

Australians at War Film Archive

Neville Wintin - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

- 00:30 **Thank you so much for your time today. Let me begin by asking you to give me an overview of your life from when you were born to where you are now and answer it in about five to ten minutes.**
- In the first instance I was born in Summer Hill at Sydney.
- 01:00 I don't remember much about that. Then I lived with my parents in the Marrickville and Dulwich Hill area. I went to the Dulwich Hill Public School and that went on until I was approximately twelve years old. Then my father, who was out of work because there was a depression on at the time and he was finding it
- 01:30 hard to make ends meet in Dulwich Hill and Marrickville - Dulwich Hill actually was the last place - he was told that if he came to Cronulla there was a chance that he could make a few bob fishing. So the move was made to Cronulla and that was when I was twelve years old and that was back in 1932. When we got to Cronulla I then went to
- 02:00 Hurstville Technical School. That went on until I was approximately fifteen and I went for a postal exam and was able to pass the exam and at fifteen and a half I then was employed at Haymarket Post Office as a telegram messenger. That went on for about six months and
- 02:30 I was transferred to Cronulla as a telegram and telegraph messenger. Besides doing telegram deliveries we also had a manual telephone exchange at Cronulla in those days. I would do one week on the telegrams and then one week on the manual telephone exchange of a night. That went on until
- 03:00 I was approximately eighteen and I went over to Kogarah to work as a postman. It was there when I decided it was time to enlist. My mate and I went to the Arncliffe Drill Hall and we were told that it would be a couple of weeks before we would hear from the army to say that we were enlisted.
- 03:30 During that two weeks my father, who then was working at the National Cash Register Company, came home and said he was in conversation with one of his workmates who knew a Lieutenant Arthur Henry and Lieutenant Arthur Henry wanted personnel who could handle Morse code at approximately twenty words a minute or higher. I was able to do that because I had
- 04:00 joined an amateur radio club in Cronulla and the first thing I learned was the Morse code. I was able to practice at the Cronulla Post Office. Arthur Henry decided that he would like to meet me the next morning at Victoria Barracks which I did and that morning I was in the army. Very smart it was. I was then a signaller in 4 Special Wireless Section. We all gathered at the
- 04:30 showgrounds and I suppose after a week at the showgrounds we were moved to Seymour in Victoria where we began our training. That went on from approximately the end of June, I was enlisted into the army on the 11th of June, 1940, and that went on until around about December that year in 1940 when we were then told that we were going overseas. We left
- 05:00 Seymour camp and we boarded the Queen Mary. We caught a train down from Seymour to Darling Harbour and got onto a ferry and onto the Queen Mary and the Queen Mary left on approximately the 28th of December, 1940. The Queen Mary couldn't go to the usual ports that the smaller boats went to. Incidentally, we were in convoy when we left Sydney
- 05:30 Harbour. We had the Aquitania, the Mauritania, the Awatea and we were escorted by the HMAS Canberra. The Queen Mary couldn't dock where other boats could so we had to go to a little harbour called Trincomalee not very far from Colombo. There were transferred from the Queen Mary to a Dutch vessel called the Slamet.
- 06:00 The Slamet then took us to the Suez Canal to Port Tewfik where we unloaded and we were trained should we say to Egypt to a camp called El Amariya in Egypt. There we established ourselves for some months and trained hard. We moved to another camp not far away called Ikingi Maru. We got

- 06:30 ourselves ready. We were a mobile force so the technicians had to install receivers in the trucks so that we could sit in there and receive messages and be mobile at the same time. Everything was arranged for us and we were off to Greece. We boarded the Breconshire from Alexandria harbour and we landed in Port Piraeus which is the port of Athens.
- 07:00 We went by truck to a place called Glyfada which is now the international airport for Athens. We stayed at Glyfada for a couple of days. We had twenty-four hours leave in Athens, then it was off to where we didn't know. We just hoped for the best. We went to the furthest point in Greece where we could see the snow-capped Mount
- 07:30 Olympus. By the time we got there the Germans had advanced and they were coming in from all sides so we weren't there for very long until we had to pull back because they were coming in from the flanks. We gradually pulled back and eventually, after quite a few days, we were evacuated from
- 08:00 Greece, once again from Piraeus, we were evacuated in a little coastal boat called the Elsee and we were taken to Crete. We were in Crete for the best part of three weeks before the invasion of Crete by the parachute troops. Fortunately we weren't where the parachutists dropped. We were in a little town called Chania.
- 08:30 Down below us we could watch this huge armada of parachute troops being dropped. Before we could blink we were surrounded by gliders that gradually came in and crashed all around us. It was a rocky terrain so the gliders couldn't land safely so they crashed. Not all of them were killed in the crash so we had the Germans all around us. That went on for quite a while.
- 09:00 I can tell you more about our job. We intercepted a lot of messages. One of the messages we received didn't do us the world of good was from a plane flying over us, "Below us we can see a whole set of high aerals, shall we destroy them?" Much to our relief we heard the answer, "No, we will capture them." After a while this place was also overrun so the evacuation stated
- 09:30 again. We were taken by truck to Suda Bay and then the walk across the mountains began; the trek across the mountains. We had to cross from one side of Crete over to the other side to a little coastal fishing village called Sfakia. It was arranged that the navy plus troop ships would be waiting there to evacuate us but we
- 10:00 had to be on board by three AM because that was the deadline. We did board the boats. I can tell you a lot of stories of hazardous stories there. We did eventually board the boats. We left at three AM. We had a bombing attack out at sea where HMAS Perth got a bomb right through it. It didn't destroy it but it slowed it down a bit. We were unharmed. We landed in Alexandria and then after a couple of days of
- 10:30 relaxation and rest we went to Syria. We arrived in Beirut and began our operations from the Grand Serail which is a very big building in Beirut and where the armistice was signed with the Vichy French. We intercepted messages for approximately two weeks in Beirut, then we were fortunately taken up into the higher mountain area above Beirut to a little village called
- 11:00 Souk El-Gharb. There we took over a very big home where we were able to have sleeping quarters and up top was a set room for our sets. It was a magnificent spot and cool. It was lovely and cool. In fact, we got snowed in for a while. It was much better than down in Beirut where it was so very hot. Then around about January 1942,
- 11:30 it was decided that we would be brought back to Australia. That is what we thought at the time. We found out later we were to go to Java. The evacuation or the movement began to go back aboard an old battered French vessel called the Mendoza which broke down on the way to Colombo fortunately because
- 12:00 we were to pick up the Orcades at Colombo and go to Java. But luckily we missed the connection because when they got to Java and unloaded a couple of 2/2nd machine gunners and some pioneers, the Japs [Japanese] were there and the boat had to beat a hasty retreat. Fortunately for us we weren't on board because we might have been unloaded. So the Orcades returned to Colombo and by that time we were waiting and we
- 12:30 Boarded the Orcades and went back then to Adelaide. We were billeted by a lovely family. My mate and I were with a lovely family in Kensington Gardens in Adelaide. After a couple of weeks there, training still, we had our home leave. We went to a place called Park Orchards which is close to Ringwood in Victoria, a bus ride, and
- 13:00 from Park Orchards we had our two weeks home leave and then came back to Park Orchards. Then it was decided that as we had done a good job with ninety-nine personnel intercepting messages and passing on valuable information that they would make our section, say 4WT Section or 4 Special Wireless Section, they would make it into a larger unit of some four hundred or so. That is when some
- 13:30 of our ninety-nine moved to Bonegilla to begin training. But in my case I was one of twenty-four, they were not all operators they were drivers and technicians, but I was one of twenty-four that travelled up to Darwin and we went to a place called Winnellie (it wasn't far from Darwin itself), we set up a camp and began to get everything ready for what was to be 51 Section of the Australian Special Wireless

Group.

- 14:00 We intercepted literally hundreds of Japanese messages from Winnellie. Then around about October some of the young recruits came up to relieve us. Our CO [Commanding Officer] decided that although they could handle the Morse code they weren't experienced enough to immediately take over; they sat on the sets
- 14:30 with us. After six weeks they became very competent and then Ralph Thompson decided it was OK and they could take over. Then I returned to Bonegilla but when I got back most of the girls and boys had had their training and they were pretty well up to it. I had no real input into training the younger troops. Then after a
- 15:00 few months at Bonegilla they decided they would send a section over to Western Australia to a place called Queen's Park. I was one of the crowd that went over to get the place ready and to get it all organised. That was staffed entirely as far as intercept operators it was staffed entirely by AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia]. I was a supervisor but AWA did the intercepting.
- 15:30 I was there for some months. Then they decided that I would go to Darwin to another section for a while. While I was up at Darwin I did the usual duties. I was a sergeant at that time and I did a lot of the duties that a sergeant would do with a section. Then I was told that they were trying to get cricketers to represent Darwin to play other areas. I volunteered and went up to Darwin and practiced and got
- 16:00 selected. I had a good time playing cricket for a while, then I returned to the section and it was decided that I should then return to Kalinga. We had changed from Bonegilla to Kalinga in Queensland and that was where the base camp was. At Kalinga I did various jobs for a while including going over to Central Bureau which was the code-breaking section. It was a big area at Ascot
- 16:30 where they had code breakers. With others I did what was called "traffic analysis". It was an important part but it was just a very small part in a giant cog. I did that for quite a while and then it was getting near the end of the war, or so we thought. Our CO, Colonel Ryan, then said, "I think I would like you to
- 17:00 go to a Cipher School to learn the cipher side of things." I had no experience in cipher so I went up to Balcombe with four other chaps and we did the Cipher School. We were just about to be sent to New Guinea when the second atom bomb finished the whole thing off. The war was over and then I returned to Sydney because the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] there said, "Well if you can get
- 17:30 back to Sydney, Nev, you can stay in Sydney. You don't have to come back here." So I went down to Holsworthy and the sergeant there said, "Do you know any units in Sydney that would accept you until your discharge?" I said, "I don't really know." I said, "I've worked in the post office, what about a postal service?" He said, "Yes. There is one in Surry Hills in Sydney go down there and see."
- 18:00 So I went down there and I saw a Regimental Sergeant Major I think he was and I said, "Can I transfer to the postal service until my discharge comes along." He said, "No, we've got that many NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] we don't know what to do with them." I went back and I said, "Yes, they want me down there." So I went back and he said, "Ooh. Righto, you're right."
- 18:30 So that is where I was until I was discharged, I was with the base postal service. That was the end of the war. I had to wait quite a long while because not being married and there was a point system. The single fellows didn't get as many points as the married ones who got double points. Anybody that was married in our unit got out a long time before I got out. I
- 19:00 Thought, "I'm not going to go back to the Post Office I'm going to go into the Police Force." So I passed everything and then it came to the medical. They gave me the confetti test which consisted of turning over pages and for anybody that is not colour blind they can immediately see numbers on the page. They kept turning them over and I kept saying, "I can't see any numbers." He said, "We can't accept you because you are colour blind." That finished that. I
- 19:30 went back to the Post Office and I didn't want to work in an office. I wanted to be outside. So I thought, "I'll take up a postman's job." I worked at Cronulla eventually until I retired when I was sixty. That is about all of my story regarding before and after.

You got married after the war?

I was married, yes. I married Gwennie in Melbourne.

- 20:00 We came back to Cronulla and lived with my mother and father for a while. I had a block of land in Cronulla and we built a temporary dwelling there and then we bought this place. We have been here for fifty-one years. I was married after the war in Melbourne.

Where did you meet Gwennie?

- 20:30 My auntie married Gwen's uncle. The arrangement was made for me to go and stay on leave with Gwen's parents on account of their relationship. I stayed with them very happily each weekend that I had leave.
- 21:00 After the war it went on from there.

Did you have children at all?

No.

That is a fantastic overview you have given us. Could we go back now to the very beginning and I'll start by asking what your childhood memories are?

My childhood memories were the fact that as I said my father was a cabinet maker

- 21:30 and he was one of the first that was put off in the Depression because cabinet makers were not needed. In those days you didn't get cash money for the dole payments you got coupons. That didn't pay the rent. We were very fortunate in that a chap named Mr Pendlebury owned the house and let the house to us in Dulwich Hill. He said,
- 22:00 "Forget it. One of these days you will be able to pay us." That was one of the main things I can think of is the fact that times were tough. They managed to feed me three times a day. Dad managed to get a few odd jobs now and again but there was very little money around. We moved to Cronulla in 1932 and I was quite happy in Cronulla. It is a wonderful place. It was a little village then.
- 22:30 I was able to do odd jobs. My father did a lot of fishing. He then managed to get work eventually and he worked for quite a few years at the National Cash Register Company. We sort of got going from there. My childhood memories were things that were tough. It was hard for families and in a lot of cases it was tough going.
- 23:00 Just to give you an illustration, when we first came to Cronulla with Dad being a cabinet maker and being able to handle carpentry somebody offered him a job to build a gate in Waratah Street, Cronulla. Just to save the fares my father and I walked to Sutherland to get the timber and then walked home with the timber on our shoulders. I don't think a lot of the kids would appreciate that these days. Things were
- 23:30 tough. I was a happy kid though, I had my mates and we played cricket in the park and we had our bikes to ride around on. I had a happy childhood even though things were tough.

You mentioned you grew up in Summer Hill?

I was born in Summer Hill?

What were your earliest memories of Summer Hill and Dulwich Hill?

I don't remember anything about Summer Hill because I don't know what

- 24:00 time we moved from Summer Hill after I was born. I can remember very well Maryville because we lived in Fraser Street, Maryville which is opposite the Maryville oval. They were happy days. We weren't on our own. My mother and father and I were living with Mum's mother. They were good days and then they
- 24:30 were good days in Dulwich Hill. We moved to Dulwich Hill in Hill Street, Dulwich Hill and we were happy there. I was happy there, I had a good childhood.

Do you have brothers and sisters?

Yes, I have got a brother. There is just a slight difference in our ages. There is just twenty-two years difference in our ages. When I came back from the war in 1942 I met my brother for the first time. He was born twenty-two years after I was born.

25:00 **Your mum, what was she like as a person?**

She was like all mothers in those days. She was very, very good. She worried about me and worried about how the situation was regarding the out of work business. I had a good relationship with my mother and father. They were great.

And your dad, could you describe him and what he was like?

- 25:30 He was like a very good bloke who always worried about the welfare of us and he was always desperate to find work. As I said, he used to get it now and again but it didn't last. He worked at Sweetacres for a while which was out at Rosebery in Sydney. He worked there for a while and then that finished. He was a very generous father in what he could
- 26:00 be generous with especially with affection.

Growing up were you brought up with any memories or given any memories from World War I and people who served there?

I was fortunate in that I had three uncles that were in World War I. I had been told when I decided to enlist that it was not going to be a teddy bears' picnic.

- 26:30 One of Mum's brothers was captured and he was a German prisoner of war. The other two were in the infantry and they did it pretty tough. I knew that I wasn't going to go into a teddy bears' picnic as I said.

I was well aware of what was ahead of me but my idea of joining up honestly was, I always thought it was a very good idea that if you were going to have a war to have it somewhere else and not in

- 27:00 Australia. I decided it was my duty then to help the troops that were enlisting in keeping the war from Australia, although it got very close at times. We did our best and that was my honest objective it was to fight the war somewhere else if we had to fight it.

Did your uncles share anything with you when you were growing about World War I, stories and things?

They told me stories of how

- 27:30 tough it could be. My uncle had a trunk full of books of the war which I couldn't get at quick enough to read at times. I was always pretty keen on reading all these books about World War I. I had a pretty good knowledge of what was ahead of me by having those three uncles telling me.

What sort of stories did they share with you?

Well, in the first

- 28:00 instance one of my uncles that was captured said that the Germans treated them very well in his neck of the woods. The only time that he was hungry was when they were hungry. When they had some food the prisoners got the food. In fact, one of the prisoners and my uncle wrote to one another for many years

- 28:30 after the war so he had his story to tell regarding prisoners of war. My other uncle was talking about being up to your ears in mud in France and things like that, although we never experienced that sort of thing. I had a pretty good grounding of what war could be like.

Was Anzac Day important to you as a young boy?

Yes, I thought it was

- 29:00 pretty important. I was always keen on the history of Anzac Day. I couldn't get enough of it and I believe in it thoroughly, yes.

Do you remember what you would do as a family or a child on Anzac Day?

I can't say that I went to any service but we used to listen to it on the radio. There was no television in those days but we would hear it on the radio and follow it.

- 29:30 I can't say that I ever went to a service.

What was your dad doing during World War I?

As I said, he was too young I think to enlist at the time. I think he just worked as a cabinet maker, I'm not too sure. I know he was the youngest of the family.

- 30:00 **Memories of school, what are your earliest memories of primary school?**

I had very, very good memories of Dulwich Hill Primary School not because they were male teachers but we had some very good male teachers. I can still remember one, his name was Mr Beaver and he was the most wonderful fellow. In

- 30:30 those days we used to have classes of over forty. You would sit on hard stools and hard desks and hard wood. They were good days. The kids were all good and the teachers were good. I have good memories of schooling in Dulwich Hill.

What subjects did you enjoy studying?

I've always been keen on

- 31:00 Writing; I love writing letters and I love writing stories. I was always very keen on that angle. I liked arithmetic as we called it in those days. I wasn't crash hot on some of the subjects; algebra left me a bit bewildered. I liked arithmetic but I especially liked English and writing.

Did Dulwich hill have a uniform at all?

- 31:30 No, in fact some of the kids didn't even have shoes. I can remember a couple of classmates with no shoes. They just couldn't afford shoes. Times were tough.

How did the Depression affect your classmates?

Fifty per cent of them I suppose had fathers who had jobs and fifty

- 32:00 per cent had fathers who didn't have jobs. It didn't make much difference. We were all pretty good friends all around and there were never any fights. As I've said, some weren't as well dressed as others but that didn't matter.

You moved to Cronulla and went to Hurstville Technical [College] can you tell me about your

time there?

I didn't especially

32:30 star in woodwork, in fact I think the woodwork teacher used to get a bit desperate at time and at metalwork I wasn't crash hot. Once again I seemed to do well at English and other subjects. I think woodwork was a no/no with me. They were good days. I can remember John Bromwich, the tennis star, was

33:00 being schooled at Hurstville Tech. The year that I went to Hurstville Tech was the year that he was given a farewell. They were good teachers and I was happy there until I went for this postal exam.

It is surprising you weren't good at woodwork given that your dad was a cabinet maker. Did he never share woodworking techniques with you?

No, I think he gave me up. When we came here he

33:30 helped no end in building cabinets and garages and things like that, so he was an asset. I used to be one of the fellows that handed him the hammer. That was about my capability as far as woodwork was concerned.

Discipline at Hurstville High School. What sort of discipline was there at Hurstville Technical?

I was never at High School, just at Technical School.

Technical school, what sort of discipline was there?

34:00 It was very strict discipline but fair. If you mucked up you got the cane. I have had the cane a few times. It never hurt me. Discipline was pretty strict. The worst discipline that I could ever envisage in those days was I didn't care if I got the

34:30 cane but I didn't want to be kept in because I used to tear home and couldn't get down to the Gunnamatta Wharf quick enough to catch yellow tail for my father to take fishing. He used to fish outside in a boat. If ever I got kept in I was going to dip out on my fishing so that was the greatest and cruellest treatment the school could ever give me was to keep me in.

What sort of things did you get in trouble for?

35:00 **Why did you get the cane?**

Maybe not paying attention when I should have. I was mad on sport. I would be writing out the cricket team. I was captain of the cricket team of the class and I was more intent in writing out who I was selecting for the cricket team than listening to the teacher so I would get nabbed for that. It was things like that, it was nothing disastrous. There were no tantrums or carrying on madly. I was just not paying

35:30 attention when I should have, that was one of the things, it was nothing drastic.

You've mentioned the cricket a few times, did you follow the cricket and in later years Don Bradman?

I actually played for Darwin and we had an ex test fellow as captain. His name was Ward. This is going back donkeys' years. He captained the side and the only trouble was in

36:00 my estimation was it was a bit cliquey. Some of the blokes he knew got all the bowling and batting and the ones he didn't know sort of filled in at the end. Anyhow, I enjoyed the cricket. We didn't win the competition but we were runners up. During my sojourn at Kalinga I played cricket with our team in our

36:30 unit and one match a chap came up to me and said, "Would you like to play with the Valley Cricket Club in Brisbane in the A-Grade Competition?" I said, "Do you think I'd fit in?" He said, "Yes, you'll be all right." I had half a season with the Valley District Cricket Club playing A-Grade cricket. That was about the peak of my performance. I could have

37:00 come back and played maybe for St. George but I worked on Saturday mornings and I just couldn't get the chance so I didn't bother. I did play a lot of club cricket, in the shire I played a lot of club cricket.

So as a boy did you ever go to the Sydney Cricket Ground?

Yes, I did. I went a couple of times. I was telling Gwen the other day on one particular occasion there was the chap that had the paper shop in Cronulla called Randall and he said,

37:30 "We'll go in and see Don Bradman bat today." So I hopped in the car with him and we were paying our money to go into the cricket ground and there was a great roar. We knew what had happened. Bradman was out so we didn't see him. I went to the cricket ground quite a lot, I have always loved cricket.

Can you describe for me going into the Sydney Cricket Ground and the layout and what you saw?

What I saw?

38:00 All I saw was massive crowds. If we were playing England they were very biased crowds all the Australian way. I can still see them pushing the turnstiles to go in. It was nothing spectacular, it was just that there were lots and lots of people there to watch cricket.

Obviously the Sydney Cricket Ground has changed dramatically from when you went as a boy?

38:30 Cricket has changed dramatically since I played cricket. I was a bowler and I never ever bowled a six-ball over. I always bowled an eight-ball over. That changed to six balls and things changed all together. The rules were changed. When I was playing, if the ball was going to hit the wicket in the umpire's decision you were

39:00 out. If it hit your pads and the ball would have hit the wicket you were out. Now of course it has got to be pitched on a particular line. There are so many different things in the rules of cricket and I can't quite understand some of them. As I've always said, if a bowler hits the batsman's pads when he is protecting his wicket and the ball would have hit the wicket he is definitely out in my

39:30 estimation but they've changed that.

Out at the Sydney Cricket Ground did you buy drinks and food?

You would get a meat pie; the meat pie was the main dish and a bottle of soft drink.

What would you wear when you went out?

If it was summertime you would wear just a pair of long pants and a shirt. You wouldn't get

40:00 dressed up.

We might stop there and we'll change tapes so we can have a break.

Tape 2

00:30 **We'll continue on. You mentioned fishing once you came to Cronulla. Can you explain to me what sort of fish you caught?**

I was a dead keen fisherman and we had our

01:00 own skiff. I used to row down the end of Gunnamatta Bay on the flat. I'd be down there when the tide was right and I'm not kidding in those days we used to dig a particular bait down there called a finger oyster and the fish would just love them. That was bream and whiting mainly. You would catch an occasional different fish like a trevally but it was mainly bream and whiting. I'm not kidding you, sometimes if you went down at

01:30 daybreak and the tide was right you would knock off at eight o'clock because you had too many fish. Gunnamatta Bay was alive with bream and whiting. Over the years it has changed completely and if I went down there now, all day, I might catch maybe one fish because all the bait that was available in those days has been taken. People have scraped the oysters off the rocks and they have taken all the

02:00 cockles out of the bay. I won't mention who does it, but they have taken all the bait and so the fish have got nothing to come in for. We used to be in a boat and we'd drift across Bundeena out towards Gympsea and we would catch flathead. There were miles of flathead. This is different. You would go down to North Cronulla Beach, I didn't do it actually but my uncle was a great jewfish catcher.

02:30 He would catch jewfish at North Cronulla Beach and Elouera beach. That is not so good now. My father used to go outside and they were normally deepwater fish such as flathead and things like that. Then he used to do a little bit of netting and he'd net blackfish. They would go into market in those days. We would get the local Italian shopkeeper,

03:00 Skafredi was his name, he used to take Dad's fish into the market and Dad would get the cheque for the fish which was all very good. There was plenty of fish in those days, lots of fish.

You mentioned your dad sold some fish; did you sell fish to people at all?

At one stage they asked me to walk around with a basket of fish when I was a young bloke and I found

03:30 that the glare of the bream was knocking my eyes around a bit so they didn't ask me to do it any more. All I did was catch them, I would catch a sugar bag of fish and then give them away and then go down the next night and catch another bagful and give them away. All the neighbours around here were supplied with fish in those days. It was a wonderful spot.

Can you share with me the way you caught the fish from the type of line you used to the bait?

04:00 In the early days, I was taught by my grandfather, we would buy what they called geisha gut lines,

Japanese gut lines and the brand name was geisha. We would put fifty foot of line on a cork and we might go down there with a dozen corks. We

- 04:30 would bait the line with a finger oyster and throw that line out and put the cork on the side of the boat and then get another one ready. My grandfather was there with myself and if it was me I would have eight lines but my grandfather would have four lines and I would have four lines. There would be two on each side each. We didn't do anything. We just waited for the cork to jump. When the cork jumped we grabbed the line and there was a decent bream on it. That is how good it was. The main thing was the
- 05:00 bait. That didn't always work in other places. Although finger oysters were the best bait you could get in Gunnamatta Bay we'd go for a trip up to Forster and we couldn't catch a fish with it up there so local fish like local bait or the fish knew where to get local bait and they went in for it. There were miles of fish in those days.

05:30 So how would you catch a certain fish as opposed to another like a bream to a flathead? Were there different things you had to do?

Usually when you catch flatheads you drift and you might drift with a tide for half a kilometre and then row back and do the drift again. With bream and whiting as the tide got high you moved with the tide. You moved your position until the tide eventually got full.

- 06:00 Once, ten o'clock came you gave it away because you don't catch many fish between ten o'clock and three in the afternoon. It is a dead spot. Early morning and late evening you are in business and of a night.

Were there different types of bait to catch different types of fish?

Yes. If you were fishing for flathead you would use mullet, cut up mullet. But

- 06:30 if you wanted to catch whiting and black bream you would use the finger oysters. If you couldn't get finger oysters you used to get the cockles and open up a cockle and use that. You know what a cockle is? It is shell fish. It is something similar to a Shell petrol sign. You know the Shell sign they have? A cockle looks something similar to that. You open it up and there is quite a lot of meaty stuff inside. There were different baits like that.

- 07:00 Sometimes other people used other things. They were keen on using blue pilchards or worms were very good bait, blood worms. There were all sorts of bait. I did use blood worms and you would catch lots of whiting with blood worms.

Where would you get the worms from?

You used to be able to dig them around Cronulla, around the river. You used to be able to dig for blood worms. Of course when

- 07:30 you've got lots and lots of people digging for blood worms you run out of blood worms. We managed for quite a long while to dig blood worms. You would get nippers [mud crabs] with a nipper pump. You would plunge the pump into the sand and suck it up and then spit it out and there'd be maybe a couple of nippers in there. They were similar to a prawn. They were very soft bait and if you didn't get your fish on the first whack you lost him because the bait was so soft.

- 08:00 There was lots of bait.

So once you caught the fish I presume your mum cooked it?

What we kept, yes, she cooked.

What sort of recipes did she come up with?

I don't know what batter she used but it was pretty successful. I tell you what, Gwennie is not bad on it either, she's got her own. I had a friend whose father had a fish shop and he gave Gwen the recipe for

- 08:30 batter so she was pretty good at that. I don't know much about the cooking part I only ate them.

So the fish was always battered, your mum always battered the fish?

Yes, except the flathead. They were cooked and eaten as straight out cooked flathead. I can never remember a battered flathead but there was battered whiting and battered bream. Although sometimes we just cooked the bream as it

- 09:00 was without batter and it was still pretty tasty.

The kitchen of your mum's in respect to your home, what was the oven like? Can you describe the kitchen?

When we first moved to Cronulla in 1932 all Mum had in the kitchen was a very big fuel stove. She

- 09:30 learned to adapt herself pretty well to this fuel stove. We had no running water. We had two huge tanks in the back and then eventually the water was put on. We advanced with the water. When we had a bath

we had to boil the copper in the laundry and take the buckets of water into the bath to fill it up. Then eventually of course we had a Dux Hot Water Heater and then eventually advanced with the times.

10:00 In the early days there was no water running past our place in Croydon Street. We had two huge tanks at the back.

What about the toilet? What was the situation there?

There was an outdoor toilet right up at the back of the back yard. There was a pan service where the fellow would come and take the pan away and replace it with another pan.

10:30 It was not the best of hygienic situations.

You mentioned the bath, would you have a bath once a week or once a fortnight, what was the situation?

It used to be a funny system. I don't know how we inherited it but I believe in England you only had a bath once a week. We did more than that but I can remember Friday night was a special bath night. We had maybe two or three. It wasn't every night but two or three.

11:00 We didn't have a shower, we had a bath.

Why was Friday night a special night?

I don't know but it was Friday night for sure and the other nights would vary. Friday night was a definite bath night and maybe a Tuesday and maybe a Monday or maybe a Wednesday. It was definitely Friday but the others might vary.

Dances, did you go to dances growing up?

I never went to a

11:30 dance, no. I never tried.

And girls, did you have girlfriends growing up?

Not really. I was friendly with a few girls but there was nothing.

Did your parents ever talk to you about girls?

Not really, no. I used to think that women were a different

12:00 class to blokes. I used to put them on a pedestal. I had girlfriends but nothing serious, I was too young. When I was in my teens I had a few girlfriends but that didn't go on much longer.

Once you left Hurstville Technical you started work. Where did you start work first up?

At Haymarket Post Office.

12:30 In those days we used to deliver telegrams around the back of Hay Street. There were lots and lots of Chinese agents and you would take telegrams to all these different Chinese fruit agents. If you didn't do that you would do what they called the rail run. You would go to Brickfield Hill Post Office at Anthony Hordern's. They had a Post Office there called Brickfield Hill. You would then travel down to

13:00 City Rail as they called it which was a little office on the top of the ramp more or less to the entrance to the country trains. They had an office there where in those days the railways had a telegraphist and they used to receive telegrams. I would pick those up and then I would take them back to the Haymarket Post Office and then I would start off again and that went on all day. I went round and round and round picking up the

13:30 telegrams from those various spots until I eventually moved to Cronulla.

So once a person sent a telegram how long would it take to arrive at its destination?

I am talking about Haymarket. I suppose I would receive a telegram, or half a dozen telegrams to deliver, and in those days to the Chinese agents and

14:00 they would be delivered within five minutes, easily in five minutes. If anybody lodged a telegram at Haymarket they had a system where - have you ever been into a shop where they had a trolley that went along and it was powered and when it got to the other end they'd undo it and find out all the particulars? You might never have seen that. They had a powered

14:30 system of putting the telegrams in a cylinder at Haymarket and it would go to the GPO [General Post Office] and be processed there. It was a pretty slick service.

And your main job at the time was delivering?

All the time I was at Haymarket it was just telegrams and picking up telegrams as I said from Brickfield Hill and City Rail.

How did you get the

15:00 **opportunity of the job?**

I went for the Postal Exam when I was fifteen and the results came out and when I was fifteen and a half I was asked to report and I was sent to Haymarket Post Office.

What was involved in the Postal Exam?

In those days it was reading, writing and arithmetic. It was three subjects. They gave you a whole page of some

15:30 misspelt words. Some of them were pretty tricky because you weren't too sure just how you did spell that. That was the very first time I ever came across the world ubiquitous. I had never seen it before. I didn't even know what it meant. I am not sure how I had a go of that one. They marked your papers on both your writing and your spelling, by you rectifying the mistakes they had made.

16:00 Then of course you had your arithmetic and that was the exam. There was nothing else.

Just in respect to correct the mistakes would you ever do that in the Post Office system, correcting spelling?

No. If I say it myself I wasn't a bad speller but when I struck ubiquitous that stumped me a bit but I could handle most of the

16:30 spelling without any problems. And my writing wasn't too bad so I was lucky there. I wasn't crash hot in arithmetic but I got by.

Now at this time you were also starting to get involved in Morse code. Can you share with me how you started to get involved with that?

Yes. There was a chap in Cronulla that had a radio store and he was what was called an amateur radio operator.

17:00 He had his own set up to send and receive on his wireless. He decided that he would get a few of the boys and they would form an amateur radio club and I joined up. The first job I had to do to be a competent member was to learn the Morse code.

17:30 I did. I learnt the Morse code. I can always remember Harry Crisp, and as I said he was an amateur radio operator (a ham they call them), and he had his own call sign and I can still remember that. It was VK 2LX, that was his call sign. Harry said, "Whenever you see any writing on the wall or the paper translate it into Morse code," which was very good

18:00 advice because even today I still do it at times. There are only twenty six letters in the alphabet and never are there any more than four either dots and or dashes. It might only be one dot which is an E or it might only be one dash which is a T. You never get more than four. For instance you can have a mixture, Z is two dashes and two dots. An L is a dot dash and two dots. In no time I was

18:30 able to pick it up and I was able to practice. They had a key there and I was able to practice and then fortunately I could practice at the Cronulla Post Office. I then became able - I was never a telegraphist but I was able to receive and send telegrams. It put me in good stead for the job I was doing in the army.

Did you get a pay rise once you were doing that in the Post Office?

No, not really.

19:00 I was doing it off my own bat.

Just in respect to Morse code how do you distinguish it, if T is just a dash and Z is ...

Two dashes and two dots.

How do you distinguish something being TZ versus something else?

I am not quite sure what you mean.

If you are doing letters in a row so E is a dot and T is a dash, yet dash, dash, dot could be

19:30 **TTE as well. How do you distinguish between letters?**

There is always a very slight pause between the symbols. Just supposing you wanted to send the word Brent you would send the B and a short pause and then an R and then an E and then an N and a T. There was no confusion.

Then there would be a longer space between each word?

20:00 Not a long space but a longer space. After a while it becomes second nature to you. Even at speed you could still do it. The only thing that tricked me once was just out of Tel Aviv there was a British camp

that had been there prior to the war. It was at a place called Sarona. They were

- 20:30 British staff who were intercept operators and code breakers. We went there just to sharpen our skills and I was put onto a Vichy French operator. The first three messages that he sent when he finished he signed off by saying Erin. I thought,
- 21:00 "This bloke must be Irish and in the Vichy army, Erin?" This went on for three times and after a while I said to one of the British instructors, "What's with this bloke sending Erin every time he finishes a message?" He said, "What he means is Fin not Erin and it means finish." Well E is a dot, an R is a dot dash dot but if you put them together it is OK it is F.
- 21:30 But if you say dot, dot dash dot, you get ER. He was saying, "dot, dot dash dot, dot dot, dash dot. So I was writing Erin all the time. There were little things like that. That was the only time I've been tricked really but I thought we had an Irishman in the Vichy army.

Given that you knew Morse code quite well were there other fellows that really struggled to work out whether it was an F or an E or whatever the

- 22:00 **situation was?**

I think I am repeating myself but my father came back from the National Cash Register Company and said, "There is a Lieutenant Arthur Henry who wants to...." I was one of the ones that could handle it. There were a few that weren't quite up to that standard but while we were at Seymour we did nothing but training with Morse. The speed had to be brought up.

- 22:30 To be qualified at the finish you had to do at least twenty words a minute. Some of the fellows that weren't quite up to it were at the finish. We had telegraphists from the PMG Department. I wasn't a telegraphist but we had telegraphists. I could handle it. We had ship's operators and we had amateur radio operators and we had fellows who had an inkling

- 23:00 of it but they had to be trained to get the speed. There was a mixed brew.

Just coming back to your amateur radio days, did you have a call sign during those days?

No, I was only one of the club and as I said Harry Crisp had the amateur radio set up and he had a call sign as I said VK 2LX. All the amateur radios at least in New South Wales started off with VK

- 23:30 and what that meant I'm not too sure. They were all VKs and then they had something different after that.

Can you describe for me this radio that you had in the club?

Well we didn't have a radio actually. All we did at the amateur radio club that I was in was to tap out Morse code. I never actually got on the air as a radio operator. I only

- 24:00 learned the basics. Harry Crisp did all the amateur radio work. I had nothing to do with it.

What was the plan with these skills, what were you planning to use them for?

I was just interested in it, in Morse code, I was always very keen on it. When I was a kid I would hear this Morse code going in the Post Office and I used to think, "Gee I'd loved to be able to do that." That always started me off. Although the

- 24:30 Morse code used in the Post Office is slightly different because they use what they call a sounder and you get a click every now and again and you've got to get used to that. When you go over to the army and you just get straight out Morse code it is much easier. There are no clicks and it is easier to read. Then of course you can get a fellow that goes pretty fast and you've got to go with him. We had to always print our
- 25:00 intercepts, they didn't want you to write because some of the writing would be pretty terrible and they probably couldn't understand it. They always insisted that you print. That was quite easy while we were doing Morse code. When we copied the Germans they used Morse code. When we copied the Italians they used Morse code. I copied Russians for a while and they used Morse code. Everybody used Morse code except
- 25:30 the Japanese. They used what was called Kana code. That Kana code, where the Morse code consisted of twenty six letters and ten figures the Kana code consisted of seventy eight symbols. One symbol alone that you had to copy down consisted of ten dots and/or dashes.
- 26:00 In other words it was, dash dash, dot dot, dash, dot dot, dash, dash dot. It was all in one hit. We had to write a shorthand to copy that. We had our own little things to do it. They all used the same. It was a regular intercept shorthand. Nobody had their own shorthand. Everybody had to have a
- 26:30 standard shorthand. I can show you later on from my papers the way it was written. We copied mostly German in Greece, all German in Greece and Crete. It was all German. When we got back to Egypt again after the evacuation it was then we could get Vichy French or we could get German or maybe Italian.

- 27:00 Then there was a mixed brew but while we were in Greece or Crete it was all German. They didn't always send coded messages. They were that confident that they were going to take over that they used to send just plain language messages and we had a linguist with us who could just read them out straight away. We knew just as much as the receiving operator about what they were up to. For instance, one message I got was to say that this battalion of Germans was in
- 27:30 deep trouble and they needed help. We couldn't do anything about it. We could pass on the message but we didn't have the troops available to send in to finish the job off. We got a lot of valuable information by just plain language. When we were in Crete we would listen to the planes going overhead and they had a code of three letters which was easily broken by our intelligence staff. So we knew what they were saying or what
- 28:00 they were sending in code. Now and again they would switch to radio and they would talk. Instead of sending coded messages in Morse they would talk back to base. The linguist would be telling us or who was interested exactly what was going on. We were up with them all the time.

We'll come to that in a moment. If you could

- 28:30 **share with me when you first realised that the war was coming?**

When did I first realise it? I suppose the only time I realised it was when I heard Mr Menzies on the radio. In those days it seemed to be a giant game because nothing seemed to happen. The French had the Maginot Line which was impregnable they reckoned. Nothing ever seemed to

- 29:00 happen. There would be skirmishes. They would go into Norway and have a skirmish and things like that but it was never serious. Once they breached the Maginot Line - you see the French forgot that the Germans could go around the end of it and come in at the back. It was like Singapore, everything was pointing in the wrong direction. That was when I realised that it was fair dinkum.

When did you want to be a part of the war effort?

- 29:30 Once it got serious I decided that I'd like to do my part. I was only nineteen but I thought, "I think it is time."

Did you want to go into signals? What area did you want to be in?

I actually never gave it much thought until I met up with Arthur Henry. He was the one that I had to contact if I

- 30:00 could do Morse code. So I didn't plan anything, it was just fate that Arthur Henry wanted blokes who could handle Morse code which I did so I was in Signals.

Your father, was he keen for you to join up?

He wasn't particularly rapt although he didn't mind. Mum wasn't particularly rapt but I talked them into it.

- 30:30 Then of course I just told them I was twenty one when I went down and that was overcome easily.

OK, your meeting with Arthur Henry, can you tell me about that?

I'm repeating myself but when my father came back and said that one of his workmates was a friend of Arthur Henry and he knew that he was looking for operators.

- 31:00 My father said, "Well, Nev knows Morse code." He said, "Here is Arthur Henry's telephone number." So I then rang him that afternoon and he arranged for me to meet him at Victoria Barracks the next morning. When I explained what I was capable of he said, "You're in." And that was it.

Had you enlisted at this point of time?

Yes, I had enlisted with my mate at Arncliffe Drill Hall and they had told us that we'd have to wait two weeks before we heard anything.

- 31:30 In the meantime I asked my mate did he mind if I went for the interview. Then I said, "Do you mind if I'm a signaller?" He said, "No." He was in the infantry. Unfortunately, fate took over there because I'm still here and my mate was buried in Thailand or wherever. He worked on the railways for the Japanese. He was buried in

- 32:00 1943. I've got a photo of his grave and all of that. So that is fate.

So when you went to enlist what was done? What were you required to do, have a doctors check?

There was a health check and particulars taken. They asked, "Do you have your father's approval?" and all that.

- 32:30 When those particulars were taken they said, "You've got to wait two weeks now before we let you know." So we were in limbo for two weeks. In my case I wasn't but my mate was.

So once you signed up with Arthur Henry at Victoria Barracks how long was it before you went off to Seymour?

First of all I was sent to the showgrounds. That was where we gathered in the

33:00 showgrounds in Sydney, at Moore Park. We were housed in a particular building. The first thing we had was a smallpox inoculation. Some people weren't affected by smallpox but there were a hell of a lot that were. I was very sick for three days, so I was home at Cronulla for three days before I reported back. We mooched around Moore

33:30 Park learning marching and doing stupid things. Then I suppose I was at the showground for ten days and they said, "We're off to Seymour in Victoria." That was when it really got fair dinkum. We were in an army camp that had been used in the '14-18 war and she was a pretty rough old job. There were six to a tent. You were on duck boards in the tent and they would give you a palliasse and they'd say,

34:00 "There's your bag of straw." When you are a rookie you think the more straw you put in the palliasse the better bed you are going to have. We found out very smartly that when you put a lot of straw in you rolled off the top. So you learned to only put a certain amount of straw in your palliasse and you'd have a more comfortable night's sleep. It was a rough and ready joint. It was very cold in the morning, it was freezing cold when you were out on rifle parade. The

34:30 cookhouse was a pretty old tin shed. Everything was rough and ready but we survived.

Just a couple of questions about the showgrounds before you actually went to Seymour. Where were you actually staying there? What was the accommodation?

From memory I think I was in the Anthony Hordern Pavilion. I can remember my cobbler, the day that I marched out of Sydney Showgrounds to go to

35:00 Seymour, Bruce moved in. I was in Anthony Hordern Pavilion and he was in the Pig Sty. He wasn't treated as well as I was.

Were you given palliasses there?

Yes and that's where we learned not to put too much in. With the palliasses that was the order of the day.

And the latrines and those sorts of things what was provided, the toilets?

35:30 There was just one ablutions block sort of thing. When you talk of toilets in the army, you don't have individual toilets for each bloke. You might have a long line. You might have a line forty yards long with holes dug and a seat on it. You would sing out to your mate up there, "How's things?" It was not very private.

36:00 That is where they reckon all the rumours started. It had hessian around it but once you got in there you could see all your mates. If you weren't used to it it was a bit of a shock.

So what sort of rumours started?

All sorts of things like, "We're off to South Africa in a fortnight's time" and all those silly things. There were lots of rumours. They called them the 'latrine rumours.'

36:30 Some of them would make them up as they went along. It was a cultural shock with the toilets.

Did any of the fellows not cope with the cultural shock?

Not in our section, no, I think everybody accepted it. We were lucky. We had a bunch of very good blokes. They came from all walks of life as I said but we were one happy family all the time. They were very, very good

37:00 blokes and we looked after one another.

How did you get down to Seymour? What was the transport?

We had a siding close to the camp where we used to have to march to when we went on leave. We would board the train on the siding and then it would go up to Seymour and get on the main line. It would go to Darling Harbour by that

37:30 train. It actually passed my old home in Dulwich Hill. I could see it on the way through so that brought back a few memories. Then when we got to Darling Harbour we joined a ferry and that took us out to the Queen Mary.

Is this to go down to Seymour?

No, we'd come from Seymour. We were going overseas then.

What was the transport to Seymour when you went down there?

38:00 It was by train, troop train, from Sydney to Seymour.

What sort of things had you packed?

We had kit bags that were about that high. We would have all sorts of underclothes. You didn't have underclothes like you have now. You had long johns and you had your shirts and

38:30 your socks. I learned from experience. I had never had any experience with washing before, I decided that I would boil my socks. I found that if I boiled my socks they would come out like jelly so I learned from experience that you don't boil woollen socks. You had big coppers to do your washing. In Seymour it was pretty rough and

39:00 ready. In your kit bag you would have all your clothes and maybe a lot of private things. In those days I had a cricket cap and things like that, personal things like photos and other personal items as well as your army equipment.

We'll just stop there and we'll change tapes at this stage and Chris [interviewer] will pick it up from here.

Tape 3

00:52 **Tell us about fishing in Darwin?**

The locals had

01:00 built a fence type situation. The tide used to go out a long way in Darwin, a long, long way and they had built this fence a fair way back from the shore line which was a very straight line with two angles coming in towards the shore. The fish would come in, the theory was that the fish would come in with the tide but when they wanted to swim out as the tide went out they couldn't find their way out on account of the

01:30 fact that this long fence was confronting them and they had the two side wings which hemmed them in. You would go down there and you would be surprised at the number of fish. The army was using that to take to the various hospitals. We could pinch a few if we wanted to but they were usually kept for the hospital patients. They kept them fed on fish. I actually fished off the coast and I actually caught a swordfish there

02:00 in a rough and ready way. I had a bit of rough old hook and a bit of rough old line. You could catch fish by the mile at Darwin.

I've heard stories about them using grenades and explosives?

Yes, they did. The only trouble was I believe - I've never used a grenade myself - they reckon that when you used a grenade and the fish came to the

02:30 surface all the bones had been broken inside. They did use them. They would drop them off the side of the boat and wait for the fish to come to the surface.

We'll move back to where we were. We were talking about some training before you went away. You were talking about how rough it was at Seymour, what did your training consist of down there, what was your daily routine?

A section consists of not only operators,

03:00 it consisted of technicians because it is not much good being an operator if you've got a set that doesn't work. You have got your technicians to keep the set working. Then you have got chaps that look after the batteries because you can't have a set working without batteries and they were all battery-powered as you would expect going overseas. Then we had to have linemen to erect aerials because the more aerials

03:30 and the higher the aerials the better the reception. Then you had your cook to feed you. We had MT drivers, Motor Transport Drivers. They have got their own thing to do. They have got to learn convoy duty and they've got to learn maintenance. Everybody trained in their individual art. In my case I trained in operating and the others trained in their technique. We had very good technicians.

04:00 We were able to always have our sets running in perfect order, the battery operated and we were fed. Everybody played their part.

Can you tell us about the sets you were introduced to there and the batteries and how they worked?

All I can tell you is they were Kingsley Receivers; that was the trade name. There were no transmitters, there were only receivers. We would listen or

04:30 somebody would just sit on a key and they would tap out messages and we would copy them. Just for

argument's sake we might have a well-respected PMG telegraphist who was a beautiful operator. When I say beautiful I mean he was perfect in sending. He would tap out an hour's Morse code and we would copy furiously. That is all it consisted of. It wasn't so

05:00 much radio interception it was more listening to tapping out on the key.

Can you tell us what these Kingsley Receivers looked like? Just describe what a Kingsley Receiver looked like and how you controlled it and what you listened to?

As I said we didn't sort of get into the receiver stage until we got to Egypt really. It was more just Morse practice at Seymour.

05:30 When we got to Egypt we didn't know where we were going but we had a fair idea and it was time to ready for Greece. The technicians installed at least two receivers in each truck that we were going to use so that you could have two operators working at the same time in the truck. We had a set that was approximately three feet wide by

06:00 eighteen inches high with knobs all over the place which controlled frequencies and volume and so on. You just learned to look around for the particular frequency you wanted. They used to be registered in kilocycles. You used to know how to adjust your volume and that was it. You learned how to use your set.

Was there a headset?

Yes, we had headphones.

06:30 We had plugged in headphones. The only time that you would never get good reception was if there was a storm brewing or a storm was overhead or even in the distance there could be a storm and there would be static. You can imagine if you are trying to take a message when there is static around somebody sends say an F or an L

07:00 and it is a dot, dash, dot dot. You would get the dot, dash, crash! And you don't know what came after the crash so some of your messages had to be unreliable. You would mark them unreliable. It wasn't any good kidding yourself that you were going to have a good message because you had to tell the truth. When you did get a perfect message you just marked it "Perfect" but static used to be a big problem.

We'll

07:30 **come back to how you worked when you went over to Egypt and Greece but I've just got a few more questions about training. Can you tell us about the blokes you met when you joined this new unit and who they were?**

The blokes we met in the initial stages? As I said they came from all walks of life. My friend actually was a cinema operator. When he went to Victoria

08:00 Barracks as it turned out on the same day that I went in he said he wanted to join the artillery. The fellow said, "We're not enlisting artillery today." He said, "What are you?" He said, "I'm an operator." He said, "All right, you're in signals." He didn't say he was a cinema operator. Anyway, Alan Flannery was his name. He ended up being a lineman. They came and there were jewellers and there were

08:30 optometrists. Our CO came from 3DB [radio station]. He was a wonderful character. I could tell you a lot about him. We affectionately called him "Uncle Jack." His name was Jack Ryan. He was an engineer with 3DB before enlisting but before that in the '14-18 war he was a young lad. He was a very young lad on the HMAS Sydney

09:00 that sank the Emden in the Cocos Islands. You might have read about it. There was a name for those young fellows in those days. I can't think what it was. It wasn't cabin boy but it was something boy, like boy sailor or something. Uncle Jack was on the HMAS Sydney as a naval young boy. As I have said he was there when they sunk the Emden.

09:30 Then he came to us as the CO of our section and he was also a radio engineer. He varied his career. We had all sorts. We had ex PMG linemen and ex PMG telegraphists. We had fellows that had worked in the railway and amateur radio operators. We had a mixed brew

10:00 from all walks of life.

Why was Uncle Jack a good CO? What did you like about him?

He was a very strict disciplinarian.

10:30 He was very strict on discipline but he was fair. What I will always remember him for was the fact that when things got tough in Crete, they got very tough and we had to be evacuated, Uncle Jack was an officer that made sure that he did everything possible to get us evacuated safely.

11:00 He looked after us as though we were his sons. Major-General Bernard Freyberg was in complete charge of Crete. He was the General in charge of the Crete Operation. Now Uncle Jack just before the evacuation over the mountains started he got on a motor bike and he went up to General Freyberg and

he got a note

11:30 signed by General Freyberg to say, "This section has priority on account of the work it is doing." That message got us through to the coast. We would be stopped now and again and Uncle Jack would just show the message and they'd say, "Righto, on you go." As I said we had to be three by three AM and be on board and away we went. If it wasn't for Uncle Jack we would not have got off. I always remember him for that.

12:00 Some of the other officers didn't have the reputation that Uncle Jack had for sticking to his troops like glue. I will never, ever forget him for that.

Obviously we'll start talking about what happened when you got to Egypt and Greece but just to fill in the gaps because we don't want to miss anything you were

12:30 **given orders to embark? What happened when you left Seymour? What were your orders then?**

I suppose the orders were actually to make our way to the Queen Mary and travel to Egypt.

What did you know about where you were going or what you might be doing?

I had no idea. We more or less were told that it was a Middle East job but

13:00 how would you know where you were going? It was in the hands of the ships and where they took us. We had no idea.

Were you given leave at that time?

We had leave in Colombo when we arrived there.

I'm thinking more to see off your family and friends?

For some reason when I was on the Queen Mary, I

13:30 hadn't been able to tell them that we were on our way or anything. I think my father had a fair idea. He came around in a launch and I happened to be looking over the side and he spotted me. He then went and gathered the family, including Gwen because she was down in Sydney at the time, and they came out in a launch and I was able to sing out to them. It wasn't for very long and then in a couple of days we were off but I did see the family before we left.

14:00 **It must have been an emotional time for you, leaving to go off to an unknown war?**

Yes, you would say to yourself, "I wonder what is in store for me?" And then you've always got that apprehension that a submarine could be lurking in the depths waiting to bring you to the bottom. We had no problems. The Queen Mary was a very fast ship although when

14:30 we first started off the fastest ship is as fast as the slowest ship so we stuck to the convoy pretty closely. Then it came to the stage when we had to break away from the Aquitania, the Mauritania and the Awatea and HMAS Canberra. There was a heavy sheet of rain that came across and the ship heeled over. The Queen Mary heeled over and the speed increased. By the time we

15:00 got out of the rain we couldn't see the other boats. It was speed alone that saved the Queen Mary. It had a reputation for being a greyhound. Then we had leave in Colombo.

On leaving Sydney though, your family came out to see you on a launch, what was the scene like leaving Sydney Harbour in that convoy?

There were crowds on the shore because

15:30 everybody could see what was going to happen. The word soon got around and there were ferries going around and so on. The harbour was full of boats and well-wishers.

What were your emotions on seeing that scene as you left to go to war?

My emotions were, "I hope I come back to the cheering crowd." They were my emotions really. I wasn't really emotional it was just an

16:00 adventure. That is what I was thinking.

On the way to Colombo what were your duties on board? What was your routine?

Well, we did a lot of physical exercises. We learned a lot of boat drill, every day there was boat drill in case. We had lots and lots of Morse practice. There was a lot of physical activity to keep us in

16:30 a fit shape. Actually a couple of blokes actually died on the way and they were buried at sea. We were kept busy training. As I said in my case it was mostly Morse training. Then you had your duties to do. Sometimes you'd be washing up great piles of plates or peeling great piles of spuds. We always had something to do.

Colombo was your

17:00 **first sight of a foreign port. What was that experience like?**

I had never been out of Australia and it was an eye-opener to see how the other half lived. They didn't have the lifestyle that we had. The little boats would pull up alongside with fruit and stuff like that. They would throw a rope up and you'd tie a basket onto the rope and lower it down and provided you put the money in you'd get the fruit back.

17:30 That was all new to us. Then we went into Colombo itself to Galle Face Green where we all assembled. We were spoken to by some British top brass. He explained that we should be very careful what we did there because there were a lot of diseases around. We just looked at shops and did a bit of shopping. We weren't there long. We only had one day's leave there.

18:00 **Was the general's advice generally heeded? Were the troops well behaved?**

Yes, the crowd that was on leave with me at the time were all well behaved. We were instructed not to be a nuisance to any of the locals and we did our best to be friendly with them.

So what did you do? How did you spend your leave?

18:30 It was only for the one day. We went and had a feed somewhere and went shopping and looked at various things and took in what the area was like. It soon went. It was nothing spectacular.

Were there any shocks or surprises about being in a foreign place?

As I said it was a shock to see the conditions that a lot of them lived under. They were very poor conditions. There were a lot of

19:00 very, very poor people and beggars and things like that.

I'm assuming that part of the general's instructions were to do with VD [Venereal Disease] and that kind of thing. What instructions did they give you in detail about that?

One of the instructions I can remember distinctly was that he wouldn't put his walking stick where some of the fellows might put a particular item in

19:30 but nobody bothered in Colombo. That was a no/no event.

Was anything issued to you in that regard as well at that time, any preventative kits?

We used to have inspections quite often to make sure that you were disease free. They used to call them

20:00 short-arm parades. You've probably heard that. They checked you pretty regularly to see that you were disease free and as far as I know our blokes never had any problems.

Who was on the ship with you? Did you meet anyone on board?

We had other

20:30 crowds. I think from memory we had the 7th Division Cavalry. We had other units. We weren't only just signallers. We were a section but we were actually one section of 1 Australian Corps Signals and that was a pretty big collection of personnel. The 1 Australian Corps Signals had so many sections but we were only one and we were the only one that did the intercept

21:00 job. What always amused me was we were told that we were very hush/hush. On no account were we to tell anybody what we were doing such as intercepting enemy traffic. The peculiar part was we were always given the word "special." We were 4 Special Wireless Section and 5 Special Wireless Section. People used to say, "Why are you so special?"

21:30 We'd say, "We're not special. We just do the same as you blokes do in your sections. We are just operating and sending and receiving." The funny part was they insisted on this "special." When we came back to Australia and they made it into a unit it was the Australian Special Wireless Group. Once again we had got the "special." It was ridiculous really.

22:00 The hush/hush part was more or less unnecessary. The Japanese and the Germans and you name it they all had intercept units. In fact, one complete German intercept unit was captured at El Alamein intact. They knew what we were up to and we knew what they were up to. There was no need for the hush/hush part.

22:30 In the first instance, while we were in Greece and Crete they never told us what our messages meant. I used to think, "That's a bit ridiculous because if you know you're achieving something good you are going to try harder." They said, "No." In hindsight I think they might have had a point because if they captured us and we said, "We're an intercept unit," they wouldn't be worried about that but they would be worried if we were breaking

23:00 their codes. That is all they would worried about so maybe in hindsight it was a good idea not to tell us too much. I had one chap in Greece who I knew very well who was in the intelligence side of it and he used to tell me things out of the side of his mouth and I knew a little bit of what was going on.

So back to the journey, where did you eventually land when you got to the Middle East?

We landed at Port Tewfik

23:30 which is in the Suez Canal. From there we went to by train to a camp in Egypt called El Amariya. That is where we settled in for two or three months. We were doing the usual things like training and that. Then we moved to another camp up the road called Ikingimaru. That was where we really got fair dinkum. The

24:00 technicians had the sets and we got the trucks equipped with sets. We learned a little bit about what the German preamble on the messages was like and what the preamble of messages were like. We had a rough idea that when we started to intercept German messages we would know what to expect. If they had a preamble like "to and from" and how many words and we knew all that sort of thing and what time. Then when

24:30 it finished we were really readied up for all that, so we had a pretty good idea of what to expect. It was then up to us to receive the messages correctly and put them in the right places and on the right forms.

What were your first impressions of the Middle East and of Egypt when you first arrived?

My first impression of the Middle East was how lucky we were to be Australians because the place was dirty.

25:00 The women were classed as second-rate citizens. I was astounded to see a bloke riding a donkey and his wife was behind him with a great stack of sticks on her head walking. He was just leading the way riding on a donkey. The women were very second rate. Their hygiene

25:30 was so backward, it was a dirty place really. I suppose you shouldn't say that but it was a dirty place. I used to think, "How lucky we are to be Australians and living out here." I wasn't impressed with Egypt but when we got to Greece it was a different kettle of fish. Athens was where the main activity went but we travelled right up to the

26:00 furthest point in Greece up near Mount Olympus. On the way we went through a lot of villages and they were pathetically poor but they were so nice and so friendly and helpful. We would give them a tin of bully beef and it was like a Christmas dinner to them. They were wonderful people. Even though we were kicked out shall we say they were still cheering us as we went past.

26:30 I will never forget them, they were wonderful people. They were different altogether. They were clean and lovely people the Greeks and their villages.

We'll talk about that more in a moment. The situation in Egypt was very much a wartime situation when you arrived. How obvious was it of what was going on in the battles there to you?

At the time it was when they were pushing up

27:00 into the western desert. It came later that they got pushed back again but at the time the Australians and British were pushing the Germans back. One of the first jobs we ever had besides training was a few of us were seconded to go over to the railway

27:30 siding and escort a trainload of Italian prisoners down to the prison camps that they had erected in the Suez Canal. We were real rookies and we felt so sorry for these Italians because there were only a few of them that were really arrogant. Most of them were poor and pathetic people. They had dysentery and they would ask you if they could relieve themselves between the carriages and you would say, "Yes." The one part that I can always

28:00 remember is that we bought oranges for them to give them something to eat. We felt so sorry for them. What I can always remember is if the general had seen it he would have had a heart seizure. One of our fellows wanted to buy them some oranges at a stop and he asked one of the Italian prisoners if he would hold the rifle for him for a while. I thought, "If one of our generals saw that he would have a heart attack on the spot." We were real rookies

28:30 and that is how we felt. We felt so sorry for these poor Italian prisoners because they were a pathetic bunch.

Was it a shock for you to be in a war zone for the first time?

It wasn't actually a war zone in the fact that we never had any problems. It was such an eye-opener. When we

29:00 went into the first tent that night we got there, there was dust everywhere. You would be sleeping in inches of sandy dust. We overcame that by getting some cane work and making a bed for ourselves. It wasn't a war zone in effect it was just preliminary to a war zone. At the time Faruk was the

29:30 King, King Faruk, and he was more pro German than he was British so he wasn't too keen on us being

there. They were days that I'll never forget.

You talked about the people in Greece later on being very keen to see you, what was your relationship with the local Egyptians like?

One of the examples is

30:00 that we were in Alexandria on leave and a young fellow said, "Do you want your boots polished?" I said, "No." He spread beetle nut juice all over my boots. I took after the kid but he beat me by a mile. It wasn't real good. The relationship in Egypt wasn't the greatest. We caused no problems but it was just that the

30:30 other countries were much more superior to what we met in Egypt.

Can you describe the first camp that you were in there?

The British had got it ready and it was as I said El Amariya. We had these huge tents, I think from memory we had something like eight or ten to a tent.

31:00 We had a picture show there. A bloke named Shaftoe had picture shows at El Amariya and they were made out of old carpets. They had a framework of carpets. The sound effects were good. The movie equipment itself was good but the old picture theatre she was a shambles. When it rained you used to watch

31:30 which carpet was going to break first and where you would get drenched. You learned to not sit under a sagging carpet when the rains came. It was a real rough and ready camp. It was really rough and ready.

How were you fed and how was the hygiene and that kind of thing?

The food was all right. They had these great

32:00 pots to boil the stew in. Our hygiene was pretty good but in the surrounding areas it wasn't so good. We made sure we did the right thing. They cooked in these great containers and we generally had stew. The diet didn't vary much

32:30 but it kept us going.

You mentioned the rain, what was the weather like when you arrived in Egypt?

They were mostly dry pretty warm days with the occasional rain storm. That was all. In fact when we went to Ikingimaru it was blowing a gale and raining like the devil and we had great trouble putting a lot of our tents up but that didn't last long. They had their own

33:00 storms like we do but it was very dry usually and dusty and hot.

Were there dust storms?

Yes. I encountered one dust storm, only one, but I'll never forget it. It might sound ridiculous but if you wanted to go from A to B and it was twenty yards away you could get lost. The sand belting against the trucks caused static

33:30 electricity. You could actually get a shock from touching a truck. We just sort of lay in our tents and I can still see some of the blokes lying there with the dust building up and on their nose they had a bridge of dust that would build up while they were snoozing. There was dust everywhere. You couldn't see more than a foot in front of you. You've got no idea what a dust storm in Egypt is like. Well, a sand storm it's not a dust storm.

34:00 You could get lost. It was best to stay in the tent or whatever until the sand storm blew over.

Were you issued with any new equipment when you got to the desert?

Yes, in Seymour we had bandoliers which I believe used to be used by the light horsemen in those days.

34:30 We were equipped with those for some reason and they were a nuisance because you used to have to keep them polished. In Egypt you would receive canvas cartridge containers and webbing belts and webbing gaiters and all that sort of thing. It was totally different set of circumstances as far as equipment went.

Was it the same uniform?

It was the same uniform, yes.

35:00 **What about the receivers and the radio equipment, you mentioned that you were fitted out with some trucks, can you describe those for us?**

Just supposing we had three trucks especially set aside for interception, they would put at least two sets and receivers in the truck up at the front and seating for you to receive. We would have a

35:30 truck with our cookhouse gear in it, and we would have trucks to carry the troops, so we might have had quite a few trucks. There would be three at least set aside to house the receivers that we would work in to intercept the messages.

What sort of trucks are we talking about here?

We are talking about probably three-tonners, big trucks.

36:00 I wouldn't know the name of them. I forget now but they were very big trucks.

They were covered and enclosed at the back?

Yes.

When you walked inside the one with the receivers can you give us an idea of what it looked like?

Right up at the front of the truck behind the driver were these two receivers where you would sit. You would put your earphones on and turn to the frequency that you were allotted and

36:30 away you'd go. They were just ordinary big trucks with two receivers in them. They were nothing special. There was no armament or anything like that. They were just covered in trucks with two receivers in them.

What about the support staff you were talking about before, what other things were there that supported these receivers?

When you say support staff do you mean in our section like technicians and that?

37:00 As I said we had technicians to look after the sets and keep them running and we had the batteries. They were in another truck on the sets and they kept the batteries charged. We had the linemen ready to erect aerials. There was a whole section of fellows that did their own jobs. That is how we went when we boarded the Breconshire to go to Greece we had all our

37:30 equipment ready to go.

What sort of aerials did you need to operate these receivers?

I wouldn't know the name of them but they were very high aerials. As I said the higher the aerial I imagine the better the reception. They weren't carried around in one piece. You would have sections and you'd join them all up and then raise them.

38:00 As far as Greece was concerned I don't think we did much in the aerial business because we were on the go all the time. The very furthest place north was a place we nicknamed Happy Valley. It was right by a river there. I think we had very limited aerials there because we didn't need them; the reception was so good because we were so close to the

38:30 Germans. We certainly didn't have any aerials in Greece at all until we got to Crete and then we did have aerials because we set up our set room, we'll call it, in a place called Chania which is very close to where we landed in Suda Bay. It is just around the hill a bit. It had its own little harbour. They found an

39:00 empty water reservoir. It was very deep and it was quite big. We covered it with beams and sand bags and we were completely concealed from the air. The only trouble was they erected very high aerials all around it and that was a dead give away. When the Germans landed in their gliders, they were all around

39:30 us. What worried us was the fact that they would see us going into this particular spot all the time and they'd say, "What's going on there?" We always had the fear that they might throw a couple of hand grenades. Of a night it was OK because we had a tunnel built. We had a blanket at one end and you'd go through the blanket and then low and then crawl along the tunnel and lift the other blanket and then you'd be in the

40:00 set room. You would go down the steps and you were in the set room. We had say eight sets working. That was OK of a night but what about during the day when they would see you crawling into these tunnels. We wondered whether they'd think, "Well, tonight's the night we'll throw a couple of hand grenades in." We got away with it but I think I mentioned earlier one message received was the fact that this plane reported back to base that it was

40:30 circling an area where there were quite a few aerials and would they destroy it. They said, "No, we'll capture it." That is the closest we ever got.

You did mention that. We'll come back to that again but we just have to change the tape.

00:34 **Just back to Egypt and these trucks that you were fitted out with. Were you given any training or instruction on this equipment before you left on the ship to Greece?**

Not really, no. All I could say is that we went in every now and again and we would sit on the truck and get used to using the receiver. We would

01:00 twiddle the dial and find stations. We hadn't established ourselves then. Much later I can tell you about it because in the latter stages we had set frequencies to work on. But in the initial stages we just fiddled around and got used to using the receiver and listening to broadcasts or messages being

01:30 sent or Morse messages of any description or anything at all just to get used to the sets. So that was all the training we did because, as I said, we had been told what to expect when we did get the messages and how to set out the preamble of the message and the message itself. It was just a matter of getting used to the equipment. It was not so much doing anything drastic.

What sort of radio traffic was there in

02:00 **Egypt during the war that you would listen in to?**

In Egypt mostly you would pick up very high powered stations. Some of the stations - just say Berlin was talking to some other big city station. They would use what they called a high-powered station and you would pick those up

02:30 anywhere. You used to practice on those. The idea of our section really was to get as close to the enemy as possible because the army groups themselves used low powered transmitters so that if you got close you could pick up the low power; whereas it didn't matter when you were practising you would get this high powered stuff. All we got used to in Egypt was getting used to using the equipment and what to

03:00 expect.

What were you to expect in terms of the way you were operating, you were in trucks and you were meant to be mobile, what was the standard operating procedure?

Well go back to Greece and we'll start off there. As I said we were comparatively new to the game. Most of us would what they call search. That is you would turn your dial until you

03:30 actually heard a station broadcasting and you would copy it in the hope that that was what was wanted, providing it was in code or you knew it was a German station. There was nothing set, a lot of the interception in Greece alone was done from the aeroplanes flying around. They would use a very simple code which was broken easily. They would also use a lot of plain language. They would talk to one another or talk to

04:00 base so we would pick up a lot of information. In those days we had no set standard of interception. We would just search and hope that we could come up with something that was very valuable.

Would you be given locations to work from? Would you be moving from one place to the other?

That was up to the powers that be. Happy Valley as I

04:30 said was the most northern point. We then moved back because the Germans were attacking and they were all around us and they were attacking the cities such as Larisa. We came back to a place called Ellassona and we were up on a very high spot which we called Marble Mountain. We looked down on Ellassona the town below us and that is where we were intercepting a lot of traffic. I was

05:00 intercepting a lot of very fast German plain language messages which were screaming for help, as I said before, but we couldn't do anything about it. While we were there the dive bombers came over and just tried to eliminate Ellassona. I've got photographs of the bombing. That was the story. We went from there to another place and we set up another place we

05:30 called - they had a name for that - we started to intercept there and I'll think of the name in a minute. We started to intercept there but before that corps signals were still with us in a sense. Uncle Jack said,

06:00 "No we won't set up camp with corps sigs, we'll go over the other side of the road and we'll get well away from them." We did and we started to intercept but we hadn't been there very long when a German bomber was wounded very badly. It came over the back of us and was getting lower and lower and lower. The rear gunner must have said, "Before we crash I'm going to sort a few of these blokes out." He opened fire on us but the only casualties we encountered there were that he

06:30 riddled the food truck and our condensed milk got shot up and a few other things like that, but we didn't have any casualties. Then we moved from there. It got a bit hot so we moved from there towards Piraeus, the evacuation point. On the way out, as we were travelling along the side road to get to the main road, three Messerschmitts appeared and they did our trucks in. They completely shot one

07:00 up and it was useless after that. They travelled on and we carried on towing the truck until we got to Piraeus. We never did any more interception because it just wasn't possible.

I want to come back and talk about all those things in detail because you've mentioned them

and they sound quite important. So as we don't get anything lost I just want to get to the beginning again and we'll go through it in order.

07:30 **You went on a ship from Egypt. We'll start there. Can you tell us about that ship and where you went from and where you arrived?**

The ship to Egypt?

You left for Greece?

We left Alexandria on the Breconshire. That took us to Piraeus. We then were trucked to a place called Glyfada. It was a camp that was

08:00 already set up. We were at Glyfada for about two or three days. We had one day's leave in Athens. We organised ourselves from there and off we went. We travelled through the villages and past the Aegean Sea until we got right up to our furthest point.

What were your first impressions of Greece then?

As I said we met a

08:30 lot of people in Athens and they were friendly. A lot of them were very Americanised. They had been schooled in America. As we passed and stopped at these different villages on the way to our furthest point, that is where we found that people were pathetically poor but so very friendly. As I said we would give them a tiny of bully

09:00 beef and they thought it was a Christmas lunch because they were so poor. They would sell us poultry and chickens and eggs and things like that. We would buy them off them. I was talking to a Greek soldier and his pay while he was wounded was equal to us getting one

09:30 penny a day. We are talking in drachmas. They were pathetically poor people. Their army was so ill equipped. There was none of this trucking business for them; it was all carried on mules. They had been fighting the Italians very successfully before the arrival of the Australian troops there. They had been fighting the Italians very successfully but with

10:00 equipment that you wouldn't think possible. They had old rifles and shot guns and they were on mules. There was nothing at all that you would get rapt in but they were successful. They were lovely people.

What was the situation with regard to the fighting when you arrived in Greece? Where was the front line?

When we got to our furthest point that was when the Germans had come through

10:30 Yugoslavia and they were heading our way. We were there only a very limited time and they were getting very close.

What was your first contact with the Germans?

My first contact with the Germans actually was the planes sorting us out. I can honestly say that I never got close enough to see a German soldier

11:00 but I certainly saw plenty of planes. We had no air force in Greece. There was no air force at all and they just did what they liked. Every time they thought they had a likely suspect they would just bomb it. We had a lot of planes but I can't say that I saw very many German troops. Not in Greece.

What about over the receivers, where were you first intercepting messages or did you

11:30 **know anything about what you were intercepting at the time?**

We weren't told anything but as I said we were getting messages from the planes and we were getting a lot of plain language so they could act on that straight away. We were learners at that stage. We got very competent later on but at that initial stage we were only learning. We were still copying messages

12:00 as we should have but what happened to the messages I don't know. There was another British Section there called 101 Section. They were doing the same job as us. They were intercepting the traffic as well as us. A couple of our intelligence operators used to co-operate with them, so they'd take the messages over and whether they broke the codes over there or not I don't know. Alongside us they were professional whereas we were

12:30 amateurs.

Where did the messages go once you'd printed them out?

I think a lot of the messages would go to that place I mentioned before near Tel Aviv, Sarona, I think that was the major part of interception and code breaking at that stage.

You advanced up to Happy Valley and that was the

13:00 **furthest point?**

That was our furthest point.

What happened up there?

Well we set up our camp and set up our trucks and started intercepting. That might have gone on for three days and then we had to move back. We intercepted for about three days and got our camp ready and after about three days the order was to move back because the Germans were getting too

13:30 close to us.

Was there any signs in the distance that the Germans were getting close, could you hear anything or see anything?

You could hear the gunfire. I can honestly say I didn't see them but I could hear the gunfire and overhead all the time were the planes.

So where did you move back to from there, back to Elassona? Where was the next place you moved to when you started retreating back?

As I said we travelled through Larisa and I can remember that

14:00 and a couple of other places. On the way we stopped at a town and I think it was called Phebes. The road was very high. They must have been flood prone because they had huge pipes under the roads. There was a series of huge pipes that went for half a kilometre and they were huge pipes. We were travelling on the road when the air

14:30 raid siren went so we got out of our trucks and we got into these pipes. That was OK where we were but along a little bit further some Greek troops were in one of these pipes and they dropped a stick of bombs alongside the entrance to the pipes and these Greeks got just obliterated. That was Phebes and then we didn't stop there. We moved on again after the air raid. The first stop we had really was at

15:00 Elassona.

What did you see of the aftermath of that air raid in Phebes?

Nothing much. There was just a stick of bombs alongside the road. It was nothing disastrous. Some of the towns we went through like Larisa they were blasted properly. At Elassona we stopped and that is where we set up at the top of the mountain that we called Marble Mountain and

15:30 we looked down at Elassona. The dive bombers did their best to inflict heavy damage on Elassona and we witnessed all of that. We were intercepting there and I was intercepting German blokes, the battalion, asking for help and that went on for a while.

How did you know they were asking for help?

Because our linguist was reading it out. As I said, I was pretty friendly with one of the

16:00 Intelligence staff called Stan Clarke. Stan Clarke said to me, he wasn't supposed to but he said to me out of the side of his mouth what it was all about. He told me what the messages were.

Can you give us an idea of what sort of things they were saying?

What I can gather from Stan is that this battalion of Germans was having heavy casualties inflicted on them and they wanted reinforcements to help them out. I think that was the crux of the

16:30 story.

How did it make you guys feel that you had these Germans in a difficult position and there was nothing you could do with the messages?

Firstly we had no air force and then most of the Australian troops were being evacuated. So you couldn't say to the 2/4th Battalion, "Rush over to so and so" because they were on the retreat to and they probably couldn't get there.

17:00 Everybody was on the way back. It was a sort of disorganised organised evacuation. If we had air support and they'd had plenty of troops available they could have acted on the information and decimated what was left of them but we couldn't do it.

A lot of people have said about the whole Greece campaign in hindsight that it was a little bit futile, what did you think

17:30 **about that at the time?**

We never gave it much thought really, it was to be hopefully a successful venture. When we got to the furthestmost point we knew that it wasn't going to be a very successful venture. As we found out later, Mr Churchill had promised Greece that he would do everything possible to

18:00 help them if they put up a resistance to the Germans. Well, that was OK in theory, but how are you

going to stop a vast German army coming at you from three sides when you have got no air force and the Greek army have capitulated on one side? It was a hopeless venture, right from the word go it was hopeless.

Once the men on the ground realised that what affect did it have on

18:30 **morale?**

I don't think it affected anybody's morale to any extent. It didn't affect mine. I just hoped that if we couldn't successfully stop them there we could successfully stop them somewhere else. If the Greek campaign was over then that was it. We had done our best, we had tried, our infantry had tried. It wasn't through a lack of trying it was through a lack of

19:00 equipment. You imagine how many Australians there were, there were a pitiful number really compared to the vast armies of the Germans. There were a terrible lot of Germans coming. We had no chance. Then as I said the Greeks on the left capitulated more or less so they were going to come in on the left flank and it was a hopeless situation. They

19:30 did manage to stop them for a while in such places as the Thermopylae Pass but they got past that eventually.

You said earlier it was a bit of a disorganised organised retreat. What did you mean by that?

If it was an organised retreat everything would have gone peacefully but we were stopped every now and again. It wasn't so much us but the infantry were stopped every now and again and had to

20:00 fight their way through encircling Germans. It wasn't a nice easy retreat that had no problems. It was a retreat that had problems. We were lucky. We eventually got to Piraeus port safely and that is when the story happened I was going to tell you, where the truck drivers left us and we got onto a boat called the Elce. The truck

20:30 drivers left us and they went back to a little staging camp called Daphne and the idea was that they completely wreck their trucks which they did. They wrecked them all except for one truck and one driver, Arthur Copp, who volunteered to go back into Greece and try and pick up some stragglers and get them to the coast so that they could be evacuated. Unfortunately it was an unsuccessful venture and he got captured. There was a humorous story where

21:00 Arthur Henry was mentioned again. He took over the drivers, he looked after them. They boarded a train and went over the Corinth Canal and they came to a railway station where they unloaded from the train. Arthur Henry had some very important papers that he had to burn. They were very important. Fortunately, there was a fire in the station itself. There was a fire

21:30 going so he threw all the papers in the fire but he needed a poker. Right alongside the fire was a British officer with his cane at the ready. He was fast asleep and his cane was alongside him. Arthur thought, "This is not a bad poker." So he poked the fire and poked the fire until everything was just embers and then he handed back a very much shortened cane. When the British officer woke up instead of having

22:00 the usual length of cane stick he had half the length. I don't know how he got over that but you can imagine the bewilderment on his face. Our drivers were evacuated by getting onto the beaches and being taken out to boats waiting off the shore.

Just coming back to the retreat, what information were you given about the prospect of being captured, what were you told to do?

I

22:30 suppose the main thing that we were told to do was to try to give them as little information as possible. I never gave much thought to being captured because we seemed to keep ahead of them all the time. When we got to Piraeus we eventually boarded a coastal vessel and it was spelled E-l-c-e, the name. For some reason they called it the Elce but to me it was the Elce.

23:00 They piled us on and they piled foreign diplomats on from the embassies. We had women and children. On top of that we had one hundred and twenty German air force prisoners. We set sail from Piraeus and we were hoping that the boat would take us to Alexandria but the captain refused. They talked him into going to Crete.

23:30 Geoffrey Barrard wrote a book which I've got called "Ultra Active Service" and he said he could never understand why the Elce was not bombed on its way to Crete. I've got a pretty good explanation for that because in Athens there was a pretty rife Fifth Column and the Germans would know exactly what we were up to because they would be told. They would know that on this little boat were one hundred and twenty prisoners and they weren't going to sink that boat so they allowed it to get to Crete.

24:00 They were bombing all the boats in Crete but not the Elce. We got onto the wharf at Crete and that was bombed. There was no way that the Germans didn't know that we had one hundred and twenty prisoners on board.

Again, I'll just come back to the Elce in a second but I wanted to ask a few more questions about a couple of things you mentioned before. Up in Ellassona you were

24:30 **dive bombed for the first time?**

We weren't dive bombed. It wasn't us. It was the town below us, Ellassona.

What did it look like? What did you see of the dive bombing?

It was staggering and I've got the photos there. At one stage you just couldn't see Ellassona for smoke. I have got a photograph of the initial stages and then the first bomb dropping and so on until they finally went. You wouldn't think anything would be left because there were countless dive bombers diving on it.

25:00 It wasn't us. They used us as a sort of a circling point and our CO was a bit apprehensive about that because a couple of trucks on the top of a hill was a pretty inviting target but, no, they didn't touch us.

Can you describe what those dive bomber approaches were doing and what they looked like in the sky?

They would come in formation and then they would peel off one at a

25:30 time. They had bombs that screamed as they went down which frightened the daylight out of you. It was a fearful noise. You got to respect that noise. They just came in formation and then one at a time they would peel off and pick their target out. They would dive on the target to a certain height and release the bombs and then climb up again. Then some of the others would takeover until they'd all eventually used their bombs.

26:00 **Was it frightening for you on the ground?**

It wasn't so much frightening to us at that time because we were being left alone but it was pretty awful. You would think, "What about those poor devils in Ellassona and how they are coping it and how are they coping?" It was awesome more than frightening. There were times that I had the wind up but not at that particular time.

Were there closer

26:30 **calls with bombing on the way down?**

I can tell you. In one instance when our CO decided that he would go across the road from corps signals and we set up our own little spot about a kilometre or so away this bomber came along. That was pretty frightening because the machine gun bullets were splaying all over the place. Fortunately,

27:00 we were able to take cover and the cook truck got clobbered. Then on the way out as I told you the three Messerschmitts appeared. We always had a look out in the truck and he saw the planes coming and raised the alarm and the trucks emptied. I ran away without thinking and I ran directly ahead of the trucks the way the planes were coming if you

27:30 can understand what I mean. I was more or less putting myself in the line of the fire. The bullets that missed the truck would have probably clobbered me. If I had gone on either side it would have been much more sensible. I can honestly say I was lying there and one explosive bullet from the plane landed approximately I suppose one foot from my tin hat. I was showered in

28:00 dirt so that is how close that one was. It didn't hit me so I was lucky. As it was explained in one of the papers, one of the fellows was commenting and he said, "If Nev Winton had have been crouched he would have been wiped out." So I was lucky that I was lying down.

I know we have already mentioned this but I'd like you to go through this again from the beginning, what happened when you were on the road and you saw the Messerschmitts?

28:30 The arrangement was to always have a fellow looking out of the top of the truck called an air raid alert sort of thing. If he saw any planes approaching he would warn the occupants of the truck to evacuate the truck quick smart because the planes were coming. The Messerschmitts come in very low. He could see these three Messerschmitts approaching in the distance heading straight for us so he raised the alarm and that is when we piled out of the truck.

29:00 **You ran in your direction and where did everyone else go?**

I ran the way the planes were going if you follow me. I ran in the direction that the planes would fly over if they missed the truck. Instead of thinking and running to each side of the trucks or in front of the trucks in a ditch or something I was the one that went the wrong way as it turned out.

29:30 None of us got hit but there were some close calls.

What did it sound and look like as they came over?

It was pretty spectacular because you can imagine they are firing high explosive bullets. There was a lot of racket going on and the whine of the planes engines and the chattering of the guns. It was pretty

frightening. And when you get a face full of dirt it doesn't do your nerves the world of good. I was trying to hide my whole body behind a tin hat and not very successfully.

30:00 **What happened next? Your nerves were pretty shattered?**

After the three planes flew over we just gathered again and found out that one truck was useless. The radiator had been shot out. We just hitched the truck up and it was towed. I was in that particular truck that got shot up so I was into another truck and away we went. There was no drama.

Was anybody injured or were there

30:30 **casualties?**

No, we had no casualties at all in Greece it was only in Crete. There were no casualties, it was a lucky escape but there were no casualties.

You are back in the truck after that terrifying incident, how are your nerves?

They were OK. Once the planes had gone they settled down again. When you are young you don't get terribly

31:00 upset I don't think. I didn't get terribly upset, I was a bit shaky when I got a face-full of dirt but I soon got over it.

Did it make the war seem more real to you to have such a close call?

It made it very fair dinkum. I knew there was a war on and I knew that I could be a target. Up to that time I didn't worry too much. It brought

31:30 home a lot of thoughts of what could possibly happen to you.

Did it change the way you might have approached the situation the next time?

No. I was never in that situation again where we had to pile out of trucks and take cover. I certainly would have used a different escape method than what I used on that occasion. I certainly learned by my experience.

32:00 **Just going back again to the other incident you mentioned with the bomber. Can you just take us through that once more, the bomber that came over and bombed your cook truck?**

Well evidently as I said, I can't think of the name we gave to this particular spot we had, the bomber was evidently crippled. I don't know how but it was crippled.

32:30 We knew absolutely nothing about it until it appeared. There was a slight mountain range at the back of us and all of a sudden this plane appeared getting lower and lower and lower. We had time to spot it, it was maybe half a kilometre away when we first saw it so we had time to take cover. There was a natural creek bed there which we could get

33:00 into which we did. As I said the rear gunner of this bomber felt, "I'm going to sort these fellows out as I go over because we're going to crash." So he had this machine gun firing rapidly from the rear. Then the plane kept getting lower and lower and approaching where the corps sigs were and it dropped all its bombs so that if they were lucky enough to crash land without killing themselves at least all the bombs would be gone. They

33:30 dropped all their bombs and then they crash landed in the distance. It was very frightening for corps sigs [signallers] I should imagine but not so bad for us because they were disappearing away from us.

What was the result of that? What was the damage that was caused?

Corps sigs reported no damage and all that happened was that these Germans were all killed in the plane.

They didn't shoot up your cook truck?

34:00 On the way they shot it up. The truck was still mobile but the contents weren't so good. I can remember condensed milk running everywhere but fortunately the truck was OK. We only lost one truck on the side road.

It brings up the question of what you were eating. What were supplies like on this retreat?

At that stage it was

34:30 down to bully beef because you couldn't expect cooks to be cooking up a meal for us on the retreat. It was bully beef and biscuits and that was about it until we got to Crete.

Did you have enough supplies of things like food and ammunition?

We had plenty of tinned food to keep us going and we had plenty of ammunition.

35:00 When you say ammunition, all we were equipped with really was rifles, we didn't carry machine guns of any description or anything heavier than a 303 rifle at that time.

On the Elce coming out of Greece was that among the first of the ships to get away? Where was that in the scheme of things?

I couldn't guarantee that I would give you the correct

35:30 answer there. When we arrived in Piraeus Harbour it was a shambles. We couldn't understand why the place was so quiet. Why it was a shambles was because the Germans had bombed an ammunition ship in the harbour and it had exploded and wrecked wharves. You can imagine the damage that that had done. The place was so quiet so a few of us walked into Piraeus itself to have a look and we

36:00 couldn't work out why there was no one around. Then the air raid siren went off so we thought, "We'd better take cover." The only trouble was it was the 'All Clear' and we had been walking around probably with an air raid going on. There wasn't one at the time but the air raid alert was still on and we were mooching around the streets wondering why no one was there. All the mob were down in their

36:30 air raid shelters. As we went to go in they came out and that explained that.

What was the scene like in the harbour after that?

It was devastation because there were boats burning and wharves wrecked. Our little wharf was right on the extreme end and that was untouched. The harbour was a real mess as you can imagine with an ammunition

37:00 ship going off plus the bombing they had, it was a real shambles.

What about with people trying to evacuate? What was that scene like?

The only evacuation that was taking place in our particular story was the fact that it was only us and these diplomatic staff and women and kids and all that sort of

37:30 thing. We were the only evacuees at that time and we got on the Elce and away we went. Most of the evacuation was taking place on the beaches around the coast a bit because the troops were making their way to the coast and not so much to the port because I don't think there were too many boats that were able to get into the port to evacuate them. So they were waiting off the beaches. They suffered a bit too because

38:00 they didn't do really well. A lot of the boats were sunk there. As far as the evacuation was concerned, in the harbour itself, I can only speak for our small section.

When you got to see with the Elce you weren't aware that you weren't going to get bombed but obviously it was a frightening trip?

We hoped we wouldn't.

What was the surrounding area like? Were there other ships in the water?

No, there were no other

38:30 ships. All we had to try and inflict damage should we be attacked was some machine guns but nothing heavy. There were no Bofors guns or anything like that or anti aircraft guns. We had some types of machine guns that we set up but we never ever had to use them

39:00 because we were lone star rangers all the way down to Crete.

How many people were on board that ship?

I could only estimate that there were roughly - there were one hundred and twenty German prisoners and there were roughly eighty-five of us, with the women and kids I'd say there could have been three hundred and fifty people on that little boat. We were crammed up and we had no

39:30 room. There was everybody using the one latrine with the women and kids and everything. It was pretty chaotic but it was accepted. There was one toilet. I would say about that number.

Did you know you were going to Crete? What was the situation?

No, I had no idea where we were going but it didn't take long to find out because Crete wasn't far away.

We'll pick that up in just a second when we start the next tape.

Tape 5

00:45 **We just had a question from the last tape about what was interesting about Greece and you mentioned Easter?**

Yes. I had never had any

01:00 case of knowing that there was a custom in Greece that they presented one another with coloured Easter eggs at Easter time. We were in this particular village at one time and the locals all came out and gave us all coloured Easter eggs. They weren't chocolate Easter eggs. They were hens' eggs but they were all coloured. It was a custom that I had never heard of, I have heard a lot of it since, but that was something that surprised us in

01:30 Greece.

And Anzac Day occurred while you were in Greece?

In Crete.

OK, we'll come to that in a second. While you were I guess evacuating and leaving Greece were tempers high? Did people sort of lose control?

No, I don't think so. I can't think of

02:00 anybody that was out of control. No, everybody was quite shall I say apprehensive but not terribly frightened. You just didn't know what was going to happen next but everybody was pretty calm about it. There was no panic. We were just thankful that we were lucky enough to be able to get onto a boat and be taken away somewhere.

02:30 I was never ever terribly frightened.

Nobody suffered that you saw shellshock?

No, not at that stage. I'll get to that later but not in Greece.

So the journey over to Crete can you share that with me?

It was pretty uneventful. There were look outs all the time. It was a short trip, not a very long trip. We were scanning the skies all the

03:00 time. I was feeling sorry for women and kids being on board and making sure that the German prisoners were kept below and didn't try and take over the ship. I was unfortunate enough at one stage to be down guarding the prisoners, fixed bayonet and all. I don't know what that was supposed to do if they rushed me. Up at the top of the steps was a machine gun pointing

03:30 down and I thought, "If they rush me and they fire the machine gun everybody is going to get wiped out including me." It was a very uneventful trip. When we got to Crete, into Suda Bay, that was a shambles because they had been bombing that continuously. One boat in particular was the HMS York, a heavy cruiser, and that was down by the stern.

04:00 There were boats half sunk all over the place. They had been giving that a real work out. When we arrived on the Elce a stick of bombs fell behind us. They didn't hit us but they fell behind us. Then a few more whacked some of the boats around us. The Elce couldn't evidently stop at the wharf so we were transferred to a British minesweeper called

04:30 the Moonstone. That transferred us to the wharf and we disembarked. There didn't seem to be any problems, nothing was happening. A few of us were ambling up the wharf and I heard this peculiar noise. When everybody heard a noise they suspected aircraft so I looked around and here were three aircraft heading straight for us. About fifty yards up the wharf was a truck and I thought, "This is where I head because I'll get behind the truck,"

05:00 expecting the wharf to be strafed. I was one of about thirty behind the truck when I got there. Everything was sweet and then the truck moved off and left a body of thirty blokes still on the wharf and not very well protected. Fortunately, they did drop some bombs. There were two Yugoslavian motor torpedo boats tied to the wharf and they dropped west. The wharf

05:30 rocked but they didn't do any strafing and once again no one was hurt. I might mention if I can and this might have some interest on the story. I've got a list of the boats that we were on. I have got something like eight or nine boats. Everyone was sunk after we got off it except for the Queen Mary. I have got a list of them there. Every single one of them was sunk after I got off, including the very last boat that was on, which was the Orcades

06:00 that brought us back to Australia. That was sunk. That was a very good idea of mine to get behind the truck and it went well until the truck drove off. It was humorous afterwards but not so humorous at the time.

Can you remember what was said when the truck was leaving?

I don't think anybody said anything they just decided that they could find a better

06:30 spot. There was no need to worry too much because they didn't strafe the wharf which they usually did. You can imagine they would come in low and just let it rip but they didn't they just flew away.

Given the chaos that you saw at the harbour did you think that surely you would keep going on to Egypt and that you wouldn't stop here?

Our first thoughts were that we would go to Alexandria.

07:00 Crete never occurred to us. As I said this story was told to me, and you hear these stories, but I believe that they approached the captain of this coastal vessel and he, on account of his family, said, "I'm not going to Alexandria. I am going to stick around these parts." He said more or less, "I'll take you to Crete but that's as far as I'm going to take you." That is all I know about it. We didn't expect to go to Crete, not really.

07:30 **What was said to you when you actually did get off the ship at Crete?**

Nothing was said really but that we were here to stay and the idea was to defend the island as much as possible and to intercept as many messages as possible providing we could find a place that we could set up as a set room which we did.

08:00 Nobody worried too much except that a couple of days after we landed we went to a place amongst the olive groves. It had a name called 42nd Street. I believe it was something to do with the name, they'd had a building there at some time and for some reason they'd called it 42nd Street. I don't know the real reason of it but that was what it was called. Amongst the olive

08:30 groves I copped dysentery, I really had dysentery bad. I was one of the few to get it and then a few more got it and a few more. I was there for quite a few days actually lying in the olive groves with my pants off and that was it. I couldn't do anything about it. We had an RAP [Regimental Aid Post] bloke, Harry Ackling, and after about five days Harry approached me with a bottle of castor oil. I said,

09:00 "You're kidding, Harry, castor oil?" He said, "It does two things. It also binds you." He gave me just about the complete bottle of olive oil and it bloody well fixed me. I was able to recover but a lot of the blokes, about a dozen or fourteen didn't, they were taken away on a hospital boat and they went back to the Suez Canal. We were a section then without about a dozen blokes when we set up our

09:30 interception at Sinai.

Just in respect of the equipment that you had in Greece going to Crete were you able to bring anything over?

We couldn't bring any equipment but the British had been in Crete and operating for quite a while and they supplied us with sets. They supplied us with what we needed to set up an interception section. The one that I mentioned before that the Brits had was

10:00 101 Section and they weren't landed in Crete. They were landed in Crete but they were sent straight back to Alexandria and we were the sole intercept unit. We were able to get the equipment we needed and we had a successful lot of equipment. We had quite a few receivers and aerials. Whatever we needed we had once we had set up our set room in this water reservoir.

So before a few of you got sick

10:30 **how many guys actually landed together in Crete?**

It was all except the drivers, they came later, they were evacuated from the coast. I suppose I would say roughly out of the ninety nine say about eighty five at least landed in Crete or maybe a few more than that. Everybody except the drivers were landed in

11:00 Crete and I'm not sure how many drivers we had. We could have had say a dozen drivers. The technicians were with us but not the drivers. Say eighty five.

So you've now got new equipment to use. Did you get trucks and the complete layout again?

We didn't have our own trucks. If I can go a bit ahead of the story, when it was time to evacuate,

11:30 we were told to destroy the sets and we were transported to Suda Bay by truck that they had got from somewhere. Then we were on our own and we had to walk the rest of the way.

What was required in setting up initially? What did you have to do?

To set up the set room?

Yes.

Firstly as I said we had to cover the roof. I don't know where they got the equipment from but they got beams to cover the top of the roof and there were sandbags over the top of that. We were

12:00 totally enclosed. Then they had bushes over the sandbags so from the air probably we looked like a bit of scrub. Then we had an entrance with the two blankets for night time. We got the equipment from the Brits and we had a really, really good set room going. We could intercept messages without any trouble. We could listen to what they were saying. We heard a lot of things

- 12:30 we didn't want to hear. CRE Force was the name of the headquarters below us, CRE Force, C-R-E. General Freyberg was probably there. We were able to tell them that an invasion was on the way by sea. Just to add to the proof of that, while they were talking to one, another one mentioned that this other mate of his was just a landlubber. That came into it.
- 13:00 We were able to tell CRE Force that a sea invasion was to take place. It turned out that it was happening. I am not sure how you pronounce the word but the Greeks had boats called Criques or something. I'm not even sure how you spell it. They were funny little boats but they were called Criques. The Germans had commandeered a lot of these, as well as other boats and they
- 13:30 were heading for Crete. The British navy got in amongst them and destroyed the lot, they wiped them all out. The only trouble was the next day the German bombers caught the British Naval force and did a lot of damage to that. That was where Mountbatten was on the Kelly and they suffered a lot of damage. But at least the German sea invasion was wiped out. They didn't really
- 14:00 expect in Crete that there would be an airborne invasion. Freyberg had reckoned it was going to be a sea invasion so he had put the troops around the coast more or less and not so much around the aerodromes. So when these big lumbering transport planes came lumbering in without anybody offering any trouble they just had the time of their lives. They suffered enormously but
- 14:30 just imagine if the whole of the troops had been concentrated there and if we had fighters there, they would never have taken over Crete, But as it happened we didn't have the resources, we had no aircraft. General Wavell way back in Egypt was asked to send over air force. He said he couldn't because the landing at the air strip was too
- 15:00 pocketed with shell holes. The Junkers German transport planes didn't have any trouble landing there and disgorging their troops. The parachutists were the first lot, they came down and I might say a lot of them didn't come down safely because some of the parachutes didn't open. They had coloured parachutes for equipment and then ordinary coloured parachutes for the troops. A lot of hem got wiped out, the parachutists themselves, but then these big planes were landing. They
- 15:30 were disgorging an enormous amount of troops. In no time they had taken over the aerodrome. But they suffered. The story is that through the Battle of Crete they were stopped for about two weeks and it stopped the invasion that was planned for Russia. You know what happened there with the Russians because the snow caught up with the Germans. Crete might have played a crucial part in hat.
- 16:00 **Just a few questions on what you have just shared with me. Did you see the paratroopers coming?**
- We heard the lumbering planes coming over first. It was on May the 20th. I will never forget it. It was May the 20th. Periodically each day they would come over and machine gun and bomb just to keep us on our toes. We knew there was going to be an invasion, everybody knew it but we didn't know
- 16:30 when. On May the 20th at about eight o'clock in the morning there was a general shooting up of the area, then we heard this noise and here are these great planes coming in disgorging paratroops. I had never seen a parachute trooper in my life before and you can imagine looking up and seeing literally hundreds of blokes coming down with parachutes. It was awe inspiring. It was say two or three
- 17:00 kilometres away from us. We were up on higher ground. We watched in awe but that was not for very long because all of a sudden we heard this noise and the gliders came over and they landed near us. I can't describe how impressed we were with all these parachutes coming down.
- What did the gliders look like?**
- They looked like a glider except that
- 17:30 they were pretty big. They carried a lot of troops. They got towed to not far from our position and then released. Unfortunately for them the ground wasn't suitable for glider landings and they crashed. There were a lot of huge boulders around and they all crashed. A lot of blokes were killed and didn't get out of the gliders at all but there were quite a
- 18:00 few that did and they were the menace. That is where we lost one bloke killed and three blokes wounded. Two of the three that were wounded we managed to evacuate and one we had to leave there. We had to evacuate and leave him in the hospital. He was well looked after by the Germans. He said they burst into the hospital with machine guns at the ready and he thought, "Well, this is it."
- 18:30 But they cared for him. They flew him back to Greece and they operated, he was actually shot in the testicle. They operated on him and he was well looked after. He had praise for them, where he thought his number was up he was looked after.
- So how were these three fellows injured and the one killed?**
- It was a foolish venture on their part. They were warned more or less
- 19:00 to not go venturing too far. They thought they might go to one of the busted gliders and get a few souvenirs like pistols. They found out it was a fatal mistake. Instead of obeying orders and sticking close

by they went out in the open and they copped it.

Was it just the four of them or were there more?

No it was only the four.

19:30 Nobody got hurt after that. Billy Walsh was killed and three were wounded. One of them, Bob Leopold, a German came up to him. He was wounded in the back. He said the German pointed a revolver at him and then thought, "Why bother." He was able to crawl back to the lines but he was lucky. He thought his number was up too. That was all.

20:00 We lost Billy Walsh and three wounded. It wasn't through us attacking the enemy or them attacking us, it was just a foolish venture.

Just in respect to that venture what were prized items to get from the Germans?

If I wanted to get a prized item from the Germans I would have probably tried to get hold of one of their

20:30 revolvers. I wouldn't have worried about anything else. It didn't occur to me that I wanted a revolver, I was quite happy without one. I wasn't going to venture out looking for one. You had to be very careful because sometimes they would have a revolver on the ground and it was booby trapped. You would pick up the revolver and it would set up an explosive that they had concealed. It wasn't a wise policy to be picking up souvenirs either.

21:00 Then they dropped leaflets on us, I wish I had kept one but I didn't. They dropped lots of leaflets warning us that the Cretian people had been treating the Germans inhumanely and if we kept it up we were going to cop it too but we never got to that stage.

Sorry, the Germans dropped these leaflets?

Yes, they were floating down.

21:30 They were telling us what the position was and I suppose more or less hoping that we would get the wind up and toss it in. I'm not sure of that. I know they were complaining bitterly about the way that the Germans were being treated by the Cretians themselves. I believe they were attacking the Germans with scythes and all sorts of things. Whether that is true or not I don't know. I never saw it.

So did the Germans use any other propaganda against you such as the

22:00 **leaflets?**

No, the only propaganda I saw was these leaflets. There was no propaganda.

Just a few questions on the setting up of the camp while you were there. You said there were about eighty five fellows that came over from Greece to Crete. How did the actual set up of the base or the camp actually operate? Was there a perimeter set up?

We went up to this little

22:30 place called Chania which in a round about way was a few kilometres away but directly opposite Suda Bay. It was about three kilometres from Suda Bay itself. We went round in a huge circle. There was a deserted street of houses and if we liked we could have stayed in the houses. Well, we did

23:00 stay in a few of them. Just behind us was a Welsh Regiment to guard the area. It was an infantry regiment. We were sort of helped by the fact that the Welsh Regiment were at the ready and if we had any attacks they could come to our assistance but there were no defences set up. We had defences. There were four positions that you went to when you were off

23:30 duty where we had rifles at the ready and we had one Bren gun. We used to go there now and again but never had to use them.

How did shifts actually operate when you were on and when you were off? What was the usual day?

You might work four hours on. You would work in four shifts.

24:00 It would work out that each day you would work for six hours. One shift would work for six hours but you might do that six hours in the early morning or you might do it in the night time. You would rotate your shifts around and you'd work continuously for twenty-four hours with four shifts or maybe three shifts if I remember rightly. It could have been three eight hour shifts.

How many radios were up and running.

24:30 From memory we could have had say six intercept sets going.

What would you do when you were not actually on a shift?

You would report to one of the outposts to watchout for any German troops or you would go up and be fed. It was nothing dramatic. You would just

25:00 fill in time by going to the defence position we had set up. I was mostly on shift, I seemed to be on shift a lot. I liked it so I used to volunteer for extra shifts; I was quite keen on it. I was always keen to get that particular message that might mean something.

Can you remember two or three messages that did mean something both to yourself and to the affairs that were going on?

25:30 The messages I mentioned before is the fact that we knew that there was a sea invasion taking place and another one was that they had discovered our aerals. It was things like that that they were interested in. We heard over the radio that Rommel was starting a campaign in the western desert. They sent that back to General Wavell and he said, "That's a lot of hoey, that won't happen"

26:00 but it was and it did happen. It was things like that we heard about.

There were six radios running, were they working on different frequencies? How do you actually cover the range of frequencies?

At that stage we didn't have set frequencies. Later on I will explain why we had set frequencies and we used to listen to particular stations but at that stage we were search,

26:30 what we called search and you would just search around until you heard a plane reporting back to base or some German base in Greece talking to one of the bases in Crete. You would search around until you got onto a station and then you would stay there and log all the messages. You were continually turning your dial until you found someone you wanted to pick up and then you stayed on it until it closed down and then you'd start

27:00 searching again.

So how long would a station sort of be operational for, the entire day or an hour or so?

In Crete it would be very quick. The plane would send a message in three letter code, in Morse, and the message would be over in a matter of two minutes. If he was

27:30 talking radio telephony as they call it you might be listening to him for two or three minutes, or we wouldn't, the linguist would. They were not very long transmissions at all. They were very short and sweet but continually. I can tell you more about it later. Later on we would have long transmissions. We would be on one particular

28:00 station. I was on a network, I'll tell you later, I was on the Black Sea Russian Network and you'd be sticking on that for your entire shift. In Crete it was a whole different kettle of fish. You would be listening to these short messages going backwards and forwards from the planes. It was mostly from the planes. They were the messages we were getting except when we picked up the message to say that these boats were on the

28:30 way and we were able to inform CRE Force about that and they acted pretty smartly and fixed that up. And the Western Desert and other things we would pick up, but what can you do in Crete when you've got no air force? We were handy. We were pretty valuable to them.

Just at this particular base are there eighty-five fellows working the six?

29:00 Are you talking about when we had the set room?

Yes.

No, a lot of them were just on guard duty all the time. The only ones that were really on the sets were our operators and there could have only been say twenty or thirty of us. The rest would be on guard duty and keeping the equipment going and things like that. They weren't all interception.

You did mention that you got a bit

29:30 **sick while you were there? What was the diet and the type of food that you were eating at the time in Crete?**

It was the old bully beef sort of thing. There was maybe a stew in a great copper container. There were flies everywhere. Once we got to Chania and set up a proper camp there and the intercept unit

30:00 we were fed properly then. We got supplies from below and we were fed OK there. At the initial stages around 42nd Street it was a bit rough and ready and that's where I think with all the flies the old dysentery took over. Not everybody was affected but quite a few were.

Once the Germans started paratrooping in and

30:30 **landing in Crete how did the situation change for you at Chania?**

It didn't change at all really for us. We still did our job. There was not really any change at all except that you just had to be very careful going to and from the set room. You never knew if a German was around the next rock and that sort of thing.

31:00 It just made it a little bit harder but we carried on as though everything was more or less normal as far as our work was concerned. We did exactly what we were supposed to do but at the back of your mind was what could happen. It didn't make any difference at all except that it was so awe-inspiring to see these parachutes. That set us back a bit. We weren't used to that sort of thing. We carried on

31:30 and it didn't worry us that much.

How long were you there for before you actually had to leave?

We intercepted for approximately in this set room that was set up I would say for three weeks before the time came to go. I can still, as I said, remember the day the parachutists first

32:00 dropped. That was on May the 20th. I wrote a poem about it which Geoff Bollard printed in the book. You can have a look at it afterwards. I call it the 20th of May. I used to like to write humorous poems. I liked to do that so I wrote one about Crete and Geoff thought it was good enough to put in the book. There is a lot of interesting stuff I can tell you when we get on to the Japanese stuff.

32:30 **Do you remember that poem off the top of your head?**

No, I've got it written down. I'd have to show it to you.

So you were there for three weeks, then what happened?

The orders came that they were closing in too much and they had captured the aerodrome and we had to get away. As I said, we destroyed the sets and got into the truck and were taken to Suta

33:00 Bay and then it was a case of trying to find your way across the mountains to a little fishing village called Sfakia where the boats would be waiting on a particular day. We had to be there on that particular day or night and be on board by three a.m. It was just a matter of climbing over this mountain range. We were harassed quite a lot by planes. You would have to go off the road because you were

33:30 walking along the main road all the time and you'd get harassed. The main thing I can remember was the terrible thirst. We were very thirsty and would give anything for a drink of water, I used to think, "When I get home I'm going to line up about fifty bottles of beer and drink the lot in one smack." The thirst was terrible but that was all. It was a hard climb over the mountains.

34:00 Eventually we stopped on this particular night, we'll say it was a Tuesday night, and we took cover. It was pitch black. Then it was time to get down to the beach; that meant going down not a sheer cliff but a very steep cliff and we were stumbling over one another in the dark. Eventually we got onto the beach and we were ushered into landing craft and we went to various

34:30 boats. Most of us were on the Glengyle but one chap went onto the Perth. We got onto the boats and we had to climb up nets on the side of the boats to get on board. Once we were on board the British sailors loaded coffee and cocoa into us. It was beautiful. That was it. We were on our way to Alexandria and only for one bombardment and everything was good. They wouldn't let us up on deck. We had to listen to this

35:00 gunfire go off and hope that it didn't land on us. We weren't allowed up on deck and I'd rather be up on deck to see what was going on than be down below waiting. We had no trouble, our blokes didn't, and we got safely to Alexandria.

During this journey did you have any personal belongings or equipment with you?

No, we had lost the lot, we weren't allowed to, we had nothing, you couldn't carry anything

35:30 across the mountains. You just couldn't carry everything. I carried my rifle and that was it. It was impossible to carry my gear. Nobody could carry their gear because it was too much hard work. There was no water and it was tough. We arrived in Egypt with practically nothing. All I had was my rifle and the clothes I wore and my tin hat and felt hat and that was it.

36:00 **How many fellows were travelling with you at the time?**

On the Glengyle?

Sorry, on the journey over the mountains?

There were a lot of infantry. A lot of other troops were making their way. You see, a lot got left behind. They didn't make it by three o'clock. A lot of them were kept back for the rear guard action to fight the Germans as they were coming after us. There were a lot left behind. The roads were

36:30 choked with fellows and they were all on their way to the evacuation point. When we got to the evacuation point there were loads of people around there waiting in the dark but they didn't all get down to the beach. There were lots and lots of troops. And then when they found that they couldn't get onto the boat and the word was out they scattered into the mountains and a lot of Cretian people looked after them as you would have read. They made very good friends among the Cretians. A lot got captured but

37:00 a lot didn't.

When the planes came over and harassed you did the fellows take cover or did they shoot back?

You couldn't shoot back they just came over and, whoosh, they were gone but you'd hear them coming and you'd get off the road. You would get into the scrub on the side of the road. If they saw anything moving like if there were some trucks on the road they would shoot them up but we got through OK except that you would have to dive for

37:30 cover now and again.

And aboard the Glengyle can you describe the ship, the layout of the ship and the armaments aboard?

I would say it was a British merchant turned troop ship. It was a fairly big boat that would usually carry say cargo.

38:00 It had just changed into a troop carrier but it was not an especially good troop carrier. It was just for that particular trip it was made into a troop carrier. There was nothing special about it. You went below decks and you had your coffee and you could have a wash and a shower. There was nothing special about the boat apart from the fact it was a pretty decent sized British

38:30 merchant vessel.

Was anything given to you aboard like life jackets?

No, we didn't get life jackets, as I said, the main thing we had was coffee, something to drink. No, there wouldn't have been enough life jackets to go around.

Describe for me on the way back to Egypt on board the ship when you first realised you were under attack?

39:00 The only thing that you realised was the noise. Firstly, we were ordered below decks. They must have seen the planes coming. We were ordered below decks and that is when the fun started. There were guns roaring. As I said, HMAS Perth was hit. There were a few killed on HMAS Perth. The bomb went right through into the galley and killed quite a few. All it did was lose speed a bit but it kept going. There was just this great commotion going

39:30 on and everybody wondering were we going to survive the air attack because they wouldn't let us up on deck. It was over in an hour and then after that we were up on deck enjoying ourselves going to Alexandria. It was nothing dramatic. We were hoping that we would arrive safely naturally.

You mentioned earlier when we were

40:00 **starting out - we'll stop there for a sec.**

Tape 6

00:44 **One thing we just want to pick up on about Crete is someone who went a little bit crazy under fire and couldn't handle the pressure. Can you tell us about that?**

There was only actually

01:00 one of our chaps whose nerves cracked and he took off. And we didn't know where he went at all. He just disappeared. It turned out he ended up being a prisoner of war but his nerve cracked and he took off. Then on top of that the Welsh Regiment was nearby and one day one of the Welsh Regiment ran up the street crying. He just couldn't help himself. He ran

01:30 crying all the way up the street and then he disappeared. The only other one we had a problem with was one fellow got into a cave and he refused to come out. Eventually he was helped out by Uncle Jack with a revolver but that was all there weren't any more.

What happened to the Welshman?

I don't know. He just disappeared towards the Germans where they were so he could have even been shot. I don't know.

02:00 The other chap that was one of our crowd whose nerve cracked. I know for a fact he was captured by the Germans and eventually returned to Australia.

What was the attitude of the men towards a bloke who that happened to?

You just felt sorry for them. Everybody was sort of nervous but you didn't want to show it in front of

everybody else so you made out that it didn't bother you in the least even

02:30 if you were a little bit windy inside you tried not to show it. I don't think we were terribly terrified. There are times there when you get a bit nervy but as I say, you try not to show it.

03:00 **The bloke who the CO had to coax out of a cave was he punished?**

No, he wasn't punished, he just lost a little bit of respect and that was all. Uncle Jack on one occasion (as I said there were Germans all around) and he happened to be in the vicinity of the

03:30 set room and he saw a figure and he challenged him. He saw the fellow raise his arm and he fired and it was a German about to throw a hand grenade. So we buried that bloke and that was what you had to be careful of. The fellow was silhouetted against the moonlight, the skyline.

That was a close call?

It was close, yes. All he had to do was let the hand

04:00 grenade go and there was a couple wiped out but he didn't get the chance. He got shot before he could let it go.

When the Germans had landed was there constant stress that they might be around the next corner?

Yes, you were always aware of the fact that they had crashed maybe two or three hundred yards away and just over the crest of this hill and there were these large

04:30 boulders everywhere, you just didn't know when you were crawling to the set room (especially of a night, you crawled) you just didn't know whether around the next boulder there would be a bloke waiting for you. There was always that at the back of your mind naturally.

Under pressure one way people often deal with it is through humour, were there humorous incidents?

We used to try and be humorous and laugh at our own

05:00 misgivings and say, "What do you think of so and so?" We used to try and make fun of it.

Were there any particular jokes or tricks or pranks or things that you remember in that vein?

There weren't so many tricks as I remember. It was just the fact that - I don't know how to explain it. You sort of made sure that nobody

05:30 knew you were frightened and you would crack a joke every now and again. Everybody had it under control. I can't remember what we said. We relied on two things, mateship and humour, and that was all.

How strong is that bond of mateship, can you talk a bit about that?

It's very strong. The only trouble

06:00 is that out of our original section of ninety nine there are only ten of us left. Out of that ten, two are suspect so we have lost contact over the years. We have got a unit paper that a chap in Melbourne produces. It is called IMI and we all contribute to it. We all keep in touch with each other and have until they have passed on. We

06:30 still have a pretty popular membership of the younger ones that came on who read IMI. Yes, there are lots of bonds there and lots of friendships will always endure. I have got a couple of mates, one in Melbourne and one in Sydney, and while we are alive we will always keep in touch with one another. You make very good friends, you have got to, you rely on one another. We were one big family and we

07:00 relied on one another and if a situation was pretty sick you knew somebody would be there to help you out. That is a big part of it.

At least one bloke was killed on Crete. How did that affect you in that situation?

Billy Wilds. To be truthful what we said was he was a bit foolish to do what he did. We didn't go into shock or anything we just accepted it. If you are going to venture out

07:30 amongst where enemy blokes are amongst rocks and things you are only looking for trouble.

One thing - stop me if we did talk about this but I think we skipped over it in the end was about Anzac Day which was the day after you arrived in Crete?

I think we arrived in Crete the day before Anzac Day from memory.

Were there any celebrations or services on that day?

No, not really, not there. In fact I don't even remember it being

08:00 Anzac Day until somebody remarked later, "Did you remember it was Anzac Day yesterday?" No, there was no Anzac Day talk. I think there were too many other things to think about.

Moving on now to what we were up to before which was just after you had evacuated and after the bombing on the way back and you arrived in Alexandria, what happened next?

08:30 We were transferred to a camp called Deir Suneid and we had two days of relaxation. That was where the chaps that had contracted dysentery were taken to after they had been hospitalised. They were waiting at Deir Suneid hoping that we weren't wiped out in Crete because they weren't sure. They didn't know whether we'd been captured or killed or whether we had

09:00 escaped. Much to their glee we arrived and we all rejoined again. Then after two days of relaxation we moved into Syria but we didn't do any interception until we got to Beirut itself. At that time the Armistice was just about to be signed. We were billeted in a big building called the Grand Serail. It was a great big building and that is where the

09:30 Armistice was signed by General Dentz. We took over from the Vichy French who had been in there. We cleaned the whole place up and we set up our set rooms there and away we went again. The Vichy French were still there at the time. We would walk down the street and we had to wear side arms. You would walk down the street and the Vichy French were on the other side of the road

10:00 glaring at you. When you went into a café they were Vichy French friendly and they would glare at you as if to say, "You are not welcome here." We weren't really welcome in Beirut because it had been a French headquarters for so long. We were in Beirut for approximately three weeks and as

10:30 soon as we had the place cleaned up and set up we intercepted. In my case, I was on a Russian network called The Black Sea Network that included such place names as Odessa and Sebastopol. I was on that network while I was in Beirut. It was so easy to read their messages because they used to send

11:00 five figure groups. They didn't use letter groups like the others. They used five figure groups and every group had an R separation. I used to say, "R for Russian" so I knew I was OK and we would take all these messages. Then we moved from Beirut into the higher ground. It was so hot in Beirut and we were so relieved to go up to a place called Souk El-Gharb. That was a little

11:30 village that was on a high point in the mountainous area that looked down on Beirut. We took over a big home, a very big home that was there and we were very comfortable with the top floor being the set room. While I was in Beirut, if I can go back to that, it just showed you what things can help the effort by trying hard. I was

12:00 copping these Russian stations and then one particular day I receive, instead of all these coded messages, a long list on the message of Russian in plain Russian language. So I copied it all down and signed my name and handed it in and never though any more of it. A couple of days later we called together by a sergeant that came over from Sarona, the headquarters of the

12:30 English where there were code breakers and that. He called us together and he said, "Just through the efforts of this particular message (and he named my name) we were able to break one particular code." It turned out that they had received a coded message and couldn't understand it. I asked would they please send it in plain language or they had lost the code book or something. So they had the coded message and then they had the

13:00 Russian plain language message so that was a code they were able to break. There were so many codes around but that was one that they could break and read from thereon. It makes you feel good and it makes you try just that little bit harder because all these little things help.

How much did you understand about why you were listening in to the Russians and the reasons for it?

It was just that I had been allotted that network. I had been doing

13:30 German networks and other networks but on this particular occasions they asked me to copy the Russians. I was copying them right up until we got to Souk El-Gharb. Then they would come and say, "Are you still getting Odessa?" And I said, "No, they've gone off the air." I would hear the station calling them up and there was no answer so I knew Odessa had been captured by the Germans. "Are you getting Sebastopol?" "No, that has gone," so we knew actually where the Germans were advancing up the Black Sea. That was quite

14:00 an interesting part of my interception duties.

You mentioned before that your method of working had changed by this point and you were now just given one frequency?

In Greece we just roamed all over the place but when we got to places like Beirut and when we got to Souk El-Gharb we were given stations to listen to and we had frequencies we knew that they were

14:30 using and we knew their call signs. So whichever set you went onto, you listened to that particular station on that particular frequency until they ceased operations. It was a really well arranged system

where we covered everything that we wanted to because we knew who they were and where they were and what times they came on. I just happened to be put on to the Russian network until it finished.

Where there any other incidents with the Vichy

15:00 French in Beirut that you remember from those weeks you were there?

No, I wouldn't say there was anything in particular. You probably would have read that a deal was made where the Vichy would be returned to France unmolested. They had capitulated but they weren't to be interned. They were allowed to go back to France. They were just there for some days while we were there before they were shipped out and went back to

15:30 France. There was nothing unusual.

What contact did you have with the local population?

As I said, we weren't looked on as the greatest of friends because they were very French oriented. They had been so close to France for so long in Beirut that we were more or less unwelcome visitors.

Were there any Free French in

16:00 Lebanon at that time and Syria?

Yes, we had some Free French because I have got a photo of while we were there and General De Gaulle went past us. I have got a photo of him in a car so he was there and naturally there were some troops there. I think he was there for the arrangement of the handover and the signature of General Dentz when he surrendered the Vichy troops.

What were your living conditions like in Beirut?

They were pretty good. After we cleaned the place up we had this great big place to ourselves.

16:30 The food was good, we worked shifts, we had time to roam the town and it was good. It was nowhere near as good as when we went up above to Souk El-Gharb. That was wonderful there.

For those who aren't familiar with the landscape up there can you describe what Souk El-Gharb was like and where it was situated?

It was a very small place where

17:00 they had a couple of vineyards. Up the street they had a very small café. All the locals seemed to be pretty friendly, there was no big deal of a township, just below us was a little town called Alayh and that is where we used to go down to. The fellow there used to say, "We have hot baths and we have hot showers." He used to talk in an American accent. We used to go down and have a

17:30 feed at Alayh and we'd have a hot bath and a hot shower. But Souk El-Gharb was a very small place. A particularly unusual thing happened many years after the war. I was looking at a TV documentary but what should I see but Souk El-Gharb with a lady setting out the washing surrounded by sandbags because the

18:00 Christian locals were firing on the Moslem locals. That went on in those days. The only one that knew everything that was going on was the local washerwoman. She would tell us what was happening. She was the informant for the area. She said, "You are going back to Australia." She was slightly out because we were going to Java.

Did they understand -

18:30 obviously there was a mixture of nationalities that had been through Syria - did they understand much about Australia?

Not very much, no. If you asked them about America a lot of them would know but Australia they didn't know much of, Australia was a place they had never heard of.

Did the Australian troops have a particular reputation do you think in that area?

As far as

19:00 combat was concerned they were always well - there was no trouble, there was never any trouble. I think they did a fairly good job with the local population. They never caused any bother, they were accepted all right in the finish.

After the Black Sea Network up in Souk El-Gharb what were you listening to there?

Then I might be on what they call

19:30 search. If I am on that I just go around the dial until I get onto a station that I think will be interesting sending Morse code. I would copy it down until I got the call signs and then we would try and identify who it was and who he was sending to and where it was coming from. It was quite interesting but then you might be on a German network. Whichever set you were

- 20:00 allotted to you would do whatever you were asked to do on that particular set. We also had at that time what they call a security set. We had one security set. That was something I was never on but I was told what was happening by my mates that were on it. There was a lot of loose talk that the Germans would be picking up or any of the enemy would be picking up. When they
- 20:30 finished sending their message Michael [interviewer] would say to Christopher [interviewer] after he finished the message, "Where is Billy Davies these days, he was with the 2/8th Battalion?" His mate would say, "They've moved up to part of Syria now. All this information they gave and they didn't realise somebody was listening to them.
- 21:00 So our security set would write all this down and then the CO or somebody would take it to his commander and he would show it to them and it didn't last very long. They didn't give much away after that. That went on for quite a while and it continued on in Australia.
- So you were spying on your own men?**
- We were spying but not in that
- 21:30 sense of the word. We were trying to cut out loose talk. You would be surprised how much loose talk was going around for a while. Unwittingly they were giving away lots of information. As I said to you before they captured an entire German interception section at El Alamein so you knew very well they were listening to you. If they pick up things like that that is a feather in their cap if they can find out where a certain battalion is.
- 22:00 There was a lot of loose talk for a while.
- Did you listen to other things as well in your spare time over the airways?**
- Just supposing I went on duty at say two in the morning and I was on a particular set frequency and I knew it didn't come on until two fifteen I would twiddle the dial for a while and I might listen to music somewhere.
- 22:30 That is when I heard them playing, "We are going to hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line" but it was played to the German satisfaction not to the British. You used to listen to different things and you would be surprised how far you could pick things up of a night. The night atmosphere must have been conducive to bringing in far away places. It is not that I ever heard anybody in Australia but I would hear Germany quite
- 23:00 clearly, German stations, and all sorts of things. Mostly you would be sitting on your set frequency.
- Could you tell us the story for the archives that you just told me before about hearing, "We'll hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line?"**
- I happened to be listening while I was waiting for the station to get going on the set frequency and I heard them playing, "We are going to Hang out the Washing on the Siegfried Line." And I thought, "Gee". I didn't know it was a German
- 23:30 station for a while. It sounded so good. Then they played it again without such a raring set of trumpets and drums going and then it gradually got to the next stage and in the end you could hear the bloke and you knew very well they were having a shot at the British version of what they were going to do with the Siegfried Line.
- What about German propaganda broadcast in English?**
- 24:00 I didn't hear many but I did hear a few. I heard Lord Haw Haw a couple of times and he knew actually what was going on a lot. He'd said, "So and so has gone to so and so" and he'd be dead right. I didn't hear much of him it was only on one or two occasions that I listened. There was another one too, the Japanese one you used to hear now and again, and she knew quite a lot. But Lord Haw Haw I think his name was
- 24:30 Joyce I heard him a couple of times with his propaganda?
- Do you remember hearing stations from perhaps America?**
- No, I never heard any American stations.
- At that time were you in Syria, America and Japan came into the war, tell us how you found out about that?**
- I think I happened to hear it all.
- 25:00 One of the sections happened to hear it come over the radio while they were on duty that Pearl Harbour had been bombed so we knew that things were going to happen. That was getting close to the end of 1941. I know there was a lot of diplomacy going on, and that was when Curtin managed to get the Australian troops to a certain extent brought back home.
- 25:30 when we were told to get ready to move we thought, "This is it. We are going back to Australia," which

was entirely wrong at the time but we thought it. We found that we were going back to Australia and we would then be intercepting Japanese traffic. Forget all about your Germans and so on. We had to learn the Japanese Kana

26:00 code which as I said to you before the Morse code is only twenty-six letters but within the Japanese code there is seventy-six symbols and it was a different kettle of fish altogether. We started practising the Kana code at Souk El-Gharb. We worked away at this Kana code and we nearly went mad with it. We did it all the way back on the boats so by the time we got back to Australia we had a

26:30 fairly good grasp of it except that we had never, ever listened to fair dinkum signals from the Japanese. That came later. We had a pretty good grasp of it. When we got back to Adelaide we had about three weeks billeted with families in Adelaide at Kensington Park. After about three weeks

27:00 we went to Park Orchards which is close to Ringwood in Melbourne and from there we had home leave. On the way back on the Orcades our CO, Uncle Jack Ryan, and I think he was a Brigadier then, the Chief Signals Officer, had a long conversation about what good work the section did and it would be advisable to change it from a

27:30 section into a unit. That meant that we were going to go from ninety-nine to something like four hundred. The plans were laid on the Orcades when we came back. As I said we went to Park Orchards and had our final leave and came back. Part of the section went to Bonegilla to begin training the recruits because they were then being ushered

28:00 into the army. We had raw recruits to train but I didn't have anything to do with it because I was in a party of twenty four that went up to Darwin. We went up in June 1942 and we prepared everything for a section to take over, called 51 Section. We had all the frequencies mapped out and the stations mapped out and everything for the young fellows to take over. Only when

28:30 they came up our boss our CO, Ralph Thompson, said, "I think we will have them sit on the sets for you for a while because they are not experienced enough straight away." So the young fellows used to sit on the sets with us until they got the hang of things and got the experience and then eventually after about six weeks we were allowed to go back to Bonegilla. They did a good job the young fellows, they carried on and they did very well.

29:00 **I don't want to get too far ahead because I want to ask a couple of questions along the way. When you first found out that the Japanese had entered the war back in Syria and you started to learn the Kana code what did you know about the Japanese?**

Nothing. I didn't know anything except that in the '14-18 war they were on our side. Then I found out that they had terrible doings in China and they had massacred so many people in China. I knew that

29:30 they were a pretty hard mob and I knew that they didn't mind dying for their country. So I knew that if we were going to have to fight them we were going to have some pretty tough opposition.

What was the attitude of the men in Syria once you found out that the Japanese were in the war and Australia might be a target?

Well naturally all you wanted to do was to get home and be a part of the defences.

On the way home you very nearly got caught up

30:00 **into that fighting in Java?**

Yes, because the boat broke down. The Mendoza broke down.

So what were you hearing from Singapore and the Japanese events at that time?

We didn't really hear very much and we didn't know that the Japs were at this port at Java that we were supposed to go to. We didn't really know very much at all. We didn't know anything about the

30:30 Burma Railway and the prisoners and all that. That was all news to us when we got back to Australia later on.

What was your reaction when you heard about the Fall of Singapore?

I was very sad about the whole thing because I knew so many of my cobbles were over there and it wasn't a real good thought to think that they were prisoners of the Japanese.

Were there any other events that happened on the Orcades on the way back to Australia?

31:00 There was only one humorous incident that my mate and I were involved in. We were up on deck and one particular night we were minding our own business and all of a sudden the ship heeled over hard left. When we looked ahead we could see flashes. We thought, "Oh blimey, we're running into the Jap navy." But it turned out to be a storm so that was one humorous incident. We never had any

31:30 trouble at all and we sailed unmolested home to Australia.

Was there a new fear of Japanese submarines during that voyage?

Yes, you always had that in the back of your mind because you never know. It is a long way to swim.

How did they deal with that? Were you in convoy or were you escorted?

No, we were on our own on the Orcades. No, there was no escort coming back. Going over, yes but coming back no.

32:00 In fact the only other time we were escorted was when we went to Greece. We had an escort there and it was British destroyers and quite a big convoy.

What was it like to get back to Australia finally after having gone through so much in Greece and the Middle East?

It was wonderful. It was wonderful to be able to talk to Australian people again and know that everybody wanted you back.

32:30 We were lucky. We were in with a beautiful family at Kensington Park. They were a great family and we were friends forever after that. You knew you were home and if need be you were going to take part in the defence of Australia instead of being overseas wondering what was going to happen here. It was a good feeling.

What chance did you get to see your family and friends back in

33:00 **Sydney once you'd arrived?**

As I said we had about three weeks at Kensington Park and then we went to Park Orchards and then we had final leave. That was the first time I had seen my family for quite a long time.

What did they do when they saw you? What was your reception like?

As you can imagine, it was pretty good. I managed to have some leave and I saw all my friends. It wasn't all my friends because some of them

33:30 unfortunately had been captured in Singapore. I saw family and old friends and it was great, it was wonderful. It was a worrying time because whenever anybody runs America down to me I just try and reassure them that they really wouldn't be here if not for the Americans. The only thing that

34:00 saved Australia was the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway. We had no chance of stopping the vast Japanese army and navy from just taking Australia over if not for the Americans. After I die they can say what they like about America but not in front of me for a while. They most certainly saved us.

What contact did you come into with Americans at that time?

34:30 Actually I think I told you after I got back from Darwin and I went to Bonegilla I was there for not a very long time and they decided that they would send a section over to Queens Park which is in Western Australia. It is near Kennington and not far from Perth. We set up a section there and that was staff

35:00 entirely - as far as I say staffed the intercept officer were entirely AWA's girls. I was one of the supervisors that got things going and looked after them. Then I was sent away up to 62 Section in Darwin and that is where I ended up as I said playing cricket for a while. Then I went back to Kalinga and that is where I first started to see lots of Americans, around Brisbane.

35:30 And then I actually worked at Central Bureau for a while and that was the big headquarters of MacArthur's where they cracked the codes. The Central Bureau was taken over by the Americans and the Australian Army and the Australian air force but not so much the navy. The navy had their own intercept crowd at Melbourne. I worked with some Americans at Central Bureau

36:00 and they were a pretty good bunch. They were a real good bunch.

You have obviously got a lot of respect for the role America played in helping Australia be defended but was there tension between American and Australian troops, is that something you saw?

Yes, there were lots of fights in Brisbane. I never took part in them but there were fights. You would read about it. They reckoned that the Americans were pinching the girls and that they had too much money and all that but all that aside if it

36:30 weren't for the Americans we wouldn't be here doing this film.

Was there any personal jealousy on your part towards the Americans?

Not on my part, no. I was quite friendly with the ones I knew.

Why were there fights then? Were they stealing our women or what was it all about?

That was supposed to be it. The fellows that came back from the islands and for some reason – I read about a terrific brawl in

- 37:00 Brisbane. There was an Australian returning from New Guinea and for some reason, I don't know what it was all about, but I think they reckoned that they were pinching the women. I don't know, I had no part in that.

Just getting back to the story, after you had spent some time in Adelaide at Kensington Park that was just a

- 37:30 **reorganisation while you were there more or less?**

I think you would say that it was just getting organised. I would say that it was marking time while they organised things such as when they were going to start the unit and when we were having home leave. But before they arranged it all we had this three-week stay with the Trugg family in Adelaide.

Most of the unit as you said went to

- 38:00 **Bonegilla and you were sent to Darwin?**

Yes, I was one of twenty four.

How was the trip up to Darwin?

In those days the highway wasn't built and you used to have to take very wide detours on side tracks. The dust was about one foot thick. We actually had to wear gas masks on the way up to Darwin because the dust was so thick. We

- 38:30 travelled by train to Alice Springs with the trucks on the train. Then we had to drive from Alice Springs to Birdham or somewhere. Then we got back on the train and went to Darwin and then trucked back to where we were going to set up our camp. It was pretty primitive in those days. Darwin had been bombed and that was a shambles. The place was deserted and wrecked.

- 39:00 The road had been made and as I said there was dust everywhere. Things were pretty tough in the Darwin area in the first instance.

Can you describe the scene in Darwin when you arrived? What did the place look like?

We just went through the town as I said and the Post Office first of all had a bomb through the roof. The Post Office had a great gaping hole in the top of it.

- 39:30 You would go past the houses and no one was there, they had all left and the houses had been ransacked and it was a real mess.

Was there any bombing still going on?

Yes. When we set up our camp and when the camp sight was selected I think they could have picked a better position because about a kilometre away there was a naval barracks. It was a pretty big building.

- 40:00 and alongside us within fifty yards away was the highest aerial I'd ever seen and that was the direction finding aerial used by the RAAF. About five hundred yards down the road was a pretty big anti-aircraft battery. And we were right in the middle. Every moonlight night the planes would come over, the bombers would come over. It was every moonlight night, you could see them. We used to say,

- 40:30 "I hope they are not going to try and take out the DF [Direction Finding] Aerial tonight." Their main mission was to get stuck into Batchelor Airport which was a few kilometres away. The old ground would heave when the bombs were landing. There was only one occasion that they did drop any bombs near us, they dropped a stick of bombs about two hundred yards away.

Just before you tell us about that we'd better change the tape because we are just about to run out.

Tape 7

- 00:45 **We finished the last tape and you were sharing about the planes dropping the bombs at Darwin?**

On Batchelor Airport mostly.

Yes, and there was a story where ...

As I said it was only

- 01:00 on one occasion that they dropped a stick of bombs that was say two hundred yards away and that was the closest we ever got to being bombed in our particular site. Batchelor Airport copped it all the time. The RAAF were pretty smart because they used to cut tracks into the bush from the highway. They

would cut a track of fifty yards into the bush and they would put their

- 01:30 fighters in there. When they wanted to get the fighters out to get stuck into them they'd just wheel them out onto the main highway and that was their airstrip. Basically it didn't worry them at all if they bombed Batchelor because they had the highway. It was a pretty smart move I thought. They had great success in that first instance when I was up there. The Americans were there flying Kittyhawks.
- 02:00 They would roar over your camp. They had shark's teeth painted on the front of the plane and they were like a great shark coming at you and they were so successful in bringing down these Jap planes. Then for some reason they changed them to spitfires and it wasn't half as successful because the Spitfires had come from the desert and they weren't used to the conditions. Quite a few crashed into the sea around Darwin, they didn't have the
- 02:30 success that the Kittyhawks had. The American pilots used to come over to the camp and you'd reckon they should be at High School, not flying Kittyhawks and getting stuck into Japs. They were so young. They were very successful.

On the occasion of your closest call when the bombs dropped where were you?

I think I was just resting on the bunk. You get very

- 03:00 blasé after a while and you don't take much notice of bombs dropping except when you hear the whistle and you know it is pretty close. We happened to hear the whistle this time and it didn't take long to get out of the bunk into the slit trench but that was only on one occasion. It was only on one occasion that they got close. As I said, this big aerial which was a direction finding aerial used by the navy, was invaluable to us because
- 03:30 when we were locating new Japanese stations and we weren't sure where they were, we would ring the RAAF up and we would give them the frequency that this station was using and we would give them the call sign and they would listen. When they located it they would, in conjunction with another direction finding station in Western Australia, take a bearing on it and where the bearings crossed that was
- 04:00 where the station was. It was foolproof. They would ring back and say, "That station you are listening to is Surabaya." So we could map out who was who and who was sending to who with the help at times of the direction finding aerial. So besides being a curse it was a godsend and it helped us at times. They were good days I thought.
- 04:30 **You mentioned earlier with the Germans that the aeroplanes had a different type of code to what you were listening to with the Germans, what about the Japanese? Did they have a consistent code?**

The Japanese had lots of codes; just for example they had different preambles. One particular code I had a fair bit to do with was the station

- 05:00 as an identification used a group of figures, five figures as did the receiving station. When we would hear the identification station send out this group of five figures we knew straight away who it was. That might sound a bit confusing to you but just supposing the station sent out its call sign and it was 80604 we knew
- 05:30 straight away that that was Singapore. To prove that you were getting right, and this is where it gets a bit complicated at first, you would add the first four figures up. You would get 8060. You end up with fourteen. And the last figure of that addition is the last figure of your five-figure group. Do you follow that? So another one was Tokyo was 26851.
- 06:00 You would add the two and the six and the eight and the five and you would get twenty-one and the last figure was one. So you would have 26851. You always had to have the fourth figure as a five or a zero and as I said it had to add up to get your last figure. We knew them off by heart. We knew Singapore and we knew Hiroshima was 28303. We knew everything that was going on and we could identify it.
- 06:30 Then of course they had other codes and they might use three figures in their preamble or identification. And so you had to learn not to change all the time. If you were on one particular group you knew you were going to receive that type of message and if you were on another group you knew you would get a different sort of message. The preambles were different but the coded messages themselves were always in that
- 07:00 Kana code. Do you follow me?

No, that is excellent. Just in respect to all this did the Japanese navy and the Japanese army or air force also use it?

They all had different codes. All preambles were different but they still went back to the Kana code for the main part. That was the messy part but it varied in

- 07:30 they way they sent their messages with identification. There were lots and lots of codes. You knew how to handle them in the finish. They never used it like the Russians, the Russians used figures and all the others used letters. I am wrong there because I have just told you about the 80604s but they were the

only ones.

08:00 When I say they used letters they used three sets of figures instead of five. Lots of things like that changed but the main part was always in Kana. Only the preamble and other parts like that changed. You knew whether you were on the army or the air force and you knew you were on navy by the way the preamble was presented.

Earlier you mentioned particularly with Crete that the Germans became a bit

08:30 **blasé about their codes and stuff. As the war developed with the Japanese and the tide sort of started to change where the Americans and ourselves sort of got on top, did their codes and the way they communicated change?**

I can't tell you too much about that because once you became an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer], which I did at the latter part of the war, you didn't sort of do any intercepting. I did at times on the quiet

09:00 just to keep my hand in. I was working with Central Bureau and I had nothing to do with intercepting messages. I was doing what they called traffic analysis there along with the other chaps. Then I went to the Cipher School so in the latter part of the war I wasn't doing any interception of Japanese at all. I don't know how they handled it at the finish. When I was in Darwin originally, when I went up there with the twenty four body of blokes, there

09:30 was only one time that I ever got a Japanese plain language message. It turned out, so I was told later, that it was a hoax by the Japanese. They made out that they had a ship in trouble at such and such a latitude and such and such a longitude. Everything was there and the navy said, "We have no ships in that vicinity

10:00 and we're not going to get sucked in." That was the only time that I had anything other than coded messages. They thought that the Japs were trying to find out; firstly if we were breaking their codes, and secondly whether we would get sucked in and send somebody there to investigate. So they were a wake up to us. The only thing they were never sure of was whether we broke their code.

10:30 **You also spoke earlier of some of the Australian operators after they had sent their messages finding out where their mates were in various units, did the Japanese operators do that as well?**

To be truthful they might have said something after the message and I wouldn't have a clue what it was. What we heard was in plain Australian and English language. The Japanese very rarely said anything, after the message finished it was kaput.

11:00 There was no more. They were well trained, they were awake to the fact that loose talk didn't pay. I don't think they did that not in my estimation.

The equipment that you were actually working on had it actually changed much since you first started training on it at Seymour and then going over to Greece?

No.

11:30 We used a lot of American sets and I would say that maybe they had advanced a bit in technology but not to any great extent because the ones we used originally worked just as well. These days, you might not know it, we have still got that sort of thing going in Queensland but it is very, very high tech. If you said to them, "We used to do that in Morse," they would wonder what you were talking about because you can imagine what they are using now

12:00 with the high tech stuff. Morse code has gone out of the window.

Being an operator what were some of the difficulties or problems with the job?

It was very stressful. The main problem was that everybody tried to get a complete one hundred per cent

12:30 message. I think I mentioned earlier that if there was a storm anywhere around and there was static you could never, ever get a complete one hundred per cent message that you could rely on because you could miss dots or dashes. I don't think there was ever any problems outside of the static. You could get some pretty terrible operators that were hard to pick up at times and you could get some that were going like a bat out of hell

13:00 and you were flat out keeping up with them. We always managed to keep up with them.

What about personal things like sore eyes from looking at the screen?

I did suffer from some of that. Going back to the original Darwin side at Winnellie, there was talk going on that there could be a possible invasion up in that area. Our CO,

13:30 Ralph Thompson - just for an example, I would come off shift at four AM and I would just hop into the cot and I would get woken up at six o'clock and I would have to go out. We had barbed wire trip wires running everywhere and we had machine gun posts. We had Bren gun posts on different places. We

were doing all this and we wouldn't get any rest at all. In the end you would go on

14:00 shift at night and you would have this very strong light shining on white paper. I am not telling you a word of a lie when I say it but the pain was so intense in my eye at some times that I would have to cover it up and just let the light in slowly through my fingers until I could actually get used to it. I got paraded with a couple of those. I ended up on my own though complaining to

14:30 Ralph Thompson that I didn't think it was a fair go that I should come off a shift at two o'clock and be digging these trenches. I said, "These stupid bloody trip wires they never catch anybody." And in disgust I wheeled away and fell ass over head over the trip wires. So it didn't work too well. We both looked at one another and burst out laughing and that was the end the story then. It was very hard on my eyes at time when you weren't getting enough sleep and you had to come on in a darkened truck with

15:00 very strong light shining on white paper. It was very hard on your eyes.

How did the actual equipment go in respect to the heat of the Middle East to say the tropics around Darwin and those sort of places? What technical problems were there?

I don't think there were very many technical problems and if there were our fellows seemed to overcome them all right. We had very

15:30 good technicians. We had one bloke in particular, a good friend of mine, Ernie Ostwith, he was pretty brilliant on the technical side. He was even able to build a sort of makeshift direction finding gadget that worked pretty well. We were pretty lucky, any problems we seemed to overcome it and not because of the operators but because of our technicians. If you have got a

16:00 section you have got to rely on one another but it was the technicians that got the sets going and the drivers took us everywhere and the cooks fed us and the linemen put the aerials up. Everybody relied on somebody else to do their own job. There was no star ranger in a sense.

You mentioned that you went swimming and stuff, what are some of the activities you did in Darwin to relieve the tension?

We

16:30 went shooting a lot. There used to be a lot of geese around and we used to go out shooting these geese for tucker. The funny thing about that, when you went to pluck the goose you got covered in fleas. God knows why but all the geese had fleas on them. We used to do a lot of shooting especially for food and anything like that, geese. There was

17:00 nothing else. We didn't just go shooting everything at random but certainly geese. I think they shot a buffalo or something and had a go at cooking that. The geese were really good to eat once you got past the flea stage. We used to do a lot of shooting.

And swimming, can you explain the reason why some of the fellows would wear stockings?

17:30 Not in those days, nobody knew about them, in later years when we heard about box jellyfish. I read that the people that knew about them say the lifesavers that swam up there, always wore these pantihose because the tentacles of the box jellyfish couldn't affect your skin if you had pantihose on. That is all I know about it. We had no idea of what a box jellyfish looked like let alone knowing they were

18:00 there. We just swam and didn't know anything about what we could have encountered in the water.

What about crocodiles and snakes, did you come across those?

Only on one occasion. On our way to Darwin we stopped overnight in a bush setting and down below us was a creek. They said, "We are going to go down and camp by the creek where it is cool." I said, "Don't go near the creek. There could be a crocodile there." And they were like, "Yeah!" About one o'clock in the morning you could hear this

18:30 thundering of feet coming up and there was a crocodile coughing in the creek right alongside them. I never saw one but I did see a lot of pretty venomous sea snakes in the creeks and rivers. I never saw a crocodile.

What was the worst thing about Darwin or Winnellie while you were there?

I didn't mind it but

19:00 one thing was the oppressive heat. We used to get violent storms, they were terrible storms, three storms at once would come. On one occasion I was out kicking a football in an open park with a few of my mates and we heard this droning sound. You might think I am lying but the sun was obliterated. It was a huge mass of March flies.

19:30 They were that long, March flies. They just obliterated the sun. You never knew what to expect over Darwin. They just flew over and eventually they all disappeared. We lay prone on the ground and waited for them to fly over. Just imagine, March flies that long, and if they had decided to settle on you they

had a decent old sting the March fly. You never knew what you were going to encounter. A lot of the boys used to swim in the billabongs or water holes and they used to get ear infections.

20:00 There were problems there. And a lot of them suffered from what they call prickly heat. One particular chap came out in blisters as big as a twenty cent piece all over his body. It was just the tropical climate, you used to get the itch a bit and little rashes on you but a lot of them suffered more than I did. Some of them had to be sent away because their skin couldn't handle it. I enjoyed

20:30 Darwin really, it was a good place.

And after Winnellie, where did you go from there?

From Darwin? I went back to Bonegilla from Darwin. From the original trip to Darwin I went back to Bonegilla and that was then they had already more or less completed their training. All the girls and boys had been trained and I just did a few odd jobs around the place. I

21:00 taught some girl drivers Morse code. They had to get to a certain speed and very reluctant drivers they were but I managed to teach them. Then as I said I was sent over to Queens Park in Western Australia. I was there for some months and then it was up to Darwin and then back to Kalinga and so it went on.

Teaching these girls would have been enjoyable wouldn't it?

Not when they said they didn't want any part of it.

21:30 One of them was trying to do some knitting while I was sending. I said, "Look, I don't care whether you write a letter to your mother as long as you write something. If somebody comes in I want you to be writing." Anyway, they came around but they were a very reluctant bunch, they didn't want to learn Morse code. Most of them I would say but not all of them. Some of them were quite good and they learned pretty well. It was a bit unnecessary, it was something that they didn't need. Why would a driver need to know

22:00 Morse code at eight words a minute, they would never use it, it was just an annoying thing for them and that was all.

How long were you there for at Bonegilla?

As I said when I came back from Darwin I might have been there for about five months before I went to Perth. It was about five months.

How many training courses were you running at the time?

22:30 I might tell you just something interesting. We have got to go back to Park Orchards where we assembled and then went to Darwin and the others went to Bonegilla. We were joined by approximately a dozen British intercept officers that had been evacuated from Java and Singapore etc. They were very, very experienced

23:00 intercept operators; they had been doing it before we even learned the codes. They were invaluable in tutoring the classes. Any of the young women or blokes that were tutored by the Brits were going to be much more well informed than the ones that were tutored by our blokes because we didn't have the experience to pass on that they did. They were invaluable and a couple of them went up to

23:30 Darwin in the twenty-four that went there. A couple went over to Perth with us. They were invaluable in the initial stages. As I said, they were so much more experienced because Britain and America had been listening to Japanese Kana codes for many, many years before the war. If you read the history the

24:00 Yanks were listening to Japanese signallers on the Yangtze River. They were well up and way ahead of us. We caught up but at the time they were way ahead of us.

Besides actual equipment what else did the Americans do in respect of training for you and people like you?

The only association I had with the

24:30 Americans was when I was at Central Bureau and we were doing traffic analysis and I got to know a few of them there. They actually didn't assist us in any way; we sort of were just part of the party. That is the only association I had with the Americans over at Central Bureau.

So after Bonegilla you went over to Western Australia?

25:00 Yes, to Queens Park.

Why did you go there?

They wanted to set the section up which was numbered 56 Section. All the intercept sections were numbered in the fifties and all the security sections that were used were in the sixties. With 56 Section they thought that they would be able to do a good job from Queens Park so they decided that they would set up a section at

25:30 Queens Park and that was where 56 Section was established. That was the one where the girls did the interception. I was sent over there as the advance party and to get the place ready and so on and that's the association I had with them over there. That was after Bonegilla.

So what was required to actually set the place up?

First of all they had to build a set room. Then they had to get the

26:00 technicians to install the sets. Then the linemen had to put up these huge aerials. Then the tents had to be put up because everybody was in tents in the initial stages, then the huts had to be built. So there was a lot to do but you had to start off from scratch and that was tents, build the set room, put the aerials up and get the place working. That took a couple of weeks before we really had the girls on the job.

26:30 **The fact that there were girls now working there was anything different set up for them as opposed to if men had been there?**

No. They were treated the same. They had their own quarters naturally and they had their own toilet blocks. They were treated just the same as if the blokes were doing the job as far as that went. We used to

27:00 often go out with the girls in to Perth of a night. Everybody mixed with everybody, it was no different to if you were a mob of blokes. We all mixed pretty well and they were good kids. They were good young people.

Just in respect to the girls were there any rules or regulations in respect to mixing?

There were very strict rules I believe in the initial stages at

27:30 Bonegilla. The girls were more or less in a Convent and confined and not allowed to do this and not allowed to do that. It took quite a while before the rules were relaxed. I was never there when the rules were very strict but in the initial stages they were kept isolated more or less. In the end it was different.

Where did you want to

28:00 **be at this stage, the time you were in Western Australia?**

Where did I want to be? I didn't mind where I was as long as I was doing an intercept job; that was all I was interested in. Even though I was in charge of a shift of girls I used to sit down at the set down one end. I'd go around every now and again to see how they were going but I used to intercept the messages myself just to keep my hand in.

28:30 **At what stage were you actually promoted?**

I was a Corporal not long after we got back to Australia and then when I was in Queens Park I became a Sergeant. These are all my identification things up there by the way if you want to prove who I was.

29:00 **I am still waiting for the story of shooting down five German aircraft?**

I won't mention that one, it is too heroic. I don't want to be a hero at this particular time. It was something I thought up that might interest you.

I can't wait for the end of the day. You went back to Darwin and set up 62 Section?

I went back to

29:30 Darwin the second time to be a Sergeant at 62 Section. That was one of those security sections and I wasn't really happy there. I carried out my duties that I was supposed to do and as I told you I managed to get into the cricket team so eventually after that I managed to go back to Kalinga.

So what was the problem there, the reason you weren't very happy?

I never liked that security work. I just liked to

30:00 intercept enemy and not listen to our own blokes making mistakes, that was all. There is nothing wrong with the security section it's just that it was something I wasn't used to.

Can you give me some examples of some of the stuff you listened to in Australia of what was being said by some of our fellows?

I never heard any in Australia; most of the stuff we heard was at Souk El-Gharb around Beirut.

30:30 That was where we managed to control it and I don't think it went on very much in Australia at all because they had all been warned about it. We did have security just in case. I don't think they had very much to report but they did keep an eye on the traffic. We also had what was called a discrimination unit. That discrimination unit was based in Canberra. That used to go around

31:00 listening to illicit radio signals from Australia in case there were people sending messages out of

Australia to say Japan or somewhere but they never caught anybody. That was another unit we had. We also had a press section; they used to copy all the press reports receiving information. We also had a diplomatic section copying diplomatic traffic and trying to get any information that could be

31:30 gleaned picked up.

What would happen to a fellow when he would break the rules and want to chat to a friend and ask them where Joe Bloggs was?

I couldn't tell you because I don't know. I would imagine that the battalion commander would give him a pretty good dressing down and he would be warned that if it happened again he would be charged with giving information away. That's what I would imagine but I don't know.

32:00 I am only guessing there. I would say for sure that he would get reprimanded very severely and he wouldn't do it again.

When you caught someone doing this what was the process of reporting them?

As I said I was never on that part in Souk El-Gharb but all I know is they used to copy the message and the remarks made after the message and present it to the

32:30 CO of the sender's battalion or whatever. There it was in black and white and he would show it to the operator and then it would start. That's all I know about it, I never had any experience with that.

So even while you were in Darwin in 62 Section nothing much arose?

No. They never picked up anything that would be alarming.

Was there anything else that you were doing there in

33:00 **Darwin in 62 Section?**

All I did was what you would expect a Sergeant to do with a section. I had to charge a fellow once and put him on a charge sheet and just run the place as the CO would want it run. I would go on route marches with the boys and have a game of football with the boys and go

33:30 swimming with some of them. You would just keep an eye on the place and that was all.

So what were the circumstances surrounding the fellow you put up on charge?

I think he had abused a lance corporal or something and had a barney [violent disagreement]. According to army rules you are not allowed to get stuck into an NCO. It was a minor thing, it was nothing disastrous.

34:00 **And at what stage was the war at at this point in time?**

Where are we now?

At Darwin in 62 Section?

I'm talking now in the latter part of 1943, the Japs were still progressing pretty well at that time. That would be in 1943 when I was up in Darwin the second time. Then I came back eventually to

34:30 Kalinga in Brisbane, or a suburb of Brisbane, and the CO, Uncle Jack, said to me, "We want a liaison officer over at Central Bureau so if anybody over there wants to get the operator's point of view you can fill them in." So I went over there as a sort of a liaison agent. Then after a while I got

35:00 involved in what they call traffic analysis. That meant that you received all the messages that were sent in the one twenty-four hour period and you worked out where the messages came from and went to and an expert could predict that some activity was going on in a particular area because of the increase in

35:30 traffic. It might have been a minor thing but it all went into the workings of code breaking and general information on the enemy. I was on that with a few mates for quite a while. We did traffic analysis in the early hours of the morning.

Just personally, being the liaison agent what are some particular stories that arose during that time?

It was something that I was never asked.

36:00 I went over there as a liaison agent but nobody ever asked me any questions. I was never asked for an operator's point of view so it amounted to nothing and that is when I went on to traffic analysis. I can't say that I saved the war with my liaison work because I was never asked anything.

Did things get any more exciting for you when you did traffic analysis?

36:30 It was work. When you are sitting there waiting for somebody to ask you questions and nobody ever comes up it gets a bit boring. When you are doing traffic analysis with the other blokes and you are all working together it fills the day in and you know you are doing something towards the effort. That was

much better.

So what particular things crossed your desk when you were doing traffic analysis?

37:00 Well, in the early hours of the morning a despatch rider would bring all these messages that were received in a twenty-four hour period. They were be from all places like Singapore and Hiroshima and so on. They were all identified and put into "Singapores" and "Hiroshimas" and then you would count them all up. In other words you would make a report on what the

37:30 traffic was or how the traffic was handled in that particular twenty-four hours and whether a lot of activity was taking place. Say a lot of traffic was taking place at Kupang at Timor you'd say, "They are getting ready for another bombing attack on Darwin." Things like that you would find out from traffic analysis. It was interesting work. It was a minor part of Central Bureau, a very minor part.

38:00 **If that was a minor part what other things encompassed your job at Central Bureau?**

When I really had to do something at Central Bureau that was what I did really all the time. It was nothing spectacular at all. It was just traffic analysis. It was nothing heroic.

And this was in Brisbane at the time?

The ones that were working with me were

38:30 all back at camp back at Kalinga. We were part of Special Wireless Group but we were seconded to Central Bureau for a while. In the initial stages we went from Kalinga to Ascot and then in the final stages when we were doing a real lot of traffic analysis we actually worked at Kalinga up in the compound where they had the barbed wire enclosure and the sets. We worked from there so we didn't have to

39:00 move anywhere. We just moved around and I've still got the leave pass that I had in I think 1943. I'm not sure what it was now but that is the leave pass I had from central Bureau. I discovered that when I was scratching around.

So what did you do on your leave time?

I would go into Brisbane, I spent a lot of time in Brisbane.

39:30 Then during my sojourn at Kalinga, I think I mentioned before, I used to play cricket with our unit team. One day one of the opposing members said to me, "Do you think you would consider playing for the Valley District Cricket Club?" I said, "Do you reckon I would be all right?" He said, "Yeah, you'd be all right." So I ended up playing half a

40:00 season with the Valley Cricket Club. That is the cricket club that Border went to at the finish. It is quite a good A-Grade side. We were runners up in the comp, I had half a season with them. There were some good times in Brisbane.

We'll just stop there and change tapes.

Tape 8

00:46 **Nev, I just wanted to go back and talk about some things that we didn't talk about your overseas service and one of them is leave. Have you got any stories about your**

01:00 **leave time as a soldier in the Middle East?**

First of all when we got to Glyfada, that is after landing in Piraeus in Greece, we went to this camp at Glyfada and they gave us twenty-four hours leave in Athens. In that twenty-four hours I managed to go and see the Acropolis, I saw all the

01:30 ruins at the Acropolis which was pretty interesting. It was a very short leave because we were off very smartly. We had leave in Colombo and we didn't have much leave in places until we got back to Egypt. We had leave in Egypt and we went into Alexandria quite frequently.

02:00 All we did was have a look around the shops and go to a restaurant and have a feed and things like that. It was nothing exciting. We had leave in Adelaide and we had home leave. It was just ordinary things.

Just on Alexandria what was that place like with lots of foreign troops obviously?

There were lots of

02:30 Australian troops and lots of English troops. Alexandria is right on the waterfront so you would wander around the harbour. You would chase kids that spat beetle nut juice on your polished shoes. It was just relaxing and walking around and looking in shops. For instance, when we went to Damascus and had leave we were able to buy

03:00 filigree work and stuff like that to send home. There were a lot of interesting place to see in the Middle East and Damascus and all those places and Aleppo. We went snowing up in the Cedars of Lebanon. We saw quite a bit of it.

Whereabouts did you eat for instance in Alexandria? Did you go to the Fleet Club or were there places that you remember?

No, we didn't go to any clubs in Alexandria. We might have

03:30 gone to a type of restaurant but that is all. There were never any clubs.

Was drinking, was alcohol freely available?

Yes, we didn't go much on a lot of the native beer. Just for example, at Souk El-Gharb we used to get a beer ration every now and again but to get two

04:00 bottles of Australian beer you had to have three bottles of the native stuff. We had sufficient. We would go down to Beirut on leave and there were plenty of drinks down there. If you wanted it there was plenty of alcohol about. I didn't mind a drink, I would have a couple. I have never been drunk but I'd sink a few and it was available.

04:30 **You mentioned in Damascus buying filigree work, what sort of souvenirs did soldiers like to pick up?**

You would pick up a necklace with filigree work for your girlfriend or your mother and you would pick up all sorts of things like bracelets and pendants in Damascus. You would see the little fellows working in their shops. I've got photos of the

05:00 tinsmiths or silversmiths working away in the open in their little shop. They used to make some good work.

Are there any particular objects that you brought home or sent home that you still have?

I haven't got them now but I sent home a fez that the Egyptians wear. I sent home a hubble bubble pipe and I don't know where that's gone now. I sent home a few things like that but they are all gone.

05:30 They have disappeared somewhere or other. I haven't got anything left.

What about mail coming in the other direction when you were overseas?

We used to get regular mail. We might wait a week sometimes but we'd always get it. We were always kept well in the mail department.

What sort of things would you be sent apart from just letters?

06:00 I had a couple of very nice parcels sent. One was from Victoria, it is in Gippsland but I can't think of the name of the place now, it starts with a B. It was a parcel of all sorts of goodies which I wrote and thanked them for. I had a parcel sent from David Jones. I had a cousin who worked there and they sent me a parcel.

06:30 You would get Red Cross parcels and it was quite good.

What sort of things were inside these parcels?

In those days I think the cake and things like that to eat were the main things. Sometimes they would send a balaclava because we were snowed in at times and you needed a balaclava or

07:00 socks or a sweater. There were all sorts of things that you could use. It was a mixture. Sometimes it was food. The cakes would last a fair while.

What would happen when you received something like this?

We would share it amongst the mob. If I received a cake all my mates would have a piece. One time Mum used to send up tinned oysters and that was very enjoyable amongst the mob.

07:30 We always shared. Well, we nearly always shared. I did but maybe a couple of the others didn't. We shared our food parcels. It was a bit of a change from the usual stuff.

Who were you writing to and who was writing to you during that time?

I used to write to my family naturally and my friends in Cronulla and

08:00 relatives that I had and all my old schoolmates. There were lots of people that I used to write to. I like writing letters. I like getting them but I wrote to quite a lot of people. I don't know whether they all arrived as written because the censor would go to work in some parts when you would try and describe in a roundabout way where you were. For instance, if you wanted your mother or father to know that you were in Greece you used to

08:30 try all sorts of tricks to let them know. You'd say, "Remember so and so that had the shop. I might see some of his relatives." Mum would know he was a Greek but I think they might have cut some of those things out and anything that could have possibly given away information. You would try to be smart but they outsmarted you in the finish I think.

Were there any sweethearts of women that wrote

09:00 **to you or perhaps pen pals?**

Not at the time, no. They were friends but definitely not sweethearts or anything like that. It was mostly friends and family.

Just on entertainment on leave, were there ever any concert parties or organised

09:30 **entertainments?**

On leave or at the camp?

At the camps?

Yes. We used to have a concert party every now and again. They were good. It was a bit of a break in the monotony. I can always remember one incident when I was on leave in Sydney. It was almost the done thing not to pay your fare if you could avoid it. I

10:00 decided along with my father and another friend that I would go to Canterbury Races because there was a couple of horses that I had seen up in Brisbane racing and I reckoned they'd be a pretty good bet if I could go to the races at Canterbury this day. I didn't pay my fare. We got off at the station at Canterbury and there were two soldiers in front of me and they hadn't paid their

10:30 fare. As they went through the gate I noticed that the guard tapped them on the shoulder. Then I noticed that two MPs [Military Police] grabbed them. I decided that it wasn't a wise thing to go through the gate at that time. So I shot up the very end to see if I could exit in safety up there. My father had woken up to what was going on and he went to the ticket window and bought a return ticket to the next station and was ready to pass it over to me. I reckon only for five

11:00 seconds instead of going to Canterbury Races I would have been in the back of an MP's truck. That was a close escape. If you ever saw a military policeman not wearing a webbing belt you knew he was a military policeman based in Sydney and they were buggers. They would pull you up on the slightest pretext.

11:30 I was even pulled up once for not having the top button done up on my uniform on a hot day. It was things like that. I never, ever got into trouble but I nearly got caught that day without a ticket.

You showed me your leave pass which was quite flexible. Can you tell us about that?

We didn't get a leave pass like that in any other unit except Central Bureau.

12:00 If you were going on home leave or special leave you got a longer pass but if you went up to the orderly room to get your leave pass for the day it would only be for that particular day. You would never get one for any longer. You always had to be back by what they called twenty three fifty nine: that was one minute to midnight. At Central Bureau they had that other type of pass which was so much better. You just

12:30 carried it around with you and you never had to worry about getting picked up in town. We were always OK because it was flexible.

What were the penalties for getting picked up without a leave pass?

I don't really know but I should imagine you could be fined so many days' pay or get pack drill and things like that. I don't think they'd execute you but they would

13:00 punish you in some way and usually by a couple of day's pay or confined to barracks for a week or pack drill for a few afternoons every day in the week.

Just back to concert parties, where did you see those? Was it just in the desert?

No, mostly I can only say it happened at Kalinga. We had a few concert

13:30 parties at Kalinga but at Seymour in the early days they used to bring out concert parties from Melbourne. They might come out every week, ever Saturday or Sunday night they might have a concert party that had come from Melbourne to entertain the troops. That was pretty frequent in Seymour but there was nothing overseas.

What sort of thing would those concert parties consist of?

Singers and pianists and things like that.

14:00 It was mostly singers and pianists. There were no can can girls or anything like that.

What affect did that have on morale? Were they appreciated?

Yes, very much because you knew the people had gone to great lengths to entertain you so it was up to you to appreciate it. They were much appreciated.

Were there less formal concerts and singing? Were songs used in a form of entertainment in

14:30 **the army?**

Not really. Not in our case, no. We had a fellow that sort of thought he could play the ukulele and he failed dismally. Another one thought he could play the saxophone and he failed dismally but other than that we didn't have any great entertainers.

There was no particular section song?

No, not really. We didn't have a battle

15:00 hymn. We used to sing a few bawdy songs at times but I couldn't repeat some of them.

Can you remember any? The bawdy songs are particularly important for the archive, that's why I ask. They are not going to get recorded anywhere else.

No, I couldn't remember all the words to the bawdy songs but one song in particular they used to sing was

\n[Verse follows]\n

15:30 "Adolf Hitler only had one ball,\n

Goering had two but very small,\n Himmler had something similar\n But Doctor Goebbels had no balls at all." \n

That was one of them.

I think they still sing that one to this day.

16:00 **What about sporting entertainment? Obviously you had the cricket when you were in the organised competition in Brisbane but what about other places?**

At Seymour when we were there originally they had sports day and you would have swimming races in the Goulburn River. You would have throwing the cricket ball as far as you could and whoever threw the

16:30 furthers won that. There were races run and it was a sports day all around. When we were overseas we used to go to the races at Syria I think. I am sure it was in Syria. I don't think we ever went to a race meeting in

17:00 Egypt. There were sporting activities of a kind somewhere.

Did any Australians play football or cricket against each other overseas?

Not in our particular part, no. They did naturally have army and navy and air force cricket teams but they

17:30 weren't played around where we were. We had fellows like Miller and so and they started off in service. They were very good crickets. While we were at Kalinga we had our own Aussie Rules team and I played in that for a while. One of my mates, Bill Ryan, he was the captain of the team and he said to me, "You are going to play Aussie Rules next week because you've got pretty safe

18:00 hands." I said, "All right. I don't know much about it. I don't know the rules." He said, "Don't worry." I said, "Where will I be playing?" He said, "You're in the ruck." I said, "What do you do in the ruck?" He said, "You'll soon find out." I did because every time I went to go up for the ball I was hammered into the ground like a stake. I soon found out what you did in the ruck. That didn't last long because I got kneed in the stomach a couple of times and I had a bruise about that big on my stomach so I decided Aussie Rules

18:30 wasn't my sport.

What about gambling? You went to the races but what sort of gambling opportunities were there?

There was two-up every night. There was two-up not so much with pennies but with dice. Every night you would play two up.

How did that work with dice?

Well you had heads and tails on the dice. Instead of having numbers you had heads and tails on the dice. Sometimes you played with

19:00 three pennies. You always played with three because if you played with two you were continually

getting the same result like one even all the time, one of head and one of tails. You always played with three and you usually got a result straight away then. I played plenty of two-up. You would put so much into the centre and you would be the spinner and hopefully you would go at least three spins and get a few bob out of it or you would fail dismally after your first

19:30 spin. We had plenty of gambling. We'd play cards for money. We would play all sorts of cards for money like poker. You name it and we played it for money.

Where were the two-up site rings organised?

As soon as the day's activities were finished you would go down to the shower recess. It was in the shower area where there was plenty of cement floor and away you'd go.

20:00 **Was that overseas or just in Australia?**

That was in Kalinga. Up at Darwin I used to stop at particular camps and they'd play there. One particular time a fellow said, "Give us a look at those pennies" and sure enough he had a double headed penny. I don't know what happened to the bloke that was spinning the double-headed penny but I'm sure he got dealt with severely. There was gambling all the time.

I have heard of that being organised on ships, did you ever find that was the case on the ships that you were on?

20:30 We never played two-up on the ship much, no. They would have but we didn't. We had a lot of sporting activities like shuffleboard and things like that but where you push things along and try to get them into a certain position but, no, there wasn't any gambling on the boats that we were on.

What were the rules in the army about gambling was it

21:00 **frowned on or condoned?**

They weren't too happy about playing two-up but they tended to ignore it most times. It was supposed to be not allowed. Nobody was going overboard with what we did. We didn't have much money to play with. I gambled. I like to gamble and I was always in it.

21:30 It wasn't very successfully but I had a go.

The other form of entertainment that you might have come across especially when working with the AWA's was dances. Were any of them ever organised?

I never went to them but they used to have dances almost every night. One of the Brits could play the piano very well. He was a member of one of the well-known bands in England and you could hear him playing the

22:00 piano. They had dances over there but I never attended the dances. They had them and they enjoyed them.

That was only in Queens Park?

I'm talking about Kalinga now when the restrictions were lifted off the girls to a certain extent. In Bonegilla it was very strict and they weren't allowed to hardly blink. At Kalinga they were much more relaxed.

22:30 The girls of course had their own quarters over one side of the camp and the blokes were on the other. I would hear the piano going when I would come back from Brisbane and you knew there was a dance on. They had a good time.

What were the restrictions like in the time you were in WA?

There were no restrictions. Our Boss, Ernie Elswick who I told you was a very good technician, he was in charge over

23:00 there and he was quite a sensible bloke. If you went overboard he would pull you up but he knew that you would behave yourself so there were no restrictions. We used to go into Perth quite a lot with the girls parties of us. We used to go to Kings Park and the Swan River and have picnics always with the girls and there was no trouble at all. We never ever caused any trouble.

Were relationships struck up at this time?

23:30 Yes, quite a lot of the fellows married the AWA. In fact some of them left their wives and went away with the AWA at the end of the war. Things like that happened. There were quite a few relationships struck up.

It sounds like quite a big scandal. Are there any particular stories that can remember about that?

You would say, "I wonder why he has left his wife?" But it wasn't frowned on. It was just part of life I suppose.

24:00 There was no scandal really. Maybe there was a scandal at one time when one of the girl sergeants was caught in the back of a truck with one of the lieutenants. One of the guards noticed it and reported it and the lieutenant got moved on. That was a bit of a scandal but it was unlucky she got caught and he got caught.

Where was that?

That was at

24:30 Kalinga. It was in the back of a truck at Kalinga. He was a really good bloke, the lieutenant, too. He used to play cricket with us. He got caught. There wasn't much of that going on not that I knew of. There might have been a lot of it that went on but not that I knew of.

When you were overseas there were obviously no women. There were no women in your life for a long time. Did that pose any problems with a bunch of men with no women?

Not really, no.

25:00 I am only speaking for myself. I suppose the married blokes would be missing their wives very much and all that went with it but, no, it wasn't too bad. It is not that we had much to do with the local girls. The only ones that I

25:30 really thought were nice to meet was while we were at Souk El-Gharb there were an American crowd of women that came along and invited us down for a party. They turned out to be a sort of Christian crowd but it was nice to see American women for a change instead of all the locals that we had been encountering, the Egyptian girls.

26:00 The Greek girls were very nice, they were friendly and nice but I wasn't too keen on them in some of the other places.

Were there many brothels?

There were lots of them in Beirut; there was a whole area of them. Most of them were in bounds and some of them were out of bounds. The in bounds ones used to be checked regularly by the doctors and the out of bounds ones were never checked so you never knew what you would cop if you ever

26:30 went there. That was the main part that I struck as far as brothels were concerned was Beirut.

How did they keep the in bounds ones under control?

I think just by regular checks by the medical staff. Then of course they had their own contraception and things like that.

27:00 No doubt you would realise that a lot of the blokes used to take advantage of them but nobody ever got into trouble over it, there were no diseases or anything like that. I would say it was well controlled.

Was that the Australian in Beirut or the British Army who did those checks?

Mostly while we were there it was Australians. There were some Brits but not many.

27:30 **Are there other places that you came across them apart from Beirut?**

Not on the scale that Beirut had. If you went to West Australia you struck them in places like that naturally but not on the scale of Beirut. Beirut was almost as big as the shopping centre in the whole of Cronulla. That was one area for brothels. There were lots of them.

What was that area called do you remember?

28:00 I forget. It had a name but I forget it, I can't think of it. I know some of them had names for areas but I can't think of that one.

I remember Sister Street was in somewhere?

Sister Street came to mind but that wasn't in Beirut. I just can't think where I heard of Sister Street but I've heard of it.

28:30 **Moving back to Australia, after your time at Central Bureau you went back to Bonegilla, no to Balcombe?**

When I had finished at Kalinga and central Bureau, when I had finished there with the traffic analysis and what went with it,

29:00 our CO, Uncle Jack Ryan, said, "I would like you to gain cipher experience." He sent me Balcombe along with three others which is near Mornington in Melbourne. We went to Balcombe to a Cipher School. I was there and did the course. I could have been there for three months I suppose and I had

29:30 got through the thing. I was due to go to New Guinea with one of the sections and the war ended and that was the finish. We had a great RSM there named Sam Bickford. Sam said to me, "The war is over

and if you apply for leave you'll get it and you'll go to Sydney and you don't have to come

- 30:00 back." He said, "If you apply for leave they will send you to Sydney and you can stay there until you are discharged." I said, "That's good." So I applied for leave and got it and I did come down to Sydney.
- 30:30 We used to have to return to Addison Street in Marrickville, that was the staging camp. They sent me up to Holsworthy, Liverpool. And I got up there and the fellow said to me, "We can't keep you here. Is there a unit in Sydney that you could stay with until you are discharged." I said, "Gee, I don't know any units in Sydney really." Then I said, "What about the Postal Unit which is
- 31:00 based at Surry Hills." He said, "Give them a go." I think I mentioned it before, I went down to Surry Hills to see them at the Post Office and I said to the fellow, "What are my chances of joining you here until my discharge?" He said, "There's no way mate. We've got enough NCOs now without any more." You learn to be pretty smart in the army
- 31:30 after a few years so I went back to Holsworthy and I said, "Yeah, they want me there." So he signed all the papers. I took them back to the Post Office back at Surry Hills and the RSM just scratched his head and said, "Righto, you're here." And I was there until I was discharged. I had a really good cop there because they used to give you food coupons to take home. I used to go home every night. All I did was to take mail to the airport at Mascot once a
- 32:00 day, that was my job. It is the greatest cop I ever had but I still wanted to get out and I had to wait a while. Being single, although I had the length of service I didn't have the points. A married bloke could be in the army for two years or two and a half years and I'd been in for five years and he would have more points because he was married so I just had to wait my turn.
- 32:30 **We'll come back to the end of the war and finish that in a moment. The one thing we don't have much information on is the cipher school. What were you learning in Balcombe?**
- We were learning to receive a ciphered message and break it back into plain language. In other words when it was came it was coded and you learned to decode it or bring it back to a readable message for anybody. It was the tricks of the trade. You had to do all sorts of
- 33:00 things to break the code and you knew how to do it eventually. That was all, you just decoded messages.
- What were some of the tricks of the trade?**
- You had to use instruments and calculations and things like that and you would have a book of instructions and what particular way to do some sort of thing. There was a lot to it, you eventually got it.
- What did these instruments look like?**
- When I say
- 33:30 instruments I mean calculators and things like that. It was nothing you could boast about. Actually, you just had to learn how to do it and the way to go about it and to concentrate on what you were doing and it came pretty easily at the end. It was very daunting at first but not at the finish.
- What were most of those codes around, numbers?**
- It was mostly letters.
- 34:00 Most of the codes that we used and the Germans used were based on letter codes and not number codes. They weren't figures. They might be in five letter groups or three letter groups, it all depended on what particular code you were using. You would get them in five letter groups and three letter groups and so on and so on. I never ever saw any
- 34:30 Australian ones. The Russians used figures but not the Australians.
- So to give somebody who didn't know anything about it who didn't know how they worked you would substitute letters for letters and that would be worked out on various systems?**
- On a scale sort of system. It is hard to explain and it is so long ago that I forget the rudiments. It was a case
- 35:00 of using a sliding - one particular day you might use A as a K and another day you might use something else. It all depended on what particular scale you were using on what particular day to work out your codes. It was a bit more complicated than
- 35:30 that but I couldn't explain to you the whole routine.

But once you set one letter on these scales it would be able to fall into place?

That's right, yes. It was sort of a very minor Enigma machine that we had.

Were there more complicated codes used by Australia like the Enigma code?

No, I never heard of the Enigma code until after the war; that was a very well kept secret. If you read about the Enigma Code you would give all the credit to Bletchley Park in England but if you knew the true story the ones that were the real cause of the Enigma Code being broken were the Polish. I don't know if you ever knew that.

36:00 The Polish Government managed to get an Engima machine from a German trader or they managed to get the workings of an Enigma machine from a French spy. I am not sure which. I have read both of them. They were able to build an Enigma machine which actually cracked the codes. The only thing was the

36:30 Germans used to put a different rotor in now and again and they'd have to learn to fix that up. Then in 1939 they handed that over to the British government. So the British government had a head start all through the Poles. Three mathematicians were responsible for that and they don't get much credit but they were the ones. Bletchley Park gets a lot of credit and they should too because they carried on a did a magnificent job but if it wasn't for the

37:00 Poles they would have been miles behind.

As you say that was top secret at the time?

For seventeen years it was kept secret. It was from 1928 until the end of the war.

What was the level of secrecy surrounding your ciphering work?

Ciphering work?

Did you need special clearance to go to the school?

I suppose the cipher school took the fact that my CO had advised them that I was going up there so they knew I wasn't a risk and I suppose that was good enough. I didn't have to have a clearance or anything but I don't know. I was always looked on as a responsible sort of bloke so I suppose they took the CO's word for it but I don't know.

You said at the beginning of the war you were always called "special" and there was some

37:30 **secrecy surrounding your job as an interceptor, did that continue throughout the war?**

As I said earlier we were called 4 Special Wireless and we were called 5 Special Wireless and when the decided to make it into a huge unit they called it Australian Special Wireless Group. I could never understand why they used the word "special" when they could have just called us the Australian Wireless Group because Special draws somebody's

38:00 attention as to the fact as to, "Why are you blokes special?" That is all I ever said about it.

Were you free to talk about your work to anybody?

No, we weren't supposed to talk to anybody. We weren't supposed to tell a soul what we were doing. As I said, that didn't really matter because they knew what we were doing, they knew.

I'm glad you decided to tell us today and it's no longer secret. We'll just stop for a second because we have to change the tape.

Tape 9

00:44 **When did you first hear the news or I guess firstly that the bombs had been dropped in Japan?**

I'm sure I heard it when I was at guard when I was listening to the radio. I'm sure that was when

01:00 I first heard it. That was when we first started to be taught the Kana code so I'm sure that was when I was in Syria up above Beirut.

Sorry when did you first realise that the atom bombs in Japan had been dropped?

I think from memory I was at Balcombe when the first one went off and then it wasn't very long after that that they dropped the other one on Nagasaki.

01:30 I was there when they dropped the Nagasaki bomb so I must have been there when they dropped the Hiroshima bomb. I would say when I was at Balcombe is when I would have known about that. I can remember we were doing a sort of a route march when it came over the loud speaker that Japan had surrendered. I had a rifle and I felt like throwing it up like you do your hat. I controlled

02:00 myself and kept hold of it but the feelings went through me to say, "Thank god it is over." It was beautiful. It was back to normal.

What was it about the war at that point in time, was it the boredom and the monotony of it that frustrated you?

I was in in 1940 and I was in until 1946 and you tend to get a bit sick of it by that time.

- 02:30 I don't know how to explain it but if the war had continued I would have been quite happy. I can tell you something very funny. I went home on leave once and I said to Mum or my father, I said, "I'm getting a bit sick of this. It's been going on for so long and I'm getting sick of the army." I said it but I didn't really mean it.
- 03:00 My uncle was a great friend of a labour politician in Maryville named Lazorini. Mum must have blown down my uncle's ear and he must have gone and had a yarn to Mr Lazorini. The next thing was I got a note from my mother to say that Mr Lazorini had said to tell me to go up to my Commanding
- 03:30 Officer and tell him that I am resigning from the army and to just leave it to Mr Lazorini and he would fix it up. I said to Mum, "Can you just imagine me going up to Uncle Jack and saying, "I'm resigning from the army, sir." The next thing I would be in the cooler let alone resigning. I thought that was quite humorous, "Just tell your CO you are resigning from the army." I think I've said it before but I
- 04:00 don't think there was ever an section of fellows that owed their lives to our CO that we affectionately called Uncle Jack. He was a marvellous bloke. I mentioned that he had gone and got a telegram from General Freyberg with a request that we be given priority in the evacuation. Many years after the war I went to see Colonel Ryan,
- 04:30 he was a widower then, his wife had died. I had a cup of tea with him and he showed me the form so he still had the form and I only wished I had have photocopied it because that would have been something I would have liked to have had to show people. He showed me the form and that was what got us out of Crete. I don't think I could ever say what a wonderful bloke he was, he was a
- 05:00 marvellous fellow, he stuck to us like glue.

There was the example in Greece that you have shared with us. Were there other examples of how he was a terrific bloke and stuck with you?

He was always a bloke to look after the welfare of his men. He worried about them and he was like a father to everybody. We were all young blokes. I was nineteen, twenty and twenty-one at the. I was nineteen when I went

- 05:30 in and twenty and twenty-one when I was in Souk El-Gharb. We were only young blokes most of us and he was an elderly chap as you'd expect if he was in the 1914/18 war as a naval boy of some sort. He was like a father figure. Naturally if you went off the rails he would pull you up, he was pretty strict. He always had a saying, "If you play ball with me I'll play ball with you"
- 06:00 and he stuck to it. There was one amazing incident; I had a good mate in the section named Ronnie Baines. He sneaked into Seymour one night and while the picture show was in darkness he sneaked in and sat down. Then interval came and the lights went up and who should he be sitting next to but Uncle Jack, he was
- 06:30 AWL [Absent Without Leave] and he was sitting next to the CO. He got into trouble but not very much, but I thought that was humorous. How unlucky could you be to be sitting next to the CO when you are AWL in the picture show.

What was an occasion when you got into trouble from Uncle Jack?

I can honestly say I never, ever had any trouble. I stuck to the rules and never caused any

- 07:00 trouble. I never went AWL, I lie, I did go AWL while I was at Balcombe because I was very good mates with the RSM and he said, "If you get caught I know nothing about it." So I used to spend every weekend in Melbourne when I should have had every second. I stuck to the rules all the time I was with Uncle Jack and never got into trouble.

What was the reason for going to Melbourne every other weekend?

To see Gwen,

- 07:30 I stayed at their place. I stayed there every weekend that I had leave I would stay with Gwen's mother and father and Gwen's sister and Gwen. That was the big attraction to get to Melbourne.

When the war ended what celebrations did you get caught up in?

They were carrying on in Sydney and when I look at TV footage I see they were

- 08:00 dancing in the streets. I was way up in Balcombe so I never took part in any of that, I was never in any of that sort of celebration stuff. I would have naturally if I was in Sydney but I was way up in Balcombe and just in camp and we celebrated with a few beers and that is all. It was nothing like they did in Sydney and Melbourne and wherever with great crowds kissing one another and doing all sorts of

- 08:30 good things.

What plans did you have on leaving the army?

I decided that I would join the Police Force which I think I mentioned. I did everything right and I passed everything but I had to go and have a medical. Part of the medical was an eyesight test for colour blindness. That consisted of some pages of confetti that

09:00 worked in some way that if you were colour blind you couldn't see figures. I never saw any bloody figures all the time the pages were turned over and the doctor said, "You're colour blind and that rules you out." He said, "Wait there just to make sure that I am telling you the truth." He got the next fellow to come along and he would say, "One hundred and twenty-eight, seventy-four" and he had no trouble at all. I couldn't see any figures so I was colour blind all right.

09:30 Yet, I still reckon I can see colours. When I was driving I could see the red light and the green light and what colours you are wearing. I get some wrong but I don't reckon I am colour blind completely. That is what he reckoned on account of this confetti test so my police force days finished very abruptly.

When did you decide that you actually wanted to marry Gwenda?

It was while I was at

10:00 Balcombe when I thought I was going to New Guinea that I tried my luck and fortunately for me it worked. That was at around about that time.

Can you explain or share with me the story of actually leaving the army. How did you react to the final news and receiving orders that it was over?

You just felt

10:30 like cheering like mad and you were thinking, "Thank God." And what a great relief it was that firstly, I was going to New Guinea and I didn't have to go and secondly that I was going to go back and do my own thing and not be in the army. It was a wonderful feeling. The days were over and the war was over. The only sad thing is the fact that I had lost quite a few

11:00 mates that I knew in Cronulla because they were on that infamous Burma Railway. There was a lot of bad luck there.

What were some of the difficult things about settling into civilian life?

It wasn't so much difficulty really. I soon settled in.

11:30 I don't think I had any trouble. I wasn't suffering from any nervous tension or anything like that like some of the poor devils were. Some of the poor fellows couldn't settle back into married life again and they were always irritable and cranky. That never affect me, I was lucky in that way.

12:00 **Now that the war is over what does Anzac Day mean to you?**

It means that people can appreciate by going and watching the march or watching it on television they can appreciate that a lot of these fellows they see marching put their lives at risk for them. They can appreciate that they played a very small part

12:30 maybe in making Australia secure. They tried their best to do everything they could. I think it is just a matter of appreciation. In my case I like to go on Anzac Day and meet as many of my old mates as possible. You might only meet them once a year. You might talk to them on the phone but you don't meet them. You see them once a year and it is good to get down and have a couple of beers with them and you hope you can

13:00 meet them again the next year. That is all it means to me. But I think the young blokes should be told that sacrifices were made for them. They seem to do that.

How do you think the Wireless Group contributed to winning the war?

I'm sure when I say the Wireless Group I have got to include not only Australian intercepts. We only had one

13:30 intercept section in the Australian army, one. When I say we only had one unit we had one unit that consisted of quite a few sections. The RAAF had about seven WUs as they call them, that is Wireless Units. The Yanks had intercept stations all over the place and the navy had intercept stations. So you don't sort of pick on

14:00 one because everybody was intercepting messages. When you realise that on a lot of these messages the codes were broken and for instance they broke the Enigma Code and they knew exactly where all those U Boats were that the Germans were smashing the convoys to pieces with. They knew exactly where they were and they destroyed them. Just imagine what a difference it made to the war because they actually knew

14:30 more about the German movements than some of the Germans did in that particular section. We knew a lot about the Japanese because we had broken their codes. And in one case, and this is fair dinkum, it was in a place called Sio I think in New Guinea, the Japanese had to retreat over the mountain and they were supposed to destroy their code books. The

15:00 lieutenant or officer in charge of that particular job must have thought, "Bugger that, I'm going to just bury them." He buried them and he didn't destroy them because everything was damp over there and they couldn't set fire to them and I don't suppose they had any petrol. So he buried them in a creek bed. As it happened a 9th Division sapper came along with a mine detector and he got a register. And they dug down and they found the trunk and it was full of Japanese code books.

15:30 They knew everything that the Japs were doing in one particular area so you can imagine that it has to shorten the war if you know what your enemy is doing. I think it played a very significant part.

Excellent. Just a couple more final questions. When we arrived you joked about shooting down five German aircraft with a handgun?

While I had sixteen bayonet wounds.

16:00 **Sometimes I suppose when you meet your mates at Anzac Day do you hear stories that you know can't be true?**

Yes. I can't say that I do these days but I can give you a couple of instances without mentioning names. One of way back to Australia from Souk El-Gharb we called into a camp called Kilo 89 which is close to the Canal. It is close to Port Tewfik at the Suez

16:30 Canal. We picked up some reinforcements there. We also picked up some reinforcements while we were at Souk El-Gharb after we had come back from Crete. I will just give you two instances of fellows' imaginations. The one that we picked up at Souk El-Gharb wrote in the Courier Mail in Brisbane, he was interviewed and he told of how he was asked of his commanding

17:00 officer to go out amongst the dead Germans that were lying around to identify whether any German soldiers were wearing Australian uniforms. The only trouble was he had never been to Crete. He was one of our recent reinforcements on the way home. Another chap, who we picked up at Kilo 89 at Port Tewfik on the way home, was telling the girls that he was instructing of how on the trek of the evacuation at

17:30 Crete he could hear the German guards whistling "Lily Marlene" The only trouble was that he was another bloke that we had picked up on the way back to Australia. He had never been near Crete. I have often said to Gwen now, "What a stupid story. If you had German guards you would be in the compound." He heard German guards whistling "Lily Marlene" so there is a tendency to exaggerate at some times by some blokes. I can give you a written

18:00 assurance that I haven't exaggerated except for that joke I tried to put over you when you came in. I didn't think you would swallow it really.

I believed every word.

Yes, three Messerschmitts with a handgun.

I've got to get your autograph before I leave. Just a couple of final questions. The first being what would you like to say to future generations in Australia given that this is an archive about war?

18:30 Sometimes I would say, it is necessary if the country is in danger you do your best to protect it. If it is possible to avoid wars try and do it diplomatically without wars because nobody wins. Nobody wins the war. You look at the results of the 1939/45 war.

19:00 England was supposed to win that war and Japan was supposed to lose it and Germany was supposed to lose it. They ended up in a better financial position after the war both the Japanese and the Germans than England did. So you don't win. You might save your country's freedom but you don't really win. People who were enemies once are friends again and it all changes. I would say that if you can, avoid war at

19:30 all costs but if you have got to defend your country be in it and that's all I'd say.

Was World War II worth fighting for?

I think as it turned out it was because the Japs would have been in Australia. There wouldn't have been any Australia as we know it. I think it was worth the effort we put into it. I'm sure it was.

20:00 **Thank you for your time today. Is there anything else you want to add to the interview before we finish?**

No, I think I've gabbled on enough. It is nice to meet you two blokes, Michael and Christopher. No, I think we have just about covered everything. As long as you are happy I'm happy with the result and I hope it is interesting for some later viewers.

I'm sure it will be. You can't tell me the type of pistol you used to bring down the aircraft?

Let's say a German Mauser, that sounds pretty good doesn't it.

Absolutely. Thank you for your time today.

That's OK. As long as I was of some help.

INTERVIEW ENDS