

# Annex 9. Steve Mason to Desmond Ball, 7 July 1995

July 7, 1995

Professor Desmond Ball,  
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Dear Professor Ball,

Thank you for your letter dated July 3, 1995 and enclosures relating to your most interesting work, "A true Spy Story".

I am afraid that I can't add a great deal to that which I have already given to David Sissons- I presume that you have a copy of this, but one is enclosed anyway.

I have four main problems with the diplomatic part of ASWG operations:

1. 50 years is a long time.
2. I personally was not involved in diplomatic work until December 1945 when I arrived in Mornington.
3. Security was such an important part of all of our operations that personnel were given only the information that was necessary for them to perform their job.
4. My duties and rank were not high enough to warrant possession of much more information than was available to signalmen.

By way of background, perhaps I could outline some of my own experiences showing how we functioned:

As a Lance-Corporal and then a Corporal, I was in charge of one of four shifts, each having from 6 to 12 intercept operators. After returning from New Guinea, I acted as Orderly Sergeant for some months, so had little to do with the operating side. At Mornington, as a Sergeant, I acted mostly as a Company Sergeant Major, although whenever possible I got onto the sets, either solely or by plugging in on one of the operators.

As a shift supervisor, you were occasionally given frequencies and less often callsigns to monitor, and then a set or sets were dedicated to that work. Generally, the supervisor spent a lot of time on the sets, assisting operators when reception was poor or in training operators. At the end of a shift the messages would be sorted, counted and passed on to their next point of treatment (being the 'I' Staff in the field or a Don-R at HQ to take to Central Bureau.). Occasionally an 'I' Staffer or an officer with knowledge of Japanese (Captain Bob. McNamara, mostly) would inspect the operators at work, and if anything looked interesting, he would direct that the operator continue to monitor that station. If it looked very interesting, Bob. would plug into the set and take the traffic in Japanese.

Operators and supervisors were rarely told of achievements resulting from their work, although you could have some thoughts when subsequent news of a bombing, a sea battle, an air raid or a point or town taken came to notice.

At one time in Dutch New Guinea, rumors were strong that we were all to receive some honor from the Dutch government. Really, just in the last few years have I learnt much more about what we did 50 years ago. We were never sure that much progress had been made in cracking the Jap. codes.

But all of that does not help you much, so let's turn to your questions:

1. The Move to Mornington:

We were told that, with the war over, Kalinga was to close, the AWAS (and a few 'B' Class men), who had done the work at Mornington over the years, were due for discharge and it would be some time before our discharge points came up, thus my task of taking 30 men from Brisbane to Mornington arose. At no time were we briefed on the Russian task and we weren't given to understand that there was any particular importance in the work. Our operators unenthusiastically took over the work that the AWAS had been doing. Everything was low key, Japanese traffic was reduced and no emphasis was placed on chasing it or any other traffic.

2. The Mornington Activity:

We operated 24 hours a day, on four shifts, with 5 or 6 operators on each shift.

Names??? Problems here:

Officers: Maj. Ralph Thompson, Lieut. Jim Murray (dec.), Lieut. Jerry Jennings (dec.), Capt. Tom. Eastick (dec.), Lieut. Reed, Capt. Pascal, Maj. Hastings (in succession).  
OR's: Bob. Edwards, Jack Daniel, Ray. Lees, Bill Carse, Ron. White, Allan Jarman (dec.), Pat. Spicer (dec.), Nick Bisas, Joe Pritchard, Jim. Mackey, 'Blue' Fairweather, Gordon Tye, Wal. George, Alan Hansford.

Harry Dempsey died 5 or 6 years ago.

We took over from the AWAS just before Christmas 1945 (about December 20).

I can't recall whether traffic other than Russian was taken, RTZ is the only callsign I know, traffic was all morse, diplomatic and mostly high speed, taken on Edison wax cylinders and transcribed later. Location of the transmitters is not known, but the operators were first class, signals clear, and as no repetitions were apparently requested, it seems that the messages were broadcast to be picked up by stations as arranged.

3. Mornington:

Situated in the Race-course, club buildings were used for the set-room, orderly room and messes, and a series of galvanised huts served as sleeping quarters.

From memory, the aerials were rhombic, directional, 90 degree span and sited in the middle of the race-course.

I picture our old faithful Kingsleys as the sets used, but note that Margaret Griffin remembers Halicrafters, AWA's and Philips.

I have been unable to ascertain whether any other Russian intercept activity was undertaken during the war.

4. Mic. Sandford:  
Our only news of Mic. came from Harry Dempsey. Before Dempsey arrived, we sent our messages to Victoria Barracks by Don-R, but it is not known to which block.  
I can't recall any feedback concerning our intercept activity. The operators were certainly not in top gear but would have risen to the occasion had any need been made known to them.
5. Boris:  
His surname should have been given as Lawrence and he was in the Press Section in Bonegilla. His movements after that are not known.
6. Closing Down Mornington:  
I was under the impression that the section continued to operate until October 1946. ( I was discharged on October 15). I also understood that 101 Wireless Section took over the job and they were based at Balcombe and then moved to Mornington Race-course, but I could be wrong there, and certainly would not know whether they took over the Russian intercept activity.  
Any of our people who wished to continue in the Army and did not wish to join the Occupation Forces transferred to 101 Section.  
I can recall taking a convoy of trucks up to Carlton to hand them in, just days before heading for Royal Park, Melbourne for discharge.  
Most of my group left Mornington in the first half of October, as we had been 18 years of age on enlistment, had overseas service and were unmarried, making our discharge points pretty well the same.

It seems that I can't help you all that much, particularly concerning the Victoria Barracks arrangements. Ralph Thompson would have been my reference, but you have spoken to him.

Further removed, reading your account on Page 31 reminded me that in early 1945 (I think) I was one of three ASWG personnel who performed signals work for the Australian Security Service when they were investigating lights flashing off the Queensland coast at the Gold Coast, first noticed after some Lutherans who had been released from internment and then purchased and occupied a property overlooking the sea.