

Australians at War Film Archive

Alan Flannery - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 21st April 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1898>

Tape 1

00:40 **As I was saying earlier we'll start with your childhood years, where you were born and where you grew up?**

I was born in Stanmore, New South Wales and stayed there for a very brief period then, my father was a

01:00 teacher in Parramatta but we moved to Penrith, again for a very short period. Eventually we ended up in Balgowlah, New South Wales, near Manly. I was an only child but I had lots of cousins, well, sufficient cousins, they became my

01:30 brothers and sisters virtually. I only had four cousins. I had an idyllic childhood. I don't say we had much money although my father being a school teacher we had regular money but we had acres,

02:00 lots of places to play in. We could walk down to the beach, we could walk across Dobroyd Point which we used to do and make our own fun all the time. No worries. We had childhood illnesses and things like that but I couldn't think of a better

02:30 way to spend a childhood than I did. Even the school, I don't say I thoroughly enjoyed school but that was part of the deal so you accepted it. I have only happy memories. For the rest, I often compare notes with my contemporaries and we lived at the best time ever I think, even though we lurched into a

03:00 Depression and a World War, we got through both and it was, we only think of the good things. I think that I would never have wanted to live at another time when we enjoyed all the benefits that the twenties and thirties brought and haven't got the

03:30 horrors that young people face these days.

Where's Dobroyd Point?

Dobroyd Point is, that photo is taken from Dobroyd Point.

Can you describe whereabouts in New South Wales it is?

Near Manly. Reef Beach is part of

04:00 Dobroyd Point. It was virtually untouched. We'd go round, even on a weekend there'd only be half a dozen people there because it was a long walk for people and they'd go to Manly. You'd never get any city people at Reef Beach. You'd only get on a Sunday about half a dozen. Then we'd walk

04:30 over Dobroyd Point and there was a fella living there. It was during the Depression. I think there's still people living there, in shacks. We'd go and hike and take our lunch with us. We had tea and sugar and boil the billy.

05:00 This was generally on a Sunday.

You knew the local people who were living there?

Yes. There was also, on Reef Beach, where that bush, those trees are,

05:30 there was a camp there used mainly on weekends by older men. Our fathers used to go round there and it was just a weekend camp for men. There were no women. They had a little mini golf course. It was good. I've got many fond memories of that.

06:00 I never saw a shark or anything there. It was a very safe beach. There used to be a, one of the men that did live there permanently had a canoe or a canvas rowing boat and three of us used to borrow it and go round Dobroyd Point into near Middle Harbour.

06:30 It had about two inches free board and it leaked a bit so two of us had to bail and one row. It was part of

life and it was good. I think there was a bit of missing school occasionally to do this too, apart from weekends. But we came through it all right, unfortunately the other two that were with me, one

07:00 died as a prisoner of war of the Japs at Sandakan. He was my best friend I suppose. The other one was a cousin, was also a very close friend even though he was two years younger than I.

So how did it come about that you spent so much time with your cousins?

They were, having no brother or sisters,

07:30 they were the closest thing to them.

So they lived nearby?

Yes. They were all close communities then. Before the war you grew up in the one spot, you always married someone in the same district and you generally lived your days there. It was only the convulsion of World War II that

08:00 everyone spread out. Due to circumstances after the war I left Sydney. If I'm jumping ahead, tell me. None of the people, or very few of the people that I grew up with in Manly stayed in Manly after the war. They all spread out because there were so many opportunities

08:30 outside of Sydney.

Sounds like you had a lot of freedom as a child.

Oh yes.

Were your parents lenient or liberal people?

Yeah. My mother was, they were both, my parents were good but I had a very far sighted grandmother who didn't believe in chastising children.

09:00 She would have gone down very well these days because she used to say you should talk to people, talk to children and not. I got a few whacks, well deserved I might say, but not beltings or anything. I was spoilt.

09:30 Being an only child. Even in the Depression.

So you knew your grandma quite well?

Yes. I was looking at a photograph yesterday, I think it's in that album, when I sent the telegram when I got out of Greece to say I was well she wrote on

10:00 the photograph taken with a friend of mine, "I'm very proud of you Alan, Grandma 1941", June '41 it was.

Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with her? Did she teach you things?

My father was a teacher and we lived in Manly and he taught in Parramatta and

10:30 he'd come weekends because he liked living in Manly, we all liked living there, or Balgowlah. We lived with my grandparents at that stage. My grandfather had a great bearing on my life as well as my father. He was a very liberal person in his own right. And a good sense of humour

11:00 which I appreciate. I was lucky, most of my relatives did have good senses of humour although we used to have a lot of arguments, still do if you ask Louisa. It was a good era for young people. I know that a lot suffered in the Depression, we were insulated against that.

11:30 Nobody I knew went short of food. We might have been a bit short on clothing, you'd only have one suit and one pair of shoes and sometimes they used to leak a bit when it rained. Things that I gave my children, well, I took as normal giving my children,

12:00 such as regular check ups, the dentist and things, we didn't have generally. Particularly with your first teeth, nobody ever got them filled, I don't know if they do these days. When they went, you got them taken out. I was lucky because my second teeth were pretty good.

12:30 Nobody was flush with money but we had the necessities.

So you lived with your grandparents, this is your father's parents?

No, my mothers.

For very long or was that just a temporary thing?

Most of my life and then it continued that

13:00 my grandparents lived with my mother and father when things went on. We were always the five of us.

Interesting household.

Yeah.

Was it a stimulating environment?

As I said, my grandmother was a great one. She said she didn't have arguments, she liked to get to the bottom of things.

13:30 I think I've inherited that too. Most of the jobs I've had, even in the army, you had to be accurate. I think I am that to the point of probably grating on people. I might even have that obsessive problem.

14:00 I read an obituary the other day of a person and I knew things, something didn't gel so I dug back, I like researching, I've got lots of books to look at and I went and I was right, he hadn't done these things which happens a lot in obituaries. Sometimes I'm wondering if I'm

14:30 reading about the same person I know, they're that embellished. A lot of them have led very interesting lives and it's not their fault it was embellished. They've led interesting lives, why the need to add this little thing that somebody else has done that's been taken and given to them.

15:00 It was still a case of be seen and not heard in those days. You didn't indulge like buying into grown up discussions. When they were discussing things I tried to analyse who was right and who was wrong.

You've described a very romantic childhood in a way, up there on the water, the little boat.

15:30 Well it was. Very free. We'd meet after school and go down, they call them the mudflats which used to annoy my mother, down at North Harbour which was inhabited before Manly was, very early in the piece there was settlement at North Harbour.

16:00 It was a nice sheltered little place but when the tide was out we used to go down and play hockey with makeshift, it probably wouldn't be approved of these days but we'd pull a few branches off trees and play. There'd be, I'd suppose, a dozen of us, always boys, no girls,

16:30 although I never went through the period of not liking girls, always liked girls, they were always on a pedestal. I think once we went to high school those after school get togethers dropped because we had homework and things like that.

So the North Shore settlement, was it?

17:00 Manly was very hard to get to in the old days. I think they were fisherman that used to live in North Harbour. I only read this in the last couple of years, that there was a settlement there. They used to have to come all the way from Sydney to the Spit.

17:30 Then they would get a boat over, might have been a ferry but it would have been a rowing ferry and everything had to come that way by land where it was easier to come by boat from Sydney than over land and then the break of the Spit where they had to cross the water. There's still a bottleneck there to this day

18:00 because they've never improved the bridges to any extent.

Did you go fishing yourself?

Very amateurish fishing, yes, catch little ones.

What about your school. What school did you go to?

I went first of all to Balgowlah Grammar School.

18:30 I think it was actually Balgowlah Girls Grammar School but they let boys go there for a couple of years. Then I went to a school, my uncle had been a headmaster at Manly West School and when he retired aged sixty or sixty five he started a Church of England School, All Saints Grammar School.

19:00 There were only about a dozen of us that went to the school and he was the only teacher but he was a good teacher. That's where I went until I got my qualifying certificate, then I went to Manly Intermediate High School. I left before I got my intermediate which was not to help me later on. I had to go back to school

19:30 when I went and joined the public service.

Where was your father teaching?

He was at Parramatta High. It was funny. He was a teacher. He shouldn't have let me leave school when I did. That was in the Depression. It was pretty hard to get a job. I eventually got one with NRMA [National Roads and Motorists Association] Insurance

20:00 and then I got a job as an assistant projectionist in a theatre, an operator in the theatre. Then I went into the army after that.

Was he disturbed about you leaving school?

I think he was, yes.

Do you remember conversations with him about it?

No.

20:30 I know he would have been hurt but a lot of my age group used to do it.

You enjoyed school while you were there?

I was fairly..., my mother was very soft with me. It wasn't that

21:00 I couldn't do things it was just that I was allowed to, I wasn't disciplined enough. When I was in my thirties I went back and then I had to get my leaving when I had three children which wasn't very easy.

21:30 I had to do it part time but I got it. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed things more like Shakespeare than I did when I was doing it in first year. It did me a lot of good too because I did Economics, Economic History, Ancient History.

22:00 My mind was more receptive then and I did enjoy it although it was a bit of a tough grind doing it part time and having a family. I had to go to Woomera two weeks out of four weeks but it turned out in the end and I was pleased it broke that way.

What was it like

22:30 **growing up in a household with four adults?**

I was used to it because one cousin was an only child and my other two cousins who were all living close to me, we were with adults most of the time

23:00 when we were home. There were never any children at home unless you brought them home after school but not like having brothers and sisters sitting round the table. This was common because there weren't many in families in those days. Two and three were the norm in the twenties.

Where had your grandparents

23:30 **come from? Had they lived all their lives?**

No. I've got my grandparent's birth certificates somewhere, I've put in a good place that I couldn't put my hand on at the moment. They were married in Waterloo. That's a long while ago but then they moved to the inner city suburbs

24:00 before they came to Manly. It would have been, I suppose in the early twentieth century that they settled in Manly. My grandfather was a builder and his eldest son was a builder so they built a lot of houses around North Harbour. I know there's still people that

24:30 once you've been there you'll never leave there. My cousin was an example of that. There were quite a few of my boyhood friends that stayed in Manly, I suppose. But only about three out of ten. The rest spread everywhere

25:00 again through the influence of the war.

So you had quite a big extended family. Were your cousins going to the same school as you?

No. One of them in the, I suppose it might have been the late twenties, his father made a body business, a panel beating thing.

25:30 He went broke and they went down the South Coast. My other cousin, the son and daughter of the builder uncle. He went broke and he went and started up a chicken farm up at Penrith. I developed other friends by then. Only half a dozen I'd call friends and only one or two real friends.

26:00 I suppose all children you have fights and then you come back again. The one that died at Sandakan we were both like that all the time. I've still got the last letter he wrote from Singapore after the war started.

So the house that you lived in at Manly, was that your grandparents house?

26:30 There were two houses involved, one was a weatherboard house and next to it he built a two storied house. We moved into that. Then the Depression, he had to sell it so we moved back into the single storied house.

27:00 Then my mother and father bought the two storied house that we'd originally lived in and we went back to that. We were still in that when I left for Adelaide in 1948. It was immediately after the war and Lou and I and the two children were living there before we went to Adelaide.

27:30 **Can you tell me about the Depression years and why did your grandfather have to sell the big house?**

Well there wasn't much building going and most of them were mortgaged. He'd take out a mortgage to build it and then couldn't repay it so he had to sell it. A lot of people with money,

28:00 the few with money made a lot of money because they could buy houses cheap. Even, I can remember, we had to sell a Ronisch piano which was a good German piano. That had to be sold to get money.

What about for you personally, do you remember it affecting you very much?

No, because Dad was

28:30 a teacher, even though he had to take a ten per cent pay cut, it didn't effect me very much.

Was that an official, a formal thing that teachers had pay cuts?

I think every public servant in Australia. I know Federal and New South Wales had a ten per cent pay cut right across the board,

29:00 which was fair enough. I know a lot of people did suffer badly in the Depression but we were lucky.

What about the people around you, the community around you?

Well most of them, I didn't know of anyone that their fathers actually lost their job. Not like

29:30 a lot of people. Most of the fathers had permanent jobs, a lot more permanent than these days because once you started, even with a firm, you were there for life unless you did something wrong. Didn't get much of a pension but they had continuity.

30:00 I don't know anyone, a few of the children at school, I know their families were struggling but not the immediate area where I was.

Did you see signs around you of people trying to survive, trying to make do,

30:30 **I'm thinking just with food for example?**

I never knew anyone that had to go and get food coupons to survive because the dole was mostly, it wasn't money, you used to get food coupons to take to the butchers. I never knew anyone like that. I recently read a book

31:00 called 'The Battlers' I think it's by Kylie Tennant which was a good example of the people who really did struggle and had to move from town to town because nobody wanted them. They were itinerants. The police would give them their rations and then move them on to the next town,

31:30 they had to keep constantly on the move. My grandfather did have a weekender at Katoomba which I recently went back to. It's still standing. There used to be a lot of swaggies [Swagmen] round then, humping the bluey [carrying their swags] and the mail'd go away[?]. I had an uncle who was back from World War I who was in the Light Horse, he went to America

32:00 after the war and came back. When he came back it was the Depression and he had to do some shocking, he was a single man but he'd have to go round with the shearers. He couldn't shear but he'd have to do all the odd jobs. Single men particularly, they didn't get much help at all, which was probably right because people with families,

32:30 what was available should go to them particularly the children, it's not as harsh as it sounds.

This is your grandfather's house at Katoomba?

I suppose it had three large bedrooms and, it'd be called

33:00 a family room these days and a kitchen and a bathroom, that was it. But we had some good times there.

So when would you go to Katoomba?

School holidays. Living in Manly and going to Katoomba at Christmas time I still shake my head at the thought of it. It'd get very hot and had some magnificent blowflies.

33:30 And the fuel stove that my grandmother used to cook, she was a good cook too, Christmas dinner. We had fun.

Would you have a traditional Christmas dinner?

Oh yes, which we don't have these days. Always. Not turkey

34:00 we'd have a chicken. The first time I tasted turkey was in Lebanon in Christmas in 1941 when the army supplied them. I thought turkey was, even chickens were a luxury, they were once a year, we didn't have many of them.

Where did they get the chickens from for Christmas?

I don't know but I know my grandfather always used to kill it and pluck it

34:30 which I attempted once when we went to Adelaide, not very successfully, oh it was alright in the end but I wasn't too enthusiastic cutting it's head off. For that time, and I think the reason I'm reasonably well now, we had a good diet.

35:00 Most people's was predominantly meat but I had plenty of fruit. I wasn't too keen on vegetables but a good balanced diet for the time.

What about your mum, how did she occupy herself?

She helped my grandmother and in the later years she took over from my grandmother.

35:30 **So running the household?**

Yes and also when the war came she did a lot of voluntary work with the Signals Association and the Anzac [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] hostel in the park. My grandmother died in 1943 and Mum had two other sisters,

36:00 one who's still alive and two brothers. My father had a large family but we never saw very much of those. They lived at Neutral Bay which was only about quarter of hour's car drive now but it was a bit harder to get to then.

36:30 I was trying to think of something about my grandparents. They were very good to me and my grandfather being a practical man I learnt a lot

37:00 from him although some of my carpentry efforts I don't think would please him too much. He was a wise old gentleman and as I said, with a good sense of humour. And a good unionist in his day, when it wasn't very popular.

What union was he with?

I don't know. He was a carpenter.

37:30 But I know history had it that one of the bosses said he was a fierce little bugger. He looked like Billy Hughes a bit. Something which he didn't like to be described but he was like Billy, he was only small. He wasn't bad tempered but you couldn't put anything over him.

38:00 I often think of him, I think of all of them. They all contributed. I always, even after my childhood, whenever anyone I worked with, I always learnt something from them, the ones that I could offer anything, I learned a few things off the ones I didn't particularly like too.

38:30 Even as I said I had such a wonderful childhood and teenage when I went in the army for some strange reason I didn't feel, I got homesick but not desperately homesick

39:00 and I think one of the reasons for that is that everyone's in the same boat. I have been on my own. I spent six months in Melbourne in the sixties on my own and that's dreadful but when you're all in the same boat, you're all away from home, you've got people you can talk to

39:30 but being by yourself in a big city. But then I got on some good friends and was best mates at the time with them. Of course then also I had Louisa was still back in South Australia with three children. We'd had our fourth then.

40:00 That makes a big difference. It is a wrench to be just on your own when your family are not that far away but you just can't get to them. The army, it was a totally different set up. Maralinga was a different set up, Woomera was a different set up because everyone they were there all on their own.

40:30 I treated that the same as the army and when you know you're going to be separated for a long time, I don't know if everyone does it, but I just adjust. I knew once I had leave I wouldn't have leave for another twelve months, there's nothing much you can do about it so I adjusted to that.

Tape 2

00:33 **I was just curious what you recall about your grandfather, you just said your father was a unionist as well. What do you recall about those times?**

There used to be, as I said, my grandfather had mellowed by then although

01:00 he called Billy Hughes a black leg at one stage of a game. He became a UAP supporter, the United Australia Party, and all of my uncles were too. As I say my father was the odd man out. I don't think there was any great argument about it. I think they new and respected their opposing sides

- 01:30 if you like. It was a very argumentative household. As my grandmother said, getting to the bottom of things, there was never any ill feeling at the end of it although there'd be some violent verbal discussions on things. I can't remember exactly what it was about I don't think it was political.
- 02:00 They could always find something to argue about. I can remember another of my uncles who married my aunt who's still alive who was much younger than the other three and my mother's family. He always used to say that's how they go their re-charge,
- 02:30 by arguing with one another. They all lived to ripe old ages too. My mother was in her eighty seventh year, my uncle was eighty nine and he died unnecessarily. They were all in their eighties when they died. They weren't very physically robust

03:00 but they lived long lives. This uncle reckoned they got their re-charging through their arguments.

So would you sit down to dinner in the evenings?

Yes. I've been back to the house where all this took place. I went about twenty years ago or more.

- 03:30 Of course it had changed hands a few times since then. I went into this room, the dining room which to me seemed so big because we'd get a dozen people in there without any trouble when I went in I thought, "How the heck did we get a dozen people in here round the table". That was the thing, when I left the army after five and a half year, everything was smaller and shorter.
- 04:00 Going back to when I was a child, walking up to the shop, I suppose with short legs, or shorter legs, it did seem a long way but when you're grown up it was nothing. I went back to Katoomba and the walk from where the house was to the shopping centre used to seem miles
- 04:30 but distances seemed to have contracted. Although when you're eighty three, I was only eighty two then, some of the hills got a lot steeper than when I was young. You wanted to bring out something else?

I'm just wondering if you had any childhood memories of things that had happened to you.

- 05:00 **I mentioned accidents. It seems to me that you had a very physical childhood, a potential for breaking arms and legs.**

The thing that always sticks out in my mind was we were doing medicine ball, which were very heavy and I didn't feel well. I got this clout and it knocked me over and when I got up I felt awful. I went home and I had chicken pox, I didn't know.

- 05:30 That sticks in my mind. Getting the bottles of milk at playtime as we used to call it. This was before the free milk came in. It cost a penny, we got a quarter of a pint for a penny. We used to look forward to that. It was nice and chilled.
- 06:00 I was lucky and I think this applied to most of my life. The people that I did meet, the majority of them were good people. Even at school. There was a sad occasion when a bloke called,
- 06:30 a boy called David Patton who sat in front of me at school and he went out after school to Manly for a swim in the surf and he got taken by a shark and they never found him again. It impacted on us but we didn't have hordes of counsellors coming to make us feel as if we should
- 07:00 need adjusting or solace. When you're young you are, I don't think things impact on you as much as when you're older and much older when you're losing something that you've had for a long time.

Was it unusual to have sharks there?

No. I knew a few people that,

- 07:30 not as intimately as I knew David, but another fella I knew married the sister of a bloke taken by a shark. It wasn't that constant but it was fairly often. Since David was taken I don't know of any from Manly.
- 08:00 You'd have to be unlucky. I think during the war there was a girl taken in Middle Harbour but I don't think Manly there's been any. Another, he lived round Fairy Bower and about a week after he was taken they caught a shark and it was on display almost outside his mother and father's house, round at Fairy Bower.
- 08:30 Would have been a bit distressing but that was during the Depression and anyway you could make a bob showing a shark off, you'd do it.

Did you see them yourself, did you see sharks in the water?

No. Usually they found the body but they never found his body.

- 09:00 It wasn't in the shark because they opened it, the shark they caught. There was no evidence of him.

Was that something people talked about a lot, the sharks, be wary of them?

Yeah. I was only with Louise in Manly in February and we were in the water and we used to say an overcast day was a shark day.

- 09:30 It was an overcast day, not that we were very far out but we both remembered it, people used to say it was a shark day and whether it was because you couldn't see, there was no rays penetrating the water and I don't know if it had any foundation at all but we used to say, "Look out for the sharks". We were always conscious of sharks.
- 10:00 We were at Ballina not many years ago and out a bit but then these dark shapes went between us and the shore. It turned out they were dolphins but we nearly walked on water getting out. We took things for granted
- 10:30 that now would be worth lots of money. We didn't have any facilities but being able to go down, knock off school and go and have a swim. Nothing was crowded. I didn't have any trauma
- 11:00 during my school days and early teenage. It was very easy going. Not much money. What we did have we enjoyed. Lucky if we got a new costume every year, swimming costume, bathers.
- 11:30 Not much for Christmas but everyone was the same, they didn't get much either. We ate well. I never felt hungry. I shared with the rest of my fellows in
- 12:00 Greece, we didn't get any sugar. I've never been deprived of sugar since but I never knew that when you are deprived of sugar you crave for it. It wasn't diabetes or anything, we just didn't get any sugar. If you got hold of a chocolate it was wonderful.
- 12:30 **So your decision to leave school, why was that, was that because of grades?**
- No it wasn't. I was in third year, I would have got my intermediate. Some of my friends had left too who weren't doing too good. I've never had any trouble with my studies.
- 13:00 It was just, I suppose it was short sighted because as I said I had to in later life go and do something. In the middle of the Depression you needed something to get jobs,
- 13:30 particularly in the clerical area because it was so restricted. You either went into a trade or went into clerical work. What else was there? Clerical workers were a bob a dozen. You'd go for a job and there'd be about a hundred other fellas there with you. If you had your Inter you might have done a bit better.
- 14:00 **So you went to work for the NRMA?**
- Mm
- So you opted for clerical?**
- There wasn't much. There was nothing.
- Did you have to sit an exam for that or was it just apply for the job?**
- Just apply. In those days
- 14:30 very few people, the Intermediate was usually the top you'd go unless you were going to University then you'd do your leaving and matriculate but I would say that only one in a hundred. I might be wrong but in my experience, I knew none of my friends went above Intermediate and
- 15:00 a very good friend of mine I don't think even go his qualifying certificate and he ended up as a Qantas pilot on a jumbo jet. He was a good pilot. All his brothers were pilots and he got in that way. But when he went into the air force during the war, because he didn't have his Inter, he didn't,
- 15:30 he might have got a commission later on but not immediately. Usually you had to have your Intermediate to get into air crew. So not having my Intermediate I applied for the air force in 1940 before I applied for the army but I got knocked back which in one way might have been a good thing because I mightn't be here now if I'd have got into air crew in '40.
- 16:00 **So can you tell me a bit about the work that you did with the NRMA?**
- Basic office boy who's doing all the numbering machine, just office boy. All the mail, I'd do, with the franking machine.
- 16:30 Taking down a great suitcase at night to the post office and post it. Fill up the inkwells. I was fortunate to get the job at the Northbridge theatre, assistant projectionist.
- 17:00 **How did it come about?**
- My good friend that died in Sandakan, he got a job at Balgowlah Theatre and the fellow that owned it

also had a theatre at Northbridge so I got that. It was a long way to go to from Manly to Northbridge. I think I used to get about thirty shillings a week

17:30 and I think it cost me about twenty five to get to Northbridge. It might not have been that bad. I don't think I could pay much board.

Were you trained as a projectionist?

On the job. I enjoyed that too. I was lucky all my life. Everything I did. I didn't enjoy the clerical work

18:00 too much but I enjoyed that, I enjoyed what I did in the army and I've enjoyed right up to the time I retired.

Can you tell me, just give me a bit of a picture of what the job entailed, being a projectionist back then.

Well, it's fairly simple. You have two projectors and

18:30 the reel, you're showing on one projector and then when you get to the, you know that it's time to change over, you can see it's getting low, you've got to keep your eye on that. In those days you had to feed, it was an arc lamp so you could get the brilliant light and you'd keep having to feed this, the operator didn't do that, that was the assistant's job.

19:00 Then when you had to get it ready for the second machine to take over and some dots come on the screen about ten seconds before and then you start the second machine up and then a second lot of dots come on and you change over. Two flaps, one cuts it off and the other opens it up. The operator does that.

19:30 Then the assistant takes the full spool out and rewinds it so it can go back to the exchange or in a lot of cases two theatres would be showing the same film so you had to have a courier take it from one to the other. Well, there weren't couriers. You had to make sure it was on time.

20:00 Usually the ones you were swapping, they were showing a different film which was on so you'd have two on, you were sharing say and you'd have one, say it was Kentucky, the other one Gunga Din.

20:30 One would be showing Gunga Din, the other Kentucky so when they'd finish you could switch over so they'd be ready to start for the second.

So Northbridge theatre would swap films with another nearby theatre, is that what you mean?

Yes.

So was this a little suburban theatre?

Yeah, all suburban.

21:00 In Manly and Balgowlah, they'd swap films too. You always had to have, whatever happened, after you showed it you'd have to rewind it so that when it went back to the film exchange, they'd check it I suppose, a lot of them they'd check so there was no damage, you

21:30 had to pay for any damage and then that'd go on to another theatre.

What year do you remember was this?

This was '38, '39. Not end of '40 because I didn't enlist until June '40 or May '40 I

22:00 had my first medical.

So was the theatre showing newsreels?

Oh yeah. Because a particular theatre was late, it got them after a lot of the other ones did because it wasn't a chain theatre although he had Balgowlah too,

22:30 he had another one too but that was the other side of the harbour. It used to finish about midnight which was very late because he'd have a double feature. Most of them would have a newsreel, a B film, and you might get another newsreel before the feature film

23:00 after interval but he used to always have two A grade films. He'd have, as I said, I remember Gunga Din and Kentucky which were two, Kentucky was in colour which was rare in those days. They'd both be over,

23:30 ninety minutes was a long film, most of them were sixty, sixty five minutes, ninety minutes was a long film. So if you had two ninety minute films on and a newsreel and some shorts, it lasted a long while.

So around that time, '38, '39,

24:00 **you were working there, Hitler had been busy in Europe and there was the possibility that war would break out.**

It was on the horizon.

Was that reflected in the newsreels?

Yes. Particularly in an American documentary, 'The March of Time' which was made by the Time organization. That was very much featured.

24:30 Of course the Abyssinian war with Mussolini was '36 while I was still at school. Then the Spanish Civil War. They were all preludes to the big one. They tried out a lot of the weapons. Although in Abyssinia they used poison gas, which they never used in the others.

25:00 **So would the theatre fill up with people?**

Saturday night, chock-a-block everywhere. People had permanent bookings. In the dress circle most of them would be booked out permanently. That was a big night, Saturday night.

25:30 Saturday afternoon for the children.

So there were lots of theatres around, heaps of theatres around?

Oh yes. It was the golden days for the movies. Until television. You couldn't go wrong. They used to have

26:00 a quota system. Any Australian film would get shown because there weren't that many of them but the British films, the Empire films, I think there was some arrangement throughout the British Empire. We used to get these films. A lot of them they called quota quickies and they were dreadful films but you had to show them otherwise

26:30 you were penalized.

These were Australian films?

No the Australians didn't have them, mainly British films.

What were the quota quickies?

Like recently in Australia they had some tax dodge that if you made a film you got a hundred per cent tax rebate or something, they were making mud but

27:00 they'd still make money out of the films because it was made in Australia which was virtually a quota. The British films had a very bad name. There were very few good, I can only remember 'The Wives of Henry VIII' with Charles Laughton was made in Britain.

27:30 Just about '38, '39 some good ones started to come in but before that there was some dreadful films.

So they didn't have a good reputation?

No. Because they didn't have to go for quality. They were just made to fill, like on television here, the Australian content

28:00 is not always, they've got to show so many hours haven't they of Australian and what do they fill it up with? Sport mainly but that gets them the quota.

What about American films?

Oh, they were popular, yeah. Not that they were always. You'd always get a B grade but the A grade films, they knew how to make films, there's no doubt about that. It certainly influenced the

28:30 Australian mentality. There was no anti-Americanism then. Everyone reckoned the Yanks were the bee's knees. I think everyone imagined every home in America had a swimming pool. I think some of the young ladies that married the Americans did during the war got a bit of a rude shock when they got there.

29:00 **So how long would a season be for these films?**

You'd have Saturday, Monday, Tuesday and then change on a Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. Twice a week you'd change. The matinee on Saturday would not necessarily have the same,

29:30 it'd be a children's, made mostly for children's, comedy, not necessarily what would be shown at night.

That's a very short season.

Yes. There was a movie called 'Showboat' that Paul Robeson, it was on at Liberty Theatre in Sydney and I think it ran for two years. They used to run in the city

30:00 for a fair while but nothing like a year, a few weeks perhaps. I don't think 'Gone With The Wind' when it came out would have gone anywhere near a year.

Would you go to the pictures on a Saturday afternoon?

Oh yes.

30:30 It cost thruppence to get in when I first went and I got a penny to spend. Then when the talkies came in it went up to sixpence and I'd get thruppence to spend. Then when girls started to come into it we'd go to the matinees early teenage

31:00 but then it cost one and nine to go upstairs I think, one and nine pence. We'd take the girl and buy a box of fantails which cost sixpence. So you could do the lot for less than five shillings.

You were at that era when the talkies started?

31:30 Yeah

Do you remember the first talkie you saw?

I remember the first talkie I saw. I'd taken my mother and my grandmother to Sydney. It was called 'Alias Jimmy Valentine'. I thought of the name of the actor yesterday, William, it doesn't matter. People used to go in and sit through three sessions,

32:00 it was that novel. I'd never, until recently I hadn't seen 'The Jazz Singer'. This 'Alias Jimmy Valentine' was all talking, one of the first all talking. It was that, it was like people when TV first came in, used to stand and watch in shop windows. Just look at them,

32:30 fascinating, but you'd go in. We didn't but some people would sit through three sessions, it was that novel to see these people talking on the screen.

We should probably move on to your military experiences.

33:00 **The war broke out, do you remember where you were when you heard that the war had broken out? Were you at home?**

We'd been down to Nowra from Manly and we'd driven back and I can remember listening to the radio and Menzies making his melancholy announcement. Then, I wasn't old enough to get called up

33:30 in the universal trainees. None of my friends were in the militia. My best friend, Sunny, who was two years older than I, got called up in the universal trainees.

What were the universal trainees?

After the war started

34:00 they decided to call the already enlisted militia and then anyone over twenty one had to do, I think it was three months training and they called them UTs, Universal Trainees, which is not used much now but it is in the official history books.

34:30 Said he, pointing over there where they are. He got called up.

So you weren't interested?

Oh yes, I was interested. That's when I tried to join the air force and got knocked back. That was in February '40 and there was nothing. They weren't recruiting, they had recruited for the 6th Division,

35:00 well they started in September I think but then there was a lull and then May they decided to recruit two more Divisions, 7th and 8th and that was when I decided the war might be over before I could get into it. You were supposed to be twenty, at least twenty and

35:30 even at twenty you had to have your parents' consent. My father died in April 1940 so I persuaded my mother to, I said I was twenty on my, which I had to be and she signed her consent and I went in on the May.

36:00 I was very, I'd always been, we'd had it drummed into us I suppose about the Empire and the old country. None of us, my father never told me of how horrible France was. It's only in

36:30 later years that I learnt reading books written after, well they were written after World War I but not in general circulation, World War I was hell in France and Belgium. I never knew it was that bad. I told my father

37:00 I wanted to join the army and he tried to dissuade me but I never knew why. I never knew how hellish it was. Nothing in World War II was anything like what they'd suffered as far as soldiers went over a long period, I know there was some shocking things happen.

37:30 I felt the need to go to the war. I thought it was, well a sense of adventure and seeing the world. I've been very lucky because I did in twenty one months I was,

38:00 the twenty one months from when I enlisted I was back from, I'd been to Middle East, I'd been to

Greece, briefly in Crete, in the Syrian Campaign and back home. And all in one piece.

What did your father die from?

He died from, he was a diabetic.

38:30 He wasn't very well. He enjoyed life and wasn't a good patient. He was only fifty four, no he wasn't, he was fifty two.

What do you mean he enjoyed life but he wasn't a good patient?

He liked his beer, he'd been a good sportsman,

39:00 an international referee, rugby referee. I think he would sooner go out like that than restrict his lifestyle.

So you were rejected by the air force on what grounds?

Well they weren't recruiting and also I wanted to go into air crew and I didn't have

39:30 my Intermediate. As an aside to that, if I may, one of my bosses who was a thorough gentleman, most of them were, he went to enlist in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], he was an Englishman. The recruiting sergeant asked, "Have you got your Inter [Intermediate certificate]?" and he said, "No", "Well you can't join the air force".

40:00 But he had an Honours degree in History at Oxford so he eventually got in. But, "Have you got your Inter?", that was the catch cry for air crew.

So where did you enlist?

In Sydney.

Tape 3

00:30 **I think at the end of the last tape Alan you told us about being knocked back from the air force and then signing up with the army, can you talk us through that process?**

I had to go to North Sydney to have my medical. That was in May, the end of May. I received notice to report to the recruiting centre at the showgrounds,

01:00 to report there on the eleventh of June 1940 which I duly did. I was there until the nineteenth of June, when we moved to, it might have been the eighteenth, we got to Seymour on the nineteenth of June and we trained there until

01:30 December 1940.

What was happening at the showgrounds for that week or so?

Not very much. They were just marching us around to fill in time because they knew we were going to Victoria. It was just a recruiting, most of them would have dispersed

02:00 to their units I suppose within a couple of days but we were held back until we were all assembled and then the New South Wales component went to Seymour to join the rest of the Australian Special Wireless Section B. it had a few titles, direction finding section, but at that stage it was 1st Australian Special

02:30 Wireless Section. I think we were, I think the Queenslanders were there before us and all other states except us. Then we got some, a month or so later, some more down from New South Wales.

At which stage were you able to choose yourself whether you were to go into the wireless section?

It wasn't as sophisticated

03:00 as it is these days. Most of, not my good friend, but most of the Manly fellas went in the artillery. At the recruiting depot they had these big signs up for the various corps, artillery, engineers and you sat on a bench under the particular

03:30 Corps you wanted to join. I sat under artillery and this lieutenant from the signals came over and said, "I'm recruiting for signals today". Also on some of my papers would have appeared operator but it was an operator in a cinema so I think that might have been it. He said, "Would you like to join signals?" and I thought,

04:00 "Anything but the infantry", so "Yes". But he didn't tell me that we were going to move almost

immediately to Victoria which I had no desire to do. At any rate, I found that it was best to drift, not to try and swim against the current because it got you nowhere. That was how I got into signals.

- 04:30 Signals 1 Australia Corps was being formed in Seymour and we arrived there about the nineteenth of June and that became the unit. Then there was drill. I was told a lineman in the wireless section which caused a lot of
- 05:00 mirth because all the line sections were in number one company, all the wireless operating sections were in number two company and yet we were linemen. The purpose of the liner was, as we were an interception section which is intercepting enemy traffic, all of the other sections were just straight operating sections,
- 05:30 communicating between units, we were sort of odd men out. The section itself was odd men out because it was just interceptions and the wireless people were even more odd because they were nothing whatever to do with operating. It was based
- 06:00 on the war establishment of similar British sections, special wireless sections. The linemen were to provide communication with the direction finding sections which would locate, or try and locate, the enemy station which was sending so it could be pinpointed as to exactly where it was. In the event,
- 06:30 we rarely did any of that particular sort of work. We did line communications with headquarters and we didn't have enough time when we got to Greece which was our first operational role to really perform our function. We trained as linemen. We were there for six months. First of all
- 07:00 they tried to make soldiers out of us, that was the primary function so we drilled, all the usual, rifle range as well as learning to be competent operators, drivers, linemen, whatever it was. I think we were intended to go overseas probably to England
- 07:30 earlier but of course that was just when the battle of France ended so that was off and we marked time. Also we were without rifles for a long time because the rifles which we were due to have were sent to England after Dunkirk to replace the rifles that were lost there.
- 08:00 But eventually we broke camp on, we had Christmas dinner in Seymour, there was a dust storm. Our Christmas dinner was pork Fritz or Devon sausage, stale tomatoes and lettuce
- 08:30 sprinkled with dust. The POWs [Prisoners of War], there were a few Italian POWs down the road and they were getting turkey. So that rubbed it in. Then after we had our Christmas dinner we had to break camp. We were all in tents. We had to take the tents down, floorboards, everything then we were marched to Seymour station which was a fair march. Fortunately
- 09:00 our kit bags and packs were taken in by truck. It was a hot day, very thirsty. We were told to behave ourselves and we could get a drink when we got to Seymour station which had a refreshment room, still operating on a civilian basis, before the Japanese war started.
- 09:30 Some of the fellas, we were desperately thirsty, went in the bar and ordered their beer. There was an objectionable major, who I won't name, I don't think he's alive but he was a ghastly person, when they went for their drink he said, "Leave that on the bar, there's a tap out the back, go and drink from there" after he'd promised they could have a drink. He wasn't popular then
- 10:00 and he became more popular at a later date. So we got on the train, this is still on Christmas day, arrived at Sydney on Boxing Day, at Darling Harbour. Got off on the Sydney ferries, and we were transhipped to the Queen Mary which was just off where the prime ministerial and the Governor General's residence is.
- 10:30 That was the twenty sixth. On the twenty eighth we weighed anchor and in company with the Aquitania, Dominion Monarch and the Awatea, steamed out of Sydney, a beautiful day, no tears but I was very emotional
- 11:00 as I saw Manly recede in the background as we went out the head. It was a magnificent sight.
- This is a good juncture at which to pause for a second. You've covered your training in Seymour which was a good six, seven months or so. It would be great before we get you off to Greece and so on to hear exactly what you learnt there and**
- 11:30 **what was the specific role of the lineman. What was your work going to be?**
- Well, we were to connect any DFs, Direction Finding stations with a central station to take bearings. They would take bearings on the enemy station to locate them. You always need that because
- 12:00 as far as the message, when the messages were intercepted, it's necessary to know where they originate so that the addresses that appear on the signals, you know if the address is, well, five six seven eight, you know that was, say Berlin. That's how you
- 12:30 narrow it down. When you got on the high level stuff, this would have been tactical but when you got on

the high level stuff it would have been done on a much more sophisticated way than that and probably it might not even have been necessary to DF but that was the function of the lineman. And also any other connection with

13:00 the headquarters from our section back to them which we went on a bivouac and did things like that. The equipment was all World War I but when we got to Egypt we got equipment that was the current equipment.

Can you explain to us that technology,

13:30 **the difference between what you were training on and what you were using in operations?**

When we trained we had to hand, on the back of a truck, wheel the line out as we went and that would be all land line, nothing on poles or anything. When we got to Egypt we got this gadget which was called the spewer

14:00 which did it mechanically, it did spew the cable out. It took us a few days to get the technique for that. We took that to Greece with us. I think we used it once and then left it. Greece was that fluid, I'm getting away again, aren't I.

It's alright, it's answering the question.

It was that fluid that you didn't have time to get any direction finding stations out,

14:30 they were on top of you before you wanted to take a bearing. Our main task was to move backwards, to retreat, or straighten the line as they said. We used Don Rs, dispatch riders to take the messages from our unit to the headquarters unit and the int [intelligence] unit. There was also another British intercept section operating there

15:00 at the same time as us and they were processing or intercepting there.

So the line basically is connecting your station with headquarters.

And any outstations, yes.

And the actual technology that is used to find, the direction finding equipment itself, what was that?

That would be operated by people who knew about direction findings, a specialist in direction finding. Again, that was makeshift

15:30 because fortunately we had some good instrument mechanics and they made up direction finders from whatever material they could get together. We never had a factory job while we were in Greece.

Just a question about army culture. You'd come from a home where everyone had an opinion and it was

16:00 **quite a lenient upbringing that you had, then you came across army life, the discipline, that sort of thing, what sort of culture shock was that for you?**

It wasn't so bad. I didn't have any time adjusting. The thing with the section I was in, most of them were much older, the other fellas. There were a few of us that were

16:30 but they were mature persons. We were sort of, the younger ones weren't, they called me the bull calf. I hadn't been around much.

17:00 I wasn't used to some of the vivid language that was commonplace but it didn't worry me. I was used to that. Even some of the antics that the older blokes got up to later on didn't shock me I suppose.

17:30 I know some young fellas, I met some later on in life who had a great trouble adjusting to the rough and tumble but no, I surprised myself really because I thought I would be more homesick than I was,

18:00 but I wasn't. Even, I'm getting ahead of myself again but even when we were all those thousands of miles in the Middle East when the Japs attacked and it came through, we had no idea where we were going or what was going to happen. I never lost faith that we were going to win the war, never, never doubted.

18:30 I knew that we couldn't lose the war, I know we nearly did but that never entered my mind, that we were going to lose. It was just a matter of how long it was going to be before we'd get back home. Our padre wasn't too popular

19:00 because when we were on the ship going to, I think it was after Queen Mary, we got on a smaller ship and he gave this sermon, it is better to, I can't think of it. The theme of the homily was when you get home nothing will ever be the same,

19:30 people have died. "It is better to journey than arrive" was his theme. He was a nasty piece of work. Which was the wrong thing to tell people who are a long way away from home and not knowing. He

didn't want it rubbed in by a gentleman of the cloth.

20:00 It was, I just accepted life as it was. I knew it wasn't going to be roses. I made the most of, well, I neglected a lot of opportunities, I wish I'd have been a bit more mature because some of the places we went I'd go and have a few drinks instead of going and looking at some historical or Biblical

20:30 places, although I did most of those. But we didn't have much time to dwell on anything because everything happened so quickly.

By the time you'd embarked on the Queen Mary had you formed good friendships?

Oh yes. Two very long lasting friendships, one

21:00 who I'm going to stay with, Neville Wenton in Sydney when I go there tomorrow. The day we joined the army I marched behind him, or next to him, we were even billeted together in Adelaide when we came back from the Middle East. And also, one of the lineys who was ten years older than I,

21:30 I had a long friendship with him until he died. We had, it was an interesting section because we had older people from all walks of life, calligraphers, a lot of people who could have been in reserved occupations and

22:00 it was a joy to be with them. Obviously, you always get one or two that you'd rather hadn't been there but fortunately they got weeded out, most of them. The rest of them, the OC [Officer Commanding], Captain Ryan was a magnificent person, a good soldier although he'd been in the navy and the

22:30 2IC [2nd In Command], Lieutenant Henry, he was a boffin, a nerd you'd call him these days. He knew everything about electronics. He, in his own way, was just as valuable as Colonel Ryan, or then Captain Ryan. He was a good soldier and he made sure that we were soldiers before we were anything else

23:00 which stood in good stead during the Greek Campaign but particularly during Crete which I'd got off on a hospital ship with about thirteen others but the rest of the section had to walk right across the island and across the mountains to get out. They all got out except we left a couple to be prisoners of war

23:30 and one bloke got shot. If it hadn't been for his tenacity it would have all been POWs.

So you were mixing with blokes from Victoria and Queensland, what was that like, I know there wasn't that much interstate travel in those days?

Of course it was always the Victorian/New South Wales.

24:00 I think this was more on the Vic's part but I may be speaking as a New South Welshman. The only thing I noticed the difference was the way they kicked the football up and down the tent lines whereas the New South Welshman, we didn't have that many South Aus or West Australians, I think we only had one

24:30 Tasmanian and he was a cook. It was a good mixture. There may have been a bit of banter but no, well, when I go to Sydney I'm going to work out how many New South Welshman were in it. But there was no

25:00 interstate jealousies let's say. As you said, I'd been to Melbourne a few times but that was unusual. I don't think, particularly the younger ones, had been very far from home.

What as the code of choice with the section when it came to playing footy?

The CO [Commanding Officer] was

25:30 a Victorian. Can I hop ahead on that? When we came back to Australia and formed into a unit, the headquarters was in Brisbane, Kalinga, just out of Brisbane, we had an Aussie Rules team and a League team and the Aussie rules got all the good uniforms. The league had to make do with

26:00 army issue navy blue pullovers and using four by two which was to clean rifle barrels made into a V. They were always second class citizens when it came to uniforms and things. Mind you,

26:30 they didn't win as many games as the Victorians, the Australian Rules, either. That was, we always said, we called him Uncle Jack, Uncle Jack made sure his boys, the Victorians go their.

Just another question about training before we get you back on the voyage across the Indian Ocean. How did they actually conduct that training in your specific field?

27:00 Well we used to go out in the field. You might see in that album some of us sitting in a ring on upturned urinal tins. We had to do reef knots, learn to do all sorts of knots, cable joining and things like that, very simple cable joining. We also had to learn the Morse code to

27:30 five words a minute. That was part of the deal, before you got specialist training and two shillings a day which was when you're on five, getting seven made it better. We had to do theory. Ohm's law and things like that which we'd do indoors but most of it was done outdoors, laying lines and repairing them.

28:00 **What did that entail, the laying of lines and repairing of them?**

Very basic. We had what they called 'don three' cable, then it was 'don eight' we got in the Middle East which was a superior. When we had an exercise we'd have to, again from the headquarters to the section and the DF, we did have a DF section then

28:30 so we'd do that. The trouble was we didn't have much equipment and it was all World War I. I suppose what we were doing, when we got the better equipment, what we'd done, we knew what to do. At least we were proficient in that.

What about rifle training, that sort of thing?

29:00 We were a bit late getting the rifles as I said, the ones we were meant to have had been sent on to England, but then a drill, we had the railway.

29:30 **We had you talking about football, the wires then rifle training.**

Oh yes, we were onto the rifles. When we eventually got issued with rifles which I think was as late as August, I think I was the only one in the section who'd never used, I'd handled

30:00 air guns but not an army rifle. The rest of them, as soon as they got it were aware of most of the movements, I wasn't. I caught up in a short time. Slope arms, present arms and everything. We weren't issued with bayonets because we weren't supposed to be getting into any fighting. It was

30:30 supposed to be all set piece battles like they had in World War I but when they discovered in places like Greece and Crete it just didn't work out that way, then we were issued with bayonets. In the earlier, the rifle drill and then I think we had only one rifle range where we actually shot live ammunition. I suppose that would have only been twenty rounds,

31:00 if that, from varying distances and then we kept those rifles until, I handed mine when, you weren't allowed to have a rifle when you were in the military hospital, under the Geneva convention I think. So I handed mine, I don't think I even took mine with me when I went into hospital in Crete.

31:30 I would have left it with the section. They could have done with, I knew that they were going to need to use them.

So what was a lineman's kit?

Pliers mostly. The ones they issued you with weren't worth anything so I bought my own. I think they cost me about seven, six but they were beautiful pliers.

32:00 I had my army number engraved on them so no one could get them.

Have you still got those?

No. When I came back to Australia, because I was a lineman, all the linemen went to another unit but six months later I went back to Special Wireless Group and I bequeathed my

32:30 pliers to my friend who had stayed with the unit, a good friend who stayed with the old unit. I think he promptly lost them.

So had you met your wife to be by this stage?

I knew her. She was

33:00 not just fifteen and I was seventeen. I met her on the course out at Manly. It wasn't a love at first sight, it was for me, it wasn't for her. When I was in the Middle East she started to write to me and that's when it. When I came back, then I was stationed in Sydney and everything went from there, we got engaged and then married the next year.

33:30 **So can you tell us a bit more about the voyage? You got us out of the heads there at Sydney Harbour, you'd seen Manly receding.**

That was, I'd always had an ambition to come through the heads which I did on the Manunda in 1949 so I've been out and in because when we came back

34:00 we landed at Port Adelaide or outer Harbour. I haven't got much memory of after we left Sydney. I know we went round the bottom of Tasmania and then we were joined by the Mauritania which had come from Melbourne and

34:30 we went in convoy then to Perth or Fremantle and then after we left Fremantle we, a few days later there was a rainstorm, just blotted out everything. The Queen Mary went into almost a complete circle turn and left the convoy and

35:00 when the rain cleared there was no sign of it. We had to go to Trincomalee in Ceylon because the Queen Mary was too big to get into Colombo Harbour so we transhipped there into a smaller troop ship. A Dutch ship. And went to

35:30 Port Tewfik.

So you docked in Fremantle?

No, we didn't dock, couldn't dock. I don't know, whether some West Australians joined the other ships I don't know, whether it was refuelling or what. We had to stand out because

- 36:00 we couldn't get near a wharf. One of the fellows that we had who was known as Blind Nell because he was always blind drunk, or most of the time. He managed to get ashore dressed as a fireman. He was made an honorary member of the local RSL [Returned and Services League]. He was the only bloke that I knew,
- 36:30 I don't know if there were any others, who actually got off the Mary at Fremantle. He was a character. Unfortunately we left him in Crete. He got off on one of his benders and didn't get back. I think they put him in the jail, that's right. He would have served the war effort more with the
- 37:00 Germans than us because he was a real reprobate.

I saw a photo in your album of you with a new haircut.

Yeah, that was on New Years Eve 1940. Right through the section, a fella had a pair of hair clippers and he clipped most of the, I had a Mohawk,

- 37:30 but then I had it modified to that. He cut various hairstyles and Pix magazine, we had a bloke who had worked for the Herald Sun in Melbourne, the Herald. He had a Leica camera and he took a lot of photos with the Leica
- 38:00 and sold them. When I said we had all sorts of people, there was a signalman there, Stan Clark, who later became the Chief Executive Officer of the Macquarie Network and there were a lot of 3DB fellas joined, he was one of them, who joined the section.
- 38:30 He was, as I said there was some good fellas, he was one of the best. He wasn't young. I suppose he would have been close to thirty which was old by my standards and married. I had a lot of respect for married blokes that
- 39:00 joined up. That didn't have to do, because he had a good job. As Eddie Ward, the politician remarked, the 6th Division were mostly economic conscripts. Which incensed people at the time but it was pretty right, a lot of those blokes had never had a job in their life.

You were talking to us before about a fellow who went on benders.

Blind Nell.

How big a part of army life at that stage was drinking, the grog?

Well, when we first went in there was no wet canteens in the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces] . Then they bought wet canteens in. It wasn't a very pleasant way of drinking

- 40:00 although I've had worse experiences. I didn't drink very much then, I couldn't afford to, nobody could. I remember Nell was responsible, the leader of the pack. The canteen had corrugated iron so he lifted the corrugated iron in the wet canteen and rolled a barrel out, got the bung out somehow and they had this
- 40:30 in the fork of the tree but there was nothing they could do. I think they were getting it in tea buckets. There was nothing, they had dixies to get it but a lot of it was wasted. I think it was
- 41:00 about a shilling, might have been sixpence a pot but when you're getting five shillings a day, you can't get very drunk on that. I saw a lot of excessive drunkenness, that's exaggerating a bit. On the Queen Mary, the canteen there, you got a bit
- 41:30 discouraged because you'd pay say a shilling for this, it was, they used them in the Middle East too, I think they had them on the Mary. It was a beer bottle with the top cut off and sand blasted so it wouldn't cut you. I'm not too sure if it was on the Mary or whether they had proper pints.
- 42:00 You'd get cigarette butts and everything in it.

Tape 4

00:30 We were talking about beer.

Yes on the Queen Mary it was like pigs at a trough really, they had this great long bar. They weren't too fussy about what went in. The drip trays were just emptied into jugs I think and then poured out.

- 01:00 You'd get cigarette butts and everything. The difference on the Queen Mary between the officers, the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and other ranks was remarkable. The officers travelled first class,

NCOs second class, with the Queen Mary dining room. And we were in this great dining room, an immense

01:30 one and the food was shocking. All I can remember is eggs boiled so hard that the yolks were green. Another, one day we got, I thought it was mince meat, I like mince meat,

02:00 this was one breakfast I was going to enjoy. I don't remember the other meals. And I took one bite and it was minced liver, which I can't stand offal at any stage. It was notorious, the food, for the third class passengers. So much so that I was told that on a later voyage that when the orderly officer got up

02:30 and asked if there was any complaint, he got hit with about a thousand of these hard boiled eggs. The difference was, on most trips, well, the only decent food I ever had on a troop ship was on the Orchides, coming back from Ceylon to Adelaide but that's further on in the story.

So you got to Trincomalee,

03:00 **did you get on shore there?**

No. Just transhipped the next day I think on to the Slommatt which was a Netherlands East Indies trader. Its' freeboard was about the same as a Manly ferry, a very small ship. Only the two companies of Corps sigs were on that. One good thing on the Queen Mary, at least there were six of us

03:30 and we had a state room. We had our own private bath, with seawater which isn't the best, we had salt water. But on the Slommatt, because we'd had the cabins, number two company had had the cabins on the Mary, the state rooms,

04:00 we had to go below decks with hammocks. I've never been able to sleep with a hammock in my life, I still can't. My friend and I used to go up on deck,

04:30 just roll the hammocks out and sleep on top the hammocks. It was in the tropics. The Dutch seamen used to hose us off every morning. That was reveille for us. We went as far as Port Tewfik on that then we got off.

05:00 We got on a train and went to a place call Ikingi Maryut in Egypt, not far from Alexandria, on the way to El Alamein but that was a fair way up. That was when the first desert campaign was going so the battalions at that stage were being pushed right back.

05:30 We got there in the end of January and we moved camp once. That, you saw, the cinema made out of old carpets and rugs, that was at Ikingi. I beg your pardon, I'm wrong, that was Amiriya,

06:00 we moved to Ikingi later on. We got leave to Alexandria which was, well you'd only have daylight leave to Alexandria at that stage, Australians. I had one leave into Alexandria.

06:30 You had to get a train in, it was so far out. Then we had a regiment, the Cheshire Regiment of the British Army near us. They were wild, they'd just done five years' field punishment down at the Red Seas and we chummed up with them. They provided us with the British uniforms

07:00 so we could go in because Aus weren't allowed in. We must have gone in by train. We ended up in this bar after various other visits and it was like something, one of these in that photograph, one of the pommies

07:30 went berserk and he wiped all the bottles off the bar, then he wanted to fight everyone. We decided it was time to go home so we went out to get a taxi and every time we'd get a taxi there'd be someone missing. So somebody'd go to look for him, then he'd come back. It'd be hilarious

08:00 if it hadn't have been, well, I suppose it was hilarious. One of our fellas got a bit boozed and he went out to sleep it off and his watch disappeared. At any rate, we eventually got in the taxi and we left two fellows who ended up in Cairo but got back the next day.

So you said you'd put on an English uniform?

Yes.

What would that get you?

08:30 If we'd gone in in our Aus uniforms we would have got lumbered by the Mps [Military Police] because we weren't allowed. The traders wouldn't have minded but somebody would have been puzzled with all the Australian accents in British uniforms.

You were talking about other visits there,

09:00 **were they like the dens of iniquity?**

Yes. I was a spectator.

That's what they all say.

I was amused in Patsy Adam-Smith's book, 'The ANZACs' which as you know is about the diggers in World War I saying he saw the cancan and Patsy Adam Smith implied

09:30 that a very, not a simple dance, but anything, it wasn't outrageous but if she'd have seen the Egyptian version of the cancan she would have found a surprise. I was moved to write to her and enlighten her about it but.

Well you can take the opportunity to enlighten her and the rest of us now.

10:00 Well, it was a cigarette inserted into a very intimate part of the body, the Egyptian style. Poor old Patsy's gone to her grave, someone might have enlightened her about it. It's nothing like the Moulin Rouge cancan,

10:30 it was done in the nude.

This was all on the day time?

No, this was on our night time jaunts but I think it's still, I'm sure it did in the day time too. It was an industry in Alexandria. La Rue de Sœur, Sister Street. There was a rumour that when it got

11:00 bombed that they killed six MPs, Military Policemen, not Members of Parliament and two padres.

So would that be the first port of call or the last?

That was part of the ritual let's say. Well, there were some serious

11:30 people who wouldn't have. They would have gone to the. I was probably with the wrong, the more mature people. Not all of them were like that, just the people that I was in the tent with that seemed to gravitate that way. They were very kind to us, the pommies, the Cheshire Regiment.

12:00 They also went to Crete. I think they only had regular army, British Army in Crete.

So they were pretty much old hands as far as the Middle East?

Oh, yes. Somewhere, Sudan or somewhere they had this five year punishment. I don't know what had happened to cause it. I might have known but I've forgotten.

12:30 **Had the army lectured the troops on venereal disease?**

Oh yes. They used to issue kits, blue light outfits they called them. You lost, the pay was lost if, which I thought was, well, I think if you had

13:00 a record that you'd been to the blue light outfit that you might not have lost your pay. Fortunately I didn't have to experience that. Particularly for married blokes because I think the wife's allotment was also affected.

13:30 I don't know what happens these days.

Were there many people going to the medical orderlies with those sorts of problems?

We never had any. The only one that I ever knew of which I don't know whether it was right, was the padre. They had a special hospital in the Middle East

14:00 just to deal with venereal disease. I think it could have been right. Everyone hoped it was because he was a shocking person. Apart from that sermon when we were in the first camp, Armiriya in Egypt, we went on church parade because if you didn't

14:30 go on church parade you had to go on a route march. He was a Church of England padre and some of the fellas, not in our section but other section of 4 sigs had been leant a vehicle by some woman in Alexandria, some kind person and they damaged it. He said,

15:00 "With the full authority of the church, I call down a curse on these men" that's the sort of fella he was. That's why I said we were so delighted to hear he'd suffered. So the next week we all went on RC [Roman Catholic] church parade and got out of the route march that way. We didn't go into the

15:30 church, into the parade, I don't know how we got off. One of our fellows, Harry Dempsey, always said that in the next war he was either going to be a padre or a canteen sergeant, they had the best lurks.

Obviously a lot of the locals did quite well out of

16:00 **having the Allied troops there but how were you generally received do you think by the population in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East.**

Well Egypt they were obviously out to get you, they were the greatest, they'd had years of British occupation if you like and they, everyone knew it was a game, they'd take you down for whatever they could.

- 16:30 That's why it was such a delight to go to Greece where there was none of that. Even, you felt that they were undercharging rather than overcharging. Not that we could buy much. My only remember of buying is preserved figs, which I enjoyed. I had that many preserved figs I couldn't look at one now. And eggs.
- 17:00 When we were on the move we used to either buy eggs from them or swap them for tins of bully beef because all we got all the time we were there was bully beef.
- You mentioned one chap losing his watch. Was there any violence? Would fights happen with the locals?**
- They'd generally duck for cover.
- 17:30 This one that went berserk in the Kit Kat bar, but there were Kit Kat bars everywhere in the Middle East, he got another young British soldier and he was belting him in the lavatory but not, the proprietor and everyone else was ducking for cover.
- 18:00 **So moving away from the flesh pots for a second, what did they have you doing when you were based in Egypt there, was it more training?**
- We did get issued with the line layer there but we didn't have time to. By the time it was ready to go to Greece. I'm trying to think now. Our transport must have gone on another ship.
- 18:30 We were in the hold, it was just the, under the royal naval, HMS Breconshire which had been a merchant ship. We were right down in the bottom of the hold and there were some New Zealanders up on top a bit from us. They, all we got was bully beef
- 19:00 and biscuits and black tea. That's all. It took two or three days to go to Greece. Once we got to Greece I can't remember anything else. Where we were, we were in tented accommodation. There seemed to be a little bar for each tent almost there were that many.
- 19:30 I never had much money. I didn't even had enough, you had to have a pound I think in your paybook before you could go to Athens and I didn't have a pound in my paybook. But I had stocked up on a lot of tobacco, because I smoked a pipe at that stage. On the Queen Mary they had a canteen and I got a lot, I liked English pipe tobacco which nobody else bothered to do and then
- 20:00 later on we ran out of cigarettes they were trying to get my tobacco off me but they were unsuccessful.
- So what was the strategic importance of what your section was going over there to do?**
- Well, intercepting enemy traffic. Most of it was in code of course
- 20:30 but there was another aspect to signal intelligence and that was what they called traffic analysis which is, I'll put it simply, if there's a lot of traffic going in a certain direction or if there's traffic going and then there's a great increase in that traffic,
- 21:00 it looks as though at the other end, something's going to happen. That basically is traffic analysis. The other is breaking the code. On a high level, you've heard of Enigma and Ultra. Ultra was the product of anything you got from signals intelligence
- 21:30 even from interception, even if it was traffic analysis, it still had a codeword, I forget what it was now but Ultra meant that it was a decrypt from an Enigma machine [The codeword (or code letter) for wireless intercepts was 'Y']. That's only just coming out in the last few years just how important that was because that's good intelligence, it's not word of mouth it's straight from the
- 22:00 mouth of the. Freyberg, the general in charge of Crete was given information about the German attack was going to take place, even the day it was going to take place but it there wasn't much he could do with it because he didn't have the men or the equipment to do it. It was still touch and go, Crete. The Germans lost a, they never had
- 22:30 an airborne invasion again after that. As an illustration of what interception will do, the battle of Midway was won because of an interception. A message was sent that they didn't, they intercepted Japanese,
- 23:00 a message was sent from Japan referring to 'MA' or something and they didn't know whether that was Midway, the people who were intercepting it. So they got a message sent, the Americans got a message sent saying that
- 23:30 Midway was short of water then a Jap message was sent, "'MA' is short of water" so they knew that when they were referring to 'MA' being a target, that was when they managed to position their battleships. Montgomery used it a lot in the desert.
- 24:00 **What did that mean for your section in terms of where it was positioned with the front line and in relation to infantry?**
- These B type sections as they called them were supposed to be in the field to give advice immediately to

whoever was. Not to go back to the formations for processing and everything else.

- 24:30 It was supposed to be the tactical level which it was in Greece and Crete. As I said I wasn't an operator, I wasn't on Crete but I know the Germans were going to, they had all these vessels lined up with troops in them, a sea borne landing in Crete to take place at the same time
- 25:00 as the air borne and the Special Wireless Section intercepted that message. I don't know if it was in clear or anything but it certainly wasn't Enigma, it was a lower grade code than that and the navy went out and obliterated them. I don't think any of them got ashore alive. A few bodies washed ashore.
- 25:30 It was an occasion in Greece that they intercepted a message in plain language, not in code which showed that they were talking about Benghazi in German, when they were in Benghazi. That was the first indication that Rommel's Africa Korps was in North Africa, that message. Nobody in Egypt would believe them when it went through to them.
- 26:00 Whoever was in charge, it would have been Wavell I suppose, he said, "It's as quiet as Bourke Street round Benghazi" Well I don't know how quiet Bourke Street was but it wasn't a very good simile, whatever.

So talk us through Greece, where you were camped and what the movements were.

- 26:30 Once we moved to Greece our section was removed from sigs one Aust Corps, we were attached directly to Headquarters I Aust Corps or yes, to the HQ I Aust Corps. We went up this place we called Happy Valley. It was nice. It was spring,
- 27:00 we could see Mount Olympus with the snow melting on it. The streams were running. It was a tranquil place. I'd have to look to see how much but we must have been a couple of weeks there. We'd connected a line back to headquarters and the operators were in full.
- 27:30 When you think, a section of ninety, I suppose you'd be lucky to get fifty per cent of that to be actual operators because we had to have cooks, linemen, drivers, dispatch riders, so when you get down to actual operational personnel, you down to say about
- 28:00 forty. When they've got to do shifts, you're getting down to about four operators on a shift, might be more. So it soon eats up the manpower. They were getting very good stuff that was very useful except the Germans were winning. We had no air cover and they had,
- 28:30 they could just fly around at will. This meant, well, the infantry had to move back and we had to move back if the infantry moved back. We were on top, we called it Marble Mountain. A chap called Eddie Oss, we rigged up this DF
- 29:00 and he said there, "The Germans are close". We hadn't seen any so I think they'd gone round the side of our people. Then a New Zealand anti-tank battery came up and told us to get out because the Germans were just down the road. There were certain times when we were ahead of people but that was just the way
- 29:30 that sort of warfare was. So we got out, skittled out of there and then we had to go through that town that you saw that had been obliterated in those photos. We'd only be a couple of days at most in any spot going back and it wasn't time to do much work, it was just
- 30:00 a matter of getting out then we eventually got the signal that's in there saying the Anzac Corps was going to withdraw and for us to get out as quick as we could. So we went down and got on a, it was a Greek coastal vessel. Then
- 30:30 we got on that. Piraeus, the port, had been bombed heavily. An ammunition ship had blown up. All the British ligation staff were on these ships, they were getting out too. We had about a hundred odd German prisoners of war that we were allowed to look after. We left
- 31:00 that night for a couple of nights before we got to Crete. There'd been a few, my birthday was on the nineteenth of April, Hitler's was on the twentieth and we got bombed all day that day but not one of us got hurt.
- 31:30 The machine gun, you'd see the planes going over. We were in a wheat field and you could hear them, the shots going through the wheat.

Were you in Crete or in Greece now?

Back in Greece, I skipped that.

So how long were you in Greece all up?

- 32:00 We got there in March and we left about, about a month. There was a song, "It was a month ago not more, we left for Greece to win the war". Then we landed in Crete the day before Anzac Day.
- 32:30 My corporal who'd been in the end of World War I said he always had a drink on Anzac Day and he was determined to get one that day but I don't know if he did. We moved, before I left, into an olive grove.

33:00 There was a street along it called 42nd Street. I took a photo of the sign. I think it was the 45th British Ordinance Depot that was in that street, that's how it got the name, 42nd Street. It was while I was there that I got dysentery and I got sent to the British hospital near the aerodrome at Maleme in Crete

33:30 with about thirteen others. We were eventually evacuated on a hospital ship before the blitz started.

That's a really good overview of that very hectic, chaotic month. You said the first few weeks in Greece were

It was only, see the Germans weren't in the war, it was the Italians and

34:00 they came down. They had to put off Barbarossa, the assault on Russia while they dealt with this so at least, though they didn't know it, it gave the Russians a couple of, it might have had some effect because they nearly got to Moscow. They came down through Yugoslavia to help the Italians.

34:30 They had Panzer divisions, we had Bren guns so it was just hopeless but it was a gesture. Anthony Eden inspired it to give help to the, Australians. Reading the war histories there was a lot of shenanigans going on because General Blamey didn't want us to go.

35:00 They went behind his back and said there'd have to be a British General in charge, General Wilson, 'Jumbo' Wilson [Gen. Henry Maitland Wilson] because there would be more British troops involved. In the event there wasn't more British troops, mostly Australian and New Zealanders, predominantly. The British troops who were supposed to be there went round the Cape of Good Hope so if we'd have held on a few more, another month or so

35:30 we might have got the Brits but it was a bit of double dealing because Menzies was being fed stuff that was not true and Blamey knew it was not true.

So what was your awareness at the time, did it seem like it was a hopeless cause or was morale high?

Morale was all right

36:00 but we were being fed some crap by one of our officers who was the exception, they were all good, he was supposed to have written fairy stories for the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission] before the war and I believe that. He said, "Look, we're straightening the line, we're not retreating. Look at all those going up" well there'd be about

36:30 two trucks going up and forty going back, we knew, it was silly. It was obvious we were in retreat. It was an orderly retreat, but there was no reason to try and give us that cock and bull story.

What was the northernmost point you reached?

Just at the foothills of Mount Olympus.

37:00 The first sign of the Germans coming through was one night, I think I was on guard duty and you could see near Olympus these flashes and dull sounds. It was the German artillery coming through. We never saw any

37:30 Germans on the ground, except when we got on the ship, POWs. [Prisoners of War]

At that time had your job been done or were you kept busy during that period, just before the retreat had begun?

We'd hooked everything up and the people who weren't operators were just doing jobs round the camp such as guards and maintaining

38:00 the line back to headquarters.

Were there any problems in that respect?

No. The only problem we had with that, and I'm going forward, was in Lebanon, when we were there for six months. A bit of sabotage on the line going to headquarters. The cable, if you get two rocks you could cause a

38:30 short circuit by rubbing the insulation off. This had been cunningly done, I actually traced it back, it went through a village and I was walking along tracing because we knew there was a dead short on the line and they'd got a signal and put it round, it just looked like a cigarette packet lining, they'd put it round the

39:00 line to disguise it but we found it. That only happened once. I never knew until the last few years of the war in the Middle East with Lebanon being involved, that the village we were in was half Christian and half Arab. Even then there would have been, you know. It was in an ideal situation.

39:30 Well, for our job, because we were right on the top of a mountain.

Can you tell us a bit more about the retreat itself, straightening the line?

It wasn't chaotic, the worst thing was, apart from that dreadful day on Hitler's birthday,

40:00 we did have a few lucky escapes, particularly this friend of mine because he was lying on the ground and this fighter went over. He was using explosive bullets and one exploded just within inches of his forehead. He's here today but that few inches made all the difference.

40:30 It was orderly but you couldn't get settled because you'd only just stop and next we've got to go back and then eventually this signal came through to get out. When we first started,

41:00 a few aeroplanes, Germans, flew overhead but didn't do us any damage.

Tape 5

00:30 **So we were going to just pick up on Greece, a little bit more about Greece and what was going on there for you. Can you just give me a bit more of a detailed picture of what you were doing there in terms of your linesman work?**

Well, as I said, after we started to move back we didn't have time to do anything.

01:00 The section wasn't in any one spot long enough to do any work because we, the only time we stopped was at a place called Murder Flat which I described but even then we spent most of our time in slit trenches, we were under air attack all the time

01:30 and even as we moved back, there were only brief, it was only a matter of hours we'd stop in any one place. So there was no chance after we left Marble Mountain to do any real operational work.

At Marble Mountain you had established a camp?

That was where the New Zealanders

02:00 told us to get out in a hurry because we were, the work had gone on, not as far as we could see because there was no line work to be done there but the operators were still working and getting valuable information which was sent back by dispatch riders to headquarters. The line business was rapidly going out

02:30 because of the nature of the work, linemen became extinct. That's why when we came back to Australia there was no linemen in any of the sections.

Were you used in other ways?

When we were in Lebanon as well as

03:00 maintaining a line between our section and headquarters in Zahle, which was a few miles away, we also maintained the aerals which were subject to lots of break downs as soon as the snow started and the ice formed on them, they'd just collapse, the mast would break, some of the masts would break.

03:30 Through all this the operators were still doing their job.

The situation at Marble Mountain was one whereby you had kind of established a camp, didn't you, you dug trenches, is that right?

We dug slit trenches but we didn't set up tents, it was only one tent set up as a set room. It was very temporary.

04:00 **What sort of information was coming in?**

Well this was mainly tactical information in plain language or a very low-grade code from the Germans advancing. Not being an operator I'm not aware whether it was land communications or air-ground-air but I think mainly it would be land communications.

04:30 **So how privy were you to information in your role?**

No. Even the operators didn't know unless they were given feedback. Nev Winton, my friend, who was operating on Marble Mountain, he was getting pages of traffic

05:00 in plain language which he was later told was very valuable, once the intelligence people got hold of it. As I said, we were withdrawing all the time so I don't know whether that saved lives. When you're on the way back you haven't got time to put into, unless it's,

05:30 being in plain language it can be read on the spot so it probably was of value.

So you ended up really just being one step ahead of the German advance?

Mm and it developed at some stages there was no one between us and the Germans and at other times
06:00 we were, when we, our last withdrawal which was at Thermopylae, the artillery were digging in to the side of the mountain as we went past them. I don't think there was much of a stand after that because it would have been from Athens and then for the
06:30 major parties the Corinth Canal and then South of the Corinth Canal, the evacuation. We, as I said, evacuated from Piraeus.

So you got to Crete and what was the situation like in Crete?

When we were on this Greek coaster
07:00 going to Crete, which had the British Ligation on it and also there were a couple of Americans and their two children who'd been with, he was an agriculturalist and he'd been helping in Macedonia but he and his family got caught up in the retreat when the Germans came down through that way. There were a lot
07:30 of civilians on board as well as us. A hundred and forty odd German prisoners. They were all from one unit and there was a German air force officer on board too who tried to organize an uprising with the others. We had a German speaking fella with us and he, they didn't know he could speak German but
08:00 we were guarding them. The officer was on the same deck as the guards and down below deck was the other German prisoners of war. The officer was up top and they were down below. He, one of our chaps who was a German speaker, heard him trying to organise them
08:30 to take over the ship. All we had was, well, we didn't, there was a fella with a machine gun up the next deck to where we were guarding and we had our rifles. I don't think, they wouldn't have been able to take over the ship because I think they would have been mowed down, and us with them,
09:00 by the machine gun. Our Captain Ryan wasn't in charge of the ship, there was a British artillery officer in charge who wasn't much chop and they invited the German officer up for a drink in their quarters with the purpose of getting him a bit full
09:30 and his mind off organizing this take over. The trouble was the only one that was sober at the end of it was Captain Ryan. The Brit officer got just as full as the German. Anyhow, we arrived in Crete before they could do anything. It would have been touch and go. I don't know if they would have obeyed him because he was an air force officer and they weren't Luftwaffe [German Air Force].
10:00 Then we landed in Crete and they took the German prisoners off in Crete and put them in a jail where they were supposed to remain but of course they were released a couple of weeks later when the Germans took over the island so they got home sooner than they thought. I don't know what happened to the ligation staff because
10:30 they would have been put on something and taken to Alexandria. The Greek ship, they wouldn't go any further than Crete. They refused to go. We were taken off on a small armed trawler, Royal Navy and landed at Suda Bay in Crete and as soon as we landed
11:00 we got air attacked and we got it pretty well all the time. It wasn't a very nice welcome. I've got a War Memorial book with lots of photos of that, of the section. They're not named but I can pick out the people.

So what was your first task after landing at Crete?

11:30 Just to get together. We didn't know what was going to happen. A lot of the ships were going straight to Alexandria. The rest of corps' signals went to Alexandria, we were the only section on Crete. Nobody knew what was going to happen. We had no, our radio sets had been destroyed
12:00 in Greece. Through Captain Ryan again, they got through, got together. This was after I had left, near Carnie, one of the towns in Crete, they set up shop there again and started intercepting and went through until, well until it became hopeless again and they had to
12:30 walk right across Crete, across the mountain. It took them two or three days and then the British evacuated them again, back to Egypt.

The radio sets had been destroyed in Greece?

Yes but they scrounged some. The Brits had some in their stores which they
13:00 handed over and they went on one of the merchant ships that was in the harbour that had been bombed and couldn't move and Captain Ryan took one of the fitters on and got, I think it was a wireless and a small direction finder that had been on the ship. They managed to get enough sets to
13:30 become operational again.

So you moved off from Suda Bay?

Just off from forty second street. Went to the hospital which was next to the Maleme airfield.

So you weren't there for very long before you got ill?

No.

14:00 I suppose about a week. It mightn't have been a week, it was a bit vague. Back there at the hospital, a few days in hospital. I was a lot better but I still, all of us, fourteen of us that

14:30 got off in the hospital ship spent about two days in the British hospital at Alexandria which was pretty well overflowing and then they took us to an Australian hospital on the Suez Canal. We were there a couple of weeks until we were fit again. We didn't go to the convalescent ever.

15:00 We went back to where Signals I Aust Corps was. We didn't know, we thought we might be able to go back to Crete, we didn't know what was happening. There was no word whether they'd taken it over and then the next thing we knew, the rest of the section arrived from Crete, they'd been evacuated

15:30 after their walk over the mountains. So we were all together again and then we all got a week's survivor's leave and went for a trip round Palestine by bus.

What's survivor's leave?

Well, the fact that we'd got out of Greece and Crete.

Was that an official term?

Yeah, I think they did the same at Dunkirk, anyone that had been through an evacuation.

16:00 I don't think they knew what else to do with us at any rate. Then we're into June and the war against the Vichy French had started then so after the week's leave we went to Northern Palestine, a place called Jish, which was an old

16:30 British barracks. We were in there. Then the Syrian campaign was covered from Jish, intercepting the Vichy French traffic. Then on the fifteenth, I think it was the fifteenth of July 1941 we went into Beirut

17:00 and we set up for a couple of weeks we were in the Grand Serail which was the French administrative building in Beirut. It was about then, I can't answer, I don't know what happened immediately

17:30 but I know that Hitler had just attacked Russia and from what my friend Neville, he was a crack operator, what he told me then and later but I don't know whether this was after we got to Lebanon or when we, no it was when we got to Lebanon. They

18:00 were listening to the Russians because nobody knew how they were faring. They weren't announcing their withdrawals. Nev, I spoke to him yesterday about this, he was on the, watching the Crimea and as each of those, Sebastopol and those towns in the Crimea fell, their radio would

18:30 cease to operate so obviously they had fallen. But that was the only intelligence about the, apart from German propaganda, it was the only reliable intelligence that these cities were falling. Once they stopped operating they knew that the city had gone. According to Nev who

19:00 was a connoisseur of operators, he said the Russians were magnificent. They didn't miss a beat right until the last, they shut up shop. Whereas the Italians were not too good and the Romanians.

Can you explain to me what you mean by they didn't miss a beat?

Well, their transmissions were

19:30 as steady as if they were just sending to another peace time station right until the bitter end they kept their communications going until they no longer could do it. Well, I didn't know at the time but since, the fear was the German forces would

20:00 come through the Crimea and down through Turkey and join up with Rommel so that they'd control the whole Middle East and the oil.

20:30 So you went to Palestine and then you moved on to Syria? Where did you land in Syria?

We went up by road from Jish to Beirut, the day of the armistice.

So were you at Jish for long?

We would have been in Jish, I suppose three weeks. The Syrian campaign, we joined after it had started.

21:00 It would have been about three or four weeks. We had French interpreters too with us then so that any plain language, they could on the spot.

So what were you doing for those three weeks in Jish?

I wasn't doing very much except looking after the antennas

21:30 and guard duty. We didn't have, we were using Don Rs for communication because we were a fair way away from Corps headquarters and dispatch riders were taking all the traffic to intelligence people in Corps headquarters in Safed

22:00 in Northern Palestine.

Why was that? So you didn't set up any lines there?

No. It was easier and probably, I can't think why we didn't do it but it was a fair distance

22:30 probably by the time the line, it would have taken a few days, they probably thought that the Don R's. We used the dispatch riders regularly from then on wherever we were, even from Lebanon back to Palestine. We had a

23:00 subsection up in Tripoli, northern Syria and that used to be a Don R run every day.

Where was Jish in relation to Beirut, how far away? Was it half a day?

23:30 I suppose a full day. Distances were, in comparison with Australia everything was condensed. We went from Jish to Beirut in about half a day. So it mightn't have taken that long to get from where we were in Beirut to Jish. I think we got there the same day.

24:00 **So what was the purpose of you shifting to Beirut?**

Well, we didn't know where we'd be going. Nothing had been set up. It was the day of the armistice. We moved up there with the whole of the Corps troops, the headquarters and then set up, as I said, in the Grand Serail and took Russian traffic from then on in,

24:30 for a few months until things became clearer.

So what were you doing in Beirut?

I didn't do very much at all. I don't know what we did with the antennas. I'd say

25:00 with the way the war was going, no permanent or semi-permanent lines were being put down so that's when the linesman became redundant except when we did settle up at a Souk Al Garb when we did have a line to corps headquarters we maintained the aerial system.

25:30 I went in the orderly room for some months there too as well as doing the other, just doing ordinary clerical work.

So what was involved in maintaining the antennas?

When it snowed ice would develop and they'd break and some of the poles were so thin that

26:00 they'd break too. We only had T masts I think which were steel. Might have only had one, I think it was two. The rest was just an array. I've got photographs. I can show you. The line itself would be about an eighth of an inch and yet when the snow got on them, the

26:30 ice formed, they'd be about an inch so they just couldn't take the strain. I can't remember any high winds, it was mainly just the snow, the ice.

Where were the antennas located, just on the buildings you were in?

No, all round. We were in, small trees all around us, they had to be above that. They wouldn't have been

27:00 more than I suppose fifty feet high, strung out, not just one but a sort of spider web.

It must have been difficult working conditions, if they were breaking?

Yeah it was. Snow would get on the trees too.

27:30 It was a bit uncomfortable but that's all.

So how did you repair them, what did you need to do?

Only pliers and we'd tie them in a reef knot, because they were the same cable we used for communications. Same as repairing

28:00 a cable for the telephone system. Not the giant cables we used to see here.

This is the Don 8 cable?

Don 8.

So had the technology changed very much over that period of time for you?

No.

28:30 It was better but it was basically the same. The phones had improved, the cables were bigger but the same as World War I. A lot of the phones we used were still World War I phones, field telephones.

29:00 There was no great, towards the end of the war of course there was a whole different ball game as far as communications particularly with radio.

So you said you were in Lebanon for six months.

29:30 Well, we were about a month in the Grand Serail and then we were five months up at Souk Al Garb.

Where's that?

That's in the mountains behind Beirut. Zahle was the summer capital which was a few miles closer to Beirut than we were by road.

30:00 That's where Corps headquarters was. The information we fed from there, that went by land line from our outstation to Tripoli and Aleppo. Dispatch riders would do all that, bring all the raw traffic back.

30:30 That would be processed by the, at Souk Al Garb or back at the British signals in Safed in Palestine, that was where their headquarters were.

So would the section,

31:00 **was it possible to find out what other parts of the section were doing? I'm just trying to work out to what degree you were working together.**

No, it was very much compartments. I never went in the set room at any time. It was always the need to know. The people that had to go in, went in.

31:30 The people at Tripoli or Aleppo wouldn't know what the people were doing in Souk Al Garb. The people at Souk Al Garb wouldn't know what the Brits were doing in Safed.

32:00 **So was it very interesting work for you?**

Well, it wasn't at that stage but after. It was interesting work for the operators, it was more interesting. The operators liked to know if what they were getting was of any use and they used to get feedback from the int people on that. It depended on

32:30 who was doing it. On the individual int person that was doing it. It wasn't an established practice. When I, after I came back to Australia and got onto the int [Intelligence] side myself it became more interesting although

33:00 it was the very first stages of preparing stuff. People on the level I was doing it weren't breaking the codes or determining the traffic flow, we were preparing it for traffic analysis. It was still, it required

33:30 you to fill in some of the gaps, you had to use your head. It wasn't an assembly line. It was interesting work then. At times when there was a big, well

34:00 when Nev was taking that plain language German stuff it was good and then another time he was taking some traffic which eventually led to a decrypt of the code because he was taking it in plain language and another section, it may even have been our section,

34:30 got it in code. It was his plain language that they were able to marry the two and break this low level code. He got a commendation for that, a verbal commendation, nothing ever written because we weren't supposed to exist. There was no

35:00 acknowledgement in any of the war histories about the work of the intercept unit. It's only in the last ten, twenty years that anything has been written or officially published about it.

35:30 I mean, everyone knew, well, Bletchley Park which was the British Headquarters, it's only in recent years that they've admitted the existence of that.

Did you have any knowledge, I'm just thinking of the sort of enemy equivalent

36:00 **of you, an interception unit. Did you know very much about them, or anything? Was there intelligence?**

No. Even, since the war it's been found out that the Germans had a very efficient intercept service. Very efficient. Particularly, they had the British naval code broken for years, unknown to the Brits.

36:30 That was when the battle of the Atlantic nearly got lost. It was only when Enigma, or the Naval equivalent of the Enigma, that they started to. There was a gap of about six months I think when they weren't getting anything about submarine movements but eventually that was broken. But the Germans were very efficient, although

- 37:00 their signals couldn't have been too efficient because Rommel once complained that he was getting better information about the movement of British troops in North Africa through the interception of British traffic than he was getting up through his own signal system. I don't know what, nobody knows what the Japanese,
- 37:30 how they went because they destroyed everything before. There was no detailed knowledge of them ever having one but they would have.
- You talked earlier today about the direction finder, or direction finding as a device**
- 38:00 **or a technique.**
- Well it wasn't much good taking the traffic or intercepting it unless you knew where it was going from and going to. You could find that out if you broke the addresses which were the five, in the case of the Japanese, high level, was a five figure,
- 38:30 ending in a five or a zero, five figures. You knew when you got a message that didn't end in a five or a zero that it hadn't been copied correctly. An intercept operator had
- 39:00 a very hard job because he or she couldn't ask for a repeat like a normal operator can when they're working. With direction finding, the Americans produced a direction finder called a Collins which was a highly sophisticated one and that could get, that was used in the South West
- 39:30 Pacific and they were very reliable but they were very big, they weren't portable. If you get cross bearings on a station. They'd get a bearing, say a hundred and eighty degrees or whatever it was, one of them would and the other one would get another bearing and where those two lines cross, that's where it was, the transmitter was.
- 40:00 Then if you knew, I'm going later in the war now when I had this knowledge, they used to change these address codes at the end of each month there'd be another one. So you'd
- 40:30 have to get what they called cribs to try and determine which were the new five figure code groups for all these stations. Sometimes instead of say, Singapore, or Rabaul I'll give you because I can remember that, they'd send it in plain language as ra-ba-ru, which was their way of
- 41:00 saying Rabaul. Then you'd get the same message on another circuit with Rabaul in the five figure code and that's when you get your breakthrough, you knew that that five figures meant Rabaul. Sometimes it took
- 41:30 days to recover all these groups but once, when we were doing this sort of stuff, we would get a list of them, all we saw was two five zero zero zero, "Oh, that's Singapore" and we would write that and then where it was going, write that down. That would go to someone else. Then at the end of the twenty four hour period.

Tape 6

- 00:32 I'm spilling over to the int side now too.
- That was later in New Guinea, wasn't it?**
- Yeah.
- Alright.**
- Not New Guinea. That was when I was bought back from New Guinea and about a dozen of us went to Central Bureau. That's what was happening but I wasn't doing it there.
- 01:00 **In regards to the work you were doing with the antennae in Lebanon, that was mostly what you were doing?**
- Yes, which was just labouring work really. Just maintaining them, there was no special skills needed or anything like that.
- 01:30 **It sounds like it was fairly mundane but were there any incidents where there were complications for example were there reasons you couldn't repair?**
- There was only one complication. That was before we moved into Syria, when we were at Jish.
- 02:00 We'd erected a couple of masts with the antennae strung between them. These were eighty foot steel masts and in this particular barracks which were being occupied by British mounted yeomanry for many years. They'd left to fight in the Syrian campaign.

- 02:30 I don't think they had horses anymore but I know they had a hundred million bed bugs in the barracks. Another friend, one that's passed on, and I decided that we'd sleep outside. It was no good in there, you couldn't, it was just scratching all night. We got out there and through the night I heard a thump. One of these masts had
- 03:00 fallen. It had bounced and then come round and hit him on the head. Not sufficiently to crush it or anything. It hit my leg and it caused pain and I wondered why he was just lying there taking no notice of me and my pain. He was out to it but no lasting damage I don't think. That was the only.
- 03:30 I don't think even when it went down there was any great loss of messages or anything, we repaired them in time. They would have been intercepting the German.
- 04:00 The operators would have been intercepting the German. They were what was called tasks, the intelligence people would tell them what circuits they wanted watching. They would follow that. That would be probably, there would be more than one intercept section operating in the Middle East. Each one would be given the tasks from headquarters.
- 04:30 We were the only Australian section. That's why our section always fed into the Australian int side.
- So your contact with the local people, the Lebanese people?**
- Very friendly, yes.
- 05:00 We never knew that there was this division of Christians and Muslims until fairly recently. Souk Al Garb [phonetic], which was the village near us, there was a lot of fighting there. The only sign, as I said, that there was any hostility
- 05:30 towards us was when that line to Corps headquarters was sabotaged. There was nothing, it just showed that there were some people that weren't too happy with us being there. But I don't think they knew what was going on. They had no idea. We took over two houses there. Whether there was any resentment of that, I don't know.
- 06:00 **So were you eating local food?**
- On leave?
- Well, anytime.**
- Not generally. We had a big canteen in Beirut and it was hard to get away from steak and eggs. I remember the first night
- 06:30 we went into Beirut and we asked for steak and eggs. Of course they'd been under, not under siege, but there hadn't been much getting through to them for some time but we did manage, I don't know what the meat was but we got the steak and eggs. They served the eggs as an entrée and then the steak. Generally we'd go to the canteens.
- 07:00 I did on one occasion. See, I was just twenty, I had tasted wine but not good wine. Being French they did have good wine and they had good food there. I really only went and had one French café meal while I was there. That was about five courses,
- 07:30 with wine. It was only in the last fifty years that I've developed any real appreciation for wine so it was wasted on me then.
- Did you say the last fifty?**
- Yeah. Over fifty five maybe. When I went to South Australia I developed a taste for wine.
- 08:00 **What was the occasion for going to the French restaurant?**
- I won a bet. First of all I asked to go to this ABC café which I used to like because they served a thing called chocolate a'la mode which was chocolate ice cream with whipped cream over the top and a long, it was magnificent.
- 08:30 When I had that I said, "Well that's not enough, that doesn't pay the debt". So he took me along to this French restaurant. I don't know what the bet was that I won. The people in Beirut were wonderful, well the Lebanon part.
- 09:00 Particularly, well, Palestine I wasn't there long enough to know people. I suppose in fairness I wasn't long enough to know the Egyptians and the people we did know, or had contact with, were no good but the Greeks generally and the Lebanese, they were wonderful, the majority. There was a bit of resentment when we first went in
- 09:30 to Beirut because obviously they were pro French. Not much is said these days about the war in Syria because we were fighting our former allies and who fought rather well, better than they did against the Germans.
- 10:00 **Who were pro French? Pro free French?**

No, they were pro Vichy.

These are the Lebanese?

Yes, the Lebanese. They'd been under French, although I think some of the Arabs had been trying to throw the French out for years, the Jebel Druse.

10:30 I can remember going to a restaurant, when I say I never went to restaurants, this was more of a estaminet where you get a drink. We'd just gone in and there were these pamphlets about the war being over and we were there just to help them.

11:00 There were some French girls on the table next to us, they just tore these pamphlets up. That was the only real sign. Obviously there would have been a resentment although I don't think we were any worse than the French as far as the locals went. The people round where we lived, there were a lot of vineyards

11:30 and they were very friendly, the ones we got to know and the people in the village itself, Souk Al Garb [phonetic], they were very friendly. We had our Christmas dinner at one of the hotels, the whole section. The turkeys were supplied by the Australian.

12:00 That's about all we did have, the turkey and vegetables. It was well done, even the cooks could have a day off.

When you say friendly, did you have daily contact with them, encounters with them?

We'd see them but we wouldn't.

Was there any trading going on between the local people and?

A young lad

12:30 used to sell lemonade. He'd bring up his block of ice and sell us lemonade. A lot of the fellas used to go down and have meals in the hotel. Some got to know families, I didn't. I got to know a fellow who had a photographic shop in Beirut very well but I never went

13:00 to his house or anything.

Because you were taking photos?

Yeah and he used to process them for me. I got to know him that way. Ya Sarafian, 'Y' 'A' Sarafian, his name was. I think he was an Armenian. He was a good photographer. I got the processing there. In Palestine

13:30 I only had them done at the sort of ibizas that were round the place near where the camp was and they weren't very satisfactory. They were probably short of chemicals. They never lasted long, the photographs or the negatives. The ones I had done in Beirut were all very good.

Wasn't it against the rules to have a camera?

14:00 It was. It was also against the rules to keep diaries but a lot of people kept diaries. Fortunately Lieutenant Henry was also a keen photographer and he had a camera. The only time I ever had it taken off me was coming back from Middle East as far as Colombo. A very officious

14:30 took it off me.

Who took it off you?

The ship's adjacent who wasn't one of our officers, he was an artillery officer. I can't think of any artillerymen, I think the only ones on the ship were ours or part of our section. But he was the ship's adjacent and impounded my camera.

15:00 There was nothing to take, I didn't mind. I got it back when we went on the Orchides in Colombo. But all the way over on the Queen Mary I took photos. It's just as well some people did have cameras because a lot of the photographs are in the official archives now which

15:30 blokes had taken. But you're right, photography was supposed to be forbidden. I don't know why. I suppose if you took photographs of installations or something. But diaries were much more dangerous, particularly in a unit like ours.

16:00 I've got extracts of diaries which have been published recently or in the last ten, twenty years that some of our fellas had written and if we'd have been captured it was quite obvious what we were doing because this particular fellow speaks quite openly about

16:30 intercepting German traffic. That was why we were in the Middle East. So I can imagine how diaries could be dangerous. I kept a diary but only for about three, until we went to Greece, about three months. This was on the way over and I just said what state room

17:00 we were in on the Queen Mary and who was in it. There was nothing operational or anything of any interest. Couldn't tell what the section did by reading it.

What about writing letters, were you writing to Louisa?

Yes. Not when I first went over there but I had a code for my mother and I've still got it

17:30 in the back of the diary I did keep for a few months. I had a young cousin called Jimmy and if I wrote J I, if there was a break between the I and the immy that meant I was in India and if I wrote Ji mmy with a break between the I and the first M, that meant

18:00 I was in Egypt and then I had about four addresses. I didn't think I was going to England so I didn't bother with that. That was the only thing. I'd say please remember me to Jimmy and the way I spelt that, she'd know where I was. But I never had any trouble. I didn't write anything that

18:30 was censored. I don't think any of my letters home ever had anything cut out of them.

So when did you work out the code?

Before I left Australia on my final leave. Because we were supposed to say somewhere in the Middle East, we couldn't say Egypt or Palestine. I think I did have one for Palestine as well as Egypt.

19:00 She got the message.

Was that something you kept secret? Was it important that other people didn't know about that?

No, it was just to let her know where I was.

Yeah, but the fact that you were using a code?

I never told anyone I don't think. I might have told my mates.

19:30 I've got a letter I sent her somewhere and I've got Syria so when we were in Syria we were allowed to say that. Even in our pay books

20:00 when we were in Greece they had a code name. Usually they put the address of where you were like Bonegilla or Seymour, Ikingi in Egypt but when we went there they left it out of our pay books. We only got about one or two pays while we were there anywhere. They'd know we were there at any rate.

20:30 I didn't think there was much chop in not putting it in because if we'd have been captured after we'd been there it wouldn't have mattered that we had been there. I couldn't see any purpose that they didn't put it in.

So why did you return to Australia? What was the purpose of winding up in Lebanon and returning to Australia?

Well the Japs came in to the war.

21:00 and we were supposed to go to either Burma or originally we were supposed to go to East Indies, Sumatra or somewhere but everything happened so quickly, they'd all been captured before we got near the place. Then Churchill wanted us to go to Burma and that was when Curtin appealed to Roosevelt and decided we would come home.

21:30 Within days of Japan declaring war all the operators were being trained in the Japanese code in the Middle East and on the ship coming back because the Brits had been doing it for years in the Far East.

22:00 The Japanese equivalent of Morse, the kana code is much more, it's got a lot more characters in it than the Morse code. A lot more difficult.

22:30 They were operationally ready as soon as we came back to Australia. As soon as the unit came back. Then it was a section formed into a unit, Australian Special Wireless Unit. We got back in March and by July there was a section in Darwin.

What about yourself?

23:00 **Did you have any special training for this new phase?**

When we came back to Australia I went to signals, Second Australian Army because I was a lineman and linemen were redundant. I was there. Fortunately they moved to Sydney which I didn't mind so I was there for,

23:30 well, I went to Mount Martha from, it was April, May, June, July, August when we were training linemen in Second Army sigs. In August we went to Sydney and I was there, again we were either training or doing

24:00 work around the Sydney area as linemen, in military installations until January. I was that fed up I wrote to my friend Neville and told him I wanted to come back. He saw, by then, Colonel Ryan and he said,

"By all means, we'll get him back". So I hastily went back to mother.

- 24:30 That was when I had to get on the operating side. That was when I first saw the kana code. I learnt it and learned the transpositions.
- 25:00 I got married in August, went back to Brisbane for a couple of months then I went to New Guinea. While I was in New Guinea was when I was told I'd be coming back as part of a signal section in Central Bureau in Brisbane. I was told that three months before I actually came back
- 25:30 so that wasn't too good for morale. I'd have sooner they'd told me the day before. After I had leave I went to Central Bureau and we were trained in the traffic analysis side of that, the basic traffic analysis. We prepared the messages.
- 26:00 For three months in 1944, got back in the April and for three months we were trained at Central Bureau then we went back to Special Wireless Headquarters and processed the traffic on the spot. We did that until
- 26:30 May '45 and then we were all split up and I was sent down to Melbourne on signal officer in chief staff, very reluctantly. We should have gone to the Philippines, which I would have liked rather than being in Brisbane. I'd sooner be home but I'd sooner be in the Philippines than Melbourne.
- 27:00 Then I got here in the May and the war ended in the August. I was closer to home than I would have been.

Can you tell me a bit more about the Japanese code, what did you call it?

Kana code. I have a copy of it which I'll give you in there if you'd like it. I'll explain it.

Is it possible for you to explain it on camera?

- 27:30 Well, it is just about impossible. I could show it to you and explain if I could just get that.
- 28:00 The kana code, Japanese, had a lot more symbols than Morse code. The British worked out the system that say the Morse letter was ditda which is A in the Morse code. In the kana symbol that would be written as a small A.
- 28:30 Then it was transposed into Romaji which is the English of Japanese instead of the Japanese characters, the Romaji would be used. Some of the symbols
- 29:00 which, this da ditditdit ditdit, the equivalent would be I in Morse. So you've got two Morse signal which is one Japanese signal. That was written as
- 29:30 B hanagori which is a b with a little stroke down beside it and that is transposed into Romaji as B A. That is one of the, then there is B haanagori which is da ditditdit ditdit da da dit
- 30:00 which is B U N barred in Morse. That is written as B with a degree sign against it. That is transposed into the Romaji as P A and so on. You have D
- 30:30 hanagi which is da ditdit ditdit da da dit D U N barred which is written as D hanagori and is the transposition into Romaji is P O. That is the British system. The Americans, with all these,
- 31:00 where there were two letters involved in the transposition had a key on a typewriter that you would press the symbol for that and it would come up on the message. That took away the need for transposition when the people who were doing traffic analysis, that
- 31:30 obliterated, did away with the need to do that. The Americans went straight from the Morse to the transposition. That in theory was very good except that unless the operator was good it was useless doing this. If it was corrupt it was useless.
- 32:00 In practice I would say that the traffic that I examined when I was with Central Bureau, the Australian, and I'm not just being biased because I'm Australian, I would say eighty per cent
- 32:30 of the Australian traffic was readable using the symbol instead of the transposition and the American traffic I saw was forty to fifty per cent reliable. So it meant even though we were getting great wads of American traffic it wasn't as effective as the
- 33:00 smaller volume of traffic that we were getting from the Americans. Is that sufficient or are you blinded with science?

I must confess I am a bit.

You can take one of these with you if it's any good.

So this is what you, when you got back to Australia and you went

33:30 **into Central Bureau or Brisbane?**

When I got back to Special Wireless Group I had to learn the code but at that stage I wasn't on the operating side because I was a corporal then and I was in charge of a shift. It wasn't until I went to Central Bureau that I had to learn the transpositions.

34:00 I'd learnt this much when I was in Special Wireless but I hadn't learnt that. When we would get messages with this, the symbol, that's what the operator would write down,

34:30 then we would transpose it so that we could prepare the messages for traffic analysis. Once we got the traffic flow we'd put that in a signal saying the volumes of traffic to and from Singapore, Rabaul, Tokyo and

35:00 that would go to Washington and they would then be processed from everywhere to determine the overall, they'd analyse the traffic to see where volumes were going where. As well as being a help in traffic analysis to decide which units were doing what,

35:30 it was also used in code breaking, the message itself. They'd have these giant IBM [International Business Machines] computers, that's the only way that you could break a machine cipher.

What did you mean, you just said when the units were being moved?

Well, if say a Japanese division

36:00 was moving from Rabaul to, or withdrawing or going forward. You could tell by the activity, by analysing the traffic, when that unit had actually moved because it would drop down. There was a Japanese water transport code which was actually broken by an American working for Central Bureau and there was a lot of

36:30 information coming out of that regarding our prisoners of war but they couldn't tell anyone because they'd know the code was broken. Or they might know. There was a famous case of the Americans had broken a Japanese Naval code and Yamamoto who was the head of the Japanese Navy,

37:00 the one who bombed Pearl Harbor, he was moving, he was flying out to Rabaul and his itinerary was sent out in code but it was, the Americans were reading the code and they knew he'd be in a certain spot in an aeroplane at such and such a time

37:30 on such and such a day but they didn't want to act on it in case they realized the code had been broken and it went up to Roosevelt himself who gave the go ahead to shoot him down and they did and he died. They'd made it look, or they'd tried to make it look as if

38:00 it was a patrol, just an ordinary patrol but they got rid of him.

So is this what traffic analysis is?

No. That was actual code breaking, the same as the one in Midway. Traffic analysis, to put a simple, when the section was in Darwin

38:30 they picked up a signal. It was in code, it didn't matter. They knew what sort of a signal it was, that it was regarding aircraft movement. They read that there was going to be moves of aircraft from

39:00 one part of what is now Indonesia to Timor, East Timor, I don't know if it was east or west. They knew that once they got to know that those movements meant the day after those aircraft moved to, I think it was Dili, that there'd be a raid on Darwin the day after. They could predict

39:30 just by analysing the traffic that there would be a raid the next day and they could notify and have them waiting for them. Even traffic analysis was hush hush. It was a very vital thing. A lot of things happened just through traffic analysis that were never acknowledged or were thought to be

40:00 by breaking the code. Radar received a lot of credit for, in fact traffic analysis had got it, because I know in Moresby our section there would hear the planes, the chatter when they took off from the other side of the island, would hear the pilots' chatter and they knew they were on the way to Port Moresby so they could alert the anti-aircraft people.

40:30 So you don't only have to break it. Breaking codes is not the only thing that comes out of interception. Traffic analysis does play a large part.

Tape 7

00:30 **What you've explained to us is what you were doing at Central Bureau a bit later on in the piece, isn't it?**

Mm.

Can you tell us a bit more about when you first came back you were at Sydney then Brisbane doing some training, is that right?

When I first came back I was at Mount Martha and Sydney with a different unit altogether, just an ordinary signals unit. Then I got back to the unit in January

01:00 1943 at Bonegilla. Almost immediately, well March, April we moved to Kalinga which was to be the headquarters of Australian Special Wireless Group and it was until it was broken up in 1945.

So what had you been doing before you got back with the Special Wireless Group?

01:30 Just ordinary training signals person in linework.

So you were instructing the new recruits?

Yes.

What was that experience like?

I didn't like it at all. Except that I was in Sydney for a few months. I didn't like it.

02:00 I didn't know then but there was no prospect when I left of them moving very far from Sydney. Much as I love Sydney, I didn't join the army to sit in Sydney. Eventually they went to Darwin and then on to New Guinea so they did get around but at least I got my New Guinea service over before they did.

You were what rank

02:30 **when you started the instructing?**

I was only a lance corporal. It wasn't until I went back to Special Wireless Group that I got corporal. It wasn't until I went to Central Bureau that I got made sergeant.

So do you want to tell us about how you got involved after that period in Sydney, Bonegilla and so on, with the Special Wireless Unit?

03:00 When I went back I was at Bonegilla and then we moved to Brisbane and I was there. We were settling in there and I was doing a bit of drilling and instructing of the new, we had

03:30 women in by then, well we had women in before that. I was there for, we'd set up and we were actually operating, well, almost immediately we were operational and intercepting the high level links.

04:00 That was in August, I got married. Then I went back in October and I went to 55 section in New Guinea. I was at Port Moresby from the October 'til

04:30 Boxing Day 1943. Then I flew over to Nadzab where there was a detachment and promptly got food poisoning and went into hospital for a few days. Then I came out and I was on the administration side, an

05:00 administrator and quarter master. It was only a small thing, I was still a corporal then. I was doing administrative work there. Then I was told three months later I'd be going back to Central Bureau. I was there still another three months. By then I'd moved to Finschhafen. That was right toward the end of it.

05:30 I was only there a week I suppose. Then I went back to Brisbane, had some leave. I think there was about eight or ten of us went over with Major Henry, as he was by then, he was in charge of us, and

06:00 we learnt the traffic analysis, or the preparation for traffic analysis bit for about three months. It would have been less than three months because we'd finished our training, had done it and were doing it. Then we were moved back to Kalinga to work directly with Special Wireless Group to process their traffic instead of it having to go over to

06:30 CB [Central Bureau] and then on. That was when we did that right through from say August '44 to May '45 and then Australia Special Wireless Group, well, headquarters was virtually disbanded so there was nothing

07:00 and I think this might be right, the remnants of them, some were still up in the islands, Morotai, the headquarters, what was left was transferred to Mornington Racecourse. There was a section there throughout the war. Some of the fellas I was with, some remained, two went to the Philippines, where we all thought we'd go

07:30 but that was political, they wouldn't let us go because we would have been with the Americans. A couple went and also a lot of Central Bureau. The whole of Central Bureau army component went. Then I went to signal officer in chief staff from the May and what I was doing there was

08:00 getting the logs and the traffic from monitoring stations. As well as intercept, Special Wireless also had monitoring stations, monitoring our own communications. They used to send the raw stuff down to the signal officer in chief and I was the only one doing it,

08:30 going through and seeing any mistakes that they'd made, which could have given the Japanese. I did that from the May until the August when the war ended. I still had to stay there until November before my discharge time came. That was just dead wasted time

09:00 which a lot of the time in the army was.

That's an excellent summary of that period coming back to Australia. A couple of questions now. You said how women were becoming involved through the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service].

They'd started to come in in '42.

09:30 There was a section of women at Brisbane, one in Perth and one in Mornington. Predominantly women, there were a few fellas but most of the operators would have been women. They recently put a plaque down at Mornington Racecourse about the operations of the section there.

10:00 **So were you involved in instructing any of the women?**

When I first went to Brisbane, yes.

In which area?

Operations, operators.

How was that? Obviously it was an area that belonged to men before that, how did they fit in?

Yeah. They were conscientious. They were all volunteers.

10:30 They filled the gap of the fellas. The only trouble came, you couldn't rotate them like men when it came to relieving them because they weren't allowed to go outside Australia. It meant the fellas who were in New Guinea, some of them served for two years, non stop which is a bit rough. Even living in New Guinea's bad enough without living in tents.

11:00 They filled a useful purpose. As I said, the only drawback with the women was the fact they couldn't be used for reinforcements or relief.

Do you think they would have been keen to do that?

Oh yes.

11:30 It didn't apply to the Americans. There were lots of American women, all the women that were in Central Bureau, WACS [Women's Army Corps] and they all moved. We were the only country I think that didn't let, we let nurses, VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachments], but I know they didn't let anyone else go.

12:00 **So what was Brisbane like in those days, the American presence?**

It was a bit overwhelmed. Brisbane as a city, it's improved I know but you've got to get out of Brisbane, even now I think. Even though there's some beautiful houses. Go up the coast or down the coast.

12:30 Perth's got it's beaches, even Melbourne's got it's beaches but in Brisbane there's nothing in the city itself. I mean, there were shortages everywhere. It was livable, it was better than New Guinea. I pity the poor fellas that had to fight in the jungle.

13:00 Because there was nothing to do when you were off duty, you may as well work seven days a week. I've got no happy memories of it.

So in Brisbane, before you did go to New Guinea, the work was mainly intercept?

It was all intercept.

13:30 **How busy were you during that period?**

You'd be on shifts most of the time. Well, all the time. It was just routine, collecting. As I said I was a corporal then so I was sort of overseeing.

What did that entail? You said you were overseeing, what were your added responsibilities?

14:00 Just see that everything was going all right. Getting the messages, preparing the messages. I'm trying to think. There was no on the spot, we would have sent them all over to Central Bureau. It was on a twenty four basis but all on Tokyo time. When it was midnight, Tokyo time,

14:30 all the messages for the day would have been collected and then they would have gone to CB the next day. It would have been the next day then they would have processed them and sent them on. Whereas when we came back we took over that part of the responsibility so it was all done within. There was a lot of,

15:00 the sections were mainly, the intercept, to supply on the spot information to whoever was in the field, to

- help them. The sections were misused a bit because in Darwin they did a lot of air to ground which was
- 15:30 an air force responsibility, it should have been but they didn't have the trained people. The Yanks were supposed to do the army but they weren't doing anything. It wasn't until late '43 that even they started to take over their responsibilities. There was a lot of acrimonious correspondence between
- 16:00 the signal officer in chief complaining to the chief of the general staff about not getting any information back. I said this recently to a fella who was in Central Bureau about this, it was only recently I learnt of this, within the last two years and he said, "Oh, I don't know if they were entitled to it".
- 16:30 The Yanks wouldn't let their, they had a signal section but they were sending everything straight back to Washington, they wouldn't let it go through Central Bureau. The air force weren't trained sufficiently so it meant the army was being misused. In New Guinea, at the end, they were being used properly
- 17:00 but for years in Darwin they were doing what the air force did and even later on, I don't know, but I would think they weren't, there was no field operations near Darwin so obviously they were still on the high level int and reporting directly to CB. The fact that they were more reliable
- 17:30 than the Americans made them more attractive because it's no good getting traffic that's corrupt and you can't use it. So that was that.

Can you describe to us what the work place actually looked like? The operations room. What would you call the?

The set room. In New Guinea

- 18:00 there were about four huts, Kalinga which were used for various, they had a fence round them, apart from the living quarters. There was only one set room. A normal army hut, you know the type, there'd be about twenty operators on a shift, sitting both sides of the room
- 18:30 if I remember rightly, side by side, only with receivers. I don't know what their set room was like in Darwin but in New Guinea, in Moresby and at Nadzab and at Finschhafen they were the native huts. The rest of us lived in tents
- 19:00 but the set room itself was native hut.

So Kalinga for example where you're corporal at this point, you've got the hut, the set room with the receivers, what sort of shifts would you yourself be working or was there no such thing, being corporal?

I'd work the same shift as the operators. You'd have

- 19:30 I suppose it would be about eight hours on and I think there'd be three shifts so you'd have about sixteen hours off and eight hours on. There must have been times when you got days off, I suppose the sixteen hours. I can't remember the exact, I know
- 20:00 when we were doing the traffic analysis, the preparation, we would start at midnight Japanese time. Or was it? Would we start at midnight?
- 20:30 I'm trying to think how far behind Tokyo time was. It might have been ten o'clock our time
- 21:00 we would start duty, say ten or midnight, I'm not sure now. All the traffic would be ready for us to process. We'd have to do that, we'd have to finish doing all that before we could knock off. The first night we did it it was about four o'clock the next afternoon. Then we, at that stage
- 21:30 it was much more complicated what we had to do. We did get it down pretty fine in the end because we were determined to probably do it in eight hours then we'd have a couple of days off but it didn't last long before we all had to.

Why was that decision made to start at

- 22:00 **Tokyo midnight, or whatever it was?**

Well you'd have a complete day's traffic and I don't know whether it was local time, I'm sure it wasn't local time but I know it was at night. If it was midnight Tokyo time I think it would be about two o'clock in the morning our time.

- 22:30 If it was zero Greenwich Mean Time it would be about ten o'clock in the morning so it might have been, I think we started before midnight.

That makes sense because then you've already got a good deal of the day's traffic in, so you can start.

- 23:00 It was twenty four hours' traffic, whatever time it started.

I know it wasn't the happiest time of your life but can we talk about New Guinea and your

experiences there? You went up to Port Moresby first?

Port Moresby.

And that was with which, the fifty?

Fifty five section.

So what was the nature of the work there, was it any different?

23:30 No, it was exactly the same. Except it was more, it wasn't on the high level, more on the tactical level. Particularly in Nadzab, it was very operational there, on the tactical level rather than on the high level links. I didn't have much to do with that but I know that's what happened.

24:00 **So you're saying Brisbane or Kalinga was more looking at the strategic, the big operations and then New Guinea was more?**

Tactical.

Okay. So what was Port Moresby like? Had the raids finished by then?

Yes. They never had a raid while I was there. I don't think I ever had a warning while I was there. It was still very active, the aircraft, American aircraft, our own,

24:30 mostly American. But Moresby itself, it was just like Northern Australia with no jungle, just ordinary gum trees around the place, scattered. Lae looked more interesting but none of it was too good.

25:00 **So what was there to do?**

Well we had a swimming hole, a little stream ran through at Nadzab. At Moresby there was swimming parades too, you'd go swimming but there was nothing to do. They went on to Hollandia after I left but I don't know how that was. I think they got a bit

25:30 better organized and then at Morotai, when they were there, I think they left Brisbane or somewhere in Queensland either the day before or the day after the peace was declared but they still had to go up there and wait there for six months. That must have been dreadful.

26:00 **So what were your specific duties there, in New Guinea, was it the same as what you were doing?**

Yeah, except when I went over to Nadzab, there was only a lieutenant in charge and then there was me as a corporal. I did all the administration. I didn't get on the sets at all.

So you were more administrative?

26:30 Yeah. It wasn't until I got back to Central Bureau that I got back into that again.

But still good to know because it was your experience, what the details were of that work, be it administrative or otherwise. That time in New Guinea.

I was only looking after

27:00 administration and quarter master. Organising the rations and sick parades and things like that, movements. I used to have to send messages back to Moresby and that had to be done

27:30 with a code book. That was one of the things, you had to encode them before they went and that fell to my lot.

And the codebook, how often did the codes need to be changed?

I think they were, it was called a one time pad and

28:00 you got the code, four or five figures, you had this book with various words and phrases in it and each one was allocated a four figure code and you'd have these code

28:30 one time pads that you, it had four numbers on it at random, they were all random numbers. You'd take these numbers you got out of the code book, put it under, it might mean we'll be arriving,

29:00 so you'll put those four figures under the one in the code book and then subtract them and that's the one that would be sent. The fella at the other end would have exactly the same one time pad and he'd write that number under the number he had and I think then you added them

29:30 so it came out to the, and you got it in plain language. They were tedious, slow, you can imagine writing. They were supposed to be impossible to crack but I've heard since that you could crack them. I don't know. They were still producing one time pads

30:00 when I went to Defence signals forty years ago. I also used one time pads when I was in working with the Department.

You mentioned earlier how in Brisbane it was looking at the strategic interception thing then it was more operational,

30:30 **smaller details of operations. Can you give us examples of what you mean by that? I get a sense but can you give specific examples of what sort of traffic you'd be picking up?**

In Brisbane it would be all strategic and that would be used for traffic analysis

31:00 and also for codebreaking, say Moresby or the detachment at Nadzab, they were involved in local operations including in the Ramu Valley.

31:30 You'd be down to battalion level, getting the information whereas the other ones you'd be at division or army level. Also with air ground tactical communications although the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], the air force had a detachment at Nadzab doing that. It would be

32:00 mainly local operations. It was during that, some time in 1942 that the, it might have been '43, that the 9th Division airfield security, I don't know who initially found it but a whole Japanese codebook was found at the bottom of a well.

32:30 It was in a bad state but the officer had written confirmation that he'd destroyed it and he hadn't destroyed it, the Jap officer. So they flew that back to Brisbane, to Central Bureau and they dried, I don't know whether drying was done at CB

33:00 or in New Guinea, I think it was back at CB and they got a whole Japanese code book which aided, they were reading things in real time instead of going through the process of trying to crack it.

You're talking about the kana code or this is the code?

No this is the code, their cipher.

So kana was well known by that, that was pre-war I guess, kana?

33:30 The Brits had been doing kana from the 1920's and the Americans had too but the American Secretary of State, Stimson in '38 or '39, he stopped all interception in America because he said, "Gentlemen don't read other people's mail". I think they

34:00 disregarded him but that was his attitude. But they were reading the Jap codes again by the time the war, the Americans, before Pearl Harbor but not the one about Pearl Harbor. Although there's rumours the Brits broke that and didn't tell them because they thought they wouldn't come in the war.

34:30 **So can you describe for us how you found things in Nadzab and you were in Finschhafen as well for a week?**

Nadzab, as I said, we had a creek. Do you mean the living conditions?

Yeah, the living conditions, the environment.

We had a creek running through it which looked like from a jungle movie where the jungle princess would emerge but it had

35:00 a disease in it which caused tropical ear. If you got it it was the worst earache you could ever imagine. What I used to do was dip a piece of cotton wool in Iodex, there used to be an Iodex cream and I'd put that, sort of ear plugs. I never got it but some of them

35:30 were in agony. That's another thing I had to do, look after the wounded. I had to put a, roll a bandage into like a long taper and dip it in a thing called gentian violet and put it in the ears. Those poor fellas.

36:00 Not a pleasant place to live.

And you were saying before that you kept getting news you were heading back but it was delayed.

It's the way the army works and reading some of this correspondence where they were complaining that it wasn't being fed back. That was the reason we were formed, to go into CB and feed it back.

36:30 But we weren't employed on that, we were just another part of Central Bureau. All we did was prepare the traffic to go to Washington. It still wasn't go through to the, I don't know.

So it sounds like you felt like you were wasting your time a bit up there.

No. I didn't know until

37:00 a couple of years ago what was going on because I think what we did was worthwhile but it wasn't what we were meant to do. I think only one of the ones that went with us was ever employed on anything like it because he, well there were two, there was one who could speak Japanese and another bloke who was a draughtsman and they were supposed

37:30 to get captured Japanese equipment, radio transmitters and work out how good they were and what the instructions were for them. But neither of those, they didn't last very long either. We were employed just straight out, no. Reading this correspondence that's

38:00 nearly sixty years old you can see why there was quite a legitimate complaint because there was so much resistance within the inside of, probably something similar going on in Canberra at the moment, one side not telling the other.

Were you involved with the Americans at all?

Yes.

In New Guinea?

No, in Central Bureau.

Do you want to

38:30 **get us back to Brisbane, tell us about moving back, the change, you've kind of taken us there already but get things in sequence again?**

When I came back from New Guinea. Well the change was we went to CB but it was still the same routine.

39:00 There was no thought of when the war would end. You had no, even when I left there and came down to Melbourne in May '45, there was still no thought of the war ending quickly. As I said before I would have sooner been in the Philippines although

39:30 I don't know, than in Brisbane or Melbourne because Lou couldn't join me. She had a little baby.

Had you married by that stage?

Yes. Got married in August '43 and when I came back from New Guinea we started a family,

40:00 that was in '44, April '44. Carol was born in January '45. Although, as I said, I'd sooner been in the Philippines, at least I would have been doing something. Just sitting in a cramped office

40:30 in Melbourne and it was, it was almost a cubicle, just looking at these message forms and logs of communications which I'd never had anything to do with them, our own communications. I was ready to get out.

Tape 8

00:34 **You were talking about Melbourne and how things were winding up there. What about Brisbane, it sounded like pretty important work you were doing there?**

I think that was the most I did but that's why I would like, I suppose you spoke to Steve who was

01:00 involved as an operator all the way through the New Guinea campaigns including Hollandia. I hope someone will speak to this friend of mine in Sydney because he's got all the Middle East and all Darwin that he was an active operator in. Then he came to Central Bureau with me.

01:30 We ended up together although we were apart when I got sent to Melbourne. Brisbane, yes, I did feel we were doing something even though we weren't supposed to be doing what we were doing which was a bit of a let down later on.

You were talking about how you would collate the day's traffic, analyse that. Can you talk us through that process?

02:00 **When you were on your shift.**

Well, when we started off there would be about three of us, four or more and one bloke typing. No, we'd all do the, we'd get a bundle of this traffic each and go through

02:30 and get the addresses, Singapore to Tokyo, Tokyo to Rabaul and all that which would take a fair while. Then we'd sort it out so that all the Singapore ones, every transmitter was in one sort. We had these different piles. It went all round the South West Pacific so you'd have more.

03:00 Most from Tokyo then some from Singapore. The first night we had to do the return ones so that's why we were so long. All the inward ones to Singapore but they told us they'd put that on computer and do that when they got it. We got that down to a fine art. You had to,

03:30 as well learning, we had to convert the address. Instead of Singapore it was Sing, Naromarso was a bit harder, that was Narm. We'd never write it in full because it would take too much time,

- 04:00 it was unnecessary. We learnt that and then we'd do the messages from and that would all have to go into a signal. We were particularly asked to look out for the water transport which began, each message began ZMTW, which is two-four-six-eight in the Japanese code.
- 04:30 They had to be given priority because they were reading that code. The rest would just have been used to try and crack codes or for the traffic analysis side whereas the water transport, which doesn't sound very glamorous but it did give a lot of information. That would take us, I suppose,
- 05:00 all in all we'd work about four hours then have that signal ready then take that over to, they had an operator ready to accept it at the time we had to have it there and she would, inevitably a she because AWAS were doing all the, she would put it into code then it would go off on a typing machine to Washington,
- 05:30 to the signals there. Then they'd get all the stuff from the South West Pacific and process it.
- So the end of the line was Washington?**
- Yes, for our area. There was Washington, Arlington Hall was the name of the NSA [National Security Agency], it was then. They've got
- 06:00 a very big building. During the war Arlington Hall was the same as Bletchley Park, was the English one and CB was in Ascot Park in Brisbane, not as well known as the other two but doing the same work.
- You said two-four-six-eight, ZMTW was the code, sign for?**
- 06:30 You had the preamble on top giving you the address, then the text below it and anything that started with ZMTW had to be given priority.
- At what stage, what you sent the signal onwards, the text was in what form?**
- That would go, any ZMTW, the whole message would go, that wouldn't be for traffic analysis.
- 07:00 **So your job was to categorise, this was coming from here, that was coming from such and such a place.**
- That was for traffic analysis but the water transport, the ZMTW which they were reading because they'd cracked the code in CB, it was the only one they ever cracked without help. He's still alive the bloke, he was a warrant officer, an American.
- 07:30 That would go straight to CB. I think we'd probably have a special Don R for that to take any of those that came through. They wouldn't wait.
- So your knowledge of kana code was solely to grab the preamble?**
- That's all we did with them.
- 08:00 Because that would be, the Japanese short figure code, and I can remember this in order of number, N was one, Z was two, S was three, M was four,
- 08:30 A was five, T was six, R was seven, W was eight, V was nine and O was zero. How remember that was what I was told
- 09:00 over sixty years ago, 'New Zealand Soldiers Must Always Try Running With Visors Open'.
- You'd have needed another trick to remember that phrase. Round of applause.**
- 09:30 Warrant Officer Joe Richards was the bloke who cracked that code.
- How long before had he done that?**
- I think only a matter of months.
- How long did it take you to become proficient with kana code?**
- 10:00 I never got to the stage like Nev Winter did, the older operators. Steve Mason, a local boy, he was a lot younger than I. I never had the need to because I wasn't on the sets that often. They were crash hot.
- 10:30 **That would transpose to Romaji you were saying, was that something you could pick up as well?**
- That didn't take long. I learnt the shorthand in a very quick time.
- 11:00 Most of the things, as I said I've got a good memory, for things long gone and not for yesterday, I try to remember things by association.

11:30 With the code, I did that in a couple of days, I learnt the shorthand. I don't think it took me long for the transposition.

12:00 I was interested in it, that's why. Anything I'm interested in I can do fairly efficiently. If I'm not interested. Well a lot of things I can't do even if I'm interested in them, not my bent.

Were you getting feedback from anyone when you sent the signals out, coming back from Washington or wherever?

No.

12:30 That was one of the, when I say that, General Akin, an American general was in charge, he was MacArthur's signal officer in chief or chief signals officer as they call them. He looked after us very well. He made sure we got priority in transport,

13:00 he was good. As far as individuals, it was very rare. Some of the intelligence officers that were with the sections were very good and they'd come and say, "That was beaut, this is what happened because of that" but others, as I said, "I don't know if it's your business",

13:30 once it enters. In the field, we used to share, the set room and the 'I' room were in the one building and you'd have a small hole in the wall and pass the messages through to them. It was very rarely

14:00 that anyone. I've spoken to other people who were operators at the time and they said very rarely did they get any feedback because they'd done a good job.

Were you ever able to anticipate what intelligence might later?

No. We had no idea

14:30 **You said before it was just heads down, bums up, you were just working hard and there was no sense that the war might be finishing. Not even with the sort of traffic that was coming through?**

No. See it was all building up for going into Japan. We knew they were going backwards but by golly, they held on. If they'd have had to have gone into Japan, God knows how many people would have got killed

15:00 because even Saipan and some of those places, they fought literally to the death and then committed suicide, Okinawa they, it didn't matter what bombardments went on, you couldn't wrinkle them out. It would have been dreadful. Anyone that complains

15:30 about the bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not, even I was in relative comfortable, I certainly wasn't in the jungle somewhere or in a landing barge ready to go in. It would have been shocking.

One more question about Central Bureau. You also mentioned you were

16:00 **monitoring Australian signals?**

That was when I was with signal officer in chief staff, I was getting the end product of that.

That was back here in Melbourne?

In Queens Road, Melbourne. Grosvenor was the name of the building. I think it's been knocked down recently.

Why did they move you out? Was it that job came up and they needed someone?

No.

16:30 It was because we weren't allowed to serve with the Americans. It meant, if that was in the Philippines, I don't know what would have happened. If we'd have gone to the Philippines we certainly would have come directly under Americans, the Australians were still fighting in Borneo and

17:00 that's why our section was in Morotai. A lot of it was high level politics. We certainly didn't help the war effort by all being split up. We would have done a lot more good in the overall doing something we knew rather than something we hadn't done before.

17:30 The other fellas, including my friend were sent to cipher sections and they had to learn to do machine ciphers. Why they were doing it I don't know because there must have been an oversupply of cipher operators.

18:00 **So as the Americans moved North that role of CB had to head up with them?**

Yeah because they were controlled by the Americans whereas we were still, I suppose we were still in New Britain at that stage. We were certainly in Borneo, it was still going on there.

18:30 With CB, of course they moved to the Philippines. I don't know who was getting their traffic because

there wouldn't have been anyone to process it. I don't know what happened.

Just another question about

19:00 **your time in Melbourne, Queens Road. That monitoring work you were doing, how were you able to detect whether someone was or was not doing their job properly?**

I had to learn the Australian procedures which was British Army procedures. Some of it would be obvious. You're not supposed to finish a message with your initials or anything like that, some of the no's,

19:30 other incorrect procedure. I went in cold because I'd never done anything like that. And who was interested? We were too far behind. The Japs wouldn't have been able to pick up any of the mainland links I wouldn't think. They wouldn't have been much interested in any rate.

20:00 It would have been all on the Americans.

What action would be taken? Did you know what was going on down the line if someone had played up?

As I said, though the war was still on, all the action was up there. I don't think any,

20:30 all the intercept sections were fifty sections, fifty one, fifty two, fifty three and all the monitoring sections, I think there were only three or four, they were sixty sections. I'm sure there was none up near where the fighting was going on.

21:00 **So you're monitoring the monitors.**

The monitors were monitoring our communications and their end product would come down to me because there happened to be a job with the, it started off as a major and ended up with a sergeant, that's how important they reckoned it was.

21:30 Why I was selected to go? A bloke called Boyse, he should have got it. A lot happened in alphabetical order. I could never really

22:00 work out why people in high places could be petty, as they are and they're still as bad as ever.

So do you remember hearing the news of the dropping of the atom bomb?

Yes. I was in Melbourne I saw the front page.

22:30 I can see it now, that mushroom cloud on the Sun-Pictorial. I was just about to go on leave which I put in for when I came to Melbourne in May, leave in August and I thought, "oh golly". The night before VP [Victory in the Pacific] day I got on the train and I've got a photo, "Peace imminent, troops still

23:00 moving North". The rest of them were but I was still going to Sydney. I got to Sydney on VP day. I had a lot of trouble getting from Marrickville where the leave and transit depot was, to Manly. I don't think the ferries were running. I got a bus, I got a tram from Marrickville to Sydney which stopped

23:30 and I walked and got a train to St Leonards and then I got a bus from St Leonards home.

What was the atmosphere like in Sydney?

Everyone went wild. Well, everywhere I think in Australia because VE [Victory in Europe] day didn't mean much to us whereas

24:00 to the Brits it meant a lot. I never thought it would come. You sort of locked yourself into a state of mind. I know I've done it since when I was at Maralinga for thirteen months, I did get home once a month from there.

24:30 When you know you're going to be somewhere for a year or two there's no good thinking about it and such as the army or Maralinga when there's a lot of people in the same boat it's a lot easier than if you're just on your own.

25:00 **So what happened, you went back to Manly, you saw your wife?**

I had a fortnight's leave then I had to come back again until November the fifth. I got back, say the end of August. I had over two months just doing nothing.

25:30 I must have gone to the office every day, to Grosvenor and back to the mess at night. It would have been better if, I don't think we had any Victorians here that could have taken my place.

26:00 After it dropped one of the colonel's came to me and said, "Would you consider serving on in the army?" but he got short shrift. It was my last thought. I know some blokes who did,

26:30 very few.

Did you have plans for what you'd do once you were out?

No I didn't know what I'd do. I went into the Department of Reconstruction. While I was there I saw an advertisement in the Sydney Daily Telegraph, they were seeking people to go into the

27:00 security side of the rocket ranges they called it. I looked in the Commonwealth Gazette and I saw it was open to people, I wasn't permanent then. I applied for it and it took twelve months to get that job. Applied in September '47 and

27:30 I got the job in June the following year. Then I had to go over by myself, I didn't know when I'd get the family there but that was my doing. It turned out that a couple of months

28:00 I got Lou over there, we had two children by then. We were there for fifteen years. I've been lucky all my life, whatever I did I've enjoyed doing.

So you got work straight after the war with the Department of Reconstruction?

Yeah.

How was it adjusting to civilian life?

It was a bit hard. That's why

28:30 when I went to Adelaide, or went to South Australia, it was at Woomera it was virtually like being back in the army again although I could get home more often and then Maralinga, it was very much like the army because there were no women there and we lived in messes.

29:00 We were all in the same boat, a long way away from home. Then when I went to defence in 1963 after I left Adelaide it was during the Vietnam War so I had close contact with the services all through that. Then in 1970 I went to the Post Office which was

29:30 very different. I was with Telecom when I finished.

Can you tell us about the work you were doing at Woomera and Maralinga?

I was part of the security team at Woomera and then I was

30:00 from October 1956 to November '57 I was range security officer at Maralinga then I was in regional headquarters of Department of Supply in South Australia, I was investigation officer there. Then I got a job in defence signals

30:30 on the monitoring side. I was a senior defence officer there for about seven years. Then I saw chief security officer PMGs department advertised and I knew the bloke, I was late applying for it because I was up in Darwin with DSD [Defence Signals Directorate], air force exercises,

31:00 and I rang this fella up and I said "Can I put in a late application?" and he said, "Put one in and bring it to me" which I did. I'd worked under him in South Australia and I got the job. It wasn't because I knew him because there were two other people on the selection board but I got it.

31:30 That was good too because I was the first and only one. While I was in it they split into Post Offices, Australia Post. I started a security organization from scratch. That was one good thing I enjoyed, whatever I started I was able to finish and move on as they say.

They sound like jobs with a high degree of

32:00 **responsibility, lots of challenges, Maralinga and Woomera for example, that was very top secret, what was going on, so security would have been of the utmost importance. What were some of the challenges you encountered there?**

It was planning and I like planning. I was involved in the planning at Woomera

32:30 but when I took over at Maralinga, the fella before me, he left it in a mess so I had to start from scratch. I got everything right and by the time I left thirteen months later it was running well. Even His Honour

33:00 Judge McClellan, when he did the Royal Commission into Maralinga said that the security arrangements were good for Operation Antler, which was the one I was involved with.

Any cloak and dagger stuff you can tell us about?

Not really, no. I'd tell you if there was any, but

33:30 there wasn't any. No, no cloak and dagger. I probably had more trouble with Maralinga forty years after than when I was there because of all the various claims being made about people being injured. It's just baloney. I was at Emu before Maralinga,

34:00 that was in 1953. I was present at one of the tests there, one of the tests at Buffalo, at Maralinga in '56, all of the tests at Antler in '57 as well as minor trials and I was as close as anyone could get. I think that

if I had any,

34:30 if there'd have been anything wrong with the arrangements, something would have happened to me before now. There's only two people I've known that made claims that were soundly based. One was an airman who flew through the radioactive cloud at Emu without any real protection.

35:00 He got thyroid cancer and the Commonwealth settled with him. Another one was a member of the radio, they used to go into the radioactive areas. I went in once at Emu and once at Maralinga into a radioactive area.

35:30 Ninety nine percent of the people, more than that, never went near a radioactive area. You see these dramatic photos of people with their backs turned and turning round, you're miles away from the radiation.

What was it like to witness one of those?

Well, as I said

36:00 it was awe inspiring but when I saw that village raised in Greece, it was a town not a village, that left the most lasting impression on me. At Maralinga it was the countdown, when you got down to about five you thought, "I hope everything goes according to plan", because mistakes can be made.

36:30 Maralinga was a good posting, that's what irks me with people now. The food was magnificent. Admittedly you're on your own but everyone else was in the same boat. For a sailor, he's at sea on his own. I never heard any of the sailors complain,

37:00 it's only the army and the air force. Most of them were in the village which wasn't much closer than the fettlers on the East-West railway line, to their families, I never heard them complain. Even on, there's people on Mobile Creek Station on the perimeter round where the fallout,

37:30 if any fallout would go, there's never been any. The Americans used to let bombs in the atmosphere about sixty miles from Las Vegas. They did use their own troops as guinea pigs too which was never done here.

38:00 During that time your family had moved to Adelaide?

Yeah. Lou had never been away from home before. It was only thirteen miles from Adelaide, Salisbury,

38:30 but they still had hitching posts in the main street so it was a bit behind the time. They had a hundred and ten volt electricity system instead of two forty and a local generator. Coming from Manly it was a bit of a let down but she never complained. Wherever I went, she came.

39:00 And Melbourne, how did you end up in this town?

The fellow I told you about that said, "I don't know whether they had the right to know", he was an assistant director and I knew him in CB but he was assistant director in DSD [Defence Signals Directorate].

39:30 He came over to Salisbury and Woomera once on a visit while I was there and I got talking to him then. One of the blokes in the job I took over, he got promoted and Bert rang up my boss and asked if he thought I'd be interested in coming over here. So I

40:00 said, "Yeah". As I said, I thought I'd done, I was ready for a move. I'm pleased I did.

I think we've only got a minute left on tape.

Could I do a song and dance?

Now's your chance. Do that cancan routine.

I can't.

No don't, please. Not equipped for that. If there's anything you'd like to

40:30 **say before we wrap up now's your chance, probably about thirty seconds left.**

Only that I've enjoyed every minute of it and I hope it does, not some good, but somebody might get something out of it. And it's been good working with you both.

Likewise. Thank you very much Alan.

INTERVIEW ENDS