

George Bland

Burial Party

And we had to bury these, there must have been about 20, not only Durhams there was Germans and there was Italians. I'd never been on a burial party before like. I was scared to death I was to tell you the truth. I think there was about ten of us on the burial party. The M.O. was there and the sergeant was there and the padre like. We went and we had to collect them. We had to pull them out of this ridge, put them on a stretcher, fetch them up, search them, get all their stuff out if they had any stuff on them like pay books and identity discs. I'd seen dead lying before like but when you've come to pick them up, blokes that had been lying out there two or three days out in the sun and out in the rain the smell was terrible. And you had to pull them up and fetch them up a bit of a line, put them on blankets, roll them in blankets, take all their gear off them and put them on top of the blankets. The padre come around and took all their gear. I can remember the blood was dried on their faces. We brought them up, laid them on a blanket. Took them off the stretcher, laid them on a blanket, put the blanket around them and then tied them up round the ankles, round the waist and round the neck. Army blanket doesn't cover you full length. And they took them. We had a Jeep with us, we had a three tonner and we had another vehicle. We lifted all the blokes onto this, put them on their truck and the smell. I wouldn't get on the truck, I got on the Jeep. There was about ten of us hanging onto the Jeep at the back. And we went on to the 56th Div. Cemetery, they also had a clearing there like similar. They wouldn't have nowt to do, "No, no, they're not our blokes try somewhere else". And I think we tried another cemetery, the 78th Div., and they were the same. Then it was getting to tea time and then we got a little place at the finish but they more or less kicked them into the ground. The graves were that shallow I can remember the sergeant saying "There's no reason to be frightened of them lad they're dead man", he says "they're just sleeping like. Shouldn't be frightened of the dead". It was just the idea of them lifting and the smell was on your hands, seemed to be on for weeks after. Couldn't eat nowt for about three weeks. This bloke kept warring off. He was about. Now this man was a Grenadier, must have been about six foot three, about 14 stone. And this bloke from Houghton le Spring as I used to say "He's trying to get away. He's trying to get out like that". And another of the blokes in the three tonner we had bodies in like there was blokes sitting on top of them.