were just sitting on cow dung.

Yes, that's right, yes.

It was an all night trip I think. When we got there, I think it was all night and the next morning I remember pulling up and getting off and carrying our swag. I can remember that. It was an all night trip.

How many of them would there have been in each truck?

I don't know. It might have been twenty or thirty or perhaps more. I only know they didn't give you much of a hand to bundle it in, but you filled it up, you never had a say in it.

When you were in Egypt you used to play at game called nap.

I never played it.

You didn't play nap.

No.

How as it played, do you know?

No. Old Harry, he used to play nap. When I looked for him - he was there before me - I asked two or three and they said, "You stand here and you'll hear him directly." The first thing I heard was, 'You are a bastard'. That was a great word of his. He'd always say, "You're a bastard." It's a wonder he didn't get his head knocked off, but then they never used to take any notice of him. That was when - old McSharry - that was in France on the sick parade, and he walked on the sick parade with a bad leg. He said to this bloke, "You hold my horse until I go on this." He was only about from the medical officer where they were lining up along the edge of the road. He gets over there and this little 'un let the horse go and it flew off with its officers' tins and crates and crockery and it rattled. And this old mare, she couldn't gallop very fast, she was too fat and old, I suppose. He turned round and ran after her for a bit then he turned round and said, "Oh you bastard," he said. And old McSharry, laughing fit to bust, said, "What did I hear you say, Harry?" He said, "I called him a bastard, and so are you McSharry." As soon as I got there and found out when he was playing, when if first when out with him ...

This was in Egypt.

Yes. I said to him, "Do you know Harry Febey?" He said, "You stand here for a minute and you'll hear him." I went over to him and said, "G'day, how are you?" He turned round and looked at me.

"Oh hello Fred. How are you? What did you come over here for?" He said, 'What about a few 'disasters'?' Piastres. So he skinned me out and he was still going crook. That was nap but I don't know how they played it. You'll have to find out from somebody else.

Apparently it was legal though, nap.

It was two-up that wasn't legal. We used to play two-up. We always had a bloke out watching. Nap was - it was some card game. But I never bothered.

What sort of cards did you play, bridge?

I played bridge, yucca, poker. I still play cards every week. Every Wednesday and Friday. We only play for the fun of it.

When you arrived in France and so on, what were the billets like? Can you remember any of the places that you were at? Some of the billets.

Some were all right. The last one I had before we came back here, after the war, we were in Belgium then, I had a good billet there. They used to look after us.

Can you remember the armistice peace day? What were you doing on 11 November?

I can only remember it by the people, they went mad.

Did they.

"Le guerre finis! Le guerre finis!" If they didn't know you, they were swinging around you. That was in Belgium, at the last billet I was in. They went just mad and took over. The soldiers could take over. Done anything/

Did they.

Yes, they went really mad. It was a free for all then. That's a good while ago, isn't it.

A good while ago.

Quite a number of years now.

Nearly seventy years ago.

What do you expect me to remember in that time?

You've told me some things. Everybody can remember a little bit.

Your home town is where?

Burnie.

My daughter's boy, she's got one at Burnie.

Yes.

And one in Lindisfarne.

That's in Hobart, yes.

And the other one, I don't know where. I think that's Lindisfarne, now I think about it.

I've been there. When you were at Pozieres, you were telling me yesterday that a lot of the men were buried by shells.

Yes.

And you were saying that you were buried also. What actually happened at that time? Can you tell me that story?

The trenches they dug. They dug trenches straight down.

END OF TAPE THREE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE A

You were saying yesterday that you were buried, but only up to your waist or something.

Yes, I didn't want to be anything further, either. Once you cut your wind off, you've gone.

Can you remember that moment? What were you doing when the shell came?

Just standing in there, on guard waiting. Waiting to hop over. I didn't know whether it was going to hop over then or not. A shell burst. I don't know anyone who hasn't got caught the same way, until they built the trenches.

In a V.

Yes, a V. Once they built the V if a shell burst it might throw a bit into the trench but not much. But when they were straight down and they burst everything would go straight in.

When you were buried like this, what happened?

They pulled me out.

I suppose you would have to be watching all the time for men who were buried all together. You wouldn't know where they'd gone, would you?

No, but the shells never come that thick. Only odd ones were coming. Once the observers got the length of where they had to put these shells, they can do it.

They would fire a lot.

Like felling a tree on a stick. I could put a stick a way out over the fence there and I could fell a tree on that stick. I did a lot of felling in the bush.

And you reckon that the German shelling could be as accurate.

Yes, our fellows could do the same. When the war finished the Germans - we never got into their territory. They pulled out of it.

They were always in France.

Yes. They never got their territory here, only shells going over and blokes in the aeroplanes dropping bombs and that. It's like all round Albert there it was all churned up.

Did you ever go into Albert and have a look at some of the buildings?

I went through it but I always used to look at that Cathedral. The top of it, I don't know whether you saw the photo of it.

Apparently if it felt the war was going to be lost, or something. Some people called it Fanny Durack because she was an English diver or something. You didn't hear that one.

A bomber and diver.

Yes. Fanny Durack was her name, an English swimmer. When you were going into Pozieres, you told me yesterday about the observation balloons that you could see.

I blame our officers for that.

Was that in the night? Was that dark?

In the daytime. Here's all the balloons up.

How many would there have been? A dozen of them?

Balloons. God knows. There could have been twenty or thirty, or even more.

Along the horizon?

Yes. They were only sitting ducks.

That was going down through Sausage Gully, was it?

I don't know if it was a gully. I know we were going up. I said to the blokes, "There's those balloons, they'll skittle us. I'll be on the lookout," I said. They got their target pretty easily. It must have been because they got the first couple of platoons there. But after that it was all extended order and we got up into the lines then.

The food that the army used to give you was mainly bully beef and biscuits, wasn't it?

That was when you were going into line, you had bully beef and biscuits, but when you were out it was a very big pot of stew. You had your dixie. They filled it up and away you went. That wasn't in the line.

That was from the Battalion cooker.

That's right. When you were in the line you had your bully beef and biscuits. But sometimes they filled up your dixies with stews and sent it up into the line. I was detailed off to go with, I think it was Sergeant MacArthur. He got killed that night, I think it was MacArthur. A shell burst alongside of us and knocked all the dixies flying. I think it was MacArthur. We were on that fatigue party that he got killed. I'm sure it was.

I'll look it up. I don't have a MacArthur here. I've got a McCarthy. It's a bit hard to say. There are seven MacArthurs but none of them were killed. It might have been somebody else. What were fatigues like? You did a lot of fatigues around Flers and Bullecourt didn't you, during the winter?

Yes. Just carrying out routine orders and that.

Did you ever try and get any different sort of food? Can you remember trying to get different food to change the diet a bit?

No, it was mostly stews. The cooks could do that, cut the meat up and drop it in with a few spuds in it.

You didn't try and steal anything from some of the farms?

Oh yes, we used to pinch chooks and get into trouble over that. The cooks would cook them up and burn the feathers.

All the evidence.

Oh yes, we used to pinch them. Old Frenchies, they'd come round to the officers and we'd caused a lot of trouble. We cost them a lot of francs. They had to pay a lot of francs.

Did you ever go and steal anything?

Yes, yes. Fowls, blinky fowls. Give them a tap on the beak and they'd lick their feet, and you'd just walk out with them on your hands to get them away.

On your hands?

Yes. Just on your hands. You got them away from the house and then screwed their necks. We did a lot of that. The Froggies were paid for them. They never lost anything.

You reckon that they used to double their price or something.

Yes, oh yes.

When the winter started to come, you were telling me yesterday that the ground was frozen four feet down or something.

Yes, and the shells burst and four feet down in the ground was frozen.

What happened to everything else that you had? All the food must have frozen.

We used to thaw it. My word, yes, in the wintertime there it was frozen. The ground was that - on the mules and the horses they had things set in their shoes, screws. They would stick like that down and they had those in their shoes so the horses and the mules could stand and so they wouldn't slip.

Like little spikes.

Yes, like spikes. They were screwed into their shoes so they could walk without slipping and breaking their legs.

I think the horses and the mules would have felt those conditions very much, I think.

They couldn't stand and they'd fall and break their legs, especially when they were in the transport and that.

What was the land like at that time? I know that being September/October and so on before it all froze, everything turned to mud, didn't it.

Yes. After it finished freezing and the summer came, it was all mud. But it's like our summer. You can run about in the summertime. There the winter was pretty severe. In 1916 it was a very severe winter.

What was it like being in the front line at that time?

No different from any other time, only, you had one blanket and that was a ball of mud in no time. But in the trenches, see you just dug a hole in the bank, and backed in, and there you'd stop.

It would be pretty miserable, I think.

Yes, you had to put up with that. It wasn't all beer and skittles then in the winter time.

What about the weapons? Would they all freeze up, all the grease and so on?

No, we kept them oiled up. They'd get stuffed up with mud at times and we had to get them cleaned out. We always kept them free.

Do you remember anything about Stormy Trench at all?

No. Whereabouts was that?

That was at Gueudecourt. It was sort of in front of Albert. It was beyond - further towards Bapaume. You went through Bapaume, did you?

Yes.

Then you must have come up to Bullecourt. You were at Bullecourt, were you?

Yes.

But you didn't go across at Bullecourt. That was where the Battalion used tanks for the first time.

Yes. I can tell you a bit about that. The first tanks never got anywhere. As soon as they got into a trench they'd stop. But they soon rectified that. The next lot of tanks were new.

What were you doing at Bullecourt. I'm a bit confused about what your service was after Pozieres, where you went. You spent the winter of 1916-17 with the Battalion in France.

Yes.

When did you got to England?

Only when we came home.

You must have got leave across to England.

We got leave a couple of times. But when we left France I can't just remember if we stayed in England long. They got us going home. I can't remember staying there long. We were just bundled up in France when the war finished.

You were at Polygon Wood.

Yes.

Had you been to England before Polygon Wood?

Yes.

On leave.

Yes.

Do you remember whether you were at Bullecourt or not?

I can't remember. I know I was at Bullecourt but I can't remember, it's such a long time ago.

You must have been in reserve at that time.

I don't know whether I was in reserve or not. I could have been.

I think you'd remember the battle if you were in it because a lot of the men were captured. There were 2,400 casualties out of the 3,000 that went across at Bullecourt.

I wasn't in that, then.

It doesn't sound like it no. You were probably in reserve.

I might have been too.

Then you were at Messines. That was after Bullecourt. That was up in Flanders, near Ypres.

I can't remember.

What do you remember about Bapaume? When the Germans withdrew, after the winter of 1916 to the Hindenburg Line, this is all before Bullecourt, a lot of the buildings were booby-trapped and so on.

Yes, yes.

Did you ever see any of those?

No, no.

Apparently, you were on guard duty on the tower or something at some stage. Is that so or not?

Yes, on the Suez Canal?

No, that's what it was. I know what you're talking about yes. In the letter that your daughter wrote to me she said channel and I didn't know what she was talking about but it was the Canal, that's what she meant. Can you remember any of the concerts?

No. They had a few of those but I can't remember.

What about brigade sports like football or cricket or something. Were you ever in any of the teams?

Football, yes. Cricket, I never bothered much about that, the ball was too hard. If you got hit with a football it wasn't so bad.

And you were in the Battalion football team, were you?

Yes.

What instances can you remember from being in action? Like actually making an attack or being attacked or something like that?

I can't just remember. I remember going over and all that and charging and sticking a bayonet. One thing, just to finish, they were easy victims.

Were they?

They were split up with us, I suppose. That's when we got a drop of rum, going over.

Did you?

Yes, they put the kick in you.

What stories can you remember about your half uncle, David?

I can't remember much about him. He went to England, you know.

Did he?

Yes, and he was over there for a long time. He got over there and he must have got in with a girl over there and he married her and he stopped there. How he stopped there I don't know. He must have got in good with the officers or something, I don't know. Anyhow, he never came back to the Battalion.

Didn't he.

No.

What time did he go across to England?

He went. I don't know whether it was 1916.

Really early.

Yes. I think it was 1916. He married and came back and brought a family with him. He made up for it when he got here anyhow. He came back with one and they had four or five after that. He's dead. He died in Wynyard or somewhere out that way.

Did you ever make friends with any of the French people?

No.

You didn't have anyone that you wrote to.

No.

DAUGHTER: He wants to know about the French girls.

I had one here and I didn't want to know her.

When did you get your first leave? Can you remember that, or not?

No. It was in France, I know. It could have been 1916, I can't remember. I know I had three leaves.

At no time were you ever appointed to England? You were never stationed in England?

No.

Were you with the Battalion the whole time?

Yes. The only time I left the Battalion was when I went on leave.

How long would you get?

Ten days. I had two in Scotland and one in England. The Scots lassies were very good. They would take you and show you around. They took me over and showed me the heather and all that. The girl's name was Cissy Swanny. She showed me about quite a lot. She had a restaurant, and that was in Glasgow. I didn't go much on Edinburgh. They would seem to be wanting to take you down all the time. But in Glasgow they couldn't do enough for you.

How long between leaves did you have? What was the period that you had to go through before you came up for leave?

About twelve months.

Would leave have been entered into your record, or not?

I don't know whether it would or not. I suppose they would have a record, wouldn't they.

I don't think my grandfather got leave at all. He was captured, of course. I don't think he got leave between the time he was in Egypt until April 1917. I don't think he got any leave, he may have done.

He must have done.

That's more than twelve months, isn't it.

Yes. He must have got leave, unless he was a bad boy.

No, there's no record in his thing of any crimes or anything.

I don't know whether they kept a record or not. I know I had three.

You had three leaves. What did you do on the first one?

Not much. I stayed in England.

In London.

Yes, the first time.

Whereabouts did you stay? You'd have gone to Horseferry Road.

Yes, I remember Horseferry Road.

What was it like there?

Alright. That's the first time I've heard that since I went there.

What was the building like inside? Can you describe what it looked like inside?

It was just ordinary. But it was different in wartime than peace time. Mostly what I saw of them, in England, London, they were trying to take you down all the time. If you lost your money you'd have to go back to your Battalion broke.

Leave started once you arrived in London, didn't it? The ten days leave that you had.

No, it started when you left France.

Did it.

Oh my word yes. Some of the soldiers got away. Somebody would shield them over there and kept them under their skirts.

You mean that they'd go absent.

AWOL and never come back.

And they never came back?

END OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE A

START OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE B

No. I'd had enough when you had your ten days leave. You only had a certain amount. I had a shilling a day. That soon went.

What did you do in London that first time?

Just walked about different places and that.

Did you go and see any plays?

I can't remember seeing any plays. Saw the old Prince ride past, but that was in France though. I never saw any of the Queen or any of them when I was in London. I never saw anything of them. But I went sightseeing and all that, but I can't remember anything about them. I can't remember anything about them. It wasn't the place to get drunk either, there were too many looking out after you to get a few bob.

Bill Curtis, it was Bill Curtis who was your friend in Egypt, wasn't it? Bill Curtis from Cairns. Did you know him in France also?

Yes. He was a bloke that made me swim across the Canal. It was Crisp.

Crisp, that's right, sorry, yes. What other friends did you have in France?

I never made many friends. You just knew them, mostly the ones that were right close to you in the platoon. Bill Crisp was a fine big fellow, a real strapping fellow.

How old would he have been - twenty-two?

I suppose he would have been in his twenties or thirties - twenties I reckon. A little fellow I can remember who used to be our butcher, cutting up the meat. He was only a little fellow. But he came from Cairns too. But I can't think of his name, and I've been trying and trying to think but it won't come back to me. I know it was Keith somebody.

What sort of job did Bill Crisp have?

He was the main butcher to the Battalion.

He was a butcher too.

Yes. He was the main fellow. He did the ordering and fixing up. He did all that. I can't remember Keith somebody, a little fellow. But I suppose he'd be well in his eighties now.

You've just about got to be ninety to have been in it.

Yes. He would be in his nineties.

When you left Sheffield your mother apparently was quite distraught about you joining the army.

Yes, naturally she would, wouldn't she.

What was your father's attitude?

He didn't worry. He never showed he worried. I was the only one who went out of our family.

Whereabouts did you leave from in the ship? Did you leave from Le Havre?

Yes.

That's on the first leave, you think.

Yes.

END OF TAPE FOUR - SIDE B: END OF INTERVIEW