Australians at War Film Archive

Graham Esdaile (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:39 **I was wondering if you could start by telling me a bit about your family?**

Yes, well I was born in Sydney on the 16th of February, 1924. I was the second of what turned out to be five children. I was born

01:00 in Summer Hill, New South Wales, at Burilda Private Hospital, Summer Hill. My first memories of life in Sydney were that we lived at Cabarita on the Parramatta River. From my early years, say I went to kindergarten at

01:30 Cabarita which would have been when I was five years old, 1929 and went to the kindergarten there at Cabarita and then to the Mortlake Public School. I had an elder brother, Bruce.

02:00 Just continuing my education there at Mortlake Public School until I was ten years of age. Didn't quite get to the stage of having to sit for what was called the QC [Qualifying Certificate] in those days, qualifying certificate. My father who was working as a salesman for a typewriter and office supplies firm was

02:30 transferred to Brisbane. He worked for Sydney Pinkham.

Before we move on to Brisbane could you tell me a little bit about growing up in Cabarita and what the Parramatta River was like at that time?

I do have memories of learning to swim in the Cabarita Baths. Now the Cabarita Baths in those days were formed by a line of what I recall as being palings or

03:00 batons set about fifty yards or so out from the beach. My father used to take us down there. We learned to swim there. These days of course Cabarita has an Olympic pool. We were there recently and the original pool where I learned to swim has long since gone. Now in other activities, the

03:30 Mortlake gas works was close by and I recall my neighbour had a boy named George May and we used to take our billy carts up to the gas works to get a bag of coke. That's the way we supplied our coke fire in the lounge room at Cabarita. More Street Cabarita we lived.

04:00 That was always a great excursion. I suppose from our place to the gas works probably about close to an hour, three quarters of an hour walk for us ten year olds. My brother, who was about nineteen months older than myself. That was quite an adventure for us. In other ways we amused ourselves on what was bush land in those days

04:30 close by to where we lived at Cabarita on the banks of Hen and Chicken Bay. The banks of Hen and Chicken Bay had a few boat sheds and of course it was always quite fun to look in the boat sheds and see all these massive boats in there. I suppose they were just minor, only small cruisers I suppose. That took a lot of our time.

05:00 We camped over the road I remember on occasion. We had a tent and this neighbour and my brother and myself, we camped across the road until about ten o'clock. We were going to stay out all night but I think we weakened on it and my mother said she watched us come across the road about ten o'clock at night, we couldn't stay the whole distance. That was the end of our camping for the night. We used to do

05:30 our shopping at our little store called Clancy's which was about quarter of an hours walk down towards the baths, down towards Cabarita Park. We used to do our shopping down there. There were no shopping villages in those days of course, not out our way.

Tell me a bit about Clancy's, the way the store operated.

It was just a single store.

06:00 Just a small place and across the road there was another one which opened up later on. In those days they were just single stores. You don't see many of them these days. They seemed to have all the necessary supplies that we wanted. No big stores. I don't recall places like Woolworths being in that area although there may have been at Burwood or Millbank

06:30 which were neighbouring suburbs. Clancy's was just one single frontage shop and when we went there just recently, a few years ago, that shop was still there but not as an operating shop, just the shell of the shop was there which was quite a memorable occasion, to see that shop there which carried memories

07:00 of our earlier days there.

I don't suppose there were pre-packaged food at that time was there? Did they used to weigh out flour and butter and that sort of thing for you?

Flour, sugar and I don't recall exactly how, I suppose porridge, that seemed to be our staple diet for breakfast. Milk, as I remember, was delivered

07:30 in a horse and cart. The milkman or milko would come by and he would pour milk in to a billy can that we held. There was no pre-packaged milk that I can recall. The food, as I say, was confined to the main items

08:00 such as flour, sugar and I remember biscuits were bulk supply. They used to be parceled out in to a bag but there was no packet biscuits as I recall the way we have them today, a tremendous range of packet biscuits that we have today. I don't recall anything like that. There was the tea of course in the packet.

08:30 Then meat. Now we had a butcher who also traveled round in a cart. On other occasions I remember going to a shop in Mortlake to buy food. Why we went there I don't know against going to Clancy's. Maybe this shop had some particular items that Clancy's didn't have. But the beef was cut up as you wanted it,

09:00 hanging on hooks in rows in the butchers shop and he'd cut what you wanted. That was our main source of supply. My father had a car as a traveler. He used to travel as part of his job. He traveled to the country. So he had a car. In those days

09:30 I remember he had a car that was called a Jawett, a big open tourer of a car. No closed in cars, or there were but he never owned one. He traveled the country in that car. Later on I remember he had an old Chev [Chevrolet], about 1926 Chev. It would be worth a bit of money these days. I've got photos

10:00 of my father standing on the running board, they all had a running board, I've got photos of my father standing on the running board of that car, one foot on the running board that is and also photos of my brother and myself in a billy cart alongside the car. Now our home in Cabarita was a typical sort of, in those days anyway, a Sydney brick

10:30 cottage. Open verandah in front. As I remember it was a couple of bedrooms with verandah at the back. We had a brick fence, out the back of the house an open yard, the toilet was down the back yard, had a timber framework over the toilet and I remember we had a grape vine

11:00 growing over the framework. We left there when I was ten, came to Brisbane. Sydney of course has still a lot of memories for me. I'd like to go back there again some time. Go in to the class, tell them I was a student here, well, tell them I was in the class anyway. That was at Mortlake Public School.

11:30 Some time ago, a couple of years ago, we went to Sydney and went looking for the Mortlake school, got the bus out to Cabarita, walked around. We asked a couple of people on the footpath there, whereabouts is the Mortlake Public school. "Oh, not too sure, but there's a school down the road here." We walked off down there and sure enough, it was the Mortlake Public School. So took a couple of photos

12:00 there but strangely enough it seems to have changed. Not exactly as I remember it. All things seem a lot smaller to me now than what they were then, even going back to the Cabarita Park. The Parramatta River seemed a vast expanse of water in those days.

12:30 They used to hold the head of the river regatta on the river. Schools like Joey's, High, Kings, those schools, it was a big event. We used to walk down there each year to watch that regatta.

What were the other big sports at the time, you mentioned rowing, what did you enjoy playing?

I used to play

13:00 football in the park at Concord. No, I think it was soccer. As a matter of fact I was in the Cubs in Sydney. Cubs being the younger group of the Boy Scout movement. The uniform we wore was a blue jersey and a scarf, blue and yellow scarf and a little peaked green cap, quite different

13:30 from these days. We played soccer as a Cub against other Cub or Scout groups. That is the sport that I seem to recall being played at Concord, soccer.

Was it quite a multicultural area even at that time?

Multicultural?

Yeah, a lot of immigrants?

No I wouldn't think so.

14:00 The people in our street I can remember still some of their names, Rayner, people next door were May, people up the road, Edwards. There were no, you might say, foreigners living around that area then.

Where do you think the soccer came in then, where was the soccer influence?

I think from the mother country. English influence possibly

14:30 but I don't know for sure. We played that on a seasonal basis. I don't remember playing any other sport. Didn't play tennis although I remember seeing a tennis court in one place that we walked by on our way to the gas works. There was a tennis court there. Also a laundry close by there too.

15:00 I remember the people who ran that were named Barry. He was in my class at Mortlake School.

We were just discussing your family.

Other members of the family. Unfortunately I had a young brother who was born

15:30 in July 1927 and the poor little fellow only survived two years. He died in 1929. That's while we were living in Sydney. I of course was three when he was born and five when he died. So I don't have many recollections of him excepting

16:00 the day he died. I can remember seeing my father looking very distraught and another thing I remember about him was the baptizing. We were I think we followed my grandparents religion, they were Plymouth Brethren, of course my mother was probably a Plymouth Brethren too. The baptizing consisted of dunking in a bath. I remember that happening.

16:30 We were dunked in a bath of water. I had a sister and another brother. There were five of us all together but we didn't all live at the one time. As I was saying, the brother of mine who lived until 1929. I had a brother who was born in 1927 and a sister

17:00 who was born in 1929 after the little fellow died so that there was only ever four of us in the family at the one time. My brother John, he was affected by polio, infantile paralysis it was called in those days, poliomyelitis.

17:30 It affected one of his legs. I can remember his being, his leg being strapped up in what we called an iron. It consisted of a couple of iron rods down the side of his leg which had a moving action. He could move his knee.

18:00 He never ever recovered, he was never cured. I don't think polio people are ever cured really. It might be relieved to some extent. He died when he was thirty-eight of a heart attack in Brisbane. Now that's getting on a bit in the lifetime.

Was he your older brother?

18:30 He was a younger brother, this fellow. He was born in 1927 on the 2nd of November 1927 and he died on the 30th of September 1966. He was thirty-eight, thirty-nine years of age. My sister was born in Sydney also. She was born on the 22nd of

19:00 November 1929. She died last year aged seventy seven on the 24th of September last year, 2003. My older brother Bruce, he served in World War II

19:30 in the 2/31st Infantry Battalion. Served in the Middle East at Syria. They returned to Australia and took part in the New Guinea campaign at Kokoda and he did not survive the Kokoda campaign. We understand from fellows in his company was that he was shot by Japanese sniper

20:00 and subsequently died in the 2/9th AGH [Australian General Hospital] at Port Moresby. My belief is that, knowing the territory up there, I served up there myself, wounded on the 9th of November and died on the 12th of November. He was wounded at a place called Gorari. I don't think there's any way he

20:30 would have survived on the track back from Gorari to Port Moresby. Somehow I think he died on the track. We've not been able to get exact records of his time in hospital there but I suspect that's because he died on the track.

Were you close to Bruce as a kid?

Oh yes, we were very close. He was born on

21:00 the 30th of September 1922 and I was born on the 16th of February 1924 so you can see there was just that about seventeen months between us. So yes, we were pretty close together. We used to go to school

together, played a lot of games together. Same interests.

21:30 He was generally as I recall just one class as they called it in Sydney, one class above me at Mortlake School.

What sort of subjects were you two good at in primary school? What were your natural aptitudes?

I don't think we were ever actually tested for aptitudes in those days.

What did you see yourself inclined towards?

I think the usual

22:00 reading, writing and arithmetic. Didn't get to any stage, any of us, where we had to sit for what was called the intermediate examination in Sydney. Probably the equivalent of a scholarship here I Brisbane. You did the scholarship examination here at the end of

22:30 grade seven when you were twelve years of age.

Did you have a natural leaning towards science or reading or mathematics or sport, what were your interests as a young man at primary school?

At primary school. I don't recall having any particular interest in any one direction. I seemed to do pretty well. I was always in the back row at school,

23:00 in the class. Presumably I did pretty well in the examinations or tests as they were. They were sort of general subjects. I don't think I enjoyed mathematics too much or arithmetic. I enjoyed English, writing compositions, let your imagination go wild. Geography, I liked geography.

23:30 Generally I think I had a pretty fair liking for all the subjects we covered there.

Was education an important aspect in your family, were your parents very encouraging towards you getting a good education?

Not that I recall. I don't know that they were highly educated. I'm not too sure. I know my mother did a business college as they called it.

24:00 I'm not too sure exactly how far my father went. His background is rather vague. All we know is that he was born in Adelaide. He was a World War I veteran, served in the army in World War I.

Do you know details of his service?

I have got details, yes.

24:30 He was in the veterinary corps in World War I. He went to Gallipoli. He went to Gallipoli rather late in the campaign. As far as the records show that I have, he went to Gallipoli in September 1915 and of course they were all evacuated in December 1915.

25:00 I think I've got that right. From there he went to France. Often used to speak of being in France. Just exactly where he served I'm not too sure. I don't think his records indicate exactly. But also of course he spent a lot of time in England on leave and was eventually

25:30 discharged from the army 1919 after the war finished.

So he didn't talk about his war time experiences?

Not to a great extent. Although I think he used to kid us on a bit when we asked him, "Dad were you ever in any bayonet charges?" and he said, "Oh, one occasion we got there but they'd gone." Now I don't think that actually happened. As a member of the veterinary corps I don't think they were taking part

26:00 in any bayonet charges.

When you say veterinary, looking after the animals?

Looking after the animals, yes. In World War I of course horses were a main form of transport and work, work horses. Now and again you see pictures of the old trucks and the old staff cars but horses played a big part

26:30 in World War I transport, carrying supplies and of course there were the Light Horse, played a very big part in the war in Egypt. The charge of the light brigade, although that's a different war all together. But they did have the Light Horsemen in World War I.

Did your dad have skills in that particular area, was he a country boy originally?

27:00 No, I don't think so. There again, I know very little about his early life. I have done some research with the genealogical society in Brisbane but I've not been able to uncover any details of his early life. Even where he was born apart from the fact that he was born on the 4th of September 1895

27:30 in Adelaide. Where he went to school, what qualifications he achieved, what he did in early life. He had two sisters, Ruby and Hazel. That's typical of the names of those days, weren't they. But I don't know anything of their activities except that his mother as we understand was born in England, grandma Esdaile

28:00 as we used to call her. But as to his father, no, I don't now anything of his father's history or life.

Was your dad patriotic, did he encourage your sense of being Australian?

I think so, yes. Without being outspoken about it. Certainly didn't discourage us,

28:30 my brother from joining up. As far as I was concerned I volunteered for the army but was not accepted because of eyesight. It wasn't until later on that I was called up, I was accepted in spite of my poor eyesight. I think with the help of a good memory, being able to remember the eye chart. We'll let that pass.

29:00 But I was accepted for the CMF, Citizens Military Forces, that was in 1942. That's getting on to my army career.

That is rushing on. As a young man in your early days even at primary school, was the empire important, was king and country an important part of your schooling then?

We had an empire day in Sydney. I remember empire day was in May, 24th of May and that

29:30 used to be a time for salute the flat and a big assembly of the school. We're going back a long way here. I don't have any strong memories you might say of empire and so forth. Excepting that we did have this empire day. So I feel that probably the bonds

30:00 between Australian and England were probably still quite strong as far as the mother country was concerned.

Did you learn about World War I at school or from anyone else in your life?

Yes, I suppose my father first of all although

30:30 we used to have to prod the answers from him. But of course Anzac day was a big day in those times. I can well remember the thousands you might say taking part in the Anzac day parade in Sydney. Now we're down to six survivors of World War I and yet the numbers taking part then

31:00 were similar to the numbers taking part in the Anzac Day parade today of World War II veterans and likes of Korean, Malaysian and other theatres of war that we've taken part in. But that was always a big day. My father had his medals, always thought he looked pretty grand. He marched in every parade.

31:30 **Were you proud of him when he'd march?**

Oh yes, in a son to father sort of a way. It was a big occasion. I'm not too sure how we used to get in to town, probably by tram to Burwood and then train in to town. That was the usual form of travel. But

32:00 that's always a big day. In to town, home again. Train, tram. No buses, not out our way but trams of course are long since gone in Sydney.

Was he successful in his business, was having a car a sign of success at that point?

Yes he was, he did have some success as a salesman.

32:30 He used to bring home little trophies that he was awarded for best sales figures. As a matter of fact that tea set up there he won. I suppose you could say we lived well enough in those days and being only a child up to the age of ten when we lived there

33:00 economics of running the house didn't enter in to my mind one bit, we didn't know anything about it. But we seemed to survive all right, we lived well enough I feel. The fact that he had a car, I'm not too sure whether it was supplied by the office or whether he owned it. These things they don't occur to you as a boy, to wonder about is it our car or is it the office car. That's the way it was.

There wouldn't have been too many kids at school

33:30 **whose families had cars would there?**

No, there weren't too many cars around. They were something of a rarity. They were for quite a while.

I know you weren't too aware of economics but do you remember hearing about the stock market crash in '29?

Not until much later years, not at the time. I was five years old, so no.

Do you remember people starting

34:00 **to talk about the Depression?**

Yes, later on. In later years I remember the reference to the Depression. I often used to think back, I can vaguely remember people coming to our door and asking for food during the Depression years. We moved up here in 1934. I think the Depression then was not felt as badly

34:30 as it was in 1929, ’30, ’31. But my father, being a salesman, I’ve often wondered how he managed to sell typewriters and office supplies, keep a family, there were four of us I suppose plus my mother, keep us fairly comfortable when the great Depression was on. But

35:00 he did it so he must have been a competent salesman, businessman, whatever you like. But we did live quite well enough. I don’t know that I ever heard my mother complain about the way we had to live or shortage of money. I know I’ve heard other people speak of this, the difficulties they had in living day to day. Some people had to go to

35:30 work, do menial sort of work to survive but I do have memories of people coming to the door begging you might say, asking for food. I thought that was rather curious but it didn’t effect us. I’ve always thought that.

Was it tough to pack up and leave your home and come to Brisbane when you were ten?

I’ve often thought

36:00 what sort of memories I’ve had of that. I can’t remember having to actually pack up strangely enough. 1934 we moved up here to Brisbane and I don’t remember the actual leaving. Maybe because we lived in Burwood, waiting to get transport up to Brisbane. We came up here on the

36:30 Katoomba which was a coastal ship in those days along with Kanimbla and Manoora. We came on the Katoomba. All the family, mother, father, my brother and self and sister, the four of us in the one cabin in this ship. I can remember playing

37:00 deck quoits on the way up but as far as actually leaving Cabarita, strangely enough I don’t have any memory of actually leaving the pace. Yet we were so close to our neighbours on both sides and other people in the street. Strange the way it affects a kid I suppose of that age. But I actually went to Burwood school for possibly a week or so, I’m not sure now.

37:30 I can vaguely remember going to Burwood School while we were waiting to get transport up. We lived in a little flat I suppose it was in some street. I’ve often wondered where it was. I can’t ask anybody now because everybody associated with it is gone. We lived there for, I don’t even know for sure how long but I don’t think it was very long, possibly a couple of weeks, maybe a month at the most.

38:00 Anyway I went to school during that time, Burwood School and we got this boat, ship up to Brisbane.

What about adapting to life in a new city, new town, new school friends?

We lived in a hotel. When we arrived here we lived in a hotel in Ann Street which is not there any more. I can’t remember the name of it.

38:30 **In Fortitude Valley?**

No it wasn’t in the valley it was in Ann Street between I would say Edward Street and Creek Street probably. Over on the, as you go down towards the valley, on the left hand side. We were there for some time until we

39:00 moved to a house in Corinda. Rented a house up at Corinda, Hilda Street Corinda. That would have been 1934. We came up here in May 1934. So we were enrolled at Sherwood State School, 1934.

39:30 The education system was such that I was being fifth class, fourth or fifth, in Sydney I was put down to about second grade at Sherwood School. My brother was also put down for the rest of that, part of that year. Then some time in the ensuing year or so we skipped part of the year.

40:00 I think they realized that we were such bright boys from Sydney that we could skip the rest of that year and go on to the next class, next grade. That was when I was ten and I would have done the scholarship when I was twelve, 1937 I think it was. That’s thirteen. Might have been, anyway it was that time that I did the

40:30 scholarship at Sherwood school. My brother had done the scholarship previously and he had gone on to state high school over at south Brisbane. I remember he used to talk about the headmaster being a man by the name of Waddle and they called him Tripod because I think he had a disability of some sort.

41:00 **Bill I’ve just got to pull you up there, we’re right on the end of that first tape.**

Tape 2

00:32 **Bill I'm sure Brisbane was a very different place in the mid 1930s, could you describe it for us?**

Yes. I suppose the first thing that you can recall is that there was little traffic. There were no traffic jams. Although I didn't have occasion to venture out in to the traffic. I lived, as I was saying, at Corinda for the first couple of years here

01:00 and we walked to Sherwood school. There were very few occasions that we went in to town. I can't really say in detail what the situation was in regard to traffic excepting that in our brief stay at that hotel when we first arrived we noticed that the traffic here wasn't anywhere near as dense as it was in Sydney. Otherwise

01:30 there were shops in the city that aren't there now. For instance Penny's was one. They seemed to be smaller, they seemed to be more small business shops rather than the big frontages that there are there today.

02:00 **Perhaps Bill you could describe Corinda specifically to me?**

We lived in Hilda Street Corinda which was a very hilly area. As a matter of fact the street that we lived in was very hilly, it was quite a long street, it started at the railway line and then went up over a hill and down to the river. Now we lived about halfway up, almost on the top of a hill. All it was, a weatherboard house

02:30 as were, as I remember, the other houses in our street, all weatherboard. Some a bit more elaborate than others though. Our house was simply a verandah across half of the house and down one side, a bedroom to the left hand side and an entrance between the bedroom and the verandah. All other houses, the house next door to us,

03:00 higher up the hill was a bigger house. The house below us was also a bigger house but they were all weatherboard. They were much the same sort of style though. They talk about old Queenslanders and that's about the way they were. Although as I remember some were more highly set than others. Some were set on the ground,

03:30 others were on the stumps above ground. But they all seemed to be similar construction, galvanized iron roofs, weatherboard or mitered weatherboard type of sheeting, verandahs across the front, back yards, front yards and all with some space around them.

04:00 Possibly because they were subdivided larger lots in those days, possibly thirty two perch lots, some might have even been bigger than that. We had a couple of big trees in the back yard where we lived and the people next door on the lower side to us they had an aviary against the fence and they had lots of smaller trees. So it was quite a leafy area really.

04:30 We used to climb some of those trees of course and not far from where we lived as I was saying, Hilda Street went down to the river. This is where we used to venture as kids, on to the river bank which was very hilly and pretty densely covered with trees, shrubs, undergrowth. We actually dug ourselves a little cave

05:00 in that uninhabited area of the bank of the river. It's called Carrington Rocks as a matter of fact and some steps had been built at this particular point on the river bank, concrete steps. Who would have done that I've no idea but we used to swim from there and on a couple of occasions we swam across

05:30 the river to Lone Pine. We had a dog too who used to swim with us. The worst part of the dog was he couldn't swim as well as we were and he liked to clamber on board when we were half way across. He wasn't actually our dog either, he was a stray that came in and took a liking to us. But it was great fun there. I remember we had great fun there. The fellow next door, young bloke next door, a

06:00 youngish family, about our age name of Clawson as a matter of fact, Alan Clawson, Helen Clawson, Nancy, they lived next door to us. So we had great times together on that river bank, not so much the girls but us boys and we used to swim in the river bank, swing into the river.

06:30 The suburb was, as I was saying, a pretty hilly suburb a lot of kids that I went to school with lived in that area. I remember one boy he was very popular because they had a tennis court, a lawn tennis court and there were occasions we played tennis there. It was handy to Corinda's railway station. In those days my father used to walk

07:00 to Corinda station and ride the train in to town. He was working for a firm called Chartress in the lower end of Queen Street, Peetree Bight doing the same sort of business, office supplies, typewriters.

What had inspired his move?

Well as far as I understand it he was transferred.

07:30 **But it was to a different company?**

Yes. If my memory serves me right, I may have to correct myself here, he might have been working for Chartress in Sydney and Sidney Pinkham here in Brisbane. I'm not too sure about that. I can't ask

anybody either. It was a sort of a transfer arrangement as far as I understand.

Was the family happy

08:00 **to be moving?**

Yes, I don't recall any regrets about it. Being a ten year old I don't think you realize whether there are regrets about these moves. You just take them, the family says we're going and we're going.

Did you adapt to your new school environment quite well?

Yes, excepting that we were put down a grade but then as I said earlier on we skipped a bit of the year and caught up a little bit.

08:30 But we found the teaching was much the same as we were getting in Sydney. The school here of course was a weatherboard school as a lot of the state schools were in those days although the school over at Ironside was a brick school. We didn't go there and I'm not too sure whether Ironside school had been built at that stage. Possibly it had but we went to Sherwood school

09:00 and that Sherwood school is still there. I drive past there every so often and pick out my classroom and the head teacher's officer where we first walked in there on our first day. Old Joe Collings was the headmaster. As a matter of fact the scholarship teacher I had, his daughter lives here in one of the apartments.

09:30 They had plenty of playing area at Sherwood school. It was the equivalent I think in as far as those sort of things is concerned, facilities and so forth, I think the equivalent of the Mortlake School in Sydney. They were constructing a large level area at Sherwood School when we arrived and that involved quite a bit of excavation because Sherwood school's on

10:00 a bit of a slope and a large area was excavated to one side of the school and the bank of the excavation was paved with stones, rocks and so forth and they had a gymnasium of sorts. Sort of a roof covering a sawdusted area where they had

10:30 swings, trapezes, ladders, climbing ladders, this sort of thing, parallel bars. We thought it was quite a good school.

Did you play any musical instruments or did you have things that were developing your sense of listening?

Not at that stage, no. It wasn't until later on. Although my mother did try to teach me the piano at one stage.

11:00 That I think was at Corinda. I've always had a liking for music but I've never been able to master any particular instrument except possibly the mouth organ. I don't know whether you'd call it mastering, I can play it anyway. As far as piano was concerned I did follow up some tuition

11:30 in piano. I was taught by a fellow in town. This is going on a bit I suppose. After I left work and I was working I received piano lessons from a fellow that had an office in Charlotte Street I think it was. I received

12:00 quite a bit of tuition from him. I got to the stage where he said, "I think I've taught you all I can teach you, now it's up to you to practice." Well that was the hard part, practising. So I did enjoy it.

Did your interest in English and composition continue through those early days of high school?

Only as far as the school work was concerned.

12:30 I did not have any desire to write beyond that stage. Never had any inclination to write a book or anything beyond the composition that was set out at school. I enjoyed doing that though. I suppose it called on your imagination I guess and I can say I always got pretty good marks for English.

13:00 In the scholarship I got a pretty good mark in English. The scholarship was the passing grade between state school and secondary school in those days. I enjoyed the English lessons but never had any desire as I recall to go further than that.

You were doing well in your studies at secondary college, at school in Brisbane?

13:30 Oh yes. Let me think now. I went to state school, if I can follow this line, until scholarship, passed the scholarship and then went to grammar. But I was only at grammar for one term and then I was offered a job by, as it happened by the Scout master who

14:00 knew that one of the members of the Scout committee ran a firm called Martin Wilson Brothers. They were looking apparently for some young bloke who they thought would be going on in the firm. As it turned out I left school, I

14:30 wouldn't have left school of my own volition and I think it was probably I'd have to say a big mistake that it did happen, that my parents did agree to my leaving school. Because I was enjoying school at grammar. I think it was a mistake. He offered this job, this Scout master fellow offered this job and my parents said, "Okay."

15:00 That relieved them of having to pay the fees at school too of course. The job was nothing more than a run around delivery boy and working in a store. I was, what age, 1938, fourteen. I left school at fourteen. I used to

15:30 ride a bike around picking up orders. I worked for a firm in those days called Martin Wilson brothers and I worked there for some short time but they had me working quite late after hours taking orders

16:00 to the rail in Anne Street in those days, there was a delivery point there where you'd take various orders to country people and these were motor parts. So there was a fair bit of heavy work in it. So somehow my father got me a job at Noise Brothers. I'm not too sure how long I was at Martin Wilson Brothers but I can say that I

16:30 was at Noise Brothers when the war started anyway. So I was possibly only at Martin Wilson Brothers from 1938 to about '39 or '40. At Noise Brothers much the same type of work but didn't involve pushing a bike around. Then again

17:00 I graduated to a clerical job there, stock sheets, things of this nature after doing some term in the store there also. The store as I call it was a basement area of the shop. It's still there. I walk past there now and again but it's not the same firm of course, it's something entirely different. Noise Brothers was a Sydney firm, had their head office in Clarence Street, Sydney.

17:30 I think after I left they moved over to South Brisbane for a while. I don't think they're anywhere in Brisbane now even under another name. So I was working for this firm Noise Brothers when I volunteered for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] when I turned eighteen, might have even been before, but was not accepted on account of my eyesight.

18:00 Then I also went to the air force but the same result there too.

Bill when you left school to go and work at Martin Wilson Brothers, did your brother, had he already left school or did he stay on at school?

Yes, he had left school. He went to state high school and he actually did a couple of years there as I remember. Whether he passed the junior

18:30 examination, I don't think he actually did sit for that. But he went to work at a place on the corner of Edward Street and Elizabeth Street. They were a hat firm. Now again I can't remember the name but he was working there until he

19:00 joined up. I think he actually put his age up a bit to get in. This is when he was seventeen. So the name of the firm there was something to do with Furfeld Hats or something like that. They were not very far up the road from Noise Brothers. Noise Brothers was in Elizabeth Street between Edward and Albert Street, about a third of the

19:30 way down.

Can you tell me about hearing the news that Australia was at war, do you recall hearing the news?

I can remember Neville Chamberlain saying that they had sent an ultimatum to Germany to withdraw from Poland and something like his words were,

20:00 "And as they have not complied with our request we now consider ourselves to be at war with Germany." "Peace in our time," says Neville Chamberlain I think it was. I think I've got that right. He declared that we were at war with Germany. That was of course in 1939,

20:30 August, September, 1939. At that stage I was working with Noise Brothers.

Do you remember Robert Menzies declaring that Australia was also at war?

That's right, Robert Menzies was prime minister at that time. Words to the effect that we would

21:00 support the mother country, Australia now considered itself at war with Germany. I remember those sorts of statements being made.

Do you remember the reaction of your family?

Something I always remember there is my mother saying, "Well at least you boys will be too young to go." Of course, we were at that stage too. I was fifteen,

21:30 my brother was seventeen. 1922 he was born, 1939, he might have been just seventeen. But that didn't stop him enlisting. We've often thought that he forged my mother's signature, signed for her if you like but that wasn't the case at all. I've seen his enlistment paper. He signed his own name, all he did was

adjust the date of birth. That would have been in July

22:00 1940. So he had not yet turned eighteen. He turned eighteen on the 30th of September 1940 and this was in July 1940. He was not quite eighteen.

Did you say it was the 2/31st he was put in to?

Yeah, he first of all

22:30 as I remember he was allocated, drafted or whatever you like to the 2/10th battalion and they were sent to Malaya. But he developed an eye problem and was sent to hospital. By the time

23:00 he came out of hospital the battalion had gone. So he was redrafted and found himself in the 31st infantry battalion. Now after a period of training at Grovely and down south somewhere they then went

23:30 off to the Middle East and they took part in the Syrian campaign against the Free French. A great pity that was. That would have been in June, July 1941.

Did he write home to you while he was away?

Yes, he did. We had some letters from him. Later on when they returned and he went

24:00 to New Guinea in one letter he said, "You can knock the Zeros down with a stick we're so high here," something like that. Because the peaks there are very high, Owen Stanley Ranges. What do they go to, probably about, very high anyway, fourteen, fifteen thousand, sixteen thousand feet, something like that. Very mountainous country, as you probably know. Anyway he was sent to Syria with the 2/31st Battalion. They

24:30 went to the Middle East and took part in the Syrian campaign and they then brought back home again because of the Japanese invasion or Japanese campaign. They were having quite a bit of success down through Malaya. That's what happened there. He developed, I think it was an eye ulcer,

25:00 something of that nature. Found himself in hospital for a while, missed the draft.

It sounds like he was very influential on you, did you really look up to your older brother?

We were great mates, yeah. We were fairly close in age as I said, similar interests I suppose. Although he was quite artistic, a very good artist.

25:30 We've got some of his examples of work here that he did. I remember he had lessons from a lady in George Street by the name of Miss Berkbeck. That part of George Street is probably gone long ago but he had these lessons from her. He had a natural talent. Not much good taking lessons if you haven't got a natural talent. He did have a natural talent. Where he got that from I don't know.

26:00 I've never known mother or father to show any artistic talents except my mother played the piano, had a good singing voice and so did my father, had a good singing voice too. Just digressing a moment, a little while, she was a member of choirs that we went to, church that we went to. Church in, going back to Cabarita, at the Congregational Church in Cabarita. That's not there any more either.

26:30 It eventually became a kindergarten. That's where I went to kindergarten in Sydney. Then when we moved up here she sang in the choir here first of all at Sherwood, we went to the Presbyterian Church in Sherwood and then when we moved

27:00 down here to Indooroopilly she took part in, a member of the choir here, the Presbyterian church here. Just down the road there where the parking lot is for a shopping town now. All these things have gone, even the house we lived in at Sydney, if I can go back there again, we went back there on more than one occasion and it was there for quite a while,

27:30 we've got photos standing in front of the house there, out on the footpath with the front fence. But on another occasion we went back and here's a grand Italian style house there. The cottage we lived in had gone and we went in and made ourselves known. My wife Sadie and myself went in, made ourselves known to the occupants and they said they had bought the house a couple of years ago and

28:00 of course you didn't move brick houses, you had to knock them down and this is what happened. They knocked the house down and built this much bigger style home, two story, cream brick place. Looked quite grand.

Do you remember any of the songs that your mum and dad used to sing?

Danny Boy was a favourite.

28:30 That one I remember. I can't remember others though.

Can you give us a couple of bars?

"Oh Danny Boy, da da dada, Oh Danny Boy, Oh Danny Boy, I

29:00 love you so." You notice I know all the words I suppose. Danny Boy is part of it.

As a family did you used to stand around and sing together?

We had a pianola, that was always a source of good entertainment. We always seemed to have a pianola. We had a pianola in Sydney. Whether it was

29:30 the same one we brought up here and had at Corinda. Pianolas are always a good source of music for sing songs. We had a great host of rolls like Valencia, things like that, Barcarolle. I remember that name because I play golf with a fellow named Barker and I used to always call him 'Barker's on a roll', Barcarolle.

30:00 We had that sort of family get together, entertainment you might say. Mainly in Sydney I suppose. Having the pianola was always good.

Do you remember in the late '30s what the popular music of the day was, what sort of music you were interested in?

The late '30s, no, my memory's not good these days.

30:30 I couldn't put a year to it you know but I'd have to do a bit of research on that. I can barely remember the names of the singers, like Bing Crosby, Perry Como, these fellas. The songs like Gershwin wrote, George Gershwin.

31:00 I'd have to think about it. They were very popular those singers, Crosby, Bing Crosby, Perry Como. The fella who died just the other day, Ray Charles. That's about all I think I can think on that score.

You mentioned

31:30 **your brothers hidden talent of being a painter or an artist.**

Yeah, pencil artist.

Did you have any secret skills or hidden talents?

Not to the extent that he did. I reckon I can still draw the difference between a car and a horse sort of thing. He had a talent that was beyond mine but

32:00 never anything beyond being self entertainment or self satisfaction, I suppose you could put it that way. It was never a source as I remember of any income for him. It was just a matter of his having this talent and he used to draw quite a bit and have these lessons. Whether it would have developed later on,

32:30 might have used it to form some source of entertainment or income but no, that sort of thing I don't think ever occurred to him, to develop it to that extent. He didn't live long enough anyway really. In the army at seventeen, eighteen so anything he did was before those times you know.

33:00 **In the lead up to the war you met your wife Sadie through your brother?**

I met Sadie through my brother, Bruce.

Prior to the war?

Just prior to the war. When we lived at Corinda. We lived at Corinda in the years 1934 to '36 or '37.

33:30 About mid '36 I would say. Sadie had a cousin who lived at Corinda and they went to Sherwood school. Now my brother of course went to Sherwood school and he met this cousin of Sadie's. Her name was Drew.

34:00 He became friendly with a cousin named Dorothy of Sadie's. This meant that he then met Sadie when she was visiting her cousin, I think that's the way it went. So my brother

34:30 Bruce knew Sadie before I did. It seems to have started at a time in Station Road, Indooroopilly, down by the station when there wasn't any grand railway station in those days, it was timber steps over the railway line and Bruce introduced me to Sadie. I think we were of mature age then, about fifteen and things sort of developed a bit from then.

35:00 Although I will say I had international competition during the war years when the goddamn Yanks were here. No, that was all very nice, very friendly and I met a few. Sadie met some Americans during the war years because they went to St. Andrew's church in town.

35:30 That's where Sadie and her sister, they went to the fellowship it was called. You may have heard of the fellowship, young people's fellowship. It was a sort of, well gathering of young people within the church which formed in to a fellowship. It wasn't just local to one church I think it was pretty well maybe Australia wide or Queensland anyway

36:00 called young people's fellowship. Now these American servicemen who were stationed up at Wacol used to go to this church, corner of Anne Street and Creek Street. The church is still there strangely enough.

They invited, Sadie and her sister invited a couple of the ex-service people to their home which was just down the road here. The house is

36:30 still there. Sadie's mother built that in 1939, lived there until she died. So that's part of the international competition I was speaking about. Sadie and her sister had these American ex-servicemen to their home after the service. In the course of

37:00 our beginnings of friendship I met these ex-servicemen. We became quite friendly. As a matter of fact our friendship has extended to the point where we have visited the States, kept up the contact with these ex-service people, a couple, two or three in particular. It was just four years ago that we were last there.

37:30 We thought we might go this year too.

You knew they weren't any competition for you though.

No, it was hands down all the way, no problem.

Just keep them in their place.

That's right, listen fellas, hands off.

Bill, could you tell me, we've just got a few minutes left on this tape but could you tell me about your

38:00 **failed attempts to enlist in to the AIF, your first attempt that failed to get in to the AIF?**

Well my brother had already enlisted before me and I went to the recruiting office. I had the idea it was in Creek Street. I went there, I might be getting that mixed up with the air force recruiting office. But anyway there was a recruiting office in Creek Street

38:30 and I went there and I failed the eye test. I lost the sight of this eye when I was just a boy, my left eye. I was hit in the eye with a stick and gradually the retina detached.

It's completely blind?

Yeah. So I was

39:00 of course not in the hunt of passing the eye test. I think the sequence is that I went to the air force after that because a friend of mine he also went along. He was accepted. I'm not to sure if I was with him at the time. Unfortunately he was killed in a flying accident later on so possibly it saved my life too.

Can I just ask you with that initial application to the AIF,

39:30 **the very first attempt to the AIF, what motivated you or inspired you to try and enlist?**

That was the thing to do. The war was on, I was of eligible age and a sense I suppose in some way of adventure, loyalty, the cause. Probably mainly the cause,

40:00 the fact that we were at war and possibly some thought about this is what I've got to do. I don't know what your feelings are really at that stage but that was what I did. I thought, "I'll do that, get in to the army." But I wasn't successful then.

We're right on the end of that second tape.

Tape 3

00:34 **Bill I just wanted to ask you a little bit about the CMF, what that was and what you did?**

CMF is the Citizens Military Forces. That was the only part of the army that I was eligible for at my age group. I was not eligible

01:00 for the AIF until I turned nineteen. I was called up at eighteen and as I've said, I was fortunate if you like because of my desire to be able to get in to the army, I was fortunate that I was able to see part of the eye test.

01:30 I suppose it's all right now to mention these things sixty years after it all but I memorized the eye chart. So I was able to pass the eye test. That got me in to the CMF. Otherwise like other friends of the day they weren't accepted because in one particular case the fellow had flat feet,

02:00 would you believe, but that's the way it went, you were either accepted or you weren't and I was accepted.

Who helped you learn the eye test?

Nobody was able to help me I just saw it in there and thought E, G, B, D, F, F, A, C, that's the treble scale but whatever it was I was able to remember enough of it that when the card was placed over this eye and I saw a deep blackness

02:30 there and I was asked to read the chart I was able to get enough of it to satisfy them. I'd have to say possibly in those days of recruiting they probably weren't too fussy about physical condition. They were after numbers. So whilst I possibly didn't read right down to the bottom line

03:00 I was able to read enough to satisfy them. I can remember the doctor at that stage saying, "Why do you wear glasses," and I said, "I get headaches now and again." That was all that was said. So I was recorded as having whatever vision for left and right eye and I was accepted.

What sort of other things did they do in the physical to get in in those days?

03:30 Chest measurement, height, not much else as far as I recall. Mainly eyesight and measurements. I think they might have asked you to bend over, do a bit of knee bending

04:00 just to check on your flexibility possibly but that was it. After that you're in. I remained in the CMF until I turned nineteen then I was able to transfer to the AIF.

What exactly did you do in the CMF?

What did I do? Well I was called up on the eighteenth of June 1942.

04:30 I was then eighteen. We were then sent, a group of about sixty of us Queenslanders under the command of a lieutenant whose name was George Oxland, we were sent to Bonegilla which is outside of Albury

05:00 on the New South Wales, Victorian border. We had been drafted in to a unit which was known as Australian Special Wireless Group and the aim of this unit was to intercept Japanese army, air force and navy traffic as it was called,

05:30 Morse code messages. To do that we had to learn the Japanese kana code. All of their traffic was sent in this kana code. Now the kana code consists of seventy two letters, symbols as against

06:00 twenty-six in our own A, B, C, D up to Z, twenty six letters. We did that from the time we arrived at Bonegilla which was June until July apart from May it was, May 1943.

06:30 So we spent all that time in training and learning.

Bill can I just ask how is it that those men came to be selected to be the ones that would do this? Did you have to do some test that showed that you were perhaps suitable for that work?

No, not as I remember. We were told that this unit was being formed. It was actually the,

07:00 you might say, continuation of a unit that had served overseas in the Middle East, Greece and Crete. Of course they were intercepting German and Italian army traffic. Now when that unit returned to Australia it was the known as 5 WT, wireless telegraphy

07:30 section. But it was then formed in to a unit called Australian Special Wireless Group. They had insufficient numbers to make up the unit that they required to do the work. So I don't recall we were ever asked would we like to go in to it, I think we were told that we were being formed in to this unit. Whether there was any prior test,

08:00 I can't recall but there were about sixty of us, I was saying earlier that were sent to Bonegilla to do this training. Now Bonegilla was the centre of a very big signals training corps down there.

Can you describe Bonegilla for us?

Bonegilla was a very extensive camp consisting mainly of the huts which were, I've got

08:30 photos of these huts too, they seemed to be weatherboard on the bottom half of the wall and fibro on the top half. Double doors at each end of the hut. The hut was sheeted, roofed over with either fibro or galvanized iron. From memory the huts in which we lived were

09:00 probably longer, much longer than this room. Probably seventy or eighty feet, of that order. I know there seemed to be whole lines of fellas lying down each side of it. They had timber floors, of course they were raised off the ground a little, two or three steps off the ground. That's where we were housed in the time we were there.

09:30 We had a general cookhouse and mess hut which housed all the members of our unit.

What sort of food were you getting?

Food. Well I suppose a lot is said about army food. Most of it's true. It was mainly mashed potatoes, sausages. It varied. Of course

10:00 the old baked beans always gets a mention. And bully beef. Bully beef is a sort of a meat stew if you like. Generally comes in tins. It's not a stew, it's more of a corned beef, I suppose you could say that. The cooks used to cut it all up and make it in to a stew. They varied the diet somewhat, you know. As an eighteen year old I don't think you

10:30 complain too much about the sort of food. You're in the army and that's what you've got. Breakfast as I remember was porridge, always porridge. Probably toast or bread, tea, never tea or coffee, always tea. Lunch or dinner was this mixture of either baked beans or

11:00 bully beef or stew or whatever was made up. Sufficient to keep you alive and well. Never any delicacies that I remember. Never any custard and apple pie or things of that nature. No cake. Some might have other memories of that

11:30 but that's what I recall. Much the same sort of diet.

How long did it take for you to settle in to army life?

I suppose it doesn't take you very long. You get accustomed to the straw palliasse that you slept on. A palliasse was a big hessian bag which you filled with straw and that you put on the ground, either

12:00 on a groundsheet on the ground or on, as it was in those days, on the timber floor of the hut. There were times when some fellas had stretchers. I don't know how they came by the stretchers. I must find out one day. I always remember sleeping on the hard timber floor on this palliasse of straw.

12:30 Now the old palliasse got pretty hard after a while too. Never any springs of course. But a pretty strict sort of a regime.

What did your kit bag contain at the time?

It contained our issue of clothing. Long johns as we'd call them,

13:00 singlet, underpants combination right down to the ankles and they were most welcome in a place like Bonegilla too. Winter time when we went down there, we left here in June where the weather, beautiful, in to cold weather on the Victorian border. So we had our clothing in the kit bags, our own, anything that you had of a personal nature,

13:30 notebook, any writing material that you wanted to take with you. Although you're also given a webbing type haversack, what we called a back pack. I've got a couple of them out there. About so big and that used to be strapped over your back and the haversack in front for the balance and your kit bag

14:00 slung over your shoulder. Of course there was always blankets you had in there too. A blanket was sometimes wrapped around your kit bag but that's what went in to your kit bag, clothing, sleeping gear, any personal items, anything of that nature.

14:30 **Do you recall what it was like the first time you put your uniform on?**

No, I can't really say. I think it was a case of, this hat's not big enough or, just comparing the size of things.

But how did you feel wearing the uniform, what did it represent for you?

15:00 I think you felt quite happy about it. This is what thousands of other fellas were wearing and I think you felt that you were doing the right thing and your uniform looked good. Of course the old boots were a bit of a problem. They were very heavy. Not like the shoes you'd been accustomed to. They took a bit of getting used to. Very heavy leather. Of course they had to be too

15:30 for all the work they were given to do over all sorts of countryside, all sorts of terrain. A pair of shoes wouldn't have lasted five minutes. Getting used to the wearing of the boots I think was probably the hardest part. The clothing we were given, the khaki

16:00 drill pants as well and shirt as well as the heavier uniform which was, I haven't got mine now but typical of the Australian uniform, it was sort of a wool material I suppose. It was much heavier than the stuff the uniform we wore during the summer months, shorts or long pants in a light drill material.

16:30 **So were your huts heated at all?**

No, not heated. Close the doors, that's what you did. No I don't recall ever having any heating in the huts. You were given a couple of blankets and no sheets, just blankets. Although some fellas seemed to have sheets, I think they might have robbed

17:00 the linen press at home somehow. You used the kit bag for a pillow, no pillows as such. So it was, took a bit of getting accustomed to, getting used to but there again I suppose I have to keep saying, as an eighteen year old it was all a big adventure, something quite different you know.

Even though you obviously didn't have

17:30 **much in the way of possessions, were there morning inspections, was there a particular way you had to have your possessions?**

Oh yes.

Could you talk me through a morning inspection?

There was always an inspection every day and your kit had to be set out in a certain order. When we were in training camp the bed roll as they called it, that's the blanket and the ground sheet, we were given a ground sheet

18:00 too, all rolled out flat on the ground with your kit bag behind it and your possessions behind the kit bag. That is to say the haversack and the back pack, they were positioned behind the kit bag which was placed as a sort of pillow at the head. That was the way they were inspected each morning. Nine o'clock or oh nine hundred or whatever.

What sort of punishments would be dished out for people who weren't neat enough?

18:30 Well punishment, whether they were specifically handed out for not having your kit in the right position or not I don't know but punishment generally amounted to pack drill. On a smaller scale it could have amounted to extra duties in the kitchen, cookhouse duties, helping the cook. When I say

19:00 helping the cook, that means washing up the dishes. Or extra duties in putting out what we call the rose bowls. These were the places where you visited during the night to answer the call of nature. They were called rose bowls and they were stationed between each hut. Fortunately in those days the demands weren't as much as they were in the later years. So you

19:30 didn't have to get out of bed quite so often. That was extra duties there, extra duty in the cook house, extra duty or duty in the guard room. That means to say, spending time on guard, in the guard house for anybody who was in the guard house. They were fellas who'd been AWOL [AWL – Absent Without Leave],

20:00 away without leave and when they returned they were given time in the guard house. Or what else, pack drill. It means you report to the orderly sergeant every day at a certain time and he would march you up and down the parade ground. What a waste of labour hey, march you up and down the parade ground for maybe half an hour or an hour, something like that,

20:30 for being late on parade, not having your kit in order, not having shaved. Fortunately at eighteen years of age it wasn't such a problem. Those sorts of things were meted out as punishment.

In the early days did it take a while for the men to settle down and get used to that discipline?

21:00 Didn't seem to. We were given leave on a fairly regular basis. We used to train at the operator training, various shifts and in between those shifts you were given leave. The shifts generally amounted to what they call the dog watch, midnight 'til four am, four am to six,

21:30 six 'til eight, eight 'til midday, midday 'til four, four 'til six in the afternoon, this sort of thing. They varied a bit. I think they handled it all right. I don't recall. Some fellas I suppose you could say, maybe the dissatisfaction or the dislike of whatever amounted to, found itself in the time that some fellas went AWL,

22:00 go through as we used to call it. That amounted to pack drill or extra duty as I was saying when they eventually returned to camp. That was treated as a pretty serious offence, going AWL or as the Americans call it, AWOL.

So when you did get leave, where did you go and what sort of things did you do?

22:30 Well the leave, first of all leave was on a visit to town basis. That's only on a short tem. We'd go in to Albury. They had dances there and we'd go to the dances or we'd have a drink or two. That was mainly, that was the main occupation, the main way we'd spend a leave

23:00 between our shifts on duty. Longer term I was able to come home. On one occasion I got leave during November. I had leave from, about a week I think it was.

23:30 During that time I got word of my brother's death in New Guinea. That was November 1942. So I'd been there from June to November when we got that long leave, about a week as I recall. We were given train passes of course and were able to travel. As I remember we traveled normal train service

24:00 because there's not many of you going at the same time, there'd only be a handful going on leave at the same time.

So did you get compassionate leave because of your brother's death?

Well I was here but it wasn't extended, no. As I remember I just went back to camp again. It was when we were living here as a matter of fact, not in this apartment but living in the house that was here. We were living in Station Road here at Norwood. The house was called Norwood. We were living here and I

24:30 came home here. That's when we got news through the army.

Were you still on leave when your brother had his funeral?

There was no funeral, no. He was buried in New Guinea. There was no funeral service in those days. As a matter of fact I went to the burial of one of our fellas who died in New Guinea. Wrapped in a blanket and

25:00 buried. No family present. They wouldn't be allowed to travel in those days. You could probably travel interstate but you couldn't travel to New Guinea so the funeral service was conducted within the unit.

That must have been very hard for your family not to have a funeral.

Yes. Well I suppose in some cases there was memorial services held.

25:30 We just got word to say that he had died in hospital buried at Bomana War Cemetery which is just outside Port Moresby. I was able to visit his grave when I later was posted to Port Moresby myself and I was able to visit his grave then. It was a big shock yes, great shock to the family. Upset my mother no end. Quite a sad occasion.

26:00 Happened to thousands of families of course. We were fortunate I guess, the family was fortunate, we only had the one loss in our family whereas you hear of families losing three or four.

It must have made your mother more fearful for you as well being in the service.

Yes I suppose so. But we were not as exposed you might say to enemy action even though we were posted to some remote areas of New Guinea

26:30 we weren't exposed initially to enemy action. So there wasn't the same element of danger.

So within your family, just to mark your brother's passing did you do any sort of religious kind of ceremony or anything?

Not as far as I remember no, because I had to go, I went back to camp again and I don't think any other service took part.

27:00 My mother was here she'd say, "Oh yes we did Billy, we did this, we did that." No, I don't think as I recall there was any service of any sort. In those days it was war years and this was happening all over the world. A friend of mine as I was saying earlier got killed in a flying accident and I don't recall any service being held for him. These things happen overseas and

27:30 you accept it as part of war times.

Being so young, young people generally feel like they're invincible, did you feel like that?

Oh sure, you don't feel the sense of fear as I think I would now about being close to enemy action. I feel now more for young fellas overseas now and what it must mean to families

28:00 and to them being in danger but at that time I think no, I don't recall having any sense of fear about going to New Guinea or being in remote areas up there It's just that you were there and didn't seem to concern you too much. I don't remember being concerned or in fear of being in those places.

So it didn't change with the death of your brother and your friend,

28:30 **did that make it more real for you?**

Yeah I suppose so. But they being front line of course, they were within arms length if you like of the enemy. They're trying to shoot you, you're trying to shoot them. That was more the danger part of the war. There were many other parts to war service apart from being close to the enemy.

29:00 All essential parts of a war of course, had to be done. But those fellas like the air force particularly so, the army, navy in close action, close contact, whether they felt great fear or not I don't know. I never heard my brother say so. We had one account of his being in action in Syria and

29:30 in a bayonet action there and a friend of mine was telling me how he saw them in action but they didn't, there was no expression of horror or fear at all. Maybe I'm wrong.

I'd just like to move now to the more specific training that you did for the Australian Special Wireless Group. Can you talk me through

30:00 **that training maybe from day one just move through the months that you learnt.**

Well we had training sets of course. We used to train in huts at Bonegilla and these huts were set up with what you would say now were wireless sets. We were

30:30 shown how to adjust these sets to intercept various frequencies and in the training days of course we weren't actually taking any enemy messages, we were simply being trained to read Morse code. No we had to be taught

31:00 the alphabet, the Morse code alphabet, and so forth. That teaching took the form of one of the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] sending the Morse code through headphones and we were told what was A, what was B, what was C and so on. This had to be developed to a time when you could

31:30 read words and sentences up to a speed of something like twenty two, twenty four words a minute. This ultimately had to be increased to about twenty-eight words a minute. When we were efficient at reading the Morse code, our own Morse code, we were then taught

32:00 to read the kana code. Now the kana code was a combination of our own Morse code but in a sort of a garbled sense if you like. In other words whereas we only have twenty six letters to our Morse code Japanese kana code there were seventy two if I remember correctly. That was made up of our own letters with an additional letter or some other

32:30 symbol attached to it which would probably mean to ko ri ma so, all this sort of stuff in Japanese. We weren't asked to write down the to ko ra mi, we were just asked to write down that particular symbol in an abbreviated sense. In other words it might have been a Z with a bar over the top, a Z

33:00 with a little zero down the bottom, an A with a bar on top, all these sorts of ways they had of being taught to write down the kana code in this symbolic sort of way so that when you actually heard that being sent by an enemy operator you wrote that down in this coded way that our I staff,

33:30 intelligence staff, were able to then decode, encipher, in some form which would then be deciphered in to Japanese language or in to a Japanese code

34:00 and the I staff had the job then of working out what the code was all about. Breaking the codes, you often hear speaking of, meant breaking the messages, the codes that we were receiving in to Japanese codes or languages and from that they were able to form a message

34:30 That's if they were able to break the code. That had to be done first of all of course.

I can't imagine how you would learn seventy-two odd different sounds, can you just talk me through how do you go about doing something.

It becomes a sort of a thing, you don't have to worry about is there a double A there, is there a B with three dots and two 'da's' after it. You get a little rhythmic sound sort of thing,

35:00 you know that is something. It comes through like that with a slight break between the sending of each letter and you recognize that as a complete sound rather than a series of dashes and dots. You'd never be able to work out whether there was two dashes, three dots and

35:30 two dashes, you wouldn't have time. You learned to, you were taught to recognize the sound rather than the make up of the sound. Sometimes it was quite simple as I've said, an A, a B, but on the other hand they might send what was called a Z barred hand niggle reed, that would be and you got to recognize that sound and you write it down in a certain way.

36:00 **So did that involve, say children at school learn their alphabet, did you do something similar. With the seventy two, how did you learn the sounds, did they keep playing one sound and that's A?**

The instructors would send through that sound and tell you how that sound had to be written, what that sound is called and how that sound had to be written. It took us

36:30 the best part of seven or eight months to learn that to the extent where we could apply it on actual service. Of course reception on actual service conditions weren't perfect either by a long way. Japanese operators weren't always expert in their sending like people speaking you might say,

37:00 people who are not accustomed to speaking in public they either tend to speak too quickly or they blur their words or this sort of thing. So it is with wireless operators, they don't clearly define the letters that they're sending. If you get on to a good operator it makes it far easier for you to read the message he's sending. Some fellas would say, "Oh I've got this guy, he sends with his foot."

37:30 It was a matter of how well the message was sent as to how well you received it and you didn't always get a hundred per cent of the message. You didn't always get a hundred per cent of what they were sending by a long way. Sometimes it was sufficient if there were two or three of you taking the same frequency, the frequency might be say Tokyo sending to Rabaul,

38:00 Rabaul sending to a smaller town, smaller place. So depend on that operator how good he was and if there were two or three of you taking the same frequency there might be sufficient to what the two or three of you had taken to make sense of the message or make sense well enough of it

38:30 for the I staff to be able to work out the message, decode it or at least give them enough to work upon for future intelligence use. It might be a simple message about supply between certain areas but on the other hand if it was air force,

39:00 Japanese air force traffic it might have meant a message to say that they are sending a certain number of planes to a certain area. You think, the I staff get that and they are warned that there's a movement of air craft. Now on one occasion one of our operators took a message to say that General Yamamoto was flying to Bougainville and they acted upon that, they sent off some P38

39:30 Lightning fighters, intercepted his plane and his plane was eventually shot down. We pride ourselves with having played a big part in the death of a major Japanese army general at that time. We're not sure whether he was actually killed in the plane or whether he was killed by the plane having been shot down.

40:00 But you read also accounts of where US [United States] intelligence intercepted a message. We were intercepting, the US was intercepting and even the English were intercepting. So who actually got the vital message we can't actually, with any great degree of accuracy, say. But we always claim that it was us.

It must have been great for morale.

40:30 Oh sure. Again you don't know at the time that you're taking that message, all you know is you're taking a message and that's what it turns out to be, it turns out to be a message to say there's that movement going on and you don't know until after it's all happened. But as you say it's great for morale to think you are doing something very useful in that respect.

We'll just change tapes.

Tape 4

00:34 **I was just wondering what Kana code, what it actually stands for.**

I don't know what Kana [Japanese equivalent of Morse code] stands for. Sorry I can't answer that one. I could find out and let you know.

How many hours a day would you be training?

I'd say probably the best part of

01:00 six hours. We used to do other army activities as well. We all trained in the use of the rifle, we did bayonet practice, we had duties around the camp, route marches for physical fitness and other activities there for physical fitness,

01:30 exercising. But actual work on the Morse code training would probably be nine 'til twelve in most cases, two 'til five, something like that, one 'til four. Probably six hours I would guess. Sometimes there were night classes as well, maybe seven 'til nine.

Could you talk me through

02:00 **just a typical day for you?**

I would say it would generally amount to reveille at six o'clock, parade, breakfast of course. Breakfast first of all and then parade at say eight o'clock. That could be followed by a route march or it could be followed by some physical exercise of some sort. For those

02:30 who were going to do the Morse code training that's what would happen, you'd go to the sets as we used to call them. Everybody had their own particular set, wireless, whatever, on a long bench in these huts and you all got hooked up to that, ear phones. Then of course there'd be a break for lunch. Now also

03:00 you were allocated duties round the camp which could be cookhouse duties. Not necessarily punishment but just that was part of the routine. Guard duty, cookhouse duty, as I was saying earlier on the old rose bowls. Cleaning up the place.

03:30 What did they call that, anyway, generally cleaning up round the campsite. The place at Kalinga was a very big campsite. I've got pictures of it here, there could have been anything upwards of twenty or thirty huts on this camp. Bonegilla was much bigger again. It was not just one unit living there, there were many units used to train there.

04:00 So they had in addition to the huts they had also the relaxation type huts, Everyman's. There was a company called Everyman's, they're still going today where they provided huts with writing material and radio and this sort of thing. No television of course.

I haven't heard of the Everyman's.

Well Everyman's

04:30 is a charity organization and they provided entertainment for troops and as I say provided comforts in

the way of Everyman's hut. Quite often the fellas would say, "I'm going over to Everyman's to write a letter," and they had the facilities there for doing that. Or just go over there to relax. They had magazines there to look at. Probably Woman's Weeklys or something like that.

05:00 That was a sort of service they provided at training camps probably all over Australia I suppose. Just the other day I got a letter from them asking for a donation to continue their service. As far as the routine of the day was concerned that's what would happen. At training camp you'd do certain periods of training

05:30 each day, you'd do your duties to the various parts of the camp. You might also have to do a mail service which would be collecting mail and distributing it although they had an orderly room for that too. You could do orderly room duty which involved helping with the mail. That was only during training

06:00 days. The main part of it though was the Morse code training, the kana training and building up your speed, building up your proficiency in writing and writing the messages, the various coding. So that would be occupying most of the day.

You said that you first had to learn Morse code before you could learn the

06:30 **kana code, how many months did it take to do Morse code before you then went to learn kana code?**

Maybe I had a little bit of a start on there because being in the Scouts we learnt Morse code there. So I think I knew the alphabet really but not to any speed. We perhaps had that little bit of a start on but yes, it was essential that you learned the Morse code, the

07:00 sounds of the Morse code. We weren't taught to send as much as to receive. There was a section later on who used to send messages but they would send messages from our sections out in New Guinea back to our base at Kalinga. They were a different section all together. We were intercept operators. Now we had to learn the Morse code first before we could then develop on to learning

07:30 the kana code. Now if anybody was starting from go I would think that it could take them a couple of months to become proficient enough at the Morse code to develop on to another stage. But there again as I was saying, I was there at Bonegilla from June to May and most of that time apart from leave and duty time,

08:00 most of that time building up speed with the Morse code and the Kana code.

Now it's a fairly specialised area, you've got to have a certain degree of skill, were there some people that just couldn't here the difference and had to go to another unit?

I suppose there were. But I suppose you were allowed a certain time to develop speed. I don't know of anybody who was not able to achieve

08:30 the necessary speed but some got more proficient at it than others. The fellas that I trained with I know we trained down there then we went back to our base camp, went to a base camp as it happened it was at Kalinga. That's a later stage and from there we were sent out in different sections to different parts of the south east pacific.

09:00 That's anther story. Mainly the developing of speed was what was required at Bonegilla.

Did they test your hearing before you were put in to that unit, obviously you had to have fairly good ears?

The only hearing test was when we were passing when you were being taken in to the army.

09:30 They checked your hearing then but apart from that there was no other specific requirement for hearing.

I was just wondering if you could describe in a little bit more detail the wireless equipment that you were actually using, the make up of it.

The wireless sets we were using were called Kingsleys, that was just the brand name of the set.

10:00 Now those sets had various, you could adjust them to different frequencies and to do that you had some sort of a block. I'm not very technical in this respect, a block that you fitted in to the set to receive different frequencies that you wanted to cover. Now the sets as I remember on actual service where different in that

10:30 we were given frequencies to watch. So you were told, "You're watching eighteen hundred kilocycles," or something like that and you'd watch that particular frequency all night if necessary, the whole shift. The whole shift you would sit on that particular frequency waiting for the Jap to start up his transmission. You'd be sitting there half asleep and "Oh hello, here he comes now," he's starting

11:00 to send a message. You were taught they way in which they start off their message. They always start their message off AHR [Morse code message prefix]. I have a message for you. So great excitement,

"Here he comes boys," and then he starts to send his message and you endeavour to take that down. In training there was a time when you had to achieve the Morse code first of all

11:30 and then the kana code. Now the sets in training, as I say each one had his own particular set and I'd say from memory if you'd like to go out to Kalinga I'll show you were the huts were, it's a football training field now. I would say there could have been a dozen of us each side of the room set on the

12:00 tables, a long table with a set in front of each of us and you had earphones. During the training period your earphones were hooked up to the instructor who was sending you Morse code but after you got to a stage where you were endeavouring to intercept actual Morse code you were given

12:30 a certain frequency to look at, to watch as we used to call it, watching a frequency. All those sets were called Kinglseys. There were some others too. Mainly the sets we used were a Kingsley. Each operator had one Kingsley in front on this bench, writing material, a particular sort of pad on which you took down the message,

13:00 a particular part of the pad where you write down the code name, the callers name and the code name or the code signal that you were intercepting and so forth. But I would guess there could have been at least a dozen each side, could have been twenty or so to a room.

Now was this equipment top of the range at the time, was this new technology?

Oh yes,

13:30 they were considered to be the best type of equipment. There was another name too, another set there. That was my experience, as far as my memory serves me, it was always this Kingsley that I trained on.

What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Kingsley wireless?

Well of course the weather played a big part in the reception.

14:00 The weather was a big factor. Weather like we're having now would be just about perfect for reception, no storm activity so you're able to get a good clear message. If there was storm activity there was always a crackling going on and of course the message itself was not easily read.

14:30 Also there was the ability of the operator, the sending operator, as I was saying earlier. His ability, his skill at sending and there again a great number weren't very clever at sending. Their messages were broken, they had to repeat and

15:00 they caused you a bit of concern in that way. There were a couple of factors but the main one I suppose would be the weather then there'd be the ability of the sender to send in a manner that you could take down fairly easily and of course then your own ability too, how well you were trained yourself.

Besides those weaknesses or inconveniences with the weather, were they generally

15:30 **pleasant to work with?**

Yes, they were okay to work with. Generally you could adjust volume to suit your own hearing. You just couldn't adjust clarity though when the weather was such that it wasn't good for reception. They were always pretty efficient sort of sets to use.

16:00 I don't remember having a great deal of trouble with them excepting as I say conditions beyond your control, weather and so on.

You mentioned before that there was a form that you used to take down the code, could you describe that for me?

I don't know that I can remember it in detail. Generally speaking it was about an A4 sized or foolscap sized message pad.

16:30 As I remember just divided in to columns with the message senders name, code name, date, the operators name, that's your own name, the time that you were taking it, the date, those sorts of things you'd expect on a form that you were using to intercept an operator's message.

17:00 Probably twenty or thirty lines per page I should imagine, divided in to columns. So you would just write the symbol down as you got it. You didn't endeavour to write down the Morse code symbol, you wrote down the symbol that represented the message that they were sending. You wrote down the code, write down the symbol which might be that, as I was saying, a Z with a dash over it.

17:30 It might be a B with a couple of little wiggles above it, it might be D with something else, it might be just a D.

So you're not writing the dots and dashes you're writing the alphabet or the symbol?

Sure, yeah, writing your own alphabet but in such a way that it represents a Kana code, a Kana symbol, a Kana Morse code. If you know what I mean.

18:00 **I was just wondering if you might talk us through now once you've taken a message, in training, what did they tell you to do after you've taken the message down, what's the procedure?**

After you've taken the message, the message as far as we were concerned was simply to hand it in to the instructor and it then went to the

18:30 I staff. Depending on where you were as to whether I staff was accessible. In Brisbane here the I staff had their headquarters at Henry Street, Ascot, 21 Henry Street, Ascot. Our messages were taken to them, the whole sheet taken to them. They worked on them there. That was a private home taken over by the army.

19:00 There were several. That home was also occupied by US and English as well as Australian intelligence section people. They worked on those messages that you intercepted. If you were away in New Guinea or some other part of the south east those messages were sent to, they were encoded if you like again and sent down

19:30 to Henry Street, Ascot. Rather than send the sheet down because that would take a long time, it's almost like a telephone message but they were then, they got the I staff at where you were stationed, they got those messages, took those messages from you, then they were sent, actually transmitted down

20:00 to headquarters here at Henry Street after they had been coded again so that if they were intercepted by enemy operators they were in another code and they had to work out what that code was before. So that was the system anyway, it had to be encoded.

Did you ever see the encoding done,

20:30 **did you know how that was done?**

No, I didn't. End of our day was when we took the message. At the end of the shift, we walked off. During the shift we'd hand those messages to the supervisor and it was the supervisors' job then to get them to the I staff, intelligence staff and they worked on them from there,

21:00 depending on where you were, what part of the world you were at.

I was jut wondering in the training days when you were just getting used to the code and everything, did you and your friends ever talk funny messages to each other just to practice or anything like that?

No we didn't, no. The use of the equipment was

21:30 pretty close guarded. It was off limits to do that sort of thing.

Even spoken to each other?

Oh you could speak but you couldn't send messages. Are you saying send messages?

I mean pass the salt over dinner or something.

We didn't have the ability, the facility for sending messages. We were only receiving messages, intercepting. To send messages you had to have a Morse code key, we didn't have that.

22:00 We were only trained as intercept operators. As I was saying there was some training done for operators to send but they were in a different area of the system. They were trained to send because they were sending messages back to headquarters.

Did you ever have any interest in learning how to send as well as receive?

22:30 No, not really. I did in my own capacity I suppose but not during my army days though. During my own time I think possibly when I first learned Morse code we had a little Morse code transmitter but not at any time during my army days did I ever have access to a transmitter. It was just a matter of reception

23:00 all the time, intercept. We were called intercept operators grade one or grade two or whatever.

I was just wondering how much of the kana code that you recall and whether you could talk us through the alphabet perhaps.

No, I couldn't do that now. It's a very long system of codes, letters, symbols. It's possible

23:30 I could get that from somebody if that might be of interest to you some other time but I don't know whether it's still available. It's talked about but no, I couldn't remember any of it now really to accurately say what is what even though all those years during the war I used to take it and write it. Now I can only remember

24:00 these Z barred hand niggly or Z barred or A bar or something like that. No, I couldn't accurately say that is part of the kana code.

During your training, you spoke before that you took it down, you didn't know what the

message was, it could have been extremely important or it could have been something minor, was that instilled in you that every message was important?

Well it was but

24:30 on the other hand when they were sending, when the enemy, the Japs [Japanese] were sending they had a system of indicating the degree of importance that a message was. I do remember that when they prefixed their message with SA [Morse code message prefix] that indicated that it was a high degree of importance attached to that message. I've forgotten what others there might have been

25:00 but they did have that system of prefixing their messages with a symbol that indicated the degree of importance of the message. I remember that one, SA but I can't remember others. If you'd come to me twenty years ago I might have been a help.

I was just wondering say within the different kinds of jobs I guess within the

25:30 **wireless unit, like you were receiving, some people had the skills to send, what were some of the other positions I guess?**

Within the unit? Well the unit was made up of tradesman but first of all you have the cooks, is this the sort of thing that you were thinking about? The cooks and there was

26:00 the orderly room staff, there were clerks working in the orderly room. This was over at base camp at Kalinga of course, we had a big camp over there. There was the orderly room, there were orderly room staff consisting of clerks. There were electricians who looked after the battery charging. There were the plumbers of course looking after the

26:30 water supply, truck drivers, they weren't called truck drivers, they were just called drivers. Don Rs [Despatch Rider], these were the fellas who generally rode motorbikes and who took messages from one part of one camp to another camp or something like that or wherever. So you could have Don Rs, you'd have transport drivers,

27:00 a variety of people there, they had people who would going to get supplies for the camp. Then you have the cooks, then you have the assistants in the cookhouse, you have the orderly room staff and you have the mess staff. These sorts of people apart from the operators and apart from the supervisors. They were mainly the people

27:30 who made up the unit all the way through. There was also the RAP, regimental aid post, and he was a fellow who was trained to some standard, I'm not too sure what standard he would have been trained to but he was always the fella you went to with sores and aches and pains, this sort of thing. We had one fellow who was always called Aspro Harry. If you went to him with a problem he'd always give you a couple of Aspros

28:00 no matter what. Fondly remembered as Aspro Harry. That was the RAP [Regimental Aid Post].

So how many actual receivers of the code were there in your unit?

I thought you might ask me that and I was just trying to think of it the other day, how many there would be in our unit. The total number possibly of the order of eight hundred in the unit.

28:30 That's almost battalion strength. But that was all consisting of all the ancillary staff as well as the operators.

How many operators though?

Operators, I'd say possibly of the order of maybe three hundred I suppose. That was at base camp. Then we were sent out as sections to different parts of the Pacific.

29:00 Those sections might consist of all up as many as sixty and as few as fifteen or sixteen. I was in a section at one stage at Nadzab which is up in the New Guinea highlands and as I remember there were only about fifteen or sixteen of us there including the cook

29:30 and including the officer in charge, the sergeant. It could have been a matter of seven or eight operators.

So within the trade group, different people had different jobs, were people paid different wages according to the jobs they did?

Yes, they were. The operators for instance, they were paid in accordance

30:00 with the degree of achievement, skill, their abilities to pass tests at different speeds. Generally after a certain period we were graded as grade two operators. I think the base pay in those days was about six and six a day. That's right sixty-five cents a day.

30:30 After a certain time in training you were graded to a grade two operator which went up to eight and six a day and then later on you could go to a grade one which was nine and six a day. That was the highest an operator could get to without going to any NCO rank. Mainly the operators themselves,

31:00 the intercept operators, they were comprised of non NCOs, NCOs being non commissioned officers like corporals, sergeants, lance corporals and regimental sergeant majors and so forth. They were there in a supervisory sort of a way. Most of our fellas that I trained with were Queenslanders although that's not quite right, we had

31:30 Victorians, New South Wales. We had every state in Australia represented at base camp. But I went down from Queensland, there were about sixty of us. That I recall only one of that sixty ever got to NCO rank. He became a sergeant later on but most of us stayed as wireless operators, grade one or grade two or just wireless operator on the base rate of six and six a day.

32:00 What was the question?

Just the different pay rates.

And of course I'm not too sure about the tradesmen themselves, how they were paid. I dare say they had a grading there too. I don't think they were graded in the way we were, grade one or grade two. I think they might have been just graded as tradesmen

32:30 or might have been a lance corporal or corporal tradesman, this sort of thing. I don't know for sure whether they had any grading within the base rank of an electrician or a plumber or a driver, this sort of thing.

Were there different pay rates between intercepting the code and sending Morse code?

No, I really can't say for sure

33:00 because I've never known what the operators, the senders, the transmitting people, how they would have been graded. I imagine they would have been graded the same way as the intercept operators, grade one or two. That's interesting, I must find that out one day. I might have some back pay coming to me.

Was it a fair system, the pay system?

Well I guess so.

33:30 I guess so for those days. I think at the time when I think about the wage I was getting at eighteen might have been nineteen and six a week or something like that at fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. So I suppose to go in to the army and get six and six a day I suppose you reckoned it was pretty good.

34:00 Seven days a week at six and six a day that's what, fourty odd, fourty four shillings a week. Probably more than I was getting paid as an office boy when I went in to the army, when I got called up. So you couldn't really decide whether it's fair or not. I suppose it was enough. Out of that money also we used to allocate money

34:30 for deferred pay. Married fellows could allocate certain of their money to a wife or you could allocate certain money to your mother if you wanted to but there was a certain amount of money that was paid in deferred pay, pay that you never actually got in hand but was paid to you when you left the army, when you were discharged. I think it was about three shillings a day.

35:00 That was held back. So in actual fact instead of getting six and six a day when you went in, you were actually getting nine and six a day but you only got six and six a day in hand. That was paid, not paid weekly either, I think it was paid monthly. So you can imagine how you had to make that string out if you went to the pub sort of thing. Beer didn't cost anything like it what it does today

35:30 of course. We used to get, mainly as far as transport on leave is concerned we would generally get a truck in to town or the local bus. I'm not too sure what the cost of that was but nothing like what you'd pay for a bus fare these days. There might have even been some concession or it might have even been an arrangement between the camp at say Bonegilla to take us in to Albury.

36:00 I think it was monthly pay and you had to string it out. You didn't have many opportunities to spend your money anyway. We had canteens on the camp but you had to pay for the beer there too but you had to be sure that you weren't going to be on parade the next day. You had to make sure that you were on a break of some period

36:30 of hours before you could go to the canteen. So you had ways of spending it.

Did any fellas ever get in to strife for having a few too many drinks when they had to be on parade?

Yes, there was always somebody being hauled in, drunk and disorderly. "Put him on a charge sergeant, drunk and disorderly." Generally somebody around town, wobbling

37:00 around town and the police, military police, the MPs, they would spot him, put him in their van, back to camp. Put him on a charge.

What did you call the military police, did you have nick names for them?

Yeah, what was it. It wasn't the dear old military police anyway. They had some name for them.

37:30 MPs [Military Police] anyway, the MPs.

What about the operators, was there a little tag name that people referred to you as?

They all had their own names I suppose, nick names. One fella's name was Speed I remember. I don't remember having a nick name myself but we all, like in any society these days, any collection of people, there's always somebody got a nick name.

38:00 **But what about the group collectively, were you known as wireys [wireless operator] or something as a collective group were you known as something?**

No, I don't think so, just operators, known as operators. I don't recall any names being applied to us. Individually yes but only

38:30 as a shift. We worked in shifts and a shift as I was saying maybe a dog watch or midnight to dawn, something like that, as shifts. The shifts were divided up as I was saying earlier on, some were as short as two hours some were six hours, some four hours.

Why the difference?

So that you all got a break

39:00 at some time and didn't work too long. Because it can be if you go on to a busy channel, a busy section taking Morse code for a couple of hours can be quite enough. You tend to get a bit tired and you lose your efficiency. They always seemed to be divided up mostly in to two and four hour shifts

39:30 to fit in with what was required on mostly training camp. I remember my shifts up in New Guinea were probably in the two or four hour shift lot. So you give the operator, the operator has a break after a couple of hours or he might, depending on what time of the day it is. Midnight to dawn

40:00 sort of thing so you didn't have to get up at four o'clock in the morning to go on shift, you'd get up at six o'clock to go on shift. Then you would do six 'til eight so you could go and have breakfast. Then a shift comes at eight o'clock and they do eight 'til midday. Then you'd have lunch. You might do another shift then. You do eight 'til midday then you're off until maybe four o'clock in the afternoon when you do four 'til six when you go and have your dinner.

40:30 The shift that had been on, they go off and another shift comes on, takes over from you at six o'clock, they might go 'til eight o'clock, this sort of thing. It was broken up in that way.

We might just leave it there because we're right on the end of the tape.

Tape 5

00:32 **Bill I just wanted to start this next stage of our interview by asking you about a few events in the war. The first was the invasion of Syria during 1941, in June of '41, was it frustrating for you to be stuck in Australia with your brother serving over there?**

No, not at all. It was something quite remote as far as I was concerned anyway.

01:00 I don't think we were aware that he was there in Syria due to security measures. There was very little said as I recall. When he came back he was able to tell us of course where he had been, names of towns, Jenin, Mersa Matruh, how's my French?

01:30 Rather an unfortunate war that with the Free French. No I didn't feel in any way frustrated by not being able to do something there. Fortunately he survived that all right but unfortunately he didn't survive the Kokoda track.

What about in early December '41,

02:00 **Pearl Harbour in early December 1941?**

Yes, of course I was not in the army at that stage, didn't go in until '42. Pearl Harbour was something that sort of brought the war closer to us, right home. It's not something that we were directly involved in really

02:30 but as it happened of course it turned out that it was what escalated America's entry in to the war. I'm sure without their entry the outcome might have been very different. It was a terrible blow for them of course, losing so many ships. As far as we were concerned, as far as I was concerned anyway, it

03:00 was just part of the war and as it turned out, to our benefit sort of, unfortunately but it was to our benefit. It forced their entry in to the war.

I'm wondering if there was an increasing anxiety that you were aware of around that time, particularly I guess in February '42, just three months later when Singapore fell?

I suppose so, I suppose there was a feeling that

03:30 they were getting closer. You never ever felt that we were going to lose the war strangely enough. You never felt that the outcome would be any different from what it was. You just couldn't imagine that we would be the loser in the war. It hasn't happened before in my lifetime. We've always seemed to come out on top no matter what the circumstances

04:00 were at the time. As far as that was concerned, as far as Malaysia was concerned, yes, there was a loss of troops through being taken as prisoners of war and we knew quite of a few of the fellas involved in that but I don't think it ever sort of changed my outlook on the

04:30 final outcome of the war. It was one of those things that was going to happen in the course of the war but I felt that we were going to win through, particularly now that American had been involved in it.

Even when they'd made it down as far as Papua New Guinea and down to Kokoda by July?

No, I don't know that I felt any particular

05:00 fear you might say in the final outcome. Like a lot of other activities, it's never over 'til the bell's rung and we certainly had a long way to go after that. That was what, February Singapore fell and the war continued on for a long time after that.

Were you feeling an increasing urgency to contribute personally, to be involved

05:30 **yourself as the Japanese got closer?**

Just I felt that when the opportunity, when I became eligible I felt that's what I wanted to do, that I should do. I don't think as an eighteen year old you feel any great urgency about it, you just felt, "Well, I'm old enough and brother's in it, I'll get in to it" and that's what I did. It's just a matter of I think feeling that that's what you

06:00 should do at the time, meet the circumstances.

At what point did you hear of your brother's death?

When I was on leave as a matter of fact. I was in Bonegilla at the training camp down there and came home on leave and while I was on leave I was saying to Michelle [interviewer] we were living in a house here on this particular site, on this block

06:30 and I came home one night, one of my nights out whilst on leave, might have even been with Sadie as a matter of fact, came home and my mother I remember she was in bed at the time and she said, "Bruce is dead," just like that. She told me that she'd had word to say what the circumstances were. Died of wounds

07:00 in hospital at Port Moresby. I think the actual circumstances might have been that he died on the track when they were bringing him back because he was shot by a sniper at a place call Gorari which is probably a good five or six days' march from Port Moresby, particularly carrying a stretcher. Four or five of the local natives, as they used to do, carry the stretchers

07:30 back and I don't think that there was any air transport available in those days. I don't think they had established an air field anywhere there. They do now of course at Kokoda but not then. I think it was a case of walking all the way back 'til they reached to a point where they could have a truck available and that wouldn't have been until they got quite close

08:00 in to Moresby. So they were the circumstances, as I said my mother just said to me when I came home, "Bruce is dead," and she had had a letter from the army, defence department, "We regret to advise" etc. Later on we had a letter from the Red Cross saying that he was buried at Bomana

08:30 war cemetery, but that's all there was to it. That was in November, 12th of November 1942. He was twenty years of age, had his twentieth birthday on the track somewhere. Twentieth birthday would have been the 30th of September. What we know is that he was wounded on the 9th of November, two months later

09:00 and he died in hospital but I don't think he did, I think he probably would have died on the track being carried back. Even if he didn't die straight away sort of thing but they just said he died in hospital. I haven't been able to obtain any records from the hospital as to his being treated there which makes me feel that he didn't die in the hospital. He was taken to the hospital but I feel he might have

09:30 passed away by the time he got there.

How did that news impact you as a young man?

Well it was quite a blow of course. It was something you try to accept in war time but at the same time when it's a member of your family it does hurt quite a bit. I remember

10:00 going back to work after the war and somebody mentioning it then and that caused me a great deal of upset and that was three or four years after. Those sort of things you don't overcome too easily. I suppose in war time it's something you must expect particularly when it's somebody involved in an infantry battalion, right up there with the action. Unfortunately that's what happens.

10:30 **Did it alter the way you felt about your own service?**

Oh no, not at all. I was in as far as my own particular part was concerned, I wasn't in a contact type of unit, enemy contact. Whilst I said we served in remote areas of New Guinea but we didn't expect to be in any

11:00 danger unless there were a few stragglers around, a few of the Japs that were stragglers. But no, we didn't come across anybody like that, no cause for alarm in that way. You always had to be on the look out, we always had our guard on duty, sentries. We had

11:30 our little campsite in the jungle. Actually it wasn't so much a jungle, it was surrounded by jungle but it was in a plantation of some sort. We just sort of cleared enough of it to set up the camp there.

Before we leap ahead to New Guinea could you tell me what inspired your transfer from the CMF to the AIF in February '43?

Just that I was eligible for the AIF.

12:00 I turned nineteen and the CMF in those days, there were some variations to it but generally speaking you couldn't serve overseas. I thought, 'I'm in the army, I might as well be able to serve overseas." I transferred to the AIF, got another, a QX [Queensland serial identification number] number. Up to that time I was given a CMF number which was a Q number, Q145855. I transferred to the

12:30 AIF, I was given a QX number. I think I felt better about being in the AIF rather than in a CMF unit where you're called up and you're more or less forced in to service. I felt better about being in a volunteer unit in a voluntary capacity. In other words I could have stayed in the CMF and stayed back here in Brisbane probably

13:00 but I chose to transfer. Probably because my brother was in the AIF although I'd have to say at that time I had turned 19 in 1943 of course he died the year before in November '42 but even so, I felt that I'd rather be in the AIF rather than, it was called the militia in those days. CMF was called the militia and the militia

13:30 didn't have quite the same ring about it as the AIF. Maybe there's a bit of an influence there.

You mean in terms of the public's respect?

I think in terms of the public's opinion and views but more I wasn't concerned about what the public thought it was just my own feelings about wanting to volunteer. Of course I had volunteered

14:00 on other occasions but they didn't like the looks of my eyesight so that was it. Fortunately I was able to transfer without any further eye test which was fortunate. I had already got in to the CMF on the basis of my medical and didn't have to have any further medical examination so transferred straight across. Just sign the paper boy, right here, okay. That was that.

Of course you

14:30 **continued on in your training in the same role.**

Yeah that's right. No change there, it's just that I was no eligible to be sent overseas in that role of an operator and I was of course sent overseas.

So your fellow militiamen signalmen what was their main interception, where were they generally working or they weren't actually actively engaged in intercepting, were they just being trained?

15:00 The fellow signalmen?

Yeah, before you transferred to the AIF what was your duty?

The same as we were doing, no change in duties at all. All trained in the same way.

Were they actually actively engaged in intercepting Japanese signals?

Yes.

From Brisbane?

Yes. This was a higher grade of Japanese signal. They were higher frequency and more powerful signal if you like.

15:30 This was our reason for being sent up to New Guinea, we were able to get a lower grade of message being sent between battalion and battalion or battalion and brigade whereas in Brisbane all we were

able to intercept was the higher grade stuff from Tokyo to Madang, Tokyo to Rabaul, Tokyo to these other places, Finschhafen or other places like that.

Because they're stronger, bigger signals?

Stronger, but they didn't contain the same,

16:00 you might say the information in their messages was more of a broad scale whereas information that you got from messages when you get closer to the enemy was more concerned with the movements of planes, movements of troops battalion to battalion, reinforcements here being sent there, all this sort of thing. So it was a help to be able to intercept those messages.

16:30 **And of course it was the intelligence staff or intelligence community who put together the overall picture based on the specific information you might be getting up close and the bigger picture.**

Yeah.

Okay, so you did spend was it almost six months in Australia before leaving, before heading for Port Moresby?

As it turned out it was probably a bit longer than that because when we finished our training

17:00 the unit we spent a short time at a small camp that we set up in Banyo, only very few of us, probably no more than about ten or so, twelve. Why we were sent there I'm not too sure because the main unit established a main camp at Kalinga at Shaw Park. Do you know that part of the world at all? You know the Kedron Park Hotel mainly possibly

17:30 but anyway out in that part of the world there's a Shaw Park and in a very big area we established a base camp where they set up aerials, high posts for all the aerials and huts with all the sets in them as we call them. So we spent some time in there. We came up from Bonegilla in May I think it was and

18:00 it wasn't until August that we were sent away. So we had those three months at base camp at Kalinga doing this sort of intercept work before I was attached to a section, called section 55 and we were sent up to Moresby. There had already been a section established at Moresby

18:30 so we were more or less going up to relieve them. We went via train to a place called Aloomba just outside Townsville and we were there for about a month waiting to get a ship over to Port Moresby which we eventually did. It was the Taroona. We were in Townsville from the 22nd of July until we left Moresby on the

19:00 Taroona on the 17th of August and we arrived in Port Moresby about three days later. During that time in Port Moresby I was detached again to another section that went up to a village in the highlands called Nadzab which was in the Markham valley. Lae

19:30 is on the north coast of New Guinea and Nadzab is up the Markham Valley. So we were getting a bit closer to the action, I'm just telling you about how we get closer to the action and it was there.

Could you describe the experience of pulling in to Port Moresby on the ship?

Yeah. First thing I suppose that strikes you is the ship that's in the harbour there that had been sunk

20:00 by bombing. It was the Macdhui. It was apart from that when you arrived at the port you became aware of all the troop movements there, all the army vehicles moving around. We went from there, we were taken from there to

20:30 what would they call it, Murray Barracks. That's where you spend some time before you are sent out to your unit allocation. I spent maybe a few days there at Murray Barracks which is a large holding centre where a lot of troops spend time there before they are sent out to their various units. Actually arriving

21:00 in Port Moresby I think the first think we noticed was this ship lying in the harbour there that had been sunk by bombing. We just pulled in to the wharf, off loaded, on to trucks, no seat belts, very dangerous, sent on to Murray barracks which is not very far out of Port Moresby. One thing you do notice is as you are driving away from the port there's a big sign across the road,

21:30 "Through these portals pass the biggest mosquitoes in the world." All the fellas standing on the side of the road saying, "You'll be sorry mate."

Was the morale of the people in Port Moresby quite high at that point?

Yeah, I thought so. I've got photos of our

22:00 camp there. It was quite a primitive life compared with base camp of course. You might be able to imagine there's our little tent set up on the hillside. Apart from a couple of bombing raids over Moresby. We actually had a picture show, an outdoor picture show, not like Yateley or all these other places.

22:30 I think it was a big sheet that they'd set up I don't know how far away but we drove there by truck

anyway. Saw a couple of movies there at various times. We were at Moresby for a while, August I went up to Nadzab and whilst at Nadzab I was

23:00 a suspected case of malaria. I was sent off to what they called a casualty clearing station which is up in the hills there not too far from Nadzab I don't think. Spent about five or six days there on a stretcher which was suspended on some posts in the ground. Actually there were a few battle casualties there too.

23:30 Of course they were fighting in the hills there, the Finisterre Ranges, Shaggy Ridge, all part of the history there of the fighting. And there were also a few malaria cases too, malaria and dysentery, this sort of thing. It was a pretty primitive sort of place, a dirt floor, stretchers fixed above ground by means of some posts driven in to the ground. I was there for a while until I went back,

24:00 until they thought I was well enough to go back, probably got treated with Atebrin or something like that.

Can I ask you while you were at Murray barracks was it strange to be in New Guinea with your brother having died there before, was it an unusual experience for you to be there?

I just took it as a matter of course. Where I expected it to be I suppose, I expected to go there. I expected to go to New Guinea. The Australian weren't involved in any

24:30 other activity other than New Guinea at that time. They had called the forces home from the western desert. They were in Malaya of course but we didn't expect to go anywhere else other than Port Moresby until later on when the war developed.

Were you able to visit his grave or speak to anyone who served with him?

Yes, I went to his grave in Bomana cemetery. I have

25:00 photos of that too. As a matter of fact my mother in law, Sadie's mother, she want to Manila after the war some time and she was going up to visit her daughter in Manila and the boat she was on stopped at Moresby and she went out to Bomana and took a couple of photos of my brother's grave. I was able to go there. I had to bum a ride with a truck out

25:30 I don't know how far I got but anyway I was able to go there during the time I was in Moresby, spend a bit of time there. It's a beautiful area, they've made a beautiful cemetery of it, much more you might say well cared for now than in those days. It was in the very early stages of development. Now what I see of it in journals and so forth is it's been beautifully built up, lawns

26:00 gardens and so forth.

Was that something that was important for you to do, to go and visit his grave?

I wanted to go there, yes. I'd like to go there again as a matter of fact but they tell me it's a dangerous area to be in now. The rascals up there as they call them can be a bit troublesome. One day I might go again, get a plane in to Moresby and bus out there or something like that. It'll be a while off yet.

You mentioned that you landed in Moresby with Section 55?

Yes.

26:30 **What was the section that you were detached to, what was the name of that section to go up to Nadzab?**

They just called it Detachment A. I arrived Moresby 55 then I went to the casualty clearing station.

Could you tell me about the, did you fly up to Nadzab, did they have the airstrip up open at that stage?

We flew up there yes. They had an airstrip there.

I've heard that's a pretty daunting flight?

27:00 Yeah, that's right. You fly pretty low level because the mountains are up here and you're flying along like this in a DC3, you know the DC3 transport twin engine with all the comforts knocked out of the inside of it. You just sit on your pack on the side of the plane. They say you had to fly at the low level to avoid the Zeros. Fortunately we didn't strike any Zeros. It was a pretty primitive sort of area.

27:30 The Japs had occupied but prior to our getting there I don't know whether you remember or ever seen any reference to it but that's where they landed, the parachute battalion landed at Nadzab and that's how the place had to be recovered, how it was reclaimed. That was a couple of months before we got there thank goodness. It was in our hands and as far as we were aware it was a safe area.

28:00 We spent some time, a little bit of an area there was cleared off in this plantation, set up our thatched hut. There might have been a hut already built or something like that. I can only remember setting up a tent where we, myself and about probably four of us in this tent and we used to do our

28:30 intercept work in a hut. As far as I recall it could have been just a native hut of some sort that may have already been established there as part of the plantation.

Was the equipment already in place when you got there?

Yes, they had a party. Somebody had been there. Maybe one of our sections had been there a day or so before us to set up the equipment. As far as I remember

29:00 the set was already in place. I don't recall having to do any work on it at all as far as setting up was concerned. So there might be some reference to it in that book there as a matter of fact. It's possible that another subsection if you like arrived there before we got there and how they got to be established in that

29:30 area I'm not too sure. Anyway they had been there and the equipment was there and we had to set up our own tent. Cookhouse was there, such as it was. It was more or less established in that way anyway. We just had to set up our tent and then go for a swim in the creek.

Did you arrive at Nadzab prior

30:00 **to the attack on Lae?**

Let me think, prior to the attack on Lae.

Because Lae was September, wasn't it, you arrived in Moresby in August?

We arrived in Moresby in August, we were in Nadzab November '43.

30:30 So Lae had already occurred.

Do you recall were there any major assaults or campaigns that you were listening for in Nadzab?

Only the parachute landing.

That you were listening for or that you were picking up signals in relation to?

That we were listening for? We were mainly concerned with any activities higher up in the highlands. Because at that stage

31:00 they had won back the Kokoda track, they were back on the north side, Buna, Gona, Sanananda, all those were back in our hands now. They were chasing them up to the north coast, further up. So we were checking on army traffic from the Japs in that area.

31:30 They also had the air wireless warning people there too, the people who were stationed, they were a very secret sort of an organization of maybe two or three fellows who were dropped in an area where they set up a watch on Jap establishments, Jap airfields and things like this. They were able to send messages back from those establishments

32:00 but that was sort of, they had watches on a separate area whereas we covered a wide area of that part of New guinea getting up towards, into that northern area, north western area of New Guinea. That's where the Japs were retreating to, up in that area

32:30 there. We were involved in watching all that type of activity wherever they sent their traffic we endeavoured to intercept that and inform our I staff of that activity. The stuff we gave them might only be by virtue of the volume of messages that were being sent which was an indication of some activity going on.

33:00 If the normal traffic from one Jap station to another is maybe four or five messages a day and then you realize that gee, he's sent thirty messages today, fourty messages, there's something going on. That's a help. Well, okay, we'll send out a plane to have a look over the place, see what's going on if possible. That sort of thing. It's all part of the scheme.

33:30 **Did you at any point interact with US intelligence officers up there?**

No, not personally. They were their own entity. We didn't have any, their main interaction with our outfit was here in Brisbane at Henry Street which was the

34:00 headquarters of the intelligence staff here. No, up there the only contact we had was we were able to make use of one of their camps after they left.

Did they leave the ice cream and donuts behind?

Plenty of that sort of stuff, yeah. No,

34:30 they left a couple of rowing boats or something like that, we made use of those.

In Nadzab I think you mentioned that malaria and dysentery were a problem, did you encounter scrub typhus at all?

No, it was something that we had to be very careful about. Always wore boots, never go barefooted. There were cases of scrub typhus

35:00 of course but none in our section there. The malaria that I was suspect to I think was probably a pretty mild case. It might have even been just dengue fever rather than malaria because we were on a daily intake of Atebrin tablets all the time which gave everybody a slightly Japanese look, a yellow appearance.

35:30 Anyhow I can't quite remember how I got to that casualty clearing station, must have been by truck. I can just remember being there but I can't remember how I got there. The records just say CCS [Casualty Clearing Station] 111. I know it was at a place called Yalu. I always refer to it as the CCS at Yalu. Didn't seem to be a very big place.

36:00 Just where exactly, it may be on a map somewhere, I must try to find it one day. It's rather strange, you can't remember how you get from one place to another. I can remember flying in to Nadzab and then from there we went to Finschhafen. I think we must have gone there by truck because Finschhafen's on the coast. We had a section there at Finschhafen, they were doing the same work as we were,

36:30 one of our own sections. They were there working on the north coast. We went there when they decided to close up the Nadzab section, we went to Finschhafen. We spent about a day or two there. We left Nadzab, arrived Finschhafen, I've got that date somewhere.

37:00 I haven't got it here. I have November to February at Nadzab. November 25 to February 16 '44 at Nadzab. During that period of three months that I spent some of that time at the casualty clearing station. Then

37:30 from then on after leaving Nadzab we went to Finschhafen and we were at Finschhafen for about nine days, eight or nine days. From there we went back to Moresby again.

Can I ask you about the quality of care that you received at the casualty clearing station?

I can't really remember much of that at all. No, I don't think I could answer that. I don't recall

38:00 any particular treatment. It might have been a case of daily temperatures and medication but I'm only surmising that. I presume that's what would happen with malaria cases there. I don't remember walking around, I was confined to a stretcher. I think just medication. I couldn't really remember

38:30 any treatment at all that I got. I imagine that's what would happen.

Why were you only in Finschhafen for nine days?

I think that was because we were then on our way back to Moresby and that was the best way to get us back to Moresby, to go up to the section up there and they organized. I'm just trying to think now, I know you're going to ask me how I got back to Moresby.

39:00 I think we must have gone back by plane from there too, I can't remember. There may be some reference to it somewhere. I know we flew in to Nadzab and to get to Finschhafen from Nadzab I'm pretty sure would have been by truck. Certainly wouldn't have gone back by truck. We would have gone by plane or boat. I'm pretty sure it wasn't

39:30 by boat. Go all round the coast of New Guinea back in to Moresby, I think we flew back. It's a shame I can't remember these things. After all it is sixty years ago I suppose.

What happened from Port Moresby or what did you do in Port Moresby?

Well we were back in Port Moresby and we were at Moresby for a couple of months,

40:00 February to April 1944 and we then embarked on the Ormiston, one of the coastal boats of those days and they took us back to Bowen on our way home.

Is that Bowen near Townsville?

Yeah, Bowen near Townsville, just south of Townsville. To Bowen and from Bowen a train back to Kalinga,

40:30 back in base camp again. We were back in Kalinga on the 13th of April 1944.

And that's where we'll hold this tape.

Tape 6

00:33 **Bill I did just want to ask you a couple more questions about your time in New Guinea. The first was whether you had any interaction with the local people while you were there.**

No. Some fellas reckoned that the longer you were there the whiter they got but no, I didn't have any interaction with them at all. I didn't see many of them really.

01:00 Why that was I don't know. Maybe it was because they were more up in the hills. I don't recall seeing too many around our area. You might say we were in a more civilized area than you'd expect to find the natives of New Guinea.

Even up at Nadzab?

No, no interaction with them at all.

01:30 **I just wanted to stay focused on Nadzab for a little bit further. Could you tell me what the set up was there in terms of the number of operators and who you worked under, the supervisor you worked under, how the system worked actually at Nadzab?**

We had an officer there and probably a couple of NCOs and operators,

02:00 I would say probably no more than about half a dozen. I've got a couple of photos of our time there and I can remember some of the names of the fellas but I would say no more than half a dozen were there at that time. Whether there were any more or less there, when we left the place ceased to exist so I don't think there was ever any great number

02:30 of operators there. I'm only sort of reflecting on numbers of fellas that I came in contact with and the photos that I've got and they only ever show a small group of operators there. Probably I think I'm pretty close to saying about five or six, something of that order.

And were you working on rotational shifts

03:00 **amongst the six of you?**

We'd be working on rotational shifts, yes. We were working on rotational shifts because I can remember I was on guard duty one night when they were working on the sets as we called it. I remember I had this Tommy [Thompson submachine] gun and I let off a blast at something in the grass,

03:30 turned out to be a snake, but you never know. So yes, we did rotational duty there. It may not have been strictly two hours on, four hours off or anything like that. It might have been something to suite the numbers that were there and the hours that we wanted to cover. I couldn't say exactly what numbers, what times but

04:00 it had to be rotational though.

Was night time a scary time in the jungle?

It's funny that you don't seem to worry too much about it. I don't think so. Age enters in to this all the time. I think we just, we had plenty of activity during the day so I suppose

04:30 apart from when you were sitting on your backside doing the intercept work but I always remember sleeping pretty well there even though it was a bit uncomfortable. As a young fella I don't think we held the same fears for some reason or other in a place like that. Yet it was very remote. But I don't remember being

05:00 unduly concerned about our safety or any surprise action. Just I think taken it day to day, a day to day action, day to day activities. I don't remember anybody being concerned that, "Hey, did you hear that last night? Do you think we're all right here?" None of that at all, no.

What did you think the night that you shot the snake, or you shot the grass,

05:30 **what did you think was going on?**

Didn't know what it was. Just saw this activity in the grass there so I had a go at it. I knew there wouldn't be any of our people there. This was at, I think it must have been dusk or something maybe early morning. I was able to see this bit of movement in this long grass, had a go at it. Woke everybody of course, came streaming out.

06:00 **How many sets were there at Nadzab?**

I would say there's probably no more than about three, something like that. I'd love to know the answer to all these questions exactly.

Would there have been a minimum number of you working at any one time, would there perhaps have been only one operator?

Never only one, there'd always be at least two working.

And should

06:30 **a busy period be picked up would people be brought on to shift to help?**

Yes, I think generally speaking the reception is better at a certain time too. Reception was generally better after midnight. In the early hours of the dark, before midnight, the atmospherics seemed to cause you more trouble than they do after. Maybe that's because there's more action going on

07:00 in the radio world you might say but it was always accepted, always taken for granted that hours after midnight were a better time for clearer reception. This was a big factor in the accuracy of the messages that you got. So those shifts were generally

07:30 greater reward you might say than the earlier ones when the static interfered with the reception and you didn't get the clearer messages that you would do later on.

What did you do for recreation to get your mind away from the job?

Oh in the place called Nadzab, at that place there, rather limited but there was a creek there and I can remember swimming

08:00 in the creek, a bit of diving activity. Wasn't a very big creek, you could just about touch the other side. Deep enough to have a swim in anyway. I'd have to say apart from having a walk, walking close by, you didn't want to go too far but apart from walks because there was a banana plantation down the track a bit too and

08:30 I can remember going out there once or twice. Mainly it was activity in the creek where of course you do your washing too. Not much else.

Did you get frustrated or bored while you were there?

Fortunately we seemed to have a few

09:00 little paperback magazines, paperback books that we could read. I suppose we filled a bit of time that way, working, reading, a bit of swimming, a bit of walking, a bit of eating. That seems to fill in the day. Pretty easy life wasn't it, hey.

09:30 Nothing else that I can remember at Nadzab. Later on I was thinking of the picture show. There was a picture show at Nadzab, that outdoor one I was talking about. I don't remember going back there. I remember going to a picture show at Moresby and at Morotai but not there at Nadzab.

10:00 **Now I'd like to leap forward again, you were talking about coming home from New Guinea and you'd made it on train down to Kalinga, did you then go on leave for a period?**

Yes, I suppose I was on leave. I haven't got an exact record of that but I would imagine we had leave. We got back to Kalinga on the 13th of April by the looks of it.

10:30 I went then on a technical training course, this is not 'til the next year. March '45 to April '45. That was when I went back down to Bonegilla again to do a technical training course but before that though, in the months before that I must have had leave.

11:00 Other than that we must have just been doing our duty in the camp there at Kalinga. That's quite a spell, April right through the year until next year. We had quite a time back there at Kalinga doing intercept work on the main stations as I was saying, Tokyo out to various other places

11:30 Could have even been Singapore, Rabaul, those places like that.

Then you went back to Bonegilla to undertake advanced training?

Just a technical training course. This seemed to be mainly concerned with portable compressors for some reason or other. Why I was chosen for that I don't know. Another fellow I went with, I must ask him

12:00 about that one day if he remembers. He won't remember much about it because he got sick while he was there and had to go to hospital. He and I were the only two that I can remember going there but there must have been others though too, half a dozen I think. We spent, how long there, I don't think we were there all that time but at the training centre

12:30 I think we were there for about a week. From memory it seemed to be centred on portable compressors. Now compressors supplied the means of lights to our camps and this sort of thing so I presume that was the idea of it all but it seemed to me to be a strange posting. I didn't have any interest in compressors at all. That's what it seemed to be all about I think, in the event that we

13:00 got posted away we would be able to assist in the setting up of the lighting system and any other area there where we could use that type of equipment.

And your overseas posting to Morotai must have come through not long after?

That's right. Well strangely enough it came through in August.

August '45?

Yes,

9th of August. Embarked on the Annui, Chinese river boat I think it was for Morotai. Now we were supposed to be on our way to, where, Borneo I think but anyway the war finished when we were halfway there, on the 15th of August so we just went on to Morotai and set up a camp there.

Did you hear of the bomb over Hiroshima before you got on to the boat?

We heard the war had finished and that they'd dropped the bomb. We expected the boat to turn around and come back home again but no, no matter all the urging we gave it it wouldn't turn round, it went straight on and we finished up at Morotai. Now there've been various stories as to where we were headed for.

Some said we were headed for the Philippines, some said we were headed for Borneo. I think it was Borneo. We had troops in Borneo at that time. A friend of mine was in Borneo for the action there. I think we were going there. Anyway they finished up in Morotai in an old US army camp there which had already been set up for us, or had been set up for their use, right on the beach

at Morotai. We arrived there on the 20th of August, went by boat. So you can see it took quite a while, it took ten day, eleven days.

And what did you find there, what was the set up like?

Well we found, we moved in to an old campsite that had been used

and we believe it had been used by the Americans. A row of tents along the beachfront with no other refinements apart from the canvas of the tents set up. So we moved in there. We had, the war was over, there was no set work to do as you call it. Nothing to do there with intercept, it was all finished.

So all we could do was swim. We played a bit of cricket on a nearby cleared area and we used to swim out off the reef because the reef used to drop away like that and there was a buoy moored off the beach. It had some sort of a planking around it like a raft arrangement. What it was for I'm not too sure. Anyway we were able to swim out to that and we did a lot of

swimming around there in the waters off the beach. We were there until January, 4th of January. We arrived there on the 20th of August and we left on the 4th of January 1946. We embarked on a ship called the Georgetown Victory

which was one of those Liberty ships they built in those days, all welded ship. From there back to our base camp at Kalinga.

I just want to ask a few more questions about your time at Morotai. When you arrived there in August was the airfield still being used at that point?

Yes it was.

Can you even estimate

the sort of numbers of people you think would have been still stationed?

At Morotai?

Yes.

Very difficult to say.

In the thousands?

Thousands probably. I remember going to an outdoor picture show there on one occasion and there were quite a few there, hundreds anyway. So they were the remnants of the occupation. Of course the Japs

had taken the place, they had occupied it. It had been retaken and so it was quite a sizeable base at one stage. All the action had ceased. I think the action from that particular part had ceased before we got there. They'd moved on to Borneo

or up to the Philippines. There was no actual warfare going on at Morotai when we got there. I've spoken to a few fellows who said they were at Morotai. I think they might have been there for the same reason as we were, the war finished and they got stuck there, nowhere else to go but home.

Can you talk about the experience of finding out that the war was over

and how the people reacted around you?

I suppose you could say a very nice feeling of relief, it's over, you know. Almost a case of who won. We were on the boat, I'm not too sure, we might have been well up towards, here's New Guinea here, stretching out there like that and Borneo's over here and the

Celebes islands in there, Halmahera, all these little islands, it's one of those in there and I think we

were probably up towards the end of New Guinea somewhere and they decided rather than go back again they'd go on. More than halfway so to speak. But yeah, great relief. We can go home now but no, we didn't go home, just went on. But all we'd heard was they'd dropped a bomb

20:00 and that the Japs had surrendered. That was the 15th of August when the war was over. That's the day they signed it I think.

Did you have any thoughts or feelings about the use of the nuclear bomb?

No, not particularly. I think generally speaking if I ever thought about my thoughts have been it's justified because it saved so many thousands of lives after. If

20:30 the conflict had gone on who knows how many military people would have been killed apart from the civilian population. I think the plan was to invade Japan. You can imagine the numbers of people would suffer through that and how long it might have dragged on, Japan fighting for its homeland sort of thing.

21:00 I know there was a lot of loss of life in that bomb, the dropping of the bomb but generally speaking I feel it was justified.

Had your attitude or opinion towards the Japanese soldiers changed through the war?

It varies a bit.

Did you find out about the treatment of the prisoners of war while you were at Morotai?

No, not really.

21:30 We didn't have any means of, well I suppose we'd hear the news every now and again. Like the old saying, you can forget but you can't forgive. What still sticks in my memory of course is the treatment they handed out to the nurses. That I'll never forgive. Those nurses, the island of Bangka where they machine gunned these,

22:00 ordered them to walk in to the surf and then machine gunned them, never forgive that. I do still have a little bit of reserve towards my feelings about the Japanese really. Generally speaking of course they are now a very friendly sort of people. They're not exactly our type of person I don't feel. They never give you a direct look. I noticed that particularly with

22:30 I don't know whether they're Japanese but a lot of the Asian peoples generally they don't look you in the eye. They are not of our type. But I get along. I've got no desire to go to Japan but then again I've got no desire to go to a lot of other places either. I think that's possibly

23:00 my feeling that I still have a bit of reserve towards them. I know it's a far bigger thing than that that we have to consider internationally but there are a lot of people who would feel the same way as I do I think, you can forget but you can't forgive.

23:30 It's one of those things, they were a pretty cannibalistic or whatever you like to call them lot in those days. Not necessarily cannibalistic but they had no regard for human life of enemy anyway. No regard for the laws or the conventions that are supposed to govern the treatment of prisoners. Same as going

24:00 on over there now of course, beheading of prisoners and so forth. Terrible.

During the war had it been a personal anger for you or a personal hate for you?

No. I don't think I ever could say that. No feeling of hate, just a feeling to serve

24:30 more or less. To do what I thought should be done. I can do my bit, I'll do it. I don't think I could ever say there was any hatred about anything or anybody. Even though we had cause to for my brother losing his life and apart from a lot of other friends of mine who lost their life. That's all war. I was never in a situation

25:00 I felt where my life was in danger. I suppose if you look at the lives of thousands of others who actually flew bombing missions or were in the actual contact with the enemy. That didn't occur to me. You might say my lot, just the way the penny falls. I was told I was going in to this unit, I could have been told I was going

25:30 in to a hand to hand combat unit if you like but no, as it turned out it turned out to be something that I found interesting and quite able to get along with, no particular feelings against anybody or anything

26:00 and an activity that I was able to come to terms with, my abilities were able to do the work that was expected of me. So no, as far as hatred is concerned I don't think I've experienced hatred about anything, pre-war, post-war, or anywhere else, during the war. Just hate to miss out on

26:30 a good cup of coffee now and then.

Is that one of the advantages of working in intelligence, having a bloodless war in a war, you

were sort of removed, one step back, one of the benefits of working in intelligence or in signals?

Yes. Of course I never worked in intelligence but worked with them but not closely to them.

27:00 We fed them with the information that we got but never worked with them closely at all. They had their I officers, intelligence officers attached to our sections wherever we went. They were part of our unit but some people that we didn't have any, I didn't have any close contact with anyway. So I

27:30 had no particular feelings about whether they were there or whether they weren't there. They were just part of the unit.

But your duties and responsibilities were secret at the time?

Yes, top secret for many years after the war too. It's only fairly recent times that that secrecy has been lifted and we can talk freely about it now.

Were you

28:00 **forced to sign confidentiality or secrecy agreements?**

Not that I recall, no. Just that we were told to keep your trap shut you know, don't talk about it and don't talk about the activities when we were discharged. Not that I recall anything, I didn't sign anything about confidentiality at all. Certainly no contracts were signed, no agreements were signed, no.

People's word was

28:30 **enough at that time was it?**

Apparently, yeah. Just don't talk about it.

Was it difficult to keep that quiet from your family or friends?

Yes I suppose would have liked to talk about it, when people asked you what you did. But certainly you were able to answer, "We're not able to talk about our activities," that's it. Apart from the fact we went swimming and

29:00 used to go to town now and again. Seriously though I didn't find it any burden. Just able to say, "Sorry, we're not supposed to talk about this." That went on for quite a number of years, 1945 perhaps up 'til ten years ago maybe, I can't remember exactly. They talk about it fairly clearly now though.

What would you say?

29:30 **You said that you were in signals?**

Yes. I always say I was in the signals during the war. This is a signals tie. That seems to be enough. If I want to enlarge upon that it's up to me. But no, I generally just say I was in the signals. Sometimes I'm asked what branch of the signals or sometimes conversation will take the line that, "You signal fellas you did this, you did that" and I say, "No, we didn't do that mate, we were something all together different."

30:00 You might get in to it then as to what you were, I was a wireless operator. But of course some branches of the signals they ran the lines from one point to another during an action so that command can keep in touch with the action as it's happening and maybe make direction. Those signal fellas they could have been very much in to the action,

30:30 in to action where their lives could have been endangered. They carried a rifle of course, we all carried a rifle, all trained to use it but they weren't in the same type of action as the infantry or artillery or tanks. They were a support type of service where they ran their wires and lines to

31:00 enable the contact to be made where the action was going on back to headquarters. That's one branch of the signals anyway. There were quite a few sides to signals, ours was just one of them. That generally satisfies people, I was in the signals.

Did you have a sense at the time that you were involved in very important work within the war effort?

Yeah we were told that.

Did you have a sense of that

31:30 **personally?**

Yes, I had that feeling that yes, it's valuable work we're doing and it's good to know that you are providing an essential or a service that can lead to even a shortening of the war. According to what's been said about us in the past

32:00 it did contribute towards shortening of the war, the service that we provided, the messages we took, the interpretation of them and the action that was able to be taken from those messages we took did lead to a shortening of the war. That gives you great satisfaction to know that whatever you're doing can have that effect.

Did signals have a particular reputation

32:30 **amongst other branches of the army, the artillery or the infantry or other groups?**

Not that I've heard of, no. I've never heard of any opinions about them.

Were there any misconceptions about the sort of work that you did?

No. Generally speaking the only association

33:00 we have now with other sides of the services is on Anzac Day and we meet within our own group of people, the signals. Otherwise it's just occasional interest with somebody who might have been in the artillery or the anti-tank or air force, navy, whatever. People don't say, "What did you do during the war?" That doesn't sort of happen.

33:30 But should the question come up as to what you were in, I just say, "The signals," and that satisfies. I don't have to go any further than that. It seems to satisfy everybody.

What does it take to be, what are the attributes of a good wireless operator?

First of all

34:00 a good understanding of the Morse that's being sent. Then a good hearing of course as it was in those days, I don't have that now. I'd be discharged immediately now. I'm not going to bother volunteering.

I'm sure you could cheat through your listening test as well.

That's right, yeah. And the ability to, it was always a help to be able to write

34:30 well, to copy the stuff well so that it's understood. Some cases that was a problem with some fellas, being able to get it down clearly, being able to write clearly. Some of the messages we took were sent in groups of, sent in numbers. This is quite apart from the kana code. They didn't send Kana all the time,

35:00 they sent figures, numbers. To be able to write them down in groups of however they were sending them. You could tell whether they were sending them in threes or fours by the little hesitation they would give between the end of a group. You know, six, seven, eight, a hesitation then they go on to the next group. Being able to write that down neatly. I suppose the greatest attribute or requirement would be a thorough

35:30 understanding of the Morse code itself, a thorough learning of the Morse code and a fair bit of patience as well and good hearing. I think that would just about sum up the requirements certainly of an intercept operator anyway. An operator who was required to send,

36:00 in those days the old Morse key was whether up and down or side to side, mostly up and down. The key was like this. Later on they developed a side to side but in our days it was only up and down like that. We never did any sending apart from sections that were trained in that aspect of it.

36:30 **Did you actually have to train your brain to be able to think on those different levels of listening, interpreting, writing and doing all three at once?**

I suppose that became part of the training yes. When you say train your brain, I think it's something that goes with the training. With those hours of training you did each day, that's all part of what you were doing,

37:00 what you were being taught. I don't recall them saying now this is a special aspect of the training, such and such. It was just a case of, this is Morse code and we'll teach you that. They had ways of teaching you that of course, they'd teach you the letters that were the reverse of others like A and then the reverse of A.

37:30 They teach you all the letters that were reverses of the other and then the letters that were similar except for one particular dot or dash so you built up a sort of a memory in that way and then of course all the numbers were also, they had a number, a message of their own.

38:00 I suppose they had their way of teaching. The way things are taught these days with any subject you do that it's divided up in some way so that parts of it come more easily to your memory. You've got your own ways too of remembering things haven't you, little systems you set up in your own mind as to how to remember various things.

Do you remember some of those systems that you used

38:30 **or ways that you used to remember?**

I think just the way in which they divided up the alphabet in to similars and opposites, the same and

opposites and ones that didn't have an opposite, all that sort of thing. Z didn't have an opposite

39:00 and Y, there's no opposite for Y but there are opposites for other letters. That helps.

What was A?

Dit da.

And what's the opposite of A?

Da dit, N.

39:30 [Morse code demonstration] B, D, Z, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, God Save the Queen, Q, R, S

40:00 T, R, U, X, Z. Now you know all the alphabet.

Our transcribers are going to love that section, that's going to be fantastic.

I'm glad I'm being a help.

Unbelievable that after sixty years that's all still there.

It's amazing how after having it

40:30 embedded in your brain so thoroughly I've had no need to remember it, no cause to remember it but I can still remember that part of it. Sometimes, I remember writing to a guy, an old army mate, I'll finish off the message in Morse code. I got the message he said.

Have you got one to ten?

One to ten,

41:00 [Morse code demonstration] one is, two is, three, four is and then you go the opposite way, six is, seven, that's nine, ten is.

Well done. We're right there on the end of that tape.

Tape 7

00:38 **I was just wondering about the camp at Moresby, was it called the eight mile?**

Yes, that's correct. Where'd you get that from?

Just a little note I've got. Can you describe it? I understand it was camouflaged a little bit.

Just a matter of some tents set on a hillside.

01:00 In some cases, we weren't the first there. Another section was there before us. I was in 55 Section and 53 Section was there before us. Some of those fellas came home and we went up there to relieve them. We had tents that sometimes were just a tent fly over a frame

01:30 but the particular tent I was in was cut in to the ground a bit to level it out and had this tent fly set up on a frame. Most of the other tents were just about the same. We had, I'm just trying to think back on to what the mess hut was. I know that the set room as we called it where we did our work,

02:00 it was a sort of thatched hut, sort of native construction type of thing. The mess hut I expect would have been something of the same. Sections generally comprised of about between fifty or sixty members. So there would have been possibly something like

02:30 ten or so tents around the place somewhere, various situations. Our showering was done by gathering water from the creek and putting it in to a bucket up high which had holes drilled in the bottom of it. So what you did was hoisted the bucket of water up, you had all your clothes off by this time, had the soap ready.

03:00 Put your water in, here she comes, then you start rubbing up. The water ran out, put some more water in, go to the creek, get some more and that was your shower. There was no reticulated water supply.

Did you bother to heat the water or were you not allowed to have fires there?

We didn't bother heating it, no. Still you look at the temperatures in Moresby these days,

03:30 any day, you don't need hot water. Anyway, we didn't have it heated. On the other sides, in the other you might say home comforts there, our toilets were slit trenches in the ground or simply some sort of a bowl system.

04:00 Reasonably comfortable. We managed to get bunks up off the ground, a framework built up off the ground. I seem to remember a couple of fellows had stretchers, might have got them local camps or something like that.

Was that a health issue?

No, I don't think so.

04:30 I've got some photos out there might be of use to illustrate just what I'm trying to describe.

So where was the camp situated, in terms of getting good signals, was it on a mountain?

05:00 Yeah, on a hillside. They had set up the aerials up on the top of the hill. So we were able to get good reception. The camp itself was set more on the side of the hill but we had the antennas or the aerials higher up on the hillside. So, pretty good reception there,

05:30 at Moresby. We did our usual shifts there.

Did they have to camouflage the aerials at all?

No, no camouflage. There were a couple of raids while we were there. As a matter of fact I was just looking through my diary, had some dates of raids there but no camouflage of any sort at all. Might have been, if there was any camouflage it was just in the nature of these nets

06:00 spread out over a tent with some webbing laced in to the net. No camouflage on the aerials or antennas.

I was just wondering if you could describe the sounds of the jungle at night?

Well I'd have to say I don't recall any sounds at all. In Moresby particularly we weren't terribly close to the jungle.

06:30 Nadzab we were right there but in Moresby, no. You've got to go a fair way to get to jungle in Port Moresby. It's sort of been well settled for a long time. The area that we were in, whilst it was not in the township itself, we're going back here to 1942, '43, '44, it was just a township. Although there was a main

07:00 street, a paved street.

What about at Nadzab?

At Nadzab of course noises there might have been birds but certainly no other jungle noises.

07:30 Birds can make a lot of various sounds. Different types of birds up there of course. Bigger birds than we have here. But I don't think you could say anything in the way of animals. I don't recall seeing any animals at all. Now I come to think of it I wonder just what sort of animals there might be there in New Guinea.

08:00 Not like kangaroos, wallabies, emus, rabbits even. Nothing like that did I ever see up there. There were no jungle noises around Moresby and in Nadzab, Morotai, bird noises I would think.

Was there some story about, I don't know if it was you or someone else, about some white ants

08:30 **boring through the wood and eating one of the men's bibles, was that you?**

Now you come to mention it there was something to do with white ants but didn't come from me though, no. They what?

People could hear them at night eating. Do you remember anything like that?

I don't remember anything like that, no.

I was just wondering, you talked earlier about

09:00 **phrases that the Japanese would start their signals with.**

Not phrases, particular signals, AHR, they would always start their message off with AHR and then they had a system of coding the importance of the signal. One I remember was SA which was very high order of importance.

09:30 I can't remember the others. But yes, they did have a system of grading the importance of their messages. So when you got an SA message coming through you attached a great deal of care to the reception.

And what about numbers versus letters, was their a difference in importance for those?

Not that I'm aware of. As I was saying, we didn't ever know the content of the

10:00 messages. We knew by the importance they attached to the heading the degree of importance but we didn't ever know the content of it. Sometimes you'd get particularly in the air traffic, if you happened to

be intercepting a message from somebody, a Jap flying, sometimes they get a bit panicky, for that matter anywhere, they would break out

10:30 in to plain language. You had to be quick to get the plain language too of course. They were sending it in Morse code but it was in plain language. Rather than in kana it was in plain language Jap.

So not knowing Japanese I assume, how did it sound?

Well we always had somebody who could speak Japanese on the I [Intelligence] staff.

So if you were taking the signal and you

11:00 **go, "Oh, he's speaking Japanese," would someone else have to take over?**

You hand him the message, "Here, this is in Japanese." He's not speaking 'okatanmayawaya' he's sending it in plain language Morse code rather than coded Morse code. Rather than sending it in code he's sending plain language. In other words if you knew Japanese you could take that signal down and make words out of what he was sending. Same as if I was sending,

11:30 "I saw a rabbit on the ground," I send that in plain language. I could also encode that so you wouldn't know what I had said. In some cases if he panicked a bit and wanted to get a message across quickly he'd just say, he would send it in Morse code and that would mean, whatever. It mean it was in Japanese language, plain language.

12:00 **Does the signal sound different?**

In signals, yes.

Does it sound different though, the signals?

No, just suddenly you take it down and think the way he rattles it off, that's in plain language you know. You just get to, I suppose interpret the difference between a regular type of coded message which comes in an orderly fashion and then all of a sudden

12:30 a message comes through not in regular coded way, it comes through as a quick little aside if you like. It might only be to say, "Oh, I'm being attacked," "I'm going, I can't stay," whatever, it's in plain language. It doesn't have a big bearing on the outcome,

13:00 doesn't have a great deal of importance attached to it, just that it is in plain language rather than code. Of course he's got all, he's supposed to send everything in code, supposed to work it out, put it in to code before he sends anything.

It sounds like there's a real musicality about the signals that there were being sent, it's musical almost in that you can pick up the difference, the rhythms.

Between coded

13:30 and plain language? Yes I suppose you could say, yes. There's certainly a different tone about it, a different urgency also. It's that difference that strikes you when you realize that he's sending in regular Morse code a coded message coming through in groups of three or groups of four or something like that and all of a sudden he's abandoned that

14:00 and you realize that he must have sent something in plain language. Sometimes they also speak plain language too but then of course you can't do anything about that. It may have been recorded by somebody else, I don't know. Mainly the plain language I'm speaking of in my case is where they sent plain language in Morse code rather than having it coded. That would be under circumstances where he hasn't got time or he's panicking

14:30 about something.

Now were the Japanese only sending signals one way or would there be times when they were having a conversation between two of them and how would you monitor that?

Yes they could be in conversation. Particularly between one small base to another small base. It could be more or less in conversation.

15:00 But you only cover one frequency. You couldn't cover two frequencies, because they're on different frequencies so you can only take one side of the conversation but you knew from the response that he was talking to somebody else. But you couldn't naturally take both sides of the conversation. In most cases except for the higher grade stuff say as I was saying earlier,

15:30 from Tokyo to Rabaul which is a series of messages just going straight out almost, "For your information, get a note of this," but at lower grade of messages it's generally messages between battalion and battalion. There again it may not necessarily be conversation but it could be a conversational sort of a message where they are asking a question and getting a response. So you knew,

16:00 not the operator but the I staff knew that there was another part to the question somewhere, conversation type of message going on. Unfortunately the operator wasn't able to tell straight away

what it was all about. All you got as I was saying was a coded message and you were told later on that there was a conversation going on

16:30 between two fellas in different locations.

If you had have known what was going on, would it be possible, there's always a couple of you working on the shift isn't there?

Yeah.

Would it be possible for the other person to be trying to find out who they were talking to?

Yeah I guess so. You could always do a search. Sometimes that was part of your shift duty, was to do a search. Sometimes you were given a particular

17:00 allocation of a frequency to watch. We want to watch this fella because he comes up every night, so and so and he might be sending from Bangkok to Rabaul or somewhere and he's regular in his transmission, so he comes up every night. But there may be somewhere somebody lese, one of the other operators can watch the other end. If we know who he sends to we can watch both ends of it

17:30 with another operator. He might be able to supply the answers to those questions then, that sort of thing. Depending on the frequency, whatever frequency he's watching, this sort of thing.

Did you have nicknames for the regulars at all?

I suppose, I think we did. But I can't remember now. I seem to recall

18:00 now you ask the question, I think we did have particular fellas we used to watch and have a bit of a nick name for them, whether they were a good operator or a bad operator. You got to recognize, sometimes if you listened to the same fella long enough you got to know as with listening to somebody's speech, you hear somebody speak often enough when you hear that person speak

18:30 even though you can't see them you think, "Oh that's so and so over there," same with the method or the manner in which a particular message is sent, he has a style that you can pick up. You know that you're on to the same fellow again because of his style.

Now I don't quite understand this frequency thing. I'm just wondering how do you know what frequency

19:00 **to choose and how do the Allies make sure they're on a different frequency to the Japanese for example, can you explain that?**

How do the Allies know?

Yeah, obviously there's all these different frequencies out there and the Japanese, how did you find which frequency they were on and did the Allies always try and be on a different frequency?

I suppose we knew what frequencies they were on by virtue of the searching that was done

19:30 where you just sit and twist the dial until you get a signal, what's that, I'll listen to that for a while. Who is that sending or who would that be. The I staff generally had an idea of the frequencies that were being used. I suppose through intelligence sections, through codebooks, they had

20:00 codebooks that would come in to their hands. They had a pretty good run down of frequencies that were being used as opposed to the frequencies that the allies might have used. So I suppose the main source of that information was from codebooks that might have been recovered from areas that were captured by the Allies and crashed aircraft,

20:30 things of that nature, from ships and so on where all that information would be contained in their codebooks. Endeavours are always made of course to destroy code books but those things do happen, they do recover these codebooks in those ways. I think that's what happens. So we were able to watch certain frequencies. We were

21:00 just given certain frequencies to watch but that's what happens I would say.

Can you describe the atmosphere when you're on a shift, when a group of men come off their shift is there a bit of dialogue between you as to whether there's much activity that night?

Yeah, sometimes you do come on and he'll say, "This fella's been going flat out since eight o'clock and he's still on there," so you

21:30 quickly change over, take the headphones, sit down, start taking straight away. It might be another occasion when you come on and say, "Is this fella doing anything?" "No he hasn't been on for about an hour now." This sort of conversation. "He was on earlier on but he's not on now and he hasn't sent much." Just comments on the frequency or the timing,

22:00 how he was sending, was he sending figures or straight out kana, was he sending in groups, those sort

of things helps the new operator coming on to get on to the message quicker.

Did you say was he sending in groups?

They might send numbers rather than letters and they'll send those in groups of

22:30 six, seven, eight, hesitation, one, two, three, hesitation, all that sort of thing. They are sending their numbers in groups of three. That seemed to be a favourite grouping, three. I've often taken groups of three myself but they also send them in fours. But they do group them. You take it down that way you know, whatever it is.

23:00 Generally you can distinguish fairly quickly as to whether they are sending threes or fours. Never much less than three and never much more than four.

Given that you don't know what the content of message is, how quickly after you've taken it down do you then pass it on, is it at the end of your shift, is it the next day or is it immediately?

No, generally

23:30 send it on, hand in all your messages at the end of the shift. Unless there's something by the importance code as to whether it could be something important and where you are and where your I staff might be because that message had to be sent in some cases somewhere else. It has to be encoded and then sent on from a place like Nadzab.

24:00 I can't recall whether we had I staff there at all. But that would have to be encoded so you could send it down to base camp either at Moresby or at Kalinga. But you can only do that at the end of the shift generally.

Just in terms of any kind of technical problems that you might have, did you have maintenance staff up there or were

24:30 **you responsible for maintaining the gear yourself?**

No, we didn't do any maintenance. We had instrument mechanics at base camps. In a place like Nadzab we would have had at least one instrument mechanic and they were responsible for maintaining the equipment. Base camps of course like Kalinga or Moresby probably have a couple of instrument mechanics. I know one particular fella was

25:00 at, Harry Hutton, Moresby I think. Anyway, yes, they did have the instrument mechanics.

Do you recall any machine failures while you were there?

No, didn't strangely enough, not that I can remember. There might have been in other shifts. Can't remember any.

You said before that just after midnight was good for signals

25:30 **because it was quite clear. Did you have different names for particular times of the day that you referred to at all?**

There's always names given to the dog watch or the dawn to, midnight to dawn but no, always just referred to as the six to eight or the eight to midnight. I think the most popular one was the dog watch

26:00 which used to be midnight to four or something like that, midnight to six or four, I'm not too sure now. That's about the only, otherwise they were just referred to in terms of the time of the day or night the shift was on. "I'm on the six to eight tonight," or, "I'm on the midday to four." Sometimes we'd try to swap our shifts if you wanted for some reason or other. One of your mates might, you'd be able to say to him, "Can you do the midnight for me and I'll do the something or other for you,"

26:30 that sort of thing for some particular reason.

What about jargon for different types of frequency, did you have different jargon for I'm getting static or, did you have slang words for that?

Jargon for different types of frequencies?

For the quality of the?

No. Just a case of describing the reception, how it was at that particular time.

27:00 When you came on the operator who had been working would say, "There's an awful lot of static around," "the reception's not good," "You'll blast your ears off" or something like that but no, that was about the only way they were described. As I've said from late at night, not necessarily midnight, maybe even have been from ten or eleven o'clock at night, the reception was always better.

27:30 **What sort of clothes did you where when you were working, must have been a bit hot at times?**

Shorts. Sometimes just shorts and shirt but always boots and socks. I don't know about the socks but we always wore boots anyway because of the scrub typhus. Scrub typhus was something you could contract through your feet, bare feet. No bare feet in the camp at all, always wear

28:00 boots. Only time we had bare feet I think was down by the creek when we're going for a swim. It wasn't looked upon very kindly.

Was that through a cut or something that you would get, if you got your foot cut is that how you would get scrub typhus?

It could be that way yes. I'm not really sure. I think it would probably have to be through broken skin somewhere.

28:30 Of course in those parts of the world you find there's a lot of skin problems, broken skin, not necessarily through cuts either but just broken skin through itching and scratching and so forth. This was how you could be affected, how you could contract the scrub typhus. I don't know too much about that but I would say that apart from broken skin

29:00 it could be through some sort of skin affect.

What were some of the, obviously you didn't know at the time, but what were some of the more exciting messages that you would have taken during the war, were you able to find out any of that after the war?

Well the most dramatic of course was the message we received, the message we intercepted

29:30 that said General Yamamoto was flying to Bougainville to inspect troops there or something of that nature. We intercepted a message to say that he was flying there and the effect of that was that American P38 Lightning fighters shot down his plane that he was in.

30:00 We claim that we had a part in that. The US claim it was one of their operators that intercepted the messages but also there were messages, intercept work was being done by UK [United Kingdom] troops, the US and ourselves so it's still a bit of a matter of conjecture as to who actually. I think in that latest edition of our 'Inkemmaink' I made

30:30 comment to our editor about that. He said, "Yes, I agree." I said to him that the message was, I had read an article about where the US had intercepted the flight of this general and I said I thought we had a hand in that and he said, "Yes, I agree." But he said, "The US and the UK could also been intercepting, could also have intercepted that message. The important

31:00 thing was that we did shoot him down."

So were you told at the time that you possibly had?

No, we weren't told at the time. I'm finding it hard to remember just what the time lapse was between our taking of a message and getting any response to the importance of the message we'd taken. Sometimes as I was saying earlier the importance

31:30 was attached to the volume of messages that were being sent from a particular station to another, one particular operator to another. Where in one part of the day this fella might only be sending two or three messages an hour and all of a sudden his volume of messages goes up to thirty or so. So we know that he's busy this boy, something's happening. You can report that sort of activity

32:00 and they can take some action on that. Some action by virtue of sending out a spotter plane or something to see what sort of action is going on. Might be a movement of ships, might be a movement of planes, might be a build up of stores, you never know. Those sorts of things lead to some action being taken on our part then.

Did you get a bit of a buzz

32:30 **when someone came on the air?**

Yeah, we did really. Sometimes it may have happened after you've been sitting there for an hour. When you say come on air, you mean that sort of thing do you? Yeah, you get a frequency to watch. Some were on search, some were set on a frequency. "Watch that frequency we know there's a bloke there going to come on at eight o'clock," and you sit and you sit and you listen and all you're getting is

33:00 and then you hear this, hello, here he comes, he's on time or he's an hour late. So, whacko, I've got something to do. Yes, it does give you a bit of a buzz to know that at least you're on to something that's proving of benefit, that you're actually getting in to the action. Something's going to happen. It might only be

33:30 a small time message but on the other hand you don't know. All you do is concentrate on getting it down as accurately as you can in the middle of all the activity, atmospherics that might be going on.

Did they generally only send the message once or would they repeat things?

Sometimes they were asked for a repeat by the receiving station because they might be having the same atmospheric problem that we'd be having. They'd be having the same problems in receiving as we would be

34:00 in intercepting. So they could as for sections to be repeated.

I was just wondering if you could describe the atmosphere when you're on a shift. Is everyone very quiet, are you not allowed to speak, what's the discipline involved?

I guess yes, you have to be quiet. The general atmosphere is you can hear in the background Morse code going on because there's about a dozen sets, in a base camp like Kalinga there's about a dozen sets.

34:30 Even at Moresby, might have been half a dozen, ten, eight, sets. And generally the atmosphere is quiet but you can hear in the background behind it all, you can hear little Morse code signals that are loud enough to come through the ear phones of somebody receiving the message. But apart form those sounds generally the atmosphere is pretty quiet.

35:00 Unless it's the duty tea break coming in, guys bringing the mugs. No, that's about the scene I would say, everything's pretty quiet. You're just sitting there, headphones on, waiting, dit, dit, here he comes.

I might just ask you again what Kana code means?

Apparently Kana means

35:30 Japanese for Morse. So I'm told by that book over there. I really have not known what kana stands for. I understood it to be a Japanese word for something but apparently it's the Japanese word for Morse code.

I was just wondering having been someone that listened to frequencies in the war time, you look at surveillance now on a global perspective, what do you make of the

36:00 **new technology for monitoring?**

Heck, Morse code's out as you're probably aware. Morse code is no longer used for communication. All sorts of technologies now, visual and sound. We're in to now of course internet communications, telephone,

36:30 but no Morse code. So it's a big step away from what it was when we were doing our intercept work.

Does it surprise you how fast?

Oh yes. I suppose it's been a while though. Somehow the glamour you might say has gone off the job. The old Morse code has a certain air

37:00 about it and Mr. Morse himself would be disappointed I'm sure. Nowadays, we still have a regiment up at Toowoomba, Kalinga. They are doing the same work now as we were doing. They call themselves 7th Signal Regiment. They used to have after their name, "electronic warfare."

37:30 Whilst we have been invited to visit the camp at Kalinga we don't get too close to what they're actually doing or the way they're doing it. But obviously they're not, they have advanced a long way beyond the old Morse code intercept.

38:00 So it's still secret in that way. There's still a measure of secrecy about intercept communications. I think it's probably mainly on a electronic basis. I don't understand this too clearly myself but I think it's probably electronic, internet

38:30 type of communications.

Did you think there was a little bit of romance about the old days?

I think so. When you think back on it of course. I don't suppose we thought of it as being too much of a romance. Yes, it has memories about it and a certain air about Morse code, how widely it was used and in different methods. It was used by flag signaling, A,

39:00 B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L. this used to be the common form of signaling between ships within visual range of each other. Then there's the Morse code sending on the key. But yes, I feel that a bit of the glamour has gone out of it all. Not the personal touch that there used to be.

39:30 But all for the better I suppose.

Okay, great, we might just leave it there and change the tape again.

Tape 8

00:35 **So finally after a lot of swimming and waiting around, you were able to make your way home in January 1946?**

That's correct yes.

Can you tell me how you got home?

We went by boat from Port Moresby, first of all have you got the part where we went from

01:00 Morotai back to?

No, just tell me, I just know that you came home January '46.

We were at Morotai. Did you know we went to Morotai? I think I told that to Simon [interviewer]. We went to Morotai in August, on the 9th of August 1945. The war finished on the 15th of August 1945 and we were on route to somewhere up there, some say it was to

01:30 the Philippines.

You did actually go through that but when it was time to come home because you said you spent a lot of time there just waiting around to get back home, so when you got word to leave can you go from there?

Yes. We left Morotai on a ship called the Georgetown Victory which was an old welded type of ship and we left there on the 4th of January,

02:00 from Morotai on the 4th of January 1946. And according to my records here we got back to Brisbane on the 5th of February. That seems a long time but when you're coming by boat I suppose it is a long time. Anyhow we came back to Brisbane and we got back here on the 5th of February, went back to the base camp then there was no activity, it was

02:30 just a case of disbanding. Discharging people who wanted to be discharged. Some elected to go to Japan in to the occupational force. We were given that opportunity if we wanted to go, British Commonwealth occupation forces in Japan but I decided I'd come home. So that brought us back here to Brisbane and from there it's a case of waiting round until

03:00 the discharge time came. Now discharge time, your period of discharge time, your seniority was based on certain points that you had accrued by virtue of your health, any injuries, any illness, your time served away from home, this sort of thing. So on that basis I eventually

03:30 was discharged on the 21st of March 1946 at Redbank Discharge Depot. That was it. I was discharged with medical classification D. I had conduction deafness, chronic Otitis Media [ear infection] in the right ear it was. So I was

04:00 medical classification D which is not such a great health classification but good enough to get me out anyway. So from there, discharged from Redbank on the 21st of March 1946, given our parts of the uniform. I got the old army hat there and a couple of other things.

04:30 The kit bag, haversack, backpack, probably had other things too which over the years have been lost. Some people were issued with a suit which distinguished them as being an ex-service person. A blue coloured suit or something like that but I decided against that, I didn't like the colour.

05:00 So that meant I was free to go home. I had my discharge papers. I had them out a little while ago, showing my discharge certificate. Any pay that was accrued by way of deferred pay and that was it, that was the end of it.

Must have been good to get that deferred pay?

Yeah, it was about three shillings a day over a period of about nine hundred days. So add that all up. But

05:30 I'm pretty sure it was paid either in to a bank account or something like that. I think that's the way it amounted. Anyway, I was there from June 1942 to March 1946. Three years and nine months.

06:00 Probably, over nine hundred days anyway.

Did you have any idea what kind of career you wanted to have after your service?

Well I went back to my old employer that I was with when I went in to the army. A firm called Noise Brothers Sydney limited. They were in Elizabeth Street, they had a Sydney office.

06:30 And I had decided that I'd like to do architecture. However that changed because I was doing my training through the rehabilitation scheme for ex-service people and somehow or other for some reason the architectural course wasn't available to me. So I decided first of all I'd do the drafting. I did drafting

07:00 down at the college. You did drafting under the scheme until such time as you were able to get employment in that training scheme. That happened to be at Evans Deakin. Evans Deakin were a big ship building firm over on the south side, Rockley way. I think the boss I was working for at Noise Brothers, he had a good pal over at

07:30 Evans Deakin. Old Deakin himself, might have been Dan Evans. Anyway, put a word in for me and he got me a job as a draftsman at the end of my three months training as a draftsman. The scheme was that the repat [repatriation] people would pay a certain percentage of my wage and the people I worked for would pay the remainder. That sort of balanced out until eventually after you'd been working as a draftsman for such

08:00 a long time, such and such a time with the company that employed you, they paid all your wages. To start off they might have paid you thirty per cent and repat paid seventy per cent and then it gradually balanced in the other way so that the longer the time you worked for this employer, the more wage he paid you. It might have changed

08:30 every month or ever couple of months so that eventually your employer would pay your full wage. Now I worked with Evans Deakin from about, I went back to Noise brothers 1946 and I was with them until, then I went to full time training at the college, drafting and then from there I went to

09:00 Evans Deakin. At Evans Deakin I decided I'd do mechanical engineering because they of course were a mechanical engineering firm. They were ship building, they were building all sorts of rail cars and things connected with mechanical side of the world rather than anything else. I wasn't particularly sold on that but I couldn't do

09:30 architecture so I thought I'd do that. Anyway went to Evans Deakin. During the time I was there I could see that there might have been some work in the civil engineering side of things so I changed from mechanical to civil. I was doing all my study at night down at the technical college. I knew a fellow over at the city council, told him that

10:00 I was working at Evans Deakins which was rather difficult for me to get to from Indooroopilly, train to Corinda, train down to Yullundry, train down to Rockley, three trains, no cars you know. So I changed over when I went to, I was working at Evans Deakin and then I knew a fellow at the city council who said, "Look we need some fellas over here because we're get in to the, need somebody in the tramway system." So I told him I was doing civil engineering

10:30 and he said, "There'll be an opening over here, I'm sure." So I went across to the city council. As part of my civil engineering course, studies, I did surveying and so I was then employed at the city council for a while as a draftsman but in the main I did a lot of the survey work for track relays, of curves

11:00 and straights and new tracks. A lot of the new track work out at Camp Hill way, out at Chermside way, this sort of thing. I was doing the survey work and design work for the relay and for the construction of tramway systems. Now in 1969 after they had quite a massive fire at the Paddington depot they lost I think it was about sixty-nine

11:30 trams in the Paddington depot fire. The Paddington depot was built on a very steep slope of ground and the tracks in the depot were all supported on very high piers, posts and in the course of a fire the system, the flooring collapsed, the posts collapsed and all these trams fell down in to the, underneath the depot floor. That meant they were

12:00 short of trams straight away. They had to buy some buses quickly from Sydney which they did but the decision was taken them to eventually fade out the trams. The last tram ran in 1969. They converted to buses. Now that meant that I did not have any more work to do on tram track design, there were no more trams.

12:30 **Can I just ask you a few things about the trams?**

Yes.

How extensive was the tram network, how far out of the city did the tram network go, the lines?

Well when the tramway system finished there were various termini. There was a terminus out at Mount Gravatt, out at the Holland Park, way out there at Holland Park shopping centre. In the other direction Chermside

13:00 went out to about Hamilton Road, somewhere out there. And Toowong, the system came out here up Digging Street, past the cemetery up the hill to Digging Street. Rainworth, went along there to Rainworth and Balmoral, went right out there along Riding Road just about to Oxford street Balmoral. So it was very extensive.

13:30 **Did it surprise you that they scrapped the trams just because they lost sixty-nine, it seems like more expensive to get rid of all that track that had already been made?**

I think there was also another argument too, they reckoned with the increasing volume of traffic that the trams were an impediment to the traffic system. Now whether that's right or wrong I've yet not quite made up my mind because we still have our traffic jams,

14:00 we still have people traveling by their own cars and I think if trams were still available a lot of those

people would still use the trams because you know exactly where it's going to start and where it's going to finish. So anyway that decision was taken to introduce buses to the system and I couldn't see myself getting involved in buses, not when I was more concerned

14:30 with the civil engineering side of things. Anyway when I was working with the council I met a fellow up town who used to work with the city council and he was then working with the electricity department. The electricity department at one time was part of the tramway system. It was called the transport and electricity department. I met him up town and we got talking and he said, "Look, we're embarking on a new power station construction job.

15:00 One was being built at Swanbank but we're starting on one at Gladstone, would you be interested in working with us?" "Too right." So that's how I came to start employment with the Southern Electrical Authority of Queensland. Subsequently the SEAQ [Southern Electrical Authority of Queensland] was divided up in to a construction and transmission section.

15:30 The construction section was called QEGB [Queensland Electricity Generating Board], transmission was called South East Queensland Electricity board. They looked after transmission and the section I was in, QEGB, Queensland Electricity Generating Board, they built the power stations. So that suited me right down to the ground because I was studying civil engineering and I was able to get a job there

16:00 in contract supervision of the construction of power station at Gladstone. I stayed in that job 1970 to 1986. I retired in 1986 at the ripe old age of a hundred and, no, sixty-two. From that time, from 1986 I have been

16:30 retired.

You've done a lot of work with RSL [Returned and Services League] though haven't you?

Yes I have. Of course I joined the RSL some years ago whilst I've been a returned serviceman for all those years. I had not joined the RSL but I did, I joined the RSL and eventually found myself in a job there as secretary.

17:00 That has kept me pretty busy for the last seven years and also in addition to that joined the local Probus club, Toowong Probus club. There again, a willing horse, found myself as treasurer of the Probus club. So in all I've been kept pretty busy with secretarial work for the RSL and the treasurer's job for the Probus club apart from family interests.

17:30 So I'm quite happy in the life I lead at the moment.

Is there quite a network of men that were part of the Australian Special Wireless Group?

Is there a network? Yes there are still some of us around. We have our reunions on Anzac Day and we march as a unit on Anzac Day. Not many of us mind you, at the most, last Anzac Day, we had AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] in our unit also.

18:00 They were wireless operators. They didn't leave Australia of course but they served over in Western Australia, up in north Queensland. There are still some of those AWAS around in Queensland and also some of the men. We have a reunion on Anzac Day and we march under our banner, ASWG [Australian Special Wireless Group]. I suppose last Anzac Day we wouldn't have had more

18:30 than maybe eight, something like that. Of those there were about half of them were the ex-AWAS. We've lost quite a few because the aging process takes over. I haven't got in to that stage yet, said he, touch wood. Then also we have one of our members who lives in Melbourne, he comes up from Melbourne for a holiday at Mooloolaba.

19:00 So we have a little get together up at Mooloolaba. He comes up every year in August, we get a few of the fellas together and the girls, whoever likes to come along and have a reunion up there at Mooloolaba once a year. We're kept in touch with each other by virtue of a news bulletin called Inkemmaink and that's published by some fellas, ex-ASWG

19:30 fellas in Melbourne. Steve Mason is one of them, he's the president. We've got a treasurer down there, Dick Thomas. They, together with some committee people, they put together this newsletter and that's published, oh, once a quarter, something like that. That keeps us informed on the activities of people throughout Australia in other sections of the ASWG. There are members living

20:00 in the west, some in South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria. We've still got a few members still around.

Can you tell me what 'Inkemmaink' is again?

Inkemmaink is the phonetic for I M I. Ink, M is Emma and I is ink, ink emma ink. Every letter has a phonetic sound like A, ack, able.

20:30 That changed, used to be ackack, now I think it's able. Anyway, same as ink emma ink is I M I which actually in the Morse language that means repeat, they're repeating the bulletin. It comes out, these fellas are very good. They take contributions from people who like to write to them. Report on the Anzac

Day activities, report on any little reunions they've had in their

21:00 own state. The AWAS have a little lunch every now and again and they report on that. All that put together to make up this publication that comes out to us about once a quarter. It's always very good to keep in touch. Of course it also tells us those that have passed on as well. It's very interesting to get.

So during the war the work you did was obviously very top secret and you weren't allowed to speak about it for a long time but can you

21:30 **just give us if you can a little brief history about some of the major contributions that the Australian Special Wireless Group gave to Australia? I know that they picked up a lot of the raids in Darwin and so forth, do you want to speak briefly about that?**

I don't think I could be too specific about that. If I have heard I'm afraid I can't recall.

22:00 All I can say is that it's been acknowledged that our work did contribute largely towards the shortening of the war. Some have said by a couple of years. But what specific messages we got that were of terribly great importance, I have mentioned this one about the Jap general being shot down but no, I'm sure there are lots of other very important messages that were taken, were intercepted

22:30 and I'm sorry I can't recall any that come to my mind. Perhaps I could get that information if you'd like at some future time.

That's okay, I just thought I'd ask the question. So what does Anzac Day mean to you personally?

Anzac Day? Oh, it's a day of remembrance of course, family been involved in it. My father was World War I, my brother was World War II, we lost him during World War II and it's a great day for getting together

23:00 with those fellas that you spent so much time with during those years. It's a very important day in my book. Our sub branch spends the morning at an early morning ceremony down at Toowong, that's our sub branch. We have a service down there which lasts for about half an hour, half past six

23:30 'til seven o'clock Anzac Day morning. Of course the Queensland University regiment is represented. We have a little march up Sylvan road in to the park and the bands from the Queensland University regiment is always there and after the service we hold what's called a gunfire breakfast which is held at the QUR, Queensland University Regiment headquarters

24:00 in St Lucia. That's always an important part of Anzac Day too. After that breakfast, off in to town, meet up with our ASWG people, whoever are going to attend, meet in George Street, hold our parade and have our banner. These days we generally have people, young people from some

24:30 of the colleges or some organisation carrying the banner for us. Then generally that finishes, the parade starts at ten o'clock and we might start off about half past ten being so far back and it means we're finished by eleven o'clock round about and we all then meet down at the Irish club in Elizabeth Street and have lunch down there. So that's always a very good day, a very important day for us.

25:00 Unfortunately a few of us got sick after our last Irish club dinner. There were about twenty of us down there at the Irish club on that occasion and I reckon about ninety per cent of us suffered in some way, diarrhea or, terrible, vomiting, wasn't very good. We reported it to the Health Department.

Can I ask, do you wear your father's and your brother's medals on Anzac Day?

No, just my own. I've got five medals

25:30 and I reckon that's enough. If I hadn't been a serviceman myself of course I'd be entitled to wear my father's or my brother's but no, I've never thought of wearing either my father's or my brother's medals. In a lot of cases my brother's medals would be much the same as my own excepting he has got one from the Middle East,

26:00 from the Syrian campaign and possibly also his own perhaps 2/31st Battalion medal. No, I've never thought of wearing either his or my father's medals.

How do you feel about grandchildren wearing their grandfathers' medals on Anzac Day?

I think I'd prefer to keep it to the servicemen themselves really. I know

26:30 some of our own members bring along their sons, grandchildren, daughters. Personally until such time as the numbers have dwindled to an extent where they're not enough of us around I feel that it should be a service for ex-service men and women. I think there's still enough

27:00 of us around to be able to do that. The kids can show their remembrance as they do at schools, ceremonies, other services but my feeling is the parade should be kept, it dignifies it more too I feel to have just the service people in the march. Some of them have to use the jeeps. A couple of our people have to drive in jeeps, others have to, there are others from

27:30 Greenslopes Hospital and others driving taxis and so forth but generally speaking I think it should be kept to the ex-service people themselves.

Can I just ask perhaps during and just after the war, how did the men regard the women that were in signals, was there any

28:00 **rivalry, friendly rivalry even?**

No I think as a matter of fact it was a good thing. A lot of them met their wives there. Some of them married. I can think of some cases where they have married the AWAS. I didn't feel that there was any rivalry because they served in Australia, they weren't able to go overseas of course. As I said, they served in Western Australia,

28:30 in Victoria at Mornington, over in Perth and up north outside Townsville I think it was. No I'd have to say, never any thought of rivalry. I thought of it more as a friendly get together so to speak. I didn't feel that they were stealing our jobs. That's the way sometimes

29:00 things are looked at with women coming in to the work force. In the case of the army, no, never looked on it that way.

Do you feel that the Australian Special Wireless Group has received the proper recognition for the work that you all did in the war?

No, I don't think so because we were top secret to start with.

29:30 When you hear the commentator on Anzac Day announce, "This is the ASWG. They did intercept work during the war," that's about all you get. I suppose that's all you can expect because behind us there's coming some other unit that deserves recognition. I don't know really whether we should get any greater recognition than we get now.

30:00 One day perhaps. That book there written by one of our people, it's not a sort of general best seller. It's been sold within our unit but as far as recognition, I don't know about other units either. There might be other units that think, "After all we were the main spear head at such and such an attack," but I think as time

30:30 goes on there might be more written about the importance of the work we did. Certainly because of the secrecy attached to it that probably got us off to a slow start. We're not concerned about it though.

If there is any benefit that can come out of being a part of a war, what in your mind helped shape you as a man in terms of your war service?

31:00 That's hard to say. I'm glad I was part of it. I'm glad I was able to join the army, to meet the fellas I met, to be able to make this association with other people, to have this friendship. I still have close contact with quite a few of those people either by this

31:30 bulletin. So it certainly has added interest to my life and satisfaction in that I was able to be part of it. So I don't regret any moment at all that I spent in the army. As far as the war was concerned well of course you have regrets about first of all losing a member of the family and other friends too, close friends

32:00 who didn't make it back but that has to be unfortunately with war. My own part I've never regretted having been in it. I think in all it gave me satisfaction.

Do you think being given so much responsibility at a young age gave you a confidence that you might not have been able to get just in civilian life?

Probably so.

32:30 There was more responsibility thrust on other shoulders than mine. I never achieved any rank. They were keeping me for later on I think. The only responsibility I had was of course with the work that I was doing in the work with the intercept work.

That was a huge responsibility though.

That was a responsibility.

33:00 So that added to the interest of course and to the satisfaction but as far as you say creating a better person later on. I suppose it did add to your self-confidence in other activities and being able to say that you were part of it rather than have to say, "No, I wasn't able to join the army, I wasn't accepted,"

33:30 that would not be a good thing for me, as far as I am concerned. There are a lot of fellas who have had to say that through no fault of their own, through some medical condition but I suppose I could say I was lucky in that I was able to join and have that satisfaction in spite of the medical condition I did have.

Are there any final words that you'd like to say? Why have you decided

34:00 **to speak to us today and be a part of this archive?**

I think it will be of value to people later on, in later years. I hope what I've been able to say will be of value. I think we have a message to leave for other people, for young people and I think it might be of benefit in that way.

34:30 The army itself as I've said was a source of some training for me in confidence, I think you've mentioned that and I found that it does give me great satisfaction to be able to say that I served. Perhaps whilst some people may say, "Waste of time," I don't look upon it that way.

35:00 I've spoken to a couple of people, one particular person said, "Oh we had a great armchair ride, it was good, I don't regret it." I don't say it was an armchair ride but nevertheless fortunately we had it easier, put it that way, than a lot of combat sections. We were lucky in the respect that whilst we didn't have a direct hand in it, we were posted to a unit

35:30 which was not directly a combat unit but one that played a vital part in the outcome of the war. I'm grateful for that and I appreciate being able to speak to you about those activities.

Thank you very much, Bill. It was lovely speaking to you today.

INTERVIEW ENDS