Australians at War Film Archive

Frank McDonald - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

NB. This transcript is of an interview filmed for the television series, Australians at War in 1999-2000. It was incorporated into the Archive in 2007.

00:36 **Frank, could you tell me your name, your age, and what battalion you were in during the war?**

I was born 26th June 1896 and I was in the 40th Battalion No. 53/40th Battalion, solely recruited in Tasmania.

01:00 All Tasmanians in it and the only one that really left Tasmania in the war was the 40th, of all Tasmanians. A lot of them was in the 12th Battalion and some in the 52nd and 54th. But 40th was entirely Tasmanian.

Now I thought we could start by telling us one of the earliest memories of when you were young. Could you just tell us a bit about when you were very young, growing up

01:30 **here in Ulverstone? What it was like? What you remember, what you did?**

Of course, being a kid, you know, I had the usual complaints, measles and mumps and that kind of thing. But 1903, the end of the Boer War, my father and my mother and I, we came down to recreation ground on Ulverstone. They had a

02:00 heap of timber, stacked up about 10, 12 feet high. And on the top of it, was an effigy of Kruger. He was the boss of South Africa at the time. And they burned that. That was my first real knowledge of the Boer War. I hadn't taken any interest before then of course because I was only seven. But my cousin

02:30 Jim, he was away at the Boer War. He came back all right. He used to live on Ulverstone. He was one of their best footballers too, and cricketer.

So did your parents at all talk about the Boer War? Was there any talk about it when you were young?

No. No. They weren't very interested in it then because being South Africa; well South Africa meant nothing to people in Tasmania at that time.

03:00 I mean we didn't have television or radio or anything like that, so only had a little newspaper, The Advocate. Used to cost us twopence at the time to buy it. But you didn't give us much news about the Boer War. It sort of didn't interest us. It was well, like Vietnam or something like that, so far as we were concerned. At least that's what I thought at the time. I wasn't really interested. It meant

03:30 nothing to Australia and I don't think very much to England as far as that goes.

So Frank, just going back to the when you were seven, and they burned the effigy of Kruger. Do you know why they did it? Why did they do that? Were there many people there?

04:00 Oh well many people, about a hundred seemed a lot of people in those days because the population of Ulverstone was only about two thousand. It wasn't that much at that time. Probably only about a bit over a thousand at that time. But when the war started I think the population was two thousand, of Ulverstone. And I started school, we lived up Caster Road [?]. That's three and a half miles from the state school

04:30 down here where I started at seven. We used to go in at a quarter to nine we had to be on parade down at the school. I went through, they didn't have, call them grades in those days, they called it classes. There were six classes, that's equal to twelve grades nowadays. I was up in the sixth class when I was eleven. Somehow or other I seemed to be able to pick pretty

05:00 quick. Well of course my brothers would be in school and I had their work too and I used to listen to them and I'd, they used to do homework in those days.

So what did you learn much about the King and Queen and country in those days?

No. My father told me to concentrate on spelling, arithmetic and writing. They were my main

05:30 items. Reading, of course. But, so I did concentrate on those and especially on the arithmetic, because the old teacher used to pay two-and-sixpence for any pupil who got his six sums correct, on examination day at the end of the year. I collected it seven years running, so I liked figures. I was very good at 'em too, as a matter of fact.

So did they ever

06:00 **sing?**

We used to play cricket and football. Course the main sports in those days was cricket, football, running, bicycle riding, that kind of thing.

Was school regimented? Did you sing God Save the Queen and was there a kind of…

We used to,

06:30 we knew, heard about the royal family of course. Naturally. It didn't interest us to any extent. Although we had the Union Jack flying on our flagpole there in the school grounds. But well, I don't know what other people, other kids thought, but I mean I didn't give them any thought at all, as far as the, I never did at any time, to tell you the truth. I have no, much time for the royal family. Nothing

07:00 against them. But we did learn a little bit about previous kings and personally I think it - from what I'd read about them, the way they carried on, I reckon they ought to have had their throats cut when they were young. They were scum, I reckon, a lot of them. But the present, well old King Edward, he was, he seemed to be all right. And George - King George.

07:30 And the old Queen. A very nice woman, the old Queen Mother. She's still alive, I believe, in her late nineties. I saw her in St Kilda when she was first married. A lovely young woman she was. And the present Queen, I think, you can't fault her. Very good. But her family, I couldn't stand them. No how, I don't think they should

08:00 be on the throne at all. As far as I'm concerned. I, well I don't like a republic. I don't like a president. Somehow or another I think they're mainly all crooks. But I wouldn't have any respect at all for her family.

Okay. Now I just want to take you back in those days, where you had life a bit tough?

Well, we didn't have much of a farm. It was only about five acres, really

08:30 that you could crop. And we had an acre of an orchard. That was the main thing about it. My father put that in. All kinds of apples and cherries and plums and so forth. So we had fruit all the year round. And we had fifty hives of bees. So we had honey all the year round as well. And we had a couple of cows so we had milk and cream and butter. And we grew our own potatoes of course. So one way or another we

09:00 made out. My father, he could, he could do most anything. He could tan a hide, make leather. He could make a pair of boots as well as they could make 'em today. He had a wooden last and an iron one. He used to make lots, and he had a big machine that you could have a sew, and sew. Or he'd make his own cobbler's wax and sew them with a bit of bristle on each end to poke through

09:30 a kind of a spiky thing, a brattle he called it. Pushed that through the sole and then he'd thread the two threads, then through and pull it, and he'd give you a sewn sole, if you wanted it.

Did you learn those things too?

No. No. I watched him do plenty of 'em. But oh, I'd half sole a pair of boots without any trouble. But he was a first-class carpenter and joiner.

Now you said about 1912 you joined the cadets, or you went to military

10:00 **college?**

Yes. Well they brought in compulsory military training.

Could you just explain that again?

More or less when the war started, I was a fully trained soldier. I was an A1 marksman with a rifle. And I'd, we'd been up to Wilmot building a couple of houses, my brother and my father and I. And we came back and the war had just started when we came home. So I went down to

10:30 Dr. Gollen and enlisted. And he knocked me back. Because I had bad teeth on the top. He said I had to get them out. So I went around to Jack McDunner. He was a dentist in Robey Street, and I said, "No, you yank out all those teeth, Jack." So he pulled them all out, with laughing gas [nitrous oxide] they had in those days, instead of the injection, a mask over your face. The only thing, it didn't last quite long enough.

11:00 He had to pull thirteen teeth out, and the last two, I was out of it, and it wasn't very pleasant. As however, he was the amateur middle weight champion of Victoria, boxing. So I didn't thump him on the nose. It was better not to. However, I got my new teeth in, in November 1914. I went back, and they'd changed the dashed law. You had to have your

11:30 back grinders. That's your double teeth, top and bottom. So I went up to North Queensland and cut sugar cane for a season. They took me when I came back.

That's good Frank. Thanks very much.

He used to put us through our paces down at the drill hall and we'd do for marches and out to the rifle range out on, out on this highway here there's a rifle range that was out here somewhere. We used to come out there

12:00 about once a fortnight and do a shoot. The range is from two hundred to five hundred yards. But oh no, we, Jimmy Newland, he was a really good instructor, really good. A good soldier too, he won the VC [Victoria Cross] at the war.

So did you used to go marching as a troop?

12:30 Oh yes. We used to go out together. I don't know how many there was, probably about fifty or sixty of us. From fourteen, I think the law said from fourteen to twenty-five you were due to do military service. And of course they cut out that twenty-five business after the war. I don't think

13:00 compulsory training was in after that. Not when I came back, anyhow. If they did if it was, I didn't take any notice of it. I didn't have anything to do with it. But oh, we used to have quite a good time. He was a nice fellow, Jimmy, and he, he taught you properly. How to handle your gun and why. His version was, "Your rifle's your best friend when

13:30 you're in war." He's quite right, too. It was. You could rely on that but you couldn't always rely on your friend.

Can we just go back to when you enlisted. When you first heard about the war. Do you remember what you were doing and where you were when

14:00 **you first heard the war had been declared?**

Yes, as I say, I was up at Wilmot, yeah I was up at Wilmot with my father and brother, building two houses up there. And when we came back, the war had just started. Must have been about, it was the fourth or fifth when we arrived home. I went and enlisted then because, as I say, I was a trained soldier and

14:30 they knocked me back because my teeth were bad on the top, decayed. We didn't have toothbrushes in those times, or there may have been some of 'em around but we didn't have 'em, on the farm. So I went to McGunner, a dentist in Robey Street, and he pulled all the top ones out. I had my new ones in, my plate, in November, and I went back to enlist again, and they

15:00 knocked me back again because you had to have your own double teeth, top and bottom, your back grinders, they called 'em. I suppose that's a fair description. So I went up to North Queensland and, up around Gordonvale and cut sugar cane. That's a tough job, that.

So what did you think about though, when you couldn't get into the army?

15:30 **Were you upset, when they'd knocked you back?**

Oh no. I didn't like the army in peacetime. But in wartime I was quite happy in it. But in peacetime, I was no good as a soldier in peacetime.

Why did you volunteer? What made you want to go?

Well it's probably a silly reason. It wasn't for king and country. Australia's too big to be carted away by anybody,

16:00 and I wasn't concerned about that. What I really was worried about was the women and the children. If a place was invaded. You know, when the war had been going along enough for us to hear what was happening to some of the women and children in villages in France being bombed out and so forth. That was my main concern, really, to see if I could do

16:30 a little bit to protect them. And it was the same reason I volunteered for the Second War. I was five and a half years in that, too.

How did you hear about the war?

Yeah, well

17:00 the first I knew about Gallipoli was when Lord Fisher, I think he was the admiral in charge of the British Fleet at the time. He ordered a battle fleet to go up into the Dardanelles there and they bombarded the

Anzac Cove or wherever it was at Gallipoli there. And

17:30 they gave it a bombardment for probably two or three hours or more. And then the fleet went out. Six months later they come and invade the place. Which I thought was the greatest bit of stupidity I'd ever heard of as far as the army was concerned. You'd warned them. Given six months. The Germans were the allies of Turkey, or Turkey was allied

18:00 to Germany. The Germans went and fortified that place and made it almost impregnable. Because there was a high hill going up to Constantinople, the capital, where they landed. And they, of course they had trenches on the hill all the way up and machine guns and what not, and plenty of artillery up on the top. They cut our fellows to pieces. They were merely murdered, actually. For useless, no point in it at all.

18:30 I was absolutely disgusted, but of course they did a lot of silly things in the war, the top brass. That was one of 'em. It turned out as I thought it would. They couldn't take the place.

So how did you hear about it? Was it in the newspapers, how was it reported back? Was it reported as a victory, when you remember it, back home?

19:00 Oh, well, I didn't read the papers over much. Of course I was in the army and I was getting the information at Victoria Barracks. That's where we used to; we knew what was going on overseas all the time. So no that's in the Second War. No, no, in the First War, Oh we didn't used to get The Advocate only about once or twice a week. Cause it was three and a half miles down

19:30 to the town to get the thing, you see, and we didn't know much about it at all, actually. But we did read about the bombardment and, and of course the landing there. But it all sounded stupid to me. It turned out it was, too. And why give a fellow six months to prepare for you? You tell him you're going to come along later

20:00 on and give him a bashing. I mean you wouldn't do that, would you?

No. We didn't give you six months' warning, we just turned up yesterday. Now when you enlisted, what did you your mum and your dad think about you going off to the war, and your brother? What was the story there?

Well my father didn't seem too worried about it. My father, my mother was worried. But I says, "Oh it's no use worrying about it, Mum," I says, "Somebody's got to do

20:30 it." But she didn't say anything, but she had a little bit of a weep. My brothers of course, five of them were married. They married fairly young and they only had one little fellow, he was only about ten or something when I went, went away, he was quite a

21:00 boy. When I came back he was wearing my suit. But oh no, well of course I suppose they take it for granted, everybody, all our friends round about were all enlisted. Everyone in the benches I was sitting on at school, they all went away to the war. And a couple in the front,

21:30 George Trew and Charlie Trew, they didn't come back. But the others did. Albert Marshall and Montague Bates and George Vaughan, and fellows like that, they came back all right. But I lost a lot of mates in the war. But still it was just something, a job that had to be done. And we were trained for it. So, well, just had to go and do it.

And were there many people who didn't

22:00 **want to go to the war, do you remember?**

Ah well, I suppose there was a few of those. But not many over here that I knew. Well probably half the boys that was in school with me went. No, I think they were all quite happy to go away. I suppose it was more the excitement than anything else. But they,

22:30 the town boys, they weren't quite the same as one when you're in the country. I mean you're brought up with a gun in your hand as I say and you like shooting, so you thought you'd have a bit of practice when you went away, on some of these Germans. I lived next door to a family of Germans, and I didn't like them. Didn't like them at all. They were real Germans. I don't know whether they were interned or whether they went over to Germany just before the war started, or what, but I never

23:00 saw them again. They'd gone when I enlisted. They were on the farm just next door to; their house was only about two hundred yards from ours. There was five sons. I didn't like any of them. They were really nasty brutes. So gave me a nasty slant on whatever German. But actually I spoke to a few of German prisoners which we took at various times, and I met some quite, some nice fellows among

23:30 them. They'd been waiters and whatnot in London, and spoke English very well. I found them quite decent fellows. Except when there was a back of a gun and it was pointing my way, then they were not my friends then.

Different story. Okay, so. I'm just wondering Frank. What were you going to do if the war hadn't happened.

24:00 **What would've your life been?**

Now that's something I hadn't given a great deal of thought to. There's one thing I was not going to do, and that was do farming work. I didn't care for farming work somehow or another. Although I did a bit. I grew about ten acres of potatoes for a couple of farms opposite us and that kind of thing, but I didn't

24:30 like farming. I knew mercery and drapery, because I served two years in it. And I was a pretty good clerk, so I didn't have any worries about finding a job. It was easy in those days. You'd get a job most anywhere. But the wages were not too good, of course. But when I came back I had a job waiting for me. George White and Son,

25:00 a tailor and mercer in Murray Street, Hobart. They, I think he, my brother had been, my brother Charlie had been engaged to one of the girls, he had three daughters and a son, and I think the old boy had one of his youngest daughters picked out for me. I don't know, but he kept this job open for me. And I went and worked for him for two years. But it was a very religious family. They'd have a

25:30 bit of a church service before breakfast in the morning and again at night, and had their own Sunday School and too much for me. I went and stayed with them there for about two months and that was enough. But I worked in his shop for two years and then I went over to Melbourne.

You mentioned your brother Charlie. Did you both go

26:00 **off together? Did you enlist together?**

Yeah, more or less. He was living in Hobart at the time. But he was in Claremont Camp with me. Yes, I met him there. He didn't go away with the 40th. They sent him over to Egypt. I don't know what he did there. But we were a bit fortunate. We went to England.

Can you just go back a bit though? When you enlisted, can you just tell me the story

26:30 **of what happened. They took you down to Claremont. And what did you do there as part of the training? Can you just explain that?**

Claremont? Well we just did our normal training there and route marches. We had to go, one night they took us away up Mount Wellington. That's right, that was a good long walk. It was eight miles to the city from Claremont and then up this dashed mountain was about another three miles or so. It was a good big walk at night. But Claremont was a nice little place. It was like a frying pan

27:00 with a handle there and the river went round it. New Northwood was over on this far side. It was quite a pretty setting. When I arrived there at night, they had bell tents. We had to put up our own tent and it rained and a howling wind, and I tell you it was quite a job putting up a tent in a real strong wind and the rain. Now we were only there for,

27:30 oh I don't think more than about two or three months. And we sailed for England. Arrived on Salisbury Plains only about two hundred yards from Stonehenge was our camp there. We were there for some months as a matter of fact. We went, arrived in France I think it would be about the very early part in November,

28:00 1916. We went to Le Havre, I think somebody christened it One Blanket Hill or another. We had to go up on a hill and we camped there at night and then we came down the next day and caught a train and went right up, about two or three days on the train in cattle trucks, sitting there, you couldn't move or lay down. Not room. It was a nasty trip. And we arrived up at a place called

28:30 Bayeux, quite a good big town. Maybe fifty, one hundred thousand people in it. That's right, I got a surprise there. All the French towns they have a square in the centre of the town, and a town hall and so forth, and council chambers and what not, and a big church on the side, and all that kind of thing. But in the middle of the square it was about eighty, a hundred yards square,

29:00 blank, tiled. Well, I went down I slept in an old cotton mill the first night and it was cold. It was coming on winter, November or December is winter time in France. Anyhow we got up from there and then we marched from there next day into Armentieres and then that's when we took over the first support to the battalion in the line.

What were you

29:30 **thinking and feeling when you were first going to the front. Were you apprehensive?**

Well. I had a funny intro, initiation as a matter of fact. Where we went in to was a support line. On the first morning, we went in on Sunday evening at dusk, as it's about eight hundred yards from the German front line,

30:00 the support camp. Our battalion was there and I came out of the office on the Monday morning, just stepped outside and these two officers, Captain Tyrell was standing like where you are there and a lieutenant beside him there. A nice sunny morning, about ten o'clock, and a shell came over. A 4.3 German howitzer shell and it landed about that far behind the Captain Tyrell.

30:30 Fortunately for me, he was dead in line between the bursting shell and myself. He got his back all torn

out with the metal from the shell burst, I didn't get a scratch. He protected me. He fell over into my arms as a matter of fact. Colonel Lord, he was our colonel at the time, he was only about twenty yards away, walking over to talk to him. He got a bit of shell through his sleeve of his jacket.

31:00 I thought to myself, "Well, I'm not going to get hurt in this war." You know, if that captain had been standing a foot that way or a foot that way, I'd have got in my chest what he got in his back. So he saved my life there. Captain Tyrell that was, I'll never forget the man for that. I never had any fear about getting hurt after that.

You were right. You were blessed.

Yeah. I didn't get a wound or anything.

I was just thinking though,

31:30 **earlier, back in England, what were the soldiers, what were the Aussie soldiers feeling about going to war then. Before you actually got on the front?**

Oh they seemed to be all right. Of course we had huts there, held about sixteen people. We were only about two hundred yards from Stonehenge. You've read about that, I suppose, and seen the picture of it. A most amazing thing that, you know. Anybody goes to England; they should never miss seeing Stonehenge.

32:00 Rocks about that foot square and about twelve feet high, five of them, I think, standing up like that, and across the top of 'em there's two more. The same size, laying across the top. And do you know, I climbed up one of them, and on the top of the front one, cross-ways, was a complete compass. Dead-set pointing due north.

32:30 Carved into the rock. God knows when it was done, hundreds of years before. And do you know, there wasn't a bit of stone to resemble those rocks anywhere within sixty miles of where they are? They must have been carried there.

Did you get to see much of England?

Oh yes I saw a good deal of England as a matter of fact. When the war ended, the Armistice

33:00 in November, I couldn't see any sense in hanging around in France if I could help it. So I applied for non-military employment in London and I got sent out to Clapham. They had a British School of Telegraphy there. I told them I could take fifteen words a minute. I could take thirty of course, because I was a first-class telegraphist. So I attended that for about a fortnight,

33:30 I got hold of the boss and I said, "Listen, I don't want to hang around here any more," I said, "I want to have a look at England while I'm here." "Oh" he said, "You've got to show some improvement." I said, "I learn very fast." So he gave me a test and he finished up at thirty two words a minute and I still had it all right. "Oh well," he said "You can go." he said, "But if you're caught," he says, "You're AWL [Absent Without Leave] from here."

34:00 I said, "Oh, that's OK." I said, "I dodged the shells and bullets in France, I ought to be able to dodge your military coppers here." So I went to the races all around England, wherever there was a racecourse, I went.

Did you win any money?

One or two, they're the biggest fools out the bookies [bookmakers] over there. They'd lay you five to four that horse, anybody would know the thing was going to win by five lengths. So I used to go and win my five or six pound

34:30 a day. That was enough for me. That was a good time.

Frank, I wonder if you could just tell us a bit now about when you left Tasmania. Did your family come and see you off or did your mum give you anything?

No. No. None of my family were there. But there were a lot of people from Hobart came down to the wharf. I suppose, you know, they had their own friends among the soldiers.

35:00 But, oh no, well from Ulverstone getting down to Hobart was quite a job in those days. There was only two trains a day used to go down there.

When did you say goodbye to your family? Do you remember that time, what happened when you left here?

Oh, I just said goodbye to my mother. I didn't see the boys – my brothers – I didn't notice them around. I just – Oh I took things as a matter of course in those days.

35:30 Didn't come home as a matter of fact. I don't recollect having any embarkation leave just before we left. No, we didn't. We left straight, Claremont and went down onto the boat at Ocean Pier. It was about eleven thousand ton boat. There was about thirteen or fourteen hundred of us aboard,

36:00 but 40th Battalion and the first lot of reinforcements. We got a frightful trip between; well we went round and called in at Adelaide for a day. And saw a funny thing there, too. There was no port at Adelaide when I went there. Whether they've got one now or not I don't know. The boats had to anchor about one hundred, two hundred yards off shore, and they

36:30 rowed us in. And there was a dashed railway station there, King William Street ran straight up the edge of the town. And a double railway line went up King William Street. It looked a bit funny to me, that. But however. We had a bit of leave there and then we sailed for South Africa, for Cape Town, and that was the roughest bit of water I think I've ever been in.

37:00 We were battened down below between Adelaide and South, Durban, no, not Durban, Dhaka. French West Africa. We pulled in there for a couple of days. It was right on the Equator line. But until we got to there, they were battened down and the waves was coming over the boat deck on an eleven thousand ton boat. So it was a bit rough. Very rough trip. But from

37:30 there, from Cape Town on over to England it was all right. Fairly good. Going through the Bay of Biscay was pretty fair. We'd arrived in Southampton and then we came up to a little town called Amesbury. We went out there by train and then we marched out about two miles out to our camp on Salisbury Plains.

So what did you get up to on the boat?

38:00 **Did you have to train on the boats, or what?**

Oh. We did play cards, yes. But mainly we didn't do anything much. It was too crowded to do much. No, we had, no I don't think we did any training going over. But coming back we had to do a bit of work. But no going over we didn't do anything.

38:30 We arrived at Southampton. Come up and went up onto the place, Larkhill, Larkhill Camp. That was the name of it.

Tape 2

00:25 **So did you remember any of that time, did you say, any of that time about Federation and the politics?**

00:30 No, I, tell you the truth I wasn't interested in it, actually. I couldn't see how it was going to affect me one way or the other. Mind you, I know it was a good thing. Same as when, later on they had what they called a Commonwealth of Nations, didn't they? That's when we became sort of more or less independent. The way we are now. But, capital

01:00 of the federal government, I think, was in Melbourne. Up off Swanson Street, or across the street on the top of the hill. Before they moved to Canberra.

Did you sort of think that Australia was independent before the war or not? Did you think you were part of Britain?

I knew it was a part of England. That's what I, we were taught at school, you know. Taught to look up to England and the King and the Queen and so forth.

01:30 But it never did interest me to any extent, that. It wasn't going to affect how I lived or what I did or one thing or another. They're just a figurehead when all's said and done, the royal family. They don't have any real power. Although they have a governor-general out here and he has to sign any bills or what not.

Do you think most of the people that lived in Tasmania in those days were pretty independent

02:00 **then? Were they self-sufficient, you know, like separate from England. I mean you said we're part of Empire, but how did most of the people feel about that?**

Oh, I think mainly they were all king and country, you know. They looked for the royal family and one thing and another. They venerated them. But, it never did interest me much.

02:30 **Do you remember the conscription debate that happened in Australia, you know, during the war. Where you here when that debate was happening?**

That was Christmas 1917, or around about Christmas. We had to vote on it. We were at a little place called Neuville in France, when we had to vote. The army had to vote on the conscription. I think I

03:00 would say, safe in saying that ninety percent of the, of the troops voted 'No'.

Why was that?

The reason for that, well my reason anyhow, for voting, 'No' was that the only chance we had of getting away from the shell fire and what not for a few days was when our battalion was too weak to hold a line

and we had to wait for reinforcements. But if you're going to have conscription, you're going to be there all the time. We'd never get out

03:30 of the line. Anyhow I mean you get, you get a little bit tired of being shelled and machine-gunned day after day, twenty-four hours a day, week after week. You need a bit of a spell from it. That's the only way we had of getting it was to, no conscription.

Did anybody think, though, that it would have been unfair to have brought blokes into the army

04:00 **who didn't want to be there, like you fellows?**

Well, anyhow, myself, I preferred to fight alongside a fellow that was, he volunteered. Not one that was forced to go. I mean, I wouldn't like to be forced to go myself. I wouldn't have my heart in the business. Different thing, doing a thing off your own bat than being made to do it.

04:30 I didn't like conscription. Didn't like it at all.

What did you think of Billy Hughes [Australian Prime Minister] then, who was pushing the conscription issue?

Poor old Billy, you know, he came over to France. It would be 1918. And the first lot of the original volunteers,

05:00 they came home to Australia. They sent them home from France. Billy came over, a little, squinty Welshman he was, a bit of a mo [moustache], and he gave us a bit of a talk on it. I met him again in Victoria Street, London, not far from Victoria Street Station. There was four or five of us there and here comes old Billy along the street. So they grabbed him. Put him on their shoulder and carried him

05:30 along and put him in a pub and made him drink a glass of beer and somebody pinched his watch and chain while he was, I'll never forget old Billy. He was scared out of his life. He thought we were going to lynch him, I think. But he was all right, he wasn't a bad fellow. I saw him over in Hobart too, after I came home. He came over there visiting for something or another. He didn't do a bad job, you know. His ideas for conscription of

06:00 course they had it in England and he was an Englishman. I don't know what he, I think he was, been a train driver or something in Western Australia before the war. But I'm sure he was born in England, or Wales, somewhere like that. No, no, I think old Billy did a fair job. Same as old Ben Chifley. I wasn't a Labor voter but

06:30 I think old Ben did a reasonable job when he took over as Prime Minister. [Prime Minister Robert] Menzies, of course, was a different proposition. Smart fellow all the same. But I didn't take any notice of politics, actually, never was interested in it, because what, I can't alter it. No matter who I voted for one vote doesn't mean much. So you just have to put up with what you get.

07:00 You trust to the majority of people to kick 'em out if they didn't do a reasonable job. I was introduced to the Mills Bomb, a hand grenade. It had a pin going through it like that and there was a lever thing like that and a pin went through the other side of it. You pulled the pin out and the lever flopped over and you had about three, some of them had a three-second fuse and other were five second to toss

07:30 it over. We had, in Larkhill they had a trench and we had to get down in a trench and they had a kerosene tin about twenty five yards away, sunk down into the ground, and you had to, from in the trench you had to toss that grenade over the top of the trench, which was about seven feet deep, and you were only six feet high as the saying is, and land it as near that kerosene tin as possible. That's how we learned

08:00 bombing hand grenades. They were pretty nasty little thing, too, when they went off.

You were trained as a signaller; can you tell me what a signaller does and what your job was?

Yeah, I'll tell you what we did. Well, when we went into the line at

08:30 Armentieres, a place called Houplines, and the telephone call sign was GR6, I can still remember that. There was a line coming back to our supporting battalion, a line going out to the 10th Brigade, one up to A Company, one up to B Company, one up to C Company. And they were linked across to the front, there was three companies in the front line and the fourth company was behind the

09:00 middle line company in the front, half-way between there and the battalion headquarters. About fifty or sixty yards apart, and they were all connected by telephone, we had a big switchboard. And the dugout was one big room, with a partition going through it. The seniors were here, and the colonel and his second in charge, old 'Piggy' Clark from Hobart and Captain Guard, our adjutant. They were there. Well, when you get a

09:30 phone rings and one of the company commanders or something wanted to speak to the colonel, we'd switch him through on our switchboard. He had a phone there and we'd switch it through and give him a buzz. And he'd speak to them. But shelling was going on every day from the German side, shells

dropping around about and of course they used to break my telephone lines. So there was one job I

10:00 had to do was go out and mend those damn telephone lines. Of course the only place you had to go was where the shells was dropping, because that's where it was broken. I used to have a phone round my neck and a connection on each of the terminals on the phone and a safety pin attached to the other end of 'em and we used to use

10:30 a twin cable like that. One line there and another there, positive and negative. We'd push one safety pin into one side and the other one onto the other. And I had to crawl up either side to see where the break was, if I could get headquarters, well I knew it was further on. That's how we used to find where the line was broken. Sometimes you'd just get a little bit of shrapnel that would go in it and it wouldn't cut the

11:00 line, but it was making a short circuit where the two wires joined, you see, damned hard to find. You might have to test within that far of it before you could find it. Couldn't see it.

I reckon that was a pretty dangerous job, sometimes, was it?

Oh yes, if you wasn't careful you'd get knocked off. But still, I suppose I, I had nine signallers and three runners to the office and I expect I probably

11:30 lost about eighteen or twenty signallers, disappeared. Got that way that in 1918 that I hardly had time to know 'em before they were topped off. Only used them as runners in the last six months of the war. We didn't have trench warfare then, we were around, about the end of July 1918 we, they had what they called a 'second Battle of the Somme', that's when we started

12:00 the big battle that really was the beginning of the end of the war. At eleven o'clock in the morning, we'd taken over forty thousand prisoners, so it was a decent sort of a battle. We had thousands upon thousands of guns all opened up at once, God you never heard such a noise.

I thought we might go back though, just in terms of, just going through the war, to when you first got there

12:30 **and I think you mentioned one day that one of your mates said it was so loud you couldn't hear?**

That was our first big battle. We were about, I suppose a thousand yards or more from Messines itself, the village that was on top of a very steep hill, high, and they came down and then there was a flat part. Their battalion, they had a headquarters there, and then there was a little river, Douvre, it was only about

13:00 seven or eight feet wide, but it was about seven or eight feet deep, too. That ran along, and then their, the German trench system was, was there running back to that. And then no-man's land about a hundred yards wide, and then there was our trench system. And back behind those hills, sloping down like that, and they had a place, Ploegsteert Wood, and on the end at Ploegsteert Wood there was a place they called it the Catacombs.

13:30 It was a big tunnel went into the hill, I didn't know what it was for. We would have gone in there when we were back behind the lines in support. But actually it was a tunnel that went through underneath the hill where our trench system was, underneath the River Douve and along the flat, and right up this hill underneath the village of Messines. They put over five hundred

14:00 tons of high explosive in about four different places. And at four o'clock in the morning, that's when the battle started, it was just starting to break day. Well we used to go out half-way across no man's land. That's one thing old Colonel Ord was a bit cunning, mainly they used to jump out, out of their own front line and go across. But we went half-way across and we lay down there about half-past three, and

14:30 waited. And at four o'clock, all our guns opened and hundreds of machine guns going, and these, this damn mine, all this thing, it all went up at once. And you know the ground rocked like that. You couldn't stand up unless you held on to something; it rocked for about three minutes. The whole earth, you'd think it was a volcano or something had gone off. It turned people, woke

15:00 people in bed ninety miles away, so it was a bit of a blast. Paddy McKinley, Paddy, a real Irishman, he says to me, "Mate," he says, "It's that damn noisy, I can't hear it." You know, he was nearly right, we could hear ourselves speak like we are now and yet the noise was absolutely terrific. Half France seemed to be up in the air, I was

15:30 wondering how many bits of Fritzes [Germans] were up there with it. That's a sight I'll never forget. And they must have known we were going to attack that day, because hundreds upon hundreds of Verey [flare] lights went up in the air, and they burst and come down very slow, different colours. All, the whole sky was lit up with these things. Of course, thing is,

16:00 as soon as we could stand up we jumped up from where we were and we charged our front line. We only had fifty yards to go. Whereas if we'd have had to get out of our own trench we'd have had a hundred yards to go, and they had five machine guns, pill boxes, concrete, about eight or nine inches thick, all over, and just a slot about that long and about that wide at the end of the machine gun so they could

traverse this way but couldn't do much in that way. Well they were all

16:30 opened up, but we only travelled only fifty yards to get through 'em. If we'd had to go a hundred yards it wouldn't have been half of us got over. As it was, we had three hundred and eleven casualties out of eight hundred went over.

That's a lot of people.

Yeah. It was a pretty rough bit of a business that, as our introduction to the First War, my young brother's birthday.

17:00 **So what were you feeling at that first big battle, were you scared?**

No. No, I didn't worry about anything. That first business with that shell that killed Captain Tyrell, that cured me of being scared about anything. I knew I wasn't going to get hit. At least, I felt sure

17:30 I wasn't going to, so I didn't take any notice of anything. I didn't deliberately get in the way of a business, although later on in August, August 31st 1918, Major Paine was coming up with about forty men and I was on a level patch of ground. I was trying to get a telephone line. The Germans, we'd been advancing every day, fighting them, and I was using their telephone line

18:00 to get back to our advance brigade headquarters. I was mending that thing and Paine had his fellows about fifty yards away and all of a sudden, there was a, well, I don't know how many shells was coming at once, but there was twenty three holes and the furthest one away from me was eight feet from where I was standing. The shells, twenty three shells landed down there. Paine bolted with his men, of course the

18:30 artillery was meant for him only they were just a little bit off alignment. They had the right length, not quite the right direction. He went back, when he got to battalion headquarters he reported that I was blown to pieces, I don't know why the hell I wasn't. My putties up there were scorched with the flame off a couple of the bursting shells. Only about that far in front of me the hole was. Twenty three holes within eight feet of where I was standing,

19:00 and I never got a scratch. I got belted from head to toe with lumps of dirt and they hurt a bit, too, as a matter of fact. But I didn't get hit. Absolutely amazing. Well Paine, Paine, he had a perfect view, nothing in his way at all, only fifty yards away, and he said I was blown to pieces.

You got through that one too?

They thought I was a ghost

19:30 when I came back. I got the phone fixed up anyhow through to brigade. They cut a piece about eight or nine feet long it was blown to bits and I had to pull that end of it and the other end and I anyhow got it together anyhow and got the connection through for the old colonel to speak to brigade.

Did that bombardment, the continuous bombardment, how did that affect a lot of the men? The continuous bombardment of the war,

20:00 **did it affect people?**

Oh yes, some of them got what they called shell shocked, and they had to be invalided out. They couldn't take any more. It would shake, you know, they just couldn't stand it again, blew their nerves to pieces. I've saw one fellow, by the name of Lewis, he was on the telephone, one of my men, and a shell burst, this is at Ploegsteert, a shell burst nearly twenty yards away from him, one of their 5.9 howitzers,

20:30 and it killed him, and he never got a scratch on him. Concussion killed him. And he wasn't the only one. There was another fellow, I didn't know the other one and I didn't see it, but they told me another one, he was killed too nearly twenty yards away and not a mark on him. Concussion. Well that's what affected the brain of some of the fellows. Or their nerves or some dashed thing or another. Oh yeah, but their, the worst well that was the

21:00 worst shell in, to my mind, in the war, the German 5.9 . It was, I never, never could fully work out, it wasn't exactly a howitzer. A howitzer has a trajectory like that. But this one was a high velocity shell, and the shell arrived before you heard it. Where the other you might get a ten or twelve inch shell coming along, you could hear it long before it got to you. You could hear it humming through the air. And you could

21:30 see it as a matter of fact. But not the 5.9 and he burst on impact, so it'd only make a hole that deep. And metal scattered, a 5.9 weighed just about a hundred pound weight, a nasty shell. But the one that causes us a lot of bother in the trenches was not the shell; it was a mini-mortar, a trench mortar thing that weighed a hundred and ten pound.

22:00 And it only had a range of about two hundred and fifty yards I suppose, but oh, God, when it landed it made a hole about ten feet deep, and ten or twelve feet in diameter at the top, came up like that. At a place called Courcelette happened where I said it was the only place where the Germans had got into our front line and they were dead ones, five. They had eleven of these things in the air at once, on our

22:30 D Company I think it was, under a Major Giblon [?], that was a nasty, only a raid, of course about sixty or seventy Germans came over. But it was a nasty business. They made a terrible noise when they went off.

Now, I just wondered if you could talk a bit about what it was like in the trenches, in the winter.

Oh, well, it was cold, of course we had a,

23:00 what they call a duck board, it was about that wide, it was three-by-one battens going across onto three-by-one battens that way, strip about twelve feet long. That was in the bottom of the trench. This kept the water and the mud off you. And we had gum boots up to here. You had to have a kind of a fat kind of stuff. You had to put that over your raw bare feet and your socks on top of it, because otherwise you'd get trench feet, as they called it.

23:30 You could have frozen and of course if you got that you was in trouble. Not only would you, couldn't walk too well, but you'd be fined. It was an offence in the army to get trench feet. So if you didn't have this grease on your feet, you were in bother. But our D Company under Major Giblon, their left

24:00 flank was up alongside the River Lys, and in the wintertime, I don't know whether it was the snow or what the devil it was, but how it used to rise, and it flooded his trench for thirty or forty yards long, it'd come under water about a foot or eighteen inches deep. The dugouts, the fellows had there, they were wading through that, it must have been very uncomfortable. But it was cold in the trenches, no doubt about that. And you only had

24:30 two blankets, you know. That's all.

Did you ever feel like you wanted to get out of there? Did you ever reach a point where you say, I've had enough of this war?

Well, we, I dunno, I quite enjoyed it, as a mater of fact. I liked bullets flying and that kind of thing. I liked to send a few myself, too, when I got a chance, but,

25:00 no, I quite enjoyed it. Course, as I say, as a kid I was brought up with guns, and banging and noises and what not, so it was all just part of everyday life to me. But of course the one annoyance in the trenches was the body lice, they used to get on the seam of your shirt, under shirt, and lay eggs there. And the

25:30 lice, just like a little bit of clear plastic or something , and they'd hatch with the heat from your body in two or three days and you had probably fifty or a hundred lice crawling around on your body, and biting, you know, all over the place. And of course you were scratching here and scratching there.

Can you mention that you, there was a dog you got, you said there were some rats?

Yeah. Tike, we called him, he attached himself to us at Armentieres and used

26:00 to come in the trenches with us. He wouldn't leave somehow or another, he was a nice little fellow. Phyllis had a photo of him here somewhere. She has got it somewhere or another, a picture of him. He was a nice little fellow, a kind of little blonde colour. But he used to come up in the trenches, he wouldn't leave us. He wouldn't even bolt when the shells dropped pretty close to him, he'd just look up and see as we didn't take any notice and

26:30 he didn't either. He was a good little dog. I don't know what happened to him in the future, later on. He was with us for about twelve months, I remember, but after that I sort of lost track of him. I don't know where he got. Well we lost track of a lot of fellows in that time.

And the British, the British Army, the commanders, what did you begin to think about them, the way that they were treating the Aussie soldiers?

Well, we didn't have much to do with the British Army.

27:00 1918 I came in contact with them a bit. But they were, at that time they were bits of boys. They only looked about sixteen. Course they probably were seventeen or eighteen, but they knew nothing, you know, and they had to take, when we started off on the second Battle of the Somme, they had to take on the left bank of the Somme, a bit of a hill went up there,

27:30 towards Bray. Well they didn't do too good on there and we had to pull out from where we'd gone and go over there and take the part where they'd failed. But no, they had a few good battalions; the 59th had a horseshoe thing on their back. They were a pretty tough battalion. Well they had some tough battalions all right, they were the one. But of course you couldn't expect the, a lad of seventeen or

28:00 eighteen in England, it was a different thing to a seventeen to eighteen year old Australian cause this was more or less a farming area over there and they were tougher there. They didn't, they were brought up tougher, no city life for them. But they were, seemed to be to me, anyhow they looked about fifteen, well, I mean you throw them into the,

28:30 into the war in 1918, 1918 from July until Armistice Day, that was a war. That was worse than all the rest of it put together. Especially September and August, September. I suppose our battalion was

engaged in bashing at the Germans, advancing

29:00 against them, two and three times a day, you didn't have much rest. I went for a two-and-a-half days without any sleep, you didn't hardly have time to eat. We took Bray, that was a nasty business, town called Bray right on the, Somme took a bend round and Bray was right on the bank of it. We took that at twelve o'clock at night. The only night battle I ever took part in and I wouldn't want another one. You had to root out

29:30 the Germans out of their houses. Some men who, they were builders in the town, Bray, we had to go in there in the dark, and we go up and haul 'em out. I didn't like it, I had to see the fellow that I was, I didn't care if he had a gun. I had one too, but somehow or another I prefer to be able to see him, see what I was doing and what he, the other fellow was doing. It's a nasty feeling to go into a room

30:00 and you don't know whether there's a Kraut [German] in it or not. He might be in there with a loaded pistol in his hand waiting on you. Yeah, well we got 'em out of it and that's when we continued these advances, all the time. And my battalion was down to eighty strength at the end of August. And the 38th Battalion only had forty. They didn't have an officer left, we had three, we had to send one over to take

30:30 charge of the 38th. And then later on in September, we'd must have got some reinforcement, a few, but the, more or less the 10th Brigade, the 9th, 10th and 11th Battalions, they, they sort of amalgamated. Had to, to get enough fellows to carry on. We had to be, we were getting into everything, anything.

31:00 **So just tell me if you believed in God. Or how you felt about God, if He existed when you were in the trenches?**

Now what am I going to, suppose to answer to that?

Just what you, just how you felt?

I know that I'm a neutral, so far as that's concerned. I don't have any belief one way or the other. I can't say there wasn't one, and I certainly don't know if there was one.

31:30 Nobody else does either. I'll tell you one thing, I read a, an article by someone, another who was an expert on, what do they call that heavy paper stuff? On the Red Sea papers anyhow, they have some name for the dashed thing. And it had all about the birth of Christ and the,

32:00 on the, being nailed up onto the cross. And this woman from these papers, was dealing with that, at that time, and she, after three years study of these papers, she'd come to the definite conclusion that there was no Son of God at all. That he was a fellow that was supposed to be, that was nailed up there, was a bit of a farm boy. And he,

32:30 his pal, had got on the wine or something, and then for a bit of a lark when he was half drunk they nailed him to the cross and they took him down, he was six months before he could work again. Now this was from, what do they call those papers?

The Dead Sea Scrolls, was it something like that? But I was just, I was just wondering, seeing so much death in the trenches, did you ever think God could not

33:00 **possibly exist?**

Well, it would make you think that he didn't have much interest in the human race, wouldn't it? And look what they did in the Second War, to the women and kids and that, the Germans, they butchered them in the villages they came through. You only had to look sideways and they'd shoot you.

33:30 **Frank, can you tell me if there were any church services at all, on the, after the battles. Can you remember any of the churches, and any of the chaplains, and what they said about the war?**

Churches? I don't know, we never had anything to do with them. They, one place, at the back of

34:00 Messines some, after we were in support there, we had a church service one morning. Some fellow was on a, I'll never forget it he was on a bit of a box, standing there, and he was holding forth about one thing and another, and he just got to where he, put your trust in God, fear nothing, and a shell burst around about three or four yards away, and he went over backwards off his box.

34:30 And there was a dugout down there, he went, he was down that for his life. So I thought to myself, 'Well, shows where he puts his trust.' That's the only thing I remember about the church service or anything like that, we didn't go to church in the war. That's the only time I ever remember a minister being there. And he wished he was somewhere else.

35:00 We had a real good laugh about that. That would be somewhere about July 1917.

Can you tell me, Frank, what does mateship mean to you?

Well, more or less someone that you trusted. And you know, well,

35:30 mateship is a real friend, supposed to be. One you can rely on if necessary, same as he could, should be

able to rely on you.

Do you think mateship existed before the war, or was it something that happened in the war?

No, as far as I was concerned it was after, it was during the war. I didn't have any mateships before it.

36:00 Except for schoolkids you know, we were friends and that. I used to play cricket with a team, school team, and we had our mates there, but I mean we were just kids together. We were friends, that's all. Not somebody that you would rely on for anything. I dunno, I had, perhaps a mistaken idea that

36:30 I wasn't satisfied that anything was done right unless I did it myself. I knew then it would satisfy me, anyhow, whether it was right or wrong.

Just getting back to the, the first battles. Can you tell me how you felt, just before the, before you fired your first shot in the war?

It just

37:00 felt normal, that's all, a bit of excitement. Oh, no, we, I don't know how the others felt, they all looked all right. Certainly they shifted themselves when the barrage got up. Some of them would nearly win the Stawell Gift [foot race] getting over the German front line.

And Frank, how did you feel when you

37:30 **first saw the enemy? The very first time you saw a German soldier. How did you feel?**

How did I feel? I felt that it was very handy to have that rifle. That's one thing I was sure of, if I could see him, I could kill him. I never missed with a rifle.

Did you, did you ever feel,

38:00 **did it ever feel bad to have to kill another human being?**

No, I didn't look on them as a human being; he was trying to kill me. So well, I mean when all's said and done, self-preservation is the first law of nature, isn't it? No, I didn't look on them as human, just as enemies trying to kill me.

38:30 You can't allow sentiment to enter into anything when you're in a war. It's just a job to kill someone, that's what we were, the government paid us for.

So that never bothered you?

No, never bothered me at all. It didn't bother me when our own fellows got killed, over much. Well, Jack Korthun[?], he was my

39:00 mate. We were going over in the Battle of Messines and he got shot dead, he was next door to me. But I looked down at him, you just had to keep going, that's all. I never thought about him after that. Too many others getting killed, you know, you've got to look after number one. You fought as a team, but you always had to look

39:30 after number one, if you didn't, well you weren't there to do any more fighting. No, I never tried to deflect a German bullet that was coming along, I let it go past. They were close to me, especially at Passchendaele. I reckon I had at least eight or nine hundred bullets came within that far of my head.

40:00 You've never heard a ricochet bullet going off a brick wall there on an angle and just coming round behind you like that, they make a horrible noise. Still, it was all part of the game.

Tape 3

00:26 **Frank, I'm just going to ask you about, back in the trenches**

00:30 **again just during the winter what it was like with all the snow and ice just being in the winter in the trenches, could you describe that for me?**

In the trenches?

Yes, with the snow and with the ice in the winter?

Oh yeah well it was just cold and miserable you see somebody had to be on duty, on guard duty in the trenches twenty four hours a day,

01:00 especially at daybreak cause that's when an attack was made you see and even the Germans didn't bother attacking at night, always just at daybreak and the morning. But it was cold, freezing to stand up there with a, well the temperature was about minus five, six, that's pretty cool.

01:30 The worst I've felt it here I think is about, I think we might have had a minus one, one night, one winter. But minus five it seemed to be a bit colder there too than here. France is about as flat as this floor, most of it, and you just get a slight breeze coming along and as far as the sun was concerned it might have just as well been the moon, it had no feeling in it at all.

02:00 In the summer it was quite nice as a matter of fact but in the winter time, I hate snow, always did., You'd get marching along it, you see the roads were built like that, sloped on the top, and you'd get snow about this deep on, then you'd walk along it and it'd get on the heel of your boot and come down the shape of a top and you know on an angle like that and you could twist your ankle so easy.

02:30 You had to keep on knocking it off the heel of your boot. I don't like the snow, they can have their skiing and whatnot, not for me, I don't like it.

Did you wear a big greatcoat, did you have a coat?

Oh yes. Yeah a big one that came well down low and you had gum boots up to here so

03:00 and we used to, I used to have about two or three pairs of socks hand-knitted ones, some people over here used to knit them and send them over to me in parcels. So I had plenty of thick socks and your gumboot, well it kept you reasonably warm, especially if there was grease on your foot, anyhow I never got trench feet.

03:30 **Can you tell me about the German POWs [Prisoners of War] and where they went to and what happened to them?**

Well, the prisoners of war I didn't, I don't know where they went but they went into concentration camps, they had to have guards around them, you might have a thousand or more prisoners there but I think they... I think the French made them do a bit of work, made them working parties, of course

04:00 you see France in those days was more or less a farming community and they needed labour. The ordinary men were out in the army so I'm sure they utilised a lot of those Germans as workmen. But at night they'd be locked up in this compound or whatever you'd like to call it, barbed wire all around them, be guards on duty

04:30 to see that they didn't get out. But what they, where they housed them all or where they buried them all, the dead, I don't know. Well, I saw some cemeteries there but when you come to remember that there'd be around four or five million killed in France, they'd take up a lot of ground you know to give em each a burial ground and they made some very nice ones too, they had a little hedge,

05:00 a wooden thing up like that and a cross specially with the name and number and so on, on it. I don't know, they'd take up enough room to half feed France with vegetables I'd reckon, if they were used as farming because I suppose they've all disappeared now and they are farms now same as our cemeteries disappeared.

Do you know Frank, what happened

05:30 **to the Australian POWs, were many Australians taken prisoner and what happened to them?**

Well a mate of mine, a school mate of mine used to sit next to me, Albert Marshall, he was a prisoner, a prisoner for two years, I think he was taken at Bullecourt, he came home and he was a telegraphist in the post office down here for, until he retired. He died

06:00 probably ten, fifteen years ago, he died of old age, he'd shrunk down, a little fellow. I saw him in the street some time in the year, about 1980s, and I hardly knew him, he was so small and wizened up. He was about the same age as me as a matter of fact.

Did he ever tell you what happened to him in the POW camp?

No,

06:30 I didn't ask him either. I never actually, I never discussed the war with anybody after the war was over. I just put it out of my mind and concentrated you know making a living. It was something you could do nothing about it; it was over and finished with, done. But I woke up early in the 1930s

07:00 that there was going to be another one, when that miserable little swine Hitler came rabble rousing there, I knew very well we were going have to fight those Germans again. That was the worst war you know, the second one. Australia was at, was in danger then, very great danger. If it hadn't have been for the Americans,

07:30 Japan would definitely have taken Australia, there's no doubt about that at all. We had to send all our rifles and things from Australia, in fact all our arms, we had to send over to England because at Dunkirk when they got kicked out there they had no arms, nothing, they just got back in England. There was the army with no, nothing to fight with. So Australia sent what they had over to England so we had nothing

08:00 here, only what they were manufacturing day by day.

Frank I was just wondering, do you remember [General Sir] John Monash at all, did you have

any, did he have anything to do with your command?

Oh Sir John, he was a nice old fellow Sir John, as a matter of fact I met him and his wife at the end of St Kilda pier one Sunday morning. I'd been down there after a snapper and there was Sir John and his wife. We had a little yarn there for a few minutes and old [General Sir] Tom

08:30 Blamey of course he was the second-in-command to Monash, he came up to Victoria Barracks and I'll never forget it. I was sitting in my chair and he came in and he had a colonel and whatnot there and he saw my colours, nothing would stop him, he had to come along and the colonels were trying to edge him away but he came up and shook hands and we had a bit of a yarn there. He was a good, pretty good general, old,

09:00 well Monash of course he was a planner really, very exact, when he drew up a battle plan, it was really exact. As a matter of fact he, the British Army kept some of these battle plans and they, the English generals were told to model in any business on Monash's

09:30 plans, the way he did them. They thought very highly of him in England. He was a smart old cookie was Monash, and a nice old fellow too. There's a division of usually thirty or forty miles behind us. They had their job to do. He controlled the,

10:00 10th and 11th, 9th, 10th and 11th brigades that made up the 3rd Division, he had twelve thousand men. Quite a few people to look after.

Yes, I was just wondering Frank if you remember men around you in the trenches breaking down or not being able to cope, did you ever try and help them in any way?

I remember old George Charles,

10:30 he was a sergeant, he left Amiens, he got half a dozen machine gun bullets went through his left arm and this was in 1918 and they hauled him off to hospital. And then we heard about it of course and the doctor's said he'd have to take his arm off and he said, "No," he said, "I'll leave the arm on."

11:00 And the doctor told him that he'll die if he didn't take it off, well he said, "Well I'll die with my arm on." I met him in Latrobe he was, about, I suppose about ten years, about 1970 or something like that, I met him in Latrobe and he was driving a float. He died in Devonport only about three, four years ago, old George, he'd fight

11:30 anything George, frightened of nothing.

Frank how did you keep your spirits up in the trenches you know when things were getting really tough, how did everybody keep going?

Well I guess just take it, it was something they had to do you know, I mean you couldn't walk out, you had to do your job and you did it for six or eight hours a shift and then you'd go to bed

12:00 and have a sleep. I think they, well I never heard a squeak from any of the boys, and I used to go round them practically every day. I went through the company to check the telephone lines and that to see if everything was alright. No, I reckon we had about the best battalion in the whole war

12:30 on either side of no mans land, the 40th, you couldn't beat 'em, nothing'd stop them once, once they had a go at something, they took it. We never lost a battle, we never had to retreat.

Why do you think they were so good?

I don't know why they were so good, just because I, well Tassie [Tasmania] was only a little place and I say they were all used to

13:00 guns of one sort or another, the main sports in those days, they just took to it same as I did myself, they got a lot of fun out of it. Old Perce Statton for instance, I saw him win his VC at Proyart, he was from Hobart. There was three German machine guns like that and the ground was as flat as this floor and they kept striking, we

13:30 had a camouflage rose about twelve feet high. But what I didn't know whether there was fowl netting on the back and hessian down the front so as you could walk along the grass verge on the main road and the Germans couldn't see ya, couldn't see through this thing. But as they'd turned the machine gun on it and there was a row of sparks as we came along the top of the road and we used to duck into the

14:00 gutter on the side. Well we were, evidently Perce Statton got a bit sick of this, he went out, he got underneath the camouflage fence and he took three machine guns was like that, now if, the main road went up there, he went to this one and he had two fellows to that one and two to this one, they got knocked off of course. But the two of the one out here that Perce

14:30 was going on to must have been watching these other two, he walked right up to their thing over ground as flat as this, and he just shot them with his revolver and then he went along to the others and he shot the three of them. He knocked the three machine guns out and then of course we tore through and that was the end of the Krauts there. I reckon that is the gamest thing I've ever seen in my

15:00 life. I mean, most of them would take some chances but cold-blooded to go out in the middle of a beautiful day like it is today and walk over bare ground about two hundred and fifty yards, straight up to a machine gun post, that takes nerve. And yet he didn't look that type of fellow, he was just a happy-go-lucky fellow Perce was, he deserved his VC if

15:30 ever a man did.

Do you think the war made a lot of men?

I think it did, I think it did yes; it sort of developed their character a good deal and gave them a sense of responsibility. I would say, a lot of fellows they didn't seem to worry about anything when they were young you know, but they had to take responsibility when they went

16:00 over there in a war, it was a different matter there, you get a different view of things. Yeah, I'll never forget Perce in that, that was the toughest bit of a job I've ever seen. I know fellows when they, they win a VC they're charging over somebody in a battle and they might knock off three or four Fritzes or capture some point

16:30 but that's one thing, you do that in hot blood, but in cold blood to walk over in the middle of the day, that's something different. Those machine guns you know they fired around about, at a rate of about five hundred bullets a minute, they'd only just have to see that one burst they'd cut you in halves, they only had to look at him and that was the end of him and he knew that too.

17:00 **Just getting back to life in the trenches when you, you told me, well I just wondered, you said you went to bed, I was just wondering where you went to bed?**

Oh well, you see the trench is seven feet high and as Germans things were over there, there was a hole dug in there, about that high and so wide that you go in there and then it opened out to about five

17:30 feet wide and the roof was about four foot six high, you crawled in there and that's where you laid down and had your sleep. They had some sandbags on the top of it in case you got a shell burst on the top, it might knock a whole lot in on top of you and then again it mightn't, if you were lucky it didn't.

Can you remember what sort of dreams you had?

18:00 I didn't have any, I have ‘em now but I didn't have ‘em then. When I went in the trenches and when I went to bed I went to sleep, you could have a shell burst within ten yards of me, I wouldn't hear it. But if you just said, “Mac”, so soft like that, I was awake instantly. You got used to the shells bursting, it was just part of the night noises.

18:30 But you just had to mention my name soft voice then I was awake instantly because if there was a raid coming over or anything like that the Germans well, you had to get out and stand to, be ready.

I just wondered what sort of news you got from home, did you get letters and can you tell me what the letters said?

19:00 Actually I didn't have more than about three or four letters I don't think. It was only just, just that everybody was alright you know and one thing and another, but the one thing that I remember that I had a bit of a letter about was my plum pudding and cake for Christmas dinner and a cream, a jar of cream.

19:30 **Can you just tell me that story again?**

Oh yeah well we, about fifty, sixty yards behind our battalion headquarters there was an old house, we came out of the trenches, two or three of us, three of us, and I brought my parcel down and we got into this old house and I saw a couple of pots and pans on the side and I thought, you know

20:00 we just want to eat, what are they doing there, so we don't know anything else. Anyhow we sat down there and we started to have our feed and we come to the plum pudding and open the little jar of cream and, it was three months getting to me, but when I took the lid off it was fresh as the day it was put in there. That sort of astounded me a bit and of course I found out the reason for it, I

20:30 worked it out myself, see my mother overflowed it with cream and slammed the lid on and tightened up so there was no air left in there, just cream, it'd keep for 12 months that way. But we were three parts the way through our dinner, there was a hedge about six feet high, about eight or ten feet behind us and what we didn't know that there was there was a dashed battery of 4.5 howitzer guns there

21:00 and I suppose they have a bit of fun with those, they loaded the four guns up and fired them all at once. They were just, the shot was coming over our heads like that, the concussion, you wouldn't believe the concussion you get from the end of a field gun when they fire a shell out it! Do you know, say a six inch gun if you was in, straight under

21:30 it like say at fifteen yards in front of it, it'd knock you down, just the rush of air out of the gun, terrific. When we were moving from one place to another we'd stop back for lunch, in the middle of the day on the road and I'd have a look round if there was a farmhouse within a couple or three hundred yards, they used to walk over to that and order eggs and chips and a

22:00 few rounds of toast and a cup of coffee and have a feed. But apart from that I didn't have, we didn't have anything to do with them much. Except in a little place called Brecourt, we were there for probably about six weeks. It was a little village and quite nice people about around sixty years of age you know and we used to go there and make friends with the old lady and do a bit of, anything she wanted doing around the place.

22:30 And they used to have a great big kettle and they had a kind of a little bit of muslin or something and they'd put their coffee beans in that, not ground up just the beans, and they had that in the bottom of the kettle and they'd keep the kettle on part-boiling so we used to have some real coffee there. They were very nice old people; we got on very well with them.

So you never came across any French girls

23:00 **then? No romance?**

Oh well, they were about, see when you get up near the line there, the Germans used to shell perhaps eight or nine miles behind their lines, they'd shell any villages in case there was any troops in them. So of course the people used to move out. Armentieres was quite a big town but there was nobody living in it. I think it was Armentieres or it might have been Bayeux, it was one of

23:30 the towns that was square like that and a church over there with a big clock in it and a shell had hit the spire where the clock was and it was leaning over like that so somebody named it 'half past eleven square', the clock was stopped at half past eleven. No, the French people, we didn't have anything to do with them at all.

24:00 **What about in England when you back on leave, you got time off from the front didn't you? What happened then?**

In England...?

Yes, you got relieved from the front; you could go back to England?

Oh yeah, when the war was over?

No, during the war?

Oh I only went over there for fourteen days

Can you tell us a bit more?

Only had the one trip over there, I stayed in Holloway, 29 Tollington Road actually, my brother Charlie was boarding there, so I went there and stayed with him.

24:30 And we just had a bit of a look around London and it could be sort of a village London was at that time. There was, they told me there was eight million people in that and in the middle of the day, in the night, whereas in the daytime there was twelve million, that's a lot of people in one town.

Sure is, especially when you come from Ulverstone - did you get to

25:00 **travel around England, what did you make of it all, did you enjoy going there?**

After the Armistice was signed I got around England. I applied for non-military employment and went out to the British School of Telegraphy in Clapham, told them I could do I think 15 words a minute when actually I was a first class telegraphist. I could do 32 words a minute, stayed a fortnight and I told him I wanted to have a look around England and I was wasting

25:30 my time there. So I went around every racecourse there was in England I think. Saw the Derby, the year 'Grand Parade', we won it the year I went out and a horse called 'Paper Money' was second, 'Grand Parade' was 16:1, I didn't have a bet on him, I backed 'Paper Money'.

Oh well there you go, you can't win them all. When the Aussies were in England did they drink a lot and fight a lot,

26:00 **where they having a good time?**

Well I didn't see them actually. They weren't in London, they must have been out in camp somewhere or another, I used to see an odd Australian on leave in London but, no they were alright. They didn't go looking for trouble, at least my fellows didn't.

Did you meet any

26:30 **English girls, was there romance between any of the Aussies and the English?**

No, there was a daughter of the people where I lived and yes, I met one out in Tottenham as a matter of fact, Coombs, yes, yes Olive Coombs, that was her name, she was a secretary or something, quite a nice girl, I used to go to her, her brother took me out there actually. Her uncle and her mother used to live in this house; her uncle was a bit of a racegoer or something or at least

27:00 he used to bet on them. He said, "By Jingo, will win the Manchester Cup." so I said, "Will it?" he said,

“Yeah.” That was the 1919 cup. So I went up to Manchester and By Jingo won it too, five to two I had a decent little bet on him. Yeah, yes I never went out with

27:30 Olive Coombs, never took her out anywhere but she was a very nice girl, she came over to Australia too, over to Melbourne I think she lived in Brighton, married some fellow down there. But I got along alright with the English people. The first lot that came out here when I was about 1902, three or four, as I said there was a good few English immigrants came out.

28:00 I didn't take to them too well, of course of only what I heard my brothers talking about they reckon they had bits of crawlers, they'd crawl to their boss you know, to get your job but whether that was so or not I don't know. I only knew one fellow, an Englishman, who came out, Arthur Chibot, he was a very good boxer this fellow but he seemed alright.

But the Australians they had a different attitude towards

28:30 **the authority in the army didn't they, than the British? You weren't such big sticklers for ... can you tell us a bit about that?**

I think taken by in large the troops, they didn't think a great deal of the authorities so they made some stupid mistakes some of them which cost a lot of lives. I’ll tell you we were all very happy when the, I think it's a cruiser [HMS] Hampshire

29:00 was sunk by a German submarine and it had Lord Kitchener aboard, Lord Kitchener was our commander in chief , an absolute fool in the type of war we were in. He was trying to run a war like a Boer War. Artillery was restricted to five shells a day. He wouldn't, he didn't agree with machine guns in the battalions, no, they'd have a Lewis Gun that's all.

29:30 Well I mean you couldn't carry on like that, the Germans they had an unrestricted supply of shells and machinegun bullets the way they used to throw them over, anyhow I'd reckon they did. But when Kitchener was drowned, I think Lord George took over, he might have been Minister of Supply or something, however we got plenty of shells and plenty of machine guns and that,

30:00 very smartly after that. We were armed differently altogether with plenty of hand grenades, it was a bit of a nuisance you know when you had to think whether you could toss a grenade over whether you were wasting it or not.

You don't want to be thinking about that?

So we didn't waste any sympathy on Kitchener.

No,

30:30 **We were talking about, you know they weren't so much told what to do they figured things out by themselves, I wonder if you’ve got any talk?**

I can only speak for the 10th Brigade

31:00 in the 3rd Division, I don't know how, I know that the old 12th Battalion they were a tough battalion in everything. The 52nd and the 54th I think had a lot of Tasmanians in it. The 12th I think was half Tasmanians, they were a good battalion and that, the 12th but. Yes, I think they, well you see we had a different type of life over here to the English.

31:30 English people were more or less brought up in cities, where it's only a little place anyhow, you could dump it in the Northern Territory and it'd take you a week to find it in a motorcar! But you are more self reliant I think, you know we were brought up different anyhow, you're not bossed by anybody as I was saying as kids we were just taught to do things

32:00 for ourselves and so forth. And of course our parents did the same thing, you, when you were nine years of age you were considered near enough for full grown to do some work about the place. I know that when we put in potatoes I used to have to go along with bone dust [probably blood and bone fertiliser] and toss it in on top of the, my brother used to drop the spuds [potatoes] in, out of a bag round his neck he'd take it out and drop em down the side of his boot as he walked along and I'd come along with the bone dust.

32:30 That when I was about twelve or thirteen, if we had a packet of wheat, paddock of wheat in well I used to go and help load the bags of wheat on the dray. You know in that time a bag of wheat weighed two hundred pound.

So how did the independence of the Australians, how did that make them different soldiers, you know because you were more self reliant did that make a difference?

Yeah I would think so yes. They would do things on their own initiative

33:00 as I say, so you didn't have to have an officer to tell you to have a go at this or that or something else. You knew dash well you had to have a go at it and you'd do it on your own, especially the sergeants. the sergeants really run the battalions, they used to, the order would come from colonel, come from General Monash first through the brigade and then to the battalions. Colonel would pass it on

33:30 to the company commanders and they'd pass it down to their lieutenants and their lieutenants would pass it down to the sergeants and the sergeants would give the orders to the troops. But I'll say this, the officers they did go over with us, that's how so many of them got knocked off. Although Major Paine, Major Giblon,

34:00 captain, I didn't like him I forget his name now but they all came back all right and Burke Jackson, my officer, he came back ,but I don't know what he was doing. Same as Frank Greene, the fellow that wrote that book The History of the 40th Battalion. I think he was more or less a correspondent although he used to come to the battalion but he never went over with us in a battle. So I knew him fairly well, I used to see

34:30 him in between whiles you know, I met him in St Kilda as a matter of fact after they'd moved down to Canberra the Governor there, was Chief Clerk at the House of Representatives, wanted me to get drunk and he said come down there where he was going to get me a good job.

When you'd been fighting for so long at the front Frank what were you fighting for in the end, you mentioned in one of your interviews that the Australians fought for themselves, they didn't fight for the British Empire or anything like that. I wonder if you

35:00 **could explain to me how?**

Oh, oh you would be thinking about the Empire or anything else you were just thinking about your own part of it. See we had our own business which kept us busy enough; we didn't bother about what was going on to the side of us. That was for the signallers to find out what that was happening and they'd pass on the information. We used to have runners during a battle, you couldn't have a telephone line cause it gets cut to pieces with shells so we used to have what we call runners and they'd get

35:30 dispatched from the company commanders and they'd go back to battalion headquarters. But no of course as I say I wasn't with the British, I never had anything to do with them but of course we used to get the news, naturally what, what was happening here and there but, I think taken by or large they were a pretty good army. They were certainly a good

36:00 good, sailors, their fleet was alright, nobody could beat them there on the water.

But the Australians were sort of sent in as sort of shock troops, can you tell me a bit about that?

In 1918 I'd say wherever there was trouble, if the Germans pushed your British troops back they used to send an Australian

36:30 battalion in there to retrieve the position. We had that at Villers-Bretonneux, we came out of there, we got what I call a Dog Fever, I don't know the devil it was but you got terrible high fever, it'd hit you and you'd be down unconscious in about two minutes. You might wake up ten or twelve hours later about half a stone lighter with fur on your tongue, a nasty taste in your mouth but

37:00 you had no fever. I dare say a few of the people might have died from it I don't know but that was Villers-Bretonneux, well we came, so many of our fellows got this they had to take us out of the line and a full English battalion went in and took over from us. And we hadn't been out of the place for more than a month, we crossed over the other side of the Somme and damn me if the Fritz didn't attack the place and kick

37:30 the Tommies [English] out of it and of course they had a clear run down, right down to Amiens it was a disaster if they weren't stopped, so they got the Australian 9th Brigade, that was part of our division, they had to go back there and kick the Germans out of it back again. But taken it by and large I suppose. Well some fellows could, some fellows could stand up to a lot of heavy shell fire, shells bursting all over

38:00 all round you and others couldn't, that's all it amounted to I suppose. Our boys stood up a bit better than the English probably. But there was part of the French Army, I just forget the field marshall's name, he was alright he, I suppose they lost half a million in defending one place there. This French marshall, he finished up he was the

38:30 Premier of France when they, or Prime Minister of France when the Germans took Paris over, Petain, that was his name, Field Marshall Petain, P-e-t-a-i-n, I suppose that's the way you pronounce it anyhow. Stubborn though, he must have had some good troops there because this is a hell hole of a place, the Germans concentrated on it, they never stopped attacking in there we didn't have to go down there fortunately.

Tape 4

00:25 **So Frank can you just tell me the story then about that?**

Yeah well

00:30 we marched down from this Becourt sixty miles down to Ypres, Y-p-r-e-s, we used to call it Ee-prey, I did anyhow and some of them called it why-per but the proper French pronunciation was Ypres. Well there was a duckboard track, it went up around the hill, I suppose it was three or four miles long, course shell holes all around it full of water and that kind of thing. You couldn't walk on the ground but you had this

01:00 duckboard track and that's how we went up. It was the Battle of Messines Ridge, well we took a ridge and that was our hop off point again for October 12, the Battle of Passchendaele. We had to go up this blasted k-track. And it was all mud and water and that you know the ground it had about an inch and a half of water on it and brown colour and you know all in amongst it was shell holes about eight or ten feet deep

01:30 and if you didn't see the difference in the colour of the water and you stepped in it, that was the end of it, you wouldn't come up again. But we went, what we thought was the left hand flank of the area we had to take and there was a hill went up like that on our left like that up about five hundred feet to the top, five hundred yards to the top of it, fairly steep hill. I thought the New Zealanders took

02:00 that although I didn't see any fighting there. But however we went down to an old broken down farmhouse and there was a couple of Germans in there, one was dead and the other one was wounded so we knocked him off and there was a passageway that went in the bottom to an underground cellar under the, well at least under the house really. The house was built up on a kind of a bit of a rise in the ground and the passageway was about two feet, two foot six wide

02:30 that's about forty five centimetres. And there was a brick wall at the back that was about seven feet high and then there was a little one about eighteen inches high in the front. So I was trying to sight our battalion headquarters which was about four or five hundred yards back behind us, I was going to send messages back on an electric signalling lamp, we called a Lucas Lamp.

03:00 And I was sighting with my cheek alongside a couple of studs that were still left standing and a bullet went right into the stud there and the end of my nose was touching the hole it made, so that's how close it was, I thought it had taken a bit of skin off but they didn't. However I hooked the lamp and gave it to Bert Jackson he was sitting behind, about a piece of inside wall

03:30 about six feet high and about five feet that way and about five feet this way but it blocked out that hill. He decided to sit down behind that, over, this could only be a sniper that had a shot at me so I said to young Rogers, he was one of our runners he was there, I said, “Roger, I'm going to get down in that trench there, that underground cellar part and see if I can find

04:00 this fellow.” he said, “Well, I'll come with you.” He didn't know hardly one end of a rifle from the other, however he jumped down in there with us and we were both looking for this sniper. Rogers found him, pointed him out to me and he was about three hundred yards away, well I topped him off pretty smart. And we thought you know that was the end of it but all of a sudden from up here near Passchendaele a machine gun opened on us from this hill, not on the top

04:30 but three parts of the way up it and the bullets were hitting the brick wall just behind us like that and ricocheting off and coming around like this. Oh, it wouldn't be missing us by more than this much but fortunately where the doorway had been into the cellar part all the timbers from the house had been knocked down there and the bullets, instead of ricocheting further off that and probably finishing up in one of us

05:00 they went into the woodwork, so they were missing young Rogers by about three inches. I saw all the holes they were making, however, we kept our heads down until the burst stopped and I looked up and waited there with my eye above this brick wall and they opened again, another burst and I saw the flash from the end of the machine gun, that's all

05:30 I could see, I couldn't see anybody where they were firing from, that hill at the background it was wet plain dirt you know and seemed to blend in with their uniform or something however I couldn't see 'em. It was about six hundred yards away so as soon they stopped again I'd marked down where the flash was and I popped up and sent a couple of bullets up there and ducked down again and that went on for about an hour and a half. And anyhow the

06:00 guns stopped all of a sudden when I was letting go at them so we didn't have more trouble with that, I put another couple or three bullets in there for good measure and I said, “Well Roger, that's the end of them.” and he said, “Yeah.” So bang, another one opened up on us about one hundred yards to the left of it. Oh bless me, that nearly got us as a matter of fact cause they were only going about that high above our bricks there and just hitting the wall behind us.

06:30 So anyhow when that stopped going I spotted a flash of that and I got onto them too, put a few bullets now and again, about an hour or more and they ceased too and damn if another one didn't open straight opposite us - three machine guns there. Well we had a terrible battle with that one because he was firing straight at us and they were coming down and of course the bullets were coming over us

07:00 like that, you had to keep right hard up against this bit of brick wall and it'd hit you on the back as they passed over. However I got onto them in the finish and they quietened down, now that's what I got my Military Medal for, or should of. Do you know what the citation said; said that I organised communications and that kind of thing! There was no communications whatever until near twelve

07:30 o'clock, if a runner had, if you had sent a runner out he'd been cut to piece with one of these machine guns. I was never so disgusted in all my life as when Robin Allen up here, he was a past president of the RSL [Returned and Services League] down here on a committee, he got in touch with me some way or another, I forget how and he went down to Hobart and he looked up everything there and he went over to Canberra

08:00 and he, he found the citation and he brought it down here and he showed to me, this was only a few months ago - it was the first I knew of it. God blimey I was that damned wild I could hardly see straight, that's what I got the Military Medal for.

Okay, can you just explain to us how the war then changed after what happened then, how you got back to England, briefly if you can?

08:30 We came out of there and we went up back to this Becourt again, back to this Becourt again and we were there for awhile and refitted, you know we got some more reinforcements and whatnot and then we came to this Novaglese [?] this little town and we were there, we got a lot more reinforcements there as a matter of fact. I've, a daughter of one of the fellows

09:00 who came there, Jimmy Gardiner, his daughter is coming over to see us - somewhere over Melbourne or Sydney she lives now. Jimmy was in my section, he joined me at Novaglese [?], he and two other fellows and a lot of other men as well of course. We were there for some time, gone through, we got our battalion up to strength and then we go down to the Somme. Well coming down to two little places,

09:30 Maricourt and Ribemont yes that's the two place, Maricourt and Ribemont. We were coming down a slope like that and we met the French people coming out of this Maricourt, they had their little hand wagon things, something like a cart you know and they had their bit of furniture and their bedding and whatnot on it. Poor old people they were and tears running down their cheeks, the old ladies and they said, “The

10:00 Germans are coming, they're just over the hill there!” and that's why they were getting out of course before the Germans came in. Well, we let them pass us and then we went down and we met the Germans in the middle of Maricourt and I tell you we didn't give them any quarter either, about an hour and they were out of there, what was still left of them. We chased them back about a mile or more and we had I think a

10:30 9th Machinegun Battalion, they were there - well I call them a battalion, there was about twenty of them, a dozen machine guns and the Germans counter attacked us. We didn't have many men left but these, these bundle of machine gunners there they cut them to pieces, oh blimey I never saw anything like it. Anyhow when we took this Ribemont too, that was the

11:00 mayor of the place was there, the two villages practically joined one another, pretty little places and the little river, only three letters in it, however we made our front line there and we were in there for quite awhile and then we, we went back over the river and into Villers-Bretonneux

11:30 and that's where we got the dog fever and we came out of there and the Tommies lost it, the 9th Brigade went and took it back again. It was a funny thing there you know, the main street where the shops were all along there and the French must have got out of it in such a hurry that they left their shops all stocked with their stuff. They didn't have time to move it apparently; the Germans must have come on them pretty quick. Anyhow

12:00 we, hold the line there, that's where I put that damn chalk, never saw so much chalk in all my life, just solid chalk, no soil at all. It's hard to believe but in that in that book I read there where they were putting an underground cave and how they, how hard it came in when they came onto solid chalk, they were laying a cable line up to Villers-Bretonneux.

12:30 **But this was where the two guys came out weren't they, with too many drinks? Where the fellows got into the wine didn't they, and you saw them coming down the road dressed up as women - do you remember that story?**

Oh yeah they were pushing their little carts, well they kept going of course, I don't know where they went, probably down to Amiens or somewhere or another.

Can you tell me the story though of the two blokes that had been in there drinking all the French wine, remember?

Oh, oh that was

13:00 that was ah, Villers-Bretonneux yeah, that was really funny. They were, one morning the shells were knocking the roofs off the buildings there and here comes two fellows down with a pram, I suppose it was full of booze [alcohol], I don't know what was in it and they were dressed up as women with big hats on the side of their head like this and dresses,

13:30 singing It's a Long Way To Tipperary or some dash thing or another with the shells bursting all around them. Well you couldn't help but laugh at them you know, silly fools they were liable to get killed at any second cause the ground was as flat as this floor there - it looked so funny. That's how I knew the, I

hadn't been up there myself in among the shops so I didn't know but that's how I knew they must have been stocked because these fellows went into the shops and dressed up as women,

14:00 there must have been a frock shop there or something. Oh gosh, they're funny things you know, that you had to laugh about, you couldn't help it.

Now towards the end of the war you talk about you were in the second Somme and the Hindenburg Line, can you tell us about that coming to the end of the war. How had the war changed by then, had it changed much, what was going on?

It really changed in July 1918,

14:30 that's when the real war really started, in July 1918 and we started off from Hamel on the side of the Somme. We advanced eleven miles by dinnertime that morning, we had some forty thousand German prisoners so it was about a sixty mile front so you can imagine the amount of guns and the noise that was going on. That's where that blasted German machine,

15:00 naval gun was. I want to tell you about Corbie, we'd gone out from Hamel, Charlie Carlneck and I went down to this cafe at Corbie, upstairs, we were just on our coffee when a shell from that naval gun hit the other side of the cafe and just flattened it. Our business fortunately was left standing so of course we got out of it pretty fast and up to our trenches again - bit safer up there I thought.

15:30 And we didn't even stop to pay for our dinner, so we had a dinner on the Frogs [the French], I don't know whether they, the landlady was killed or not, she probably was anyhow cause half the building disappeared. Well they brought that thing over here that gun on view in Sydney.

Okay so the war had changed now and...?

Yes well it became a war of movement from then on. We didn't have trenches, we just

16:00 Bray, I suppose after the after the forced, end of July when they were started our, on the Somme we went had to go over the other side because Tommies, the young boys they didn't sort of do as well as they ought to have and we had to go over and take the position there to make our left flank alright. See they were firing at us from behind us, so we couldn't have that

16:30 so we, we went over there, my battalion, and we shifted the Fritzes out of it and came up to Bray which we took in the middle of the night, a swine of a business. I don't like fighting at night.

So is this getting towards the end of the war now? Where was your last battle before the war?

The last battle was the Battle of the Hindenburg Line, now, in September 29, 1918. That was our last battle, it wasn't the last battle of the war but that was the last

17:00 one, the Hindenburg Line was supposed to be impregnable. They'd spent years, dugouts there about thirty feet deep, long alleyways, long underneath with little rooms off it. Oh you could put one hundred to one hundred and fifty men down in each one of these at a time and perfectly safe no matter what hit up the top, she was thirty feet underground. And on their front line near the trench they had these pill boxes.

17:30 Well the American 35th Division was to go over in front of us, smash through the Hindenburg Line and we were to take over and jump over them at around ten o'clock in the morning. So we come up wandering across over the paddock you know down to towards the old Hindenburg Line and there was a, well I didn't know about it but some of them may have I don't know but there's

18:00 like an underground, like a dried up river bed, it was about sixty yards wide and about ten, twelve feet straight down. In this book Frank Greene wrote in the history of war he called it a canal [St Quentin Canal?] - well it may have been a canal I don't know, it probably was because the bottom was quite level, it must have shifted a hell of a lot of dirt though when you come to think of it, it run for miles.

What were you thinking at that time though,

18:30 **did you think the war was coming to an end, how were you feeling about it all by that stage?**

Well we knew, well we had a few other things to think of just when we got near this canal part. We didn't know it was there but five pill boxes and the German front line there opened up on us with machine guns and we knew the Yankees [Americans] had gone through there three or four hours before.

19:00 What had happened the Germans had gone out and gone down these blasted dugouts and the Americans, inexperienced you see they didn't go down there, and when they went on the Fritzes came up and they manned them pill boxes again. And they must have opened up all night about one hundred and fifty yards away - oh boy. I reckon I broke the time for the Stawell Gift getting to that damn

19:30 alleyway there, what I call the underground river or the dry river bed, that's the first I saw of it when I got to it. I'd take a flying leap, it's no fun going down about ten, twelve feet to land, but however I landed there alright and you know that for about twenty yards from this end, about thirty or forty yards wide you couldn't get a strip of territory that wide

20:00 without there was a dead Yankee in it. As far as the eye could see and it was a sight, dead Yanks side by side, mowed down by these machine guns oh blimey. We rescued about - one of the generals, or major generals or something and about thirty five men later on in the day. We had to go through this damned barbed wire and get up and take those machine guns. You couldn't, there's no use firing a shell at them,

20:30 just bounce off it.

Did you do it in the end?

Would I do it again?

Did they? Well that's a good question, would you do it again?

Oh, I suppose so, if I was that age I would, I wouldn't now, but no it was just something that had to be done. We couldn't go through; they couldn't depress the machine gun in this pill box

21:00 down as low as a wire, it came down like that on a slope from about twelve feet up, and of course I suppose about ten or twelve feet deep the barbed wire.

So in the end what happened at the end of that battle? What happened towards the end of it, did you take the position?

Oh well we had to, we went through to the Nord Canal [Canal du Nord] and then we pulled out and that was as far as, the war was over as so far as we were concerned.

When did you hear that the war was over and what were you thinking at the time, where were you?

We were just getting ready as

21:30 a matter of fact to go up and take part in another battle when the news came through that the Armistice had been signed.

What did you think about all that?

Oh I thought, oh, we were relieved we were getting a bit tired of it I suppose, but personally I didn't care, I was enjoying myself alright.

So how long had you been in the front line for at that time, how long had you been fighting continuously for?

Two years all but

22:00 two months. A year and ten months. I started in November 1916 and I was finished on September the 30th 1918, had us in the, I was only, we were out of the firing line I suppose for three or four months waiting, you know at different times, a couple or three weeks waiting for reinforcements.

And what happened then

22:30 **at the end of the war, was there any celebration, what did the people do, did the troops…?**

Oh celebrations, I was in London. They had the massed bands, the Coldstream Guards Band and the French bands and there was over twelve million people in London. I was along in Oxford Street and I wanted to get into, now I forget the name of the street, a bus came down

23:00 and it didn't have any, trams didn't run into London, only buses, I was to catch the bus there. I forget the name of the road, anyhow to catch it out to Holloway, it took me over twenty minutes to go about twenty five yards, that's how the people were and I was battling pretty hard to get that. People, my God, they was as thick as flies. Oh they were

23:30 cheering and of course they were, it was a great letup for them you see, England had about three million soldiers in the war so there must have been a lot of anxiety to their parents and brothers and sisters and whatnot.

Did you start to feel differently about the war after it was over, was there a sense of relief? I'm just starting to think about you

24:00 **personally.**

No, I tried to put it out of my mind. I was just waiting to come home, but I went out as I say to the British girl's place and then I went out all around the races, all over the place. I wanted to see a bit of England, I knew I wouldn't go back again. But no, I put the war

24:30 out of my mind altogether. There's no use thinking about it, it was over and done with. I lost a lot of mates in it but still some would have died anyway I suppose, we all have to go one time or another.

Had it changed you, did the war change you; were you a different man now at this time when you finished than the man you went?

Oh yes well, you learn, well you see I had a lot of responsibility with the

25:00 communications for the battalion. All messages used to come through my office, both from the Morse or written dispatches would come from brigades and divisions and so forth. I used to enter them up in a book and get them signed for in there, in by the adjutant. Well I had a bit of responsibility and I had to keep the dashed telephone lines in order and that kind of thing, and had to dodge a shell here

25:30 and there but no, it sort of, well you get used to running something you see. You had a job to do and you had some good few fellows under your control as the saying is, so it gave you a sense of responsibility. I could run a business, I felt sure I could run a business when I came back. Well I did as a matter of fact, in Sydney, had my own limousine company

26:00 there, was managing director of it. Yes it altered one's outlook on life a bit, you didn't worry so much about people dying and so forth cause I seen so many of them.

And Australia, when you got back to Australia, was it a different place, how had the country changed, cause you'd have been away for a few

26:30 **years?**

Yes well as far as Australia itself was concerned, I didn't know much about it but Tassie, I went down to Hobart yes, things had changed. It changed quite a bit as a matter of fact, the women used to have skirts right down dragging on the ground I think, when I went away, but they were halfway up their calf when I come back and a few years after that they were up above their knee. There were a few changes,

27:00 but well they were a bit more enlightened I suppose, you know they, the war taught a lot of the civilians, taught them a lot. You know, they learned about overseas places and so forth, they were reading in the news, war news and so forth. But I noticed a bit of change in Ulverstone of course, it had grown a lot while I was

27:30 away. I think it's the nicest little town in Tassie and I don't know why I do but I just like it, that's why I came back from Sydney. I thought well I was born there, I'll die here.

28:00 **What was your first Anzac Day, do you remember celebrating the first Anzac Day?**

Yes I was in Hobart, and we had this, this Major Paine I was telling you about, he used to work in the Don Store down here. I knew him before we went away to the war, but I didn't know he was in the army but he led the first march. They had in Murray Street Hobart they, he was only not,

28:30 only just a few doors down from Collins Street down towards Liverpool Street, that's where they started the RSL there and Major Paine led the march. I didn't go on it. I've only ever been on one Anzac March and that was down here as a matter of fact, a fellow of the name Burgess, he was living next door to me in Ulverstone, he was an Englishman. He wanted to go onto this march and of course they started the

29:00 dashed thing around about five o'clock in the morning or something. Anyhow I took him up and, the RSL in King Edward Street and we marched up to the Cenotaph or whatever they call it, where the clock is down there and they had their service. That's the only Anzac March I've ever been on, as I say I didn't take any, I never, I wasn't a member of the RSL either until around about

29:30 three or four years ago. That's the first time I was walking.

Why didn't you join it?

Oh I didn't what any more to do with it but I was talking to Albert Marshall, this is the old school mate and he was telling me, he was the secretary there at that time, but anyhow I didn't join then but I only joined some few months back. I was coming along King Edward Street and I saw the RSL there so I thought, 'Oh well, I'll

30:00 go in and join.' so they made me an honorary member and now I'm a life member of the RSL in Canberra. I got a big certificate from them there.

Did you think it sort of glorified the war too much, the Anzac tradition or what do you think about that? What do you think of the Anzac Parades, do you think it's a good thing or a bad thing?

30:30 Oh well I suppose, personally I think it's a mistake to hold any celebration on Anzac for a start off it was a bad defeat and it was brought about by stupidity on the part of the British command. And there should never have been any attacks there in the Dardanelles at all. Like when they shelled the place with the British Fleet then six months after they go and attack it.

31:00 In the meantime the Germans fortified this big hill.

Yes the Germans knew they were coming by that stage, so they walked into a bit of a trap but, why do you think, why do you think the Anzac Day became such a big thing, do you have any ideas about that?

Well I don't think it's anything to celebrate myself. I wouldn't celebrate a defeat and especially one

based on such

31:30 stupidity on the part of the British High Command. If they wanted to attack the place, right take them in there with a fleet in the first time, not wait six months after they'd been in there and bombarded it and tell the Turks oh right oh we've gotta come in here and land one of these days. The Germans, the Germans were real soldiers, professionals and they fortified that place so it was more or less impossible to take it. A big hill with machine guns

32:00 and trenches all the way up it and artillery and that on the top

Do you remember the first Anzac Day though in 1916? In 1916 they celebrated the first Anzac Day I believe, do you remember?

1916 did they?

They did I think, I don't know whether you remember that or not?

Oh I didn't know that, I guess I was in France then anyhow. But the first I ever saw of it as I say was in 1919

32:30 in Hobart I was working there in Murray Street and Major Paine came along Collin Street to march and down Murray Street. He led the march but still.

When you think back on the war with all your mates and stuff went, do you often wonder what it was all about or not?

33:00 **How do you think about war now at this time in your life?**

Oh I think there will always be a lot of little wars especially around the Balkans and places like that. You know the Serbs [Serbians] and the Croats [Croatians] and whatnot; they were always at loggerheads, always fighting one another. There will always be little bits of wars here and there but I don't think there'll ever be another big one

33:30 and the reason I don't think so is that practically all the decent sized countries now they have the atomic bomb. And well, supposing you were running a country are you going to start a war and you know dashed well as they are going to land one of those things on ya and flatten you out. These big atomic bombs they have now they flatten

34:00 everything for miles all around, no matter what it is they'll flatten it and they kill everyone in the area. Anyhow the first one they dropped was only a miserable thing over Japan and they killed some ninety thousand people, just the one bomb. But that was only a hand grenade compared to what they have today, so who is going to start a way when then know that the other fellow's got that to drop on them? I wouldn't and I don't think anyone

34:30 would with any sense.

So what do you think of Australia's involvement in Timor, the Timor situation?

Timor, well I don't know why they've got their nose in there. Of course I can understand in the first place they didn't want Indonesia to hold Timor cause it's too close to Australia and Indonesia had about ninety million population whereas Australia was only about ten, twelve at that time. But

35:00 I don't know , I think that it's really the Indonesians that they're fighting over there, not the Indonesian themselves but the Timorese who are they want a bit of a revolution - I think that's it, I don't know much about it actually. But we want peace there which is understandable

35:30 because it's very close to Australia. But there's one thing that I've never been able to quite fathom and that is how they come to conscript and send fellows over to Vietnam. Now Section 92 I think of The Constitution expressly forbids any Government in Australia to conscript men and send them to fight outside

36:00 Australia. That's what [Prime Minister] Billy Hughes had the referendum on in 1917 to bring in conscription in Australia so that he could keep us supplied with reinforcements. Well we didn't want it at all, we'd have been in the line all the time, we'd never have had any rest from it. And that is

36:30 that there was no war in Vietnam officially, no war declared against Vietnam.

When the first conscription debate was on in 1917 do you remember much, was there much talk about it by the soldiers?

No we just got the word about it, it was, were at Nouvaglese [?] at the time, Christmas

37:00 1917 that's when we had to vote on it. We were only told, you know the main points of it, just able to conscription then we'd have plenty of reinforcements but the army, as the fighting part of the army, they were one hundred percent against it. I mean you had to get a bit of a rest sometime or another. I mean most fellows they can't really

37:30 understand it as shells bursting around your ears, they make a hell of a noise those bursting shells you know a good big one. Well you get those bursting within five or six or ten yards of you twenty four hours a day, every now and again, and if you'd pop your head up in the air you'd get a bullet through it, machine guns sweeping across the top of your trenches, you need a bit of a rest from that. At least I thought I needed it.

38:00 **So were you proud to be an Australian soldier in that?**

Yeah I wouldn't want to be any other one. I'm very proud of the 40th Battalion. I swear I've never seen a better one. Well our record stands alone. Never a defeat, never pushed back, took every objective we had set to us on time. You can't beat a, you can't beat a record like that you know. And we

38:30 even attacked the Germans when we were down to about one hundred men, we'd attack three or four hundred, didn't make any difference how many they were, we'd get stuck into them and we never lost and that says a lot. I know some of the other battalions they, they lost a lot of prisoners and got pushed back and that kind of thing but never the 40th. So I'm very proud to be a member of the 40th.

39:00 Cause they are all Tassies, made a difference I suppose.

Tape 5

01:00 **Do you remember anything about, were any of the letters and things that you got in the war were they censored, were there things you couldn't write home about?**

Oh yes they'd scrub out anything at all that was mentioned about the war. You couldn't mention anything they'd just blot it out. An officer used to, you had to give it to him in an open envelope and he would go through the letter and anything he thought might interfere with the war efforts he'd scrub it out.

01:30 **Why do you reckon they did that?**

Oh I don't know,it was another bit of stupidity but I mean when all was said and done what could we know about any secrets that was the Germans didn't know about. It's a nonsense but still that was one of the things I suppose that kept somebody in a job.

Do you think it

02:00 **affected the way people at home understood what was happening in the war you know like the letters?**

Well they didn't have a chance to find out did they? Anything that was put in the newspaper that was censored. You couldn't publish news without; you had to get permission to put certain things in. They wouldn't allow their British papers to print it either. We used to get the Continental edition of The Daily Mail, that used to come over to France

02:30 and when we were back behind the lines sometimes we'd get it. I used to see that and read the English news and they had a little bit, news a brief, news in brief in French, just a little piece but there was nothing there that was any use to the Germans.

But even with that sort of, even with them censoring the information from the letters, even so the

03:00 **people never voted for conscription there must have been, people were still finding out about the war were they or how did that work do you know?**

The officers you see they could write home he censured he's own letter, they're the ones that used to distribute the information. See they'd just write a letter and post it and that was it but we had to write a letter and give it to them.

03:30 **We didn't get that bit about the officers writing home you'll have to tell me again. I just need you to tell me again about the officers, they could write home?**

Well I mean it was the officers that did the censoring of the letters so their letter wouldn't be censored, they'd just send it over. I know some of the news did get over some used to get over here but, well for instance they used to send the casualties.

04:00 Telegrams would come over here and the people that were looking after, say in the Second War for instance I was down at Records Office and I had to send these dashed telegrams out for our casualties to various people you know, the parents and so forth. Well there'd be a certain amount they knew about people, about men getting killed and wounded and that kind of thing.

04:30 I think they used to publish their names in the paper, I'm not sure. But I know, we used to send their parents or their next of kin of the solider we used to send them a telegram whether he was wounded or

killed or what have you. So well we had more news in the Second War than the first but of course there again they had radio for the Second War

05:00 they didn't have it in the first, radio didn't come in till about 1930s or something like that.

You've seen a lot of changes. You've seen electricity, you've seen all of these things, what do you think that the war has done to people in Australia, how do you think this affected us?

Oh it's brought technology in leaps and bounds, it's still going you know, a cousin of mine she's second in charge at Latrobe Hospital, she's telling me

05:30 that technology is so fast and things are happening so different now that she can't hardly keep up with it. Instead of sewing up after you have an operation, instead of sewing up by hand now they have a damn machine that does it. Put a machine there and that sews you up.

Do you reckon people are tougher today than they were in your time or not, do you reckon we are a bunch of weaklings these days or what, what do you think about how people of your generation were…?

No, no I think they're,

06:00 well I don't know whether they are any tougher, they're probably not but they've got better medical supplies today than they had then. I mean the drugs they've got out today they didn't have them when I was a kid you know if you got appendicitis you just had to lay there and die. There was no such thing as an appendix operation.

But do you think that if it if it was today was like when you went off to war do you think we'd do the same thing?

06:30 **Do you think Australia is still the same place, in other words do reckon we'd get a volunteer army to go off to France today, you know the same way?**

Oh I think they would yeah, I think so. I think the young fellows would go in for the experience you know and the excitement. Same as they go to a football match or something, oh I think they'd go just the same. I don't think they're, they are not a scared race, they'll fight if they have to.

07:00 I wouldn't like to buck a bundle of angry Australians, I'd want a gun in each hand I think. Oh no, they'll fight alright, if somebody attacked your place, your wife or your sister or something or your mother you'd be into them wouldn't ya? You're not going to stop and think, 'Well, am I going to get a broken jaw or a nose broken?'

07:30 or something, you'd be into 'em, you'd have to.

I'm just jumping down the list here now. What would you say that's important about World War I, the lesson for it, is there a lesson or what is the important thing about…?

Well I'm surprised actually that the younger generation anywhere up to say forty, I'm surprised that they even remember about the First War, even think about it.

08:00 I was quite surprised when this mate of mine there from the RSL, and he started to tell me about things you know. I'd never taken any interest in it at all after it was over it was done with but he opened my eyes that, and I've spoke to people you know and the letters that we got from all over Australia when that broadcast went on from the fellow

08:30 from Sydney. God blimey, we had letters and phone rings from all over the place. I was absolutely surprised to think they would, you know, still take any notice of it. When all is said and done you know it's what, eighty odd years ago, that's a good long, good long time for people to worry about it but they seemed to be quite interested in it still.

09:00 So they want to know did I know Bill Smith from somewhere or another. When you come to think of it you know there were sixty or, what seventy odd thousand original Australians over there. Well that's a lot of fellows to remember and then there was about two hundred and seventy thousand reinforcements,

09:30 you can't, you can't remember any, you only knew the fellows alongside ya. You didn't mix with the others, you didn't, you were battalion right oh that's it, you were with a battalion they were in the four companies, about two hundred and fifty men in each company, well even one company you couldn't remember all of them. I remember a few of them of course but…

10:00 **Frank when you came back from the war, you had trouble sleeping I believe and you took sleeping pills. Can you tell me about that and why you did that, tell me about why you had to do that?**

Yes I couldn't get anything to fix it down in Hobart. I had to leave, I had ulcers break out where the cheek joins the gum, well with a plate and a top it was a bit awkward when you started to eat. They ached like the devil they would, well I had to leave my job in Hobart and I was there for

10:30 two years and that's when I got the reaction from the war and really got bad in sleeping. I went over to

Melbourne, I had a brother living in Ivanhoe, I went out there for a couple of months then I went over to St Kilda to have a look around and there was a chemist shop opposite St Kilda station in Fitzroy Street, I went in there and told him the tale, he was an old chap about seventy and he

11:00 mixed me up a draught, I forget what he called it now but I had a bottle, about a fourteen ounce thing and you know in two days I was sleeping alright, lost my ulcers.

But did you have nightmares, is that what the case was, was the war, was it coming back to you in memory?

Yeah, that's right.

Can you explain that to me?

I think it was the nerves started to go a bit on me or something, I don't know what, but however I didn't do anything for about four

11:30 or five months then I opened an estate agency business in Fitzroy Street.

I just needed you to tell me though that when you came back from the war you had these nightmares and you couldn't sleep?

I had no trouble when I came back I was as fit as a fiddle

Okay well then just tell me how it changed, I just want you to tell me what happened, you were fit and then what happened? You started, you couldn't sleep is that what happened?

What happened…what do you mean? What did I do?

Yeah well

12:00 **for the nightmares, for the sleeping, not being able to sleep?**

Oh well, I slept alright when I came back it was when this business broke out on me down in the shop in Hobart, that's when I couldn't sleep, that's when I went over to Victoria I had to leave my job there and I went over to Melbourne and stayed with my brother for a couple, or three months. And then as I say I got into this old chemist on the corner of Grey Street and Fitzroy Street and he fixed me up.

So what was happening to you?

12:30 **What was happening, exactly what happened with the nightmares, what sort of things did you start to see and dream about, what happened to you, what were you seeing?**

Oh there was nothing really happening as I say except I got these ulcers and I couldn't sleep and well I suppose I didn't feel a hundred percent but the doctor couldn't find anything wrong with me. Oh, I had all little lumps come out all over my back, green and yellow and all

13:00 things and I asked the quack [doctor] about that and he said, “That's probably the gas working out on ya.” Anyhow they didn't know anything about medicine much in those days and it's probably what it was, they disappeared after about six months. I had a lot of gas as a matter of fact, lost my voice at the battle of Hindenburg Line on September 29, I had a gas shell - only a little fellow,

13:30 burst about that far off my nose while I was asleep. I didn't hear the burst but I got this gas, a gutful, I couldn't speak, I had no voice for ten days. They called me the Whispering Baritone, that was a damned thing that gas, you know the mustard gas was the worst. I dodged that, I wouldn't go near it. It'd work through your uniform

14:00 in about two or three days and you'd have blisters as big as fowl eggs all over ya, oh a swine of a thing. It was heavier than air the gas was, and it'd stay down but you get where it was and you you'd cop it. First time I found that was on top of Messines Hill, that was around about July 17, 21st gave us mustard gas, saw about twenty fellows blind, stone blind they couldn't see anything.

14:30 They had fellows that could see in the front and they got hold of his bayonet scabbard, it's on the left side here, and they were holding onto that and there was a line of them about twenty going out blind. That was enough for me I wasn't going to have anything to do with that mustard gas.

Hand to hand combat, were you ever in hand to hand combat?

15:00 Oh we had a gas mask, you had to have a big tube in your mouth and the mask over here that fitted skin tight around here, you had eyes so that you could see out there, well that'd keep the gas out there in the bottom the thing was in a bag about wide and about that deep and in the bottom was charcoal so the air came through the

15:30 bottom and the gas would come through too but it had to go through the charcoal, well the gas wouldn't go through the charcoal but the air would, you could breathe alright but I couldn't wear the damn thing because I can't stand anything, and it had a clip over your nose as well. That settled it for me I just couldn’t, couldn't wear one for more than two or three minutes.

Did you ever dream about the war when you came back?

No, no, no never had any dreams at all for many, many years.

16:00 No I never dream about the war. I put it out of my mind when I came back, put the war right out of my mind. That's why I never joined the RSL or anything nor took any part in anything like that, war celebrations or that, I avoided them. I suppose that probably might have helped I didn't have any dreams about 'em but I didn't want any anyhow, some of ... some nasty

16:30 sights you know you see in the war, you don't want to dream about them.

What were some of the nasty ones, what were things that were shocking do you remember?

There's one thing getting killed with a machine gun bullet and another thing getting a shell burst down blasting you to bits and pieces, you were going in all directions. I had three mates lived just up,

17:00 about half a mile from where my farm up in Caster Road, three young boys they went away to war and they were in our battalion and we were in Armentieres to, and they, they came out of the trench and got in a shell hole to have a bit of dinner, and one of these Minenwerfers [German mortar]landed in the hole with them. Two sandbags about that long and about that wide had bagged up the three of them.

17:30 Those the kinds of thing you don't want to remember or dream about because they, it's another thing where the soldiers I think made a mistake. They shouldn't have allowed brothers to be together, they should have had one in one battalion and one in another one and so on so they don't all get killed at once.

When you came back home was there any

18:00 **celebrations, you know when you came back as returned soldiers was there any big hoopla about you or what happened then, you just came back and...?**

I just came back and was home for three or four days and I went down to Hobart and got a civilian suit made and got my job there. I was home for another couple of days and I went down and started work – fourteen days after I was discharged I was working, I didn't have any celebrations. I know they,

18:30 you know I think they used to meet the troopships coming back although they didn't meet mine, we came into Launceston, there was no, I don't remember anybody on the wharf there, there wasn't and there was no-one at the barracks when I went back only Jimmy Newlands, for discharged, they gave you a civilian suit and discharged ya with fourteen days leave.

19:00 **When did they pay you the money they owed you? Did they pay you the money they owed you then?**

Oh yes we got our pay up to date and fortnight's pay for leave, that was all but later on they brought in this, what do they... a gratuity. It was about ninety or a hundred pounds or something, gratuity money but that wasn't, you couldn't go along and cash it,

19:30 it was kind of an investment. I kept mine for a few years but then I cashed it. But no I we, when all's said and done you know it cost the country an awful lot of money, that war, they had to pay us our wages while we were away, they had to keep us in clothes and food and all that kind of thing.

Did people make money out of the war back home?

Oh yes the ones that stayed back did yeah

20:00 made it alright.

Sorry what did you think what did you think about that, about people who stayed home?

Oh well, somebody had to stay home I mean when all is said and done we had to get supplies and the only place we could get it was from home. You had to, I mean the living had to go on in Australia just the same, the farmers had to produce the food and, I suppose they used to send it to England, I know we used to send about three million

20:30 cases of apples over to England from down beyond Hobart a bit down there. They used to grow these apples but no, I, we didn't go worry about the people that was left home. We knew they had to be, you couldn't expect your parents to run a farm on their own, somebody had to stay. As a matter of fact I was instrumental in getting the army changed,

21:00 regulations changed during the Second War. A farm where only had one son and the old people were in their sixties or seventies they couldn't, nobody could expect them to carry on the damn farm on their own, three or four hundred acres so I had it so that that man was not allowed to enlist. I got that through on an MB, Military Board Memo, they changed the regulations so they were

21:30 marked as, what'd they call 'em like men was on the railway and the post office and so forth, they had a name for it anyhow, they were exempt from serving. Which is only right when all said and done because they, I mean industry had to go on just the same, they had to make things, people had to be clothed and fed and that kind of thing so they had to have somebody to do it didn't they?

22:00 And the only ones that could do it were the people that stayed back. No we were quite happy that, well as I say I had five brothers that were eligible to go away to the war but none of them went but I was quite happy to have them stay home, I didn't want them over there, only one of us went Charlie and I. Oh no I think that enough's enough if one or two from a family

22:30 go away to the war I think it's fair enough. Cause if Australia was attacked that's a different matter. I reckon then everybody from twelve years of age, women and all, should be fighting, protect their own country.

Was there ever a difference after the war between those that went away and those that stayed behind, was there a different group of people do you know?

23:00 Well I don't know about the First War but the Second one, the fellows that came back had a bit of trouble getting their jobs back. Some of the fellows had grown up, you know while the war was on, they were in their jobs and it made it a bit awkward for the, I suppose might of bred a bit of bitter feeling I don't know. I got a job straight away so I wouldn't worry about anyhow I

23:30 didn't like working for a boss. So I say I hate taking an order, didn't like it. I never took wages for near forty years when I was in Sydney. The last job I had was in 1955 that's when I worked for wages for the first time.

Well that's good. Your name and your

24:00 **age and your battalion and when you went off to war?**

My name is Frank McDonald…do you want me to repeat that? The name is Frank McDonald, I was born on the 26th of June 1896. I enlisted around March I think 1916,

24:30 I'm not sure when we sailed from Hobart to Queensland but it'd be some time around about June I'd think, I was in the 40th battalion.

Okay that was great now can you do it, I know this is picky but can you do it, can you say that again but looking up to where I am up here.

25:00 My name is Frank McDonald…. I was born on the 26th... My name is Frank McDonald….Yeah we're ready Right...My name is Frank McDonald, I was born on the 26th of June 1896,

25:30 I sailed from Hobart in the first war in the 40th battalion I think around about Easter time 1916. We arrived in England in the summer and hit France in November 1916.

Thank you that's very good….

26:00 You're ready? My name is Frank McDonald, I was born on the 26th of June 1896, I enlisted in the 40th battalion in March I think 1916. We sailed from Hobart, the Ocean Pier somewhere around about Easter I think for England and

26:30 arrived there and from England we went across the Channel to Les Havres and from there up to Armentieres and into the line sometime in November 1916, that's our first introduction.

Thank you that's great…thanks very much.

26:48 **INTERVIEW ENDS. Tape continues with memorabilia**

27:00 **(Memorabilia)**

27:30 **(Memorabilia)**

28:00 **(Memorabilia)**

28:30 **(Memorabilia)**

29:00 **(Memorabilia)**

29:30 **(Memorabilia)**

30:00 **(Memorabilia)**

30:30 **(Memorabilia)**

31:00 **(Memorabilia)**

31:30 **(Memorabilia)**

32:00 **(Memorabilia)**

32:30 **(Memorabilia)**

33:00 **(Memorabilia)**

33:30 **(Memorabilia)**

34:00 **(Memorabilia)**

34:23 **(Memorabilia)**