



Australian War Memorial

Sound Collection

ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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TITLE: Joyce Linnane interviewed by Joyce Thomson about her service with the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAF) during the Second World War.

INTERVIEWEE: Joyce Linnane

INTERVIEWER: Joyce Thomson

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Interview with Miss Joy Linnane, on 24th August 1984 continued.

LINNANE: And then we moved to Ascot Park which was not very far from Henry Street to help out with some of the intelligence work that was piling up there. The war was receding from us and it was felt that people further forward may be able to handle the job and we could be used to greater effect, helping the Americans specifically who had quite a wonderful set up and a tremendous amount of work that they wished to get rapid information from. Because the Japanese had been pushed back to quite a large extent, I learned again, as we had been warned before, how dangerous diaries are and they had stacks of diaries captured from Japanese troops and various kinds of documents and this information was put onto punch cards and then into probably the first computer that was ever brought to Australia and we were given the duties of sorting the punch cards and feeding it into the computer which translated from Japanese into English. However this was done, I had no idea and unfortunately we were told to operate the machines and not to read the results. I'm sure they would have been most interesting. We worked very long shifts with the Americans, very hardworking people, and if they're in a hurry they want things done yesterday and I thought I'd worked very hard before but they have a dreadful shift called the swing shift – 16 hours – and we would work 16 hours on the various duties allotted us and have 8 hours off and come back for another helping of work. It was quite hard but we enjoyed it and it was new to us because we had been sitting so long in front of a radio set that all of this different equipment and watching intelligence brought to life, it was really quite exciting. This lasted until the workload was resolved and then it was decided to move us to another operations room not very far away in Brisbane at Hamilton. The name of this building was Eldinell and it was occupied with Colonel Sandford's team of ARB field men. We worked there, intercepting again, we found the signals were still quite good and we continued to work there although not as hard as previously because the war was coming to a close and there was not quite so much work and as supervisor I had very little to do and I used to play 500 with the IRB men and they used to go off and on with their jobs, they had quite a lot of time off but when they worked, they really did. Unfortunately my partner got caught up in one of the invasions and I lost him for months, but he did come back. I enjoyed working with them and we were working at Eldinell when peace was signed and I can still remember the tremendous messages coming through

in English. The war was virtually over for us and rumours were flying round as to how quickly we'd be discharged and what was going to happen to us. Thank goodness they weren't like some of the rumours that had flown around in our earlier service life such as the ones in Townsville when, as a disciplinary measure, we were all given a week's CB and the civilian population up there heard the rumour that it was because so many of the WAAF were pregnant which was absolutely not so, it was just one of those unfortunate things and it did upset the families of people who lived in Townsville because they heard all these distressing rumours. Fortunately the rumours didn't come as far down as Sydney, and my family did not know anything about this and in Sydney we seemed to be treated with very high regard and while I spent virtually no service life in Sydney, I have often heard stories of how well the girls were entertained in places like the Women's Weekly Club that they had at David Jones and all sorts of wonderful facilities for people who did service in Sydney. We had the job then of saying goodbye to many of the people we had worked with. We had very good relationship with all services which was absolutely necessary in any case but we liked so many of the people there and the time we spent prior to Eldinell working at Ascot Park with mainly Americans but there were all services there, we became very friendly with some of the WAACs, particularly there was a lass who was named Willie the WAAC. They used to be distressed at the conditions we lived under compared to their own and were always offering to buy us silk stockings because they were appalled at the lyle stockings we used to wear and suggesting we take up our hemline a little and let our hair grow down as they did, great curls over the shoulders when we must keep our hair short above the collar and when they found out what our pay was they were horrified. Very generous people, both the girls and the men, they were always wanting to buy us food and drinks and even while we were working we'd find a coca cola put beside us. They didn't want us to buy anything because they didn't know how we existed on our pay because they were so very well off. The men of all services were good friends as were the airforce people that we worked with in Brisbane, the same type of people we had found in Townsville. Unfortunately each time I shifted location, I managed to get a recurrence of a fever, which seems to be unidentified. We all suffered from it in Townsville but nursed each other and it doesn't appear on our records but a fever appears on mine because when I shifted from Townsville to Brisbane I went into hospital with suspected malaria and when I moved on discharge down to Sydney and was sent to Bradfield Park for discharge, in

a very short time, I had a recurrence of the fever again, which was very unpleasant but I became used to it because over the years it recurred I suppose for the better part of twenty years. I would get these little attacks although they diminished and eventually disappeared thank goodness. My feelings on discharge were rather mixed. I wasn't quite sure what to do. I had heard all the stories from World War One about how people who'd had good jobs were selling matches on street corners, had difficulty finding jobs and nobody wanted them and I knew I could go back to Drug Houses of Australia again if I wished. I would have liked to have travelled a little bit but travelling immediately after the war wasn't very easy and we also in early 1946 had coal strikes and general upheaval and I thought the best thing to do is to go back to my old job. This is what I did. I thought about a rehab course but unfortunately I had not matriculated and it meant going back to school before I could go on to do the course I thought I would really like to do which was pharmacy so I continued to work in pharmaceutical houses without being a pharmacist because I thought I was a little bit too old to go back to school. I was 26 years of age, which seemed old then but these days' people go to school until they're a much greater age than that. I neglected to mention that my discharge came through while I was in hospital and I suddenly recovered on December 7th 1945. It brought back memories. It was the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 7, '41. I thought about all of the wonderful companionship I'd had with the men and women of the services. We'd formed such a tremendous bond between us and said we'd keep in touch and indeed we have. We had lots of fun together in Townsville. We made our own fun. In Brisbane there was a little bit more formal entertainment. We still went around with wireless unit and intelligence groups. We very rarely mixed with anyone else except perhaps in the Sergeants Mess, I met very nice men and women but there was always this leaning towards the people we worked with. In Brisbane we used to go to theatre a little bit. I remember going to see Boravansky Ballet at the very beginning of their inception. They had some wonderful dancers but their music was only two pianos. That was in Brisbane. We went to parties, had some nice times and some of the parties that I remember best were held at Strathpine, a suburb of Brisbane, where the wireless units had a big camp and mainly II Wireless Unit and they used to invite all of us girls over to join in the fun and we had some lovely times there. We still meet frequently, the wireless unit and intelligence people and still enjoy one another's company. The girls have an arrangement that if you happen to be going to their city,

and we are spread all over the east coast of Australia, there's always a bed for you and a great big welcome and I have visited my friend in Tasmania, Laurie Dale and I have stayed a month with friends in Townsville, that's Stella mainly, and also Phil up there, Connie in Buderim, I see well at least every two years, sometimes once a year, and then we travel to reunions together which we've enjoyed doing, some for the ex-service women, some for the WAAF and some for the wireless units and I have on the 11th August 1984 travelled up to Brisbane especially to attend with the men and women of wireless units a wonderful reunion, and those men still treat us as if we're royalty as they always have done.

[gap in tape]

... affiliation with the airforce at all or anything to do with the air and I imagine if the WRANS had come up first well I could have joined the WRANS. I just wanted to be in one of the services and the WAAF was the one that came up.

THOMSON: Did you know any women fliers like Amy Johnson and Jean Batton and Nancy Bird Walton?

LINNANE: Yes indeed. I can remember very well Amy Johnson's flight to Australia. Don't remember the date but I was still a school girl and Jean Batton a New Zealander, yes I certainly knew of her and Nancy Bird Walton, I did not know of as well but I did hear her speak a couple of times when she came to Ford Street School when I was doing my training in morse code and I thought they were absolutely wonderful women.

THOMSON: What, did she just talk to you to encourage you to keep going and join the service?

LINNANE: Yes, yes it was a talk on the valuable jobs that women could do in the services and she did encourage us and she also gave us lots of little pieces of information because there were so many words, we used to read about it and not really know what some of the words meant. I can well remember when she said a

tender would pick us up and I thought a tender, that's a part that's attached to a train, that carries the coal, and I looked it up in the dictionary and I found out that a tender was also a small boat but I never ever did find out what the meaning of what an airforce tender, a truck in fact, was until I joined the airforce.

THOMSON: Amongst your friends when you were working at Anthony Haughtons and learning Morse code, what was their moral behaviour? What was their attitude to moral behaviour?

LINNANE: I think that we were all very much younger in those days and the people of the same age are today. We didn't involve ourselves very much with sex, we used to go out with boys, sure, but we'd go out on the tram into the picture show and he would bring us back home, say a hasty goodbye because he had to get a tram back to wherever he lived and of course, very often, one of the first questions a young man that you might think was attractive would ask you, is whereabouts do you live because if he lived in the eastern suburbs and she lived in the western suburbs, no matter how attractive they were to each other, it was an impossibility because not very many young men or older men for that matter, had cars, and the people in the area where I was brought up and the financial situation being as it was, I knew one young man with a car out of all my acquaintances. He was the wealthy one. I came across him later in life he joined the airforce too.

THOMSON: And what did you do for sport and recreation?

LINNANE: I didn't do a lot of sport at all. At school I played a little bit of hockey, I always liked the beach, went swimming, picnics. I think our favourite recreation, and I've got lots of happy memories of this, is going on bushwalks which we called hiking and we would catch a train to way-out places like Waterfall out in the country, down to Watamala, Burning Palms and we'd carry little haversacks, tiny haversacks with a little bit of food, and usually we'd make a campfire, cook our food and you'd hike back again. Eventually we did some quite long walks for young people. I can remember the longest one that was recorded, was 26 miles in one day, which is a lot for people who just go out for a stroll. But we used to have a lot of fun. Sometimes we were all girls, sometimes girls and boys, but you were asking about the moral

standards. I don't know if I was very very innocent or not but I didn't ever see anything to counter that in the behaviour of the young fellows that came along with us and certainly I didn't suffer from it. I was always treated very well with them but of course they all knew my mother and father expected this and there would have been trouble if they'd kept me out too late or if I'd complained about anyone behaving badly towards me. That may have had something to do with it. My father always said that he expected us to be ladies even though at the time we were a little bit poor, not dirt poor, but a little bit poor and he said just because we're in one of our down periods, you are young ladies and you are expected to behave as such and we had to get permission to go to a dance and if we didn't have an escort to the dance, which sometimes happened, we weren't permitted to go, and if there was an escort, he had to be inspected. It was a little bit Victoriana and this is what surprised me a little when my father agreed I should join the WAAF without any hassle at all because he said I have done my best, he said if you haven't been trained properly, you're not going to be trained now. You're 21 and it will be an experience for you and it was. I'd had discipline at home but it was usually reasonable discipline. Without being unkind, I thought some of the discipline that we suffered in our early days in the WAAF was a little bit unreasonable. If you did the wrong thing, like folding your blankets the wrong way, so that the blue stripe in the middle didn't quite gel, you were sent to pick emuing, you remember the word emuing? The grounds had been cleaned but you had to find leaves and things to pick up. There were spiders around the place and spiders are things I don't like very much. We weren't given gloves, nothing so sissy as that, and here we are gathering dirty bits and pieces up as a discipline, but I appreciate now it was a good discipline because discipline is for you to obey without reason in my opinion and a lot of the punishments we were given for very very minor things, possibly helped form the characters of the WAAF to make them the women they are today which is a very high standard. I know a lot of them.

THOMSON: Did you go to church?

LINNANE: I'm not a churchgoer. I did go to church occasionally with the girl down the street. My mother had been a Sunday school teacher in the Church of England. My father was an Irish Catholic so it was a mixed marriage. I was christened in the Church of England but at a quite early age, when I said something about Sunday

School, I was told yes go along and learn about it and my mother used to talk a little bit about the church and then she told us that our father was a Roman Catholic and this was a different church but when I was old enough if I wanted to go to the Catholic church, there was nothing to stop me from joining the Catholic church, and that she'd be quite happy about it. Then I was still quite young, think still in primary school, when my uncle came down from Queensland. He was my father's younger brother and he was going to become a priest and he was such a glamorous person to us that I thought the Catholic religion must be absolutely wonderful. This didn't last. I went to church to mass, the Catholic mass, if my Catholic relatives came, if I had protestant friends going to their church, I'd go to that and I still do this to this day. I have deliberately not been confirmed in any church at all. I enjoy going into the Moslem church, the mosques and any other eastern religions, I find them interesting. I loved when I was in Rome, going into St Peters but that wasn't very much religion, that was beauty and pageantry. I saw Pope Pias there blessing all of the people and the Swiss Guard and the Michelangelo paintings and it is such an impressive religion but that doesn't stop me going along to the Garrison Church when we have our services there but then we all go there. Our WAAF branch, goodness knows how many religions, Jewish people, Catholic people, Methodist, Presbyterians, Uniting, we all go to Church of England because it is our official church.

THOMSON: How did you go about joining the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force?

LINNANE: I believe I have already mentioned that I belonged to the voluntary organisation, the WANS, and amongst other lessons we were given, we learned signalling. I was interested in this so I opted for WT Operator mustering and commenced training to learn more about WT and Morse code at Ford Street School where I stayed for some months and put in my application for WT operator. It took quite a long time to get through Woolloomaloo but eventually I had my call up early April '42 and I took off for Melbourne on 11th April 1942. I was sent to Toorak Wireless School and we did a little bit of training at Woragaleen. We were barracked at Rathbarren. Conditions there were pretty rough, food was poor, we had no beds to sleep in, we did have paleasses, I was relegated to the ballroom which was rather good except that I was sleeping on the floor and my only pillow was my kitbag. Eventually

of course this improved but it took quite a long time to help us with ordinary creature comforts but we were accustomed to this very quickly. We expected it and I can remember being quite surprised when I found out that we were given days off, weekend leave and this type of thing. I had never been to Melbourne before so I enjoyed very much the little bit of leave we had and learned to know a little bit about Melbourne. We weren't in Melbourne proper for a great length of time because quite early we were called on to volunteer for a special course. We were told ten telegraphists were required but we were given no indication what the course was. I volunteered because I thought it would be rather good to learn something more and was most surprised when I was accepted but the questions we were asked were quite extraordinary. The one that stands out most in my mind was if you were on active duty and proceeding as a wireless telegraphist and taking a very important message, you are under fire and the person next to you was hit and fell over your message sheets, what would you do? I really do not know, still do not know, what I would do in circumstances like this but I knew the answer that probably would give me the best chance of being selected, so I said I would very quickly brush the person away, particularly if they were bleeding over my message pad so that the message wouldn't be destroyed. It could be very very important. I still think that this was one of the extraordinary questions that helped with my selection. Other questions were asked which obviously were pointed towards whether we were squeamish or not such as had we ever been out shooting for fun, did we shoot rabbits, did we know how to skin them, did we go fishing, did we de-gut them and scale them ourselves and you could see the direction that their question was trying to get to, so of course I very smartly was a crack shot and I skinned rabbits which actually I had never done. I had had great experience with fishing because in my childhood we had family holidays at the north coast on the Northern Rivers, Billinger River in particular, and my father used to say, well if you children want breakfast, you'd better go to catch it. And we were expected to catch our breakfast. This was a bit of a joke because if we hadn't caught the breakfast, I'm sure there would have been something else but we were expected to scale and clean the fish, and help cook it. We learned all of these little extra things that all children should know, so that was the truth. The others I think I drew rather a long bow at, but I was selected with twelve other people. I understand that they actually wanted to start off with ten WAAF but they chose 13 because they thought there might be some dropouts so the 13 of us were chosen, the Rookies Course was

abandoned and we were immediately posted to Ascot Vale. There again we didn't have very comfortable quarters. I remember Mary Seivers was our Chief Officer and she did all she could to help us but the pavilions that we were barracked in had previously been used to display trucks, Leyland trucks, for show purposes and the Leyland trucks didn't need to be kept as warm as we did in the middle of a Melbourne winter. We used to put our kitbags over the centre of our beds, we had acquired beds by then and blankets but no sheets, so that all of the moisture that gathered from the tin roofs would drip onto the kitbags and not come through onto us. Quite a lot of illness there. The toilet facilities there were absolutely shocking. There were no doors to the toilets. There was very public toileting and showering but we accustomed ourselves to this. That was the personal side. As far as the work was concerned, at our first class we were then told the job we were going to learn. There was a place called Central Bureau of Intelligence, that top security was required, that any one of us could endanger the whole of the war if one of us spoke out of turn and gave away any of the information we were about to hear. We were really brainwashed and pounded on this and it stayed with all of us to the extent that when my parents died a quarter of a century later, they had thought I had served as a straight WT operator, absolutely nobody knew until the security sealing was lifted and now my family and a few friends do know of the interesting job that we learned. There is a great deal of security involved in intelligence but we took this in our stride and we were among the original intake for instruction in the Japanese Carnacode and our duties were intended to be and indeed they eventually were, to intercept all enemy signals. Carna is quite different to international Morse. It involves symbols and transpositions, which are phonetic Japanese language. It was not an easy course but we all passed, that is the WAAF, already a RAAF class had passed out ahead of us.

THOMSON: Were you purely just a WAAF class?

LINNANE: We were entirely WAAF. The 13 of us and I don't think our courses were ever numbered but I would guess we were probably class number two because the RAAF that graduated before us was sent up to Pimleyco in Townsville and when we graduated, we were sent to Point Cook outside Melbourne and there we were attached to the Sink School, actually we were kept very much apart from Sink School but that was our attachment and we were given a little hut down near the bay and it

eventually became known as the Hush Hush Hut because of the secrecy that was absolutely essential there. There was a lot of interest in the place and humorous incidents such as one of the very young lads decided to find out what the Hush Hush Hut was all about and we had blackout curtains of course, and they were actually outside the hut. I was on duty in the very early hours of one morning with two other of the WAAF operators and I saw this partition moving and we had very strict orders that any of the Carna material had to be destroyed immediately there was any doubt that anyone was trying to get it. So I thought, what do I do? Well we were armed, we had a Smith and Wesson pistol which I know very little about and I don't know very much about protecting myself on these occasions and I did all the wrong things. I opened the door which was a sliding door with a light on behind me, picked up the pistol, and said come out or I'll fire. There was a rattling of a couple of garbage cans that were standing outside the hut and this young lad came out and said don't fire I belong to the Sink School. I said well you should not be here, go. But two years later I met the same young man at a dance at Garbutt and he asked me where I'd been stationed, and I said Point Cook, and he said I was there once at the Sink School. We started to chat and would you believe it was the same young man except that when he described that particular occasion where he had been snooping, he had the Corporal who came to the door of the hut and threatened him about 6'6" tall and I'm 5'5" and weighing about 12 or 14 stone, and at that stage I had to struggle to meet eight stone. He gave a wonderfully colourful story on how he was nearly killed at Point Cook. But the work we were doing there was intercepting messages from the Japanese Navy. They appeared to be quite close to our coast at the time, by the signals, the strength of the signals, and although we did not know their location, we purely took the messages and passed them on to the authorities.

THOMSON: How many would have been on a shift?

LINNANE: There were three on shift at a time. There was an RAAF Sergeant in charge of us and he would come as often as he could and share shift with us and advise us because we were very new to the job and he had been trained as an instructor and he had helped with instruction of Carna and we had the most ridiculous shifts. It was four hours on, four hours off, around the clock. This was supposed to be because it is hard to concentrate on Carna for more than four hours but what was

not taken into consideration that we lived up in what used to be the married quarters and Point Cook, way at the end of the Administration Block which was called the Castle, and we had to walk down what was known as the Burma Road, right down to the Bay. It took some time to walk down there and walk back. Then of course, we had to eat at some time. We rarely found time to do this and I would say that I was in the Point Cook Mess once or twice that would have been about all. We used to collect food from the mess, take it down to our little obs hut. If it was cold weather, we would cook whatever we wanted on top of the radiator and boil up a jug and that was our meal because we still had to do our panicking to keep our quarters clean at some time, washing and our ironing, and then be awake to go on the next four hour shift, and our RAAF Sergeant didn't ever think we needed a day off so we didn't get the stand-down that Sink School had and it just kept going and going and going and it was a very long time before we suddenly decided, look we must have some days off and if I remember rightly, the crunch point was the Melbourne Cup. Some of the girls who were interested in racing said couldn't we have a day off. So we shuffled our shifts around and we did this. I did have about four days off when my mother became desperately ill and lost her eyesight and I was given compassionate leave to get back to Sydney to see her for a few days, and I didn't have any sleep the whole way, going up in a train and coming back again and all of the drama and sadness at home and when I went back on shift, the RAAF Sergeant came down and said to me, oh, you'd better have a little bit of a break and so I lay on a spare table that was there and I think I slept for about twelve hours, just sleeping on the table, to try to catch up but the others didn't get breaks like that. It was just that special occasion. We worked at Navy Intercept for I suppose about six months while they were preparing the operations room in Townsville and also our quarters at Roseneath, which was outside Townsville. It was wonderful news when we were told that we were going to move onto join other people that did Carna and I was very impressed when I first saw our operations room which was situated well past Stewart, very isolated place and it was so interesting to see it as we approached because we appeared to be coming to a farm house and even a hundred yards away you couldn't identify that it was all camouflage. There were windows painted on it, doors, steps leading up to it, latticework and when we actually arrived there, we found it was just a solid cement type place with no frills at all outside. It was really flat-roofed and it was said to be bombproof and of course this was marvellous camouflage because it could not be seen from the air. I defy

anyone to identify it. The aerial masts were camouflaged as trees and they were very effective because we soon found that we could pick up signals a long way off.

THOMSON: Before you get settled into Roseneath, what happened at Point Cook? Did RAAF relieve you down there, or did they close the hut?

LINNANE: They closed the hut at Point Cook and I believe somebody else, possibly the Americans, may have taken over the navy operation. We simply were not told, and I only say this because I saw navy messages right at the end of the war that were taken by Americans so I imagine that the Americans took over it, from where I have no idea, but we, when we went to Intelligence Headquarters outside Stewart, we found that we were involved in much more interesting work. It was going to be air ground, that is Japanese planes taking off from the various bases and operating from the air, keeping their base advised. It was always a matter of amazement to all of us that worked on intercept, that Japanese appeared to be absolutely unable to keep quiet in the air. Our people used to have radio silence, Japanese, if they had radio silence, it was very rarely because from the time they took off, we had the airborne signal and their call signs and then they would keep going which was very very good for us because once we had taken some messages which may have been absolute rubbish, but that didn't matter, we had a signal. The DF stations were located around northern Queensland at Togga, Rockhampton and Julia Creek. They were easily contacted because inside this solid structure, bombproof, camouflaged farmhouse, which so impressed me, was the latest, sophisticated equipment that I had come across. For instance, they had the latest in radios, teleprinters, and the DF panels to contact the stations. There were also scramble phones, plotting tables and apart from the intercept operators, there was a staff of linguists and code experts, intelligence officers and all the paraphernalia required in top secret operations.

THOMSON: How many staff approximately would there have been.

LINNANE: I have tried to remember how many intercept operators were on duty at the one time and it would be approximately twenty, and there were usually a couple of code experts. There were also the people that worked the teleprint, the clerks, the straight WT operators, usually 2 WAAF were on duty there and at least one

intelligence officer, maybe more, depending on the time of the year and the weather. There were busy times; the bombers' moon and this type of thing but the intelligence people could predict when we were going to be very very busy. So, we had quite a large staff on duty there. Each of the carna operators, concentrating on air ground or army activity, were given a set frequency to monitor. Personally I usually worked on the air ground and we had to wait sometimes-incredible hours and there'd be absolute silence. This was the hardest part of our work and quite suddenly the signal would come up and usually a string of Vs and so we'd grab our pencils, put our hand up so that our trick chief, which we inherited that name from the Americans (he's actually a supervisor) and he was liaison between our operations room and the intelligence room. He would know that there was activity on 10 mgs, which was one of our frequencies, and he would be ready as soon as you started to copy. He'd be beside you, ready to take the frequency you were operating, and the message, straight into intelligence and then someone in there would advise the DF stations to get a fix, the plotting tables would be arranged so that they could quickly get a cross-fix on the position of the aircraft and then the DF panel would come into operation, giving all information to help with the plotting table, and then I understand, although I saw very little of it, that the information would be given to the teleprint operator who would contact maybe Moresby where we had squadrons waiting or they would send the message onto somebody else. If nobody else was listening to it, they would have it possibly checked and then they would go up to intercept the intruders. It would be a very exciting occasion if we would be still copying the Japanese morse and we get the signal, I am being attacked which is a triple barbed Z, which in symbols was He He He and of course there was great jubilation then because we knew we had prevented one of our bases from being attacked and possibly one of our planes had despatched the Japanese plane. I know we were a bit blood thirsty but that's what it was all about, to try to get the information very very quickly to the people that were most concerned. We were only small cogs in the wheel, being operators, and there were a lot of very very clever people that did so much to help with the war effort, that we always felt fully our responsibility because all signals emanated through the intercept operator and without our diligence we felt the rest of the work that was so important would either be delayed or not happen at all. We always had this close feeling, this is important, nobody worried about how many hours they worked. When we had floods in Townsville and couldn't get back to barracks, well, we stayed overnight in the ops

room and there were a few blankets around and that was all, but it was really a very interesting job. I think I might here quote a couple of short excerpts from a book called Saga of Achievement. This book was written by an airforce squadron leader, I think, or group captain, ER Hall about all of the work that was done in telegraphy and wireless operations generally, and there is quite a long chapter devoted to the work the wireless units did, and for the first time I learned of commendations because he has quoted the following: "On 20th April 1944, the CO of Number 1 Wireless Unit received a letter from headquarters, Advanced Echelon, 5th United States Airforce, stating, 'It is desired to express appreciation and to register commendation for the superior work you and the men under your command are doing. The interest displayed and the exemplary promptness with which your informations are transmitted to this office, indicate devotion to service which is beyond the strict limitations of what we know as line of duty'". I think that was wonderful praise. I regret the word "men" there but I gather they meant men and women although someone has told me the women were never mentioned, just in case we needed a little bit more protection and they didn't advertise the fact that there were quite a few women connected with Number 1 Wireless Unit. I don't know if that's quite right or not. There was a further commendation that emanated from Major General SB Aiken on 3rd August 1944. He was Director of Central Bureau of that time and he stated, "it was desired to commend the excellent work one wireless unit was doing. The value of its contributions was well recognised by General Headquarters as well as other formations. The CO was requested to convey the expression of appreciation to all officers and other ranks of the unit."

THOMSON: Mm. That was high praise.

LINNANE: Yes, we were very proud of it. Our biggest disappointment was when we WAAF Carna operators thought we would be joining our units in Laiti.

THOMSON: That came a little bit later didn't it? How long were you operating in Roseneath?

LINNANE: Oh, at Stewart we were doing the operating. We lived at Roseneath. Oh, about a year.

THOMSON: And what were conditions like for you, living conditions? How did you get for instance, from your barracks to the operations room?

LINNANE: By a truck. It was a, I think 2 ton stake-sided Ford truck and we stood in the back of it and we travelled several miles from Roseneath to operations room. We were used to bad travelling because I will never forget our journey after we were posted from Point Cook to Townsville. Over the course of years, I don't recall how many dreadful days we spent and how many interruptions we had but we took off from Melbourne, we were offloaded in Sydney. People that didn't live here had to go into barracks and then we continued our journey onto Brisbane where we were offloaded again, and this wasn't too bad. But then we started on that dreadful haul from Brisbane to Townsville. The facilities were not good, there were very few WAAF on the train, and I objected so strenuously when we stopped at places to be fed. The troop train carried all services and all allied troops and the navy were fed first, and then the army, and the Americans, then the airforce men. And the WAAF were last, every time. We thought, oh well, we can cope with that. We travelled on and there had been some dreadful actions up in New Guinea, and the hospital trains had to be brought through so we were put on sidings so we realised then that being fed last, was a mere nothing to not being fed at all, and we weren't. We had no food, there was one lassie who was not very well, and we had her lying on the floor. The water ran out and of course, the toilets smelt rather horribly, and they kept saying there'll be food at Bowen and do you know I cannot look at Bowen today without shuddering because we were held up on sidings for so long and when we got to Bowen it was two o'clock in the morning and there was no food at Bowen. The girls that had relatives in Brisbane, luckily, had some food. One of them had a fruit cake and there were little bits and pieces, but very little to eat, so the next siding we were pulled up on, one of the men, I didn't know who he was, came and tapped on our windows (we were locked in on account of being the only females on board). We could not get out. The men could hop off and stretch their legs and get a breath of fresh air but we were locked in. This man came along and said have you girls had anything to eat? And I said, no, not for a long long time. He said, well now, I don't know if you'll approve of this, but he said, we have just discovered a goods train and we've broken into it and there are pineapples and pawpaws and mangoes and we have

stolen it. Do you want some? I have been brought up to believe that stealing under any circumstance is wrong but by jove I enjoyed that fruit. It had been so long since I'd had any, in fact we were so careless we couldn't get at the food quickly enough, and we dribbled it on our shirts which was disastrous because we had been, I think, several days on that train and the shirts we had taken off in the first place as soiled were now clean shirts and we were switching our shirts and our underclothes around to the least dirty. That was one of the worst trips and it was, I suppose, 25 years before I ever voluntarily got on a long distance train again after that trip. It was horrible. Eventually we got to Townsville, we bunked at St Ann's temporarily until they sorted us out. Unfortunately some of the girls were picked up and told they had to work at North Eastern Area as radio operators and of course they couldn't because we were not permitted to touch a Morse key in case we used a carna signal. This was a very strict ruling so the girls folded their hands when they were told they were going to be put on charges, and I sent off desperate messages to Roy Booth at Central Bureau, saying Help! He smoothed it out for them but none of us were permitted in the lower ranks to say anything about the job we did. We had to have one spokesman only and we had to be very careful about that too because if we spoke to a shift supervisor, well he or she could easily go around checking, and in no time it would have been common knowledge that there was an intercept operation going on and then it's anybody's guess how soon that knowledge could have reached the Japanese. Amazingly enough, it never ever did. But after staying in St Ann's barracks for a short time, we were going backwards and forwards to Stewart, this was my introduction to the operations room and quite a long journey from Townsville, but we were taken backwards and forwards by truck from there until we were told we could move into Roseneath. Roseneath was a bush camp, rather pretty, lots of trees, lots of long grass. We didn't realise all the hazards of this until we moved in. We were moved into a couple of huts that had tin roofs and the sides of the huts were opened out, you could prop the whole sides of the hut open so you could get a breeze through so you virtually had a floor and a ceiling and nothing much in between. We were issued with sheets that was a first, this was very good. We didn't need blankets because it was February, the weather was hot, and then we found out there were herds of goats that were in the surrounding paddocks and at night they'd clutter right through the hut and wake everybody up. The cane toads were prolific and they were absolutely tremendous, and we would try to shift them when they came into the huts,

with brooms and they jump up and stretch out their legs, and it was incredible the size they were. Of course the horrible part was that if you needed in the darkness to go to the toilet, we had to walk out of our huts and dodge the cane toads, the goats would bump up against you, the knowledge that there were a few snakes around, was buzzing with mosquitoes and all sorts of unpleasant things, to get down to the ablutions block. That was not very good. I know I had a cane toad that rested in my tin hat, they insisted on us keeping a tin hat because Townsville had a couple of bombs dropped on it before we arrived there. Always, the tin hat had to be beside your bed, and this confounded toad would get there and just as I'd be dropping off to sleep, it would crow, and wake you up. We had infestations of ants that would make themselves comfortable in our beds, in fact it wasn't a very comfortable barracks but we managed. Our main problem was water. There were tanks, we'd had a drought, the water had gone a little bit peculiar, so I complained about it to the office and they said we'll do something about it, and they did. They tipped the water out of all the tanks because there were foreign bodies in the tanks, things had slipped in, small animals had died and got through broken wire and it was quite dangerous so we had to rely then entirely on the bore water. We had a little pump that always managed to be in operation if I'd been on night shift and thought I might get a little bit of sleep in the morning, and this pump, pump, pump of the water going on, but this was essential, to get any water at all. For drinking purposes it was absolutely shocking. We tried making cups of tea in an electric jug we acquired but the element wouldn't tolerate the bore water. It just collapsed so there was no tea. Trying to wash our clothes. You'd put soap powder in and all the soap powder would go hard on the top and it was rather terrible. There was no hot water of course, and we had cold showers, and we shared those usually with little frogs that used to jump around us. There was one thing about our ablutions block; it was the coolest place in the camp. I'm not quite sure why, but we found, I suppose it had a stone floor, that helped, but on the very very hot days, and it could be incredibly hot, you'd come off shift and you'd think you'd be going to bed and you'd sit on your straw palleas and you'd be sizzled because the sun beating on the tin roof would just make the straw so hot, it was incredible. It was impossible to sleep there. I used to get a couple of cane chairs and go down to the ablutions block, put my feet up and wear a swimsuit, or we didn't call them swimsuits, playsuits, and step under the shower in a playsuit, put my feet up and hope the mosquitoes would keep away and get my sleep that way. The water situation for

drinking was quite ridiculous and I remember Starkey who was our CO in Townsville, paid us a visit one day and I was endeavouring to sleep and it was far too hot, and she said to me, how are conditions Sergeant? I said, not very good. She said was there anything particular you want? I said, yes, a glass of water. She said, oh, a glass. I said, a tin pannikin will do. She said, you want a glass of water. I said, yes. She said, where do I get it? I said, Townsville. (Townsville being miles and miles and miles away.) She said, haven't you any water? I said, yes, but it's bore water. She said, oh dear, that's bad. So eventually she went off and I went back under my mosquito net, which she had inspected and found a hole in. There was malaria in Townsville although it was kept quiet, and when I woke again it was the girls coming back off the next shift with great shrieks and there was the most magnificent sight we had seen. Starkey had arranged for water, pure water with ice in it, and the ice was still floating, it must have just arrived. One was pure water, and one had I think some lemon juice in it, and there was the beautiful cold water in those, do you remember the great silver milk cans we used to have, there was one on each side of the door. And that was one of the highlights of our stay at Roseneath. Apart from, when that wasn't possible, the girls used to try to drink lolly water and that was sweet and clean and it does anything but quench your thirst. In those days, unlike today, other ranks did not have wet canteens. I didn't ever care very much for beer in those days, still don't very much, but it is thirst quenching, so having attained my Sergeant's stripes by then, at least I could drink something when I was thirsty. The other ranks, when I was asked what happened about them, I didn't really know because it was only rumour that I'd heard that they managed to acquire bottles of beer via the back window of the Sergeant's Mess via sympathisers who knew that they were so thirsty and there wasn't anything much that they could do about it.

THOMSON: What about the atmosphere between the RAAF and the WAAF on the station?

LINNANE: It was absolutely tremendous. As I believe I've said before, one of the disadvantages of working for intelligence is that you don't mix with other people very much. We didn't go into any of the entertainments that were provided for WAAF and RAAF. We kept to ourselves and we decided we had to do something about this, apart from, oh the Americans were very good. They used to invite us to their outdoor

picture shows at times, that was one entertainment, but a couple of us used to organise little dances in the mess, we had a very good pianist and we'd decorate it with gum leaves, this was in the airmen's mess, and all the boys would work hard chopping down leaves and trying to find a few flowers, a truck driver, well two of the truck drivers that I remember very well, Les Copeland and Tom Chisholm, used to take turns when they should have been off duty, of driving us around to the farms to collect a bit of extra foods, some delicacies, keeping in mind that coupons, food coupons were non-existent for us, we couldn't buy food in shops but we could arrange it in some way from the farms. We girls used to then prepare the food, the boys would do the decorating of the mess and try to make the floor a bit slippery, putting various powders on it, and we would have beautiful little dances and the boys always treated us with the greatest respect and regard, and I'm very happy to say that I didn't once hear any complaints from any of the girls about any bad treatment from the boys. We were very fond of all of them and they used to take us out in groups mainly and if we went into the pictures in town, probably a dozen of us would go. The girls usually paid their own way too because the boys didn't have any money. Some of them may have been married, I know some of them were engaged to be married, and others were freelancing, but it was a group sort of thing. A few of them paired off, and a couple of them even married boys from One Wireless Unit eventually, but it was a very happy association, which exists till this day. We all keep in touch and the boys were such wonderful friends, did everything they could for us and in return the girls used to perhaps if there was a chicken available that someone found somewhere, the girls would cook it for the boys and we'd find some potatoes in the mess and have a really bang-up meal because the food was absolutely appalling. I don't know why we appeared to be issued with New Guinea rations but this was the case. It was nearly all tinned food and we were fed on baked beans, goldfish (they've got a proper name, pilchards), but they were known as goldfish, bread we very rarely saw. At St Ann's in Townsville, bread was automatic and very few miles away out at Roseneath we were given what we call dog biscuits. If they had a proper name I don't know but they were known as dog biscuits and a tin of butter. Now tinned butter is revolting. It smells and when the mess steward would open a can of tinned butter, particularly when we were on duty out at Stewart, well it would easily empty the room immediately because of the horrible stench and we were supposed to eat this. If we were unlucky enough to be on day shift at Stewart, the cooks at Roseneath would put

a baked dinner perhaps into a hot box which keeps the food warm and when it would be opened, the meat would be fly blown and we would have maggots crawling over the meat and depending on how hungry you were, how strong your stomach was, you would remove the maggots, eat the meat, there was nothing else to eat because there was no shops, no food, nothing out there, so we had to do this. It was horrible. For those who like milk in there tea, and I started, all my young life I had milk in my tea, I don't drink milk at all now. The milk was unacceptable to say the least of it. We used to drink black tea and they used to boil up tea quite often, not often coffee, and on night shifts we'd have a little bit of a break from our work and we'd go out into a hut that was indescribable really. It had a tin roof and it was falling to pieces and it had spiders. There were masses of spiders all over the place. Eventually there was a table that we used to put our cups and saucers on, I said to one of the RAAF Sergeants, look, the spider webs are getting all over our jeans, we worked in jeans, we were never in uniform, didn't wear shoes, we wore roman sandals, had to have our jeans buttoned right down to the wrists despite the heat because of the mosquitoes. I diverted. I was saying that I complained about the spider webs so one of the electricians and another boy carried the table outside, turned it over and put the blowtorch on it. Redback spiders, just swarming all under it. It wasn't funny. I said, oh how horrible, I hate those things. But there was worse to come. About the middle of my stay up there, we had a quiet night and I was getting very very sluggish and this is something you have to be on the alert the whole time so got the trick chief to relieve me and I said, I'm just going to wash my face. So the ablutions block was a little way across the grass. I arrived there, started washing my face and I thought I might as well go to the toilet while I'm here which was a hassle because you had to undo the buttons on your sleeves and all the way down your front and get your arms out of your jeans and drop them round your ankles. I went in, for some unknown reason the girls opened the door the wrong way, they opened inwards instead of outwards so I went in, sat down on the toilet, looked up and on the division which was a half division between the two toilets there, there was a head of a snake looking at me. I thought, oh dear. I'm sitting borne and bred and I don't know how to despatch a snake and I'm not quite sure what a snake will do next except this one looked as if it was very very interested in me. I thought I must get out. How stupid of me to close a door when it was impossible for anyone else to come into the place, you know, there was privacy involved, so I thought oh dear. So, still sitting, I lost all desire to go to the toilet, I

mean that didn't matter at all. I put my hand forward to open the door and the snake came down the wall two inches. I thought this is terrible. I have to get out of here and what's going to happen is that snake's going to drop right off there, right into my jeans, which were hanging around my ankles somewhere. Will it get around my neck, I wasn't frightened, I was terrified! I eventually got the door open, hunched all over my jeans, trying to hold them with one hand and dashed outside, yelling for the guard. In the meantime, trying to make myself a little more respectable as the snake slithered down and down and down the wall. Oh, what a terrible experience. So the guard's voice answered, yes, what is it? I said come in here and he said, sorry we're not allowed in the WAAF ablution block. I said get the Sergeant of the Guard immediately please. Sergeant of the Guard was an old man, the guard was a young man, the old man was about 32 or 33 I think, and he came along and said, what's wrong, who is it? So I gave him my name and I said would you please come in here. He said, all right, and he came in, and I said look. He said, oh dear. That's terrible. I said yes. He said, what do you want me to do about it. I said, kill it. He said, don't know how. I said, well you can't leave it there, its going to escape, there'll be other girls coming in here. He said, all right. I said, look I've got to get back on shift as I was doing up my buttons rapidly. So I went back on shift and several hours later I came out and I saw the Sergeant of the Guard and I said, Sergeant what happened? He said, oh, machine-gunned it. You've got holes in the wall there. It was the only way. I despatched it. He said what were you so darn scared about? I said well wouldn't you be? That snake was taking an awful lot of interest in me. He said oh Sarg you're just kidding yourself. That snake wasn't worried about you. I had a look behind the toilet. That snake was just protecting its mate that was curled up behind the toilet you were using! So, that is my snake story. I didn't faint, I didn't collapse, I think I had a lucky escape but I have never been very fond of snakes, still don't know how to handle them. One should learn these things. But I thought that was an interesting experience after which several other snakes were sighted around the area and we had to be extra careful of the snakes and the spiders, but more so the mosquitoes as one after the other of us went down with Dinghi Fever. None of this shows on our records because we all nursed one another. It was just too much except one girl who happened to be in Townsville who happened to collapse and she went into hospital and she got some sick leave over on Magnetic Island, and we all worked through it. Or if we couldn't work, someone covered the shift. I eventually, when I

came down to Brisbane, had another fever attack. None of us knew what they were but called them fever attacks and when the doctor asked me what was wrong, I said I had a recurrence of Dinghi Fever. I've never been able to work out how much the doctors know about Dinghi Fever because one says yes you'll get it back again, but this doctor said it does not recur, are you malingering, and took my temperature. He decided that I wasn't malingering, I did have a very high temperature, but I did not have Dinghi, I was suspect Malaria, which would have caused chaos in Townsville because there was all, shushes there, there was no Malaria in Townsville. The Townsville girls tell me that in their childhood Malaria was known there, it just wasn't brought back from New Guinea but became worse with an [inaudible] being brought back in clothing that troops returning brought back with them.

THOMSON: Did any of the clerical staff, or the messing staff, WAAF staff at Roseneath know what you were doing at Stewart?

LINNANE: Generally speaking I would say no. The only exception would be some clerical staff who were actually involved in intelligence, but as far as messing staff, drivers, guards, general hands would have had absolutely no idea and I recently asked one of the drivers if he had ever guessed or had any idea, and he said absolutely none. He had been warned that he was not to talk about our locations he drove us to, but he said he had absolutely no idea what went on in the farmhouse as it was called out at Stewart which was Intelligence Headquarters. So I would say no, we were very very careful about what we said because this was a big part of our training that a slip of the lip might damage the war effort to a tremendous extent and each one of us was responsible. We took this very very seriously indeed and this is why our social life was so confined because we did not want to mix with anyone outside our own unit because we feared we might give something away. As far as our families were concerned, well, they didn't even know where we were. We had a post office box number which gave no indication whether we were in Perth or Central Australia, and it was a great surprise when I came home on leave one time, that my father said if ever you get up to Queensland, remember that we've got some relatives up there. And I said, yes I'll remember that. And of course I was in Queensland all the time. He simply didn't know where we were. My family had absolutely no inkling of the work, nor did my friends and it is only about 18 months ago one of the men I worked

with on State Council here phoned me and said I've just been talking to a girl who worked in the same unit that you worked in, at a dinner party. I said, oh that's nice, who was it? And he told me and it was one of our carna operations. And he said I didn't know you worked for intelligence. And I said, yes. And he said, an intercept operator, Japanese, oh how interesting. He said, why couldn't you have told us about this because I've been friends with this man and his wife for oh twenty years I suppose. I said it simply didn't occur to me. It has become a habit not to talk about it. Since everyone is taking such an interest in writing books and I've read accounts in the newspapers about this, it's quite a relief to be able to talk about it, which I'm enjoying.

THOMSON: And the one thing you didn't mention was the difference in times of your shifts.

LINNANE: We worked Tokyo time. We slept eight, went on shift and had our stand-downs all according to Tokyo time because this was the most reasonable way to work since the whole of our work involved Japanese. To work Eastern Standard Time would have been a little bit ridiculous. The only foul up was, which didn't worry me in the least, was being at WAAF Command when we were stationed there, didn't matter at all in Townsville, because we lived a very free and easy life up there, but there were such things as parades and inspections and what have you, and it was done between shifts because I was in a shiftworker's hut and I was never there. They were peculiar hours you worked, and they'd say you just have to be there at a certain time and that's when we're there because all the other WT operators were Eastern Standard Time and worked a set number of hours and their breaks were all the same but not so us. We had to sort of phenangle around it and never could explain the difference to anyone but it was reasonable as far as our work was concerned.

THOMSON: And then when MacArthur was preparing to go up to the Philippines, were you expected to go with him, your unit, expected to go with him.

LINNANE: This was so. By this time there were up to six wireless units in operation, right throughout the islands, and General MacArthur was very impressed with the work they had done and said so, and he asked if one of the wireless units

could be part of his invasion force into the Philippine Islands. There was a plan for a landing at Laiti and in fact, in October 1944, Number 6 Wireless Unit was chosen to go in with the invasion force. One wireless unit was spread throughout and some of one where I knew some of the boys who were at that time serving with 6, they used to move them around a little bit, and it was announced that they would be short-handed because the number of people trained was limited, and that our, by this stage, ten girls because we had lost three of them who had become married, and left the service. We were told that we would not be allowed to go in with the invasion force but as soon as they were settled we were to go up there because they were short-handed. In the meantime, we were called rear echelon, another word for being left behind. We continued operating from Stewart when most of the boys went forward, we were left with the 18 year olds who had to wait until they were 19 to be sent up to join our unit and they said it would be best if we were transferred back to Central Bureau of Intelligence which was our headquarters at Brisbane. We were very sad about this because we had enjoyed working in Townsville, despite the conditions, and we were placed into RAAF Command in July 1944. We often felt very sad about it, we were all immediately in trouble because we had lost, the cockroaches had eaten various parts of our uniforms and equipment, we hadn't worn stockings for years, and we didn't have any stockings and there were various other, ties weren't uniform in Townsville either, and nobody could find a tie, and we walked through RAAF Command to establish ourselves there and within hours, half of my girls were on charges for incorrect uniform, or not from discourtesy but purely forgetting to salute an officer. We had usually only a CO and a couple of intelligence officers who we worked with so closely who preferred to do away with the saluting, rather get on with the work, and of course RAAF Command was a different story. It was really rather difficult at trying to get used to this idea but we did. So we started up operations, still air ground and army at Central Bureau of Intelligence, Roy Booth was in charge there, and he arranged for us to have a room where we could carry out our intercept operations and then we found that the boys who had been up in Beeack and round New Guinea, all the islands in fact, were being sent back for a little rest sometimes but they couldn't have leave so they used to come and work with us and we all worked in very well together. By this time I was permanently on day duty, I had a supervisory job and didn't do any operating but we kept 24 hour watch there at Central Bureau, first on the ground floor and then we were upstairs on the first floor

and I understand it was quite successful, and the messages we got even from that distance.

THOMSON: What was the difference between the duties of operating and being a supervisor?

LINNANE: I had to make sure that all the messages were in, everyone was on duty, I had to select various frequencies and confer with the various officers that were there to advise me and also to get the material down to Ascot Park which was a tremendously big park, lots of huts there and they had interesting equipment, and there they had all services from all allied forces, all working in together on various jobs. In fact, my main contact there was an RAN man called Commander Nave and I used to deliver the messages to him, take instructions from him, just generally supervise and write reports on the progress of our work. That generally speaking, covered what I was doing at that time there. We worked there at the Central Bureau for a considerable time.