

Annex 8. Steve Mason to David Sissons, 26 June 1994

June 26, 1994.

Dear David,

Thanks for your letter- I was pleased to hear that you were able to make some sense out of our findings. One of the great difficulties that we now face in ascertaining facts of 50 years ago is the understandable desire at that time to restrict information to people exposed to the work to only what was needed for the task that they had to perform. With Kana operators, it was always a risk that our intelligence successes could be extracted in the event of capture.

Further to your enquiry on call-signs, Bob Suttie has confirmed that call-signs were unenciphered and no Kana was used at the time of Ferny Creek (Bob did not learn Kana until he got to Bonegilla). Operators were given call-signs and frequencies to monitor and those stations sent high grade, high speed messages for long periods. He had no knowledge of any low grade, hand sent messages, although later, Margaret Griffin mentions that hand sent messages were intercepted in Mornington. Thus, it would seem that consulates would use the main networks and stick to set frequencies. Bob cannot recall ever discovering a new diplomatic link on his dial searching operations, but he could have without knowing it.

It is thought that the intercepted traffic was forwarded to Victoria Barracks for analysis.

For what it is worth, a rough old poem written by Joe Walters, the cook/check at Ferny Creek mentions the following:

JUM, JUF, JNB, JNP, JUX, JAR, RGE, YAK, HSP, RIKUGUN and KUIBEY-CHEV. 52 boys called themselves "the Koshi boys". I guess the 'J' stations would be Japanese and the R's Russian.

As regards DF, their detachments were usually sited away from their section, and it was later that our unit became involved in this aspect. 52 Section never had a DF, but instructions could have been issued to any of our DF establishments to obtain a line on a station. We had a station operating at Bald Hills, outside Brisbane, at Wanegilla and Kerema near Port Moresby and later at Nadzab (with RAAF 1 WU) and Finschaffen. The latter two installations had Collins machines. I was personally involved at Nadzab, where it was difficult to get cross bearings, although we were able to give the Ack Ack and the Fighter planes up to an hour's warning of an impending raid.

I have been advised of a couple of corrections to information given in my last letter.

Press Section Page 2, about half way down: Translators were:

Mickie POSANNA and Boris LAWRENCE (not Lawson).

That's all for the moment, but please let me know if I can help further, and if I come across more information I will advise you. I enclose copy of our latest Newsletter, which may be of interest.

With kindest regards,
Sincerely,

(Steve Mason)

AUSTRALIAN SPECIAL WIRELESS GROUP, DIPLOMATIC AND PRESS SECTIONS.

Because of the nature of their work, sections dealing with diplomatic and press tended to be pretty much self contained and their personnel tended to be isolated from the much larger and probably more prestigious areas of interception.

In addition, the translators were mostly of foreign origin and their off-duty interests rarely corresponded with Australian-bred operators. The gap of 50 years has not made the task any easier. Accordingly, it is difficult to piece together an account of these operations, the more so because many of the key players were older and now are no longer with us.

However, with the willing cooperation of several of our Association members, in particular, Bob. Suttie, Beryl Leopold (nee Enright), Margaret Griffin (nee McBrien), Betty Davies (nee Hurtig), Nev. Wintin and Bob. Edwards, who have put their memories on 'search', it has been possible to build up the following account:

Frank O'Loughlin has on record that Press operated at Park Orchards from early 1942. It may be that some diplomatic traffic was also taken there, but Bob. Suttie feels that our first coverage of Diplo. traffic was performed when the detachment went to Ferny Creek in March 1942, where both Press and Diplo. were dealt with.

Bob. Suttie enlisted in January 1942, first reporting to Caulfield Race Course. Then followed his first real job in peeling spuds in Park Orchards whilst a member of LHQ Sigs. His Lance-Corporal there was Dave Drummond, later to be a Captain in ASWG. In March 1942, Bob, in company with Bob. Parker and Harry Ginnivan, was posted to Ferny Creek, where a detachment from the Group, then known as 5 W/T Section set up business to take Diplo. and Press wireless messages.

The dates correspond with your references to Major Mason, but our members have no knowledge of the Major.

The camp was on One-Tree Hill, where several houses, including one owned by Senator Leckie (a relative of Bob. Menzies) were taken over. Amongst the operators were : Diplo.: Bill Redpath, Ross Kirby (now managing director of Village Drive-ins), Ivo Riley, Tom Collins, Frank Walsh, Bob. Suttie and i/c was Jack Paterson.

Press: Bill Ryan, Ray Dolling with Gerry Jennings i/c.
Joe 'Gunga Din' Walters was the cook.

In mid-June, some original members of 5 W/T and presumably the Press Section from Park Orchards joined the detachment, which functioned there until July/August 1942, when they moved directly to Bonegilla where the Group had already been formed (at end of May).

Diplo. traffic was high speed, so was recorded on Edison circular wax cylinders, to be played back later and taken down by the operators. Messages started with the call sign, followed by the

preamble including an identification of source, e.g. JG for Japanese Government, then the text. Messages were sent, no acknowledgements from receiving stations were received, at least on the transmitting frequency, and messages were never interrupted with repeats, requests for signals strength etc. It is thought that our operators' receiving sets were AWA's.

In May 1942, Park Orchards contained many sig. units, including 5 W/T Section. I think that the Sig. Training Battalion was the largest of the units and they also moved to Bonegilla at about the same time that our section moved.

Diplo. work carried on in Bonegilla the same way as had prevailed at Ferny Creek until August 1942, when the first of the AWAS joined the unit. Corporals Barbara Thompson (nee Nichols) and Doss Black (nee Jury) were among the first to report in. Beryl Leopold recalls being met by the Administrative Staff consisting of Lieut. Peg. Sitlington (nee Harrison-Owen), Miss Pettigrew, Miss Flowden, Miss Stacey, Miss Marg. Seabrook and Miss Sharp, together with C.O. Lieut.-Col. Jack Ryan. The girls came from S.A., W.A., N.T., Vic., N.S.W., Tas. and Qld. Uniforms, straw paliaes and dixies were issued. They were billeted in huts and soon started morse training, route marches, rifle drill and lectures on hygiene and security.

During October 1942, AWAS recruits were divided between Diplo. and Press sections.

Lieut. Litchfield, Sgt. Bill Ryan, Sigs. Jack Timberlake and Ray Dolling served as editors, proof readers and supervisors of the Press Section. The translators were: Mickie ? (Dutch), Werner Miebach (German), Boris Lawson (Russian), Frank Scally (Spanish), Frank O'Loughlin and George Perry (French), and Bill Thompson (Japanese), together with Paul Grange who had 6 European languages. The operators were: Gwenda Furness, Barbara Christie, Win. Menzies, Joan Bungey, Elsa Glen, Mavis Ball, Lea Leggo, Nance Newland, Pat. Thompson, Joan Baxter and Beryl Enright. Receiving sets were 101's and Kingsley Broad Bands. Reuters, Japanese Kana and Tokyo Rose were taken.

Operators were given set frequencies to monitor, but the dial was searched when there was no activity on set frequencies.

The information was edited and bulletins sent to Army, Navy and Air-Force H.Q.

In September 1943, sections were formed and sent to Perth, Mornington, Cairns and Kalinga. There were 25 AWAS personnel in Cairns.

Margaret Griffin was involved solely in Diplo. work. She trained in Bonegilla, moved to Kalinga then to Mornington. Press work was carried out as well at most locations, but Mornington's Section 52 was all Diplo.

Transmissions were both high speed, interceptors using Edison cylinders, and hand sent. Most operators took messages on typewriters and later had the use of special typewriters which were adapted to Kana.

Kana 5 letter code was mostly used.

Receiving sets were Halicrafters, AWA's and Philips. Many of the messages were designated JG and many were signed off by Tojo. Mostly operators were given frequencies to monitor, but dial searching was carried out in inactive moments. Many messages originated in Truk and call signs remembered were: YAK (Afganistan), RTZ (Russia), D.. (Germany) and I.. (Italy). No acknowledgements were received on transmitting frequencies and there were no repeats or requests for signal strengths. Jap. operators were skilled and transmission was good, although replaying the Edison records sometimes gave problems.

Our operators had their first Kana lessons before they left the Middle East, under British instructors, starting about December 1941.

It is not known how the frequencies given to operators were obtained, but it was later that the unit became involved in DF operations. It would be usual procedure for any instructions issued to Section 52 to emanate from HQ. ASWG. It was very rare for a station to change frequencies.

In December 1945, the AWAS left Mornington to be discharged and male personnel from Kalinga replaced them. I had the unenviable task of bringing a party of 30 returned men from Brisbane, through their home states of NSW and Vic. to Mornington, and with the war over and the men awaiting their discharge points to come up. Six men were with me when we reported into Royal Park, but we managed to squeeze 4 days' leave there, allowing a full complement to be present at the first parade at Mornington Race Course. Understandingly, enthusiasm for the work was at a low ebb, but we took mostly Russian high speed traffic. On occasions, with the use of incentives, full logs were produced- I can remember one night's work which yielded more than 1000 messages.

A liaison officer, W.O. Harry Dempsey was appointed (he had previously been with our Middle East Section and Section 55 in New Guinea) and each Wednesday he took our work to Mic. Sandford at Victoria Barracks. Kingsley Receiving sets were mostly used.

The people whose names you mention from the War Diary are mostly not now available: Frank Walker, Gwenda Furness and Gerry Jennings are all deceased. Miss Jury became Mrs Black, but her address is unknown. Tom Wastell (spelling?) lives in Caringbah NSW. Jack Butler was not known to be involved in Ferny Creek or Bonegilla- he was in New Guinea at this time seeking possible locations for Section 55 when it arrived. In any case Frank Walker was O/C of a reinforcement of Section 55, which later merged with Section 53 at Finschaffan from December 1943 to mid 1945. Please advise if we can assist further. Steve Mason.